Dementia Together Co-Production Group

Minutes of Meeting – 27 August 2026
10:00am–12:00pm, Hybrid meeting (Council House, Derby + Microsoft Teams)
Chair: Phil Wall (PW)

In Attendance
Phil Wall (Derbyshire County Council, chair)
Vicki Baker (Alzheimer's Society & minute taker)
5 x Individuals with lived experience (LS, BM, JB, KOR, EL)
Claire Moore (Commissioning, Derbyshire County Council)
Michael Rose (Commissioning, Derby City Council)
Debbie Fennell (Dementia Advisor, Alzheimer's Society)
Dave Roberts (Founder, Hardy Group)
Sarah Greaves (Trustee and Membership Secretary, Hardy Group)
Genny Cotroneo (Training and Learning Manager, OPUS Music)
Mary Derrick (Co-Founder, The Connection Space CIC)
Robyn Hughes (Co-Founder, The Connection Space CIC)
Emma Beestone (Engagement Service Lead, Derbyshire All Age Carer Support Service)

Apologies
Wendy Burton (Co-Chair)

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1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting opened with a welcome from VB. There was a round of introductions from attendees joining both in person and online and apologies given.

Due to travel disruption Co-Chair PW joined shortly after the meeting commenced. On arrival, he thanked attendees for attending and reinforced the importance of co-production and ensuring that the voices of people living with dementia and unpaid carers remain central to future service planning and delivery.

The theme for this meeting is groups, creative activities and community support.

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2. Review of Minutes and Actions from April Meeting

The minutes from the April meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

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3. Alzheimer's Society Update

Speaker: *Vicki Baker – Local Services Manager for Derbyshire Dementia Information and Advice Service & Derby City Dementia Information and Advice Service.*

VB provided an overview of the dementia support groups currently delivered by Alzheimer's Society across Derbyshire and Derby City.

In Derbyshire, ten groups operate each month. These alternate between Memory Cafés and Singing for the Brain sessions. VB reported that feedback from these attendees has been positive, with people reporting that the groups provide valuable peer support, help reduce social isolation and offer opportunities to enjoy time with family members and carers in a supportive environment.

A recent review of the Derbyshire groups confirmed that participants value the opportunity to connect with others who understand their experiences, with many reporting that the groups allow them to focus on enjoyable activities and social interaction rather than the challenges associated with dementia.

VB also highlighted the challenges, namely Derbyshire's large geographical area making it difficult to provide groups in every community, particularly in rural locations. Transport also continues to be a significant barrier for many people wishing to attend. As a result, the Alzheimer's Society is exploring opportunities to work alongside existing community groups to develop dementia-friendly activities and volunteer-led support networks. This approach is intended to expand local provision and improve access without requiring large increases in staffing or resources.

Work is also underway to improve engagement with communities that are currently underrepresented within dementia services. This includes closer working with Rural Action Derbyshire and organisations supporting farming communities. Efforts are also being made to improve engagement with people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Attendees heard about work currently taking place with a community group in Long Eaton that supports attendees of the Windrush Generation and their descendants. Feedback from this group suggested that some existing dementia activities did not reflect their cultural preferences, particularly around music. In response, discussions are taking place about developing a dementia-friendly gospel choir, which could provide a more culturally relevant and accessible form of support.

Within Derby City, eight groups currently operate, including art groups, singing groups, Musical Memories sessions and culturally specific groups for members of the Asian community. The groups aim to provide a variety of opportunities that meet different interests and cultural needs. A Dementia Voices group has also been introduced within Derby City recently. This group has been created specifically for people living with dementia and enables participants to share their views directly on topics that affect them. Early sessions have been well attended and have allowed attendees to influence discussions around issues such as housing and support services.

Attendees were invited to share their experiences of accessing support groups and identify barriers that may prevent people from becoming involved.

Feedback and Reflections from the Group

One carer shared concern regarding a previous experience with an Alzheimer's Society group in Derby City, describing difficulties with communication and understanding of the level of support arrangements. The attendee explained that the issue had affected their confidence in the service and had influenced their decision to access support elsewhere.

