



A good place to grow older: learning and innovation from local government

Introduction

People in the UK are living longer than ever before. This is a cause for celebration. Already in Britain, for the first time in our history, there are more people over the age of 65 than there are children under the age of 16. And one in four babies born today will live to be one hundred.

Our ageing society presents real opportunities but also raises challenges. Councils and their partners play a pivotal role, as decisions about the design, development and shaping of communities, and the delivery of most services, take place at a local level.

National government, local government and their partners are already working together to respond to demographic change. With people more likely to use local services regularly in their later years, it is essential that local service providers understand the needs and aspirations of their communities and develop accordingly.

Learning what has worked well in other places can help councils deliver changes and ensure that money is spent on the things that matter most for local people.

Beacon councils

In 2009, four councils were awarded Beacon status for the positive engagement of older people to support and promote greater independence and well being in later life. Their 'beacon year' finished at the end of March 2010. This booklet brings their stories up-to-date, highlighting their successes, lessons learned and challenges faced over the past year.

Other recognised innovation

In January 2010 the councils recognised for their innovation in older peoples' services met to share their experiences. One outcome from that meeting was a commitment to publish their stories.

This booklet

Councils tell us about their experiences in this booklet. We hope that you will find it helpful and that it provides some fresh ideas.

If you would like to share your experiences then please join the Community of Practice (CoP), tell us about your examples and join the debate.

www.communities.idea.gov.uk –
Ageing well

We would also like to thank the councils for their contributions to this booklet and commitment to sharing their lessons learned for the benefit of older citizens in all areas.



Dorset County Council

Authority overview

Dorset County Council's population is around 406,000. Of these, 27.4 per cent are aged 60 - 65 years old and above. Currently, the national average is 18.7 per cent. Life expectancy in the county is amongst the highest in the UK, with some areas (East Dorset) reaching an average of 84 years old for women and 81 years old for men.

Dorset is ranked second amongst the 34 English shire counties with regard to the amount of its area covered by ecological, landscape and conservation designations. It has the lowest proportion of pre-school children and the lowest birth rate of any shire county.

With this population profile it might be expected that the number of people in the county is declining, but the number of residents is in fact increasing significantly, owing to the large number of people moving to the county.

What we achieved

- The Partnerships for Older People Projects (POPPs) programme based on developing supportive communities that enable older people to remain living in their own homes for as long as they wish. This programme is jointly funded by NHS Dorset and Dorset County Council and continues to be led by older people.
- Dorset Age Partnership (DAP) which is the older people theme group for the Dorset Strategic Partnership. It provides the more formal conversation with older people in their communities about their lives and how they can be improved.
- Older people's forums in many parts of the council (17 so far) operate as an independent voice for older people. It includes many creative opportunities as well as the business agenda.

- Ageing Well Framework and Action Plan based on a process of co-production which asked questions about what prevents you from ageing well and what we/you/the community can do to help.

All this work is important as it recognises that is not one single action which will improve services for older people, but an orchestration of many parts leading in the same direction.

Service improvement and innovation

- POPP programme.
- Ageing Well Strategy and Action Plan.
- Dorset Age Partnership (DAP).

Challenges

The challenges that needed to be overcome were:

- time constraints – community engagement is very important, but it is also time consuming. It needs to be given a high priority so that conversations take place in a meaningful way
- language – we needed to be clear that we were talking about the same things and understood each other
- geography – Dorset’s population is spread out but each part is equally important

- managing across the whole area creates challenges.

What we would do differently next time

Make sure the lead person (who should be a senior manager in the council) has time made available to give this work priority attention.

Top tip

Spend time getting ready for partnership working.

Use the co–production guide produced by NDTi and HSA, and work in an environment of equals.

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Westminster City Council

Authority overview

Westminster is a central London borough with a population of 236,000, of whom 25,000 are aged 65 and over. The City is characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity, a high proportion of single-person households and a complex pattern of deprivation – with areas of wealth located close to areas of deprivation, a contrast reflected in marked variations in health outcomes such as life expectancy.

Organisationally we have seen major developments: the expansion of adult services to include leisure, libraries and adult education. The implementation of a commissioning model across the council to give a stronger strategic focus on commissioning, and closer joint working with our health partner NHS Westminster, including the creation of a joint commissioning team for older and disabled people.

What we achieved.

In 2010 we launched our new joint commissioning strategy, which sets out our shared priorities for older people's services for the next three years. The strategy is informed by an extensive needs assessment and was developed in consultation with groups of older people.

We have reviewed our older people's strategic planning group, the Older People's Commissioning Partnership Board. Made up of older users, carers and staff from statutory and voluntary sector organisations, this group is now responsible for overseeing the implementation of the strategy.

As part of our Local Area Agreement (LAA), we have worked successfully with a range of voluntary sector organisations across Westminster to add value to the contribution these services make to older people's quality of life.

We are currently undertaking a prevention review and are developing a demand-modelling tool to model potential demand on services across the City over the next ten years.

Service improvement and innovation

- In 2007 we launched a council-wide initiative known as Every Older Person Matters. Under this initiative, council departments with partners pledged to help deliver improvements in older people's day-to-day quality of life. The programme has involved over thirty different pledges from such diverse areas as dropped kerbs to IT training in libraries.
- As part of our LAA Quality of Life Project, we ran a series of roadshows on a range of topics which older people told us they were concerned about. Some of the roadshows were run specifically for women. We also produced and distributed an information handbook in response to a gap identified by older people.
- Working with a social enterprise company, we have been exploring innovative ways of reaching older people who are socially isolated.
- Every four months the council and NHS Westminster publish Westminster Plus, a magazine aimed specifically at older residents. Delivered to over 20,000 households, it provides stories and information on a range of topics while promoting positive images of older people.

- We are setting up a project with two voluntary organisations to create a pool of older residents who will be able to contribute to the development of services, for example through mystery shopping and membership of recruitment and contract-letting panels.

Through our joint commissioning work, we have launched a memory service – a team comprising staff from a mental health foundation trust and a social care worker; and an End of Life Care Strategy, with the main aim to support 50 per cent of deaths happening outside hospital by 2013.

Challenges

- Learning to work in a new environment with a greater emphasis on prevention and a focus on achieving outcomes.
- Delivering high-quality services while demonstrating value for money at a time of economic recession.
- Meeting the needs of people whose voices are often not heard, especially people who are isolated or marginalised because of language, disability or gender.

What would we do differently next time

We would engage with partners from a wider spectrum of universal services which impact on older people's lives from the beginning. This is something we now do. We also now recognise the need to work more with older people so that they are in the driving seat.

Top tip

Strive for genuine partnership working. This promotes value-for-money, best use of resources, range of experiences and service users' involvement, it widens the scope of older people's services and brings partners on board to make sure that older people remain everybody's business.

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North Yorkshire County Council

Authority overview

North Yorkshire County Council is England's largest shire council covering some 3,100 square miles of predominantly rural countryside. Some 20 per cent (116,000) of its total population of 600,000 are older people over 65 years old, with over 50 per cent of the population living in areas classed as sparse or super-sparse. It has been deemed by the Audit Commission that North Yorkshire is a "good place for growing old" and this is certainly the case with, over the past few years', significant numbers of people migrating to the county to enjoy this lifestyle.

Over the next ten years there is going to be a significant increase in the numbers of older people in the county, especially in the more dependant 85 years old and above age group, coupled with increased rates of dementia. The rate of growth in both these groups is set to be higher than the average predicted increase across England.

What we achieved

North Yorkshire has developed a community menu of services, some with the independent sector and some with the third sector, but all with the aim of maintaining independence while offering personalised choice on how that service is delivered.

Currently, North Yorkshire County Council supports over 15,000 vulnerable adults to live at home; this is coupled with a significant reduction in the use of residential placements.

The key elements in this strategy are:

- a strong preventative programme proactively targeted at early intervention rather than reacting with more costly 'crisis intervention'
- a strong commitment to rehabilitation
- innovative use of the council's network of libraries to promote the wider health and well-being agenda
- extensive and mainstream use of Telecare and assistive technologies

- development of Extra Care Housing in areas of need.

The work also involves thinking differently about how adult social care services can be accessed in the wider community. We have used our network of libraries services, for example, to promote our carers' services, and also the over-50's 'Roadshows' which is about bringing together different agencies to a familiar and comfortable library setting to provide advice and support.

Residential care is now regarded as a last resort when considering care options for vulnerable people. All community-based options are explored first.

What challenges needed to be overcome

The most significant challenge was the switch from reliance on expensive residential care to creating a more independent older population, who could live in their own homes for as long as possible. This is the central strategy that North Yorkshire County Council has adopted in developing its range of services.

The second challenge was to implement this strategy of social independence in a county of North Yorkshire's size where "social isolation" can mean one mile to your nearest neighbour,

10 miles to do your shopping or over 15 miles to see a doctor.

Service improvement and innovation

Significant investment in Extra Care Housing has proved a positive alternative to residential care, providing people with their own front door in rented or purchased accommodation, allowing them their independence, but with a wide range of care and support services unobtrusively at hand. Further benefits are that these developments go on to be community hubs, supporting many times the numbers that actually live there.

A prime example of this is the development at Bainbridge in the Yorkshire Dales, which not only provides accommodation and day centre facilities, but also the village shop, hairdresser, library and on occasion community cinema. This is in addition to being one of the main focal points for community life in the village.

There is also extensive use of technology though a range of Telecare equipment, which improves independent living for vulnerable people. The equipment can range from simple lifeline pendants, to more complex motion detectors and telemedicine units. The use of this technology helps the recipient feel safer, gave them more confidence, peace of mind and enables them to carry on living

independently. Some 12,000 people use lifelines in North Yorkshire with over 3,000 people using additional telecare equipment.

Other key developments are the range of practical low-level prevention schemes that have been set up across the county, some in conjunction with the third sector.

The schemes offer practical support with a range of daily living tasks such as home maintenance or gardening, or to rebuild confidence after a period of illness. The success of this low-level strategy has recently been enhanced with a re-ablement programme, which will help people retain or regain their confidence after a period of illness or hospitalisation. This short but intensive re-ablement service in partnership with the other strands of the strategy aims to reduce unnecessary admissions to more costly hospital or residential care.

What we would do differently next time

The main things that North Yorkshire would have done differently would be to get even more community engagement in developing some of the preventative services to deliver a more collective self-help style of service. It has also allowed us to move more rapidly from pilot initiatives to 'mainstreaming' within services. Pilots are not always necessary,

sometimes you simply need to get on with it.

Top tip

That the use of other community resources such as libraries are key in getting the message out to the community to ensure early engagement and also provide the necessary information available about care options to ensure that people live in their own homes for as long as possible.

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Lancashire County Council

Authority overview

Over 1.1 million people live in Lancashire and this population is increasing. Lancashire is an area of contrasts, taking in busy urban centres and large agricultural areas. Some areas are fairly prosperous, but others suffer from high levels of deprivation. A significant number of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds live in Preston and East Lancashire.

Older people in Lancashire receive good care and support to help them live as independently as possible, and users of care services rate them highly.

Lancashire has been recognised for engagement of older people, and for improving quality of life and maintaining independence for older people.

What we achieved

The Lancashire 50+ Assembly became fully established in 2010

Lancashire has a 'Strategy for an Ageing Population', which is a strategic planning tool to assist Lancashire, through the Lancashire Partnership, to work for today's older people and plan for tomorrow's older people. The strategy and its key outcomes are now reflected in a full range of partner's action plans and strategic responses to demographic and population change. Older people were at the heart of developing the strategy.

The 50+ Assembly is one strand of that strategy – it is an elected self-governing strategic consultative body, also having responsibility for the local area agreement (LAA) older people theme.

The assembly is constructed on the 12 local strategic partnership (LSP) footprints with three assembly representatives elected from the LSP geographical areas. The representative structure consists of representatives elected from older peoples partnership board's, older people's forums and crucially community

groups who have a high proportion of the 50+ age group as members. This final category is to provide the opportunity to draw in “ordinary folks”, whose views can then be reflected in strategic planning.

Development of the Well Being and Prevention strategy

During the year, Lancashire’s Well-being and Prevention strategy has been revised and reissued. The updated strategy brings together a number of important initiatives into a framework for improving people’s health and well – being across Lancashire. It outlines the steps required by the Adult and Community Services Directorate and its partners to achieve a strategic shift towards prevention and early intervention, so that:

- prevention, early intervention and enablement become the first line of support in the directorate’s transactions with citizens and customers
- people are supported to live in their own home for as long as possible
- people are supported by the resources of their local community and feel connected to it, helping to alleviate loneliness and isolation
- community resources work actively together to support the individual.

The strategy builds upon:

- recent experience from delivering Help Direct in Lancashire as well as learning from key national pilot programmes
- the rich experience of local statutory, voluntary, community and faith (VCF) partners
- work already underway to transform adult social care including the newly published Directorate Commissioning Intentions.

Challenges

- There will be continuing support for various service user forums, including the older people’s partnership boards, the older people’s forums, and the 50+ Assembly.
- Support for Older People’s Assembly. Assisting these bodies to align with community strategies and the Local Area Agreement will remain a challenge.

What we achieved

National Dementia Strategy

In response to this strategy, Lancashire has worked with partners from the NHS and the VCFS sector to develop the Lancashire Outcomes Framework for Dementia.

This framework was developed through a high level of engagement. People with

dementia and their carers attended a series of workshops across Lancashire where they were supported to consider the outcomes that they would want.

The workshops deliberately focused on people with dementia and their carers, to the exclusion of professionals and other interested parties, in order to ensure that this outcomes framework is firmly rooted in the expectations and aspirations of those affected by dementia.

Benefit take-up amongst older people

Benefit take-up affects health inequalities, the wellbeing of older people, and also the local economy. The Lancashire multi-agency officer working group of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) reports annually on this issue and their report of September 2009 includes a number of specific recommendations for future work:

- a benefit take-up target set to restore take up levels to those of 2005
- an annual benefit claim week each spring to promote and focus attention on benefit take up
- a good practice guide with examples of how to promote benefit take-up for older people
- a virtual networking group to support benefit take up for older people and share good practice

- an explicit commitment from statutory services and partnerships to support benefit take-up for older people.

Service improvement and innovation

Help Direct

Help Direct is an innovative new service, designed to help people get the right practical support or simply the right information and advice that they need before a small problem becomes a crisis. The service is aimed at people who want more practical, everyday type of support to help them get the most out of life. It supports people to make their own choices and decisions about what works for them.

A brief report of the work of Help Direct during its first year of operation up to November 2009 can be found on the Lancashire County Council Website (link below). The report indicates not only the breadth of the services available, but also some of the challenges that have been met in developing the service.

www.lancashire.gov.uk/helpdirect

(on the Lancashire County Council website)

Help Direct is available to all adults in Lancashire, but older people make up about 50 per cent of the referrals and self referrals. Older people have been involved throughout the development of the service and many

of the delivery partnerships that are central to this approach reflect the needs of older people.

Help Direct is a key part of the Adult and Community Services Directorate's investment in the Well-being and Prevention Strategy, helping people to maintain their independence as well as improve their sense of well-being. It offers a 'listening ear' and follow-up as well as access to practical help. It helps people gain in confidence, hopefully sufficiently for them to make a contribution to their local community, for example through volunteering and timebanks.

Extra care housing

The county council has worked with partners, and contributed to, extra care housing schemes in localities. One such is Green Brook House in Rossendale, which will provide 42 one and two-bed apartments for older people with a mixed range of needs.

A number of facilities will be available within the scheme including a lounge, shop, and hairdressing salon; this will ensure that the facility offers opportunities for social interaction as well as encouraging communal activities. Work with local providers within the community is taking place to promote the use of the facility as a community hub.

Housing 21 have been commissioned to provide the core background care and support service, and will also provide an emergency response service and housing-related support.

Tenants were fully involved in the selection of the service provider.

Each tenant who is eligible for additional social care support has an individual budget ensuring that they have full choice and control over who provides their support.

Age Friendly Lancashire Fund

The Age Friendly Lancashire Fund is a recently established fund of £40,000 seeking to provide start-up and project maintenance funds to groups of older people living in Lancashire.

It will assist groups of older people who are excluded. Management of the fund will reflect Lancashire's approach to engagement of older people via boards with representatives from older people's forums, older people's partnership boards, Lancashire 50 Plus Assembly and Regional Representative Age, and chaired by an elected member

It is also intended that when the fund closes there will be a greater understanding of how to engage with excluded older people, as well as a repository of best practice in how to assist excluded groups manage grant funding.

What we would do differently next time

Engagement is more of a journey than a destination, and the journey will continue.

It was always felt important to establish firm foundations in terms of building relationships with individuals and groups. Although this has been a long and painstaking process, in retrospect the outcomes tend to confirm that it was correct to invest the time to build those foundations

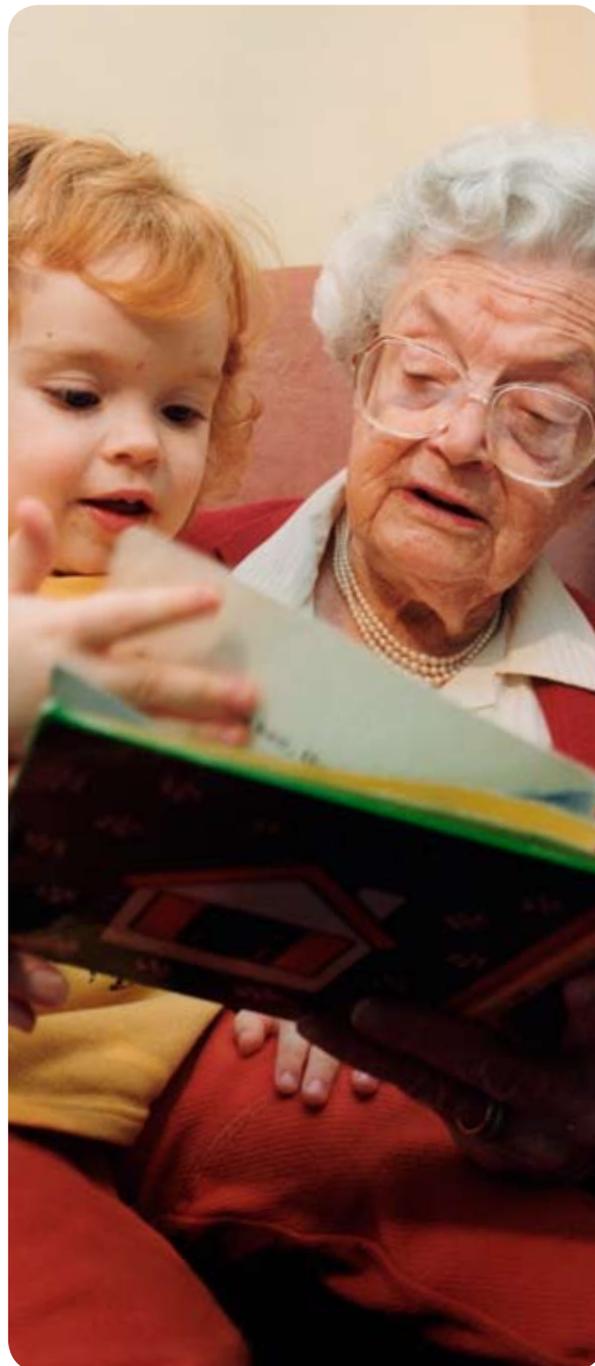
Top tips

Firstly, systems put in place to engage and support citizens have to be reviewed and developed continually.

Secondly, such systems will not work without the continuing commitment of staff

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Camden Council

Authority overview

There are more than 20,000 people over the age of 65 living in the London Borough of Camden. Nearly 81 per cent of them are satisfied with their home and neighbourhood. This is higher than similar areas in the country.

Camden Council and its partners have successfully engaged older people, provided opportunities for them to influence decisions and include them as active citizens, contributing to further improve their quality of life.

Older people were involved in developing Camden's strategy for older people, *A borough of opportunity for over 50s and beyond* which was published in 2008. Camden's first strategy for older people was published in 2002.

In 2009 Camden received a beacon award for engaging older people in promoting their wellbeing and independence.

What we achieved

Working with other local authorities

Camden hosted a learning network for local authorities across the country to develop tools for engaging older people more effectively. Participants reflected collectively about their practice and came up with innovative ways of tackling barriers to engagement. The learning was collected in a set of tools to approach usual and newly emerged engagement scenarios more creatively.

Developing new ways of engaging

Camden continues to explore the use of digital technologies to widen the way in which it engages with older people. They will be soon piloting new online opportunities for people to talk with the council; it is anticipated that this will promote social interaction between older people as well as another way of talking with and to the council.

Older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)

Camden helped disseminate the evaluation of Opening doors in London, Age Concern (now part of Age UK) Camden's project for older gay, lesbian and transgender people (LGBT).

The project was originally funded by Camden Council and subsequently supported by the Big Lottery to extend to four other London authorities. The initiative developed social groups for LGBT people and provides good neighbour scheme support, as well as advocacy, counselling and support services.

A conference was held earlier this year to present an evaluation of the project; it was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including a number of London local authorities seeking to develop similar support services for older LGBT residents in their boroughs.

Service improvement and innovation

Personalisation

We are working with all users of adult social care to develop its approach to personalisation. Older people with varying care and support needs, people with learning disabilities, sensory impairment and representatives from the BME community took part in a planning conference and are now part of a customer reference group.

They meet monthly to work with senior managers on the implementation of the programme. Participants identified how the supported self assessment could be improved, and as a result a more user-friendly document was produced.

Engagement

Camden Council has consolidated a centralised approach to engagement to cover adult social care as well as older people; there is a specialised engagement team that covers generic engagement as well as initiatives related to specific projects.

Safeguarding

Older people are part of developing Camden council's work on safeguarding adults. They sit on the safeguarding adults engagement group which works directly under the partnership board.

Older people inform the process and ensure it is meaningful for them and the population that they represent, and they contribute to the development of the council's engagement and communications strategy around safeguarding adults.

Challenges and what we would do differently next time

As a beacon for the engagement of older people, Camden's main objective was to encourage local authorities to share their experiences and to facilitate knowledge transfer. Although there is always interest in new ways of approaching engagement, it was very hard to identify which areas of their practice other local authorities wanted to develop with peers.

It was also hard to engage local authorities in conversations that they have had many times before. Engagement is not new. Everyone is trying to engage with older people - some more effectively than others. However, it was hard not to feel that we were reinventing the wheel.

We would like to develop a more systematic and holistic system to demonstrate the effectiveness of its engagement and the positive outcomes for people that are involved or receive services shaped by participation.

Top tip

Get the pace right. Camden is committed to involving people and getting the pace right – not always working at the pace of officers but taking the time to talk to people. Don't let the pace always be driven by external pressures

but by citizens. It is important to plan realistic time frames – not rushing things in a couple of weeks. The development and publication of Camden's latest older people's strategy, took at least six months longer than originally agreed.

Work in partnership. One of the key messages from older people when developing Camden's first strategy was that the local authorities couldn't achieve everything on its own. Working in partnership with other agencies and the community and voluntary sector was (and still is) key. Partnerships with older people is in the 'doing' not the 'sitting and listening', and improving quality of life and wellbeing together.

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City of Bradford Council

Authority overview

The City of Bradford Council and its partners were proud to be awarded a national Beacon Award in March 2009 for their work with older people under the theme Positive engagement of older people to promote and support independence and wellbeing in later life.

The council, through the work of its Older People's Partnership, was able to clearly demonstrate that it has developed a culture of sharing and delivering with older people and partners working together. One of the partnership's key relationships is with Bradford Older People's Alliance (BOPA), an umbrella organisation for over 100 older people's groups from across the district. Elected BOPA members sit as equal partners in the partnership's board and action groups.

What we achieved

From the outset, our main aims for Beacon year were:

- to ensure that older people and our partners from both the voluntary and public sector formed an integral part of all our Beacon events, both in terms of planning and participation. This was achieved on both counts
- to not only share our own good practice in our engagement with older people but also to learn from other areas.

To achieve this, we planned and hosted a variety and size of events from which a number of outcomes were achieved:

- **beacon open day in October 2009** highlighted the Older People's Partnership's involvement and engagement that takes place with older people on themes such as partnership working, neighbourhoods, excluded and diverse groups and early intervention and prevention. Over 100 people, many different agencies and groups from across the north of England, very

positively evaluated the event and valuable links have now been formed between partners in Bradford and other agencies across the country

- **a mystery shopping project** involved 17 older people and 10 partner organisations. The aim of the exercise was to test how older people initially find the information to access partner agencies and frontline services, and if they were then provided with appropriate telephone information advice and signposting. As a result of the exercise, significant changes have started to be made to websites, telephone book entries and signposting services across many of the organisations that took part
- **‘Older People Leading the Way’**: partnership working in the Bradford district’: led by older people from BOPA and supported by Bradford council and other organisations including the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, the workshop included discussion with all delegates on sharing the best practice within their areas on partnership working as well as providing an opportunity for networking. Due to

popular demand this workshop has been repeated

- **‘Building A Bradford district for all ages- the voices of older people’**: The event, attended by other representatives from partner organisations and older people, has fed into the current preparation work that is being undertaken on the district’s new sustainable community strategy - The Big Plan 2011-2014
- **‘First Contact’**: the workshop was based on sharing the experiences from the Bradford First contact pilot with other local authorities and agencies. Outcomes included the agreement from participants to form a national First Contact network for organisations that are already running projects of a similar type or may be thinking of using the First Contact approach in their area
- **‘The Voices of Bradford’s Older People’ DVD**: the film captures the aspirations and hopes of a range of older people from across Bradford on what they want life in the district to look like by 2020. Filming

took place at a variety of locations including with harder-to-reach older people as well as with BME older people's groups eg from the Bangladeshi Dominica and Polish communities

- **dissemination of best practice at regional and national conferences and events**, for example the ADASS, DASS, DCS national conference, the LGiU national conference, the Capita conference on 'Social exclusion of older people', the regional Forum on Ageing Older People's Champion Network Forum, the national Chief Fire Officers Association annual conference.

Lessons learned and what would we have done differently?

If time and resources had permitted we would like to have produced some tailored briefing materials to disseminate different aspects of good practice.

Top tip

Do not underestimate the amount of work associated with running a Beacon year, especially if you plan to have a range of events. In Bradford's case we employed a dedicated full-time co-ordinator to run our Beacon Year

A variety of different-sized events aimed at different groups, for example professionals (workshops) older people (training and research) as well as small projects, research and evaluation.

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London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Authority overview

Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country with one of the highest population growth projections in London, with the older people population set to increase by twice the rate of the rest of the population by 2026.

There is a strong culture of community engagement and partnership working in the borough to improve services and this too is visible in the engagement of older residents to promote active ageing. Through well-established methods including the Older People's Reference Group (OPRG), the voice of older people is heard and directly shapes service development. The borough's pioneering LinkAge Plus programme provides a range of services to support and empower older people to live healthy and active lives. There is a commitment to consistently improve engagement through innovative methods, such as intergenerational projects and our nationally-recognised participatory budgeting project.

What we achieved in the Beacon year

The Beacon year provided the council and local partners with the opportunity to continue developing approaches to engaging older people by exploring new methods of engagement; sharing good practice and learning from others. As a result, the profile of older people and older people's services in the borough continues to increase.

The council hosted an open day in November 2009 providing a platform for practitioners to share approaches to engaging older people. Through presentations and workshops, delegates were able to explore the challenges and opportunities of engaging older people. The event was well attended, bringing together over 50 delegates from the public, private and third sector.

One of the areas of focus for the council and local partners has been engaging particularly vulnerable groups of older people. In response to the awareness that older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are at greater risk of social isolation, the OPRG has

been commissioned to set up a support group for this community. The OPRG is also continuing to develop links with a network of housebound older people via the Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours Befriending Service, to ensure that people who are not able to attend meetings have the same opportunity to get involved.

We have been able to significantly improve older people's perceptions of local services. Our Annual Residents Survey 2009-2010 has shown a marked improvement in older people's views about the council and partnership's record on resident engagement:

- well over half of those surveyed agreed with the statement "my council involves residents when making decisions" – a rise of 20 per cent since 2003-2004
- 62 per cent agreed that "the council listens to concerns of local residents" – up by 18 per cent since 2003-2004

- almost two thirds (64 per cent) agreed that the "council responds quickly when asked for help" – up by 22 per cent since the 2003/2004 survey.

Tower Hamlets is currently the only local authority nationally to be judged as 'excellent' for increasing the choice and control of older people. As a result of our pioneering work, Tower Hamlets was invited to present at a number of events, one example is the Consultation Institute's - Meaningful Consultation with Older Generations conference in January 2010. We have also been invited by the Department of Communities and Local Government to pilot a pre-retirement programme. The programme identifies people aged 50 and over approaching their retirement enabling them to start looking at positive contributions they can make towards their health and wellbeing in later life.

Lessons learnt and what we would do differently

We have found that it is very effective to actively involve older people in events and conferences for practitioners. Older people co-presenting at conferences and taking part in workshops helps reinforce the important co-production element of purposeful engagement.

Older people, defined as “those aged 50 years old and above”, is not a homogenous group. It is a complex one with varying needs. We have learnt that we need to do more to engage the 50 – 65 age group - particularly those who are not in contact with council services, to take a more proactive approach to ageing before they need services. Our pre-retirement pilot with Communities and Local Government should go some way to better understanding and meeting the needs of this group.

Top tips

Engaging older people is not an event, but a process which recognises that older people are active co-producers and not passive recipients of services. There are no ‘quick wins’ and dedicated time needs to be invested to develop and enhance user involvement at all levels for engagement to be genuine and not tokenistic.

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The Local Government Group is made up of six organisations which support, promote and improve local government.



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