

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH 2012

THEMED DEBATE ON OLDER PEOPLE

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Resident 1

I am a Southwark resident, retired, in my early 60s. The council's interest in the role of older people is not visible to me. I participate in volunteering in my local church, which is accessible and obvious. If the council wants to recognise us - go where we go (the supermarket, leisure centres, parks) and talk to us.

In terms of sporting, educational and social activities, we need to know what is available. With the decline of libraries, use your common sense to get out there and tell us what's happening. Lots of us use Facebook, Twitter, and social networking. I found out about this public debate via Twitter.

There's a generational split in the wider community between young parents' groups and older carers. Again, church is a place I go and can mix with other families. Have a look at how churches support active grandparents (don't be put off by the religious content - just see how things are done). Go to churches and other community initiatives and be seen to be interested in their work. Give us a person to relate to, not anonymous phone numbers and departments.

How can the council work with the NHS and other partners to give older people more choice in the services they receive, enabling them to live healthy lives and stay in their own homes and communities for longer? We spend a lot of time in doctors' surgeries and hospital outpatients' departments. Get in there, not just with posters and leaflets which nobody reads, but with volunteers of our age (I'd be happy to do it myself) to explain things and take note of concerns. It won't work so well if you send young people as they haven't the experience to share.

Resident 2

In terms of knowing what sporting, educational and social activities are available, I feel that more publicity and information is part of the answer. On a number of occasions in recent years, I have come across, quite by accident, information and news about events and services that would have been of possible interest to me and older people generally.

The same is true for how the council can work with the NHS and other partners to give older people more choice in the services they receive – more publicity and information. Perhaps the various providers need a more co-ordinated approach. Of course, SCC (Southwark Churches Care) is doing some of this already.

Resident 3

We have lots of amenities for older people in Southwark. You only pay £1 to use one of the council leisure centres and just 60p to have a swim. Then there's the Pensioners Centre at Camberwell Green, so we can't complain. There's a lot for us to do.

We have very limited means as older people so it's great that we're catered for at the right price.

Resident 4

The bus pass is a great help too. Don't you ever take that away! It gets you out and about.

Resident 5

What I like about being an older person is the fact that you don't worry anymore about what people think. I've long since ceased to care and I feel freer as a result.

So long as you have your health, then you are freer to do as you want. That really is everything.

Resident 6

I take my inspiration from a poem about growing old and wearing purple, and learning how to spit, or gobble up free samples in shops. It makes you realise how we lived a sober life for too long and old age is a time to let your hair down!

Resident 7

Getting out and about to clubs like this (Recycled Teenagers) keeps your mind and body active. I go to a little arts and drama club too and we take part in plays. Then I go swimming and to the gym a few times each week. Life is for living, man!

I like my crosswords too. I'm really enjoying my old age. I never thought I'd be doing these things at my age and I just love it!

Resident 8

A lot of older people are great for volunteering too. We have the time and we like to give it. You can do something that you might like being paid for, but because you don't get paid for it you're freer to do it.

I teach English to refugees, and I've always taught, but now I can teach exactly how I like and who I like. That keeps my brain active too and I like the pleasure of teaching. You gain much more than you could ever give.

Resident 9

I didn't retire until I was 71 and I thought I'd be terribly bored. I am getting that way so I'd like to volunteer but I'm not sure what to do.

Resident 10

Contact the Dulwich Helpline or the Volunteer Centre. They'll have lots for you to do. Then there's all the churches and Southwark Circle. They're always crying out for volunteers.

Resident 11

The Pensioners' Centre in Camberwell is great. They organise all sorts of outings. We went to the Charles Dickens Museum last week!

Resident 12

We spent so much time over the years rearing our families or doing jobs that we didn't have time for ourselves. Now is the time to put things right!

Resident 13

The thing I've found is that for every older person who goes out and gets involved in things in the community, there's another twenty sitting at home watching the bloomin' television all day!

Resident 14

Men are the worst. I think they're scared. It's all about motivation. Some people need encouraging, especially men. You need to take them by the hand.

Resident 15

It's partly to do with your personality. Some people are better than others at mixing. They're more naturally outgoing. That's true of young people too, so it carries on in old age as well.

Resident 16

Some of my older neighbours look at me leaving the house each day and they wonder where on earth I could be going. They don't seem to realise that there's a great big wonderful world out there.

Resident 17

You can still learn new skills as well and meet so many new people and make new friends.

Resident 18

I know that many older people are not in good health, but there's no good staying indoors all day and feeling sorry for yourself. It's a case of mind over matter.

Resident 19

We could always do with a better pension. And now they've taken away some of the lunch clubs and the day centres.

A lot of people rely on those, especially the men. They don't like to cook and they're guaranteed at least one good hot meal a day if they go there. But now they're closing them down because they're losing their funding!

