Best Practice

Guide for Older People’s Champions
For the purposes of this guide an Older People’s Champion is a councillor, who is not a member of the cabinet, and who has taken on the role because of an interest in older people’s issues.

This guide suggests five recommendations to help Older People’s Champions define their role and make a positive difference in their borough. The recommendations are informed by some of the great work already being done by Older People’s Champions within borough councils in London and are designed to complement the Department of Health’s Toolkit for Older People’s Champions (www.dwp.org.uk).

For more information about Age UK London and our work visit www.ageuklondon.org.uk
Recommendation One

Set a clearly defined role and strategy

The purpose of the role should be clear from the outset to ensure that all councillors, officers and partners are clear about responsibilities and desired outputs. The remit can be developed according to need and may include collecting and feeding back on older people’s concerns to the wider council, leading on council campaigns around older people’s issues and communicating council policy back to the older community and voluntary sector bodies. For help shaping your priorities you can work with the voluntary sector in your borough, council colleagues and older people themselves to identify the key issues which affect people locally.

**Action**

Draft your strategy in collaboration with voluntary sector partners and older people’s reference groups and agree it with your Council’s Cabinet.
Recommendation Two

**Ensure that a strong system of governance is in place**

Many Older People’s Champions do not have a ring-fenced budget so to avoid the risk of this role becoming purely nominal, structures must be in place to allow the champion to act on older people’s concerns and influence the council’s expenditure on older people to achieve real change. Champions need to have authority to influence and hold Cabinet Members and officers to account and the Council Cabinet must demonstrate that they take the role seriously by involving their Older People’s Champion in strategy decisions that will affect the older population. Older People’s Champions should be encouraged to use the scrutiny process effectively to assess whether services are meeting the needs of the older population.

**Action**

Agree a system for working with the cabinet member who has responsibility for older people and produce an annual report, reporting back on your outputs and achievements, to present to full cabinet.
Recommendation Three

Maintain excellent links with the community

It is imperative that older people themselves form the basis of any action taken within the role. Developing links with older people’s groups in the area, listening to their views and really championing their voices from within the council is the most important part of being an Older People’s Champion.

It is important to reach out and meet a wide range of older people and each London borough has an Older Persons Forum, a group of older volunteers who act as part of local strategic frameworks and meet regularly to campaign on the issues which matter to them. Forums therefore represent a great way to access the views of the older population in your borough.

Action

Make contact with your local forum and arrange to attend a meeting. Call Zara Ghods, Forum Support Officer on 020 7820 6781 for the contact details of your local forum representative.
Recommendation Four

Develop good partnership working with voluntary and public sector organisations in your borough

Excellent work is already being done in your borough by numerous voluntary sector partners. The opportunities for joint working and information sharing are hugely important and by forming strong partnerships between public and third sectors bodies, older people can only benefit. There is a local Age Concern or Age UK working in every London borough that can provide you with expert local knowledge on policy and services for older people as well as links to other voluntary and public sector organisations working locally.

Action

Contact the Age Concern or Age UK working in your borough and see how they can support you. Contact details can be found at www.ageuklondon.org.uk
Recommendation Five
Confer, collaborate and share good practice pan-London

Most boroughs in London have an Older People’s Champion and there is a substantial amount of learning and experience spread out across the city. Each borough may work slightly differently but by sharing expertise and offering each other support and guidance real improvements could be made. The Department of Health maintains a website for Older People’s Champions, and publishes a regular newsletter but some areas have chosen to set up an Older People’s Champions network to further facilitate information sharing. Sometimes, networks are set up by an individual champion, and sometimes they are facilitated or supported by a paid official in the NHS or the local authority.

Action
If you would be interested in helping us to set up a London network please contact Gordon Deuchars, Policy and Campaigns Manager at Age UK London on gdeuchars@ageuklondon.org.uk
With our thanks to

Councillor Robert Freeman
Kensington

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Councillor Ray Puddifoot
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