

Belfast City Council approach to Civic Engagement
Becoming Visible:
Older People as Active Participants in the Community and in Long-term Care
Settings

Active ageing, productive aging, healthy ageing, civic engagement
Abstract for oral presentation

Belfast City Council has identified older people as a key priority under the social pillar of its corporate plan, 'better support for people and communities'. It has established a cross party political reference group which leads the Council approach in tackling the issues affecting older people in Belfast.

This political and civic leadership is at the heart of the Council's approach in its advocacy role with other agencies and government. The Council recognises the value of working in partnership and has linked its older people agenda with the work of the Belfast Health Development Unit, a newly formed collaboration between the Council and the health sector. This collaboration will form the basis of a future city wide health partnership and an integrated plan for tackling health inequalities in Belfast. The Council is an active partner in the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership and along with the Regional Health Board jointly funds a Coordinator to support the Partnership. This political leadership and connected working within the Council provides a sound basis for joined up planning and the sharing of resources in a strategic way to improve older peoples' health and wellbeing.

The Council engages with its older citizens in numerous ways, for example it recently hosted a debate in City Hall between Councillors representing five of the political parties and forty older people, representing the six seniors' forums in Belfast. The questions covered challenging issues such as the review of public administration, funding and euthanasia.

The Council also hosts an annual Senior Citizens Convention. The purpose of which is to encourage local older people to participate in civic life and to facilitate an understanding of how they can influence decisions that affect their lives. In 2010 the convention was organised in conjunction with the Healthy Ageing Partnership.

Other examples include the launch of a 'Good Neighbour' award Scheme in 2010 and the Council joining with Madrid to organise a volunteer exchange programme for older people.