



## **Age UK Oxfordshire proposals to change its Community Club provision**

Age UK Oxfordshire is planning significant changes to the support it currently provides to older people and their families through its Community Clubs.

Age UK Oxfordshire's eight Community Clubs have all undergone changes in recent months in an attempt to maintain the clubs following Oxfordshire County Council's introduction of a new model of daytime support. Penny Thewlis, Chief Executive of Age UK Oxfordshire, says: 'Our original plan was to maintain all eight of our Community Clubs by reducing costs and increasing income. We planned to do this by increasing the number of older people attending each session, increasing the charge we make and stepping up our fundraising. We have also had the support of a transition grant from the County Council to help us to make the changes. After four months of operating in the new way, it is clear that in six of our eight clubs, the increase in the number of members attending that we anticipated and hoped for has not happened. This means that the income we need to maintain the clubs in their current shape has not been generated. We have had to think about how we can best use the resources available to us to continue to provide the friendship and support that people value at our clubs in a different and more sustainable way.'

Ms Thewlis says that the charity has learnt a lot from the work its Community Information Network team undertook last summer, supporting over 450 older people affected by the changes to Health and Wellbeing Centres. This has involved listening to and understanding what it is that these individuals and their families want and then supporting them to find other daytime support options. 'We had anticipated that many of the people affected by the changes would choose to come to one of our clubs. In fact, only twenty decided to make this transition. Most people chose to do different things, ranging from volunteering in a school to playing golf, from meeting friends at a local restaurant to joining a local bereavement support group - receiving support in many different ways that better suits each individual. There is a strong message for us in that.'

‘The current low attendance at our community clubs has simply reinforced the messages that we received throughout the summer, suggesting that there is an increasing demand for more diverse local activities across the county, with services tailored to the individual’s needs and interests, enabling us all to live well in our community as we age.’

In communities where Age UK Oxfordshire does not run Community Clubs, the charity offers a wide ‘menu’ of social activities and opportunities, including a growing number of dementia support groups; singing groups; community film clubs; exercise classes to reduce the likelihood of people falling and enabling people to retain independence; IT support groups; carers health and wellbeing sessions; coffee mornings, lunch clubs and afternoon teas. Ms Thewlis says: ‘One of our most successful activities is ‘Chatterbox’ in Witney, which regularly attracts between 65 and 125 older people, including people living with dementia and their carers. Specsavers generously support this initiative, which offers people a place to meet with new friends and old, as well as access to information and advice and signposting on to other support, helping people to maintain their independence.’

Age UK Oxfordshire is proposing to reduce the eight clubs it runs to two by the end of March 2018 and to develop alternative activities and opportunities for people in the affected localities. The proposals will affect 95 older people who attend the six clubs.

Ms Thewlis says: ‘We know that for people attending our clubs and for our longstanding staff team, the prospect of further change is worrying and upsetting. The charity is making a commitment to work with every individual affected to identify alternative options for them to ensure that people do not lose the friendship and support they value. We take our responsibility to combat loneliness and isolation very seriously and we are determined that these changes will not undermine our efforts to address these issues, but will help us to reach more older people.’

The charity is consulting with staff and older people and their families about these proposals. If people have comments or concerns, they can get in touch by emailing [admin@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk) or by writing to Kerry Tuson, Executive Assistant, Age UK Oxfordshire, 9 Napier Court, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3YT.

## Editor's notes

The six Age UK Oxfordshire Community Clubs affected by the proposals for change are in Burford, Faringdon, Henley, Hinton Waldrist, Kidlington, Oxford (Hollow Way).

Community Clubs in Holton and Nettlebed will continue to operate as usual.

### *About Age UK Oxfordshire*

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity dedicated to giving older people in Oxfordshire comfort, support and opportunities and enabling them to love later life. We provide free local information, advice and support; commercial products and services; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. We work with our national partner, Age UK, and our local Age UK partners in England. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and wellbeing, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle.

You can find further information on all our services and volunteering opportunities by telephoning 0345 450 1276 or by visiting our website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire)  
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For all media enquiries please contact Sophie Dyer on 07827 235405 or email [media@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:media@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk).

When referring to Age UK Oxfordshire in the media, we kindly ask you to consider the following:

- As a charity that serves older people in Oxfordshire only, please refer to us as 'Age UK Oxfordshire' rather than 'Age UK' (a national charity). As such, while we adopt branding from the national charity, we are separate charities. From a fundraising perspective, the choice of wording has important implications to our charity.
- As part of our brand guidelines, please use the term 'older people' instead of 'elderly', 'pensioners' or 'old people' to avoid any negative connotations.