



GOVERNMENT OFFICE  
FOR THE SOUTH EAST

## **Connecting the voices of older people's groups across the South East**

A discussion paper on the six month empowering  
engagement project



**Gerry Mahaffey**  
April 2010

## Foreword

The balance between generations is changing, there are now more people over the age of 65 than young people under 16 and in order to create an equal and just society, everyone should be given the opportunity to shape the world in which they live. In the South East over one third of the population (almost 3 million people) are now aged 50 and over and to make our region a good place to grow older, they must all be able to contribute their views to influence the development of local and regional strategies and inform national policy.

In 2008, Government commissioned John Elbourne's review of older people's engagement with government. He found patchy coverage at a local level and no systematic means of capturing views at either a regional or a national level meaning that older people lost opportunities to influence policies that affect them. Government's response in 2009, *Empowering engagement: a stronger voice for older people*, identified national, regional and local action to address this lost opportunity. At a national level, the UK Advisory Forum has been established, chaired by DWP's Minister for Pensions. Government Offices were tasked with a direct role in to develop an empowered regional voice for older people through helping establish systems in our regions to ensure the voices of older people are heard.

The first step for GOSE in taking on this new challenge was to map across the south east, the over 320 older people's groups and forums, representing a great diversity of participants and different levels of influence. The challenge then was to work identify how we could work with SERFA, the already active and influential regional forum on ageing, and with our local authorities and local groups to develop the voice of older people in our region.

I was really pleased that serendipity played a part in being able to commission a more in-depth study of the effectiveness of engagement and empowerment in the SE, at the same time that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission agreed a regional bursary programme to improve the engagement of under-represented groups of older people. We were lucky that we could bring in Gerry Mahaffey, already known to many regional colleagues through his previous post with Age Concern, to lead on both projects for 6 months.

Gerry's report, which captures key findings from these two projects, gives us a unique insight into the way that in the SE older people are involved in shaping their communities and the services they receive from local government. It identifies some of the barriers that are felt by local groups and also reveals some areas of notable practice. The report's recommendations have already formed the basis for discussion by members of SERFA on how partners will respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by our ageing population. And as this report goes to press, Government has just launched the Ageing Well programme to help local authorities improve their services for older people.

The Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly IdEA) Ageing Well programme will provide tailored support to local councils and

partnerships to help them provide better and more efficient services, shaped by the needs of older people that are engaged in civic life. At the heart of the Government's policy for change is a vision for a 'Big Society', where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities and where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control. The case studies in this report show this is already what is at the heart of many older people's groups. And action to take forward the recommendations will provide a firm foundation to support local groups which can give older people the tools and recognition that they need, to take control and to tackle the problems and opportunities of demographic change.

Clare Wormald  
Government Office for the South East

## **Biography Gerry Mahaffey**

After returning to England from Latin America in the mid 1980s, Gerry has worked extensively in the statutory and voluntary sectors. He has senior management experience in a range of areas, including service delivery, organisational development, engagement and policy/influencing. He has successfully overseen and carried out various pieces of research and has championed user and citizen led services at all levels. Over the past two decades he has ensured that the work he carries out has its foundations in strong theoretical, evidence based research, enhanced by his post graduate, managerial and counselling training. After working for some years as a director within Help the Aged for the south of England, he worked for six months for the Government Office for the South East on a short-term contract, on strengthening the voices of Older People's Groups across the South East.

## **Summary**

### **Purpose**

This report sets out the findings from the six month empowering engagement project carried out for Government Office South East (GOSE). The purpose of the project was to evaluate the involvement of older people's groups within the south east, highlight the themes that emerge and promote best practice innovation and learning across the network. One of the other key objectives was to explore the gaps and examine the findings in light of reaching the 'hidden voices' of the most under represented older people's groups.

### **Context**

The previous Government's response to Elbourne, 'Empowering Engagement', and various other national policy initiatives have given high prominence to the involvement and participation of older people's groups in creating better places to grow older.. This paper highlights older people's engagement across the south east and illustrates the different levels on the 'ladder of engagement'. Many words are used by older people's groups in preference to the term engagement; words such as to inform, include, involve, influence, participate, represent, connect, to have power and control. This paper seeks to evaluate engagement across the south east and promote the

rich diversity of active participation of older people's groups in collective action, in partnership with their authorities to create a better place to grow older.

### Emerging themes

There are one or two pioneering authorities in the region where older people are involved in all areas of decision making, including strategic direction, service development, designing, monitoring, and evaluating services. There are a few areas where there is little or no engagement. However, the majority of areas have examples, sometimes striking, of older people's participation. The report promotes the diversity of methods of engagement and shows that effective participation comes in all shapes and sizes and that it is not necessarily 'one size fits all'

### The hidden voices

This paper highlights that as well as geographic gaps across the south east, there are also more generally and just as seriously, thematic gaps. The voices of older people's groups from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender (LGBT) communities, older people who are rurally isolated, with mental health problems or Alzheimer's, in care homes, disadvantaged areas, sheltered accommodation, or with caring responsibilities, are often silent.

The paper discusses partnership work carried out during the project, which provided bursaries to groups, in order to generate the capacity to strengthen the voice of older people from the most under represented groups, and increase empowerment activity through older people feeding into and influencing decision making processes.

### The South East perspective

After examining local participation, the report goes on to highlight the importance and examples of engagement, in the south east, through such bodies as the South East Regional Forum on Ageing (SERFA) and more widely through the UK Advisory Forum on Ageing. The paper explores and examines how this is working at present and examines particularly the methods and contents of communication at all these levels.

### Conclusion and recommendations

Over the six months, the project was able to get an overall broad picture of what engagement looks like, what it means and compare how it works within and across the region. It shows that much has been achieved by the GOSE Later Life team and SERFA. Looking towards the future, the continued involvement of older people in the planning, operations, co-designing and evaluation of services appears likely to continue to form an essential part of national and local developments.

The report finishes by setting out recommendations to be considered, discussed and decided upon within the context of the new emerging priorities and resources.

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## **1. Introduction**

This is a paper summarising the work of the six month 'empowering engagement project' carried out on behalf of the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) from October 2009- March 2010. The involvement of older people's groups across the south east is of course a 'work in progress' and the paper includes, for discussion, questions, comments and, most importantly recommendations to be decided upon regarding next steps. The work has generally attempted to examine the theme of engagement from the perspective of older people's groups, as seen through their own eyes; the report is not an academic piece of research

The project further examined engagement in each of the 19 upper tier authorities and these reports are available to update, amend and build upon, on request

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the paper is to support the planning and future communications of GOSE and of the South East Regional Forum on Ageing. (SERFA) The paper contains also contacts and information about best practice. The paper may also therefore, be of use in supporting the numerous older people's groups run by, for and of older people as well as the members and officers across the south east.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Evaluate the strength of involvement of older people's groups in their areas
- Highlight the themes that emerge and promote best practice innovation and learning to share across the network
- Explore the gaps and examine the findings in light of reaching the voices of the most under represented older people.

In addition this report

- Gives a summary of the engagement event on 9 March 2010
- Provides a report of the bursaries granted in partnership with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to reach the most under represented groups of older people
- Gives details of the summaries on engagement in each of the 19 upper tier authorities, with contact details of key players, both older people's groups and statutory services

## **2. Context and Terms of Reference**

### **The Elbourne Review**

This work follows directly on from the previous Government's response to the Elbourne report 'Empowering Engagement' which set out the importance of involving older people's groups at a local, regional and national levels.

Within the region, the Later Life team has, through the project, identified the key engagement players, evaluated the quality of participation, identified best practice, established where there are gaps and within the resources available, supported the capacity of older people's groups to reach the 'hidden voices.' There is now a foundation within the south east from which partnerships can facilitate and support older people's networks and forums within the region.

The work builds on the first phase of identifying the groups carried out in summer 2009 which identified the voices of older people in SE, which was also carried out across the country. **(Appendix 1 mapping)**

Some 320 groups were identified that are run by, for and of older people's groups providing a voice for them within their areas. These included action groups, Forums, carers, retirement associations, 50+ groups, older tenants associations, local trade unions, sub regional national pensioner conventions, Older People's partnerships, campaigners, seniors' councils, parliaments.

The groups were broken down within the 19 upper tier authorities, (the counties/unitaries) into categories of i) under represented groups (BME, LGBT, etc. excluded groups); ii) health and carers' issues; and iii) all issues including wealth, housing, social and transport . The picture gave for the first time a snap shot of the numbers and types of older people's voices in upper tier authorities across the south east.

It was not within the remit of the mapping brief either to evaluate the quality of engagement or to establish a database and contact list or evaluate the quality of connection of these voices with the Local Authorities.

### **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007**

This legislation means that authorities must consider, as a matter of course, the possibilities of provision of information to, consultation with and involvement of representatives of local persons across all the authority functions. It represents an opportunity for authorities to reinvigorate local democracy and improve the quality of decision making and thus the service that local people receive. In meeting this statutory responsibility, authorities are required to embed involvement in everyday practices, harness the power

of communities and reap the rewards, which include greater efficiency and improved service performance.

Authorities must not discriminate in the way they inform, consult or involve local people. They must promote equal opportunities for people to engage and get involved.

### **Sustainable Communities Act 2007**

Through this Act, councils and communities can put forward new thinking on how to meet the challenges of sustainability and local well being, including those of older people's groups. It starts from the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area. For older people, therefore, councils should develop plans and proposals through wider community consultation, using a panel or panels of local people

### **Equalities Bill April 2009**

For the first time this bill, is expected to come into force by autumn 2010, will require public authorities to ensure the elimination of age discrimination and the promotion of age equality. The Act will replace the three existing duties (relating to race, gender, disability) with a single duty covering the protected characteristics of race, sex, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion and belief.

The Bill also introduces a new requirement on strategic public authorities to have due regard to how decisions might help reduce inequalities associated with socio-economic status.

## **3. Definition**

Early on in the project, it became clear that 'engagement' is not a term either used or liked by older people's groups. There is a varying 'ladder of engagement' across the region. Words that are preferred and used by groups throughout are terms such inform, include, involve, influence, participate, represent, connect, power and control. There are lots of definitions of the term, depending on perspective, but one that is particularly evocative and comes from community groups themselves is **'participation in collective action to affect change.** (From the project 'Every Voice Counts' by South East Empowerment Network)

This report uses the term engagement for two reasons i) because it is a term which is in vogue; ii) as shorthand for all the innovative practice that the project has uncovered.

## **4. Themes emerging from the project**

### **General overview**



There are several key themes that have emerged from this project. One of its purposes was to examine which groups are engaging and being empowered and what is the quality of involvement and participation of older people especially those that are often the most marginalised. The question throughout has been, how included are older people's groups in the development of services within their areas, especially communities such as those from Black and Minority Ethnic, Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender groups, carers, older people from disadvantaged areas, care homes, sheltered accommodation, older people with disability or mental health problems. During the course of the project, there was no evidence within the region of enabling the voices of other excluded groups such as older prisoners and older travellers.

Over the six months, the project was able to get an overall, broad picture of what engagement looks like and what it means. There are only a couple of areas where it is working effectively at all levels; there are those areas where it is working adequately overall, with sometimes excellent work in one or two key areas; and there are those areas where the project has been unable to establish any clear evidence of older people's engagement. In a few areas the project witnessed that there are strong older people's groups who are largely disconnected from the authorities, 'speaking to the wind'. There are other areas where they are part of the area's decision making, the strategic direction, involved in service development designing, monitoring, evaluating services.

The individual reports on each of the 19 upper tier authorities provide a local picture highlighting good practice, as well as gaps. This part of the report seeks to illustrate some of the practices where it is working effectively and where agencies have reached out to support and include the most excluded groups in the later life agenda.

### **East Sussex Seniors Association (ESSA)**

East Sussex demonstrates how robust engagement with older people's groups can happen at almost every level.

#### **ESSA**

There are 7 forums across the county that feed in to the association of Forums called East Sussex Seniors Association (ESSA) with a membership of 4,600. ESSA meets bi-monthly through a Management Committee meeting and sub-groups including a Health & Community Care Theme group and a Transport & Environment Theme group with elected representatives from each of the local forums. They are well run, effectively organised and have strong support from the officers of the council. They have effective communications with regular newsletters and feed back from the various sub groups that members are on at all levels of service delivery. ESSA is in the process of seeking charitable status.

ESSA has a strong commitment to supporting the most under represented older people's groups and with a bursary from EHRC are in the process of

establishing ways in which these groups can be more included and involved in the decision making process. Evaluation of this initiative will be out shortly.

### **Funding**

Each of the 7 Forums receives annually £2,500 + from the county and East Sussex Seniors Association receives £10k. With this funding as a foundation, the Forums are able to fund-raise for further resources. With small amounts of funding they are able to provide a wide array of activities and often raise other voluntary income.

### **Operational Governance**

There is a strong and effective older people's strategy. There are annual conferences feeding in to the strategy, with regular monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's action plan through an inter-departmental working group with ESSA representation. The strategic approach to ageing focuses beyond health and social care, to embrace the wider later life and wellbeing agenda.

Representatives attend the Older People's Partnership Board which is chaired by the Director of Adult Social Care with representation from the Councillor older people's champion. The partnership meets quarterly and covers the wider later life agenda. There are excellent examples of involvement of East Sussex Seniors' Association and the 7 seniors' forums at all levels, apart from strategy, including the design, operation and evaluation of services, as well as occasionally participating in the recruitment of key staff.

### **Other Leadership Approaches**

The Authority has strong strategic and operational leadership including strong involvement from the Director of the Adult Social Care at the highest strategic level. There are two meetings per year with the Director and the Chief Executive of the two PCTs. These meetings discuss significant issues for older people including the participation of older people's groups in the budget planning and commissioning of services.

The demographic profile is used extensively to inform the planning of services and future direction of services

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### **Strategic engagement**

Many of the upper tier authorities have older people's strategic partnerships, but it is not always clear how they fit in to the decision making, especially with

the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) or the joint commissioning strategies. Many do not have a separate older people's strategy or else a strategy that is 'gathering dust' and not really operational. Most will have something like a health and well being partnership which will include older people's groups. Where engagement works effectively, the partnership board embraces the wider later life agenda and has clear joined up structures.

### **The Southampton Later Years Partnership**

Southampton City Council's later years team co-ordinates the Later Years Partnership, which feeds in to the Local Strategic Partnership. A member of the team also provides administrative support to Southampton Seniors Council, which is involved in the partnership and in decision making. The partnership has a clear, jargon free web site [www.southamptonlateryears.org](http://www.southamptonlateryears.org) and produces regular briefings.

The Seniors Council consists of over 30 members, drawn from the five neighbourhood areas of Southampton. It includes members from ethnic minorities, as well as representatives from Age Concern Southampton and the Southampton Pensioners' Forum. Full meetings are held monthly to agree direction, while smaller task groups focus on specific issues.

As well as having three seats on the Later Years Partnership, the Seniors Council is represented on the Health and Well-being Partnership and other bodies in the city. It has a strong focus on the importance of age-friendly neighbourhoods.

The Later Years Partnership agenda is concerned with the wider issues that affect people over 50 – job discrimination, active retirement and opportunities, as well as issues of care, frailty and isolation. These issues are connected to health and social care since active, healthy ageing can reduce the risks of ill health, falls, isolation and dependency later on.

In addition to the Seniors Council, the Partnership includes an impressive list of agencies; Age Concern Southampton, Alzheimer's Society, Southampton Voluntary Services, Hampshire Constabulary, St John Ambulance, Hampshire Fire and Rescue, Shopmobility, Hampshire Partnership Trust, Southampton Care Association, Southampton City Council, The Millennium Third Age Centre, NHS Southampton, The Pension Service, University Of The 3rd Age Southampton.

Southampton also has a senior citizens charter and supports intergenerational work through Southampton Inter-Generational Network (SIGN). Quite uniquely, the Seniors Council is a partner in the European funded Cities in Balance project. Through this project, it has a part time development worker 3 days per week to include more people in its work and strengthen its voice.

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## Operational engagement

Most areas within the South East have both strengths and weaknesses in their involvement of older people's groups. Some may be strong at a strategic level but have weaker involvement at grass roots level. There are likewise areas where this operates the other way round. In order for engagement to be effective, there needs to be a connection between the two. There were several good examples of robust connections at a local operational level but weaker connections at a strategic county wide level.

### **Partnerships of Older People's Projects (POPPs)**

POPPs in West Sussex have largely been successful in establishing older people's reference groups across the county. Whilst there is no evidence of a strong county wide group to influence strategic direction, the older people's groups appear to operate effectively at a local level. The reference groups are established in 7 areas. They are linked to the community partnership teams and to neighbourhood network co-ordinators. (NNCs)

The reference groups have achieved some concrete successes e.g. in getting benches and toilets in Shoreham and in Chichester. There is a web site and there are regular newsletters.

Within the boroughs for example, the reference groups have aimed to seek to nominate representatives to the Older People Board, Health & Wellbeing Partnership, Transport Sub-Group, the Local Strategic Partnership. Membership comes from older residents, carers of older people, resident within the borough and the Borough Council Older People's Champions.

Older persons' reference groups are supported with small amount of funding, but aim to be self sustaining.

The aim of NNCs is to build the capacity of the Older People engaged in the Older People Reference Group (OPRG). Where a locality has no standing consultative group of OP, the OPRG may offer its services to others with strategies to implement on an issue-by-issue basis. For example, Health & Wellbeing Partnerships, LSP, Transport Sub-Groups, and Borough/District Councils can make use of OPRGs for one-off consultation exercises (and can be encouraged to contribute towards the expense of facilitating the group).

As capacity has built, the OPRG has sought to nominate representatives to LSPs, Health & Wellbeing Partnerships and other sub-groups, and other relevant bodies (for example, in Adur & Worthing, the Programme Board for Older People). The governance link to the POPPs can sometimes be an

incentive for older people's representation. Representative/s from the OPRG can be nominated to attend Neighbourhood Network Steering Group meetings.

### **Leadership county champions' elected and paid**

An older People's Champion is someone who argues, supports and defends the concerns/issues of older people in the local authority area (Older person's Champion guide, Welsh Assembly Government). For engagement to work effectively, it is important to have effective leadership at all levels. Some areas have councillors who are older people's champions, whilst others have champions covering all areas of adult services, which can dilute the later life message. In one area there was an example of a member champion who had been designated the role of older people's champion but had been unaware of the fact.

An older people's champion may promote wider local democracy and the involvement, participation and engagement of older people in the planning and review of all aspects of a local authority's work is important. This includes where they work in partnership with other organisations. In some areas, champion groups have been established that bring together interested parties from health and statutory authorities, including the older person's champions. In other parts of the south east, champions attend older people's forum meetings either regularly or when requested. Spending time with older people and crucially listening to their concerns, issues and needs are essential components of the role.

### **East Kent Champions and Association of Forums**

There is a strong commitment from the county to an East Kent champions' structure with quarterly champions' meetings that include representatives from the East Kent Association with strong championing roles from the councillor who is Kent County Council Older People's Champion, and the Director of Commissioning and Provision (East) for Kent Adult Social Services, as well as key officers from the local authority and PCT. There are also unpaid older people forum members with strong links to regional bodies such as South East Regional Forum on Ageing and the South East Network of Seniors. In a recent meeting they have decided to make transport the key focus for the coming year.

East Kent also has a strong Association of Forums across that part of the county, 5 forums and still growing. The Association has a chair, key officers, regular newsletters and meets quarterly with representatives from each of the individual forums.

Significant work is also being carried out to reach under represented older people's groups, reaching into West Kent too. Several groups have received bursaries from the recent EHRC bursaries to reach communities as diverse as BME, rural, older people with dementia via Chatham Age Concern, the East

Kent Association of older people's groups, via sheltered accommodation, care homes, as well as in areas such as Maidstone, Ashford and Tunbridge Wells where new forums are being developed. Reports on these initiatives will be available in June

It was not within the remit of this project to examine the effectiveness of older people's champions within the districts. However, there are some excellent examples of how having leadership at this level can help the cause of older people. A significant ingredient of successful engagement is a strong councillor champion for older people preferably at cabinet level, as well strong leadership from senior management and operational officers.

### **Buckinghamshire Champions Group**

#### **Purpose of champions Group**

- To collate views and issues that are of concern to older people and to use these as the basis to influence decisions and service delivery
- To monitor the actions and decisions of the Older Peoples Partnership Board
- To promote public health, prevention and to facilitate understanding among the public and the professionals of the key issues that relate to the health and well-being of older people

The Older people's Champions Group meets quarterly to influence decision making and service delivery and to monitor the action and decisions of the older person's board. The focus is mainly on health and social care within the county and districts and the meetings are attended by councillors, senior managers from Local Authorities with representation also from PCT and PALs etc and LAs. Champions are also involved in the Dignity in Care campaign.

### **Capacity building and funding**

It is rare for groups to be fully engaged without, at the minimum, some element of support for building capacity. In order for forums to flourish, at least small amounts of funding and support are important. Forums often especially need support at an early stage in order to start up and get things off the ground. Several older people's groups have workers dedicated to them from the Local Authority

### **Buckinghamshire 50+ and older people's champions' group**

In Buckinghamshire there is a dedicated part-time worker to support the older people's champions group and there is paid officer time dedicated to the 50 + forum. There are several reference groups and panels upon which older people from the Bucks 50 + (see below) sit such as hospital discharge, Meals



On Wheels, inspection of care homes etc. Older people are also on the complaints design and review panel.

A 'Shape' report two years ago analysing engagement of older people on the issue of transport to hospital recommends older people to be involved right from the beginning of the service and that older people should be involved at every level

### **Engagement sense of belonging to community and communications**

There is Bucks 50+ Forum with funding by the county and by the community foundation which brings together 8 Older Persons Advisory Groups originally based on the Better Government for Older People (BGOP). These include Chalfont St Peter, Chalfont St Giles, Stokenchurch, Amersham, Chesham, Marlowe and Marlowe Bottom. More work is being carried out in Buckingham and Aylesbury to establish Forums

There are bi- monthly meetings and there are Forum Implementation meetings. 2 elected representatives attend from each of the forums. The local forums have links with their parish councils.

Bucks champions and 50 + has a paid employee who supports its initiatives. It has a web site which seems to provide excellent information and is well linked to the county website, for older people interested in being involved. 2 hours per week is given from the council towards up-dating and maintenance. There are regular newsletters. Both the Bucks 50+ Forum and the champions' forums have a very substantial involvement by 2 key older citizens who chair the two bodies, upon whom their success largely depends.

Training for all chairs within the Bucks 50 + forum comes largely through the local CVS.

Contact Bucks 50 Plus Forum

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Other valuable means of support include provision of most importantly, travel expenses, and support in kind, such as use of council resources, rooms, venues, teas and coffees. However a constant issue for many forums is funding. Where there is, even a small yearly income coming in, the Forums can often build on this to obtain other voluntary sources of income, sometimes doubling or trebling their income.

Part of the project manager's work has been to support capacity building often by simply connecting with other groups or linking them with the regional and local groups. The networking and sharing of practices should not be underestimated. The EHRC grants have also been a rich source of capacity building.

## Representation

Among the numerous types of engagement within the region, an important element for many older people's groups is the concept of representation. Representation comes in many different forms and at various levels across the region. For example, people from parishes/district forums may be represented on the county wide forum, members of the forum may be represented on older people partnership boards, which will have representation from the Local Strategic Partnership; there may also be representation from the local areas on south east or national bodies or networks. Whilst important, representation is only one form of engagement, no one person or structure can represent the many older groups and individuals within an area and whilst valued it is not definitive.

### **Democratic representation and involvement; Brighton & Hove Older People's Council**

The Brighton & Hove Older People's Council (the OPC) is based on a Danish model where every town has to elect Seniors Councils. A shadow OPC was established in 2001. Elections were held in 2003 and 2007 and will be again in 2011. 28,000 older people are registered to vote for the 9 OPC members. The unitary authority is divided into 9 zones with each member representing up to 4 wards.

The Council meets monthly and in addition holds open meetings. The Council has a well publicised plan, clearly written leaflets, and holds a regular AGM at one of the open meetings. There are strong links to the Older People's Forum, which produces an excellent paper called the Pensioner which has extensive coverage. Links are being established with the local youth council. The management committee meets the City council leader four times per year and also engages with the relevant budgeting process.

The different Council members have varied and wide-ranging experience. One of the council members with broadcasting experience produces a regular radio programme for older people, 'Grey Matters'. There is strong involvement from the Council in research led by Brighton University by, of and for older people.

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Website: [www.olderpeoplescouncil.org](http://www.olderpeoplescouncil.org)

## Autonomy and independence

There are examples across the South East where forums are completely autonomous and operating wholly independently of the council and other areas where without the council leadership the forums would collapse. Where engagement works most effectively there has to be a balance between groups

being so separate that they have little contact, communication and influence and where the authority is so much in control that the independence of the voice is weak.

## **The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM)**

### **The Older Persons' Advisory Forum (OPAF)**

The Local Authority has demonstrated strong leadership in supporting OPAF whilst at the same time ensuring that the OPAF is able to make independent decisions, some that may sometimes not necessarily concur with the council. The OPAF has some small funding from PCT and the Local Authority as well as support in kind. The Forum acts as a 'critical friend'. Formed in Jan 2006 from the BGOP project, it has 88 members and is 'strictly independent'.

In addition to the key elected officers in place, including Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Officers, there is also a Web Secretary. The OPAF has a lively web page to attract new members. An excerpt from the page explains 'By working with and through the providers of all such services, we seek to get involved in the planning, reviewing, monitoring and development of all services which affect older people. In this way we will be able to identify gaps in these services and thereby communicate our concerns and comments on existing services to the relevant organisations. We are able to act as a 'critical friend' to ensure that the voice of the older person is heard.'

### **Operational Governance**

Representatives of the OPAF are on the Older Persons' Partnership Board, NHS Berkshire East and other Public Involvement Groups, and regularly advise on the opinions and ideas of the membership.

There are also strong links with the OPAF to Adult Services, Supporting People and the Healthier Communities Ambition Group with representation on the LSP sub groups from the members of the OPAF.

The Forum has a work programme and a column in 'Around the Royal Borough' newsletter, leaflets and features in the local newspaper. The group is involved in consultations around the Borough on issues including housing, transport, planning, Alzheimer's etc. Members are involved in all the appropriate strategy groups and NHS sub-groups boards. Councillors and Officers also attend the meetings as and when appropriate.

The OPAF has full support from the senior managers and Councillors and has strong operational support from both the Council and the NHS as well as support regarding venues, transport, payment of expenses, refreshments, etc. The OPAF can also pick up on an individual issue and complete a needs analysis to see if it is a collective concern.

### **Funding**

Berkshire East NHS funding £500 and RBWM (LA) funding £1,000

### **Other Leadership Approaches**

As well as hosting bi-monthly meetings, there is involvement of Forum members at all levels of service development. Involvement most recently in designing a Citizen's Safety Pack (to prevent being the target of rogue traders & distraction burglaries) and in the 'Project for the Rejuvenate of Maidenhead' initiatives; helping to make the centre of Maidenhead more age friendly through advising on issues such as access, public toilets and park benches, etc.

### **Key Contacts**

Older Persons Advisory Forum  
Chair Sheila Holmes 07887 510033  
[sheila.holmes@ukgateway.net](mailto:sheila.holmes@ukgateway.net)  
[shealholmes@gmail.com](mailto:shealholmes@gmail.com)

**Key link to the OPAF** RBWM Officer, Catherine Mullins  
[Catherine.mullins@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:Catherine.mullins@rbwm.gov.uk) Tel 01628 683664

### **Older People research**

Due to time constraints, the main thrust of the project was to explore engagement within and at the upper tier authority level, with little time to explore the excellent work that is going on at a district level. It was not within the remit of the project to examine best practice at the local, parish and district level. However, some innovative projects shone out and are worthy of inclusion in this report.

### **User led research Eastleigh Southern Parishes Older People's Forum (ESPOPF)**

Eastleigh Parishes Older People's Forum (ESPOPF) has carried out various pieces of research by, for and about older people on issues such as housing and transport within their local communities. An excellent recent piece of research, 'Pills & Perils', researched the area of repeat prescriptions for older people.

The ESPOPF website states 'Pills & Perils' is another ground-breaking piece of research by the ESPOPF Researchers. It is a telling indictment of the administration of repeat drugs for older patients and the lack of awareness of professionals.

It is a survey of the problems of 845 ESPOPF members who are on repeat medication. It uses questionnaires, interviews and photographs as the research tools. Much of the research consists of quotations from older people who describe, in their own words, the problems they face.

ESPOPF has received a bursary from the GOSE EHRC partnership of £3k to research the information needs of older people across the whole county of Hampshire. A report will be available from July 2010.

Contact

[diane.andrewes@virgin.net](mailto:diane.andrewes@virgin.net)

023 8040 3311

[www.espopf.org](http://www.espopf.org)

### **A rich diversity of engagement methods**

There are various types of involvement and a variety of methodologies. It is not one size fits all. A rich, treasure trove of resources is available for authorities and groups to put them together and to achieve, that perhaps overused word, synergy, something over and above the two separate entities, something greater than the sum of their parts.

#### **Surrey 50 + Network and centres of enthusiasm**

In Surrey the County Council-led 50 + Network, has 1,300 members that seek to increase and improve engagement of people aged over 50 in the county. Two representatives from each of the 11 boroughs and districts meet three times yearly. There is an elected chair and officers with administrative support from the council. The Network is available for consultation on reviews of local and county-wide services such as bus services, technology in the Library Service and the best means of informing the public of road works. It has produced a directory of services for older people and has its own web site [www.surrey50plus.org.uk](http://www.surrey50plus.org.uk).

Local 'Centres of Enthusiasm' are now beginning to be established, for example in Elmbridge, Mole Valley and Tandridge, which champion the later life agenda in the local community.

Contacts: Surrey 50 + Laurence Russell [Laurence.russell@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:Laurence.russell@surreycc.gov.uk)  
Laurence Russell 020-8541 9441

#### **Scrutiny Reviews**

In Hampshire an overview and scrutiny review was carried out by the county council by the Hampshire scrutiny team, as part of its role. It is preparing a report on its findings entitled 'engaging older people'

Katie Benton Tel 01963 847336

[Katie.Benton@hants.gov.uk](mailto:Katie.Benton@hants.gov.uk)

Hampshire has recently established a Hampshire Association of Older People's Forums that links together existing local forums into a county association. The Association aims to develop still further two way communications between older people and local authorities. Each local forum is independent and autonomous with varying levels of funding from their districts. More established forums such as Basingstoke and Eastleigh can

achieve attendance levels of over 300 people at meetings and some groups, such as Havant, have played a key role in developing their local older people's well-being action plan.

