

## Older in Oxfordshire Forums Spring 2010 – what people said

Throughout March 2010, over 200 people attended one of 5 participative, workshop-style Forums which were set up to ensure that the voices of older people **drive** the production of an influential Age Concern Oxfordshire report, *Older in Oxfordshire*, due to be published in June 2010 to mark the launch of Age UK Oxfordshire.

The Forums all had a short presentation of facts and figures about ageing in each of the different districts of Oxfordshire and we then asked everyone what they thought about the facts and figures. What does they tell us about need? Where are the gaps in the facts and figures and how can we fill them? What don't the facts and figures tell us about ageing in Oxfordshire? Views ranged from healthy scepticism about the figures, particularly in the City – '*we are all individuals*' - to interest and in some cases surprise – and a sense that we need to keep asking questions about what the figures mean.

We then asked people to think about:

- what helps you stay healthy?
- what makes it difficult?
- what needs to happen to help?

What follows is a brief summary of the discussion and responses from all 5 Forums:

STAYING WELL	BARRIERS TO STAYING WELL	WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?
<b>Physical health and wellbeing:</b> people talked both about personal responsibility and self help and about the support they need from the NHS – particularly primary care		
<p><b>Exercise</b> Exercise is the most frequently mentioned way of staying healthy. For some this means walking '<i>as much as possible</i>'. '<i>If you can manage stairs, use them!</i>' '<i>Keep on the move!</i>' Health Walks and Nordic Walking popular in some areas. For others regular, organized exercise classes are the answer: '<i>classes really make you do it.</i>' People also mention cycling, gym, Tai Chi, Yoga, dancing- including American Square Dancing, Tea Dancing, Folk Dancing and</p>	<p><b>Illness</b> Illness is seen as the principle barrier to keeping busy and staying well – along with accidents, falls and broken limbs – or the fear of them. '<i>Poor access and availability to swimming pool and general fitness classes</i>' is an issue for some – and the <b>cost</b> of accessing them. Many people mention the cold weather / bad winter as a barrier and uncleared pavements had been a real issue for some.</p>	<p><b>NHS</b> Although self help features most highly in the in the other categories, in terms of what need to happen there people were very clear about having good access to '<i>adequate health and care services and support if necessary – determined by need and not age.</i>' Significant numbers of people mention '<i>being able to see a doctor when you need to</i>', and their comments imply that some people experience significant difficulty with appointment systems: '<i>not having to wait</i></p>

