

The Ascot Project

Improving the Quality of Life of Older People in Ascot

The Ascot Project Relaunch

Initiated in 2001 to improve services for older people (see History overleaf), the Ascot Project has now been re-launched.

The Project was influential in the formation of the Single Point of Contact team that has now been established by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It also contributed to the work on falls prevention across East Berkshire.

The Project is supported by a Panel of (largely) older people. This held its second meeting in September 2003 to discuss four main areas of work: transport; leisure and education; information and support in the community.

More than thirty people attended and the conclusions of each of the focus groups are presented overleaf.

The Panel learnt that (in 2001), there were 1,355 people over the age of 75 living in the area covered by the wards of Sunninghill and South Ascot, Ascot and Cheapside, and Sunningdale.

There are also around 1400 people in the three wards providing voluntary care to family, friends or neighbours. The majority of these carers will be older people themselves, or will be caring for older people.

One of the key messages from the Panel meeting

was that The Ascot Project needs to be grounded in a clear understanding of the needs and wants of older people. This will require some fairly sophisticated market research which will now be designed by the steering group (with help from others).

Leadership of the Project has been transferred to the Chandler Day Centre, under the guidance of a small steering group, comprising David Hilton, June Martin, Judith Davies and Margaret Simmons-Hodge. They are supported for two days each month by Graham Box, thanks to some short-term funding from Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead PCT.

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Key points

- Older people are living longer, and staying healthy for longer
- The Ascot area has around 1400 people who are over 75
- Communication is critical to improving the quality of life of older people

Communities for all

The keynote speaker at the second Panel meeting was Dr Chris Foote. He reminded the Panel that we are living longer, and we are staying healthy for longer. So there is much good news.

Dr Foote contrasted the inevitable rationing of

services that are delivered by the NHS and local government with the vast and less developed resource of those that live in the community. His message was that major health gains in the elderly can result from lifestyle changes (although these cannot be forced upon the individual).

Equally, the development of local communities can reduce the number of older people who go into hospital unnecessarily.

To work in Ascot this model requires a clear locally developed vision, to which people enjoy contributing.

Focus Group Priorities

The Ascot Panel focus groups recommended the following actions:

Transport

- Publicise the taxi voucher scheme to increase uptake among those most in need
- Recruit more volunteer drivers to support the work of the Ascot Volunteer Bureau
- Consult with local bus operators to explore alternative services

Information

- Use existing channels, including parish newsletters and websites
- Produce a directory of services and activities that are relevant to older people in Ascot
- Recognise the value of word of mouth in recruiting volunteers

Community support

- Establish strong links with existing local organizations eg churches, local politicians, parish councils etc
- Consider a “street warden” scheme, along the lines of Neighbourhood Watch, whose role is to keep an eye on vulnerable older people

Education and leisure

- Explore the establishment of a local University of the Third Age
- Understand provision outside Ascot eg in Bracknell or Camberley.
- Help to publicise RBWM’s SMILE initiative (So Much Improvement with a Little Exercise)

The steering group will take responsibility for these actions, and will reconvene the focus groups as necessary. The Panel as a whole will meet again in six months to review the progress that has been made.

Other key messages from the Panel were:

- A comprehensive survey is needed to clarify what older people in the Ascot area would like.
- New initiatives should not be too ambitious: piloting in a single ward will often be wise
- Contact details for Panel members should be shared
- The steering group needs to define the geographical scope of The Ascot Project.

Can you help?

The Ascot Project now has some clear tasks to undertake. Many of these will require support from outside the steering group.

In particular, we would love to hear from anyone with a marketing background to help us to clarify the needs of older people in Ascot. Equally, please let us know if you are able to offer some time to serve as a volunteer

car driver or to assist in website design.

“Older people have the time, drive, experience and skills to play the most important role in community development.”

Dr Chris Foote

Finally, if anyone has an academic background, there may well be an opportunity to design a research proposal based around older people in Ascot. This would provide additional support to older people. It would also help to evaluate the various changes in health, social and other services that are currently taking place.

Please see the contact details below if you are interested in these areas.

The Ascot Project—A brief history

The Ascot Project was conceived in February 2001. Its purpose was to consider how the various agencies could work together more effectively to support older people in the Ascot area.

Short-term funding (9 months) was secured for a half-time project manager, Joan Simmons. By the end of that period, a steering group had been formed together with a Panel of interested local citizens. Together with

other methods of consultation, these identified a series of priorities:

1. More accessible information
2. Local day assessment/treatment
3. Greater focus on prevention
4. Improved transport
5. Better support for carers
6. More leisure and education opportunities for older people.

After a short break in activity while further funding was identified, a new steering group was formed. This operates under the umbrella of the Chandler Day Centre.

The steering group, supported by the Panel and the local community (and with good links to the statutory sector), is now responsible for addressing these priorities. Progress will be reported in regular newsletters.