

# Engage with Age Strategy 2017 – 2020



## Introduction

This photograph represents much that is important for Engage with Age. Pictured are some members of the “Winter Wanderers” - a group that meets once a fortnight to go for walks. They walk routes that everyone is able to go on and they make sure no-one is left out. If a member of the group hasn't been for a few weeks someone usually calls and asks how they are. They get out into the fresh air, exercise and catch up. Some members do other activities, while for others it is the only socialising they can fit their responsibilities. When interviewed, this group said the walks improved their physical and mental health. They talk over problems and share experiences. Sometime the walks end with a shared lunch or a trip to a café. Laurence, who works with Engage with Age and supports this group, is off-camera.

In this strategy, Engage with Age aspires to undertake activities that are sustainable and renewable, authentic and meaningful, with a grass roots impact and which help build neighbourhoods. The older people we work with will be in the driving seat making the decisions, and we will remain in the background, or “off-camera”. We hope to enable this work at a pace that means everyone can join in, and engage groups and communities in a journey in which older people live their lives to their full potential.

The Winter Wanderers and the way they run their group is one example of best practice in community development that Engage with Age aspires to emulate.

# Background to the new strategy

19% (53,530) of Belfast's population is over 60 and this is set to rise to 36% by 2050.

The NI Assembly Research and Information Services Briefing Paper on Health Inequalities shows that life expectancy by parliamentary constituency in Belfast between 2007-2009 was between 72.3-76.6 for males and between 78.4-81.4 for females. Northern Ireland fares poorer than the rest of the UK.

One third of over 60s in Belfast live in ten of the most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in Northern Ireland. An additional 13% live in the 20% most deprived SOAs. 26% of over 60s live in the 20% least deprived SOAs.

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland reported in 2016 that 10% of the population of older people in Ireland (north and south) experiences chronic loneliness. In the 2010 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 58% of people over 55 identify loneliness as the main problem facing older people in Northern Ireland. The impacts of loneliness and isolation on health include cognitive decline, decreases in physical health and some studies compare loneliness to having the same impact as smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

The physical and mental health of older people is rising up the agenda of public health provision. Transforming Your Care and the restructuring of health and social care services is promoting a re-ablement agenda. In the future older people will play an increased role in managing their own health. Physical health in older people is now promoted in tandem with good mental health. An increased emphasis is placed on older people accessing their communities and the available services that assist their wellbeing.

This new Engage with Age strategy sits in a Northern Ireland context in which active ageing is embraced by decision makers, but there is much work to do and many challenges to face.

The Northern Ireland Assembly's commitment to older people is articulated within its Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021. The Northern Ireland Assembly's vision is of "Northern Ireland being an age friendly region in which people, as they get older, are valued and supported to live actively to the fullest potential; with their rights protected and their dignity protected."

Belfast City Council is a leader in the Age Friendly Belfast campaign to champion Belfast as an Age Friendly City and create positive views of ageing, reduce age inequalities and create friendly places to live in. The post of Commissioner for Older People is now into its second appointment and the voluntary and community sector is busy ensuring the profile of older people within the new Programme for Government in Northern Ireland.

Numerous agencies, voluntary organisations and community groups promote the interests of older people. There are an estimated 400 older people's groups across the city and each plays their own part.

# The work of Engage with Age

Since 2000, Engage with Age has taken a community development approach to working with older people. It is a multi-agency organisation with formal partnerships with sector partners and informal partnerships with a wide range of organisations. Engage with Age delivers programmes that enable the creation and maintenance of social relationships, and which also improve health and well-being. Engage with Age seeks to enable older people to fulfil their potential and also enable advocacy so that older people have influence over decisions and inform policy makers.

Engage with Age's most recent focus has delivered programmes in South and East Belfast through individual groups and through three Older People's Forums. The Lottery Funded HOPE programme (Hubs for Older People's Engagement) has created hubs of activities around supported housing facilities. HOPE has directly addressed loneliness and isolation from tenants and non-tenants of these housing associations. Regular research, both in-house and in partnership with Queen's University of Belfast, has brought the experience of older people to decision and policy makers. Engage with Age is currently involved in a research programme with the University of Ulster on the impact of technology for people living with dementia.