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<p>bowling</p> <p><b>Diet and nutrition</b> Eating well is important for most people and Wiltshire Farm Foods, 'buying for one' schemes and delivery of food from supermarkets are all mentioned as being helpful.</p> <p><b>Gardening</b> Gardening gets a lot of mentions along with fresh air, nature – and keeping busy generally</p> <p><b>NHS</b> <i>'The reassurance of a good health service and community care'</i> is mentioned by many people, though almost always after the self-help measures outlined above. Several people talk about having <i>'confidence in the NHS'</i> and <i>"A good rapport with your Dr and seeing the same Dr when requested"</i>. <i>'Diabetic care is very good.'</i> <i>'Independent Living Centre in Witney well worth a visit if you need help to use stairs, bathroom etc.'</i></p>	<p><b>Poor diet and nutrition</b> This is seen by many as a barrier to staying healthy. Poor appetite contributes, as does energy and motivation: <i>'not wanting to cook regularly'</i>. Cooking for one / shopping for one and eating alone play a part here. Difficulty with shopping is a factor, particularly in rural areas - <i>'transport can lead to shopping problems and poor nutrition'</i> – and Banbury is singled out as having no town centre supermarket. The affordability of food is a significant factor for some.</p> <p><b>Access to NHS</b> Poor access to NHS dentistry and health services is seen as a barrier. For some this is about <i>'feeling unable to consult medical help with minor problems and intermittent events.'</i> Access to NHS dentistry is seen as an issue for general health and there is one mention of a <i>'proven correlation between poor teeth and heart disease'</i>. Too many people mention discrimination – <i>'an over 80s approach by some Drs'; 'lack of interest by Drs who are apt to say, 'what do you expect at your age?'"</i> And for a small number of people, <i>'the wrong medication'</i> or <i>'Drs getting it wrong'</i> is an issue. <i>'Not taking opportunities on offer for health screening, flu jabs etc'</i> is also mentioned.</p>	<p><i>10 days / 2 weeks; 'If you get past the desk you're in; 'Not having to wait for a phone message to say when you can be seen at the surgery.'</i></p> <p>There is enthusiasm from many for drop-in health services, to see nurse or adviser <i>'not necessarily a Dr'</i>, <i>'to be re-assured about small problems,'</i> and also for health checks. Improved access to dentistry also features.</p> <p>In the West, GP home visits are mentioned but not elsewhere in the county.</p> <p>People want to see an end to discrimination: <i>'More understanding by doctors of the problems older people have, not told a lot of people of your age have your problems too!'</i></p> <p>More falls clinics and better access in rural areas were also felt to be helpful.</p> <p><b>Exercise</b> Improved access to exercise classes and swimming, better publicity and <i>'More emphasis on exercise etc – although there has been more about keeping moving lately.'</i></p> <p>Day Centres help with loneliness, nutrition, outings and passing on of knowledge</p> <p><b>Diet and nutrition</b> More information and help with diet and nutrition – and support for people who are <b>under-eating</b>, for whatever reason.</p>
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<p><b>Mental health and wellbeing:</b> friends and family, staying involved, having a purpose or meaning to life and keeping up 'mental exercise' are all seen as important for the maintenance of mental wellbeing and knowing what's available, cost, transport and confidence are all barriers. Loneliness is a very major concern for most people.</p>		
<p><b>Friends and family</b> Friends and family, being in contact with people and meeting people – <i>'to be able to meet people and go out with friends'</i> - are mentioned by almost everybody – people with whom to chat (<i>'men need to talk more'</i>), share things and <i>'have a laugh'</i>, <i>'people to love and be loved by'</i>, <i>'a supportive family within a few miles'</i> and grandchildren.</p> <p><b>Opportunities for meeting people and socialising</b> <i>'Joining in and enjoying life'</i> and belonging to an organisation - clubs and groups, church, conversations and discussion groups and singing are the most frequently mentioned activities <i>'Join any local group – or start one! Don't sit at home waiting for someone else to do it.'</i> Intergenerational activities – particularly related to IT – also feature: <i>"keeping in touch with young people and their interests"</i>. Community development is a valued approach: <i>'we need more like Ruth to help us enjoy ourselves in old age'</i> U3A, bridge, lunch clubs, and part-time work are important for some people. Several people mention the importance of achieving a <i>'balance between sociableness and being alone'</i>.</p>	<p><b>Loneliness</b> Social isolation and loneliness leading to depression is seen as the major barrier to mental wellbeing. Loss of friends and relatives, <i>'no family members near'</i>, <i>'falling out with family or friends irrevocably'</i>, the cost of getting out and about, disability and illness, lack of energy all contribute to this. <i>'Depression and ill-health causes a vicious circle. Feeling unwell makes one lethargic and loathed to do anything, not contacting people when things get bad.'</i></p> <p><b>Stress, anxiety and confidence</b> A lot of people mention stress and anxiety, <i>'too many cares, too little support'</i> and a variety of causes including financial worries and concern about the house. Life goes too fast for some – and technological changes are difficult to keep up with. Confidence <i>'particularly after illness or a fall'</i> is a significant barrier for some people, <i>"Not having confidence to ask questions of people one might think superior eg Drs, hospital staff.'</i> Lack of education also affects confidence. Lack of sleep is a real issue for many.</p> <p><b>Attitudes</b> Lack of motivation, inertia, apathy and <i>'becoming insular'</i> are mentioned by some people – linked to lack of mental stimulation boredom.</p>	<p><b>Opportunities for meeting people and socialising</b> More affordable and accessible educational opportunities, classes, drop-in places and coffee mornings for chat, discussions and activities are needed. <i>'Opportunities to mix with others through things chosen by the elderly not what others think they need.'</i> More community development to help solve problems (<i>'rooms to meet are difficult'</i>) and provide <i>'support for small, local groups which are struggling yet provide vital support to their members.'</i> <i>'Having enthusiastic young organizers like Ruth to get us going.'</i> <i>'Don't campaign. Set it up yourself!'</i></p> <p><b>Changing attitudes and countering discrimination</b> Many people talk about a more positive attitude to ageing by both young and old – <i>'counter negative stereo-types'</i>. <i>'Older people need to raise their profile.'</i> <b><i>'Campaign not to be ashamed of being old cf. gay pride.'</i></b></p> <p><b>And .....</b> <i>'CRB checks take too long – need to be easier and less scary for people.'</i></p>

