

Minutes of the Older People's council Open Meeting held at Tower house

10th December 2024

Attendees: Mary Davies (chair), Bernadette Kent(secretary) ,Sara Fulford (secretary), Ali Mohammed (Age uk,) Michael Creedy(treasurer) ,Maureen Winder cllr. Marian Adler ,Jenny Thon, Cathy Payne. Maxine Thomas(Impact Initiatives,) Ty Galvin (cllr) Kery Pickett (cllr,) Val Cane, Angela Stretton, Jerry Thomas, Peter Huntbach(Brighton council lead senior housing)

Apologies: Mo Marsh ,Doug Thomson, Theresa Mackey(cllr) George Vas, Davina De Lazlo, Jo Clarke (age U.K),Joyce Gould

The chair made introductions all round and introduced the speaker , Victoria Garcia from Brighton and Hove bus transport speaking on accessibility issues for older people .

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Victoria Garcia outlined that she had joined in 2010 as the first person in the role of accessibility which looked at issues of operationality, design of buses and meeting with the lived experience of public transport users. The talk outlined **in detail the improvements made in bus design** for the variety of users which included : the improvements in providing spaces for wheelchair users and spaces for buggies- two bays; flip seats, fixed seats and priority seating for guide dogs users; next stop announcements with new buses now being fitted with the loop system for the hard of hearing. Receiving feedback from different user groups has been part of the role of accessibility and has fed into decision making. The Alzheimer society were consulted and sent different fabrics with dementia friendly colours in the design of the moquette and flooring being used thereby informing design principles such as avoiding the black hole effect of visuals that can lead to accidents. Consultation with sight groups have resulted in the use of pattern with panels down the sides as this makes it easier for those with poor sight to differentiate. 1x and other new services will have all this going forward. **The bus transport approach is to work nationally and also at the local and individual level and to work with the council in identifying any bus stop issues.** It is government policy to operate the older person and disabled pass between the hours of 9.30 am and 11.30 pm with local councils being able to add on any other discretionary additions for example in Brighton and Hove the disabled pass is valid for twenty four hours over seven days a week. **There is a campaign to unify these variables nationally** due to different councils approaches in how they set criteria : for example in East Sussex the older peoples travel pass starts at 9.30 a.m whereas in Brighton it is valid from 9 a.m.

Questions and discussion from attendees included asking about dementia friendly colour choices and **problems of buses being able to pull in around the hospital area with the access needs there**, together with the ability to see the digital board and the issue of the prevailing wind direction from the sea which would make it a much better option if the shelter was turned around. An issue the chair raised concerned buses starting too quickly before one had a chance to sit down. Victoria responded by highlighting **fall prevention**

policy which is to remain seated. That accidents on buses often are due to a passenger getting up while the bus is in motion which the driver has no control over. **When alighting there is no need to get out of your seat once the bell has sounded for a stop**. It was emphasised that no driver would be disciplined for lateness due to helping someone out of their seat. For safety and as part of the fall prevention strategy - **remain in your seat until the bus has stopped or use the helping hands card**. There is a pro-active disability awareness training for all drivers including managers. The chair also commented on a changing culture as during the covid years passengers were required to remain seated and now it seems to be that issues have to be declared to the driver. Another attendee commented on getting caught in the double doors and missing a step and this being a major fall risk with grumpy drivers or drivers who seem to be under pressure. Victoria responded that getting caught in the double doors would be viewed as a major incident by the safeguarding team. When complaints come through cctv footage is viewed and it goes through disciplinary and action is taken. Buses can be traced through concessionary tickets and with dates and times if it has been a cash payment for the journey. Victoria added that we have the best training in the U.K. An attendee qualified that passengers may have mobility problems although they are not registered disabled and made a further point that along the western road in the heart of city centre there are **long gaps between bus stops and no bus service at all along the sea front**. Victoria responded by saying the problematic nature of the junction on western road is why the stop was removed and it is unlikely to be re-instated. It is not commercially viable to run a bus service along the sea front. **Victoria to send us copy of e mail response to questions previously asked about these issues.** A member raised the issue of there **no longer being a rapid response team** if for example a fight broke out the only remedy being to put the bus out of service and call the police. Victoria responded that the rapid response team has been reduced. There were two vehicles and if a driver radios through to the control team a response team would come out but they would not be able to interact in the same way the police can so that has been reduced. There are three bus inspectors and there are more drivers on the routes. Drivers still have an emergency button they can press. On the **recurring theme of accessibility** throughout the discussion **a member commented on the long gap between stops from the level to the Steine** and the chair in concluding the discussion stated **that good design is good design for everyone**. Victoria mentioned the success of the santa bus charity with fifty organisations on the waiting list. That applications can be made to the community support fund and any charity can apply this then goes to a committee group with a decision being made in January offering £500 or free tickets.

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Campaign updates - parking: We are still Awaiting response from lead councillor Trevor Muten This can be taken forward through our involvement in scrutiny and through some of our councillors. Paying on line has got easier but there are issues with QR codes on

machines and fraud which may raise anxiety concerning technology for users and impact on how it may be taken up.

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Budget scrutiny meeting: some alarming proposals being made with the **tendering out or closure of in house council social care such as the dementia beds at Ireland lodge** ,and the **need to defend services for older people**. On the 12th and 19th December there are budget simulations and a meeting in January for the budget with the **expectancy of cuts** although at this stage where the cuts will come remains rather vague as final government settlements for each area have not been announced until 19th Dec..

AOB M.T. requested that the Aging well phone number be given during the local radio interview on the 18th so that older listeners could be informed on what was available for them to go to during the Christmas holiday season. A member also was concerned if the library was providing such information as the location of Information in the library was not that easy to find.

The chair ,in the absence of Doug Thomson, outlined the work he is carrying out on updating the website and that it is a work in progress with improved functionality

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Treasurers update: £3,233 is the sum in the account following costs of hiring Friends Meeting house for the last OPC open meeting. ***Next OPC meeting 28/1/2025.***

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Social and Group discussions at tables: issues OPC to focus on over 2025 in separate document attached and will be added to general OPC themes, campaigns and issues document