

The Future of Champions for Older People in Buckinghamshire: Report to the Older People's Partnership Board

Introduction

On 4th September 2007, the Champions Forum for Older People in Buckinghamshire discussed the findings of the consultation on the future of the champions for older people. Their discussions were guided by a summary report which is presented as an Appendix to this document. This paper summarises the views of those present and includes recommendations for the future of the Champions.

Discussion

There is broad support for continuing with the Champions Forum. It has played an important role in bringing issues to the fore, both through the case study and the peer interviews. But it should only continue if the problems identified below are addressed.

1. **Lack of status and authority:** The champions are not consulted on and kept informed about important issues and changes that affect older people. They struggle to hold the OPPB to account, are not consulted on its agenda and do not have a slot on that agenda to raise their concerns. The acting lay chair does not receive the information that is routinely shared among professionals and is therefore not well placed to intervene on behalf of older people.
2. **Lack of focus and impact:** The champions used to contribute to the NSF for Older People Standards working groups. Their demise has diluted the focus of the group and made the champions influence within the system far less tangible.
3. **Lack of commitment from the statutory sector:** At the September meeting, which was intended to see a reinvigoration of the Champions, there was no representation at senior manager level from the Primary Care Trust, the Mental Health Trust, the Ambulance Trust or Social Services.
4. **Lack of senior management ownership:** There is no senior manager with responsibility for the champions and, as a result, the network has dwindled over the past 18 months, rather than being built up.
5. **Lack of clarity:** The lay people present do not understand if they are there to represent groups such as their Older People's Action Group or whether they speak for themselves. Nor are they clear on how decisions are made, who makes them and how they can be influenced.

Recommendations

These are the recommendations of the Champions Forum, based upon the recommendations that came out of the review. We would like the OPPB to support them and act upon them.

- I. The Champions Forum needs to be chaired by someone who is linked to the whole system network of health (primary and acute) social care and community services.(a professional manager at a high level, or clinician). This person should be identified by the OPPB in partnership with the Champions Forum Chair and acting Chair. There should be a lay co-chair.
- II. A senior manager should be given responsibility for the champions network. Their role would be to grow the number of champions for older people across Buckinghamshire to become a vibrant body. The membership of the Champions Forum would be drawn from that wider network.
- III. All of the relevant statutory organisations should commit to the Champions Forum and send substitutes when their nominated representatives are unable to attend. They need to keep the Champions Forum informed about changes and issues that relate to older people.
- IV. Mechanisms need to be established that allow the Champions Forum to influence the agenda of the OPPB and to allow the Champions Forum a regular, dedicated slot at OPPB meetings. The Champions Forum also needs to be clear about whether it can commission work and whether it has a budget for its activity.
- V. Training needs to be available to Champions Forum members.

Graham Box
5th September 2007

Appendix: Summary of consultation findings on the future of the champions of older people

Introduction

This paper summarises the conclusions from the recently completed review of the future of champions for older people. The Champions Forum is asked to support the recommendations which are important to give the champions more influence and, in turn, to improve the care and services provided to older people in the county.

Responses

Replies were received from Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust Public Health Directorate, Buckinghamshire County Council Culture and Learning, South Bucks District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council Voluntary Sector Development Manager, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust, the former chairman of Buckinghamshire Older People's Forum and the Patient and Public Involvement Forum.

In order to produce this paper, the responses were then discussed with Steve Stych (Project Manager for implementation of the National Service Framework for Older People), Chris Stanners (current acting chairman of the Champions Forum), Sheila Davies (Health Promotion Coordinator, Wycombe District Council) and Graham Box (independent consultant).

Key findings

1. There was a strong feeling that we should continue with the Forum but amend its practices.
2. The current remit received broad support, namely
 - To collate views and issues that are of concern to older people and to use these as the basis to influence decisions and service delivery
 - To monitor the actions and decisions of the Older People's Partnership Board
 - To promote public health and the prevention agenda and to facilitate understanding among the public and the professionals of the key issues that relate to the health and well-being of older people
3. The current formal membership was considered right although some noted the need for greater engagement with voluntary sector organisations and we also need to be mindful of the likely formation of Local Involvement Networks to replace the PPI Forums. Most organisations are still considering who should represent them.
4. Respondents recognised the value of a lay person acting as chair but also highlighted the benefits that could come from a "professional"

chairman so that the work is linked to all the right strategies and to improve the flow of information.

5. Only one person felt that six monthly meetings were preferable. The remainder were split between quarterly and the current two-monthly interval.

Recommendations

- A. A database of champions for older people should be created with champions across all levels of organisations in Buckinghamshire. This wider network should be kept informed of key issues relating to the work of the champions and to older people in the county.
- B. Sufficient administrative and managerial support has to be in place to undertake this work, which will involve identifying and approaching prospective champions so that they are clear about their role.
- C. The Champions Forum needs reinvigorating and during this period it should be co-chaired by a senior professional who can help to make the necessary linkages and raise the profile of the champions.
- D. Each Champions Forum meeting should have a clear theme and focus with suitable speakers invited and time allowed for discussion. Some of these themes will follow directly from the messages that came out of the peer interviews that are being carried out (see separate paper).
- E. All staff and older people should be aware that they can approach champions for older people with issues of concern and these issues should be brought to the Champions Forum as part of the Agenda of themed meetings where appropriate.
- F. Training should be available to the Champions.
- G. The meeting is asked to decide whether it would prefer meetings at two or three monthly intervals.

Conclusions

The champions have an important role to play in improving the care and services provided to older people in Buckinghamshire. Professional champions should raise the profile of services for older people, argue for better preventive strategies and ensure proper planning for the major demographic changes currently taking place. Lay champions can provide a voice for older people that might otherwise go unheard, challenging providers and commissioners and holding the Older People's Partnership Board to account. If we can get it right, the Champions Forum should play an important role in coordinating and motivating that activity.

Graham Box
31st August 2007