

7 June 2004

Older People's Champion

Report of Councillor Christine Smith

Purpose of report

- 1 This report seeks to update members about progress in relation to older people over the last 12 months.

Background

- 2 Recommendations about engaging with Older People were made by the Better Government for Older People programme, and included a recommendation that each local authority should appoint an Older People's Champion. This became a requirement in the National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People, where the need for a political champion as well as a professional one was identified. I am the elected member with responsibility across the County Council for older people i.e. a Cabinet Champion. I am required by the NSF to report to scrutiny members on progress.
- 3 Ageing will be the biggest socio-economic challenge in the County over the next decade at least. Older People will represent a greater proportion of the population and therefore become more politically active, assertive and economically influential. Due to improvements in health care and changes in lifestyle, more people will be living longer but may also have increasing and complex needs.
- 4 The challenges of demographic change for employment, the concept of retirement, health, and the planning of services will have major implications for the County Council's ability to fulfil its corporate aim of "making County Durham the best place to live, work and bring up a family". Although it is tempting to see the challenges of an ageing population focusing primarily upon Social Care and Health and the NHS, in reality, it offers significant opportunities to engage the whole of the County Council, all of the District Councils, the Department of Works and Pensions, public and independent sector providers, voluntary organisations and, of course, older people themselves as well as the NHS and Social Care and Health in delivering the objectives. It is essential for all organisations to be able to respond rapidly to the changing needs of older people; traditional ways of meeting these needs will no longer be acceptable as older people become more discerning consumers. A strategic approach therefore needs to cover

all services which older people use, including housing, leisure, pensions and transport as well as health and social care services.

- 5 Considerable work is going on in the authority to improve services for older people. For example, in Social Care and Health, recent developments have included:
- The development of 7 Extra Care Schemes which won a national Health and Social Care award
 - The involvement of older people and their carers through a Service Level Agreement with Age Concern
 - The development of 5 local Partnership Boards designed to integrate services for older people and adults across Social Care and Health, PCTs and District Councils
 - Significant reductions in delayed discharges
 - Overall good performance in adult social care services and improving performance in relation to some indicators eg C32 Older People Helped to Live at Home is now in the green banding
 - The development of intermediate care beds in CDC homes
 - Increasing take up of Direct Payments
 - The implementation of Social Care Direct as a single access point
 - The recent refocus of the multi-agency group driving the NSF into a new Modernisation Group.
- 6 Of course, more work still needs to be done to continue improvements to services and to meet demand from the increasing older people's population. One area also in need of more work is that of Adult Protection. In response to the national report entitled 'No Secrets', procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults have been drawn up and a multi-agency Adult Protection Committee meets on a regular basis. The Police have trained their protection unit officers on adult protection so that one unit now covers both adults and children. Staff in Social Care & Health have also had some training about abuse investigations and a video has been produced for training and awareness purposes. However, much remains to be done in terms of the development of standards, improved practice, performance monitoring, and training staff in all agencies including the independent sector. This is a considerable amount of work to improve the protection of the most vulnerable people and, although no resources have been provided for this nationally, Social Care & Health intend to fund 3 additional staff to support this work this year.
- 7 However, older people do not just consist of the frail and dependant, but need also to be seen as citizens with contributions to make to their communities. In fact, at any one time, only about 15 per cent of older people are in immediate touch with care services, whilst the vast majority receive little attention. The challenge for local authorities, therefore, is to help older people stay healthy and active and to encourage their contribution to the community. Local authorities should

take responsibility for leading these developments with a wide range of partners.

- 8 Culture and Leisure help to do this by carrying out improvements, which have impacted upon the lives of older people. For example, their developments of the easy access mobile library service for vulnerable people; and the use of 'Pathfinder' projects to train volunteers to help people learn ICT skills.
- 9 However, the whole Council also needs to take up this challenge. One specific impetus for doing so is that, in 2005, the CPA process will include assessment of the progress made and the impact of local authorities' activities on the well being of older people.

My Role as Champion

- 10 In the last year, I have undertaken the following activities:
 - Engaged in positive publicity eg open days at the Extra Care schemes, and in press releases eg queries about reductions in meals services; and sent a recent letter to Stephen Ladyman, Minister for Health, inviting him to visit our Extra Care schemes.
 - Chaired the Extra Care Conference on 29 April 2004 for a national audience.
 - Attended service user/carer forums. This ensures that the local authority is seen to listen to and support user/carer engagement in planning and decision-making.
 - Been involved in the County Council's application for a Beacon Award for Older People's services for which we were shortlisted. Together with senior officers of the Council, I attended a panel meeting where the application was considered. Although we later found out we were not successful in obtaining the award, actually being shortlisted was a significant achievement and an experience which the authority can learn from.
 - Monitoring progress of the NSF national standards and performance information. This involves regular discussions with the Head of Adult Commissioning to discuss relevant issues.
 - Been a member of the Age Concern Executive Committee. Age Concern in County Durham carry out a wide range of activities to support healthy ageing. These include:
 - An intergenerational project using SRB 6 funding
 - An ageing well programme of physical and other activities
 - Handyvans, which help to maintain independence at home
 - An information and advice project.

This is in addition to their SLA with Social Care and Health designed to engage service users and carers in the NSF.

Further information about the work of Age Concern is attached as Appendix 1 (to be distributed at the meeting).

11. In the future, I see my role as helping to facilitate the Council's leadership of the wider agenda for older people. A draft strategy is being developed for a whole Council approach which will be reported to CMT and Cabinet in the next few months. The report will recommend that the County Durham Strategic Partnership and the Strong, Healthy, Safe Communities group adopt the strategy. There are also plans for corporate policy to organise a conference about Forging New Partnerships with older people and across generations. I would anticipate having a lead role in facilitating the conference.

Recommendations

11. The Scrutiny Meeting is recommended to receive this report.

Contact: Cllr Christine Smith 0191 383 4567
