

FAIRNESS COMMISSION - OLDER PEOPLE'S COUNCIL - INITIAL VIEWS

A Fair City

A fair city, as an age-friendly city, means that older people are included in all aspects of civic life, that their views were sought and listened to and acted upon. Older people within the City have a diverse range of needs covering a diverse range of communities. Brighton & Hove is a lively, liberal City with a wide range of cultural and leisure activities. However, there is a need to recognise that there are a number of distinctive factors that affect older residents that the Fairness Commission needs to build into its recommendations.

Older People's situation

Brighton & Hove has 37,193¹ (13%) over 65 year olds and of these 6.7% are from BME communities. In housing 73.4% are in owner occupied, 16.9% in social housing and 9.6% in private rented. Health needs are much higher for older people with 51.9% of over 65's with multiple long-term illness or disabilities.

A fair city needs to recognise that ageism takes many forms and how the Council organises itself and its services impact on the quality of life for older people. Older people are less likely to be satisfied with Brighton & Hove as a place to live than other age groups and more likely to feel unsafe in their own local area after dark and particularly those in more deprived areas. They are also less satisfied with regard to services with only 28% satisfied compared to the national average of 44%. A fair city would devise a clear strategy across all of its services to ensure inclusion for all older people which treats them with respect and values their past as well as their present contribution.

- **Many older people are on Pensioner Credit, 23.6% of older people are affected by income deprivation which is higher than the national average.** ²
- **The City has twice the national suicide and undetermined injury death rate in older people and around 9% of people over 65 have depression.**
- **Over half the City's older people live in the 40% most deprived areas for older people in England.**
- **We have a higher proportion of older people living alone - 41% over 65 years live alone compared to 31% nationally**
- **It is estimated that around 3,000 people in the City have dementia and that this figure is likely to rise.**

There is therefore a range of issues relating to poverty & inequality, health and social isolation that are of critical importance to older people in the City and where the City needs to act to improve their quality of life. What is also important is that the Council shapes its services to meet the needs of all its citizens. If we take one

¹ Brighton & Hove Older People Health Profile - Public Health Intelligence

² Brighton & Hove JSNA 2015

example, communication, the Council needs to support a strategy that includes older people who are not able to access e-communications. At present the Council is increasing its use of electronic communications, for example the use of smart phones for parking, when it is clear that this form of payment excludes many older people. Human contact is a critical need for older people and the more that services rely on automation and self-assessment, the greater the social isolation and frustration for many older people.

Causes of inequality

The causes of inequality relate to a range of factors including income and housing but also older people may face sudden deterioration in their health, the death of partners & friends, and a general sense of social isolation. The use of transport is vital for older people and it is greatly disappointing that the Council is currently proposing to reduce the use of the bus pass to a more narrow time frame. Many communities with a high number of older people such as Hangleton & Knoll, Hollingbury, & East Brighton are significantly out of the city centre and depend on bus services for travel. This will also impact on a significant number of younger disabled people. The OPC is concerned that the current financial situation of the Council will further reduce the quality of life for older people whether it is in reduced access to public toilets, home care, community meals which include safe & well checks, day centres, or libraries such as Westdean or Hollingbury. We therefore make our recommendations for priorities within this context.

Best ways to tackle inequalities & increase fairness?

Some of the services that the Council provides to older people are not known to citizens until they come to need them. The Fairness Commission needs to prioritise fairness for those that are most vulnerable in our communities and we would maintain that many older people fall into this category. Some by income, some by housing conditions, some by health and some by lack of social support whether due to living alone or by dint of losing many key people in their lives.

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.
- 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.

OPC Action Plan

The above are initial views around the issue of Fairness based on discussions to date with older people. We have further meetings planned during the forthcoming period in a range of areas across the City in venues where older people live or visit. This is in conjunction with Council and Voluntary sector organisations such as social housing tenants and Hop 50+ in Hove as well as a public meeting in Brighton. We are also seeking to have inter-generational discussions to identify issues of common interest for we believe that older people and younger people can work together to make the city fairer for all.

We have amended the Fairness Commission form as we have found that many older people wanted more information before completing the form. We have found the areas scoped out in the context of an Age friendly city useful in this regard. There will of course be some older people who have also used the standard form and submitted it but we are trying to ensure that older people, many without access or use of IT, have an opportunity to input into the process. Our full submission will therefore reflect further views arising from our actives in the next few weeks.