

## Strategy for an ageing society: age friendly Wales

### Welsh Government review of engagement Questions for older people

**Question 9: Are you a member of a 50+ group or forum? If yes, how successful do you think the forum is influencing local and national policy decisions?**

**Comments:**

**Questions for older people**

Why are you limiting this to responses from older people? Given the use of social media, it is evident that younger people can help their older family and friends by sharing information otherwise not available to the digitally excluded. Such individuals could give a valuable insight to the effect of Forums.

**Forum membership**

The Forum does not operate like the AA or RAC by refusing help to non-members. We are available to help any resident in the Borough over the age of 50. For example, (i) a man living abroad asked if we could help him find help for his mother who was suffering from dementia and was finding it difficult to cope, (ii) another man, also living abroad, asked if we could help his recently widowed mother as she was feeling isolated and lonely. We were able to help both and received a very grateful response. See also “Blue Badges” below.

When we created our website over 6 years ago, it was evident that the concept of “membership” would change significantly. We have:481 members for whom we have mail and telephone information. Of these we have 119 who also provided email addresses. On Facebook, we have 417 Followers; this means that there are at least 298 people in regular contact that are not part of the email cohort. In normal times, outside covid constraints, this gives us 779 people that wish to be associated with the Forum. In addition, our website has been accessed by 158 people since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, visiting 427 pages.

**Responses from Forum “Members”.**

The foregoing begs the question “Why has your Q9 been limited to only those that can answer positively to being Forum Member?” We have at least 298 Followers on Facebook that you are excluding from responding.

**Digitally Excluded**

The publication of this consultation was subject to number of delays against announced targets through 2019. This has resulted in seeking responses during the covid pandemic. This means that our Forum cannot contact those 362 members for whom we only have residential postal addresses.

**Successful Influencing**

We should probably declare an interest in that the Chair and Vice Chair of Cymru Older People’s Alliance are also officers of this Forum. Much of our contribution is through membership of various advisory groups on specific issues. A good recent example has been our contribution to the Older People’s Commissioner, detailing issues with the covid pandemic that are a concern to our members.

The Forum make a considerable contribution at local and national level, exemplified by the list of documents below. These are high level summaries but include links to detailed papers.

[Housing an Ageing Population In Wales](#)

[Bus Services Policy Discussion](#)

[Concessionary Bus Fares](#)

[Blue badge Applications](#)

[Blue Badge Applications: Update](#)

One of our residents (not a member) used our contact form to question why he had been refused a renewal of his Blue Badge although his condition had deteriorated. Following consultation with other Forums across Wales, who were finding a range of issues, we referred the matter to the Older People's Commissioner's Office. The note on our website was used by the Commissioner's Office to inform other Forums of the status of their investigation.

[Well-Being Plan](#)

[Dementia Action Plan](#)

[Isolation and Loneliness](#)

[Carers \(Unpaid\)](#)

[Health & Care Services fit for the Future](#)

[Social Services and Well-being](#) (information)

**Question 10: Does the 50+ forum benefit your local area in other ways? (Eg. by reducing social isolation or building community resilience?)**

**Comments:**

The examples referred to in response to this question probably represent the major aspect of what our Forum participates in.

We have a substantial bank balance generated by our own activities over the years. See section 62:

[Local-Implementation-of-the-Strategy-for-Older-People-in-Wales.pdf](#)

See also: Smarter Working Network – Caerphilly (page 16 of this document)

**Loneliness and Isolation**

[Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation](#)

We obtained grants for over £2000 at the end of 2019 to support the intergenerational lunch club in a local school. This was formerly supported by the local community council but had been discontinued for 2020. This is now on hold because of the pandemic.

An application to the National Lottery for £9000 to support a virtual reality project was obtained in early 2020. It was intended to take 3D films on VR headsets into Care

Homes to remind residents of familiar life outside.

[Virtual Reality Project](#)

[VR Update](#)

[VR Filming](#)

[Inside - Outside](#)

[Safety First](#)

We introduced the Council to the concept of “Chatty Café” and jointly opened the first one in the Visitor Centre, Caerphilly.

[Chatty Cafe](#)

[Caerphilly News](#)

*Events*

We ran annual “Share A Smile” events providing some excellent and varied entertainment with an afternoon tea. Our last event was held just before the pandemic struck.

[Christmas Dinner & George Formby](#)

We had a series of events planned for 2020. These included an LGBTQ event in which we had secured the help of “Umbrella Cymru” and the Older People’s Commissioner. We are currently hoping to re-activate some of these events this year but are also considering the possibility of an LGBTQ video conference.

*Newsletters*

We produce a high quality, 8-page, newsletter. Circulation has grown to 6000 copies. These are distributed by volunteers across the county, Councillors and via Council services, such as meals-on-wheels. The primary audience is those residents that do not have internet access, but it is also available online.

