

The Future of Champions for Older People in Buckinghamshire

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
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