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<p><b>Keeping the mind active</b> Educational opportunities / classes / staying interested in learning new things are vitally important for wellbeing and self esteem – <i>'Keep your brain going'</i>. <i>'Never stop THINKING - continue to use your brain as much as you ever did.</i> The Local History Society is important for some people. Crosswords, quizzes, jigsaws, scrabble, reading, TV, radio and current affairs - <i>'keeping up with the news'</i> and <i>'having a lively interest in what is going on around you'</i> all help, as do hobbies <i>'old and new'</i>. Theatre, music, museums and exhibitions are important for some people as are creative activities - making things, textiles and art.</p> <p><b>Volunteering</b> Many people emphasise the importance of contributing and participating – either through formal volunteering or much more informally: <i>'a feeling of being needed'</i>, <i>'a feel good factor'</i>, <i>'giving back'</i>, <i>'a purpose to life'</i>. Several people specifically talk about committees.</p> <p><b>Attitude</b> A lot of people mention the importance of humour and <i>'a lighthearted approach'</i> and of attempting to maintain their optimism, <i>'knowing my glass is always half-full'</i>. <i>'Focusing on the bright side of things rather than on the sad / bad things that</i></p>	<p>Negative attitudes and age discrimination also play a part. <i>'Being intimidated by neighbours or gangs of youngsters'</i> is an issue for some And several people mention <i>'over zealous use of CRB is a big hindrance'</i>.</p>	
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<p><i>happen eg. in the news.</i> Having things to look forward to helps. Staying independent is important and having a pattern to the week and undertaking routine tasks help some people to maintain a sense of wellbeing.</p>		
<p><b>Economic wellbeing:</b> poverty was a real concern at every Forum and people made a strong link between poverty and health.</p>		
<p><b>Paying your way</b> The financial ability to pay for activities and opportunities, to go out and about, to take holidays plays a major part in health and wellbeing.</p>	<p><b>Money worries</b> People identified financial deprivation and worries about money as a major barrier to health and wellbeing: <i>“Not having money to pay bills in winter; lack of money for essentials.”</i> <i>‘Economic issues affect nutrition, warmth, transport and social contact.’</i> Poverty amongst women because of lack of NI credits, divorce or widowhood was seen as a particular issue.</p> <p><b>Benefits take-up</b> The complexity of the benefits system and the paperwork associated with it is a real deterrent to take-up.</p>	<p><b>Tackling benefits take-up</b> A more accessible system is needed – but until this happens, more encouragement to take up benefits and help with filling in forms and claiming benefits must be available. And some work on attitudes to financial help – <i>‘not a charitable donation’</i>.</p>
<p><b>Housing</b> The availability of affordable and appropriate housing, keeping warm in winter and good neighbours and supportive neighbourhoods are all seen as critical contributors to health and wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Housing worries</b> Lots of people talked about worries about maintaining their home and engaging help: <i>‘Worries about the condition of home and unknown expenses’; ‘unable to cope with running home and worry re deterioration of home and not wanting unknown people into home’; ‘could be taken for a ride’.</i> The difficulty of accessing aids and adaptations to help people manage and to prevent accidents were also</p>	<p><b>Housing help</b> More affordable and appropriate housing is needed, as is more accessible information about housing options and more help with home adaptations and heating costs In West Oxfordshire there was a specific issue relating to a perceived loss of sheltered housing provision.</p>

