



WOLVERHAMPTON OVER 50s FORUM
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Minutes of Over 50s Forum
Held on Wednesday 18th November 2009, 10am

Present: 38 Members, Rose Powell

Apologies: Brad and Jen Purshouse

Marjorie welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that she would be chairing the meeting. She introduced Glen Mason and Phil Griffin from the Police and Chris and Mathew, who are students at Wolverhampton University.

1. Minutes from last meeting:

- Mr Rai had sent his apology for the previous meeting but this had not been recorded in the Minutes.
- The Housing meeting (P5) date was incorrect, the Minutes state 29th November when it is actually 20th.

Otherwise the Minutes were agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising:

The Environment Group reported that the litter-pick planned for the 25th November has been cancelled.

3. Chairs Report:

None

4. Treasurer's Report:

£1379 in the Bank account although most of this has been designated to the environmental group.

5. Correspondence:

The latest edition of Forum to Forum was distributed. Roy reported that the publishers had asked whether O50 Forum would like to submit articles for it.

6. Discussions on the proposed Savings Programme.

Marjorie outlined the main proposals that she was concerned for members to consider:

- 1) **Hot lunches & Day Care meals** which are not financially assessed or means-tested: Will increase from £2.40 -£4.40 each. Freshly cooked meals may be replaced (Jan 2010) with re-heated frozen meals.

- 2) **Transport costs**, people receiving mobility allowance may be prohibited from using council transport to travel to day care: transport for older people will no longer be free, but cost £1.50 return
- 3) **Day Care** which has traditionally been free. Each visit is likely to cost between £10 and £20.00
- 4) **Carelink** which affects the most vulnerable: is likely to cost about £14 a month.

Hot lunches and Day Care meals:

- This represents a 90% increase which is excessive
- As Meals on Wheels is not means-tested everyone will have to pay regardless of their financial situation.
- Frozen meals can be purchased for £1.25p but the less mobile will not be able to get to the shops.
- If meals are not eaten immediately and are re-heated later this is a health risk.
- Older or infirm people who elect to buy frozen meals are at risk as the containers change shape when they are hot and are potentially dangerous.
- Although Iceland delivers food there is a minimum spend first.
- There are additional costs associated with re-heating frozen meals as utility costs are also rising.
- Older people are likely to cut down on what they eat –or forget to eat at all- if they can no longer afford delivered meals.
- Frozen food can never replace the nutritional value of fresh foods. It is acknowledged that some children eat badly, living on frozen food or take-aways as their main meals yet Pensioners may be forced to live on frozen meals.
- Food is an essential item for survival and quality of life – if the Government is not prepared to care for older people then issue them with sleeping tablets and remove the problem.
- Meals on Wheels is often the only human contact that many older people have, if pensioners can no longer afford this they will become even more isolated and lose a life line.
- People may die as a direct consequence of this.

Transport:

- Those who currently receive Mobility Allowance but do not drive will not be able to use Social Services transport. This particularly impacts on those who care for other family members (ie People With Learning Disabilities) and have to escort them to Day Centres using taxis. Ultimately the burden will fall on the State if the Carer cannot cope.
- Pensioners will be hit again when Fair Access to Care cuts are made and Day Centres are closed. They will be re-assessed and criteria determined to see if it affects their eligibility.

Day Care:

Whilst members agree that there are currently too many Day Care facilities and this should be streamlined:

- It is likely that more centres will close if people can no longer afford to attend them.
- Those who cannot afford day care will become isolated, depressed and have little quality of life. People are struggling generally now anyway, this puts yet another burden on the family, health and ultimately Social Services.
- If, as the council say, most people will still be eligible for free day care, is it really cost effective especially with the additional administrative costs associated with it?

What is the REAL saving here?

- It will take an enormous rise in Pensions for Pensioners to be meet all the additional costs that are being proposed across the Council – not just these that directly affect older people.