Resident 20

A lot of our houses are cold and the draught whistles through the windows. There must be something the council can do to make them warmer. That's not to encourage people to stay in when they could go out.

With a bit of luck we'll all grow old. Councillors and council officers need to remember that one day they may be in the exact same position themselves as we are. How will they deal with it when it comes to the crunch?

Resident 21

A lot of young parents today depend on the grandparents to look after their children while they're out at work. But a lot of clubs won't let you take the grandchildren with you and then the older people won't come to the club anymore.

Resident 22

Some sons and daughters neglect their parents in old age. They don't visit them at home or in their care homes. But that's often to do with the poor relationship they've built up over the years.

Then others are scattered all over the place for work and they have their own life to live.

Resident 23

Your children can be spread far and wide and still remain close to you. Mine are travelling all the time but you've got Skype and email. There's lots of ways to stay in touch but it's all down to the way you bond with each other over the years.

Resident 24

The council needs to remember that pensioners can't keep paying out endlessly. We're all living on a reduced pension and we don't have endless pockets of money. When they get to our age group, let's see how they deal with it.

Resident 25

I have no issues with the council or life in Southwark. We have our clubs in Southwark and without them life wouldn't be worth living. I go to different ones three or four times a week. I learn a little line dancing at one and play bingo at another. I won the top prize last week – 50p!

Resident 26

The only thing is the buses. I have to get three or four buses to get from my place to the club. Then sometimes when the roads are up and the bus can't make the usual stop the driver doesn't always let people know. They end up having to drag all the way back.

I got caught yesterday so today I went up to the driver and asked him to announce it that the bus stop was closed. I told him there were a lot of older people on the bus and they can't do a lot of walking.

Resident 27

I worry about all the drugs where I live. I've had so many police down to my next door neighbours I thought I was living in Scotland Yard!

It's murder on my balcony. That's why I'm trying to move out of where I'm living. I couldn't fault the little maisonette and the council has always been very good to me. It's the neighbours.

Resident 28

You might as well live in the middle of the desert as where I am. That's why these clubs are a lifeline. I look forward each day to see where I can get out and go. People these days keep themselves to themselves. They won't mix, meddle, or make!

It wasn't like that years ago. People lived side by side and we all got on. You could tell people your business. These days you're frightened to even tell them you're going out in case they'll break in.

Resident 29

We could do with more clubs on estates. That would bring people together in their own area.

I have one neighbour next door who looks out for me. Otherwise I'm completely on my own. But I have nothing but drugs on the other side. I've been there for forty years and it's only now that it's all gone this way.

Resident 30

I have no complaints with Southwark. As long as we're left our freedom passes! If they're taken away we'll be housebound. That's all I worry about.

It all depends on who your neighbours are as well. We have a brilliant neighbour and we'd be lost without her. If you were sick she'd do your shopping or bring you in a dinner. Her husband is great too. My radiator was stuck last week and he had it done in five minutes.

Resident 31

I have neighbours and we live in the same house. When it's cold they'll knock on the door and ask if there's anything I need. That means a lot.

Resident 32

A lot of good work goes on in Southwark to support older people but now we're being told that we've all got to become self helpers. A lot of us have served on committees and run things all our lives and we'd like to be able to take a step back at this stage. We don't mind lending a hand but we can't run everything ourselves in this so called Big Society way.

Government decides that they'll cut funding to lunch clubs, thinking that won't make much difference because people can cook for themselves at home. But we come here because we're friends and we need friendship as much as we need food.

Resident 33

If we didn't have lunch clubs like this we would be finished, dead. We need more places like this, not less.

Resident 34

If councils stop funding to places like these (day centres) you're going to have to pay somewhere else along the line, in mental health. Because if people can't socialise they're going to need more social care. The mind has to be fed as well as the body.

Resident 35

I haven't been here (day centre) for several months because my neighbour fell and she's 85. I've been helping her because she has no relatives and is completely alone in the world.

I didn't see her for two weeks during the snow last winter and I discovered that she had been taken into hospital during the night. I went to see her but they wouldn't let me because I wasn't a member of her family. I told them I wasn't leaving without seeing her and in the end I did. I asked her, 'Do you remember me?' She cried and said, 'Yes I do'.

I live on the ground floor in our block of flats and I told her how I baked bread and made soup and brought them up to her during the snow but there was no answer.

I also told her that I would come and see her again and that I would be there for her when she came home. Two weeks later she came home and she was crying, 'I want my Mum, I want my Mum'.

I asked her had she any breakfast and she said no. I made some porridge and brought it up to her. Then I sat with her while she ate it and I noticed how cold the room was. I put on the heater and she fell fast asleep.

