

**Date:** Friday 2 November 2001  
**Time:** 10.30am to 1.00pm  
**Venue:** Village Hall, Aberporth

## **A STRATEGY FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN WALES:A POWYS PERSPECTIVE**

**25<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

### Introduction

Powys County Council welcomes this opportunity to provide a Powys perspective to inform the development of the Strategy for Older People in Wales. It is our hope that the Strategy will be a broad and comprehensive document which will provide clear pathways for everyone working in health and social care, in transport and adult education and in the statutory and independent sectors. We trust that the Strategy will be founded upon a commitment to root out age discrimination.

It is also our hope that the Strategy will be resources by the Assembly to help ensure that problems and shortcomings can be addressed not merely identified.

### The Main Problems Facing Older People in Powys

The extreme rurality of Powys exacerbates the problems of our older people, which otherwise are little different from the problems of older people everywhere in Wales. Powys has a relatively high proportion of older people and of these a high proportion of who live alone. It has relatively older and poorer housing than most Welsh counties, but most of all has its population scattered over a huge area. It is a county of numerous small communities and isolated properties.

The consequences for older people in Powys of the extreme rurality include:

- problems accessing information
- problems accessing community care services
- higher costs
- problems for health and care services accessing the older people
- high dependence on private transport
- higher dependence on family and the local community
- limited opportunities for diverse social interaction

- social isolation.

## Promoting and Supporting Healthy and Active Ageing

The inter-relationship of good health and activity for older people is now widely acknowledged. Lack of opportunity and lack of activity can lead to loss of interest and motivation. Older people, like everyone else, need opportunities to do and contribute, not just be passive recipients of services. It is through actions and relationships that we all re-affirm our identities and sense of worth, irrespective of age.

Increasingly, health and social care services have been targeted upon those in greatest need: eligibility criteria with high thresholds of need. The move away from the preventative and supportive 'social' services has had a negative consequence for many older people.

Some service models address the compounding problems of social isolation, reduced opportunities to give and to receive. One excellent example is the 'mobile' day centre, the service that comes to a village near you each week. Centres which are run with the Age Concern ethos of self-help and mutual respect can be characterised by 'volunteers' in their 80s, by activity and by companionship. Some mobile day centres are supported by community transport schemes. The typical driver for a social care scheme is, of course, 'retired'.

## Support when things go wrong

The services which we provide are often very good at promoting dependency: they de-skill people. For example, whilst you are in hospital often you are not 'allowed' to do for yourself things which you can still do. Similarly, when the home carer calls they have not got time to help you to do things, only to do things for you. If you need residential care there must be things which you can no longer do, but this does not mean that there is nothing you can do for yourself.

This poses a major challenge: to change the ethos of our services. The appropriate approach is epitomised by the new Reablement Teams but this approach needs to permeate all of our services.

## The Roles of the Independent Sector

It is generally true that you get what you pay for. Residential and nursing homes are closing all over Wales: seven in Powys in the last twelve months. Often it is the local, small home (which the local person wants) which 'not financially viable' and is the one to close. Unless local authorities can buy care at a price which is realistic for the standards we should expect, care standards may seldom rise above the 'minimum' more homes will close and choice of local homes will continue to diminish.

Voluntary sector initiatives are often innovative, preventative, highly valued: but they can remain 'initiatives' and 'projects' for people who need **services**. Voluntary groups are often expected to magic up matched funding instead of being paid the going rate to provide quality services. However, how can the local authority purchaser prioritise voluntary sector preventative services when they are struggling to fund adequate 'survival' services for the highly dependent?

There is enormous scope for the voluntary sector to fill the void left by local authorities as lack of resources has led them away from preventative work. The voluntary organisations can be good value for money, may be able to use volunteers, indeed may use 'older' volunteers, but they need adequate and secure funding for their contribution.

### Some National Issues

Welfare benefit take-up campaigns in Powys, as elsewhere, continue to highlight the difficulties so many older people are experiencing accessing the benefits to which they are entitled. The 'solution' of voluntary agencies and local authorities employment benefits workers to access benefits that the Benefits Agency should be getting to people requires rethinking.

One of the most appropriate and valued services for older people is equipment provision. This has been well documented in reports such as Fully Equipped and Money Well Spent. Older people are enabled to retain their independence and their dignity. In England, in recognition of this good value for money, considerable additional government funding is being made available for equipment services. There is the same need for additional funding in Wales.

Many older people in Wales live in housing which needs to be renovated, made safer and adapted to meet their needs. The grants available to assist them are not ensuring that older people are getting the help they need, or getting the help quickly enough. The grants system is seen as complicated, the test of resources ignores people's financial commitments and their administration by grants officers with the involvement of social services and agencies is problematic throughout Wales. The system needs reform so that older people can receive appropriate and timely assistance.