The County Association of Forums is a new structure and is brought together by the Hampshire County Council's Older People's Well-Being Development worker. It has recently agreed a constitution, has a chair and officers. It is now pulling together a plan to which it will work in the future. The development worker is also supporting the establishment of further local forums.

Alex Burn

Tel 01962 847279

Email [Alex.Burn@hants.gov.uk](mailto:Alex.Burn@hants.gov.uk)

07738311763

### **Local Older People's Networks**

In a few areas there are local networks of groups that are not necessarily run by older people, but work on behalf of older people.

#### **South West reference group**

In the South West of Surrey, there is the SW Network for older people group, previously known as the SW 50+ reference group, with clear terms of reference. It brings together LA, NHS Surrey, voluntary sector organisations, older people and carers at operational level to share best practice, raise awareness, campaign and lobby across SW Surrey. It is independently chaired with officer support provided by the LA and NHS Surrey. It has a clear plan of what it needs to achieve, with effective evaluation of and achievements from last year. Last year for example it was effective in lobbying for voluntary sector funding, GP carers registration, hospital discharge, emergency care and raising awareness of dementia and communication. It has bi-monthly open meetings, with three action groups to take work forward. It also has links in to LSPs. In 2010 the group will focus on community transport, dementia care for older people, the introduction of self-directed support and older people's nutrition as well as continuing to support individual projects such as Dancing 4 Health.

Contact Debbie Hustings [Debbie.hustings@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:Debbie.hustings@surreycc.gov.uk)

Tel: 01483 517254

Mobile: 07980 626360

Available Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

Age Concern Oxfordshire enabled an innovative form of involvement in 'Get the Picture' a three year project using a combination of creative use of cameras, producing a report in pictures and talking to engage with decision makers and influence decisions.



It also has received an EHRC bursary to highlight hidden disadvantage, especially those older people below the poverty line. It is organising 5 participative workshops targeted at those disadvantaged groups which will contribute to a report entitled 'Growing older in Oxfordshire' which will help influence the later life agenda in the county.

Contact Penny Thewlis

[pennythewlis@ageconcernoxon.org.uk](mailto:pennythewlis@ageconcernoxon.org.uk)

## **5. 'Hidden voices': Plugging the gaps, capacity building bursaries**

During the project there were mainly two types of gaps identified; one geographic and the other thematic. Whilst there are examples of best practice and reasonable practice across the south east, there are also 'geographic deserts' where there is little connection or where either the project was unable to identify evidence of groups or where the two sides in the equation do not connect.

There are also more generally and just as seriously thematic gaps that include groups such as BME, LGBT, but also embrace rural isolation, mental health, Alzheimer's, older people care homes, disadvantaged areas, sheltered accommodation, and carers. There is real mileage in work to identify and include these often unheard voices. The evidence is that every area across the south east has had problems and challenges with this area of engagement.

### **Summary EHRC bursaries Bursary awards December 2009**

#### **Purpose**

As part of the empowering and engagement project, the GOSE Later Life team worked in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the South East Regional Community Council (SERCC) to provide a small, but significant, award stream of £36,000 to build the capacity of Older People's Forums, Older People's Action Groups and Voluntary and Community Sector Groups (VCSGs) in supporting the empowerment needs of older people.

The aims of the bursaries were to generate the capacity to strengthen the voice of older people, especially those most under represented groups, and increase empowerment activity through older people feeding into and influencing decision making processes. Awards offered were between £400 & £1,000 for a local project and up to £3,000 for a project covering a whole county, or wider geographical area. We intended to fund as wide a geographic spread as possible across the 19 counties or unitaries.

#### **Allocation of Bursaries**

Despite the very tight turn around, there were 39 applications totalling £67,989 for a pot of £36k. 24 applications were successful ranging from £416 to £3,000. Many projects were innovative and creative.

Several projects were awarded in communities where there are little or no independent voices for older people, especially covering isolated rural areas. Projects covered small community areas, as well as large county wide areas. Successful projects focussed on a range of areas of exclusion, including older people and disability, Afro Caribbean and African Muslim communities, specialist schemes to provide a voice to older users and to carers of older people with mental health problems and Alzheimer's, within a health and hospital setting. Others focussed on rural isolation, housebound older people or those in sheltered accommodation. One older people's forum specialising in research was successful with a research proposal about accessing information to the most underrepresented groups across the county. Another successful project covering the whole of the south east was targeting those areas where the voices of older people appear to be weak and poorly networked.

#### **Brief Summary of successful awards**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Targeted excluded groups</b>	<b>Brief Summary of Activity</b>	<b>Amount £</b>
Case Kent Ashford	All, special focus on faiths	Start up event for new forum	416
Tunbridge 50+ forum	All, Especially rural	Start up event for new forum	1,000
Young at Heart Tunbridge Wells	Disability, council estates	Event for older tenants	600
Community First. E. Hampshire	Rural, dementia, residential care	4 community forum events; to for links to Hampshire Association of Forums	1,650
Bracknell Forest	BME and faith groups	Event focusing on Faith and Black Minority Ethnic Community	646
Age Concern Oxford	Hidden, disadvantage, rural	5 Forum events with radio and press coverage. Produce report 'Growing Older in Oxfordshire'	2,987
Voluntary Action Maidstone	Housebound, needs assessment rural areas , 4 areas deprivation, BME	Start up event for new forum. Desk research, 'Walking the patch'. Establish steering group for forum	832

Gosport Voluntary action	All, especially disability	Start up; 2/3 launch meetings across Gosport	1,000
Seven Oaks Forum	All, new Forum	Start up 3 launch meetings in community centres across locality and steering groups	1,000
AC Chatham	Alzheimer's/ dementia	Knowledge and awareness events and workshop; establish user groups	700
People's voices, Milton Keynes	Older people mental health and dementia and their carers	Two Workshops for voices to influence services heard by PCT; improvements in medical and clinical care in hospital; report to PCT and Council	957
Oxon Pepper Pot	BME Afro Caribbean males and African Muslim older women	Workshops to influence decision makers, increase and establish roles on management committee, links to SERFA	3,000
IOW older voices	Isolated older people sheltered accommodation	3 workshops based on the 'Participatory Appraisal Model'	2,400
Alzheimer's Brighton	People with dementia and carers	Weekly café pilot 10 sessions, linked to influencing the PCTR and Local Authority	1,500
East Sussex ESSA	'seldom heard' especially BME, LGBT	Workshops in 7 forums to recruit members, strengthen management committees and determine future action.	3,000
Hastings OP Ethnic Group	Start up and launch Focus BME	Start up launch event and establish steering group	1,000
East Kent Association of Forums	Care homes, Sheltered accommodation, BME	Mapping exercise and targeting through leaflets and websites to increase diversity of representation on local forums	3,000
Eastleigh	Isolated older people, physical disability, mental health, low incomes	In depth research on the needs for and access to, information. Series of events and talks to share	2,963

		information	
Waltham Wickham, Hants	Start up rural communities	Start up event and establish steering group	870
Elmbridge 50+ Surrey	85+ Disabilities BME, Faith	Start up, Events + Web site	1,000
Community People First Portsmouth University	Focus especially on under represented groups	2 workshops to help shape the PEOPLE project; evidence based research to establish the needs of older people. Produce newsletter	1,000
West Sussex Association Disabled	Start up Disabled OP, BME, LGBT	Start up county wide Access Group. Exploratory meetings to establish county-wide management committee	1,500
West Sussex AGE Concern	Visual impairment deprivation, mobile homes, extra housing	3 events to explore needs and to share findings with PCT and Local Authority	1,500
South East Network of Seniors	Older people in unitary and counties across SE not represented .	2 Events in north and south region and increased membership of SENS and on Management committee	1,500

### **Geographic Spread**

Successful applications were received from:

Kent 8; Hants 3; Oxford 2; West Sussex 2; East Sussex 2; Surrey 1; West Berkshire 1;

Milton Keynes 1; Portsmouth 1; Brighton 1; I.O.W 1: South East Network of Seniors 1.

