

Reference Group on Older People

Tuesday, 19th September, 2023

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON OLDER PEOPLE

Members present: Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors T. Brooks and Ferguson.

In attendance: Ms. J. Holland, Age Friendly Coordinator (temporary);
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer - Community Provision; 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 Ferguson
Seconded by Councillor T. Brooks and

Resolved – that Alderman Copeland be appointed to the position of
Chairperson for the period ended June 2027.

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

(Alderman Copeland in the Chair.)

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st March 2023 were taken as read and signed as
correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Update from G6 on Belfast Action Plan

Members of the G6 and Mr. Eamon Quinn, Director of Engage with Age, were invited
to attend the meeting in connection with this item and remained for the duration of the agenda
items under discussion.

Mr. Quinn highlighted the significant role played by the G6 in galvanising a response to the consultation document on the 60 plus smart pass scheme to extend its qualifying period from sixty to sixty-five years of age. To that end, the G6 undertook to submit individual responses to the consultation document and to coordinate action with the other national forums located throughout the city, including use made of social media and marketing campaigns.

The Members were informed that members of the G6 had visited the Department for Infrastructure offices (DfI), in person, to deliver their responses to the consultation document. Mr. Quinn stated that a meeting had been held also with the Director of Public Transport and his staff. The G6 highlighted the importance of public transport in the maintenance of social contact for older people and how withdrawal of the service could exacerbate social isolation for that group. The G6 highlighted also the potential for a reduction in spending, by older people, in city centre shops should the free public transport service be withdrawn. In terms of the negative environmental consequences, the G6 highlighted the fact that, whilst withdrawal of the service would have no impact on the number of public transport journeys, it was likely to add to both pollution and congestion created by an increase in private car journeys. In addition, the Members were informed that a reduction in passenger numbers could have negative employment consequences for public transport staff and could result in a rationalisation and reduction in financially viable routes.

The Reference Group was informed that other actions, organised by both the G6 and individual forums, had included a protest outside the City Hall, which had been supported by the trade union movement and protests organised, outside the DfI offices, to highlight the impact of the proposed changes. Mr Quinn stated that more than seven thousand four hundred individuals had responded to the consultation document. It was reported that, whilst there was no guarantee that the comprehensive objections might not change proposals to amend the policy, it delivered a strong message in regard to the overwhelming objections by older people. It was noted also that the G6 would seek representation to the relevant Permanent Secretary or government minister, should the local assembly be re-established, on the design of the survey which was complicated to the point that a large number of older people were unable to complete it. Mr. Quinn agreed to report back to the Reference Group, at a later date, once he had received feedback from the department in regard to the concerns raised by older people on the design and complexity of the survey.

A G6 member raised an issue in regard to the lack of age-discrimination legislation, in Northern Ireland, to protect the interests of older people. She highlighted the fact that such legislation existed in the United Kingdom. The Chairperson suggested that it might be appropriate to lobby existing M.L.As to have legislation enacted once the local assembly was re-established. In the interim, she suggested that a Notice of Motion be presented, to a future meeting of the Council, requesting that the Executive take action to draft and enact formal legislation in that regard.

After discussion it was

Proposed by Alderman Copeland

Seconded by Councillor T. Brooks and

Resolved – that the Chair of the Reference Group, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee, submit a Notice of Motion, to be presented to a future meeting of the Council, requesting that such legislation be drafted, approved and enacted by the Executive once the Assembly became re-established.

The Reference Group agreed also that, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee, it would not present such a motion, to the Council, until Mr. Quinn had provided an update on a proposal to change the role and remit of the Age-Sector Platform, to enable it to become a regional forum for older people.

A G6 member raised the issue of the cost-of-living crisis, including loneliness and social isolation as being of particular relevance to the group. In response, the Lead Officer highlighted the work which fell within the scope of the Cost of Living Working Group in that regard in addition to the work being undertaken by the Council to develop community programmes.

In response to funding grants available and budgetary pressures, the Lead Officer agreed to request that relevant officers liaise with local forum chairs to identify funding opportunities and assist with the application process for those groups which had been unsuccessful in securing Council funding. She reported that, owing to the extensive number of applications received and budgetary pressures, the Council had been unable to fund all of the applications which had been submitted.

In response to a question from a G6 member in regard to feedback on failed grant applications, the Lead Officer confirmed that feedback on application forms was available and that the relevant community teams would engage, with the forum representatives, to furnish them with that information.

The Lead Officer, at the request of the Chairperson, agreed that members of the teams responsible for the allocation of community small grants funding liaise with the relevant forums, through the Age Friendly Co-ordinator, in order to offer advice and guidance on the completion of applications forms for 2024/25 grants.

Noted.

Update on Age Friendly Belfast

The Age Friendly Coordinator provided the Members with an update on the key issues contained within the Age Friendly Belfast Plan 2023-2027. She stated that the Age Friendly Plan had been aligned to the Belfast Agenda, with some minor adjustments, as a result of consultation with the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP). She referred to infrastructure as being one of the main themes within the Age Friendly Plan, incorporating Age Friendly design principles. She highlighted the collaborative work undertaken between Belfast City Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council, including a meeting with Emer Coveney, National Programme Manager from Age Friendly Ireland, who had shared their experience of developing a checklist of Age Friendly design principles with the input of architects and planners in the design and implementation of public realm projects.

The Members were informed of the importance attached to Social Connections as a further key theme within the Age Friendly Plan. She highlighted work which had been undertaken by Ruth Blood Associates to identify barriers that adversely impacted on older people and which impacted negatively on their ability to engage socially with their community.

The Age Friendly Coordinator highlighted a further key theme within the Age Friendly plan, that of connection, hubs across the city, and an identification where those connection hubs might be located to maximise their community benefit. She emphasised the importance of staff training in the identification of loneliness and isolation, including the remedies to reduce

the impact of both. To that end, she stated that further training would be provided in October 2023. The significant impact of the tea dances and their continued popularity was highlighted with the next schedule of tea dances organised to take place in 2 Royal Avenue on 17th October and 5th December 2023.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the publication of events taking place as part of Age-Friendly Belfast including training on loneliness and isolation for Members, the Age Friendly Coordinator reported that a booklet was available outlining the range of events on offer and agreed that it would be distributed to Members and throughout the city. She stated that it was proposed that training for Members, on loneliness and Isolation, would be provided also.

Noted.

Update on Positive Ageing Month

The Age-Friendly Coordinator provided the undernoted report in regard to the extensive range of events organised as part of Age-Friendly Belfast.

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

To update members on the Age Friendly Belfast Positive Ageing Month activities and events.

2.0 Recommendations

To ask members to note the planned Age Friendly Belfast activities and events that will be delivered as part of Positive Ageing Month.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

Age Friendly Belfast Positive Ageing Month

Sunday 1st October 2023 is the International Day of Older Persons, which acknowledges the contribution that older people make to society. Now in its eight-year, Positive Ageing Month is back with a full programme of activities and events delivered by a number of partners across the city of Belfast. Details on events being organised by our partners can be found in the Positive Ageing Month Booklet. (Copies of this booklet will be made available at the meeting).

Below is a list of the events organized by Age Friendly Belfast:

- Sunday 1st October 10.30am-12.30pm – Silver Sunday at the Ulster Museum- the opportunity to hear more about what’s happening during Positive Ageing Month.**
- Monday 2nd October- 10.30am-12pm-walking tour of the City Hall and surrounding area by Mark Doherty**

- **Tuesday 3rd October 10.30am 12.30pm ‘Be Prepared’ drop in event at 2 Royal Avenue - which includes information stands to give older people the opportunity to meet face to face with organisations who can offer advice and support in terms of keeping warm, benefits advice and fuel poverty.**
- **Thursday 5th October 10am-11am online presentation to Carer’s support group from the Age Friendly Coordinator on the Age Friendly Belfast Plan and Positive Ageing Month activities.**
- **Monday 9th October 10.30am-12pm – walking tour of Queen’s University and surrounding area by Mark Doherty.**
- **Wednesday 11th October 2-4.30pm Movie Afternoon ‘The Quiet Man’ is being shown in the Banqueting Suite, City Hall.**
- **Thursday 12th October- 2 minibus city cemetery tours 10.30am and 12.30pm**
- **Friday 13th October- 3-4pm virtual tea dance with Victor Mawhinney**
- **Tuesday 17th October 2-4pm-Tea dance in 2 Royal Avenue with the band Soda Popz**
- **Wednesday 18th October- 3-4pm online quiz via Zoom**
- **Tuesday 24th October 10am-12pm Dementia Awareness Training delivered by BCC staff in Inverary Community Centre**
- **Wednesday 25th October- 10.30am- 1pm- Age Friendly Belfast Convention event with speakers from Libraries NI, 2 Royal Avenue, BCC Community Centres, GLL Leisure Centres and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Following on from last’s year’s event, work began on exploring community hubs and a city centre based hub, these speakers will provide an overview of the types of activities and support that are available to allow older people to feel connected.**

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

All work is carried out within existing budgets and staff resources of Age Friendly Belfast and the partners involved.

4.1 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 processes.

The Reference Group noted the information which had been provided and the opportunity for them to participate in dementia awareness training as part of the programme of events.

Date of next meeting

The Reference Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 12th December at 12.30 p.m.

Chairperson