

Ageing Well case study

Hounslow (health and wellbeing/involving older people)

Introduction

The London Borough of Hounslow facilitates a community services volunteer project (Older People's Volunteer Pool) where local volunteers (many of whom are service users or carers) are recruited and trained to take part in specific projects.

This group was first established in 2004 however it has recently been less active. This project therefore was used to re-energise this group of volunteers, to ensure that they are well placed to be a resource for the health and wellbeing board. Working with other key council staff, a short video has been developed to celebrate and promote the role of the current volunteer pool.

Reasons for applying to be a development area

The older people's volunteer pool had been in existence for some time, but the earlier enthusiasm surrounding its role had waned. Inevitable changes to council structure, personnel and strategic priorities over successive administrations meant its significance and status had diminished and its role and purpose had not kept pace with organisational changes and service redesign. However the pool remained in existence and offered a 'ready-made' opportunity to better engage and involve

older people in Hounslow and be a base for growth. It needed re-invigorating, and its role refreshed, so that it could play a role in the council's future plans.

Therefore this project focused on raising awareness of the volunteer pool's existence beyond the adults services and health environment in which it had previously operated and re-engaging with its membership who had become somewhat disheartened with their waning significance over recent years.

Encouraging older people to remain healthy and independent for as long as possible is key to minimising the pressure on services. By integrating an ageing dimension within the newly developed health and wellbeing board Hounslow can build on the good practice developed with the volunteer pool - listening to the views and insight of the older population, and understanding what they want and need to maintain their health and wellbeing.

What Hounslow did

Project development

The Director of Public Health was the organisational lead, providing the initial impetus and resources to deliver the project within Hounslow. He provided strategic direction and support at chief officer level, in

initiating and gaining support more widely in the council and in providing the health and wellbeing context for the project. The project focus on older people and the health and wellbeing board provided an opportunity to explore, at micro level, how broad population agendas could stimulate cross-organisational working and engagement in future.

The first goal was to identify and make contact with the appropriate people in the council, including those supporting the formation of the health and wellbeing board (HWB), to gain their support and interest. At the time of the project there was no separate strategy for older people in Hounslow but they were specifically identified within the council's draft health and wellbeing strategy which was released in November 2011.

In considering how Hounslow could make best use of the support from the LGA, conversations and investigations revealed that there was an older people's volunteer pool that has been very active in the past (with input into tender panels, strategy development, to scrutiny panels), led by the wellbeing and involvement team. This group fed in to the Older People's Scrutiny Panel, which remains ongoing.

Initially it was suggested that this project could work with the volunteer pool to engage them in local GP consultations, giving the group a new purpose and focus and benefiting the wider HWB. However it was felt that this was not deliverable in the time available. The volunteer pool had decreased dramatically in size over the last 18 months, there had been a significant drop in the number of projects consulted on, and the volunteers had become

demoralised. The original terms of reference for this group needed reviewing and their focus in the past had primarily been in the areas of adult services and health but had not spread to other services in any consistent way.

The second stage of the project involved connecting with health and wellbeing board leads shaping the project, agreeing scope and objectives that were deliverable in the timeframe and appropriate for the Hounslow context. Broader discussions with Hounslow's organisational development lead, Director of Public Health, the wellbeing and involvement team and others helped shape the eventual project scope:

- Using an existing meeting with the volunteer pool to explore their role and experience to date and engage them in thinking about how they can continue to contribute. A key element in this event was to engage those whose voices are not usually heard.
- Developing a short video to celebrate and publicise the role of the current volunteer pool.
- Introducing the volunteer pool, via the promotional video, to a wider audience within the council and particularly with the emerging health and wellbeing board as the route by which older people's views and opinions can be heard and their advice sought on service shaping and commissioning.

USP

This project was led from a new public health service, sitting within local government and provided some valuable learning about the challenges of integrating the new public health function into a coherent and well established organisation.

Key learning points

That engagement and involvement practices for older people (or any community or community group) have to be flexible and respond to changing council policy and organisational structure. From the community perspective, changes in the way councils do things or the people they engage with can seem inexplicable.

Panels of older people should be clear of their role, as individuals or as representatives. Those giving their time voluntarily need to understand the impact of their involvement and see the results of their efforts, eg via an annual report.

The role and purpose of any engagement processes or representative group should be regularly reviewed and terms of reference established and revisited. This enables involvement processes to remain purposeful and integral to council operations as well as offers the opportunity for representative groups to develop and change.

Engagement must be two way – those involved should feel they are able to raise issues as well as respond to the council's agenda.

For panels with an ongoing, rather than task and finish role, consistency and continuity are very important, as is a clearly defined, and planned, set of activities and actions they are to be involved in. If continuity of council personnel is not possible (and people do move

on) then consider how the way the group works can supply this.

Work out how, for what and where older people will engage with the HWB board. Be clear what their role is and how far it goes. This will avoid disappointment later because expectations have not been clarified. It is worth spending time and resources on this groundwork first.

The agenda for older people is not only one of ageing. Their input as experienced, skilled community members with links to wider and different sub communities is equally important. Ensure the strategy and practice of engaging and involving older people sits within a coherent overall strategy for community involvement.

Highlighting innovation

The use of multimedia and using the internet has been crucial to this piece of work. We also sought to build on what already existed, repairing old established relationships and avoiding duplication of what had already happened around engagement with older people within the council. Local communities often feel that large organisations play at consultation and duplicate effort from different silos. With this approach we have tried to gain value from what had already been established and add value and new purpose.

Models of engagement

Re-energising existing mechanisms was seen as an effective way forward for this project. Links have been made with two public health registrars who have been tasked with leading on a promotion and engagement strategy for the health and wellbeing board, reporting to the assistant director of Community Services. This work for the ageing well agenda will thus inform a wider consultation process.