



GREY MATTERS

OUR THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A warm welcome to everyone who joined at our "Marketplace" coffee morning in May. It was good to see so many existing and new members on that day and we are grateful all those who participated, especially the organisations that took part, providing a wide range of helpful information.

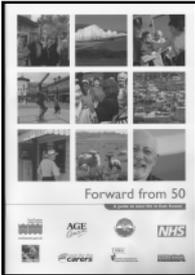
The next event we would like to invite you to will be our third Annual General Meeting, to be held on Monday, September 29th, in the Old Hall at the All Saints Centre, Crowborough. We'll start with a sandwich lunch at 1pm and finish with tea and cakes at 4pm. The main speaker will be Marian Barnes, Professor of Social Policy at Brighton University, (see photo, right) who involves older people in her research into health and social care issues and can help groups such as ours set up their own research projects.

We hope all members will want to come along to hear what she has to say, as well as to find out how our forum has progressed over the past year. By holding the meeting in Crowborough we are hoping that our many members in the Crowborough area will want to come along, but we can provide help for anyone living further afield who needs help with transport.



Please complete the reply slip on the back page to let us know you are coming.

FORWARD FROM 50 - a guide to later life in East Sussex



This invaluable handbook is being launched this month and will be widely available in libraries, information centres, doctors' surgeries, etc. It contains a wealth of information for older people under the headings "Keeping Healthy and Well", "Keeping Safe", "Financial Legal and Housing Matters" and "Dealing with Life Changes", including where to find help if further support is needed.

If you would like to receive a copy of the booklet, ring Social Care Direct on 0845 60 80 191. It is also available in large print, in Braille, on audio tape, on CD and in other languages (in this case allow four weeks for delivery).

INTRODUCING 'PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST'

East Sussex County Council is preparing for a different approach to help for the disabled.

'Putting People First' is a new directive from the Department of Health aimed at personalised care and assistance. It sets out radical changes to the country's social care system, based on individual choice and tailoring services to suit different needs.

Adult Social Care exists to help a range of people who need support in their everyday lives - the introduction of 'Putting People First' will give them more control over the type of assistance they receive and who they receive it from. For instance, some might need assistance in the mornings to get up, washed and dressed, and want a nurse to come into the home to help, or prefer to pay a member of the family to do it.

Either way, the new system is about respecting choices and supporting clients to get the care that is right for them, according to ESCC.

Everyone will get a 'Personal Budget' which is the total amount of money allocated for their care services and support, following assessment of individual need and financial situation. They will then consider their options and decide how to use the budget with as much or as little ESCC support throughout this process as is appropriate.

The government laid out 'Putting People First' in December 2007. The County Council now has three years to fully implement the changes and expects this to be a gradual process, but is already looking at internal systems and processes to make sure they can cope with the changes before introducing Personal Budgets.

Adult Social Care now expects between 20 and 50% of people to opt out of traditional social care services and is anticipating a fall in demand for some council-run services. It plans to work with a range of other people who provide care services in both the voluntary and private sector to develop a more flexible range of services.

For further information, contact Adult Social Care Direct - call 0845 60 80 191



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.wealden-scp.org



EXERCISE IN LEISURE TIME PROLONGS LIFE

A study by researchers at King's College London has shown that people who exercise more in their free time appear to be biologically younger than those who don't.

Scientists studying twins looked for evidence of ageing in the population by analysing telomeres, which cap the end of chromosomes in our cells and protect them from damage.

With age, our telomeres shorten, leaving us more susceptible to cell damage, which causes disease. However, there is considerable variation between people, and recent research has already highlighted several lifestyle factors such as smoking and obesity that are associated with shorter than average telomeres. The scientists found that overall, the difference in telomere length between the most active people and inactive people corresponds to around nine years of ageing.

Physical activity has already been shown to have a major impact on health: frequent exercisers display reduced risk of heart and other health problems. However, despite the known benefits of physical activity, inactivity continues to be a major public health problem, increasing the propensity to age-related diseases and death.

This study suggests that a sedentary lifestyle may diminish life expectancy not only by predisposing to age-related diseases but also because it may influence the ageing process itself.

The investigators recruited 2,401 volunteers from the UK aged 18-81 years onto the study. All completed questionnaires detailing their levels of physical activity during leisure time in the last 12 months, in addition to a wide range of health and lifestyle issues.

The study population was comprised of both identical twins and fraternal twins and it was found that with twins who were raised together but take different amounts of exercise, the telomeres of the more active twin were significantly longer than those of the less active twin.

BEECHWOOD UNIT TO MOVE TO HASTINGS

We have recently learned of proposals to close 16 in-patient beds for patients with mental health problems at the Beechwood Unit at Uckfield Community Hospital as part of plans for a move to community based provision of care. The unit serves patients from across the county, but is the only unit serving people in the North Wealden area. If the beds are closed, patients with mental health problems needing hospital care will go to St Anne's in Hastings.

We are concerned about this because it will mean that some patients with mental health problems may have to go to Hastings, even those from the far north of Wealden. This could potentially create travelling problems for relatives visiting these patients.

A consultation is currently under way and will finish at the end of July.

We really would like to hear from anyone who is likely to be affected by this closure, so that their views can be taken into account. Please contact Ivy Elsey, 01435 863719, ivy@ivywe.eclipse.co.uk or Linda Graham, 01892 770487, lindagraham@wealden-scp.org if this issue affects you or somebody you know.

NEED AN ENTERTAINER FOR YOUR OLDER PEOPLE'S EVENT?



Ring Reg on 01435 863445
(Electronic Keyboard - '30s to '90s music for all functions)

ADULT EDUCATION



Changes in adult and further education mean that many Local Authorities are either having to reduce the number of classes available, or increase the fees for the existing classes, and remove concessions for those over 60. This is in spite of the fact that the Government have increased funding for adult and further education, but the increased funding is being targeted at training designed to improve skills in the workforce, to enable the UK to remain competitive with the emerging economies of China and India. It is however having serious adverse effects on older people who previously enjoyed classes in a wide range of leisure and cultural activities.

The Director General of Age Concern has said that "improved education and training in later life can make a massive difference in terms of career options and health in retirement". The loss of a favourite class can mean a reduction in the quality of life, loss of mental stimulation, loss of social contact and, as many classes involve physical activities, a lack of exercise, which is very important in later life. This could all lead to greater use of the NHS.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills are currently conducting a consultation on Informal Adult Learning - Shaping The Way Ahead.

If these changes have affected you, please let us know, and we will pass on your experiences via this consultation.

JUST EQUAL TREATMENT

Recent research from Help the Aged shows that many people are worried about how society is going to treat them once they turn 65. Many also feel that older people are too often dismissed by the rest of society and are frequently the butt of jokes and disparaging remarks. The daily reality is that age discrimination is still legal: for example, older people can be denied access to medical treatment simply because they're "too old".

Help the Aged are encouraging people of all ages to support their "Just Equal Treatment" campaign by calling 020 7239 1982 or visiting www.helptheaged.org.uk/takeaction

MERGER CONSULTATION

Help the Aged and Age Concern England have entered an extensive consultation process with their partners with a view to merging and creating a new organisation.

A final decision will be made in September and decisions about a name, organisational priorities and other issues connected to the creation of a new charity will be made over the next few months.

Both charities are seeking support and positive feedback from partners, friends and allies. Those affected include 353 Age Concerns in England, Help Age International and the independent Age Concern organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Age Concern England chair Catherine McLoughlin said: "Spending time and energy operating separately no longer makes sense. Instead we intend to pool our talents and resources to ensure older people's needs receive the even greater focus they deserve."

Jo Connell, chair of Help the aged said there had never been "a greater need or a more compelling reason for such an organisation."

"The demands of an ageing society mean that this in-principle decision – which has been taken collaboratively and in partnership – is the right one for older people today and tomorrow. There is an urgent need to protect the human rights of older people as well as ensuring that our ageing society recognises the enormous contribution they make."

OLDER PEOPLE'S VOTING HABITS

A recent survey has confirmed previous surveys, which have found that the propensity to vote directly relates to age. 78% of the age group 65-74 say they will be absolutely certain to vote in the next General Election, whereas only 23% of the age group 18-24 say this. Percentages gradually increase as you get older and then show a slight reduction after age 75.

Perhaps by then we are so disillusioned that we can't be bothered! (Don't forget that anyone can now apply for a Postal Vote - ring 01892 602417).



THE BUDGET

There were no great surprises in this year's Budget. It confirmed many of the announcements in the Pre-Budget Report and did not initially address concerns raised by many organisations about the scrapping of the 10p tax band, a move that hits those earning less than £18,500 the hardest. (Within three weeks, however, the Government performed an abrupt policy about-turn, promising a cash handout to the low-paid to compensate for the doubling of the 10p band.) The little sweeteners at the end for pensioners were the increases in Winter Fuel Allowance, for this year only, of £50 and £100. This will in no way compensate pensioners for the large increases in energy prices that are now working their way through the system. There is no additional help to compensate for increases in Council Tax. This contrasts with generous reductions in Inheritance Tax and special arrangements for non-domiciled millionaires.



The main changes as they affect pensioners are as follows:

The basic State Retirement Pension will increase by about 3.9% from £87.30 per week to £90.70 per week for a single person and from £139.60 per week to £145.05 for a couple.

The age addition for the over 80s will remain at 25 pence per week. Additional pensions will increase by 3.9%.

For this year, the Winter Fuel Payment will increase to £250 for households with someone aged 60 or over and to £400 for households with someone aged 80 or over. It remains to be seen what will happen in future years.

There will be no special payments to help meet the cost of Council Tax or other living expenses.

WOMEN'S STATE PENSIONS

If you are a woman, and you stayed at home to care for children from 1978, are you sure that this has been taken into account when calculating your pension entitlement?

Home Responsibilities Protection, which was introduced in 1978, reduces the number of years of National Insurance Contributions required for a person to be entitled to a State Pension, if they have been unable to pay these contributions because they were caring for a child under 16 years of age. Because women were not required to give their National Insurance Number on Child Benefit claim forms until the year 2000, they may not have been given the benefit of HRP. To find out if you could be entitled to an increase in your State Pension, ring the National Insurance Office on 0845 3021479, quoting your National Insurance Number.

"TAKE A BREAK" SCHEME FOR CARERS

Older carers in particular are not taking full advantage of a scheme that provides direct cash payments to carers.

East Sussex County Council has funding available for carers to relax and enjoy leisure activities such as sports, training, complementary therapies, short breaks or to purchase equipment that will relieve the day to day pressures on the carer.

Most grants are for around £300, and are limited to one grant per carer per year. The grant money is paid directly into the carers' bank accounts, is non-taxable and will not be taken into account for benefit purposes.

"We recognise that carers are doing a fantastic job and they have a right to take time out from caring to pursue their own interests," says Councillor Bill Bentley, lead member for Adult Social Care. "These grants are designed to be flexible to enable a range of activities."

Carer exhaustion has been identified as one factor that sometimes leads to elderly people having to move into long-term residential care after admission to hospital rather than being able to return home with appropriate support in place.

Those eligible for a grant are those caring for an adult aged over 18, who is living in East Sussex and who has been assessed as needing a break from caring.

People should contact their support worker to find out more, or call Social Care Direct on 0845 60 80 191 to ask for an assessment.

WE DO URGE ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY ARE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR A GRANT - THIS MONEY IS AVAILABLE AND THERE'S NO CATCH!



USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS FOR CARERS



OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS

East Sussex County Council Social Care Direct:
0845 60 80 191

Care for the Carers: 01323 738390

Age Concern East Sussex: 01273 476704

Crossroads: 01323 848422

Disability Benefits Enquiry Line: 0800 88 22 00

Navigator Service: 01323 442618

Lifeline (personal alarm system): 01323 644422

Alzheimer's Society: 020 7423 3500

Dementia Helpline (24 hour) 0808 808 3000

Samaritans (24 hour) 08457 90 90 90

NHS Direct: 0845 4647

University of the Third Age (U3A)

National Office: 020 8466 6139

Medicines Information Centre: 020 8321 5880

Diabetes UK Helpline: 0845 120 2960

Sussex Police: 0845 60 70 999

Citizens' Advice Wealden: 01323 842336

Home Improvement Agencies: 01323 441013

National Gas Emergency Service: 0800 111 999

Power cuts: EDF Distribution 0800 783 8866

To report a leak from a water main: 0800 028 339

Adult Social Care Emergency Duty Service:

07699 391462 (outside office hours)

CONTACT US

Mailing List

(If you've received this newsletter in the post, you're already on our mailing list)

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Please add my name to/remove my name from* the Wealden Senior Citizens' Partnership mailing list

EMAIL ADDRESS..... I am happy to receive the newsletter by email Yes/No*

**delete as appropriate*

AGM (see page 1)

Please let us know if you would like to attend our third AGM, to be held in Crowborough on Monday, 29th September

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Please reserve places at the AGM, including lunch and tea. Do you need help with transport? Yes/No

Detach and return this slip to: Linda Graham, Wealden Senior Citizens' Partnership, 5 Rectory Field, Hartfield, TN7 4JE. Enquiries to: 01892 770487, e-mail: lindagraham@wealden-scp.org