

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 November 2019

Report of the Older People's Champion

1. In May last year I, Andy Paraskos, took over from Karin Sedgwick as Older People's Champion. We decided to produce one Annual Report, covering our work since Karin reported in May last year.
2. It is a pleasure to celebrate the ways we support and encourage active, independent and healthy lives for older people, and show how we might all promote positive images of older people as citizens and combat stereotyping and age discrimination.

The OPC Role

3. This role is intended to ensure that the profile and 'voice' of older people is raised and that the issues that matter to older people in their communities become and remain a priority on the agendas of local decision makers.
4. Being Older People's Champion does open doors to go talk to all organisations and find out more about initiatives that do so much to support people. Not just those that are connected to the mainstream of County Council services and activity - such as North Yorkshire Forum for Older People, Better Ageing Partnerships, and the Dementia Collaborative - but also those whose motivation is all about "community". Here I refer to Rotary groups, the Good Neighbours scheme in Hambleton, and The Good Life Project in the Upper Dales, for example.

An Ageing Population is not a Demographic "Time Bomb"

5. We are living longer than ever before and the age profile of our society is changing rapidly. The number of people aged 65 and over will increase by more than 40% within 20 years, and the number of households where the oldest person is 85 and over is increasing faster than any other age group. These changes have profound implications for each of us, as well as for government, business and civil society.
6. We often hear this referred to – negatively it must be said - as the "ticking time bomb". In many of our meetings, people said this use of language makes them feel like a problem because people live longer. People are right to constantly remind us that they contribute so much to our communities and people from all backgrounds should be valued and respected. Part of the OPC role is to make sure that this

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message gets across loud and clear, not just in the corridors and meeting rooms of county hall, but to all local authority services and partners.

Age Friendly Communities

7. People respond well when told that the County Council is linked to the UK network of the Centre for Ageing Better - a six-year, £78 million national investment to improve the lives of people aged over 50 by addressing social isolation and loneliness within local communities. Here we thank Caroline Dickinson, Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Supported Housing for her work.
8. There are eight parts to an Age Friendly Community: Housing, Transportation, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Civic Participation and Employment; Communication and Information; Community Support and Health Services; Outdoor Spaces and Buildings. We will use some of these themes to feedback what people have said, and what it means for the OPC role.

Transport

9. Of these transport and bus services are so often mentioned as a hugely significant issue. Connectivity across a large area like North Yorkshire with a lot of people using bus passes etc. makes the viability of running buses difficult. It is such a big problem.
10. Having said that, an older person's bus pass means free travel on local buses in England. Great for essential journeys which otherwise would be unaffordable. It helps with leisure trips for shopping, sightseeing and into the countryside. It is good for older people's health and well-being, enabling people to socialise, take exercise and reduce social. But, by the same token, I am acutely aware of the impact of concessionary bus fares for the viability of commercial, as well as tendered bus services.

Loneliness and Social Participation

11. We report at a time when, particularly through the efforts of Public Health, a strategy to combat loneliness and isolation is being considered for adoption countywide. Social isolation and loneliness is not just a big problem for older people, all ages can experience this. It is pleasing that the strategy recognises this. We would encourage everybody to comment as part of the consultation.
12. We all need someone to talk to, but not all of us are lucky enough to have someone. So, at a practical, local level, we were pleased to support the Age UK North Yorkshire & Darlington initiative where volunteers are offering companionship

to lonely and isolated people in communities across Darlington & North Yorkshire through their Befriending service, the award-winning Good Friends scheme and also offer specialist Veteran's telephone befriending support through Ex-Forces Support.

Respect and Inclusion: Intergenerational Activity

13. We are seeing more media interest in Intergenerational activity and the important benefits it brings: promoting good relationships between groups; it reduces ageism, promotes friendships, and reduces the anxieties many older people feel about interacting with older people, and vice versa.

“We are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us”

14. We felt privileged to have been involved in the successful event "The Great Get together" North Yorkshire's version of Get Togethers that have happened up and down the UK in memory of Jo Cox.

Community Support and Health Services: Social Capital

15. Being part of a community with family, friends and neighbours is important for people's wellbeing

16. As an example, Karin has supported the cafe geared up to creating a supportive and understanding environment for those living with dementia which has opened in Richmond. Dementia Forward is a charity passionate about supporting people living with dementia and those who care for them, and already has dementia friendly cafes in Ripon and Harrogate.

17. The new cafe in Richmond, open every Tuesday from 1pm until 3pm in the Town Hall, is designed to provide a relaxed atmosphere, and all the staff and volunteers have experience with dementia – either by having it themselves or through supporting someone with it.

18. We would encourage all members to go along and see for themselves how having an understanding of dementia and what makes people more comfortable can have hugely beneficial effects.

19. We have attended the local groups developed since the launch of Bring Me Sunshine in October 2017.

Communication and Information

20. Repeatedly people told us that they want to stay connected with events and people and get practical information to manage life and meet personal needs. This is vital for active ageing. Broadband or lack of it in the most rural parts of the county is raised on a regular basis. All the indications are these are being addressed and resolved; but it is mentioned time and time again by older people's representative groups.

Civic Participation

21. The council supports the North Yorkshire Forum for Older People - representative group of older people, with network groups across the county, which helps keep the County Council's focus on older people on things that matter to them. We regularly attend their meetings. The HAS directorate taps into the knowledge and expertise of these people: we would encourage all council services to follow suit.

Priorities and Interests for the year ahead

Advance care Planning

22. Sharing your wishes and preferences for the future with your family, friends and health and social care professionals is essential to help you and the people close to you understand what is important for your future, even if your health deteriorates and your capacity to make decisions is lost. Advance Care Planning ensures that your wishes and preferences are respected and that your voice and opinions continue to be heard, even if you are unable to speak for yourself.

23. I will be keeping an eye out for how successfully NYCC and partners are encouraging people to do both this and the next theme.

Transitions

24. In the same context, Transitions in later life, for instance retiring from paid work, changing career, ending or starting a relationship, can have a major impact on people's lives and their wellbeing. We will urge not just NYCC but all the organisations we come into contact with to provide effective support to employees in mid-life as a way of helping them stay in work for longer if they want to,

Dementia Friendly

25. We would like to see North Yorkshire being renowned for being dementia friendly across the whole of the county

TV licence campaign

26. The BBC has announced they plan to means test TV licences for the over 75s.

That means they'll only be free for people receiving Pension Credit. Age UK believes this will harm older people who rely on their TV. I will wait to see how this pans out, but my worry is how this affects those older people – and perhaps we ought not assume it means everybody – who can least afford it.

Our appreciation

27. We would like to place on record for the support we have received from Health and Adult Services Directorate and Public Health, Corporate Services, from Stronger Communities. Also from fellow councillors, especially the Young People's Champion, Annabel Wilkinson, Portfolio Holders Caroline Dickinson and David Chance.

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County Hall,
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12 November 2019
Background Documents - Nil