We have to look after one another, to know who my neighbour is. If I don't know them, I will never miss them. We are our 'brother's keeper' and that's why I was helping her, until somebody phoned social services and she now has a carer. I have no idea how long I did it for because I didn't count the days.

Resident 36

In old age you're supposed to have the time of your life to enjoy yourself and the only way you can enjoy it is by having a lunch club like this. You go on outings and see various places where you meet different people. That helps you and if you're lucky enough to do the computer that encourages you to keep in contact with other people.

Resident 37

We have the bus passes and every year we're threatened with losing them. If we don't have them we are going to die. I was sick for three days and never went outside the door. I was so depressed and we are all the same. We want to shoot ourselves!

Resident 38

I often feel that I'm invisible to others as an older person. Written off. Forgotten. Left out. People think, 'let's sit her in a corner and she'll be alright'. And she won't.

Resident 39

Many of us like the independence of a car but we're disabled and there are never enough parking spaces for us to use. I'm tired of getting tickets.

Resident 40

We're lucky to be alive. Will power keeps us going, and determination. Get up, wash and dress yourself. That's the main thing in life - that and getting involved with other people.

Resident 41

Things have changed in London. People don't want to know you. If you say hello to them on the buses they turn around and face away as if they don't hear.

If you greet someone they think you're going to ask for help.

Resident 42

Society today is very orientated towards youth. Older people are often seen and presented as figures of fun or bloody nuisances. Advertisements, television programmes, are all about youth, youth, youth.

Parents don't talk to their children. So they grow up without a proper grounding in language not to mind anything else.

I believe we're a broken society where family life is not what it should be. Young people are not being brought up with a sense of responsibility to other people.

Resident 43

I feel very sad about the cutting back on older people's services. Older people are expected to be more independent and do more things for themselves.

My worry is that a lot of isolated, vulnerable older people are going to fall through the net. Older people use places like this (day centres) for social interaction and stimulation both physical and mental.

One old person came up to me last week and said, 'I don't believe the health services think of us as people with lives to live. They just look on us as people who are going to die soon'.

Resident 44

I divide my time between living in Devon and living in Southwark. I find that young people here are much better behaved and kinder to old people than they are in Devon. They always get up and offer me their seat on the buses and they're very friendly.

Resident 45

I find that too. They'll help me on and off the buses with my shopping trolley, or on escalators, and when I get back to my block of flats they'll come down and take my trolley up.

Bermondsey Social Club

How can the council recognise the role that people in later life often play in their communities, through volunteering, caring and by playing an active role in neighbourhood life?

Unregistered [charity] self-financing groups like ours means it's difficult to get funding. It's a lot of time and effort to get registered status. Please can someone advise unregistered [charity] groups like ours on how we can bring in more funding to support other older people. Our group has been running for over 22 years. We think we do good work in the community, knocking on people's doors to find out what their needs are and holding regular social meetings.

Another social group on the Wymer Estate is also doing good work for older people. Don't withdraw the local warden because who will help us read our meter?

How can people in Southwark take advantage of the wide variety of sporting, educational and social activities available as they get older?

If you don't already, how about promoting things of interest to older people in Southwark News, Southwark Life, doctors surgeries, Beormund Community Centre, council rent offices etc. Southwark Life doesn't cover enough of things of interest to older people. We also feel libraries should promote what may be of interest to older people in large lettering.

How can the council promote the greater role that more active grandparents can play in their families' lives?

Please encourage and support families to live together. We think housing policy and costs need to be more sympathetic and sensitive to encouraging older people as parents and their grown up children to live near each other, so they can look after each other better. Older people as parents don't want to feel they have to move into a smaller accommodation to accommodate other people. Why should we, when many of us have been living in a particular place all our lives? Our children feel they have no option other than to move away from us, to places that are more affordable.

How can the council work with the NHS and other partners, to give older people more choice in the services they receive, enabling them to live healthy lives and stay in their own homes and communities for longer?

Older people who use carers should not be charged for the service. The council needs to liaise more with GPs. GPs have lots of information about us, and we think this information should be shared to improve our well-being.

The closure of the A & E at Guys Hospital is wrong. We now have to go to St Thomas' Hospital, where we have to sit and wait for hours.

Southwark Pensioners Forum – the views of some individual members

How can the Council recognise the role that people in later life often play in their communities, through volunteering, caring and by playing an active role in neighbourhood life?

I think the council should stop undermining the support it gives to the community and voluntary sector; although we appreciate the support it gives to Southwark Pensioners Centre.

More resources should be put into supporting a borough-wide voluntary network. The centre's part-time paid worker needs more support and co-ordination, as part of a preventative health agenda.

