

FAIRNESS COMMISSION - OLDER PEOPLE'S COUNCIL - SUPPLEMENTARY VIEWS

A Fair City

The Older People's Council made an initial submission to the Fairness Commission in January which identified our top 3 fairness priorities as communication, benefits take up and the need for investigation into the high suicide rate for older people. We have held a number of discussions with older people since then and wish to supplement the information with an indication of further views.

Older People's situation

A range of themes emerged from our discussions with older people which they felt disadvantaged them and just made daily life more difficult. Those with walking difficulties are challenged by uneven pavements, poor lighting, cyclists on pavements and short-term pedestrian crossings. This included wheel-chair users who felt vulnerable when faced with cyclists on pavements. The need for more seating in both public and private spaces was important. Transport and access to transport for those unable to take public transport was a theme that often arose. The high cost of living in Brighton & Hove and negative media reports and ageism often present older people as well off, with high health & social care costs and a burden on society. However, many older people are suffering from income deprivation with 23.6%¹ affected by income deprivation which is higher than the national average. Many also struggle to maintain their homes and need support and advice in a secure environment where they are not vulnerable to being exploited.

However, many older people actively support younger people and children. Grandparents undertaking childcare, and bring benefits to the City in savings made by voluntary work, caring and have shown to be net contributors in monetary terms. A higher proportion of people over 65 spend 50+ hours on unpaid care per week than all other ages at 4.6%.² There are many situations where both older people and younger people need support. Bus passes are not just for older people for whilst 39,500 older people use bus passes in the city, there are also 5,839 disabled people who have bus passes. Whilst dementia affects at least 3,000 people in the City, there are also 7,300 people unable to work due to mental health issues. Older people are a diverse group within the City and make a massive contribution to the life of the City, But, there are those that are vulnerable, have long term health problems, lack mobility and need our support. With the backdrop of massive cuts to the Adult Social Care budget it is important that the Fairness Commission recognises that those who are socially isolated, financially limited often with health & care needs should be prioritised.

¹ Brighton & Hove JSNA 2015

² Local insight report for Brighton & Hove Oct 2015 Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI)

Causes of Inequality

We covered some of these areas in our initial submission. However, in addition coming from our conversations there does need to be a recognition that 19,000 people over 65 suffer a limiting long-term illness. At 53.7% this is significantly above the South-East average of 48%.³ In addition, whilst life expectancy in Brighton for men is 78.8 years and 83.1 for women there are major differences across the City between the most & least deprived areas. So that in the most deprived areas men live 9.4 years less and women 6.1 years less than the average.⁴

There are cost pressures with deteriorating private housing conditions due to dwindling funds and increased costs. Health conditions can also be limiting and gradually affect activities with walking difficulties, deafness, eye sight problems and fatigue. Those affected are less able to interact socially and can become isolated.

Best ways to tackle inequalities & increase fairness?

The Council is cutting the cost of information dissemination by going electronic and digital but cost savings should be diverted to reaching the disadvantaged and isolated by post, paper, telephone and personal contact. There should continue to be health and social care information provided in paper form and sent to the isolated identified from the community database through local community groups who could arrange distribution with volunteer groups.

The contact details of all those over 70 years are held on a data base by the Council. Any mail to them such as for Council Tax should include details of befriending, activities and clubs for the elderly. Elderly people with similar care needs could be invited to regular group meetings/talks about their conditions. There could also be a drive linked to benefits take up through this mechanism and as part of a strategy to tackle social isolation.

There should also be a strategy to provide web access to all council older person schemes with a plan to increase digital engagement of residents. At the same time to support Barclay Eagles, SEEFA, and Citizens Online efforts to decrease digital isolation by actively marketing and supporting their efforts in the creation of digital community hubs. Media communications should challenge ageism and any negative portrayal of any section of society.

The Council is supporting 1,100 clients in residential care and 2,111 for care in the community and these figures do not include self-funders. This is also a significant number of people who could be communicated with on a regular basis as outlined

³ Ibid

⁴ Annual Report of Director of Public Health for Brighton & Hove 2014-2015

above and where possible could participate in the quality assessment of services they receive.

Overall the OPC would want to see more opportunities for participation and a greater voice for older people across the city in the services they need. The OPC proposed that Brighton & Hove Council became an Age Friendly City which was agreed by all the Council. However, the Age Friendly City forum which brought together older people for their views on the range of issues relating to the adoption of an Age Friendly City, to feed into the Steering Group, is now under threat due to lack of support for a small resource to service this group. Volunteers can do so much but do need support to facilitate communication & administration. Obtaining views from older people needs to be prioritised and their concerns need to lead to action by the Council to make Brighton & Hove a City for all generations.

Voices of Older People

To give a flavour of some of the voices of older people we have selected a few to highlight for the Fairness Commission a range of issues many linked to mobility, costs, health & vulnerability:-

“Repairs to my flat have been rubbish. The council send people who know nothing about the job. They also just mess around and don’t clear the rubbish around the flats.”

“The street lights are terrible at night. Yellow lighting is poor and you can’t see the bumps on the pavement. It means I try to get home before dark.”

“My wheel chair is electric and cannot move quickly. I have had problems with cyclists on the pavements and it makes me worried about getting out and about. I feel vulnerable”

“Pedestrian crossing times are too quick. And on the crossroads (Grand Avenue/ Church Street) you can be waiting for ages. The green man light position is also confusing as it’s low and pointing in the wrong direction.”

“They have stopped the community bus to the day centre. The taxi is now too expensive.”

“ I don’t seem able to get an appointment with my GP when I need one and have to wait for ages.”

“I have prostate cancer and need access to public toilets when I am out. I cannot wait because of my condition.”

“Its not fair that I have to loose my home to pay for care. I saved and missed out on pleasures to buy my home.”

Our top 3 Fairness priorities

- That the Fairness Commission proposes that the Council commits to meaningful communication with older people, including locally based communities, with an action plan for every area of service provision which is multi-channelled. This should include making best use of the information the Council already holds on older people.
- That the Fairness Commission suggests that a take-up benefits campaign is undertaken by the Council given the high level of deprivation for older people in Brighton.
- That the Fairness Commission proposes that the Council commissions research into the reasons for the high suicide rate for older people in Brighton & Hove.