

Speech for Dignity in Older Age event – 7 February 2008
David Grayson, Chairman, Housing 21

Our thanks go to Professor Banerjee for setting out some of the challenges, realities and potential solutions that lie ahead in this complex area – we hope that the forthcoming strategy has a real impact on the way dementia services are designed and delivered.

I'd like to pick up briefly on the theme of early diagnosis, which was also highlighted in a recent report from the Commons Public Accounts Committee. At Housing 21 we endorse wholeheartedly the importance of a clear and early diagnosis. Having for many years taken an approach that is focussed on prevention and wellbeing – we know that the right approach from the start is crucial to prolonging older people's independence, particularly older people with dementia.

When Ivan Lewis announced the launch of the programme of work for the strategy last summer he said:

“The scale of our ambition must now meet the scale of the challenge as demographic realities mean dementia will impact on an increasing number of families in our society”.

Such a direct and clear sentiment was, I'm sure, as welcome to everybody in this room as it was to me. The challenge for us – as providers and commissioners – is translating that ambition into relevant, targeted services that are easy for people to both find and use.”

This is about the 'how' – how to ensure people with dementia get the care and support they need, how to ensure families also feel supported, how to ensure staff have the skills they need, how to get health care services plugged in, how to manage services for people who become confused or develop dementia over time, how to work together to make services seamless – the list sometimes appears to go on and on.

Why is the dementia strategy so relevant to Housing 21?

At Housing 21, we realised some time ago that issues around dementia and mental confusion were going to become key elements of our work. We provide homes for around 17,000 older people; we deliver 30,000 hours of home care every week. There are also many thousands of older people in communities local to our courts, who use the facilities and join in the social activities on a day to day basis. An average of one in 20 develops mental confusion or dementia, this increases to around 1 in five for people over 85. Couple those figures with the vast range of older people we support and it should come as no surprise that we are acutely aware of the impact dementia and mental illness can have on older people and on those close to them. We knew we needed to develop a framework for dementia services to support our customers, their families and our staff and that's why we started by supporting a local dementia services development centre – Dementia Voice

10 years on and Dementia Voice is now an integral part of Housing 21 and operates as a centre of dementia excellence - we're the only housing association with a centre of this nature. It helps us keep abreast of new thinking and developments in dementia expertise, feeding learning from both services and research into policy and practice. This means that our frontline staff have constant access to specialist expertise and training.

Dementia Voice also directly manages specialist dedicated services for people with dementia.

Services like Tresham Day Centre in Westminster. Tresham is open seven days a week, and also coordinates Home Care Plus, a specialist flexible home care service for people in the area. And services like Cherry Tree House in the Wirral, a 10 unit extra care scheme where we provide carefully tailored care services for residents. And services like Oak House in Suffolk, where we worked with the local authority to close their EMI residential care home and transfer all the residents into a purpose built extra care scheme.

People like Marge or Rosemary – *you may want to make reference to a case study from the DVD*. You can find out more about them by requesting a copy of our latest DVD on dementia services.

Stories like this remind us that our services need to be about people. People have a right to enjoy independence, dignity and choice in older age, whatever their circumstances.

So... looking to the future...

We've secured funding from NESTA – the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts – to run an evaluation project on teaching people with dementia to use computers and the internet. And we've set up a pilot project, with support from the King's Fund, employing a dementia end of life care nurse.

These are challenging and innovative projects, but they help us to develop and inform services around the wants and needs of older people with dementia.

But what of the broader picture of older people's services?

Promises of a brave new world of social care, individual budgets, the dignity agenda and the personalisation of services offer us exciting opportunities as a housing and care provider.

We believe that as people get older they are still entitled to be able to choose how and where they want to live even if they need some form of day to day support.

Sheltered and extra care housing can provide choice for people who, as they become frailer, want to make a move, but without moving into residential care. It can offer the independence they want with the added security of support on the doorstep if they need it - and let's remember that 20% of these people will have or will develop some form of dementia or mental health condition.

At Housing 21 we're developing more and more extra care schemes which include new types of tenure for people who don't just want to rent.

We're careful to look beyond simple housing developments, though. The new well being agenda has brought the spotlight onto services beyond bricks and mortar – and about time too.

Most of our courts have a range of facilities not only for residents but for use by the local community. Communal areas, day centres, shops, hairdressers, restaurants, internet cafes and advice services help make up the mix. We have specialist food markets in Bradford, a men's club in Gateshead and Caribbean cookery classes in London.

These facilities help to bring communities together, reduce social isolation and create new choices for older people, their families, friends and neighbours.

All of this is not without its challenges?

There are some huge challenges ahead. Some of those relate to resources, and the Government must play its part in this regard. Our society needs to have a range of options for our ageing population.

The right range of services is vital to local authorities looking to transform their services. They need to work with partners able to deliver not just range and quality but capacity and impact too.

That's why projects like our PFI and PPP schemes in Oldham, Kent and Walsall are so important. Don't underestimate the complexity of putting these schemes together, as anyone who has worked on them will tell you. We've been fortunate to have such excellent partners to work with to turn these proposals into reality (including partners such as Devonshires Solicitors, KPMG and Tribal, whose support for this evening we're very grateful for).

These projects require intensive work, development of new expertise, and preparation and planning that can take not just months but years.

However, the rewards cannot be understated. These schemes will lever hundreds of millions of pounds into local areas, and help create real change for people living there – not just for our residents and clients, but for others in the area. They will see the provision of hundreds of new and refurbished homes, the development of new community orientated activities and services, and specialist support for people who need it.

Our ambition is to continue picking up these challenges, bringing our experience of more than 40 years to ensure we make choice a reality in the life experience of older people, both now and in the future; this includes people like you and me, our families and friends, our neighbours and colleagues.

Our thanks again to Professor Bannerjee for starting the evening off, and thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to come today – thanks also to Kathryn Collinson for organising tonight's event, and all those who have helped to make it a success. I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening.