

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 JULY 2021

Report of the Older People's Champion

1. I last reported in June 2019, shortly after taking over the role from Karin Sedgwick. This briefing updates the committee on what has been a year and a half like no other.
2. This role is all about raising the profile and 'voice' of older people so that the issues that matter to older people 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 talk to all organisations and find out more about initiatives that do so much to support people. It is difficult in the middle 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 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.
3. Covid19, and the accompanying social distance restrictions in particular, has put so much of this on hold.
4. Cllr Caroline Dickinson and I share a similar aim: how can we help make older people's representative groups more self-sufficient, more active and more independent. I raised the additional obstacles to involving ethnic groupings in these difficult times.
5. North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) wants there to be strong and proactive independent voice and representation for the full diversity of older people living in all parts of the county. In turn NYCC wants 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. Local forums are currently active in Hambleton, Harrogate, Ryedale, Scarborough and Whitby. NYFOP also organised NYFOP+, a quarterly forum that brought together NYFOP

representatives and public sector partners to consider issues of mutual interest. After a period of review, the trustees of NYFOP agreed to dissolve the Charity in summer 2019; however, the locally based district groups have continued, as well as NYFOP+ (albeit at much reduced capacity and in some cases virtually throughout the pandemic). So there has been limited opportunities to meet with older people's groups as only a few are actually meeting remotely.

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. Ann Hindley of Cross Keys Associates produced the independent exploratory report, which was developed alongside a reference group of key stakeholders, including NYCC Officers, myself and older people representatives. The reference group not only provided a coordinating role for this piece of work, but also allowed the consultant to gain invaluable insight and feedback from those working and consulting with older people across the County.
8. The report was published in March 2020; despite the pandemic, work has been on going where possible, to develop those recommendations, with a collective meeting of NYCC Officers and older people representatives taking place in August 2021. I hope to play a key role in that discussion, and in how the project is developed moving forward.

Loneliness and Social Participation

9. We all need someone to talk to, but not all of us are lucky enough to have someone. Some older people have been isolating since February 2020 and many with complex health conditions are fearful of the opening up of as restrictions as infections surge. This heightens concerns that some older people may not be able to readjust to life post-pandemic and that they may be fearful of going out and picking up with their life as it was in March 2020.

Age Friendly Communities

10. The above point featured in a recent meeting of Age Friendly Communities - something I attend with Karin and Caroline Dickinson, Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Supported Housing.
11. The Council's community support organisations are increasing the amount of befriending that they are doing, with the aim of increasing older people's confidence and to encourage them to go out and about. But we talked about the next steps - how we get people back out and how to encourage their independence, For example, the confidence to start those simple community social

activity and many people that have been isolating would have some, doing their shopping and now may need some encouragement do their own and maybe luncheon clubs help get them out and about.

Images of Older People in the Pandemic

12. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected various age groups differently, with most deaths concentrated among the older population and those with previous health conditions.
13. This has led to a greater presence of older people in the agenda setting of all the media. Older adults were represented unfavourably in 71.4% of the headlines, with them being presented as a homogeneous group and associating them with deaths, deficiencies in residential care, or extreme vulnerability. The presence of certain potentially derogatory or improper terms (elderly, grandparents) was consistent with this negative representation. We ought to be concerned that COVID-19 pandemic may reinforce an ageist narrative of the older people, based on frailty, decline, and dependency, which may justify discriminatory practices directed at this sector of the population, but without these so-called older people, things would have been very different, many have volunteered at vaccination centres, shopped for friends and neighbours, collected medication and supported their local communities throughout the pandemic

Respect and Inclusion: Intergenerational Activity

14. As we come out of the pandemic, I hope we can again see 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.

Priorities and Interests for the year ahead

15. Older people have borne the brunt of the pandemic, with a higher death rate and with the consequences of long periods of social isolation. 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 over the past 15 months.
16. As for Health concerns - I know both scrutiny committees are interested in the negative health outcomes especially those who have been unable to find creative ways of staying socially connected. I will, therefore, continue to raise concern about the mental and physical effects the pandemic has had on older people, particularly:

- Loss of function – mobility and balance
- Pain from untreated medical conditions
- Psychological impact living under so much stress

17. It is recognised that the NHS is working to reduce the backlog in elective surgery (hip replacement and knee replacement, for example) but the impact upon quality of life and mobility can be significant.

Appreciation

18. I would like to place on record my thanks for the support 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, and finally all the volunteers whose contribution so often goes under the radar.

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Background Documents - Nil