



Engage With Age

'Giving a voice, providing a choice'

Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014

4 July 2011

Background – ‘who we are – our history’

Engage With Age origins go back to the 1990’s when studies undertaken in the area of the South & East Belfast Trust (now Belfast Trust) highlighted a number of significant and growing social issues within the older population. These included poor health status, social isolation, low levels of participation in their communities, low usage of local services, and poverty, including fuel poverty.

A number of organisations came together in 1996 to discuss these issues in an inter-agency forum. They developed a shared understanding of the problems and a shared vision of how these issues might be tackled.

A pilot project developed in Castlereagh demonstrated that, using community development approaches with older people increased participation and raised the profile of older people in the community.

Encouraged by this, a partnership of eight organisations came together in October 2000 to form Engage With Age, with a primary focus of working with older people, who for whatever reason were isolated or lonely. The partnership included Age Concern NI (now Age NI); Belfast City Council; Castlereagh Borough Council; Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum; East Belfast Partnership Board; Help the Aged (now Age NI); South & East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust (now Belfast Trust); and South Belfast Partnership Board. Subsequently South Belfast Lifestyle Forum and Belfast East Seniors Forum joined the partnership.

Ten years plus Engage With Age continues to be a strong and effective network of relationships and local partnerships with older people, older peoples groups and forums, community, voluntary and statutory organisations, not only in South and East Belfast and Castlereagh but across Greater Belfast. It has extended its reach through working in partnership with North Belfast Senior’s Forum and Volunteer Now and is committed to further strengthening strategic and operational links.

A focus on isolation and community development principles of justice, equality and mutual respect remain central to its work. The partnership continues to demonstrate its ability to impact on the lives of older people through collective effort, harnessing the wealth of knowledge and experience, by working creatively, by developing new skills and building relationships with key people and organisations.

Engage With Age has a staff of three development officers, an administrator and a manager.

Strategic Drivers – ‘what’s going on around us that has an impact on what we do’

There is a maze of public policies which impact on the lives of older people, generic, age specific and specific policies related to the work of the public sector and voluntary and community sectors. However two key themes have been identified as being most likely to affect the strategic direction of Engage With Age and which will inform our priorities over the coming years. These are:

Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) - Partners include Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Local Commissioning Group, Belfast Healthy Cities, Age NI and the Department of Social Development. This partnership brings together key organisations at the highest level, working together on cross cutting priorities to improve health and well-being through joined up planning, re-engineering and delivery of services across Belfast. Key strategic priorities include loneliness and social isolation, care and repair, joined up communication and capacity building for the age sector to enable older people to stay well and healthy in the community for longer. Additionally, Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) is focusing on life inequalities through three initiatives namely, Active Belfast; Total Place Approach to Alcohol and Drugs and Mental Health.

Partnerships, collaborations and mergers – Current economic challenges, tightening of the public purse and competition for funding is challenging the voluntary and community as to how best to deliver to a high quality with static or reducing funding. While partnership working is not new to the voluntary and community sector, increasingly many are being directed by funders to share resources and develop more formal ways of partnership working including collaborations and mergers. Currently Engage With Age is in discussions with Volunteer Now and North Belfast Senior’s Forum to agree a form of collaborative working which will develop the age sector throughout Belfast and enable more formal joined up working in the future.

Strategic Planning – ‘how we developed this plan’

In 2011 Engage With Age set about reviewing its key priorities and developing a Strategic Plan to March 2014. It set out to concisely define what it intends to do, how it will go about doing it as well as measuring and reporting its success. Grace Henry, Organisational Development Consultant, was commissioned to facilitate this process.

It is important to note that this strategic plan is set out to build upon the priorities developed through the strategic planning process of 2007 when 122 people, 72 of which were older people drawn from the three older peoples forums, participated giving their views on issues relating to older people which established strong foundations for the work of Engage With Age.

In developing this strategy to 2014, an inclusive and participative process was adopted. Representatives from the 3 older people’s forums (South, East and Castlereagh) along with board members and the staff team came together in 3 workshops throughout April and May 2011. In total 27 people participated in this process.

A draft plan was developed based on the thinking generated through the workshops and was subsequently reviewed by a smaller team of forum, board and staff team representatives. After a number of alterations the final draft went to the board for sign off in July 2011.

Vision, Mission and Values – ‘what we want to achieve and how we will work with you’

Engage With Age has a **Vision** of older people in Greater Belfast living their lives to full potential.

Our Mission is to work with others, connecting, developing and creating opportunities for older people to enjoy life, stay well, active and involved, contributing to and influencing the future of their communities.

Our work is underpinned by two key **values** which not only inform what we do but also how we do it.

We put older people at the centre of all that we do, believing in self-determination and the right to make their own choices.

We do this by:

- Actively seeking participation and supporting older people to take part in decision making
- Being inclusive, respecting differences and embracing diversity
- Being person focused, creating energy and fun
- Promoting positive messages about age and older people
- Being empowering, challenging inequalities, promoting fairness and social justice

We are committed to working in partnership, believing in the strength of the contribution of many agencies and people to make a real difference.

