

# Reference Group on Older People

Monday, 19th December, 2022

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

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

In attendance: Mrs. G. McEvoy, Senior Environmental Health Officer;  
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer - Community Provision;  
Ms. T. Mawhinney, Community Development Officer; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

### **Apologies**

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

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd August, 2022 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 reported that the public consultation exercise on the draft Age Friendly Plan had ended on 2nd December 2022 and that the majority of the responses had been positive. She stated that, following completion of that exercise, the comments had been forwarded to the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) who would make any required amendments, prior to a launch of the plan in February/March 2023.

The Senior Environmental Officer reported that the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum continued to meet both, city wide and locally, with a number of meetings being held remotely. She informed the Reference Group that Dr. Alan Stout would be in attendance at the January meeting and the Chairperson of the Reference Group stated her intention to be in attendance also.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Reference Group, requested if the Conor Room or the Reception Room might be available during 2023 for use by the G6 group. The Democratic Services Assistant stated that he would enquire on behalf of the Reference Group to ascertain if that request could be accommodated. The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided an assurance that a Council officer would be present at those meetings in order to ensure that the integrity of the room/s, including all electronic equipment contained therein was protected.

The Chairperson requested that, where individual attendances by political parties of the Reference Group was less than expected, that the relevant Party Group Leaders of those groups be contacted, with a view to ensuring there was sufficient cross-party attendance at future meetings of the Group.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided an update on the Age Friendly Belfast Convention and Positive Ageing Month and reported that it was encouraging that events were now being held in person. She reported on a range of events which had been held as part of Positive Ageing Month and referred specifically to the success of the four "Be Prepared" events which had been held across the city.

The Members were informed that the Policing and Community Safety Partnership had re-scheduled its Christmas event to take place in the Spring of 2023 and that work was underway to make preparations for those events, including liaising with a range of exhibitors and participants. The Senior Environmental Health Officer reported that a Regional Age Friendly calendar had been produced in partnership with Age NI and the Age Friendly NI Network and would be delivered to local communities across the city.

The Reference Group highlighted the success of the tea dance event which had taken place recently at St. Comgall's. She informed the Members of support for older people, which had been provided over the Christmas period, including the provision of emergency telephone numbers and helpline support. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Reference Group, expressed her satisfaction that "face to face" meetings with older people had been re-established, post Covid 19, including the support provided to that group as part of the "Make that Call" initiative.

A Member highlighted a cultural music dance event which would be taking place, as part of the Féile an Earraigh Spring festival, and which might be of particular interest to older people. She provided information on the various dance exhibitions taking place, including Irish, Scottish and Highland dance. The Senior Environmental Officer stated that she was happy to note the event and the Member stated that she would keep the Reference Group informed of the various events taking place as part of that festival.

Noted.

### **Extreme Weather and Winter Planning**

The Senior Environmental Health Officer informed the Members that the above Group had been re-named and was now called the Seasonal Planning Group to encompass a wider range of extreme seasonal climatic conditions. She stated that the group was working closely with the Emergency Planning team to share information with other relevant organisations, including the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

She highlighted in particular the concerns of older people in regard to high energy costs and a reluctance to heat their homes, including the associated problems to both their dwellings and health, including dampness and burst pipes. The Reference Group was informed of the fuel stamp initiative to assist with the budgetary pressures associated with the increase in energy costs.

The Senior Environmental Officer referred to sessions on Pension Credit that had been delivered by Advice NI for Members in October. She highlighted a number of cooking demonstrations have taken place, as part of the Falls Road shows, focussing on nutrition and which had proved to be both popular and successful. The Members were informed of an initiative focussing on the creation of a number of warm spaces hubs throughout the city and

of the development of a warm spaces register providing information on the location and distribution of the hubs. She highlighted a range of events and indoor activities for all groups, including older people, undertaken on behalf of the Council by GLL and which provides a warm and welcoming environment.

The Reference Group was informed that 2 Royal Avenue would be used a central hub for older people and that it was hoped that the operation of those warm hubs would encourage older people to visit and partake of future activities at both council owned community and leisure centres. The Lead Officer reminded the Members that the Council hardship fund was available for older people to claim in addition to the winter fuel scheme provided by central government.

Noted.

### **Older Volunteer Awards**

The Community Development Officer submitted the undernoted report highlighting the Age Friendly Volunteer Awards and providing a list of those individuals and teams who had been successful in achieving awards in a diverse range of categories:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**To update members on the Age-Friendly Belfast Older Volunteer Awards presentation event.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**Members take note and discuss future Age-friendly Belfast Older Volunteer Awards**

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 This is the 10th year of the Age-friendly Awards which provides an opportunity for groups, organisations and individuals from across the city to recognise and celebrate their volunteers who are aged 60 and over.**

**The Awards are delivered with the support of Volunteer Now and are a partnership between Age-Friendly and Community Provision.**

**This year’s Award nomination period ran from 19th September until 28th October, with the assessment panel meeting in November to agree the winners. Representatives from Belfast City Council, Volunteer Now and Age-Friendly Belfast sat on the assessment panel.**

**The presentation event for the Awards took place on 12th December in the Great Hall, City Hall. All the nominees, their nominators and guests were invited along to the event. Representatives of Wicklow Older People’s Council were also in attendance as part of their 3-day visit to meet with the Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (G6).**

The event was hosted by Tim McGarry and the Lord Mayor. Alderman Copeland also spoke as Chair of the APRG. The event featured two videos – the Indian Seniors Group and its volunteers, Nilam Gutam and Rajni Sharma and North Belfast Men’s Shed and their volunteer Jim Thompson.