In response, VB acknowledged the concerns raised and apologised for the individual's experience. She explained that substantial work had taken place over the previous twelve months to strengthen communication, improve consistency and address service quality concerns. A commitment was given to review the matter in more detail following the meeting and to ensure that the concerns raised were appropriately investigated.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of clearly communicating the purpose and scope of support groups. VB explained that Alzheimer's Society groups are designed primarily as activities and support opportunities for people living with dementia and are unable to undertake personal care tasks due to regulations. Attendees discussed the difference between social support, peer support and regulated care activities, recognising that expectations of groups can vary considerably between individuals and organisations.

Several attendees reflected on the challenges carers can face when trying to balance the needs of the person they support alongside their own wellbeing needs. Members discussed how different groups provide different forms of support, with some offering joint activities for carers and people living with dementia, while others enable carers to spend time separately receiving information, advice or peer support. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring that people understand what each service offers so they can choose support that best meets their circumstances.

All attendees agreed that clear explanations and timely communication are particularly important when there are any changes in support needs which can impact access to groups.

PW and MR acknowledged the feedback and stressed the importance of hearing both positive and challenging experiences through the Co-Production Group. They noted that while positive feedback is received regarding commissioned dementia services, it remains essential to examine concerns openly and use them as opportunities for learning and improvement. Both commissioners emphasised that all feedback from people with lived experience is critical in shaping service development and ensuring that support remains responsive to local needs.

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4. Hardy Group – a volunteer-led charity supporting people living with dementia and their carers.

Speakers: *Dave Roberts and Sarah Greaves*

DR detailed how Hardy Group was established fourteen years ago and has developed from a small informal gathering into a large community organisation supporting more than 220 attendees. The group's core purpose is to reduce isolation and help people remain socially active following a dementia diagnosis.

Attendees heard how the organisation is run entirely by volunteers and funded through donations and fundraising activities. DR commented that this independence allows the group flexibility in deciding how support is delivered.

DR continued to detail the twice-monthly social meetings which are attended by around one hundred people. Meetings include entertainment, music, refreshments, information stalls and opportunities for social interaction. Attendees also participate in a wide range of outings and day trips throughout the year.

DR explained that social isolation is one of the greatest challenges faced by people living with dementia and their carers and the activities are designed to help people enjoy themselves, develop friendships and share experiences with others in similar situations.

Examples were provided showing how friendships formed through the Hardy Group frequently continue outside organised meetings, resulting in attendees meeting socially, holidaying together and developing lasting support networks.

Fundraising remains an important part of the group's success. Community organisations, local businesses and supporters contribute towards running costs, enabling the group to keep activities affordable and accessible.

Feedback and Reflections from the Group

Attendees were particularly impressed by the organisation's longevity, growth and ability to support a large number of people affected by dementia through a volunteer-led model.

The group agreed that the Hardy Group provides a strong example of how community-led support can reduce isolation and help people remain socially connected following a dementia diagnosis.

Some attendees at the meeting described their experiences of Hardy Group. They highlighted the value of the group's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Positive feedback was shared regarding the friendships that have developed through attendance at the group, with many members continuing to meet outside formal sessions. The creation of lasting social networks was viewed as a significant strength of the organisation and a key factor in supporting wellbeing for both carers and people living with dementia.

The role of volunteers was recognised as a major contributor to the group's success. Attendees were interested in hearing about volunteer recruitment and retention,

particularly the number of former carers who choose to remain involved and give back to the group following their own caring experiences.

Attendees were also interested in the group's successful fundraising activities and community links. The ability to secure support from local businesses, community organisations and individual fundraisers was viewed as an impressive achievement and an example of strong community engagement.

Both PW and MR commented on the value of learning from successful community organisations such as the Hardy Group. They noted that there may be opportunities for other providers and commissioners to learn from the group's approach to engagement, volunteer involvement and sustaining long-term participation. The willingness of the Hardy Group to share its experiences and support the development of similar initiatives elsewhere was particularly welcomed.

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5. OPUS Music Group

Speakers: *Genny Cotroneo*

GC presented information about the work of OPUS Music and its co-produced music programme in Bolsover.

