

Services for Older People Task and Finish Panel

Thursday 2 November 2006

Briefing Paper – Day Clubs for Older People

Background

1. In 1984, a former employee of Essex County Council's Social Care, set up a Day Club for older people in partnership with Housing Services, at the Council's sheltered housing scheme at Buckhurst Court, Buckhurst Hill.
2. Following the success of this Day Club, it was agreed that the Council would promote the setting up of further Clubs' in its other sheltered housing schemes. This would further ensure that maximum use was being made of the communal lounge and kitchen facilities.
3. Day Clubs are a discretionary service and are run by hard working volunteer organisers and helpers. They are not Day Centres, have no professional carers in attendance and are an opportunity for older people to interact with others and enjoy social activities. Members are assessed in advance by the volunteers and include either tenants or private sector occupiers living locally who are generally housebound and would benefit from a day out. They receive lunch, local transport and refreshments at a nominal charge of between £2.50 & £4 per visit.
4. It is important to note that the Day Clubs were only set up, and can only continue, with the agreement of the majority of the sheltered housing scheme's residents.

Current Situation

5. In 1995, two volunteers from each of the Clubs set up the Epping Forest Day Club Committee, which is a valuable forum where ideas and common problems can be discussed. The Committee meets on a six-monthly basis and is supported by Council officers.
6. The table attached as an appendix to this briefing paper sets out the Social Clubs currently in operation. As can be seen, membership of the Clubs is reducing with only 12 referrals being made to all Clubs during 2005/2006 which is the lowest ever, this is possibly due to older people having more options for socialising. The table also explains the problems being experienced within each of the Clubs in terms of recruiting volunteers and access to transport.

Difficulties with Recruiting Volunteers

7. Although the Task and Finish Panel requested a report on the difficulties being experienced with transporting members to the Day Clubs, the first problem to address is the recruitment of volunteer organisers and helpers without whom the Clubs would not be able to continue. Any new volunteers who come forward are endorsed by VAEF who take up references. As can be seen from the attached table, most of the Clubs appear to have sufficient volunteers at the moment, but, there are concerns that some volunteers are themselves getting older and may not want to continue for very much longer. When they decide to give up their role, new volunteers will be difficult to find and the Clubs may not be able to continue. Indeed, the Day Club at Jubilee Court, Waltham Abbey closed in 2004 due to the lack of volunteers.

8. The Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services), in liaison with the Day Club Committee, has taken action to attempt to recruit new volunteers, including:

- Placing posters in public places
- Advertisements in the Forester magazine
- Articles in the tenants magazine Housing News
- Working with Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF)
- Seeking assistance at the Joint Management Team
- Press releases

9. Experience has shown that potential volunteers are discouraged by increasing demands of Day Club members who, in a minority of cases are not grateful for the work they do. In addition, recent legal requirements such as, health and safety, CRB checks and ethnicity monitoring has placed an un-welcomed burden on volunteers and has resulted in the role becoming a major commitment, often needing a number of hours outside of the Club itself. Volunteers explain that they are also incurring costs due to telephone charges, using their own cars to assist with transport problems (including concerns about insurance for business use) and are needing to undertake time-consuming assessments. It is a reality that those who may have volunteered in the past, now have more opportunities themselves to pursue so many other interests.

Transport

10. As can be seen from the table attached as an appendix to the briefing paper, the Clubs have experienced difficulties with transport. In 1996, the Day Club Committee secured a lottery grant to purchase their own mini-bus. The balance of the grant was used to service the mini-bus and to provide additional funding for taxis. The mini-bus was only used by two of the Clubs due to problems finding volunteer drivers at that time. The Day Club Committee has around £800 of the grant remaining.

11. Any potential volunteer drivers would now be required to pass the "MIDAS" driving test which is very extensive and costs around £30 per test.

12. There appear to be the following options in attempting to solve the problems being experienced with transport:

Option One – Community Transport Scheme

13. Each of the Clubs would need to join the scheme at a cost of £10 each year. They are then charged 70p per mile for the vehicle. The Buckhurst Court Day Club use the scheme at a cost of around £140 per month. The problems with the scheme is that is not affordable and the Community Transport Scheme has too many members with minimal drivers available, which can lead to last minute cancellations.

Hiring of a Mini-bus

14. The cost of hiring a mini-bus privately is around £65 per day plus fuel. This does not include a driver. Therefore, it appears that due to the excessive cost, this is not an option.

Funding for Taxis & Volunteer Expenses

15. Day Club organisers estimate that they would need around £250 per month to fund a sufficient number of taxis for their members. This could be an option but it would need to be funded. Consideration could be given to increasing the charge made to members for attending the Day Clubs, or applying for appropriate grant funding.

Consultation

16. The Day Club Committee has been consulted on this briefing paper. Their comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.