

## **Member Champion for the Over 50s – Annual Report 2023/24**

It has been a privilege to continue in the role of Member Champion for Over 50s during the past year. There have been many challenges with multiple examples of pragmatic resilience in the Over 50s group of residents that have offered great opportunities for me to listen, learn and grow as a Councillor serving all members of the community.

This year it has been my pleasure to make connections with residents at Holsworthy House, a retirement housing complex in my ward. I was first contacted by a resident who had a specific concern and have since been welcomed every 6 weeks or so to enjoy a cup of coffee and chat with residents in their communal lounge, often leaving with a list of queries and casework to take up on their behalf. It's a great way to communicate up to date information from the Council on topics and issues of interest to the residents and a terrific insight into the concerns, worries and good news of those who come along. I would like to make contact in the coming year with other settings across Havering that may benefit from similar visits in my role as Member Champion for Over 50s. I continue to be available at regular Heaton Ward and Harold Hill advice surgeries and I look forward to meeting many more residents there.

The Over 50s Forum continues to be a gathering of dedicated members and guests, with lively discussions and debate to represent, support and advocate for those aged 50 plus and their families, focussing on enhancing the quality of life for members. There continues to be a need for new members and volunteers to take up a managing role, to secure the future of this highly regarded group. I'd like to wish Chair Cliff Reynolds well, as he recuperates from recent ill-health and express my gratitude and thanks to Forum members who have taken up responsibilities and all who attend and contribute to keep these meetings going with understanding, respect and great humour. Details can be found at [havo50forum.org](http://havo50forum.org) and on Facebook 'Havering Over 50s Forum'. Meetings are at the Town Hall every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month between 10.30 and 12.30.

The Council must be prepared to support older residents with the challenges they face. Recent data from various sources including The Office of National Statistics, Age UK and Aegon UK tells us the cost of living crisis is affecting people over 50 in many ways, including:

- **Energy bills**

11.3 million people over 50 in Great Britain had trouble paying their energy bills, and 1.3 million were unable to pay a bill, standing order, or direct debit.

- **Food**  
4.2 million people over 60 have cut back on food or groceries to make ends meet.
- **Retirement savings**  
13% of 50–59-year-olds who are employed have stopped or reduced their contributions to retirement savings.
- **Lifestyle**  
Only 59% of 50–59-year-olds feel confident they can maintain their current lifestyle in a year, which is lower than the UK average of 70%.
- **Day-to-day spending**  
51% of 50–59-year-olds have reduced their day-to-day spending, which is higher than the average of 46% across all age groups.
- **Loneliness and isolation**  
People on a pension may only be able to afford essentials like food, housing, and bills, leaving nothing for leisure or transport.
- **Health and care**  
People aged 50–59 may have a hard time managing multiple health conditions and their care responsibilities.

I'd like to thank Havering's Resident Engagement Team who have continued to reach out to support older residents across the year and specifically during the winter months, conducting welfare calls to Over 70s.

Some outcomes of these calls were:

- 382 people were contacted (or contact attempted)
- 619 referrals were made internally and to partner organisations
- 24 heating systems repaired that were faulty
- 105 outstanding repairs chased
- 30 people expressed their home does not suit their mobility needs
- 32 requested a referral to the aids and adaptations team
- 30 people requested more information regarding the telecare system
- 36 people didn't have a working smoke alarm; details were given to the London Fire Brigade to follow up

- 34 people had security concerns that were referred to the 'handyman' to follow up
- 22 people would consider downsizing or moving to sheltered accommodation
- 55 people affected by the cost-of-living crisis were referred to the COL response team for a benefits entitlement check and pension credits check
- 21 referrals were made to the befriending service
- 51 people expressed interest in finding out about local activities
- 111 people requested a call from the Welfare Reform Team for benefits checks
- 29 people requested more information regarding warm spaces for the winter
- 86 Energy Doctor referrals were made
- 49 declared a sight difficulty that was recorded on Open Housing
- 76 declared a hearing difficulty that was recorded on Open Housing
- 50 people expressed they had difficulty moving round their home
- 98 people used a walking aid (frame, scooter, etc) recorded on Open Housing
- 25 people informed they would not be able to evacuate safely in an emergency and were referred for a home visit check.

The breadth of issues this brought to light exemplifies the range of challenges many older people face. Three key points from this list particularly resonated with me, having received casework over the year specifically linked to sight, hearing or mobility difficulties. The Over 50s Forum has benefitted from professional insight and information from professionals who gave presentations on these topics. I have also been able to signpost to various organisations that offer support and guidance for those living with conditions that impact on quality of life, including charities such as Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB - [rinb.org.uk](http://rinb.org.uk)), The Partially Sighted Society ([partisight.org.uk](http://partisight.org.uk)), Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID - [rnid.org.uk](http://rnid.org.uk)) and Age UK ([ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)).

One group has been particularly helpful about a condition that is often misunderstood but can have a devastating effect on both physical and mental health of sufferers. 'Versus Arthritis' ([versusarthritis.org](http://versusarthritis.org)) is a registered charity that provides a helpline (0800 5200 520) and has a very informative 'online community' where friendly communication, answers to questions, advice and support is available on many different aspects of this condition that affects so many people. It is estimated that 43% of people aged 55 - 64 experience chronic pain and this rises to 53% in over 75s. There is currently a campaign to ask the Prime Minister to 'take arthritis seriously' with an open letter to sign on behalf of those already living with the condition and millions more who will be diagnosed in the years ahead. It can be found at [action.versusarthritis.org](http://action.versusarthritis.org)

Over 50s face the complex interaction of health, financial, and social challenges. Addressing these requires coordinated efforts and Havering Council must be at the forefront in leading policies and strategies to improve housing, social and healthcare access, combat ageism and foster inclusive communities that support healthy aging and social engagement. Many more organisations do so much to help. With a significant issue raising funds during the cost of living crisis, I urge everyone to support a chosen health and wellbeing related voluntary group or charity if and when you can, however big or small.

Once again, I would like to thank the many residents, Council officers, Over 50s Forum members and community volunteers who have shared insight and wisdom that has supported my work in the role as Member Champion for Over 50s this year. Our local communities are at their best when supporting each other and the dedicated leaders of local groups and activities aimed at helping older people are a credit and very much appreciated asset across our borough.

We are fortunate to live in an area with so many parks, open spaces and places celebrating Havering's heritage and culture right on our doorstep. I will close this report by wishing all good health, peace and safety to enjoy these in the coming year and to quote Franz Kafka, "Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old."

Mandy

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