The new Engage with Age Strategy 2017-2020 will continue to focus on enabling older people to change their lives and improve their well-being.

# New Strategy Consultation Process

Between June-September 2016 Engage with Age consulted with individuals and groups to help develop this strategy and a new programme. We openly asked what the most important priorities are in undertaking work with older people.

Consultation took place between June – September 2016. It took the form of:

- A facilitated day workshop with Engage with Age staff and trustees exploring future organisational themes. This was attended by 6 staff and 5 Trustees.
- 3 x focus groups held in the Engage with Age Offices. Over the three focus groups we engaged with 19 older people and 15 professionals working in the sector.
- 4 in-situ focus groups were held as follows: Winter Wanderers group in East Belfast; St. John Vianny Club in South Belfast; Harmony Men's Group in North Belfast; Inverary Fold East Belfast. This engaged with 52 older people.
- A survey of 84 older people.

The total number consulted was 181 people. 158 of the people were older people. Many of the older people consulted have experience of isolation and loneliness.

## Focus Group Results

Focus groups and conversations took place at the Engage with Age offices and in other centres. Meetings were attended by representatives of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, the South Belfast Health Forum, Dementia NI and Age NI, among others. Significant numbers of older people participated.

Key issues which arose include:

- Loneliness and friendship
- How to reach the isolated older people
- Access to transport
- The importance of someone calling at your front door
- The need for links within communities and the need to rebuild neighbourhoods
- Ageism is acceptable in society
- Intergenerational work
- Reaching "younger" older people
- Reaching out to minority communities, people with dementia, carers and men
- Technology –positive and also negative comments
- The need to take the time to find out what a person needs.
- One size does not fit all.
- The need to feel safe, confident, and good about yourself.

## Survey Results

“What do older people need or want the most?”



*(word cloud representing the relative popularity of feedback received)*

67 of the 84 surveys stated older people need friendship and company most. Other prominent answers included company, social contact, going out, safety and friendship. Further responses included: activities, stimulation, peer support, warm homes, good transport, to have a laugh, family, new activities, to be independent and good health.

In answer to the question “What kinds of older people should Engage with Age reach out to with its services” there were 101 separate answers.

- 57 (57%) stated lonely or isolated older people
- 12 (12%) stated people with disabilities
- 10 (10%) stated there should be diversity or all kinds of older people

“What contribution can older people make...”



*(word cloud representing the relative popularity of feedback received)*

In answer to “What contribution can older people make in their community”

25% said give experience  
21% said volunteer and get involved  
14% said make friends  
10% said give help and support  
9% said help younger people.

Other answers included: share skills, get involved in cross community activities, and provide stability in someone else’s life.

