

Conference Report



East Midlands Speaking Up for Our Age Conference

29th March 2011

**Trent Vineyard Conference Centre
Nottingham**

Summary Report

Introduction

The East Midlands Speaking Up for Our Age Conference took place at Trent Vineyard Conference Centre in Nottingham on 29th March 2011. It was attended by fifty representatives from twenty seven different forums and similar groups from across the region. The conference was also attended by representatives from Age UK and local Age UKs. The theme of the day was how we can achieve more for people in later life by working together.

The day began with a warm welcome from the Conference Chair Simon Main, Regional Manager in the East Midlands Team at Age UK. The morning session included several informative presentations, which covered topics such as developments within Age UK, how Age UK and forums can work together and information about the Big Society. The morning also included lively question and answer sessions.

The afternoon session began with a presentation about Age UK campaigns followed by workshops on localism, fundraising, working together, the Big Society and influencing in a time of cuts. The workshops provided delegates with the opportunity to share their knowledge with representatives from other forums and to obtain information and ideas to assist them in their activities. A summary of each of the workshops is provided in this report.



Summary of Presentations



Elisabeth Davies, Director of Partner Relations, Age UK 'Age UK - Our first year and beyond'

Elisabeth provided an overview of the key achievements since Age UK was launched in April 2010. She talked about the Age UK group now and our plans for the future. A theme of her presentation was the importance of extending our reach through our partnerships. She discussed our vision for partnership of building a strong network of independent local Age UKs, Friends and Forums across the UK so that we are all better able to flourish in challenging times and can learn from each other, bring our expertise together, ensure that the voices of older people are heard loud and clear and achieve more for older people everywhere.

Hilary Bath, National Manager, Age UK Kate Adams, Head of Engagement, Age UK 'Age UK and Forums: How will we work together?'

Hilary and Kate discussed the Age UK vision of a network of vibrant independent charities and groups working with and for people in later life in their local communities. Working with forums is an important part of this vision and a key part of the partnerships that Age UK is developing across the country. Through working together, whilst recognising each other's independence, we can reach more people in later life and improve their lives through:

- Local contact, opportunities and activities
- Co-ordinating our activities more effectively
- Signposting people to the range of Age UK services and products – both locally and nationally
- Increasing our shared campaigning and influencing impact

Hilary and Kate highlighted the activities that have taken place to support forums in their work such as regular communications from Age UK, engagement and involvement opportunities, training and networking events. They also provided information about future plans.

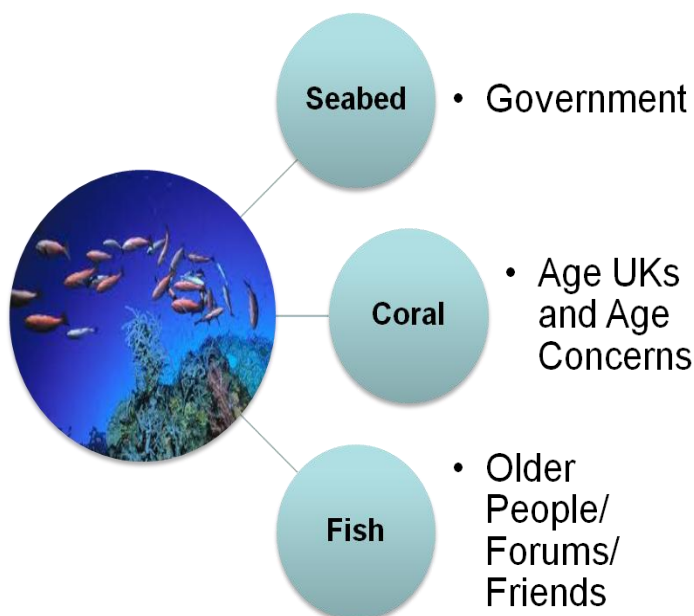
Over the coming year Age UK wants to develop its relationships with forums. We will be updating the Speaking Up for Our Age database and will be asking forums to re-register. We will focus on supporting the formation of relationships including with local Age UKs and will introduce forums to their local Age UK partner. We are currently working on the detail of our offer to forums and have listened to feedback from forums in developing our proposals. We will keep forums informed during the next few months.