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	<p><b>Staying warm</b> Cold houses and the high cost of utilities are issues for many: <i>'Eat or heat for some older people'</i>.</p> <p><b>Community</b> The closure of local facilities, shops and pubs etc is an issue for some people particularly in rural areas: <i>'Lack of local facilities and people to organize them'</i>.</p>	<p><b>Community</b> More work to foster neighbourliness, good neighbours and strong communities is needed.</p>
<p><b>Getting out and about:</b> for many simply going out every day is a key to staying healthy.</p>		
<p><b>Transport</b> <i>'Opportunities to get into the wider world puts ones problems into perspective.'</i> Good, accessible public transport is essential to health and wellbeing, as for many is the ability to drive. <i>'Bus passes invaluable!'</i> <i>'Enjoying good holidays'</i> is also mentioned by many people.</p>	<p><b>Transport</b> If transport is essential for health and wellbeing it follows that difficulties with transport present a major barrier – one that is raised by most people – particularly, but not exclusively, in rural areas. Lack of public transport options prevents people from getting to activities and opportunities. Transport to health services is also an issue for some. The cost of fuel and train fares also presents a barrier for some: <i>'too high for visiting relatives and friends.'</i></p> <p><b>Community</b> There are specific issues relating to the maintenance of paths and pavements which prevent people from getting around – damaged and obstructed pavements present a hazard. And in the recent snow, the failure to grit pavements was a real issue for very many people: <i>"not able to go out for two weeks during the snow – and</i></p>	<p><b>Transport</b> Better transport (including later buses) is unsurprisingly an issue for many. <i>'Dial-a-Ride could be much more helpful if club organizers took the time to explain it all to customers.'</i> <i>'More local transport suitable for older people.'</i> <i>'Provide transport to isolated people for petrol cost only.'</i></p> <p><b>Costs</b> Bus passes are popular: <i>'keep the bus passes'</i>. But for people not on a bus route a choice of travel tokens is welcome: <i>'other Districts still have a choice but not the Vale. Why??'</i></p>

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	<p><i>I'm talking about Witney."</i></p> <p>Cycling on pavements presents a further barrier.</p> <p>Seats in public places and public loos also influence people's ability to get out and about.</p>	
<p><b>Information:</b> difficulty in accessing information <b>is a major barrier to staying well</b> and information provision is perceived to be <i>'patchy and bitty and a bit ad hoc and hit and miss.'</i> There are very strong and very mixed views on IT and internet provision of information – for some a panacea, for others <i>'this www business – saying it's available on the internet is like shutting the door in people's faces.'</i></p>		
<p><b>Information</b></p> <p>Information available in a variety of ways – face to face support valued highly – as are locally accessible one-stop shops – <i>'there is no substitute for human contact'</i></p>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <p>Insufficient knowledge of what is available is a real barrier to staying well. <i>'Knowing how and where to seek help when problems arise.'</i></p> <p><b>Planning</b></p> <p>Planning for the future is difficult because it's hard to find out what resources are available (aids, adaptations and support) and at what cost until you actually need help.</p>	<p><b>Access to information</b></p> <p>Improve access to / ease of getting information: <i>'advice needs to be available from accessible sources GP Surgeries, churches, libraries.'</i> <b>Effective</b> information about services / benefits <b>tactfully disseminated.'</b></p> <p><i>'Information about local services written in easy to understand language and readily available at eg GP Surgeries, village halls town halls churches etc.'</i></p> <p>More personal support needed: one-stop-shops <i>'for people 50+ to get information re: benefits, help for carers etc.'</i> and <i>'a Helpline number – not just email help.'</i></p> <p>More Age Concern Information Fairs: <i>'valuable on market days when bring a lot older people together.'</i></p> <p>More information about activities, services and support in the media – <i>'we need an age support section in the local paper'</i></p>

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		<p>Improved access to <b>written</b> information and medical leaflets and ‘<i>mediators</i>’ in GP Surgeries to provide information – ‘<i>not a new idea</i>’ - would help with health services.</p> <p>‘<i>A countywide Directory of information about services and <b>costs</b> is needed so that people can plan.</i>’</p> <p><b>IT</b></p> <p>Much more accessible and affordable support for people to use computers is important – and some of this may need to be at home ‘<i>because it’s different when you get home</i>’</p>
<p><b>Caring:</b> stress, exhaustion and loneliness were all raised as major issues for older carers.</p>		
<p>‘<i>Good community support for a family member gives piece of mind (for carer)</i>’</p>	<p><b>Financial</b></p> <p>Loss of income (Carers’ Allowance etc) is a big issue</p> <p><b>Respite care</b></p> <p>Breaks from caring are very important. ‘<i>Little time for oneself (as a carer) which leads to deterioration in relationship.</i>’</p> <p>Day care offers one such break on a regular basis but is over-subscribed in some areas and ‘rationing’ to half days is distressing.</p>	<p><b>Financial</b></p> <p><i>Older carers should continue to receive carers’ allowance after pension ages</i></p> <p><b>Respite care</b></p> <p>Flexible and dependable respite readily available – both regular and one-off.</p>