

Dementia Awareness Bulletin – June 2015 (Brecknockshire)

Cllr Dawn Bailey – PCC Dementia Champion

A Motion taken to Council in October 2014 resolved to appoint an elected Member to champion the 'Dementia Friendly' cause within Powys County Council and following calls for expressions of interest from Members, I was appointed earlier this year to the position of Dementia Champion by Portfolio Holder for Adult Services Cllr Darren Mayor.

Our Mission Statement for a Dementia Friendly Powys County Council will concentrate on what we can do within the organisation and through the services we deliver. It is my intention to provide Members with regular written reports on my activities as Dementia Champion.

If you ask most people what concerns they have about their future health, the greatest fear for most is that they may end their days slipping into dementia. Dementia is now the most feared disease overtaking cancer. It is important however to understand dementia is not a natural part of ageing, it occurs as a result of diseases affecting the brain with the most common being Alzheimer's. Dementia describes a range of symptoms that can include memory loss, difficulties with thinking and planning, communicating and doing everyday tasks. However it is quite possible to live well with dementia and with appropriate support and understanding, people can and do continue to take an active role in life.

As Members we are in a position to influence the experience of a person with dementia within our communities, in Powys alone there are over 2,400 people diagnosed with dementia but countless more remain undiagnosed.

One of the main reasons why people with dementia stop going out is a lack of confidence however simple things can make a huge difference to people suffering from dementia and their families, carers and friends. There is already much support out in our communities, the Alzheimer's Society are very prominent in Powys offering information and help with developing practical skills and the setting up of new initiatives to support those living with dementia. There are also some excellent examples of good practice already in the county, one being the Brecon & Hay Dementia Friends community initiative together with the Knighton project that is currently being developed.

As Dementia Champion, I recently attended an event in Cardiff Bay at which the Deputy Minister for Health, Vaughan Gething AM reaffirmed the Welsh Governments commitment to supporting and funding dementia services.

On 2nd April 2015, I return to Cardiff Bay to attend the launch by the Minister of Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford AM of ***Wales: A Dementia Friendly Nation*** a new Welsh Government initiative designed to improve services and support for those affected by dementia.

Powys County Council is one of the first local authorities within Wales to accept the challenge to work towards becoming a Dementia Friendly organisation and I am currently working alongside an officer from the Alzheimer's Society in order to bring forward an action plan to help the Council achieve this ambition.

Whilst this action plan is being formulated, I have already commenced discussions with the library service in order to raise awareness of the self-help Books on Prescription service we currently offer on a range of health issues including dementia. Libraries and museums are perfect venues to reach out to the public and I intend to extend this initial self-help books initiative to include further public facing exhibitions and events on how communities can get involved in creating supportive networks. Brecon library is already closely involved with its local Dementia Friends project.

This however is just the beginning, the Council dementia friendly action plan currently being prepared will outline how we foresee all service areas being involved. For example this could perhaps be Highways and the Environment designing street scenes with simple, clear signage on our high streets to give confidence to those wishing to continue to do their own shopping, refuse operatives recognizing a householder may need extra assistance or ensuring housing needs are accommodated. Dementia awareness sessions across all service areas will be the start of the process of working towards being a dementia friendly organisation. As we already give due regard and consideration to those groups of people with particular characteristics, the needs of people with dementia must also be taken into consideration in everything we do.

In conjunction with the Care Council for Wales, the Chairman of Council will be hosting a special reception and event at this year's Royal Welsh Show entitled 'Tackling dementia in a rural County'. A number of keynote speakers from a range of our partners will be attending and a supporting programme of public facing awareness events is already being planned for that week. A similar presence albeit lower key, will also take place at the National Eisteddfod in August.

Above all else, simple respect, awareness and understanding of the needs of someone with dementia goes a long way to tackling this growing problem and I hope Members and staff of Powys County Council will collectively come together in order to help overcome the issues and challenges that face people with dementia. With this aim in mind, a Dementia Friends awareness session is to be held for Members on Monday 18th May 2015, the start of National Dementia Awareness Week 2015. Across the county, various organisations will be holding similar awareness raising events.

We can all play a part in enabling people with dementia live well wherever they are. Small actions and changes can make a significant difference to someone with this illness and help them to continue living safely and comfortably in their own community.

Councillor Dawn Bailey – PCC Dementia Champion