**Camilla Williamson, Parliamentary Advisor,
Age UK
Angela Kitching, Government and Stakeholder
Manager, Age UK
'The Big Society and the big picture'**



Camilla and Angela began by providing some background information about the role of the Government and Stakeholder Team at Age UK. They went on to provide an overview of the Big Society. They stated that the Government describes it using a diagram of a Seabed, Coral and Fish, where no one thing can exist without the other. The examples provided in the diagram below of Age UKs, Age Concerns, Older People, Forums and Friends have been added by Age UK.



The Government describes the Seabed as itself

- Protecting the vulnerable and ensuring essential services
- Facilitating design of other services with diverse partners

Coral as Social, Public and Private providers

- Collaborating in the design and delivery of complementary services
- Developing innovative service models for 'harder to reach' groups

And Fish as Citizens and Neighbourhood groups

- Participating in design and delivery of services – sees people in later life as an important part of this

They said, in practice, the Big Society approach is about:

- Transparency about Government and local government expenditure
- Driving decision-making down – to neighbourhoods where feasible
- Personalisation – personal health budgets, personal care budgets

- Freeing local government from central direction and control
- Promoting partnerships with the private and not-for-profit sectors and encouraging volunteering

Camilla and Angela also discussed how the Big Society is being achieved and drew attention to the Localism Bill, changes in health and social care and public service reform.

Ian Willmore, Head of Campaigns, Age UK 'Age UK Campaigns – Working Together'

Ian highlighted campaign success stories and provided information about current Age UK campaigns, which include:



- *More Money in Your Pocket* – Our year long campaign to ensure that people in later life receive the benefits they are entitled to
- *Stop Care Cuts* – Our campaign currently focusing on preventing cuts to social care
- *Hungry to be Heard* – Our campaign to end the scandal of malnutrition in hospital
- *Down but not out* – Our campaign to improve the quality of life for older people with depression
- *Spread the Warmth* – Our campaign to tackle unnecessary deaths as a result of fuel poverty
- *Stop Falling, Start Saving* – Our campaign to tackle preventable deaths as a result of falls in later life
- *Change One Thing* – Our campaign to bring real change to local communities around the country. We are supporting local groups to improve their neighbourhoods for people in later life. Each campaign will be led by older people, but Age UK's Campaigns Team will be on hand to offer support and advice
- *State Pension Age* – The proposals in the Pensions Bill to speed up the equalisation between men's and women's state pension age to 65 will have a negative effect on many women now in their 50s. A third of a million women born between December 1953 and October 1954 would see their state pension age rise by eighteen months plus. They would not get enough notice to plan properly for their delayed retirement

The Campaigns Team is interested in hearing from local campaigners and can provide campaign resources and assistance to forums in planning campaigns. The contact details are as follows:

The Campaigns Team
Age UK
Tavis House
1-6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NB
Email: campaigns@ageuk.org.uk
Tel: 020 303 31425

Summary of Workshops

Workshop One - Localism, Planning and Your Forum



The purpose of the workshop was to look at changes to the planning process under the new Localism Bill and to consider some of the implications and resulting opportunities for involvement.

Current system

The current planning system is seen to be ineffective. The Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State can override, and local decisions can always be overturned. Consultation is not an integral part of the current planning process and is often disregarded. Workshop members felt that the 'sweeteners', i.e., the provision of additional facilities such as play areas, new roads or units of low cost housing as part of a planning bid or planning permission can be perceived at best as a way of securing additional local benefits, at worst as a form of bribery. Large businesses such as supermarket chains can afford to have recourse to the legal process; local authorities cannot use public funds to defend in court.

What will be the effect of new legislation?

Under new legislation the Neighbourhood Plan, produced by a local Neighbourhood Forum, will become part of the formal planning process and may give more local control. At present a parish council may prepare a Parish Plan, but a district council may disregard it. In future local decisions will apply, and the Neighbourhood Plan will hold sway. However, decisions already taken by the local authority cannot be prevented and the local authority still has to give its agreement to the Neighbourhood Plan – but – the local authority will have to hold a local referendum to ascertain the view of the local community. Money for holding referendums has been allocated. The plan once agreed will be in place for five years.

Comments from workshop participants

The workshop members noted a number of issues and some perceived difficulties. These included:

- Some local councils are enlightened and already have mechanisms in place for involvement and participation but elsewhere it may be difficult to raise local awareness, to change local attitudes and to promote participation.
- A minimum of three people are required to form a Neighbourhood Forum. It is possible that more than one group may want to establish themselves as the local Neighbourhood Forum in the same location. The local authority may have to decide which one to accept. Representation, accountability and lack of sanctions are seen as considerable issues, as well as skills and finance.