## **What’s New? Developments from the previous Strategic Plan**

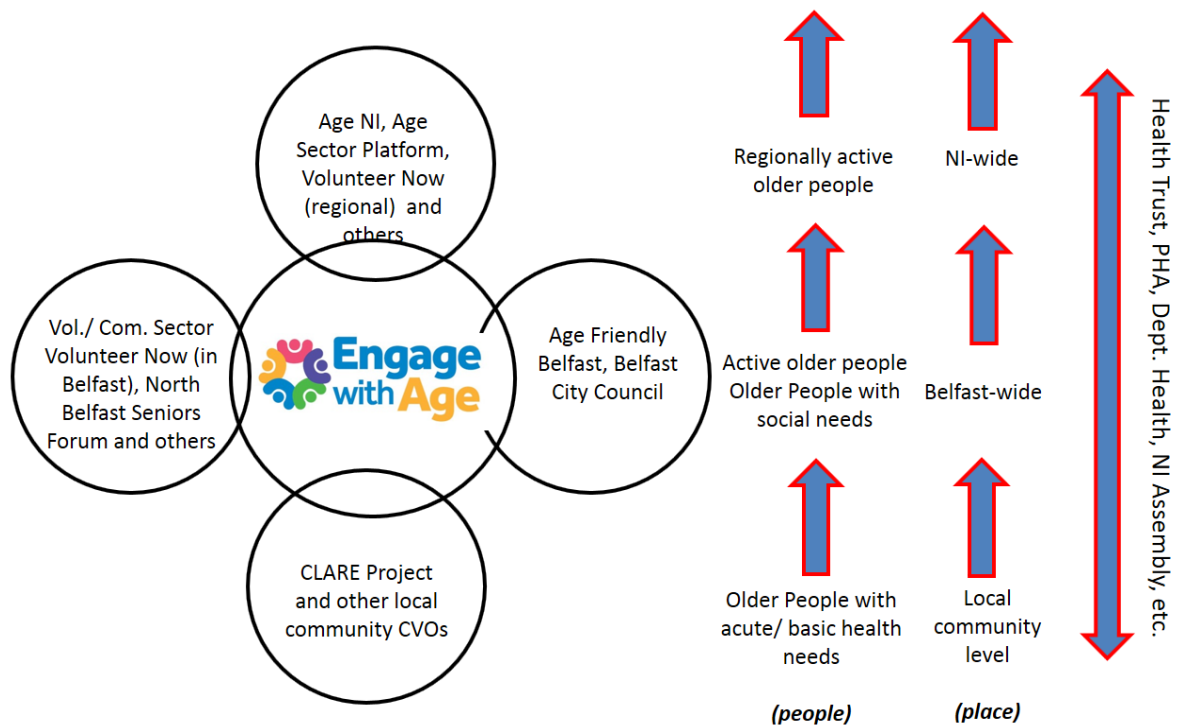
Much of the research and consultations reinforced the value of Engage with Age’s existing strategy and the work of its staff. This will be continued and developed.

This strategy aims to deepen the grass roots nature of Engage with Age’s work, to increase efforts to contact those who are alone or who are out of contact their community and with services, and to continue to develop bonds within communities and help build neighbourhoods. This will mean more feet on the ground and more people knocking on front doors to actively engage older people. At every consultation these priorities and the need for these activities was emphasised by older people, sector workers, decision makers and commissioners of services.

Specific adjustments are made from the previous strategic plan. The former strategic aim concerning partnership is relocated across all of Engage with Age’s work. Partnership working is at the core of Engage with Age’s approach, from our founding document to the way the staff work every day. The former strategic aim to develop the business of the organisation is relocated as a priority in ongoing business plans.

The 2017-2020 strategic plan follows on from the developments of previous plans and work. This strategy for the future is only possible due to the work of staff past and present and the numerous older people Engage with Age works alongside with.

# Engage with Age in the older people's sector



Engage with Age aims to deliver this strategy in ways that complement the work of other partner agencies and organisations, and in ways that strengthen the sector. AS before, partnership will be a key way of working.

# The Engage with Age Strategy 2017-2020

Engage with Age has a vision of older people in Belfast living their lives to the full potential and engaging with their communities and neighbourhoods.

Engage with Age's mission is to work with others creating opportunities for older people to engage with their communities, enjoy life, be healthy, and influence the future of their communities and neighbourhoods.

Engage with Age is committed to working in partnership, complementing the work of other agencies, workers and volunteers, to make a difference to the lives of older people. Using the values at the core of our work, Engage with Age will do the above by:

- Building strong, enduring and appropriate 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:

1. To engage with older people who are isolated or lonely or both.
2. To engage with older peoples for improved physical and mental health.
3. To engage with communities of older people so they become stronger.
4. To engage the voice of older people so it is heard.



# Strategic Objective 1

1. To engage with older people who are isolated or lonely or both.

Engage with Age seeks to reduce isolation and loneliness in older people and its impact on their health and wellbeing.

In furtherance of this, Engage with Age seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1.1 Reduced isolation and loneliness felt by older people.
- 1.2 The development of new and accessible networks and links within communities that impact positively to combat loneliness and isolation.
- 1.3 Greater awareness of the impact of isolation and loneliness within local communities.
- 1.4 Increased numbers of older people actively involved in older people's groups and activities.

To achieve these outcomes, over the next three years Engage with Age will:

- 1a Further develop and implement programmes that reach older people who are isolated, lonely or both.
- 1b Continue to work in partnership to support targeted physical and social activities which contribute to improved health and well-being.
- 1c Develop and implement programmes reaching younger older people.
- 1d Develop and implement volunteering programmes with the capacity to reach and support older people who are isolated, lonely or both.

## Strategic Objective 2

2. To engage with older people to improve physical and mental health

Engage with Age seeks to enable older people to have improved physical and mental health and manage their own health needs.

In furtherance of this, Engage with Age seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- 2.1 Older people have improved physical and mental health.
- 2.2 Older people's groups have increased capacity to deliver activities that have physical and mental health benefits.
- 2.3 Older people have improved access to information and opportunities with the result of improved health and well-being.

To achieve these outcomes, in the next three years Engage with Age will:

- 2a Maintain support of existing groups that require support, and engage with new groups and individuals that haven't access to support.
- 2b Continue to deliver a range of activities that benefit the physical and mental health of older people.
- 2c Introduce a range of new programmes and activities to maintain and develop engagement and benefit health and wellbeing.
- 2d Undertake a programme of training/ sharing skills and resource provision to enable groups to undertake activities that benefit their physical and mental health.
- 2e Promote information and opportunities from other partners that will benefit the physical and mental health of older people in Belfast.

## Strategic Objective 3

3. Engage the communities of older people so they become stronger.

Engage with Age seeks to enable groups and forums to grow and become sustainable so that they can achieve their own aims and make stronger communities and neighbourhoods.

In furtherance of this, Engage with Age seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- 3.1 Increased numbers of older people's groups.
- 3.2 Increased skills, capacity and sustainability within the older people's sector in Belfast.
- 3.3 Older people's forums and networks are stronger.
- 3.4 An increased diversity of people experience improved well-being.

To achieve these outcomes, in the next three years Engage with Age will:

- 3a Grow the number of older people's groups across Belfast and maintain existing groups.
- 3b Deliver community based education, training and capacity building programmes.
- 3c Develop the capacity of the Belfast East Seniors Forum, the South Belfast Lifestyle Forum, and the Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (G6).
- 3d Deliver programmes that reach under-represented communities including BME, older men and people living with dementia.

# Strategic Objective 4

4. Engage the voice of older people so it is heard.

Engage with Age will enable older people to articulate their views, complement the work of other advocates, and will continue to advocate for older people with decision makers.

In furtherance of this, Engage with Age seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- 4.1 Individual older people are better equipped to articulate their perspectives and influence decisions that affect their lives.
- 4.2 Older people's groups have increased capacity and sustainability to articulate their perspectives and influence decisions.
- 4.3 Increased scope and influence of the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum (G6).
- 4.4 Decisions affecting older people are positively influenced by older people.

To achieve these outcomes, in the next three years Engage with Age will:

- 4a Work with individual older people's groups to improve their capacity to articulate their needs.
- 4b Support the Greater Belfast Seniors' Forum (G6) to deliver a lobbying programme that influences decisions that affect the lives of older people in Belfast.
- 4c Undertake a programme of academic research and evaluation that examines issues affecting older people in order to use the findings to influence decisions and systems that affect older people.
- 4d Represent the views of older people at forums that have an impact on their lives.



## Contact Details

For further information contact:

Engage with Age  
East Belfast Network Centre  
55 Templemore Avenue  
Belfast BT5

Telephone 028 9073 5696  
Email [info@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:info@engagewithage.org.uk)  
Website [www.engagewithage.org.uk](http://www.engagewithage.org.uk)