

Wandsworth Older People's Forum Annual Report 2016

The regular meetings of the Forum (second Tuesday of each month except August) have been held with a range of speakers. We started the year celebrating the launch of the new Wandsworth Older People's Strategy for 2015-2020 but unfortunately any progress on this seems to have got lost with concern over Wandsworth Council's reduced funding. It is probable that work is moving on with some of the proposals but at the moment it is not apparent to the public. Forum meetings have provided information on AgeUK Safe Trader list, Wandsworth's service for helping householders maintain a safe house suitable for their needs as they grow older, keeping safe from SCAMS and the woeful progress towards clean air in London. We also heard from a solicitor about the legal problems we should sort out before it becomes too difficult for us to manage and from Alzheimer's Society about the information and help that is available for people becoming affected by dementia.

Wandsworth has a wealth of voluntary bodies but finding where to get the right help is a problem. We heard about the health service "Wellbeing Hub" where you can get help either on line by yourself or using 020 8812 6700 there is a person who will navigate it for you. We heard from Disability Living Foundation, a national service, now moved into Wandsworth which will give advice on the many aids and adaptations you can use to make life easier when some bits of the body stop working so well. We finished the year with a lively performance from Treblemakers, singing a capella, some Christmas music with the audience encouraged to join in.

The Council has now joined with Richmond to share senior officers which, we are told, will save a large sum of money and leave more for actual services. The process has been working through job interviews and new postholders and has made it difficult to have our regular meetings with adult social services and other officers in the second half of the year. Under the Network programme we held a conference for all older people's groups in November when the principle speaker was Anna Raleigh, Consultant in Public Health, formerly in Richmond and now in both boroughs. She talked about the health needs in the two boroughs, the differences between them in needs and also in the ways the Council have chosen to help voluntary organisations provide useful services. Richmond probably has a better-off population but does have pockets of low income, deprivation and poor health. It has a flourishing voluntary sector which is well-supported by a Council for Voluntary Service. We can learn from Richmond and no doubt there are ways they can learn from Wandsworth. There is an Older People's Forum in Richmond and the Wandsworth Forum will have a speaker from it at one of the meetings in 2017.

The newsletter has been produced quarterly with 4000 copies distributed in the first place to the members who have paid a subscription and thereafter to libraries, sheltered housing and community centres and to the councillors and MPs. A questionnaire was distributed with each copy this year and the analysis of the response is available. Respondents overwhelmingly welcomed the newsletter and particularly the information it gives about local services and things to do. They also liked the articles on national and London-wide issues. Half the respondents were over 80 and 80% live alone. But most of them got out as much as they liked. Difficulties preventing going out were health conditions and lack of confidence with walking and also not knowing where to find social activities they could access. This year 67% had access to the internet. Use of the internet has risen each year but there is no doubt many older people still find difficulty in using on-line ways of finding information and prefer speaking to someone. Many mention loneliness and isolation as a concern for older people and a fear that the cuts may reduce services.

A small pot of funds from Mercers Company enabled the Forum to conclude the outreach programme to people in sheltered housing resulting in almost all blocks being covered. The hope is that the work will leave little groups of people who will continue to meet after the programme has concluded and be a friendly focus for others. Outreach work started in the second half of the year to raise interest in setting up a Men's Shed in Roehampton. This work has now received further funds from a Wandsworth fund and will be supported through the Community Resilience project. Community Resilience is a programme supported with money from Wandsworth CCG to support voluntary groups in running exercise and healthy eating groups to promote healthy living, an aim of the local health service. Four groups are being funded, two being larger groups with paid staff who are able to report on outcomes as the CCG require and two being smaller groups run largely by volunteers who struggle with the monitoring. A report on

the first year will go to the CCG early in 2017 and will contain comments on the difficulties experienced and also about the successes and recommendations for the future. The CCG and the Council are looking to a joint funding arrangement for voluntary groups which could run health promoting programmes and a Project Worker has been meeting with and arranging a collaborative meetings and will be reporting also early in 2017.

Forum committee members are involved in many groups and committees of the Council the CCG and the Health and Well-being Board and some all-London groups as well. Reports from these are discussed at the monthly Committee meetings and selected reports appear in the newsletters and are shared at the monthly public meetings.

The Forum hopes to continue being a voice for all older people in Wandsworth and we hope that Wandsworth Council will continue to value that and provide the funding which helps the wide circulation of the newsletters and the Network conferences to which all older people's groups are invited and which have a usual attendance of about 50 people representing some 25 groups.

Lilias Gillies

January 2017