- The Neighbourhood Forum will have to finance the preparation and writing of the Plan. The estimated cost is around £18,000, with no clear idea of where this is to come from. It could be sponsored, but this may be seen as having potential to skew decisions. Businesses will also be given the right to prepare Plans, which makes more sense in town centre locations.

Overall the workshop members were generally in favour, but with some reservations.

Workshop Two - Fundraising for Your Forum

The aim of the workshop was to provide hints and tips on accessing funding and developing fundraising plans in order to ensure that forums have sustainable futures. Some of the key points discussed were as follows:



Find potential funders

Seek out potential funders. Find out what they fund (from websites/annual reports etc.). See what the Charity Commission says about them. Find out what level of funding they give.

Assess the fit

Read guidelines carefully. Note key areas of funding and criteria required. Review own project to assess fit. Consider implications of applying for 'part funding'. Use the funders' language. Be positive. Use active words such as 'increase' and 'maximise'.

Research evidence of need for your project

Examples of evidence may include local statistics, user or other feedback, national policy information, evaluation information or other evidence of impact.

Cost the project appropriately

Make a request for a specific sum of money. Ensure that the figures in the budget are realistic and add up. Don't forget to include expenditure items and overheads.

Prove that you're a good bet

Send evidence, for example, a business plan, project plan, information about the board/advisory committees, good news stories and list of current/recent funders.

Beware of ...

Too much project activity for too little money, over ambitious targets, asking for a disproportionate amount of grant, lack of clarity about relationship of activity to benefit, trading on the reader's guilt, assuming that the moral imperative is enough.

Consider different ways of fundraising

These may include trusts and foundations, local rotary/round table, statutory funding, events, raffles and support from local businesses such as supermarkets and banks. Develop links with your local CVSs and Community Foundations.

Other hints and tips

Assume that the reader knows nothing about your organisation. Contain your application to the information required. Focus. Do a first draft. Make sure your objectives are clear and measurable. Describe how the project will be managed and monitored. Don't rush to get an application in for an unrealistic deadline. Develop links with funders. Don't send a blanket letter to 100s of funders.

Some useful websites

FunderFinder – www.funderfinder.org.uk (It includes some information about fundraising strategies)

Funding Central – www.fundingcentral.org.uk

Awards for All – www.awardsforall.org.uk

Workshop Three - Working Together – Forums and Age UK

The aim of the workshop was to provide an opportunity to learn in more detail about how forums will relate to their local Age UK partner and to share ideas. It included some examples of existing relationships between local Age UKs and forums.



Background

- Age UK would like to work with a large vibrant network of independent organisations and build networks at a local level to improve effectiveness and prepare for the 'local' agenda
- Aim is to increase the reach to more older people through co-ordinating activities, signposting to more services and through campaigning

Key principles

- Recognising that we all want to improve life for older people and focusing on how we make the most of opportunities
- Recognising local independence
- Dialogue and opportunities for contact are important

Relationships - What issues do we share?

Examples included:

- Need for social / adult education opportunities and other services that support wellbeing
- Increase membership and awareness of our organisations
- Increase awareness of services and links to the most isolated and vulnerable adults
- The need to develop independence from funders and the local political agenda

What interests might we have in common?

Examples included:

- Challenging age discrimination. Shaping things such as the Equality Act 2010
- Identifying the most vulnerable to help give them a stronger voice
- 'People' rather than 'older people' – People to be seen as individuals and citizens rather than beneficiaries
- Clarity on changes and developments / restructures in the local 'architecture'
- Resources – Making the most of opportunities and protecting against threats
- Age UKs need to think about ways the network of forums can help us understand our local population better and also support campaigns

How do we build and maintain relationships?

- Communications – Need to communicate and prepare well for issues
- Recognise that different issues are of different relevance in each local area
- We need an overarching strategy for our work together with core principles
- Information and communications should not all be electronic. Many forums do not have the funds required to print off large electronic documents. Communications should be short and relevant

What happens next?

- Developments will take shape over the next few months
- Discussions will take place with local Age UKs and with forums
- The approach to this work – 'It's a marathon not a sprint'

Workshop Four - Influencing in a Time of Cuts

The workshop was led by Ian Willmore, Head of Campaigns at Age UK, who posed the question: 'What sort of action are you undertaking with your Council?' Participants reported on how they are involved in a wide range of influencing activities such as involvement with a local Ageing Well Partnership and representation on a Strategic Partnership for Care.

Hints and Tips Shared During the Workshop

- Obtain a seat on the local Healthwatch.
- Understand what the terminology means, for example, in one area 'moderate need' includes needing mechanical help to get into the bath.
- Check your facts! Beware heresy! Find out the reasons why something is happening. You may not be able to stop it but you may be able to influence how it happens. One example provided was the closure of care homes in one area. Campaigners could perhaps have influenced the timescale and the process of closure, but focused on stopping the closure, which had already been confirmed.
- Publicise successes and find simple messages that people will sign up to.
- A service user who speaks about his or her own experience will have great impact.
- Identify 'a concerned councillor' who is not a lead councillor. Lead councillors will be constrained by responsibilities.
- Find a volunteer who will scrutinise local authority finances to find hidden pots of money to access for local initiatives.
- Set realistic targets. One local example provided by a forum representative was on the subject of cycling on pavements. The campaign started in a small area, which was very successful.
- Remember our power. More older people vote than younger age groups. See the elections as an opportunity to influence.
- Use neighbourhood leaders to listen to and represent people who can't attend meetings.
- Keep flagging up digital exclusion and the need to communicate with people using traditional methods. Some older people love Skype and see that the internet can save money. Recognise its strength to mobilise campaigners.
- Support other organisations in their campaigns such as disability organisations or Sure Start. Campaign on the inside – talk to your local authority, etc., and on the outside, through press releases.
- Co-ordinate questions to ask authorities and demand feedback in six months' time.

Workshop Five – The Big Society: What Role Can Your Forum Play?

The workshop started with a discussion about the key principles behind the Big Society. The group identified that forums fulfil many of the key principles that David Cameron describes in his Big Society speech such as communities, public, people, work, responsibility and society.

Lord Wei has described the Government's role in the Big Society as designing the architecture for communities to build upon. The Government is deliberately not defining the Big Society, which enables community groups such as forums to have the opportunity to shape the agenda at a local level.

Forums are in a strong position to engage with the Big Society as they are often independent of local authority funding. They have an important role in ensuring the voices of those in later life are heard. The group unpicked the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Big Society.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Strong voice for people in later life	Same volunteers will come forward. They will just do more work	Grow membership of forums	Lack of budget or training to support members
Independence of forum's voice	Might not be representative of all older people in the community	To influence the council as not reliant on funds. Use the media to promote work	Concerns that councils will remove in kind support such as facilities, transport
Experience and skills of members	May lack some specific skills, for example, IT skills. Dominant voices within the group	People in later life are more likely to vote. United voting voice	Limited personal resources. Lack of access to skills training

The group identified ways that forums could actively engage with the Big Society agenda and areas where they would require additional support.

What forums can do now	Where forums might need support
Grow membership – reach out to more people in later life and more diverse groups	Training and support to develop membership
Demonstrate how representative the forums are. Share information from surveys, consultations etc	Expert advice and sharing of good practice
Influence local councillors United voting voice Tackle dominant voices	Share forecasting of future challenges for forums or local politics Specific skill training

The group concluded that forums have an important role in shaping the Big Society and they provide valuable opportunities to influence, support and share voices of people in later life. The challenge is to grow the membership and the diversity of voices in a period of significant change.

Question Time

The conference included several question and answer sessions, which covered topics such as age equality, public transport and concessionary travel, the Big Society, social care, health reforms and localism. Other issues that were raised included fees in retirement housing, electric scooters, how Age UK engages with older people at different levels within the organisation and concerns over the possible withdrawal of support for forums from local authorities in some areas. The subject of nutrition in hospital was also mentioned and one delegate highlighted a report (nutrition and red tray report), which has been produced by the Nottinghamshire County LINK. It is available online at: www.strongerlocalvoice.com/nottingham-county Further information about the report is also available by telephoning the Nottinghamshire County LINK on 0115 975 4647.



Final Remarks

It seems clear from the feedback that overall delegates enjoyed the conference and found it very worthwhile. The event enabled forum representatives to learn more about the work of Age UK and local Age UKs and to consider how we can work together to achieve more for people in later life. Delegates also enjoyed the opportunity to network and to share ideas and experiences with each other. The evaluation forms stated that most people felt that the event was excellent or good. We value the feedback and will use it to inform future events.

A special thanks must go to all who contributed in any way to the success of the conference including the speakers, workshop facilitators and scribes, and most importantly the delegates themselves, many of whom had travelled a long way to be with us. Thank you for taking part in the event.