Volunteering is vital to peoples' life experience. Can something be done like a joint mapping research exercise, to find out what the needs of people doing voluntary work are? This could involve the council, community, and voluntary sector working together.

Let's have one 'advanced CRB check', to allow prospective volunteers to work at more than one organisation. This would encourage more volunteering among older people.

I understand the Luncheon Club along Lordship Lane is closing down, and I'm wondering if it could open at reduced hours each week, to keep the service going.

The council could do with better promoting the services provided by the community and voluntary sector e.g. cookery lessons at Blackfriars Settlement.

The council should value in cash terms the voluntary work of elderly people as this will help public and service providers recognise the positive contribution older people make to communities.

Nationally, a recent study by The Institute of Actuaries on behalf of Carers UK found that carers have saved taxpayers over £119 billion, and we believe these savings equate to a few million pounds if worked out locally for Southwark Carers. Why can't a similar study for Southwark be done? Maybe this could be tied to the suggestion of a mapping exercise.

'Southwark Explorers' is run entirely by volunteers who organise outings about once a week. We consider ourselves largely self-sustaining yet our funding application was turned down – why?

How can people in Southwark take advantage of the wide variety of sporting, educational and social activities available as they get older?

Can the council please publicise discounts that pensioners are entitled to in plain English? I was told to pay £112 for a dress-making course, which is too much for me and other older people to pay.

We would like to see the three healthy lifestyle planners being funded by Health and Adult Social Care to be up-scaled to include the council supporting volunteers who wish to fulfil a similar role where volunteers can promote sporting, educational and social activities, etc.

More could be done by working with the community and voluntary sector, including Time and Talents, and Blackfriars Settlement, who provide one-to-one support and signposting information.

People need to be informed as to what's available through '1 in 5' (Southwark Pensioners Centre monthly newsletter) and Southwark Life. Can we look at producing a free magazine for distribution to every pensioner in the borough, perhaps led in partnership with the Southwark Pensioners Centre and other voluntary groups supporting older people?

The Walworth Local Learners Opportunity Project (WALLOP) used to update a list of activities and services for local people. I'm not sure if updates still happen but if not, can it be restarted?

How can the council promote the greater role that more active grandparents can play in their families' lives?

The council should encourage more community spaces at affordable rates, where intergenerational activity can take place.

How can the council work with the NHS and other partners, to give older people more choice in the services they receive, enabling them to live healthy lives and stay in their own homes and communities for longer?

It's critical and substantial you do a self-assessment. Can we have in place a modest charge for toenail cutting? The Southwark Pensioners Centre has already been advertising this service through its '1 in 5' monthly newsletter.

Southwark Irish Pensioners Project – submitted by the project manager

1. The pensioners said that the best way the council (or any organisation) could work better with older people is to talk to them face to face, don't use jargon and actually listen to what they said.

2. To make the neighbourhoods/wards more age-friendly: the general consensus of opinion was that poorly-lit streets combined with a lack of community police (or any other kind of policing) keeps older people indoors at night so they won't attend community council meetings or social activities or anything else unless they get a lift from and to their door.

Several people also mentioned that they feel so intimidated at bus stops where school children gather when they come out of school in the afternoon. As a result pensioners usually limit their outings to the middle of the day and ensure they're on the bus before the children leave school and are indoors again by 4pm.

3. Another point made several times was to get young people and old people to mix with each other (some sort of gathering at local community centres maybe) to ascertain what life was like for each other. This would encourage understanding and tolerance from both young and old. It would also help with the point raised above.

Another point made was the lack of benches. More benches mean more people sitting down for a while and taking the time to talk to each other. And they generally felt that community centres could be utilised much more to bring different age groups together.

4. The pensioners do not like visiting people in care homes because it is so depressing to see someone with their liberty taken from them. Our pensioners opinion on care homes was 'don't go there because if you do, you're rarely seen out again.' They felt that the carers/activity workers in the homes should take groups of residents out into the community – to church, shopping, bingo or anywhere where there are people - the homes should be 'just a place to lay your head rather than the entire focus of your life.'

Another view was that older pupils in schools (i.e. A level students) should have a couple of hours a week to do community work as part of the curriculum & taking older people out into the community for an hour or two every week could be ideal.

5. The pensioners generally felt that they would prefer not to have to move from their homes because they were familiar with their surroundings (most live in social housing).

They recognised the necessity to move to a smaller flat at some point and said their ideal was sheltered housing with support from a worker who lived on the premises because most emergencies occur at night and currently wardens are off duty at night.

If they absolutely had to go into a care home they said they would much prefer to go into a small care home with between 5 and 20 residents (similar to those operating in Lewisham) rather than get lost and forgotten about in the huge care homes in Southwark. They felt that smaller care homes would be easier to monitor for good service, that they would get to know the staff and vice versa.