

Corporate, Adult Services & Social Inclusion Select Committee

A meeting of Corporate, Adult Services & Social Inclusion Select Committee was held on Tuesday, 18th November, 2008.

Present: Cllr Mick Stoker (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Lynne Apedaile, Cllr Aidan Cockerill, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Roy Rix and Mrs C Clark

Officers: Mrs T Harrison and N Hart (LD)

Also in attendance: E Briggs (Age Concern), J Slade (Help the Aged), Meg Collins (U3A) and M Rose (Over 50's Assembly)

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Ann Cains, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Cllr Andrew Larkin, Cllr Mick Womphrey and Mrs T Fraser

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of Interest

2 Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 30th October 2008

CONCLUDED that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 30th October 2008 be agreed as a correct record and be forwarded to Council for consideration.

3 Scrutiny Review of Older People's Strategy

Members welcomed representatives from Age Concern, Help the Aged, University of the Third Age and the Over 50's Assembly to provide evidence and feedback in regards to the Older People's Strategy.

Ms Briggs (Age Concern) highlighted the following issues that were apparent regarding older people from their perspective:

- Many social inclusion strategies were targetted towards areas of deprivation only; and as a result could exclude individuals that were income poor but lived in an asset rich area;
- access to pharmacy facilities can be difficult for people with access problems.

Reference was made to the good policies provided by Age Concern; and it was noted that in some cases similar organisations can often try to provide policies in isolation; the 'Slips, Trips & Falls campaign being an example. Ms Briggs suggested that with greater co-ordination, many older people initiatives can be targetted with more impact as a result of more joined up working by the organisations involved.

The importance of influencing the media to report positive stories of older people rather than showing them as vulnerable, was noted. Age Concern could also effectively raise awareness of any older people issues emerging; and it was suggested that given the difficulties of securing adequate local press coverage of older people stories, use of the Council's own Stockton News could be a vehicle for co-ordinating and promoting events/issues.

Instead of using the term 'Benefit', which could put independent, yet needy

people off from applying for benefits, it was suggested that encouraging people to 'maximise their income' was a better way to encouraging application for Benefits. Continuing public frustration with transport issues was also noted as a continuing concern of older people.

Reference was also made to uncertainty as to the extent to which the Handy Man service was known and being used by older people. The Home Improvement Agency now incorporated the Handy Man service, however it was unclear what service was provided/what work was eligible/who could utilise the service. Specific mention was made of 'The Golden Guide' document which provided helpful information to older people of available services and advice. People were encouraged to identify any persons/organisations that would benefit from receiving the Guide. It was questioned whether the document was also provided via the housebound library service.

Ms Slade (Help the Aged) advised that Help the Aged had a 10 point charter called 'Common Ground Policy' which suggested ways to encourage older people to be part of, and be active in, the community; a part of which aimed to get more benches in the community, better toilets, pavements and less anti social behaviour as these were reasons given why older people did not venture from their homes. Agency representatives did praise the toilets in Stockton Town Centre. It was suggested that this evidence based manifesto would be useful to the Committee's review.

Help the Aged also had their own Better Health/Fairer Health strategy with seven key aims, four of which dealt with winter poverty. A major concern was the increased cost of fuel raising questions as to whether the Government should increase fuel grants or force fuel providers hands to reduce fuel charges.

Older People would benefit from fuel tariffs being easily accessible as some did not have access to the internet and phone calls to providers were expensive. It was suggested that a list of tariffs could be put on the notice boards at the libraries and be updated every month so people could see and decide who was the best provider.

Members discussed the best places to display information regarding older people issues and it was considered that bus stations and shops frequented by older people were good places; as were Doctor's surgeries and Libraries although some older people did not attend either place.

Members discussed the possibility of all the various agencies and organisations that contribute to older persons issues having a hyperlink to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council web site therefore enabling older people to be aware of what was available to them from one place. However this relied upon the person's access to a computer.

Ms Collins (U3A) outlined the purpose of her organisation, which provided a thriving teaching and learning facility for 250 members. Once again, transport was identified as an occasional barrier to participation by some older people.

Mari Rose (Over 50's Assembly) outlined concerns regarding both public awareness and understanding of the strategy document. A condensed version had been made available at the recent Are You Being Served Event, however it

was suggested that the presentation of this version could be improved upon. The importance of the language used being easy to read and understandable, was also stressed as being vital to ensuring people would take notice of the document.

It was suggested that two pages could be allocated to Stockton Borough Council in the next Golden Guide to show what the Council had done for older people, what was in the process of being done and what was planned next.

The Committee discussed the usefulness of having an Older People's Champion as the Fire Brigade did, and noted how this could have the effect of raising the profile and identity of older people issues.

It was observed that some of the targets in the strategy were general for all ages of the public; however such things as bus time tables being produced in large print would make a big difference to older people. Reference was also made to the shortage of central meeting places in Town Centres, and the impact that older people's perception of crime and safety can have on their willingness to visit town centres etc.

The Over 50's Assembly representative was happy to report that the Assembly was growing and a joint meeting would be taking place in 2009 between the Over 50's and Youth Assembly's; and would contribute to the need to build community cohesion between these sectors.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked all of the representatives for their attendance and participation; and expressed the wish that all parties work together in the future as part of the older people's strategy.

CONCLUDED that the evidence be noted.