



The role of local authorities in preparing for the opportunities and challenges of an ageing society.

Response to Call for Evidence

by CPA working on behalf of the LGA

From Sheffield 50+

We submit this response to your call for evidence under our own initiative. We have requested, indeed urged, colleagues in Sheffield City Council (SCC) with whom we work closely on a number of issues relating to older adults and an ageing society to also respond on behalf of SCC. We hope that you receive a submission from them.

As a body of nearly 2,600 people over 50 living in Sheffield drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds, we would suggest that SCC have given a great deal of energy and thought to deliver better social policy outcomes for older people living in Sheffield. When we asked in our most recent survey of members in 2012, whether Sheffield was a great place to grow older the response was very positive indeed. SCC are moving away from a 'deficit' model of delivery to one which considers (older) people as assets and is 'asset driven'. This is very much to be welcomed and supported. We are more concerned however about how these excellent initiatives are delivered and indeed implemented. This can only be described as 'ad hoc' and uncoordinated, if they are ever fully implemented. We explore these issues within this submission. Sheffield has signed the Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Cities (2011), yet we see very little engagement with a structured framework towards this aim, and indeed involving our organisation in that process.

Background

Sheffield 50+ (see www.sheffield50plus.org.uk) has been in existence since 2002 and was established out of the 1999 Home Office initiative 'Better Government for Older People' (BGOP). This was set up and supported by various local authorities including Sheffield, in the form of pilot projects to encourage greater democratic accountability and to empower those over 50 to give 'voice'. Fundamentally, the aim was to mobilise older people and encourage them to use their wealth of knowledge, skills and experience for the benefit of their peers and the communities they live in. The resultant findings of these pilots as documented in the Elbourne Review of 2008, found that the BGOP model had broken down as a result of poor governance and patchy



delivery. At the same time, the Audit Commission's report "Don't Stop Me Now" also published in 2008, reinforced the view that despite significant numbers of older people being involved in their local communities, many of their views were not being captured or responded to. Indeed it found that only around one third of local authorities had meaningful engagement with the older community. Our business plan is a positive and creative reaction to these findings. It is also supportive of three of Elbourne's findings namely:

- The need for government clearly to recognise the value of older people coming together to influence and effect change;
- The principle that voices of older people should be heard across all levels of government;
- The need to build upon what is already working.

Sheffield 50+ is a non-party-political, independent, voluntary group democratically run by and for older people over 50 residing in Sheffield. As a registered charity our mission is to promote and support the capacity and skills of all people over 50 residing in Sheffield, so that they can actively participate in society.

We adopt a rights based approach to engagement that supports the interdependence, choice and control of and by older people within Sheffield. We adhere to the Five Ways to Well-Being as outlined by the New Economic Foundation and support the WHO's 'Active Ageing' paradigm. Membership is free and for life to all those living or working in Sheffield who are over 50.

We continually work on behalf of older people making sure we are aware of everything happening in the City concerning older people. We make our views known to the City Council, NHS Sheffield, CCG Sheffield and the VCF sector. We work in a number of co-produced projects including, as core partners, to the BIG Lottery funded programme Age Better Sheffield (part of the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better investment to reduce social isolation and loneliness) and to the separately funded RCUK funded DWELL project (see <http://dwell.group.shef.ac.uk/>). All such programmes will have benefits to older people in the city. We are currently funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation, Comic Relief and for our role in the Equality and Fairness Hubs by SCC. Sheffield 50+ is a company limited by guarantee, registration number 6406691 and a registered Charity, registration number 1128185.

The Challenges

For us, the most important strategy for policy for an ageing society that has informed SCC most recently has been a *City for all Ages: making Sheffield a great place to grow older*. I attach this document as an appendix and wish to include it as part of our



submission since it answers most of your key questions you raise. The strategy adopts an active ageing approach to ageing (as promulgated by the WHO) and links in with the age friendly cities approach of integrating ageing policy across the lifecourse. In the Foreword there is expressed a desire to,

...make the city a better place to grow up and grow old in. In fact we aspire to be the most age-friendly city in the country'

These are bold words indeed, and although ones which Sheffield 50+ are fully signed up to, we do have our doubts whether they should be regarded as empty rhetoric. We have yet to see any leadership from SCC about this very positive framework of actions being implemented in a structured way. Since the adoption of this City for all Ages framework by Council in autumn 2012, the implementation of the plans has been patchy at best and non-existent at worst. A planned for implementation Board (see p.20) only met once and currently there is no senior officer (or member) with oversight for implementation nor any constituted Board. Indeed, the person who was to chair this 'city level Board', Professor Alan Walker, a world renowned Social Gerontologist, shares our concerns in this regard. We have lobbied the Leader of Council for better governance of the strategy without success thus far. The focus seems very much upon implementation of the local JSNA through a Health and Wellbeing Board.

On governance your question 7 is pertinent here. Our answer to each of the individual questions raised is as follows. There is no one individual officer or member currently assigned to the implementation of the City for all Ages strategy. There is little or no buy in and engagement with the strategy particularly within Council (i.e. with Officers and Member's) nor was this ever sought. From our regular contacts, few Officers even those working with or for older adults, know about the strategy or its contents. There is very little integration of policy that focuses on delivery of older adult services and we often find that the individual Directorates of SCC work independently of each other (so called silo working). All this runs counter to the holistic and integrated approach required of an age friendly strategy. We remain very concerned about this.

This lack of governance or leadership may be a result of the very major re-organisation of roles and responsibilities that have been forced upon SCC as a result of the inexplicably harsh cuts to central government funding to LA's over successive years. This is particularly the case for Sheffield. Many senior officers have left the Council and with it their knowledge and expertise. We have asked for an organisational diagram of officer responsibilities within Council and have been told that there is not a definitive one since roles and personnel are changing on a regular basis. One can assume from this that SCC is a Local Authority in flux. Yet from such flux, new systems must be



developed that allow for full implementation of such cross-Council integrative policies and strategies such as City for all Ages.

To emphasise the lack of an integrated implementation strategy we can point to how a number of the Five Key Themes mentioned in the City for All Ages Strategy (p.14). In terms of Street Environment implementation, a huge programme of work has been contracted to Amey who are delivering the 'Streets Ahead' initiative (see (<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/roads/works/schemes/streetsaheadproject.html>)). This removes them from some level of democratic accountability and influence. There has been some work by one fairly junior officer in promoting dementia proofing and building dementia friendly communities but the impact of this has to be called limited, despite the very positive outcomes for those few areas of the city in which she has been working. One can also mention the very path-breaking work of small VCF organisations like Darnall Dementia Group who are independently assisting with this task. More satisfactorily on the issue of Housing, the SCC has been very recently working with The University of Sheffield researchers on a project called DWELL. Many of the stated outcomes for this piece of work chime with those mentioned under Housing on page 15 of the strategy. They are very positively working under the active ageing paradigm. All this is to be applauded, yet this team had no knowledge of the City for all Ages strategy document until we mentioned its existence.

It is clear that with the ageing of the population what is required is for each Local Authority to appoint a senior councillor at Cabinet level to coordinate all policy implementation and strategy on our ageing society, not simply on older people. They should also have sufficient support from a dedicated team of knowledgeable officers. This structure should be reflected in central government with a senior politician appointed as 'minister for an ageing society' within the Home Office or Cabinet Office. With only central government supporting a positive policy focus upon our ageing society will any real difference be made at a local level. This must be dominated by an asset driven approach to counter the current very negative deficit based 'burden' rich model that encourages ageist practices and policy implementation.

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Appendix.

A city for all ages:
making Sheffield a great
place to grow older



[Click on document to open it.](#)