

Annual Report 2015/16

Councillor Anne Whitehead, Champion for Older People

It is a pleasure to present my Annual Report as Member Champion for Older People.

The role of the Champion for Older People is to provide a link between older people, the community and Lancaster City Council, and to help older people with a whole range of issues they have within their community.

During the year, I have visited a number of older people's groups to meet members and discuss any issues they may have, and have provided information to individuals with specific problems. In addition, I have attended a number of events which have focussed on factors affecting quality of life for older people. Below, I have summarised some of the activities with which I have been involved.

North West of England Network of Local Authority Elected Older People's Champions

Following appointment in May 2015 as the Champion for Older People for Lancaster City Council, I joined the North West of England Network of Local Authority Elected Older People's Champions. The aims of the network are to help and support older people's champions to develop and share good practice, and to seek to influence central government on key issues affecting older people.

During the year, I attended the network's Good Practice and Business meetings at Sefton, Preston and Chorley. The general theme at Sefton was the engagement of older people across the borough in order to obtain their input to decisions affecting them. Presentations were given on research into housing options for older people and the development of a five year strategic plan for older people. A case study from the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service highlighted how the service works with the older person, a range of agencies and the local community to help the person stay safely in their own home.

At Preston, I was delighted to hear from pupils of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Barnoldswick about how they had become dementia friends and had started supporting a local home for elderly people some of whom were living with dementia. It was also good to learn about the success of the Silver Line Charity, set up in 2013 by Esther Rantzen to combat isolation and loneliness experienced by older people via 'a chat on the phone'. The helpline is 0800 4708090.

At Chorley, there was discussion of the report 'Fairer Lancashire Fairer Lives', produced by the Fairness Commission, under the Chairmanship of the Very Reverend Christopher Armstrong, the Dean of Blackburn. The main recommendation in relation to older people, was the creation of an Older People's Charter for Lancashire, which recognises that because people are now living longer there is both a third age (retired people with plenty of time, energy and relatively good health, who can contribute to society in many ways) and a fourth age (people mainly aged over 80 with poorer health, limited mobility and a need of increased support).

Lancaster District Pensioners Campaign Group

I attended a meeting of the Lancaster District Pensioners Campaign Group, where issues relating to the shortage and location of in-patient beds for older people with mental health problems, and the impact of reduced or cancelled bus services on older people were discussed.

On 30 January 2016, I helped on the stall for the National Pensioners Convention Dignity Action Day. We were highlighting the inequalities of the new state pension being introduced on 6 April 2016. Major changes to the state pension have not been communicated very well to the public, and many people are left confused about how they will be affected. Those reaching state pension age on or after 6 April 2016 will get the new regular payment of £155.65 a week. However, many people will receive far less, particularly women now in their 50s and 60s, because they will not have paid enough National Insurance contributions. Further information can be obtained from the website at www.npcuk.org.

Alzheimer's Society

I met with the Dementia Support Manager of the North Lancaster Alzheimer's Society to discuss services for people living with dementia in the Lancaster District. The need to find more suitable venues for holding Dementia Cafés in Lancaster was identified.

Age UK Lancashire

On 8 July 2015, I attended a half-day event on 'A Vision for Lancashire' organised by Age UK Lancashire. The focus was on an integrated approach to the provision of health and social care for older people, and presentations discussed the ways of delivering new care models within the vanguard programme. For example, The Better Care Together (Morecambe Bay Health Community) vanguard aims to work interdependently with a much more integrated out of hospital sector and moving to a smaller, more productive group of hospitals.

Centre for Ageing Research, Lancaster University

The Centre for Ageing Research at Lancaster University conducts high quality interdisciplinary research and promotes research-led teaching around ageing, older people and age-related disease. On 16 June 2015, I was delighted to join a discussion panel following a presentation by Dr Bill Thomas, Global Chair of Evermore, on his ideas for revolutionizing lifestyles in older age. He proposed that institutionalized housing and care for older people might be replaced by smaller community groups of older people governing their own rhythm of daily life. It will be interesting to see if there are such developments in Lancaster in the future.

I was also pleased to attend the Centre's 'Town and Gown' event on Dementia Futures at Lancaster Town Hall on 18 September 2015. I was impressed by the amount of wide-ranging research being undertaken in relation to dementia. There were presentations on software for facilitating early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, either by monitoring people as they use their home computers, looking for signs of cognitive decline over time, or by monitoring eye gaze while a person is watching TV. We had an update on the Defying Dementia campaign, which is raising funds for conducting a clinical trial of people receiving a drug developed at Lancaster University. This drug blocks the formation of the 'senile plaques' that are found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. Issues relating to the social dimensions of dementia were discussed, such as looking at needs of people living with dementia over and above those just connected with the dementia. People with dementia want to use mainstream services, not just specialised dementia services. Further details of the presentations and ongoing research can be found at the Centre's website.

University of the Third Age (U3A)

U3A is a self-help organisation for people no longer in full time employment, providing educational, creative and leisure opportunities in a friendly environment. There are about 1000 local U3As across the UK, which are charities in their own right and are run entirely by volunteers. On 16 July 2015, I attended the meeting of group leaders of Lancaster & Morecambe U3A, and was impressed by the many and varied activities undertaken. On 3 November 2015, I attended the North West Regional Study Day of U3A entitled 'Living well in

later life – “Learn, Laugh, Live” ’, organised by the Lancaster & Morecambe U3A and held in Lancaster. A number of the presentations highlighted the key elements of making retirement enjoyable, healthy and rewarding. That is, forging new social networks, playing, being creative and keeping on learning. It is great that we have such an active U3A group in our district.