- 3.2 There were 21 organisations from across the city who nominated 14 individual volunteers across 4 categories, as well as 10 Team nominations.

This year’s winners were

- *Older Volunteer of the Year: Owen Coogan from BraveHEARTs 50+ Men’s group*

Owen approached the HEART project about getting involved with them. He has been the lead on Danderball walking football, organising many elements of the programme. The staff appreciate what Owen does because it frees them up to focus on other areas of work. Jackie who nominated Owen says ‘We believe the BraveHEARTS group would not be as successful if it wasn’t for Owen and his continued commitment to his role. He is 81 years young and has been living and working in this community all his life. Most of the participants turn up for Owen. They enjoy the danderball and don’t want to let him down’

- *Longstanding Volunteer: Cooper McClure from Midland Amateur Boxing Club*

Cooper has been at Midland ABC since he was a young boxer. After retiring from boxing at the age of 20 he came back as a coach and has been coaching for the Club ever since. In 2018 he became Head Coach and has worked to move the Club into a positive position including getting involved in cross community activity. Cooper has a full-time job and still manages to be at the Club at 5:30pm, making sure that it is open for 6 pm. What stood out for the panel was Cooper’s dedication to the Club. He started out as a young boxer and stayed on to work with new generations of young boxers. The panel felt he had a vision for the local area and for the young people involved in the club.

Sam who nominated Cooper said, ‘everyone in Midland looks to Cooper as a leader and is inspired by him’.

- *Unsung Hero: Robert McClenaghan from Falls Residents Association*

The key word here is relationships. Robert builds relationships with local residents, young and old, with statutory agencies and those working in the local area. He’s there for family fun days, community safety issues and during Covid he was one of the volunteers supporting the most vulnerable in Lower Falls. The

panel felt Robert is the 'go to man' in the area. Aisling who nominated him says he is a positive role model. She adds 'He was the first person I met when I became a community safety worker in Lower Falls. He helped me meet residents and engage with them. Once they saw me with him it made my job easier as he is respected and trusted.'

- ***Digital Champion: Mary McCullough from Conway Education Centre***

Mary is an example of someone who gets involved with a group and then decides to stay and give back. Mary began in Conway Education Centre as a student herself, doing Maths, English and ICT. Having gained qualifications in ICT she became the Centre's ICT Support Volunteer in 2018. Since then, she's supported over 150 IT learners. As well as ICT support Mary also makes sure there are lovely cakes for break-times. Neither ill-health nor Covid have stopped her. During lockdown Mary quickly learned how to use Zoom so she could continue her volunteering online. Pauline who nominated Mary says 'Without Mary the IT classes would not be the same. The support she gives to nervous students, her unassuming encouragement - 'of course you can do it, if I can, then everyone can, just take it step by step, are priceless'

- ***Team Award: Given the quality of the nominations received the panel decided that 2 teams should be recognised this year for their contribution to the city***

### **Community Projects Volunteers from Volunteer Now**

The Community Projects team support socially isolated older people from across the city through befriending, driving and shopping support. As well as doing shopping or driving they provide companionship to those who may only see their home help or carers. Lauren who nominated this team says they stand out for 3 reasons

- Their dedication: they will willingly arrange their personal lives to accommodate the people they support
- Their loyalty: they support people within their own homes and build trust with those they volunteer with.
- Their reliability: the group provide support over the 52 weeks of the year. They're out and about in all weathers and all situations including Covid and the lock downs.

### **Belfast East Dream Team from the RNID**

Belfast East Dream Team is Tom Clarke and Gary Nummy. They are Hearing Aid Maintenance volunteers. They visit private homes, care homes and supported living accommodation to support people with hearing aids. Tom attends awareness events, coffee mornings and health fairs, sharing information about RNID services or offering on-line hearing aid checks. Gary draws on his

technical career in telecommunications to learn all he can about how hearing aids and loop systems he comes across in people's homes. He also takes time to learn about the newest hearing aids with blue tooth capabilities. Melissa who nominated the team says they are passionate about supporting their local community and are generous with feedback, suggestions and ideas about how to make services even better.

The event was supported by Age-Friendly event volunteers who provided meet and greet services. As part of the 10th anniversary celebration this group of volunteers were also honoured and presented with an award recognising their contribution to the work of Age-Friendly Belfast.

As well as the category winners receiving an award, all those nominated received a crystal plaque recognising their nomination. All the volunteers were given a goody bag containing a 'thank you' chocolate bar, foldaway shopping bag and keyring torch, as well as a volunteer pin badge.

### **3.3 Financial and Resource Implications**

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

### **3.4 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 Members were informed that the number of volunteers and teams nominated was much higher than anticipated and were provided with a list of the organisations which comprised the judging panellists. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Reference Group, noted the information provided and thanked the officers for their work in organising a very successful event and offered its congratulations to those who had been nominated and also those who had been successful in achieving their individual and team awards.

### **Age Friendly Staffing Resources**

The Lead Officer reported that the Senior Project Development Officer had retired from the organisation and it was anticipated that a replacement officer would be appointed by Spring 2023. She stated that funding had been secured from the PHA for the post of Age Friendly Co-ordinator under a three-year funded contract. She assured the Members that, despite changes to the personnel attached to the Age Friendly programme, resources would be maintained to secure delivery of the initiative.

Noted.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The Reference Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Tuesday, 21st March, 2023 at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson