

Reference Group on Older People

Monday, 22nd August, 2022

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

Members present: Alderman S. Copeland; and
Councillors R. McMullan and B. Smyth.

In attendance: Mrs. G. McEvoy, Senior Environmental Health Officer;
Mrs. E. Greer, Senior Project Development Officer;
Mrs J. Derby, Project Support Officer;
Ms. C. Young, Marketing and Communications
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 Smyth
Seconded by Councillor McMullan and

Resolved – That Alderman Copeland be appointed to the position of
Chairperson for the period to end on the date of the Local Government
Elections in May, 2023.

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

(Alderman Copeland in the Chair.)

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Hutchinson and
McCabe.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th May, 2022 were taken as read and signed as
correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Update on Age-Friendly Belfast Plan 2022-2026

The Senior Project Development Officer reported that, following presentation of the draft Age-Friendly Plan to the Chief Officers' Management Team, it was felt that it would be beneficial for the draft plan to be presented to the various Departmental Management Teams as a means to ensure that all relevant Belfast City Council activity was included in the draft plan. She stated that, after completion of that process, the draft plan would be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

The Reference Group was informed that, following input from the various Departmental Management Teams, additional actions had been included and that some of those actions would require a detailed implementation plan which would be confirmed following a public consultation. It was reported that the Age Friendly Plan would focus on the 4 themes of infrastructure, social connections, health and wellbeing and financial security. In terms of infrastructure, the Senior Project Development Officer reported that it was important that new developments in the City centre involved an input from older people. She stated that both the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum and local forums were keen to be involved with the support of the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) who had offered to provide support for older people to enable them to develop the skills necessary to contribute to this work.

The Senior Project Development Officer emphasised the importance of the development of a set of Age Friendly design principles and of the need to involve older people in both the design and development of projects and their inclusion as a key element of the consultation process. She highlighted the need to review and improve toilet facilities within the city and acknowledged that any work would have to take into account other considerations such as deterring anti-social behaviour. She highlighted the action to carry out an audit of current public toilet usage, including any barriers restricting that usage. The Reference Group was informed of the need to explore the "take a seat" pilots and of the need to provide Age Friendly input into the development of parklets.

The Members were informed of the need to promote and develop social connections for older people and, in particular, the need to recover some of the older people programmes which had been operational pre the Covid-19 pandemic. She highlighted some of the work undertaken by the Council currently in building and supporting social connections and referred to the aim to develop local connection hubs, including a city centre hub, to provide a central communication and information distribution point. In this regard, she stated that 2 Royal Avenue had been a considerable success story and was now used regularly by older people, from across the city and beyond.

The Senior Project Development Officer stated the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum had agreed to provide assistance in the operation of the hubs and that further work was required to agree where local hubs should be located and on how they could be supported. In terms of dementia-friendly, the Members were informed that the Age Friendly Plan would support dementia-friendly neighbourhoods and encourage the development of carer's cafes throughout the city. She stated that there was a need also to recruit and support volunteers through working in partnership with Volunteer Now.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer referred to two further main themes identified with the Age-Friendly Plan, namely, health and well-being and financial security. In terms of the former, she stated that the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum had established links with GP representatives, including the establishment of regular meetings with Dr. Alan Stout. The Reference Group was informed of the importance attached to improving mobility for older

people, which was linked to the Belfast Agenda and to ensure that the problems of connectivity for older people and social isolation were addressed.

In terms of falls, which it was reported had a major impact for older people, the Senior Environmental Health Officer stated that a number of falls road shows were being planned across the city, as a means to address the problem and stated that it was intended to publish a regional calendar, in conjunction with Age NI and the Age Friendly Network NI.

The Members were informed that financial security was a major priority affecting older people and that there was a pressing need to ensure that older people were provided with access to the benefits system, including pension credit. To that end, the Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that the Council was running four "Be Prepared" events across the city, at which advice services would be available to assist older people to obtain the benefits which they are entitled to. She stated that debt control advice was a further service which was necessary, particularly for older people, and that advice and guidance in that area was essential, given the current economic climate.

The Reference Group was advised of additional areas which were of particular concern to older people, including fuel and food poverty and the provision of support for food banks. Obtaining employment for older people was highlighted as a key priority for those older people who wished to return to the employment market and, to that end, the Council had sought engagement with employment academies to enable older people to access the labour market.

The Members were informed that an Age Friendly Officer would be appointed, in the Autumn, to support the work of the Reference Group and that the Senior Environmental Health Officer would be returning to her role, as an Environmental Health Officer, after a lengthy secondment, supporting the Reference Group.

The Chairperson complimented the dementia friendly work undertaken throughout the city and the vital role played in the provision of social connections and the efforts made to reduce social isolation and loneliness. She praised the work of Dr. Alan Stout in engaging with older people, through a number of programmes, including the Take Five well-being initiative.