The presentation focused on the development of a project called Mind and Melody, which was created following concerns about low attendance at previous dementia-specific music sessions.

Rather than simply continuing existing activities, OPUS Music chose to work directly with local people to understand barriers to participation. A series of co-production events was organised involving people living with dementia, carers, healthcare professionals, volunteers, social prescribers, council representatives and musicians.

The participants explored practical questions such as timing, location, accessibility, promotional methods and the type of music that should be included. Importantly, music remained central throughout the consultation process, enabling participants to experience the benefits of participatory music-making while contributing ideas. One participant, who had not played musical instruments for many years, began playing the bongo drums at home following attendance at a session.

The purpose of these sessions was to design an ideal music-based activity for people affected by dementia in Bolsover.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Many described the sessions as uplifting, enjoyable and memorable.

As the project developed, participants helped choose the group's name, create publicity materials and shape the overall programme. This approach resulted in a strong sense of ownership and commitment among attendees.

The programme has continued to grow and now attracts increasing numbers of participants.

Feedback and Reflections from the Group

Attendees responded positively to the presentation and were particularly interested in the co-production approach. Attendees felt the project demonstrated how involving people living with dementia, carers and local professionals from the beginning can help create services that better meet local needs and encourage greater participation.

The group welcomed the decision to explore the reasons behind low attendance in Bolsover and praised the work undertaken to gather feedback directly from those with lived experience. Attendees recognised that some communities can be harder to reach and welcomed hearing how a locally focused approach had helped increase engagement and attendance.

Discussion highlighted the benefits of music as a tool for promoting wellbeing, confidence and social connection. Attendees also praised the sense of ownership created by involving participants in naming the group, developing publicity materials and shaping future sessions.

The presentation prompted discussion about future partnership opportunities with community groups, libraries, social prescribing services and other dementia support organisations.

6. The Connection Space CIC

Speakers: *Robyn Hughes and Mary Derrick*
The organisation supports people experiencing a wide range of challenges, including dementia, mental health conditions, autism and other forms of neurodiversity. Its approach is based on connection, inclusion and purposeful activity rather than diagnosis.

RH and MD spoke openly about their own lived experiences and emphasised the importance of understanding the realities faced by carers and families.

Attendees heard how Connection Space places relationships and emotional wellbeing at the centre of its work. Activities are designed around the interests, strengths and preferences of participants rather than predetermined programmes.

A number of examples were shared demonstrating how meaningful activities can support confidence, identity and wellbeing. These included creative projects, nature-based activities, animal encounters and opportunities for volunteers and participants to work together.

A key message throughout the presentation was the importance of recognising what people can still do, rather than focusing on limitations. Activities are adapted to individual needs and are intended to help people continue participating in meaningful roles for as long as possible.

RH and MD emphasised the importance of therapeutic environments. Consideration is given to factors such as noise levels, comfort, emotional safety and opportunities for choice and independence.

Attendees heard how carers can choose whether to remain involved in activities or take time for themselves. This flexible approach allows support to be tailored to individual circumstances.

Future plans include the development of "Connection Boxes", which will contain activities and resources designed to help families remain connected and engaged in meaningful activities at home.

Feedback and Reflections from the Group

Attendees welcomed the organisation's emphasis on relationships, inclusion and seeing the person beyond their diagnosis. They felt the examples shared demonstrated how meaningful activities, supportive environments and strong personal connections can help people maintain confidence, independence and a sense of identity.

There was particular interest in the organisation's flexible approach, which adapts activities around the interests, abilities and preferences of individuals rather than following a fixed programme. Attendees agreed that this approach helped people remain engaged in activities that were meaningful to them and encouraged participation from both people living with dementia and their carers.

The emphasis on creating safe and supportive environments was highlighted as an important factor in enabling people to participate in activities at their own pace and in ways that suited their individual needs.

Attendees were particularly interested in the proposed development of "Connection Boxes" to support meaningful activity and engagement at home. Attendees felt the concept could be especially beneficial for carers who may be unsure about suitable activities to undertake with a loved one and welcomed the organisation's ongoing commitment to co-producing future developments with the people who use its services.