Few or no applications were received from Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Slough, Southampton, Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham

This may reflect gaps in our communication, the extremely tight turn around or simply a scarcity of groups within those areas. This needs further research. Generally, within the extremely tight time schedule, the communication systems have been successful in getting the message out to diverse groups across the south east and we can build on this success. Much has been learned from the planning and organisation of the awards; further learning will come from the evaluations. With further analysis and interpretation of the projects' achievements, an in-depth understanding of good practice can be shared across the network. The lessons from the project have already stimulated work to reach areas of the south east and older people's communities of interest that the project has identified as having gaps.

The purpose of the Bursary Programme was to ensure all areas of the region benefited, so EHRC have funded activity to do capacity work in the remaining areas.

### **Evaluation**

Once full evaluations have been analysed it is hoped that a full report will be available from summer 2010.

## **6. The Voice of Older People in the South East**

### **Older People's working group**

The project identified three main older people's groups run by and for older people across the region: the South East Older People's Advisory Groups, based on the Better Government of Older People (BGOP) model; the four National Pensioners Convention (NPCs) sub regional groupings; and the recently established South East Network of Seniors, which has links to approximately sixty forums across the region. Whilst the NPCs have as their primary focus the national dimension, the local advisory groups and forums deal mainly with the local and regional.

Many of the forums encountered were members of the NPC. The organisations are not therefore mutually exclusive. An older person's working group was established during the project to bring together these groups and discuss the connections. The group was involved for example in planning the March 2010 event 'Celebrating the voices of older people in the South East' and examining issues of representation on bodies such as SERFA and the UK Older People's Advisory Forum. It is important that the momentum that was gained from this grouping is built upon and that there is clarity on such issues as representation and partners/ members within the terms of reference.

### **South East Regional Forum on Ageing (SERFA)**

SERFA has been successful in establishing itself as a leading body in the region in building a partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors with a strategic focus on the later life agenda. It brings together agencies in order to help identify and promote issues relating to older people and demographic change. Its aim is to influence regional strategies, policies and services in order to ensure that the needs of older people are met. Part of the remit of the project was to support the link with one of its key objectives which is to 'promote the engagement of older people, partner organisations and policy makers.' **(Appendix 2 SERFA leaflet)**

In talks with groups across the region, a great deal of interest has been generated by and about SERFA and there is keen interest in engagement, communication with and membership of SERFA. The coming year is a good time build on this growing relationship.

## **Event 9 March celebrating the voice of older people**

SERFA, GOSE and the older person's working group organised an event to celebrate the voices of groups across the region. Almost two hundred people attended the event which included a key note speech from the Minister for Pensions and the Ageing Society, celebrating the voices of older people's groups across the region, which was the culmination of this part of the work. A short report of the event has gone out (**See Appendix 3**) and a full report will be available from summer 2010.

### ***Emerging Themes***

One of the key messages from the conference was the importance of establishing and maintaining effective communication. This must underpin everything else that we do, enabling us to share information and good practice and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in shaping the decisions that affect them.

There will be a key role for SERFA, working with GOSE, to ensure that good practice is identified and shared and to help local authorities and others find the best way of talking to and involving older people. We also have a role in explaining and demystifying the system so that older people can take full advantage of new opportunities and also to promote a more positive image of older people in the media. We must also consider how we can best influence thinking on specific areas of concern, such as transport, physical environment, social isolation, pensioner poverty and skills.

SERFA will be considering how this should influence its work priorities for the coming year and will incorporate this in its 2010 -11 work plan. If you have any comments on this then we would be happy to hear from you.

There is plenty of learning from this event regarding good practice and gaps in reaching the most under represented groups. It is important to learn and build on its success.

SERFA and GOSE, along with other partners also organised a highly successful engagement and Housing event in March which also similarly needs to be included in the analysis of next steps.

## **7. Communication**

### **Technology, Translation, Timing, Tailored and Targeted**

One of the most important themes that has come out of the project and one highlighted most strongly at the March event, is the importance of that most elusive of concepts, communication.

### **Technology**

#### ***i) Up to date data base***



One of the barriers within the project was the lack of information concerning the groups, email addresses, telephone numbers address of key members of the forums. Messages out to the network can get stuck at various stages of the process. Having accurate details is important in getting messages directly and quickly to the key players.

The project has now gathered together information on the key players across the region. The information is now being transferred onto a database which GOSE is developing which will be an important tool for the establishment not only of the basic contact details, but also of qualitative information which can be included and built upon.

## **ii) Website and emails**

Whilst there are older people groups that need hard copies of information and need to be mailed out to, most of the forums are linked in to emails and some have websites. Buckinghamshire 50 + has a simple but effective website that is regularly kept up to date with contacts and dates of district meetings across the county and linked in to other council websites including the older people's champions.

The SERFA too has a website (<http://tinyurl.com/SERFA>) which could be an important and rich source of two way information for the future, but is at present rarely utilised. In all communication, there must be clarity as to why we are communicating? Who are we communicating with? What are we communicating? How will we know that our communication is working? Likewise it is important to have a two way dialogue so that comments, thoughts, views, developments, practice and ideas can also be incorporated across the networks.

## **Timely, tailored**

The project has identified that older people's groups are hungry for information that is timely and tailored to their needs. It is essential to get the messages out with enough time e.g. the tight turn round for the EHRC grants prohibited many groups from applying. Communication about events and meetings need to leave enough time for cascading the information out to forum members. Not infrequently forum members communicated that by the time they had received the information the closing date had passed. Open Forum meetings may often take place once every three months and therefore there has to be where appropriate space and time to get the information through.

## **Translation**

There was also a constant plea that came out from many of the groups of the importance of having messages communicated in simple, clear jargon free language. The project has identified that the two sides of the engagement process can often be separated, not by their purpose and concepts, but by language. There were several pleas to have information 'distilled', interpreted and translated , accompanied by details and connections of where further information could be gathered.

## **8. Engagement in the counties and unitaries**

Discussions took place in each of the 19 upper tier authorities to establish engagement within each area. Information was obtained on the key contacts, such as the older people councillor champions, the key contacts for the older people's groups, and relevant web sites. Where it was possible to gather the appropriate information an indication of the forums' sense of belonging to the community and the effectiveness of communication was also established. Where there is poor communication and connections between the groups, this can be a "lose-lose" situation all round.

These discussions highlighted some best practice leadership approaches and practices, such as older people's strategies and older people's partnership boards, the links to LSPs, and to under represented groups, the connections to the older people's indicators in the Local Area Agreements and how the Local Authorities compare with areas that have similar challenges in regards to PSA. This information provides an initial base from which to build up a comprehensive picture of the later life developments in each of these areas.

It is important to see engagement as a key ingredient within the wider life agenda. Often the issues are the same for local authorities and for older people's groups, with the focus on communities, access to facilities, civic engagement, health and social care, information, housing, transport, crime, independent living, toilets, seating, dropped curbs. The problem as highlighted above is the language used. Here there can be an abyss in engagement and lack of understanding through not speaking each other's language.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

### **Work in progress**

This is a discussion paper and as stated above, older people's engagement is a work in progress. The previous Government's response to Elbourne, and various policy initiatives has given the involvement and participation of older people's groups a great impetus. Much has been achieved by the GOSE Later Life team and SERFA. However, nothing further can be achieved until there are decisions regarding future developments on the subject, otherwise this paper may be left on a shelf to gather dust. The project has provided a strong base from which to develop.

Civic engagement and therefore the continued involvement of older people in the planning, operations and co-designing and evaluation of services, appear to form an essential part of national, regional and local development. The language and the politicians may change but the principle and concept will remain and looks likely to develop further.

