

Wandsworth Older People's Forum Annual Report 2015

One of the successes of last year for the Forum was seeing a new Wandsworth Older People's Strategy from 2015-2020. In 2014 the Forum had many discussions with the Council on whether to do a follow-on strategy and held a conference on what it should contain. The final version appeared in July 2015 and although the Council would prefer people to consult in online there are paper copies available. Work is at present going on within Council and health bodies to draw up an action plan and some time was spent at the first Forum meeting in 2016 on that.

Another success was to achieve funding for the Forum Newsletter for three years from City Bridge. The print run for the newsletter is 4000, some sent to individuals who have paid a subscription and others in bulk to libraries for public use and to sheltered housing and community centres in the numbers they have requested.

A third success has been the *Getting to know you* outreach programme run by Mac Downes with Su Elliott. Mac has been working as Outreach Manager for the Forum for five years during which he has managed to find funding for and run an outreach programme to hard-to-reach groups in estate community centres and sheltered housing. The *Getting to know you* programme was a series of five sessions of tea and cake and chat, advertised in a common room and for anyone willing to join. The chat moved on to reminiscence sessions and health, social care services, living safely and not being persuaded by a scam about finance or dodgy building work. Sadly Mac has decided to retire although he is continuing with some work in extra care schemes in this year. The Forum is very grateful to Mac for his work in Wandsworth which has enabled information about services to be disseminated and friendly relations develop between people living in the same area. Hopefully friendships and groups will have grown which can go on and will have relieved loneliness and isolation for many people.

The regular meetings of the Forum have been held with a range of speakers. The director from Wandsworth Museum spoke about the future of the collections in the joint venture with Battersea Arts Centre, the start of which was sadly marred by the fire at BAC. We had speakers on local food, on public involvement in the NHS and on the new information Hub, Care for Me, which can be accessed online but also via navigators, real people, on a phone line. There is continued concern about the amount of information and access to public bodies and suppliers which is available only online and there is no telephone access advertised. There are still many older people, possibly 50% on a recent estimate, who do not use the internet. There should always be a telephone number to allow everyone access.

The Forum is funded by Wandsworth Council to facilitate links between, and a joint voice from, all the older people's groups and organisations in Wandsworth. The outreach programme and the newsletter are part of that although separately funded. Two conferences for representatives of all organisations and groups were held in 2015. The first was in January on the Care Act and the differences that would make for older people. One most important difference is that everyone is now entitled to an assessment from a professional along with information about where to find the services needed even if the person will be paying themselves and/or is not in the most needy categories of critical or substantial. The second was in July on Loneliness and Isolation. A recent LGA circular on this talked of the effect of these on health, said to be equivalent to 15 cigarettes a day, and recommended that Health & Well-being Boards should take these factors into consideration in their commissioning decisions. Following on from the conference the Forum planned a project which received a lot of support from first line providers to assist in the training of first line workers in identifying loneliness, in being able to speak about it and in knowing where to find information about activities or organisations which would be appropriate for that particular client. Unfortunately bids for funding have not been successful so far.

The Forum looks forward to 2016 with some trepidation as to funding for survival. With funding for the newsletter assured the Forum could continue in a reduced way. The loss of the outreach programme would be a major gap, leaving many older people, unable or unmotivated to travel, in isolation across the Borough.