The presentation prompted discussion about future partnership opportunities. PW suggested that there may be opportunities to help raise awareness of the organisation through existing county networks, including libraries, newsletters and other community

channels. Potential links with other organisations supporting older people and people affected by dementia were also identified.

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7. Derbyshire Carers Association & Derby Carers Information, Advice and Support Service

Speakers: *Emma Beestone*

The organisation provides support to carers across both Derbyshire County and Derby City. Services include information, advice, wellbeing activities, support groups, training opportunities and individual support.

Derbyshire Carers Association works alongside hospitals, GP practices, community organisations and local support groups to reach carers who may otherwise remain unknown to services. Derby Carers Information, Advice and Support Service has recently been awarded a contract from the City Council.

Attendees heard about the challenge of serving a large geographical area while ensuring support remains accessible. Feedback from carers suggests that services are most effective when they are close to where people live and easy to access.

A wide range of wellbeing activities are currently available, including yoga, exercise classes, gardening projects, support groups and reflective sessions. Both online and face-to-face options are offered to maximise accessibility.

Emma described the Caring with Confidence programme, which has been developed in direct response to feedback from carers. Topics include rights, finances, employment, manual handling, caring skills and end-of-life care.

A strong emphasis is placed on co-production through the Carers Voice programme, which enables carers to influence service design and priorities.

Feedback and Reflections from the Group

Attendees agreed that access to information, training, wellbeing activities and peer support is essential for carers throughout their caring journey.

There was particular interest in the organisation's co-production approach through the Carers Voice programme and the Caring with Confidence programme, both of which have been developed in response to feedback from carers.

Discussion highlighted the challenges of reaching carers across a large geographical area and the importance of maintaining both online and face-to-face support options. Members also reflected on the fact that many people do not identify themselves as carers and may therefore miss opportunities to access support and advice.

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8. Final Discussions and Reflections

An open discussion took place about the presentations and the points raised by the speakers.

Attendees agreed that there is a wide range of excellent support available across Derby and Derbyshire.

Attendees acknowledged the value of community-based support in providing peer support, shared experiences and regular social interaction, which can play a significant role in reducing feelings of isolation and maintaining wellbeing. They also acknowledged the importance of ensuring that services are accessible, clearly communicated and understood.

Several attendees highlighted that they were unaware of many groups and services discussed during the meeting. This raised questions about how information could be shared more effectively.

A key suggestion was the development of a single, easy-to-use directory showing all dementia-related groups, activities and support services across Derby and Derbyshire. Attendees recognised that maintaining such a directory would require ongoing updates, but felt it could significantly improve access.

There was also discussion about increasing collaboration between organisations and improving visibility of smaller volunteer-led groups. Attendees noted that many local groups are run by volunteers who may have limited time and resources to dedicate to publicity and promotion.

The Dementia Derbyshire website was highlighted as an important resource that could be used more widely to promote local opportunities.

Overall, the meeting demonstrated the considerable strength of community support available across Derbyshire. Attendees agreed that future efforts should focus on improving awareness, strengthening partnerships and ensuring that people living with dementia and their carers can easily find support that meets their needs.

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9. AOB

No formal items of Any Other Business were raised. However, attendees discussed the need to improve awareness of the Co-Production group to increase engagement from carers and people living with dementia within future Co-Production Group meetings.

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10. Next Meeting

22 October 2026 - (venue will again be hybrid: In-person + Microsoft Teams)

Actions

1. **VB –** follow up concerns raised regarding communication and previous group experiences and provide feedback to the individual concerned.
2. **VB** – to circulate contact details (with consent) and facilitate networking between organisations represented at the meeting.
3. **All organisations** to provide details of their groups and activities for inclusion on the Dementia Derbyshire website.
4. **VB and partners** to explore opportunities for a more comprehensive directory of dementia-related groups, activities and support services across Derby and Derbyshire.
5. **PW and CM** - Consider future discussions regarding improved information sharing and service navigation at upcoming Co-Production Group meetings.
6. **ALL** - share information about the Co-Production Group within their networks to encourage greater attendance from carers and people living with dementia.