We do this by:

- Building strong and enduring relationships
- Being open and honest
- Valuing and respecting all contributions
- Exercising mutual respect
- Sharing and learning from each other
- Being creative, innovative and embracing change

Strategic themes – ‘the things that are important for us to do over the next three years’

Engage With Age is recognised for its practical, locally focused work within communities across South and East Belfast and Castlereagh enabling older people to stay involved and connected, try new experiences, enjoy themselves, have influence and have a say in shaping their everyday life.

We are recognised for our ability to build strong and trusted relationships, for our commitment to working in partnership with other agencies, and for the accessibility of our advice, information, activities and supports.

Everything we do and will continue to do is about ensuring older people, particularly those who for whatever reason feel marginalised, excluded, isolated or alone, have the opportunity to be involved and live life to full potential.

We wish to further strengthen our reach and work with older people across the Greater Belfast area, building even stronger supports and networks. To achieve this we are committed to working in collaboration with two key partners, Volunteer Now and North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum.

We have refocused all that we strive to achieve, under four key strategic themes:-

- **supporting and connecting older people and communities**
- **reducing isolation and loneliness and its impact on health and well being**
- **influencing decisions and contributing to everyday life**
- **working together, developing the organisation and achieving more**

One - supporting and connecting older people and communities

What we mean: Supporting and connecting is about building and maintaining social support networks, relationships and opportunities for older people to meet and interact through existing forums and new groups.

By 2014 we will have:

- One** Increased the range of practical support to older people's groups and forums, strengthened capacity and sustainability.
- Two** Developed and implemented a targeted strategy alongside our partners, identified and addressed gaps in older peoples' social support networks.
- Three** Improved communications so that information on 'what's happening across Greater Belfast' is accessible offering increased opportunities to participate.

Success is: Engage With Age being recognised as a model of excellence enabling better opportunities for older people to stay connected to each other and their communities.

"It's about...learning new skills...finding you can do things you thought you couldn't...remembering things you thought you'd forgot...good craic...singing old songs...making new friends...putting it down on paper side by side, our words our images..."

Quote from a participant in the Side by Side Project, City Way Day Centre, Belfast

Two – reducing isolation and loneliness and its impact on health and well being

What we mean: Reducing isolation and loneliness is about developing opportunities to be meaningfully involved, having access to learning, stimulating and enjoyable activities, being healthier and more active particularly those who feel isolated or lonely.

By 2014 we will have:

- One** Developed initiatives to reach isolated older people and increased access to meaningful activities.
- Two** Increased awareness of causes, effects and solutions to older people's isolation and loneliness.
- Three** Contributed with others to the promotion of physical and mental health.

Success is: Engage With Age and partners have increased older peoples sense of well-being, with older people feeling more connected, less isolated or alone.

"In our club before someone new comes we make sure we welcome them, surround them with the friendship, because if someone comes and they're left to sit on their own then they're not going to come back".

Quote from 'Gazing at the 4 Walls', Voices of older people experiencing social isolation in Belfast, Engage With Age

Three – influencing decisions and contributing to everyday life

What we mean: Influencing and contributing to everyday life is about equality, inclusion and involvement in making decisions that are important to older people and their communities. Older people having their views and opinions heard and having a say in decision making.

By 2014 we will have:

- One** Increased the leadership capacity and confidence among older peoples' groups and forums to influence policy development, political processes and campaign on issues important to them.
- Two** Increased the confidence of older people to have a voice in how local services, particularly statutory services are developed and delivered.
- Three** Promoted positive and realistic messages which challenge the range of negative stereotypes about age and ageing.
- Success is:** Engage With Age being recognised as a key and trusted route to older people, facilitating and supporting access to the wide range of voices.

"I got involved following retirement. I volunteered as it seemed similar to union involvement during work. I got involved with Engage With Age through a fellow group member... speaking for pensioners was important".

Quote from a participant at the Strategic Planning Workshop, Engage With Age

Four – working together, developing the organisation and achieving more

What we mean: Working together, developing the organisation and achieving more is about working with older people, groups, forums, other voluntary and statutory agencies who share our vision; It is about developing trusted relationships, challenging traditional ways of working, exploring innovation and remaining relevant and adaptable in an ever changing world in the belief that the best results are achieved through collective effort.

By 2014 we will have:

- One** Secured sustainable income from statutory organisations and charitable foundations.
- Two** Delivered training and development programmes for our staff team and volunteers, further developing our skill base to deliver on our strategic intentions.
- Three** Reviewed collaborative working with North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum and Volunteer Now. Decided on the most effective approach to supporting older people’s groups and forums across Greater Belfast and aligned our governance and organisational structure accordingly.

Success is: Engage With Age being recognised as having and maintaining good governance, systems, processes and procedures which consistently comply with good practice and being recognised as having contributed to improving the lives of older people across Greater Belfast.

“I joined my group when I became widowed. I have enjoyed learning different things and activities... Through my forum I learned computer skills and recently I have undertaken digital photography. I have been able to inform my group of the grants and events and cross community events”.

Quote from a participant at the Strategic Planning Workshop, Engage With Age

Contact details

East Belfast Network Centre,
55 Templemore Avenue,
Belfast, BT5 4FP

t: 028 9073 5696

e: info@engagewithage.org.uk

w: www.engagewithage.org.uk

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