

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 December 2022

Report of the Older People's Champion

1. This is my first full report to you since taking over from Andy Paraskos in August last year.
2. This role is all about raising the profile and 'voice' of older people so that the issues that matter to them in their communities become and remain a priority on the agendas of local decision makers. Ordinarily, being Older People's Champion opens doors to go to talk to all organisations and find out more about initiatives that do so much to support people. At times, this has been difficult as we move out of restrictions to engage at an informal level. Not just with those that are connected to the mainstream of County Council services and activity - such as Better Ageing Partnerships, and the Dementia Collaborative - but also those volunteer led local groups whose motivation is all about "community".
3. In many ways we still live with the impact of Covid19, especially how it appears to have dampened older people's enthusiasm to engage in a way that seemed so natural before 2019. We also know, as our Director of Public Health rightly continues to emphasise, that the virus is still out there.
4. A key consideration has therefore been "how can we help make older people's representative groups more self-sufficient, more active and more independent." For me, the role is about helping to empower older people so that they can live their lives independently with full trust in those around them.
5. North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) has always wanted there to be strong and proactive independent voice and representation for the full diversity of older people living in all parts of the county – a principle that ought to be retained by the new authority. In turn, NYCC and NYC needs to listen, understand and be responsive; creating a trusting, positive, proactive and mutually beneficial relationship; and gaining local and countywide perspectives on the needs of older people and the Council's capacity to meet them.
6. For many years this has been achieved through a partnership with the North Yorkshire Forum for Older People (NYFOP), a registered charity bringing together independent district-based forums for older people. After a period of review, the trustees of NYFOP agreed to dissolve the Charity; however, a number of the locally based district groups have continued.

7. In parallel, an independent piece of research was commissioned by NYCC to explore options of how the voice and representation of older people could realistically and sustainably be developed across the county in the future. Working alongside representatives of the former North Yorkshire Forum for Older People, a specification was subsequently developed to seek an independent delivery partner to develop, establish and facilitate a new network of older people's voices across the county over 3 years, which supports and advances local networks and activities, and plays an active role in countywide representation. Community First Yorkshire were appointed to this role and started work in April 2022, working closely with NYCC to commence engagement activity including a widespread survey which went live in September. I hope to continue to play a key role in how the project is developed moving forward.
8. As well as using data to help us prioritise our work we also wanted to ask people over 50 what it is like to live and/or work in North Yorkshire. A survey has been launched that will be used to look at what more we can do to support people to age well in North Yorkshire. The main themes are:
 - Voice and participation
 - State of Ageing
 - Coordinated approach and anticipated benefits/options of LGR
 - Working together
 - Housing
 - Partnership working
9. If by the time the committee meets there are some early headline results, I've asked Carly Walker to report these to you.

Loneliness and Social Participation: Post Pandemic Concerns

10. We all need someone to talk to, but not all of us are lucky enough to have someone. I hear from some older people, especially those with complex health conditions, that they have struggled to return and re-adjust to a fully active life since having to isolate.
11. Older people seem to have borne the brunt of the pandemic, with a higher death rate and with the consequences of long periods of social isolation. We know that many older people are resilient and have a can-do attitude when faced with struggle and challenges. But so many we know have had reduced contact with family networks in particular. (It seems this has impacted upon women more than men). With so much uncertainty and isolation, many experts are suggesting that there is an increasing amount of un-met social care need, as older people have been deterred from seeking the support that they have needed – probably going back to the start of the pandemic.

12. Despite these concerns, it's worth reminding ourselves that things would have been very different had older people not come forward to volunteer at vaccination centres, shopped for friends and neighbours, collected medication and supported their local communities throughout the pandemic.

Age Friendly Communities

13. I attend NYCC meetings of the Age Friendly Communities with Karin, but also accompany Carly in other forums connected with this work. The aim, through partnership, is to create and foster places where age is not a barrier to living well, and where the environment, activities and services support and enable older people to have opportunities to enjoy life and feel well; participate in society and be valued for their contribution; have enough money to live well, feel safe, comfortable and secure at home; and be able to access quality health and care.

14. Partners have agreed to focus on five priorities:

- Strategic Approach to Healthy Ageing in North Yorkshire
- Improving health and reducing inequalities
- Housing
- Employment and financial security
- Developing Age Friendly Communities

15. The issue that seems to feature most regularly and strongly in these discussions is transport availability and infrastructure – especially for those needing to travel in a timely way to make appointments.

16. In this forum we have talked about positive ways of increasing older people's confidence and independence. For example, encouraging those who have been isolating to start those simple community social activities like doing their shopping, attending luncheon clubs and so on; the more we can help them to get out and about, the better.

17. Louise Wallace and Carly have agreed to give a little bit more information at this committee meeting about the broader agenda of Healthy Ageing and the work of the directorate.

Older People and Sport

18. As we come out of the pandemic, I hope we can again see greater interest in promoting older people's activity and participation in sport. I asked David Watson from North Yorkshire Sport for his views. He was kind enough to put together the attached report which outlines the importance of physical activity in older age and some of the opportunities that exist within North Yorkshire and elsewhere.

19. Physical Activity for adults and older adults has several benefits, these include:

- General Health benefits
- Improved sleep
- Healthy weight maintenance
- Stress management
- General quality of life improvement

20. It can also reduce the prevalence of:

- Type 2 diabetes (-40%)
- Cardiovascular disease (-35%)
- Falls, depression, etc (-30%)
- Joint and back pain (-25%)
- Cancers (colon and breast) (-20%)

21. These are startling numbers.

22. Members will no doubt be impressed as I am not just by the number of schemes and initiatives, but also by their ingenuity. David's advice in paragraph 3 of his report about how to encourage older people to be more active is especially helpful.

Priorities and Concerns for the year ahead

Keeping Warm in Winter

23. Many older people are dreading the cold winter months ahead. I was pleased to see details of the Warm and Well service, commissioned by NYCC on behalf of the Winter Health Strategic Partnership. Delivered by Citizens Advice North Yorkshire it provides advice and guidance for anyone who may struggle to pay their energy bills or heat their home. Referrals can be made if someone is living in or at risk of a cold home, fuel poverty, struggling to afford their energy bills, or worried about winter. These can be made by professionals or by individuals themselves.

24. I have also been encouraged by local activity on Warm Spaces through local networks. In my area, church groups are looking to band together to initiate local aligned with the Warm Spaces thinking, although trying to go a step further to include a pay as you feel food offer in conjunction with other local groups. Although this is still very much in inception stage, I hope efforts can be co-ordinated. Stronger Communities maybe able to help when appropriate, possibly through community grants, if they need some financial assistance to get things going. I'm sure other members can highlight similar schemes.

25. More broadly, the eight Councils have collectively agreed that the best course of action at this stage is to compile a directory of community warm places/spaces and support for publication on the NYCC website and to enable Community Centres,

Libraries and social care/social prescribing teams to signpost people. We are hoping to get this pulled together imminently to ensure it is ready for winter.

Financial exploitation of older people: Safeguarding

26. Financial exploitation is a pervasive form of abuse or mistreatment of older adults. Researchers predict as the population ages, the incidents of older adults becoming victims of financial exploitation will increase. Age UK calls for more collaboration between health, social services and financial sectors to recognise and report signs of financial abuse. The majority of financial abuse of the elderly is not, however, committed by fraudsters in boiler rooms many miles away. Research collated by Age UK suggests that 70 per cent of financial abuse is perpetrated by family members.
27. I know Karin is sympathetic to my suggestion that the committee take this topic as a potential agenda item in the new year.
28. In the meantime, I encourage members to take the opportunity to bring this issue up with the Chair of the North Yorkshire Adults Safeguarding Board when the committee reviews the Board's annual report in the new year.

Appreciation

29. I would like to place on record my thanks for the support received from Health and Adult Services Directorate and Public Health, Corporate Services and from Stronger Communities. I have always been able to rely on strong support from my fellow councillors – especially those on this committee. Finally, I want to thank all the volunteers whose contribution so often goes under the radar.

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Older Peoples Champion

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Background Documents - Nil