The Members praised the work undertaken by the Senior Environmental Health Officer in supporting the Reference Group and enquired if the review of toilet facilities in the City was a fresh review and enquired also if older people were still reluctant to travel into the city centre, following the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, the Senior Project Development Officer stated that the review of toilet provision was an emerging piece of work being undertaken by council and that a consultant would be recruited to undertake a comprehensive review of toilet facilities throughout the city, which included parks and open spaces. She stated that confidence building measures were required to be put in place, in order to provide older people with the confidence to venture out again, post the Covid-19 pandemic. She highlighted the work being undertaken by Volunteer Now, including their befriending initiative, was part of that objective.

A Member raised concerns in regard to the pending energy crisis, with future increasing costs forecast over the winter period. He requested what measures could be put in place to encourage the take-up of benefits, by older people, including pension credit and how an extensive information programme might be undertaken to communicate to older people the potential benefits available. He stated that it might be beneficial if some of the information sessions, across the city, might be programmed to take place, in both the day and evenings, to maximise communication of the potential benefits available.

In response, the Senior Environmental Health Officer stated that advice and guidance on the benefits system would be available at the "Be Prepared" events which would be taking place across the city. She acknowledged that a broader means of communication might be employed to communicate with older people, utilising a range of media communication methods including City Matters, billboards and community centres. She stated that some community centres were operating currently an advice service, for older people, and that it was hoped that this would be extended. She stated also that she would take on board the Member's suggestion, that advice services be extended to include evening sessions in an endeavour to facilitate those individuals who were employed during the daytime.

After discussion the Reference Group noted the information contained within the draft Age Friendly Belfast Plan and approved the draft plan. They noted that the draft Age Friendly Belfast Plan would be discussed at the next meeting of the Chief Officers Management Team, prior to being presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Update on Extreme Weather and Winter Planning with Older People

The Senior Project Development Officer provided the Reference Group with an update on the work of the Age Friendly winter planning group, which formed part of the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP). She reported that the group met on a twice yearly basis and provided the Council with an update on proposals and measures to mitigate against the worst impacts of winter, in all its forms, including flooding and winter emergency planning measures. She stated that demand for the winter warmth packs, provided by the Public Health Agency, would be high this winter, including advice and guidance on draught proofing measures. She stated that winter warmth packs would be made available also, through the Council, as part of its Belfast Safer Homes scheme.

The Members were provided with an update on the operation of the fuel stamps scheme provided by the Council and which was included in the Council's City Matters publication. The Senior Project Development Manager stated that four "Be Prepared" events would be hosted in the Autumn to facilitate advice and provide guidance to individuals on matters relevant to coping with the pressure and challenges of Winter. She reported that the Northern Ireland Assembly All-Party Group on Older People would be meeting on 7th September 2022 and that the cost of living crisis was on the agenda for that meeting. The Members were informed that information from that group would be communicated to the Reference Group and the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum

At the request of the Chairperson, the Senior Project Development Manager agreed to furnish the Reference Group with information on the Warm and Well project and agreed also that external advice on pension credit, by way of a presentation, be provided to all Members.

A Member requested if it might be possible for the Council to waiver its fee, over the Winter months, in terms of its inspection fees for insulation. The Senior Environmental Health Officer stated that she would note the Member's suggestion and refer it to the relevant department and that a further update would be provided to Members.

The Reference Group noted the information which had been provided, including the action points, subject to the relevant approval being granted.

Update on Age-Friendly Events

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided the Reference Group with the undernoted report in regard to the extensive range of Age-Friendly events planned for 2022.

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

To update members of recent and upcoming Age-friendly Belfast activities and events.

2.0 Recommendations

Members take note and promote events and activities.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

The Greater Belfast Seniors Forum

The G6 have been begun to meet face to face and hope to be back in the City Hall in September.

The G6 meeting generally meet the second Thursday of the month at 1pm should any members wish to attend.

Age-friendly Belfast Tea Dances - 2 Royal Avenue

We have had 8 hugely successful Tea Dances at 2 Royal Avenue, the venue is great for older people. The next event is 23rd August at 2pm – 4pm and 27th September at 2pm - 4pm.

The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Tea Dances

These were very well attended and a huge success, great feedback.

Age Friendly Belfast Walks

We have pulled together a walking programme over the summer including a mini bus tour of City Cemetery.

Positive Ageing Month

Preparations are well under way for the programme for event for PAM, including local tea dances, Silver Sunday, Health days, the 4 Be Prepared events, fall prevention roadshows, a zoon tea dance, a zoom quiz, bingo, walks, talks, info sessions and the first post covid Slipped Disco!

Age Friendly Belfast Convention

This will take place on Tuesday 4th October in the City Hall.

Older Volunteer of the year Awards

This will take place Monday 12th December, Tim McGarry is Guest Speaker.

Belfast Stories equity steering group

Ivan Baxter from the G6 has been selected to represent older people on this group.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

All work will be carried out within existing budgets of Age-friendly Belfast and the partners involved.

**5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

This work is part of The Age-friendly Belfast Plan which has been equality and rural needs screened in line with the Council's agreed process."

The Reference Group noted the events which had been planned for the remainder of 2022, given that the Covid-19 restrictions had eased significantly.

Date of Next Meeting

The Reference Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Monday, 19th December, 2022 at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson