

Reference Group on Older People

Thursday, 22nd August, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

Members present: Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Groves and Heading.

In attendance: Mr. D. Connolly, Environmental Health Manager;
Mrs. G. McEvoy, Senior Environmental Health Officer;
Mrs. E. Greer, Healthy Ageing Coordinator; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Election of Chairperson

Nominations were sought to fill the vacant position of Chairperson and it was:

Moved by Councillor Groves
Seconded by Councillor Heading and

Resolved – that Alderman Copeland be appointed to the position of
Chairperson for the period ended June 2020.

Alderman Copeland accepted the appointment and thanked the Members for their
nomination.

(Alderman Copeland in the Chair.)

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillors Michael Collins
and T. Kelly.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th December, 2019 were taken as read and
signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Terms of Reference

The Environmental Health Manager provided the Reference Group with an update
its Terms of Reference including, amongst other things, the provision of political direction
in respect of the city planning process for the improvement of health and wellbeing and
securing greater independence for older people. He referred to a further key role of the
Reference Group in the provision of political legitimacy to advocate, lobby and challenge
on policy issues which impacted directly on the quality of life for older people. The
Environmental Health Manager reported that it was proposed to hold the Annual Meeting

of the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum following the November meeting of the Reference Group.

Age-friendly Belfast

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Reference Group with an update on Age-friendly Belfast. She referred to the fact that, within the Belfast Agenda, it was recognised that 20% of citizens were over 60 years of age, a figure which was set to increase rapidly given the importance attached to the Councils commitment of ensuring an Age-friendly Belfast. She referred also to the fact that becoming Age-friendly was a World Health Organisation initiative. The Members were provided with an outline of the key elements of the Age-friendly approach and the fact that becoming Age-friendly was a continuous process, where structures and processes were adapted to support the health and wellbeing of older people.

The Reference Group was provided with an outline of the work of the Health Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) including the range of statutory and non-statutory organisations which comprised that body. The Senior Environmental Officer reported that life had improved for older people and provided the Members with a range of positive indicators, including the fact that 84% of older people felt that they could live life to the full in Belfast. She reported also that confidence had grown within that group in respect of their feelings of safety after dusk.

In terms of the contribution made by the Council in support of Age-friendly Belfast, it was reported that 485 home safety checks had been undertaken, including 140 repairs. It was reported that further partnership work had been carried out in that 3,635 dementia friends and 27 dementia champions had been created in Belfast. The Senior Environmental Health Officer stated that she was pleased to announce that 40 organisations and business enterprises had signed up to the Age-friendly Belfast charter, The Reference Group, despite the successes to date, was informed that there were many challenges still to be addressed and highlighted a range of physical infrastructure works which had been undertaken to assist older people, including improved street lighting, transport and the removal of pavement obstructions, She referred to further measures which had been undertaken to assist with financial security, including the improvement of health and wellbeing. She referred also to a range of additional measures implemented to increase social inclusion.

The Reference Group noted the information provided and acknowledged the efforts made to secure Belfast as a place where older people felt safe and were able to participate and play an active role within the city.

Age-friendly Belfast Plan 2018-2021

The Senior Environmental Health Manager provided the Members with an update on the Age-friendly Belfast Plan covering the period 2018-2021. She reported that a workshop had been held on 15th May, 2019 which had explored how the Council could support older people in the development and planning of services designed to meet their needs. At the Workshop it was reported that a number of specific themes had been identified including:

Physical Infrastructure;

Social Inclusion;

Health and wellbeing; and

Financial Security.

In keeping with the themes identified, it was reported that research had been undertaken to identify barriers hindering older people accessing the city centre including its range of facilities. The Reference Group was advised that a new toilet strategy was being developed for Belfast and that guidance by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in respect of pavement cafés was still to be produced. The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) had undertaken research into the housing needs of older people in the private sector which was due to be published in the near future. It was reported also that the draft Local Development Plan strategy would be published in August, 2019, prior to a consultation process being undertaken.

Noted.

Presentation by Michele Smyth – Age NI

(Michele Smyth, Age NI, attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.)

Ms. Smyth provided the Reference Group with an outline of the work undertaken by Age N.I. to help make Belfast a city where older people could engage in city life and could lead healthy and productive lives. She highlighted the importance to that organisation of Belfast becoming Age-friendly and of the need to set up an Age-friendly network. She stated that, of all the local authorities within the province, Belfast was at a more advanced stage in the Age-friendly process and confirmed that the all Council members had pledged to become an Age-friendly champions. The Reference Group was reminded of the need to maintain the momentum in the development of Age-friendly initiatives. She requested that officers encourage the Members of Council to engage proactively in the forthcoming Age-friendly events and the importance of using social media as a means to promote Age-friendly status.

Ms Smyth provided the Reference Group with arrange of suggestions on ways to promote Age-friendly in each of the local Council areas, including the promotion of age-friendly communities. She provided information on the eight themes contained within the framework used to develop Age-friendly plans, including amongst other things:

Civic Participation and Employment;

Social Participation; and

Transportation.

She provided the Members with a range of practical ways in which they could engage with older people's groups and networks and referred to the key components of the pledge. Ms Smyth stated that the Council had signed up to the pledge which included the promotion and support of good Age- friendly practice and planning. She highlighted also a range of initiatives which had been undertaken to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

The Reference Group noted the information which had been provided and thanked Ms Smyth for her detailed and informative presentation.

Age-friendly Belfast Convention 2019

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Members with information in respect of the forthcoming Age-friendly Belfast Convention which would take place on 1st October 2019. She stated that the purpose of the convention was to highlight the

progress which had been made in the development of the Age-friendly Belfast Plan 2018-2021 and to celebrate also the contribution made to the city by older people.

Noted.

Age-friendly Belfast Events

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Reference Group with a range of Age-friendly events which would be held as part of Positive Ageing Month. She stated that the scheduled events had been designed to be interactive and that some new events had been added to the schedule.

The Reference Group noted the diverse range of events which had been organised as part of Positive Ageing Month and congratulated the officers in their work to develop Age-friendly initiatives.

Date of Future Meetings

The Reference Group agreed its schedule of meetings covering the period until December 2020.

Chairperson