[Spring 2019](#)

**Intergenerational Solidarity**

Support for the Lunch Club (see Loneliness & Isolation)

*Poetry Together*

This was a UK wide initiative started in 2019. Our “entry” was so successful that we were selected as one of only 5 groups from 250 entries to attend an event in London with the Duchess of Cornwall.

[Poetry Together \(1\)](#)

[Poetry Together \(2\)](#)

*Groups*

We regularly visit groups around the county to talk about our work and how we can help them. This has proved particularly helpful to the local Stroke group. As well as giving a general lecture on staying safe online, we have been regular visitors to help individuals with specific issues with their digital devices.

[Stroke Group](#)

[Out and About This Summer](#)

We also formed a close link with Newbridge Tabernacle who needed training with how to use Word Press so they could update their websites.

### **Safeguarding**

#### *Protection of Vulnerable Adults*

We worked with the Council Safeguarding Team to provide talks about Abuse and explain how wide-ranging the definition of abuse could be. The intention was for older people to present to other older people in Day Centres, Residential Homes, and Care Homes. This programme culminated in securing funding to produce a video and circulate 22,000 DVD; 1000 copies to each of the 22 Welsh Counties.

[POVA Video](#)

### **Public Information**

#### *Simon Says Campaigns on our Facebook:*

- Reminding Pensioners to Claim Pension Credits 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020.  
Reached 2,674
- Slips, Trips and Falls advice
- Free swimming for over 60s

#### *Money Matters*

We provide 30 links to internet resources that give explanations about, for example, benefits, allowances, financial protection etc. The references have been selected as providing the best explanations.

[Money matters](#)

We also offer some basic explanations about how to behave safely on the internet.

[Online Safety](#)

**Question 11: How do you think local and national government can better engage with older people?**

#### **Comments:**

[Local-Implementation-of-the-Strategy-for-Older-People-in-Wales.pdf](#)

This document, published in 2011, sets out very clearly the development and achievements of Forums Across Wales.

Both local and national governments should first ask themselves why they sat back and allowed many Forums to “wither on the vine”.

It is evident from [COPA's Report](#) that many local councils have subsumed the role of Forums into the general relationship they have with other older people's groups. This completely removes the primary remit of Forums as representative bodies.

It is difficult to understand why the Welsh Government invested in strengthening COPA in 2017. This was to make it a charity acting as the focal point for the voice of Forums to national government. Yet in a year-long dialogue with COPA there has been no indication of Government support for helping to revitalise Forums.

Forums provide a unique opportunity for older people who are not tempted to join formal groups to have their voice heard, join one-off events or access information.

At the outset of this response are a number of examples of considered and detailed responses we have made to consultations. There is a general perception that responding to consultations is a waste of time: "They never listen". I am not aware that any of the comments that we have made in our consultation responses have been adopted. Perhaps the effort we have made could at least be rewarded with an explanation of why they were not found appropriate.

### **Engaging with Local Government**

Our Forum has a very good working arrangement with the local council. Although we lost our coordinator 2 years ago (early retirement and not replaced), we retain a long-standing cooperative but independent relationship.

During my time as Chair (8years) the Council has never provided us with a budget. It has been the case, though, that we can put forward a specific request for small amounts of funding and it is often granted. For example, the forum sourced a venue and professional entertainers for the last Xmas dinner and the council funded the cost of the meal (<£300).

We recognised several years ago that many unpaid carers were over 50 and consequently forged a strong relationship with the Carers Team in the Council. Their Team leader is a regular attendee at our Committee meetings and, with the departure of our coordinator, forms a key link with the Council.

We are currently engaging with a number of groups that are preparing to work across the County as we emerge from the covid pandemic. Caerphilly Cares is a new initiative established by the Council. We have had an initial meeting and agreed that coordination between our groups will be beneficial. Caerphilly Cares were not aware of the existence of the HOPE (Helping Others Participate and Engage) project, so the Forum have arranged for the 3 groups to meet. We have also been able to work with Caerphilly's Adult Community Learning department who have been awarded funding from the Welsh Government's Digital Transformation Fund to carry out a 6-week study around Digital Exclusion. As well as publicising the project within Caerphilly Borough, we have also been able to send publicity information to other county Boroughs involved.

Of course, we can always do better. We are currently seeking help from the council to find more volunteers to join us. One positive outcome from the pandemic has been the amazing number of people that have stepped up to volunteer to help their neighbours. We hope we can tap into this spirit and encourage a few to join us. It would also be very helpful to revisit the role of the (elected) Older People's Champion. This could (should) be a pivotal role for forging the link between the Forum and the Council.