

Reference Group on Older People

Tuesday, 12th December, 2023

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

Members present: Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors T. Brooks, Ferguson and
McCabe.

In attendance: Ms. J. Holland, Age Friendly Coordinator (temporary);
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer - Community Provision;
Ms. L. Wallace, Community Centre Supervisor; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors S. Douglas and Smyth.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th September, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were recorded.

Update on Age Friendly Belfast Plan - J. Holland

The Age Friendly Coordinator reported that the action plan contained four separate themes and that the area which was being worked on currently was connection hubs. She stated that consultations had taken place on a preferred location for the connection hub and that 2 Royal Avenue had been cited as the preferred option.

The Members were informed that the objective in setting up the connection hub was to establish a central location where older people could receive information on events and issues pertinent to them. The Age Friendly Coordinator reported that officers would be seeking the views of the Health Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) on making use of 2 Royal Avenue as a central information and communication hub for older people.

The Reference Group was informed that training on social isolation was being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Trust (HSC) and that further sessions had been scheduled to take place during November and December 2024. The Age Friendly Coordinator reported on the success of 'Positive Ageing Month' and the Age Friendly Convention which had been attended by over one hundred and thirty older people. The Reference Group was informed that, as a result, of Positive Ageing Month, older people had been made aware of the range of events which had been planned and those which had taken place across the city.

The Age Friendly Coordinator reported that, once again, the tea dances had proved very popular and were well attended, and that access to dementia services had been highlighted as a priority for 2024. In terms of winter planning, the Members were informed that, due to resource limitations, winter warmth stocks were limited and were now operated by the Housing Executive. The Age Friendly Coordinator reported that the fuel stamps scheme continued to operate and had proved popular with older people, allowing them to budget and assist with their energy costs.

In response to a question from the Chairperson in regard to the beneficiaries from the social isolation training, she was informed that it was available to care workers and those from within the voluntary and community sector. The Age Friendly Coordinator stated that she would check if future social isolation events could be programmed for 2024.

In response to a further question from a Member in regard to the availability of recordings on social isolation training, given that Members who were in full time employment found daytime training sessions difficult to attend, the Age Friendly Coordinator stated that she would ascertain if such training recordings could be made available for Members.

The Reference Group noted the information provided and thanked the staff for their dedication and work in organising the range of Age Friendly events and paid particular tribute to the work provided by the staff operating the handyman scheme.

Overview of Cost of Living Support - M Higgins

The Lead Officer reported that a cost-of-living guide had been produced and that the Council had received approximately one million pounds from the Department for Communities (DfC) to assist with its hardship scheme. The Members were reminded that a Cost of Living Working Group had been established by the Council which had agreed the approach adopted to administer and distribute the resources attached to the hardship fund. The Lead Officer reported that older people had been identified as a key cohort to benefit from the hardship programme.

The Reference Group was informed that the Council intended to work with delivery partners who had expertise in that area and who were best placed to provide support to meet identified need.

Noted.

Overview of Older Peoples' Groups and Support Provided by Community Centres – Lorraine Wallace/Lisa Wilson

The Community Centre Supervisor reported that, of the twenty-seven council run community centres in Belfast, twenty-six had undertaken activities targeted at older people. The Reference Group was informed that Community Development Officers provided the lead in a diverse range of activities, including direct activity provision by Council staff, with the various community centres.

The Members were informed that Community Development Officers collaborated with other support workers in order to provide for the needs of older people and were available to assist with grant applications, support with governance, programming, including a range of other support facilities. Ms. Wallace referred to a range of external groups which delivered services within the Council owned community centres, including fitness activities, arts and

crafts and learning and skills development. She highlighted the importance of community centres in the provision of a warm and safe space for older people, enabling them to connect and socialise with others.

The Chairperson highlighted the importance of the role played by local community centres and requested that information be brought back to a future meeting of the Working Group, identifying the reasons why political representation was no longer sought for Community Centre Councils.

A Member requested if a mechanism could be put in place to provide support and guidance to non-Council operated community centres and if Community Development officers could provide them with information and guidance as part of an extended outreach programme.

The Community Centre Supervisor agreed to offer information and guidance to those non-Council affiliated local community centres, including the information which those groups could gain from access to the Council website offering information on activities and the provision of practical support for those groups.

The Reference Group noted the information provided from the Lead Officer and she agreed to provide an update on the background on the decision not to appoint political representatives to the various Community Centre Councils, as had been the case during previous Council terms.

Date of Next Meeting

The Reference Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Tuesday, 19th March, 2024 at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson