

Reference Group on Older People

Monday, 24th January, 2022

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

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

In attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mrs. G. McEvoy, Senior Environmental Health Officer;
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer- Community Provision;
Mrs. E. Greer, Senior Project Development Officer;
Ms. T. Mawhinney, Community Development Officer and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th September, 2021 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 the Reference Group with an update on the progress made to develop the new Age-friendly Action Plan. She stated that consultants had been appointed to assist with the consultation process for the new Age-friendly Belfast Plan 2022 - 2025

The Senior Environmental Health Officer highlighted the success associated with the publication of the Health and Well-Being information and support for seniors in the community publication, stating that many of the topics contained therein had been influenced by the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum. The Members were informed that the publication of City Matters had been a major source of information for older people and, in particular, for those individuals with no access to alternative means of communication.

The Reference Group was informed that the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum had continued to meet, in virtual format, throughout the pandemic. The Senior Environmental Health Officer highlighted the contribution made by older people in regard to the Belfast Stories project and other consultations. She referred to some of the issues raised by them, including transport and personal safety and reported on the enthusiasm demonstrated by them on being

invited to participate in the consultation process, as a means to inform and influence government policy.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer reminded the Members that the Belfast Safer Homes project was now operating again, post-pandemic, and that information had been distributed on measures to stay warm during the winter months and which included the distribution of winter warmth packs and the provision of advice and guidance on energy efficiency. The Members were informed that an Age-friendly convention had taken place in October 2021, within Covid guidance restrictions. She reported that sixty older people had attended the event which had been attended by the Chairperson of the Reference Group.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided information on a range of additional events which had been held over Positive Ageing month, including a Silver Sunday event, IT workshops, cookery demonstrations and a number of outdoor activities.

The Members noted the information provided and thanked the staff who had continued to provide a range of support measures for older people, under challenging circumstances, as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

Update on Older Volunteers Celebration 2021

The Community Development Officer provided the Reference Group with background information on the establishment of the Older Volunteer Awards, which had commenced in 2011, and which were subsequently suspended in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to recognise the contribution of older volunteers, she reported that a decision had been taken to organise and distribute a series of older volunteer videos with agreement that the celebration event should be held virtually to comply with covid restrictions.

The Members were informed that the celebration event had been a considerable success and had been promoted through a range of organisations including community centres, the G6 and Volunteer Now. The Reference Group were provided with an overview of the content within the events which comprised, amongst other things, music and a quiz which had proved popular with the participants. The Members were provided with a number of videos produced by volunteers and which highlighted the diverse range of their volunteering initiatives.

The Reference Group noted the information provided and praised the sacrifice and contribution made by older volunteers, including the benefits to society of their invaluable work.

Safe Seniors Packs

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Reference Group with an update on the co-funding and distribution of the seniors' packs of which it was reported that fifteen thousand has been distributed to date. She stated that the packs had been well received generally and that partnerships, between the Council and other co-funder organisations, including the Police and Community Safety Partnership, had been strengthened as a result of the cooperative working arrangements.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Reference Group, paid tribute to the work undertaken by officers to engage and support older people through the pandemic. She requested information on the criteria to participate in the Winter Warmth scheme and was informed that details of the criteria and application process to access the scheme would be circulated to the Members.

The Chairperson stated that the Age-friendly convention had been a great success, despite the restrictions preventing face to face interactions, created by the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to a question from a Member in regard to ensuring that the Age-friendly programme encouraged greater participation from minority ethnic groups, the Senior Project Development Officer stated that links had been established with Chinese older peoples' groups. She confirmed that there existed opportunities to engage further with under-represented ethnic minority groups, including representatives from the African and Syrian communities.

A Member raised an issue in regard to the incorporation of climate change into the agenda for older people. In response, the Senior Environmental Health Officer acknowledged that climate change and the views of older people had not been given sufficient status and that work needed to be undertaken to address that deficiency. The Senior Project Development Officer suggested that it might be possible to address the concerns of the Member, by the inclusion of older people and climate change within the new Age-friendly plan.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Reference Group that its next meeting be held on Monday, 25th April 2022 at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson