

ANNUAL REPORT

2009 - 2010

1 INTRODUCTION

ESPOPF celebrates its 10th birthday this year. The Forum was established in 2000 to consult with older people in the southern parishes of Eastleigh Borough; to promote their interests with statutory authorities and voluntary bodies; to respond to their needs; to draw the attention of the public to their concerns. During this time, ESPOPF has succeeded in attracting not only over 3,500 members, who have had the opportunity to contribute to the work and finances of the forum, but also the support of many organisations and individuals. We wish to record our appreciation of those who have joined us in enhancing the profile, potential and performance of older people far beyond Eastleigh, establishing us truly as *a force to be reckoned with* and *the authentic voice of older people*. Our main aim has always been to give older people a *voice* and who would deny that we have achieved that aim? Our research, in particular, has been welcomed and praised by all who have recognised the urgent need to enable older people to maintain their independence and wellbeing in age-friendly communities. It is regrettable that we have had more success in persuading others of older people's needs, rather than our own Borough councillors, where involving local people in the planning and delivery of services hardly ever happens.

2 MEMBERSHIP

ESPOPF members are over-55's, who live in the six southern parishes which comprise about half of Eastleigh borough. About one quarter of older people in our catchment area are members. We have a database of 2,411 addresses to which our Newsletter is sent. We now have approximately 3,200 members, of whom 311 are subscribing members. Our membership year runs from AGM to AGM. We also have 100 members in our 100 Club, which runs for the calendar year.

3 COMMITTEE

We began the year with 12 full and 3 co-opted members on our hard-working Committee, which has met 11 times with an average attendance of 10.3 members. Our officers were re-elected and deserve special thanks. Committee members decide policy and ensure the smooth running of the Forum by undertaking necessary tasks. They also represent ESPOPF at meetings and conferences. They are offered out-of-pocket travel expenses. Shirley Driscoll, Jean Huggett and Jean Purchase resigned during the year and we co-opted Judith Cam, our Consultation Officer, from Hound, and Susan Moody, from Botley. We have continued to enjoy meetings in the Conference Room of the Drug Safety Research Unit (DSRU) at Bursledon Hall. We were delighted when Eastleigh Volunteer Bureau provided us with a volunteer assistant secretary, Michelle Rice. Patrick Fowler and Sheena Ibbes from First Wessex Housing Association with Julie Bowering, the occupational therapist from Eastleigh's Housing Department, Jane Mielniczek, the newly-appointed, HCC Wellbeing Development Worker and Richard Strong, Chair of the Gosport OPF visited the Committee during the year.

4 NEWSLETTER AND WEBSITE (www.espopf.org)

Our Newsletter continues to attract favourable comment. However, Hampshire Adult Services declined to renew the annual grant they had been awarding us since our inception. Apparently, the Local Government Act prevents local authorities from giving financial support to organisations that, by criticising the ruling party of a council - as we did over the travel tokens fiasco - appear to be persuading the electorate not to vote for that party! What has happened, we asked, to free speech, and would the outcome have been the same if *flattering* remarks about a political party had been published? It is unfortunate that, by taking up the cause of the frail elderly and disabled, who have been deprived of travel tokens, we have had to forego grants from our local councils or agree to be *gagged*. However, we were pleased to accept a grant from the independent Hampshire & I.O.W Community Foundation (HWCF), which has contributed to the six issues of the Newsletter that have been distributed this year. We purchased a franking machine, thanks to Bonhomie, to cut the rising costs of postage. We acknowledge the contribution of many people towards the production and distribution of the Newsletter, especially Margaret Phippard and the residents of Hamble Side Court.

The Newsletter is published on our Website, which also contains our research, newsletters and everything about ESPOPF activities and campaigns. David Andrewes, our webmaster, manages the website. Since 2008, we have had 1,500 visitors to the site from all over the world, reading 7,000 pages. Every ESPOPF talk at a conference stimulates large numbers of *hits*.

5 OPEN MEETINGS

We have been very pleased to greet West End members at our new venue, the Hilldene Centre in West End, where the Community Association has made us very welcome, even to introducing internet connections in time for our Silver Surfer sessions. The local Mojo Cafe has supplied *home-cooked* lunches to a very high standard. The Botley Homecare Bus provided transport. The Home Information Support Project (HISP) offers information and advice. Diane Rodaway continues to lead her popular Extend exercises. Our Raffles are well supported and contribute substantially to our fund-raising; we also have the draw for our 100 Club. The Hamble branch of the RNLI and the local branch of Save the Children Fund brought stalls for Christmas shopping in November. Unfortunately, we were forced to cancel our January meeting because of the inclement weather.

The 5 Open Meetings have had an average attendance of 70 members. The highlights have included Community and Health Information/ Networking Days; talks about Tax Advice, the Home Information Project (HISP) and Financial Abuse; a workshop on hospital experience with the Patient Experience officer and a Matron from Southampton University Hospitals Trust. We arranged focus groups for our research, Silver Surfer appointments for computer novices, and a game intended to discover patients' feelings about computerised patient records and confidentiality issues. Our highest attendance (132) was for our very successful Hustings prior to the General Election, when we welcomed all the Parliamentary candidates. We have been very glad to welcome the service providers and organisers of community activities who attend our information meetings.

Our Open Meetings are working meetings, providing a sounding board for concerns, and opportunities for giving, receiving and sharing information. The food, exercises and socialising are bonuses. We should like to organise more light-hearted activities as well, but do not have the time or resources.

The Hilldene Centre, previously the village school, offers us unrivalled facilities and hospitality, which allow us to provide workshops and exercises in the mornings, in addition to forums in the afternoon. We are still striving to ensure that our sound system is the best possible and we look forward to the day when the ambitious plans to refurbish the kitchen facilities come to fruition.

6 RESEARCH

This year, a new team of 13 ESPOPF members came together to research *Information for Older People*. Of course, all our members have the opportunity to participate in our research and we thank the 646+ members who were involved this year. We have been shocked to discover how difficult it is for older people, especially those with hearing and sight impairments, to access the information they need, when they need it. They are left, literally and metaphorically, *in the dark*. We must now inform the information providers that their services are not reaching the people who need them: that they must research and respond to consumer needs and work together to provide an accessible and relevant supply of information to those whose independence relies on it. The supply of corporate information by Hampshire County Council, for instance, is big business consuming valuable resources, some of which could surely be diverted to providing a comprehensive network of staffed and more effective local information *hubs* to serve local people, especially those in rural and semi-rural areas.

Members have been invited to speak at numerous national conferences and meetings in London and Hampshire, and to lead a seminar at the University of Ireland's Centre for Social Gerontology in Galway. Our ground-breaking research continues to impress policy makers, and presentations about it are in demand. There seems to be a growing interest from academic institutions in training older people in research method, and there is a funding condition now, that all research on older people must involve older people, to ensure that it is grounded in older people's experience. Is this acceptance of the Forums' mantra: *nothing about us without us*? Diane Andrewes has joined an Older People's Reference Group for the *New Dynamics of Ageing* Research Programme, which consists of 32 research projects across research councils. The main task of the reference group is to monitor the research to ensure its benefit to older people; individual members are able to develop an interest in specific projects. It provides a wonderful opportunity to meet with other older people from across the country, who are interested in research, as well as keeping tabs on major research projects across the country. David Andrewes joined the British Society of Gerontologists and presented a paper at their annual conference at Brunel University on "*In the Dark*", the title of the report on our Information research.

"*Bleak Housing*", our housing research (2007), coupled with our *Age-Friendly Action Plan* (2009), continues to attract attention from policy makers. However, the most visited research on our website is "*Pills and Perils*" (2008), our study of prescription drugs, which has featured as an example of best practice in a recent Government Office of the South East (GOSE) report on the effectiveness of engagement and empowerment of older people's groups in the South East. "*In the Dark*" was part funded by the Equality & Human Rights Commission. It was launched on July 20.

7 CONSULTATIONS

ESPOPF was overwhelmed with consultation requests last year and our Consultation Officer recorded that, despite our very serious attention to the issues, our willingness to be involved and to share our concerns, we have received almost no satisfactory responses: cursory thanks, perhaps, but the issues and concerns we raise are not addressed in the strategies or reports which follow. The Committee, left wondering whether anything changes as the result of our time-consuming work, agreed that a more selective approach to consultations should be adopted in future. Recent consultations have included: *Hampshire Fire & Rescue Plan*; Department of Health: *GP Choice*; Age UK: *Improving Local Services for Older People: the value and impact of local plans and assessment processes*; Home Office: *Raising the age for jury service*; HCC: *Engagement*.

8 PARTNERSHIPS

We nominated our Chair, Patience Sambrook, to be first Chair of the Hampshire Association of Older People's Forums and we hope to work through the Association to engage with Hampshire County Council and increase our involvement in planning services. Also, Patience has just retired as founder Chair of our Hamble Valley U3A, for whose huge success she must take much credit.

We have been disappointed so far by the merger of Help the Aged and Age Concern and we miss the active support given to forums to influence local councils, under the *Speaking Up for Our Age* programme of Help the Aged. We believe that Age UK, like many local authorities, has not accepted the new agenda of supporting and assisting the *independence and contribution* of older people, rather than portraying them as helpless victims dependent on charity and the provision of residential care.

We have continued to work with Hampshire County Council on safeguarding older people, and we have given evidence to their Scrutiny reviews on Engagement and Age-proofing services. Transport is a crucial factor in the wellbeing of older people and we cannot understand the unwillingness of the County to involve us on local transport plans and to listen to what we have to say on other transport matters. We continue our cordial relationship with EBC's Housing Officers. We are pleased to be involved with the NHS Eastleigh Southern Parishes Practice-based Commissioning Group and the Community Innovations and Rehabilitation (ESPRIT) teams. We send representatives to the Local Area Community Safety Action Groups. We have continued to work with First Wessex Housing Association on the phased refurbishment of older people's bungalows and with Saxon Weald on the new Rotary Court development at Netley. We have attended Regional conferences this year.

9 CAMPAIGNING ISSUES

Our Age-Friendly Action Plan (AFAP), launched last year and hailed elsewhere across the country this year as a blue print for Lifetime Neighbourhoods, advocates a joined-up approach to providing the services and activities needed by older people in villages. After its rejection by Eastleigh Borough Council, it was later amended and adopted as the BHH Area Committee's Older People's Plan! Meetings are being held with the Local Area Co-ordinator to monitor its implementation. We have presented our AFAP to all our parish councils to involve them in the adoption and implementation of it, as part of their Parish Plans. We understand that ACRE, the rural development organisation, is also interested in this. Our members have discussed their own priorities, such as the need for timely availability of information.

The long wait for assessments for and installations of disability adaptations is very unsatisfactory. Such adaptations make all the difference to older people, enabling them to stay put rather than move to residential care. They are even more essential given the current shortage of lifetime housing options. We remain concerned about the following issues: long waits for physiotherapy; charges in extra-care accommodation; lack of direct bus services to Eastleigh, public lavatories, and user-friendly opportunities for would-be silver surfers; senior playgrounds. On the horizon looms the proposed disappearance of cheques. There is no shortage of issues on which to campaign, many of which arise from case work with members.

10 THANKS

Geraldine Windeatt, Bookings Manager, and Brian Trotter, caretaker, at the Hildene Centre have been incredibly helpful. Botley Neighbour Care has supplied their bus and volunteer drivers for our Open Meetings. We thank organisations which have given us grants and the DSRU for free use of their facilities for our committee meetings. Jane Mielniczek has helped with funding our research. All the speakers, HISP staff and Diane Rodaway with her exercises have *made* our Open Meetings. Our subscribing members, 100 Club members and those who bring raffle prizes, buy raffle tickets and give donations keep us solvent. Last, but not least, we thank our many active and willing members, who take on necessary jobs for the benefit of all.

11 CONCLUSIONS

The new government has made a good start in restoring the pensions link with earnings, prices, or 2.5%, whichever is higher, but pensioners will receive only £1.45 a week more than under the old system. The National Pensioners Convention says that it would have been fairer to raise the pension substantially and then restore the link. By setting up a Commission to deal with Personal Care, the Government has failed to grapple immediately with the issue which most worries older people. We all wait with bated breath to see how the threatened cuts in public services will impact on older people, their children and grandchildren.

We, ourselves, have become increasingly disillusioned with local democracy. At the beginning of the year, we reported that the Standards Board had not upheld our Secretary's complaint against the Leader of Eastleigh Borough Council: that he had not treated her with respect at the Council meeting she attended to plead for the reinstatement of the concessionary travel tokens on behalf of ESPOPF. *Treating others with respect* is in the Code of Conduct for Councillors. Apparently, the witnesses, who were, in the main, councillors and officers, unsurprisingly, were not able to remember the exact words that were spoken. The Petition we raised across the borough of over 2,000 signatures calling for the re-instatement of the travel tokens was ignored by the Council. Only Hamble le Rice Parish Council, by introducing its own travel token scheme, responded positively to the pleas of their older residents. We salute those Councillors and record our real appreciation of their action.

However, on June 10, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) reported on the Travel Token issue, following our complaints against Eastleigh Borough Council. She found maladministration causing injustice and she has upheld our complaints. Her Report states:

“To put matters right I recommend that the Council should:

- ***“revisit the decision regarding the discontinuation of travel tokens as soon as possible, following appropriate consultation ...***
- ***ensure that, in future, it has due regard to its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act ...***
- ***apologise to Mr and Mrs Wilson (a married couple who also complained) and pay them £100 ...***
- ***apologise to ESPOPF for its lost opportunity (to consult) and for the time and trouble that the poor complaint-handling caused.”***

More details of the LGO's investigation and Report will appear in the September issue of the Newsletter and the Report is already available to internet users on our website: www.espopf.org.

So, ESPOPF ends the year vindicated in its efforts over two years to defend the frail elderly and disabled in Eastleigh from injustice and to ensure their equal treatment under the law. We hope we shall see the restoration of travel tokens and we thank everyone, especially members of the Borough-wide *Save Our Travel Tokens* campaign, who joined us to fight the good fight.

We shall continue our efforts to represent older people in the Borough with renewed vigour, and we look forward to working closely with the Council to achieve our vision of an age-friendly Borough.

ESPOPF OFFICERS 2009/10

**Chair: Patience Sambrook Vice Chair: Jackie Charles Hon. Secretary: Diane Andrewes
Hon. Treasurer: Betty Lawrence Webmaster: David Andrewes Consultations: Judith Cam**

NOTES TO THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2009-2010

- 1 Fixed assets: franking machine, laptop, projector, microphones, dictaphone, flip-chart**
- 2 Reduced interest due to lower deposit balance and low interest rate.**
- 3 No local authority grants this year.**
- 4 Newsletter stamps purchased 2008/9: no purchases in 2009/10**
- 5 HWCF: Hampshire & IOW Community Fund ; EHRC: Equality & Human Rights Commission**