

Wandsworth Older People's Forum

Annual Report 2010

The Forum continues to monitor services for older people in the Borough of Wandsworth. The banks' financial crisis brought threats early in the year of cuts to come and by the end these threats were real. Voluntary organisations hoping to receive funds from trusts found it much more difficult with reduced income to trusts. Those receiving grant or contracts from the Council fear reductions. Increases in charges for services are pending. Closure of Church Lane Day Centre has been agreed. Reduced hours for all libraries and closure of York Gardens Library in the most deprived area of the Borough were to be subject to consultation early in 2011.

The Day Services Review was consulted on over the summer, a bad time to hold meetings, but views were submitted from the Forum. Personal budgets are now offered to everyone entitled to help from the Council with daily living. This will enable people to have choice about the kind of help they receive and who should give it. Some will be able, either themselves or with help from a relative, to manage the accounting required but for many older people this is not feasible at this stage in their lives. The Council offer Third Party Management which takes that chore away but still gives them their choice in how and when they want help. The ability to choose makes a huge difference to the services, particularly the specialist day services. Now people may choose to employ a personal assistant leaving them free to go where they like or remain at home. However this choice is of greater benefit to young, physically disabled, people rather than for older people who have become too frail or too forgetful to look after themselves. Making choices is difficult. There is the small good news that independent advocacy is available to help people who have to make choices about how they will receive care at a time when they are not terribly fit and perhaps have no younger relatives around to help them decide.

The Network of older people's organisations, which the Forum runs on commission from the Council, has held two conferences. The first in March was an update of progress on the actions promised for the Older People's Strategy. The meeting heard from too many people about all that is being done which left little time for people to ask about the things which were not done. We are planning a repeat in April 2011 with longer time and more time for the participants to have their say. The second conference in November worked better and we had three good accounts about how Wandsworth services were planning to work under the new Government's sweeping changes to health services.

Regular meetings have been held with the Deputy Director of Adult Social Services and many other meetings attended by representatives including the Local Strategic Partnership enable the Forum to keep the views of older people before the authorities.

The monthly members' meetings continued with speakers on topics of interest, some about services in Wandsworth, such as the Specialist Day Centres, a community library, community safety and a new service for people with aphasia. We also had excellent talks on Hampton Court, making a will and one about Two Pioneering Women of Egyptology. The Forum celebrated its 20th birthday, held off from January because of the snow, but held in May. Newsletters were published four times with accounts of the meetings and other items of interest.

Comments were made on the NHS White Paper. The Forum saw it as a very expensive exercise which we thought might be a disaster and the proposed system would probably be less able to be monitored by the new Health Watch. The Forum hopes it will work.

The Forum gained a Grassroots grant to help with outreach and employed a worker to contact small groups of older people in sheltered housing and churches. A number were helped to constitute themselves and apply for funding to help their activities and 12 were successful in gaining grants. It is hoped that funds can be found to continue this work but that may not work out with trust funds being rather depleted at present rates of interest.

Lilias Gillies
Hon Secretary

A questionnaire is circulated each September with the newsletter. This year again we sought the reasons older people give for not being able to do the things they would like to do.

The Forum sends representatives to meetings of many organisations in the Borough and keeps good contacts with the LINK as well as the Council, NHS, police and other local voluntary bodies. The Forum is represented on the Local Strategic Partnership.

Lilias Gillies
Hon Secretary

December 2010