These recommendations need to be considered, discussed and decided upon within the context of the new emerging priorities and resources. They are as follows:

## Planning and prioritising

1. On the premise that older people's engagement will continue to be one of three priorities within the Later Life team for 2010 and promoting the engagement of older people one of the four main objectives of SERFA, this paper should support the discussion and decisions about the next steps for the next few years.

The first key recommendation, therefore, is that the knowledge gained from this project forms an integral part of the planning and prioritisation process for both GOSE and SERFA. The rest of the recommendations should be considered to form part of this plan.

GOSE should have a continuing coordinating, enabling and facilitating role and the developing membership of SERFA could direct and contribute robustly to the work. GOSE should continue to act as the secretariat and co-ordinator for developments.

1. Establish a small multi-agency group co-ordinated by the Later Life team, to set the direction, planning and the implementation of the work on engagement. It is important, especially within the present constraints to share the work-load. The project has provided a quantitative snap shot and qualitative evaluation to build upon and develop. The group could also include representation from older people's groups across the south east. In this way agencies can build on the best practice.

## Continue to share and develop knowledge

2. Once agreed and amended according to needs, information from the project should be made as widely available as possible. One of the purposes of the report should be to seek as widely as possible feedback and updates on developments. GOSE should continue to co-ordinate this.
3. Continue to build up the GOSE engagement database. Establish a group of key contacts, from the case studies in this report as 'founts of knowledge' on good practice. Many of the local contacts were receptive to being contacted and to supporting the spread of best practice, and once permission has been granted could be used as key contacts.
4. Carry out an analysis and interpretation of the reports out in May regarding the EHRC bursaries, circulate, promote the findings, share and build on the learning.

## Communication

5. Communicate regularly with those on the database using the ideas expressed on technology, translation, timing, tailoring and targeting. The engagement sub group outlined above could:
  - a. Promote the use of the SERFA website and keep it up dated on regular (quarterly or at least six monthly) basis.
  - b. Use the new database to mail out a newsletter to groups every quarter/ six months depending on resources to include links to the national UK Advisory Forum, SERFA, summary of key developments over the period and a distillation in short succinct bullet points, national, regional and local.
  - c. Up date the database once yearly to ensure contacts are up to date and to recruit new contacts and partners.

## Event Planning

6. Consider, within the budget and depending on priorities, using the database established, for an event targeting councillor and paid officer champions across the region to build and share the practice already established
7. Complete a full report on the event March 'Celebrating the voices of older people in the south east' and the Housing and engagement event. Circulate the reports of the event extensively, share the learning and establish the next steps.

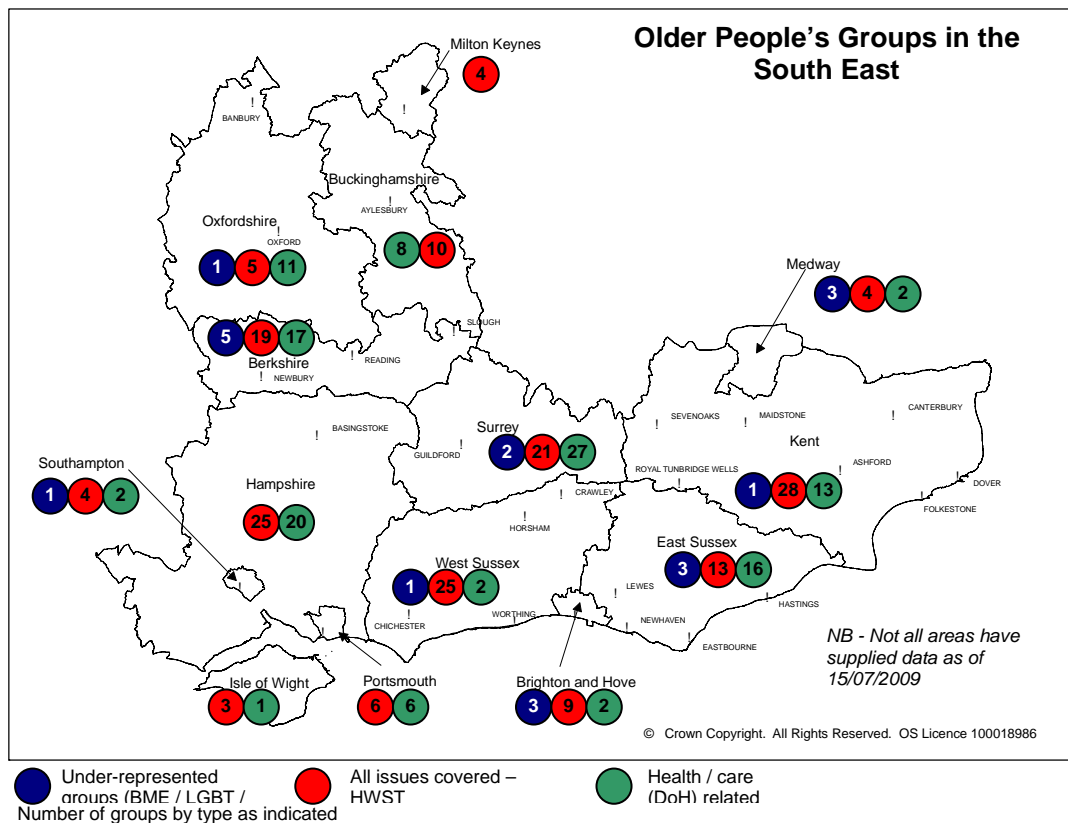
## South East developments

8. Ensure that SERFA's new terms of reference clarifies issues such as partners and representation. It is important that the terms of reference has simple, but clear governance arrangements in place, outlining its 'modus operandi', meetings, planning and decision making. The terms of reference must fundamentally address the issue of selection of key appointments such as Chair and officers and future representation on the UK Advisory Forum. It is important to use the contacts developed on the database to enable the growth of membership, embedding engagement as an inherent part of its development.

## APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Mapping of Older people's Groups in the South East**
- Appendix 2: SERFA Partnership Leaflet**
- Appendix 3: 9 March Conference Report**





## SERFA

# **Making the South East Work for Older People Now and in the Future**

## **SOUTH EAST REGIONAL FORUM ON AGEING**

### **Who we are**

The South East Regional Forum on Ageing (SERFA) brings people together to help identify and promote issues relating to older people and demographic change. Our aim is to influence regional strategies, policies and services to ensure the needs of older people are met.

### **What we do**

The Forum has four main objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the issues around ageing and older people
2. To review and inform strategies and policies that will impact on the lives of older people
3. To promote the engagement of older people, partner organisations and policy makers
4. To act as an advocate for older people now and in the future in the South East region

As part of our role, we will challenge ageism and promote social inclusion and independence for older people as citizens within our sphere of influence.

### **Members of the Forum include;** amongst others:

Government Office for the South East  
South East England Development Agency  
South East England Regional Assembly  
South East Regional Public Health Group  
Association of Directors of Adult Social Services  
Age Concern and Help the Aged  
Alzheimers Society  
South East Community Services Improvement Partnership

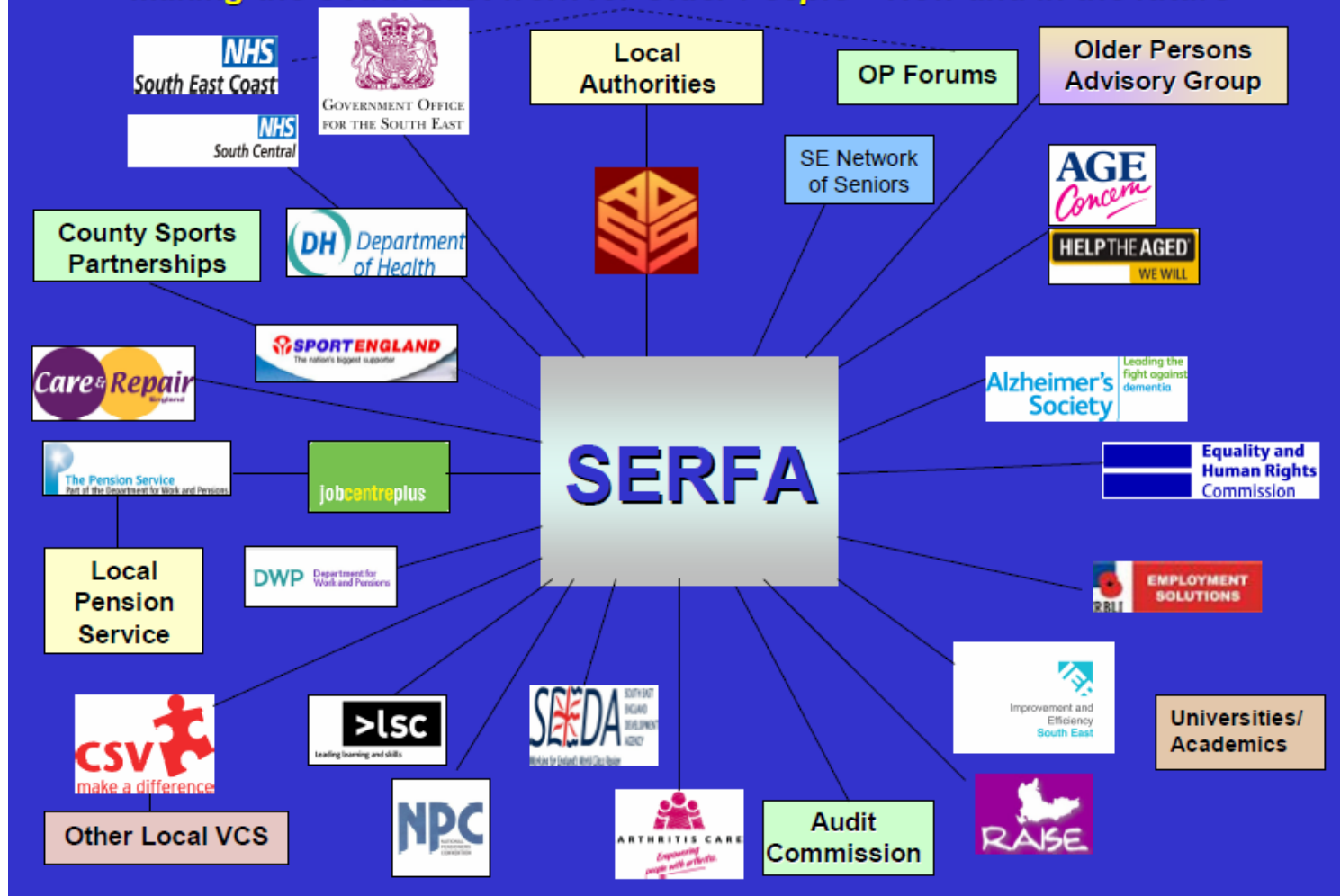
### **For more information please look at our website:**

<http://tinyurl.com/SERFA>



# South East Regional Forum on Ageing

## Making the South East work for Older People – Now and in the future



**'Listen, Hear, Act: Celebrating the voice of Older  
People in the South East'**  
**Tuesday 9 March 2010**

Following last week's successful conference we wanted to contact you all as quickly as possible, to capture some of the first reactions to the event and to reassure you that we are committed to developing a robust communications structure that can build upon the excellent start that was made at the conference.

First of all, a big 'Thank You' to everyone who attended and took part so enthusiastically in the day's programme. The success of the event was in no small measure due to your willingness to join in, to share your experiences and to tell us what you think are the priorities that will help to make the South East a good place to grow old. The vast majority of evaluations and feedback we have received have been fantastic and I think that we can confidently claim that the majority of you had an enjoyable and worthwhile day.

Angela Eagle the Minister for Pensions and an Ageing Society was able to join us in the afternoon to outline the work being undertaken to deliver the strategy "Building a Society for All Ages" and to engage in debate with members of the audience. She stressed the importance of preparing now for the impact of an ageing society and the need to challenge stereotypes that surround older people, by promoting the valuable role they play in the community and their contribution to the economy. She joined in some lively debate and stayed beyond her allotted time to share in the discussion.

We will be producing a full conference report in due course but below is a quick overview of the event:

**Morning Discussions:**

After introducing the event and highlighting some of the key statistics and trends that underpin demographic change in the region, there followed a panel discussion and Q&A. Panellists outlined the importance for the Government of continued action to build greater engagement with older people's groups and explained that the contribution that older people can and do make to society is often undervalued and overlooked. Whilst inequalities still exist, this will hamper any efforts to increase the input and influence of older people. Work needs to continue with under-represented groups to help them overcome both cultural and language barriers to engagement.

Members of the audience were able to discuss the presentations in their table groups and then had an opportunity to put some of their comments directly to the panel. Key examples of these included:

- **Transport:** The availability and accessibility of reliable public transport is essential to many older people and isolated groups and helps them become more involved in the community. Simple solutions can produce cost effective results.
- **Pensions:** Concerns raised about issues affecting state and occupational pensions
- **Engagement:** Older people should be more involved in local decision making and in actually developing local services – not just asked what they want. What about an older people's version of the Youth Parliament?
- **Communication:** Need to understand the barriers, many older people cannot access/are not comfortable with IT, never under-estimate the effectiveness of face to face communication. Information should be available in hard copies. Communication across the region is essential for effective inclusion and involvement of older people

### **Afternoon Workshop Sessions**

After the Minister's speech and Q&A, the conference broke into four workshops before reassembling for further discussion.

1. Developing Best Practice: This session was about breaking new ground and provided thought provoking discussion about organising and inspiring people to get involved. It demonstrated how even small initial steps can set the path to future success.
2. Encouraging Involvement and Inclusion: The focus was on removing the barriers that older people face in their everyday lives, both in their physical environment and emotional barriers such as social isolation. Older people, as active citizens, have a lot to contribute based on their varied life experiences.
3. Regional/National Engagement: How can older people contribute in an increasingly complex environment with a diverse range of local providers? SERFA can provide a conduit between national and local providers to ensure that information and good practice are recognised and shared across the region.
4. The Wider Later Life Agenda: Local structures can be confusing with little clarity about different roles and functions, this can disaffect local communities who do not know the best way to raise issues and make their point. Investment in community based activity can have a real impact in creating age friendly communities.

### **Final Plenary Discussion**

The panel discussed the messages being fed back from the workshops and emphasised the importance of participative democracy. The challenge for society is to provide the security and stability that all citizens need to enable them to deliver and achieve to their full potential. Positive developments were recognised but there were concerns that complacency should not affect progress towards a fairer society for older people both today and in the future.

### **Emerging Themes**

One of the key messages from the conference was the importance of establishing and maintaining effective communication. This must underpin everything else that we do, enabling us to share information and good practice and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in shaping the decisions that affect them.

There will be a key role for SERFA, working with GOSE, to ensure that good practice is identified and shared and to help local authorities and others find the best way of talking to and involving older people. We also have a role in explaining and demystifying the system so that older people can take full advantage of new opportunities and also to promote a more positive image of older people in the media. We must also consider how we can best influence thinking on specific areas of concern, such as transport, physical environment, social isolation, pensioner poverty and skills.

SERFA will be considering how this should influence its work priorities for the coming year and will incorporate this in its 2010 -11 Workplan. If you have any comments on this then we would be happy to hear from you. We hope that you think that we have picked up the right messages from the conference and we will write to you again when we have had an opportunity to study all of the conference feedback and can produce a more detailed report.

In the meantime, thank you all once again for making our Conference such a memorable event.