

Reference Group on Older People

Tuesday, 21st March, 2023

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

Members present: Alderman Copeland (Chairperson); and
Councillors McMullan and McCabe.

In attendance: Mrs. G. McEvoy, Senior Environmental Health Officer;
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer - Community Provision;
Mr. J. Morgan, Senior Project Development Officer; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Smyth.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th December 2022 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Update on Age Friendly Belfast

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided an update on the Age Friendly Plan which had been published for public consultation in December 2022 and which had resulted in a small number of amendments to the document. She highlighted a number of proposed changes to the plan including the fact that the plan would now cover the period 2023 -2027 and aligned to the timetable of the Belfast Agenda. She stated that safeguarding was being included as an objective, within the document, and had been linked to the Council's safeguarding policy.

The Members were informed of the four key priority areas contained within the Age Friendly Plan. The Senior Environmental Officer reported that infrastructure was a key priority within the plan and emphasised the need to develop a joined-up approach, with older people, on locality and future city centre developments. She stated the Belfast Seniors' Forum (G6) were working on that particular priority area, in partnership with the Imtac mobility transport advisory committee.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer highlighted a further key priority in regard to the development of Age Friendly design principles used to inform the development of city centre infrastructure projects. She stated that the design of city centre infrastructure projects had been recognised as a regional priority, with BCC taking the lead working in a partnership project with other local authorities. She stated that, as part of a longer-term plan, work on that

priority would be undertaken with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and Imtac and was planned for years three and four of the Age Friendly Plan.

The Reference Group was informed that a further priority area related to the provision of seating and toilet facilities and the provision of radar keys. She highlighted the need to carry out audits and pilot studies, in selected areas, and to provide Age-Friendly input in regard to the provision of Parklets, including the need to engage with the business community in regard to the provision of additional toilet facilities and seating. The Senior Environmental Officer highlighted the need to address the issue of transport, for older people, and to encourage older people to make use of public transport after the recent restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Members were informed that a further priority identified within the Age Friendly plan related to social inclusion and social connections in the support of the recovery of groups and programmes for older people. She highlighted the need to coordinate Age Friendly activities including, community centres being provided with funds to undertake Age Friendly events. She explained that there was a need to promote and enhance local connection hubs for older people including events in 2 Royal Avenue and the provision of dementia carers cafes located throughout the city.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer referred to the need to develop programmes dealing with Health and well-being. To that end, she reported that the G6 had forged links with GPs and multi-disciplinary teams including, engaging with Dr Alan Stout, the Healthy Ageing Partnership and relevant health trusts. The Members were informed of the need to protect the most vulnerable and isolated groups, working in partnership with relevant health trusts, on the prevention of falls by older people and increasing their mobility.

The area of financial security was highlighted as a key objective within the plan including, increasing the awareness of benefit entitlement and the take up of benefits by older people in addition to removing the stigma associated with benefit entitlement and dealing with the issue of debt. The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that there was a requirement to address both food and fuel poverty including the promotion of fuel stamps, access to food banks and improving the opportunities for older people to gain employment. She stated, further, that it was intended that a soft launch of the action plan would be held in May 2023.

The Chairperson stated that she was pleased to see the focus and operation of the safeguarding policy and recognised the important contribution made by the G6. The Members recognised also the importance attached to the promotion and development of dementia cafes, throughout the city, and the vital role provided in the provision of support for carers. She stated it was important that the location of dementia carers cafes were published and recognised and also the important contribution made in the promotion of financial security by "Make the Call". The Chairperson requested if it might be possible to secure PCSP representation on their panels. In response, the Lead Officer reported that she would enquire what flexibility PCSPs had to amend the composition of their board representation.

A Member raised the issue of toilet provision and requested an update on the progress made in terms of the review which had been undertaken. The Lead officer stated that she would report back to the Members including the provision of a timeframe in regard to completion of the review.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported on the success of the tea dances which had been held recently including, a show bands event in The City Hall which had been

attended by over two hundred and fifty older people. She provided a list of the warm spaces events which had been undertaken in conjunction with the Council's community centres and the opportunities available to encourage older people to get out and about, following the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. She reported that the Council was committed to the provision of £500 of funding to each community centre in order to assist in the provision of Age Friendly events.

Noted.

Isolation and Loneliness

The Senior Environmental Health Officer highlighted the importance of providing support to older people most in need which was a key component of the Belfast Agenda. She stated that the Council had commissioned consultants to undertake an initial piece of work, dealing specifically with that area and that it was anticipated that two workshops would be held in April 2023. She stated that the purpose of those workshops was to map out existing referral pathways and interventions, culminating in the production of a report on how progress could be achieved to address isolation and loneliness.

The Members were informed that loneliness training was a further area requiring consideration and that the HSC trust had examined the issue of loneliness and isolation in conjunction with the Northern Regional College. She stated that a number of training sessions had been organised by those organisations to provide formal accreditation in tackling the issues of loneliness and isolation.

The Chairperson stated that she was encouraged by the work which had been done to tackle the issues surrounding loneliness and isolation and hoped that Members would avail of the opportunity to participate in the training programmes designed to educate and inform in that particular area which was of particular relevance to older people.

Noted.

Age Friendly Network NI

The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that the networks acted as a significant source of support for older people, throughout the province. She stated that the UK network continued to meet on a regular basis and that the network was examining the development of priorities for the following year. The Members were informed that the resources available to fund Age Friendly priorities including supporting the networks. The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that both "Engage with Age" and "Volunteer Now" had separate funding streams provided by, both, the Public Health Agency and the HSC trust.

Noted.

Roselawn Bus Service

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Reference Group with an update on the Roselawn Bus Service which had been suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic. She highlighted the social benefits associated with the bus service and the fact that the service operated on a twice weekly basis from, both, the city centre and Shankill Road and had proved to be very popular by visitors to the crematorium.

Noted.

Age Friendly Staffing and Resources

The Lead Officer provided an update on the staffing resources for the section. She stated that a new Senior Development Project Officer had been appointed who would be taking up the post at the end of April 2023. She stated further that interviews were ongoing in regard to the recruitment of a new Age Friendly Coordinator, providing a dedicated resource for the Age Friendly Plan.

The Members thanked the Senior Environmental Health Officer for her support provided to the Reference Group, over the previous eleven years, and for her dedication in raising awareness of the issues affecting older people.

Noted.

Request by G6 to attend September Meeting

The Chairperson, behalf of the Reference Group, highlighted the important work and contribution made by the G6 in addressing many of the issues pertaining to older people. To that end, the Reference Group agreed that the G6 be invited to attend the September meeting of the Reference Group, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

Date of Next Meeting

The Reference Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Tuesday, 19th September 2023 at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson