

Devon County Council

LinkAge Plus

Senior Council for Devon

The Senior Council for Devon (SCfD) is a network consisting of local associations of people aged 50 plus, across Devon, designed to engage with public service providers to improve the lives of older people.

Senior Council for Devon

Objective

To establish the SCfD which will have the following features and functions:

- a network of associations of people aged 50 plus and of individuals in each of the 29 community planning areas of the County;
- the fullest possible scope of membership from among organisations of (and for) people aged 50 and over in each community planning area;
- federal arrangements at District Council and County Council levels;
- additional routes for the representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and other minority groups of people aged 50 plus, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gendered people at District and County levels;
- an established constitution in accordance with best practice and the vision statement;
- the capacity and skills to deliver the described functions;
- minimum of 800 members.

Activity

A Joint Commissioning Group (Devon County Council (DCC) and Action Group In Later Life (AGILE)) oversaw work by Peter Fletcher Associates (PFA).

- Older people were invited to discuss the proposal and how a senior council could work.
- Local meetings and LinkAge Plus-sponsored events raised awareness and involvement.
- Older people established a set of priorities through discussion at local meetings, later confirmed at a County-wide conference.
- Representatives of local groups approved a constitution and the legal form of a Company Limited by Guarantee.
- Additional direct discussions with groups and representatives of minority groups among people aged 50 plus.

Achievements against objectives

- Groups have been established in 27 areas.
- Over 800 older people and organisations have joined.
- The County level federal arrangement is in place. The local groups elect representatives to the Assembly and this elects the Board which is the legal entity of the Council. Direct discussions with groups representing BME and other minority groups have established how these groups wish to be engaged with the SCfD – in general not through additional routes as we first thought.
- The SCfD has taken its place as the County's Older People's Advisory Group (OPAG).

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- Specific local conditions arising from outstanding Local Government Reorganisation decisions, re-structuring of Devon's previous six PCT's into one, plus amalgamation discussions for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) in the County made it difficult to progress our ambition for District level federal arrangements within the timescale of the pilot. Instead, local groups will cooperate in whatever groupings are required.
 - Work is continuing on building capacity and skills.

Wider achievements

Since its inauguration in March 2008:

- SCfD has been represented at a countywide strategic partnership conference, explaining its aims and encouraging wider partnership working.
- Exeter City and the District Councils, LSP's and town councils are beginning to approach the SCfD for involvement in planning.
- The Devon Primary Care Trust (PCT) has expressed its support and is jointly sponsoring the SCfD with DCC.
- The SCfD made its own submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into services for older people.
- The SCfD is influencing work at a local level (e.g. Adult Education in Axminster), co-operating in developing the County's first strategy for older people, is enthusiastically progressing trans-generational work with the Youth Parliament, and is actively working to improve older people's access to information.

Resources

The development contract was let at £200,000 over two years with an additional sum for further work with 'hard to reach' groups.

The SCfD budget has been agreed at a figure in excess of £150,000 for each of three initial years, to be reviewed in the light of experience.

Key lessons learned

- We found that positive enablers of this type of development include:
 - a positive and clear vision of the purpose at the outset;
 - public declaration of long term commitment, beyond the LAP pilot timeframe - when funding for the SCfD (by the County Council and Devon PCT) was announced, recruitment accelerated;
 - the conference, 'Everyone's Tomorrow' on 1 October 2007 created a sense of momentum – older people felt genuine involvement in practically focussed activity on the day, and a sense of optimism grew.

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- Other things we think would help in other developments:
 - a longer timescale - the two year target was testing for all parties;
 - clarity and a higher national profile about national expectations of the model to be adopted;
 - older people did not recognise '*Better Government for Older People*';
 - a wider range of older people can in theory be involved through organisations they choose to be members of, and there are disadvantages in trying to establish a new membership organisation, but it is difficult to marry individual and group membership in the same organisation. The Government's citizen involvement agenda requires individual involvement; a resolution is needed over a period of experience.
 - Tendering (a legal requirement) and a contractual approach makes a difference to this type of work.
 - The tender was won by an independent consultancy from elsewhere in the County (Peter Fletcher Associates - PFA). We picked up traces of local resentment on the part of some voluntary sector interests which may have inhibited the development of the SCfD in certain areas.
 - We have gained much from the undoubted expertise of the contractors. However, we feel that separating expertise from development within the tendering process could have given greater value.
 - AGILE were given the status of co-commissioners of this work. We would recommend this. However, the development was a complex process which some older people who were involved found confusing, and in some cases there was a sense of loss as more older people became involved and distress when processes seemed beyond their control and the differences between the existing model of engagement and the new one became apparent. Time (in a very short timescale) and opportunity to provide specific development support to them for involvement in this complex task may have been beneficial.

Further information

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Related documents

'Everyone's Tomorrow' report of the 1 October Conference <http://www.devon.gov.uk/everyones-tomorrow.pdf>