Carelink:

- This affects the most vulnerable as it is their life-line.
- People could be lying on the floor injured. They may then need emergency care, additional support services such as adaptive resources and equipment and after care. Their quality of life could deteriorate very quickly – this would ultimately cost considerably more than the savings made by charging for carelink. (If there is any value put on older people's lives!!)

Additional comments:

- Older people have contributed, and continue to do so as carers, parents and grandparents yet when they have needs themselves they are made to feel like a burden on the state.
- There are a number of knock-on effects linked to this – such as Verona Court having to stop providing hot meals due to the way their budget is managed.
- It is the accumulation of cuts that will affect older people very badly and is disproportionate to the rest of society. Older people are also being hit by other cuts across health and social care.
- Older people are the easiest targets.
- Older people in England are living on the lowest pension in Europe.
- Councillors are supposed to represent us, how can we make them really listen to what we have to say?
- How is consulting those who cannot get out of the house or those for whom English is not their native tongue?
- Older people do not have faith in the Council's Consultation process. Members expressed the view that decisions are already made and it is an expensive and pointless system. For those who are consulted and ignored it is a very disempowering experience too.
- Although older people are not an homogenous group and have different political views, there is a shared strength of feeling about the injustice of these cuts.
- Most vulnerable older people will not know anything about – or understand about the impact of them, until it is too late. Those who can must make their views known.

Due to the strength of feeling, it was agreed that forum needed collective action . Roy agreed to draft a letter template for members to use to send letters in response to the proposals.

A petition was passed around the table. It was agreed that group reps on the Forum would collect signatures from their group members and return them to Forum.

It was suggested that details of the cuts and the action recommended by Forum members, should be put onto the O50 Forum webpage, as it will be on Pensioner's convention site.

7. Sub-committee reports:

Housing:

The meeting is on Friday 20th November at 10:30am in Briefing room 2. Andrew Moulden and Paul Duffy will be present.

Environmental:

Morrison's at Bilston employed extra staff to clean up litter around their site when they

heard that the Forum were going to organise the next litter pick there!!
The toilets opposite Beatties that Forum were successful in arguing for, is used by 400 people a day. It is anticipated that this will increase even further when the bus station is closed for renovation.

8. Wolverhampton University project:

Chris explained that he, and other students, were involved in a video production about empowerment; the voice of those who are not normally heard. Having heard the discussions he asked for 4 volunteers who are prepared to discuss their views on a specific subject: Children's meals cost 50p in school yet Pensioners may have to live on frozen food.

9. AOB:

The Savings Programme:

A few members requested copies of the Council document which Rose said she would send to them.

Police:

Representatives from the Police came along to see what happens at Forum. They are prepared to talk to Forum about any issue. A discussion followed about the reduction in crime – which is actually a reduction in 'reported' crime. It was agreed that it is very difficult and expensive to actually report a crime and there seems to be little point in doing so anyway as it seems that little or nothing happens as a consequence.

Albert Rd Day Centre:

Roz reported that she has been campaigning for some time against the closure of Albert Road Day Centre. She has written letters, organised a Petition and has been assured that the Centre will not close (Roz's husband is also on the PWLD Board). However, Albert Road Day Centre IS going to close.

Information Centre:

Gina reported that the Information Centre in Queen Square will close in April, as part of the cuts associated with the Savings Programme. It is likely to be relocated to within the Art Gallery. Everyone agreed that the Centre provided a range of services and should be retained – ideally in a more accessible location. A suggestion was made that it could be relocated into the same building as the toilets as it has an information area.

Bradmore Snooker Club:

Mike reported that Bradmore Snooker Club was in danger of closure unless membership increases. He urged Forum members to support the club.

It is Marjorie's 90th birthday on December 8th, everyone from Forum wished her a happy birthday.

Date of next meeting is Wednesday 20th January 2009, 10am, Meeting Room 3, Third Floor, Civic Centre.

No speaker: