



**Quality of Life for People Over 50
Residents and Voluntary Sector Discussion**

Tuesday 27 April 2010

EpiCentre, Leytonstone

FEEDBACK REPORT

Overview

This report presents the findings from the Quality of Life for People Over 50's residents and voluntary sector discussion that took place on the 27 March 2010 at the EpiCentre in Leytonstone.

The Council and its partners, Age Concern Waltham Forest and NHS Waltham Forest, facilitated the event. Attendees had been invited through Age Concern Waltham Forest's local mailing list, with an invitation being both mailed out and advertised on Age Concern Waltham Forest's website. Over 40 people attended the event and this included local residents and representatives from voluntary organisations.

The event provided an opportunity for attendees to find out about the Quality of Life for People Over 50's strategy that is currently being developed in Waltham Forest and to engage in more detailed discussions around the key ideas that have been used to inform the developing strategy. There was also the opportunity for attendees to engage in a question and answer session with the Director of Adult Social Care, Alan Adams.

The attendees were divided into groups. Each group had been assigned two key themes from the Quality of Life Strategy to discuss in more detail. Discussions on each theme lasted 30 minutes and facilitators from the Council and NHS Waltham Forest recorded the results. This report draws on the key findings identified in these discussions and which was fed back to the group at the end of the event.

Background

The Quality of Life for Over 50's strategy is the follow-up document to 'Age is just a number'. This was the Council's previous policy for improving the quality of life for older people in the borough. However feedback from the Audit Commission on our performance suggested that older people's (including vulnerable older people) aspirations and needs were hard to trace within corporate strategies and priorities; the council lacked a co-ordinated approach with partners to commission and deliver services and that improved outcomes were limited and unclear.

There is also a need to develop a policy that reflects the changing priorities within Adult Social Care that are continuing at both the local and the national level. These changes centre on delivering the Government's Putting People First Personalisation agenda and Adult Social Care's Transformation programme. The aims of these programmes are to maintain the independence, good health and wellbeing of older people by making a strategic shift towards prevention and early intervention.

We also wish to make Waltham Forest a borough in which people can thrive as they age. This can be achieved through ensuring there are activities and opportunities available to older people, that information and services is centred around people's requirements and that the public environment is inviting and accessible to the needs of older people.

The other challenge that must be considered is the economic context that all public service providers must work within. It is likely that there will be spending restraints in the future and decisions must be made on the type of service that the Council and its partners should provide. The consultation events are part of the process of developing an understanding of what is important to our residents so that we can direct our resources to the areas that will have the greatest impact on resident's quality of life.

The changing face of Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest's over 50s population is growing and changing. Similar to the rest of London, the borough has quite a young population compared to the national average (26% are over 50 in Waltham Forest compared to 34% of the population across the UK). However it is expected to increase in Waltham Forest to 37% by 2031. This would equate to 80,000 people over the age of 50 in the borough, an increase of 21,000 in 20 years.

It is also likely that the older population will become increasingly ethnically diverse with approximately 42% of all people over 50 coming from a minority ethnic background by 2031.

Currently almost 50% of people aged over 75 live alone in Waltham Forest, whilst 30% of all over 75s live in socially rented accommodation. Thermal comfort has been one of the major challenges for older people in the borough and, at the time of the 2001 census, 17% of over 50s in the borough did not have central heating.

Typically less than 20% of older people actually use social care services. It is important to recognise this majority that do not require acute services and the increased focus that is being placed on preventative strategies reflects this. With the pressures that an increasingly ageing population can put on service provision it is particularly important that we provide an "age-friendly" environment where older people can remain healthy and independent, whilst ensuring that we are still able to identify and provide services for those most in need.

To take such an holistic approach to the needs of people over 50 requires moving away from the traditional model of centring a strategy in one service area and instead requires an approach that cuts across all Council services and draws partner organisations together to think about the most appropriate way services could be delivered.

What does it mean to be over 50?

If we are serious about delivering a quality of life strategy then it is essential that the Council and its partners gain a perspective on what residents find important. In order to begin to understand this we asked the question: **what does being over 50 mean to you?**

Asking people what they associate with being over 50 provides the opportunity to check whether the strategy in development aligns with the key issues identified by our residents.

The Exercise

At the start of the workshops the facilitators asked their group to split into pairs and spend a few minutes discussing the question: what does being over 50 mean to you? This question was then discussed in the group and the facilitators took note of the key phrases, issues and values that were raised. The facilitators were instructed to only intervene with questions in order to generate discussion among the group.

Responses

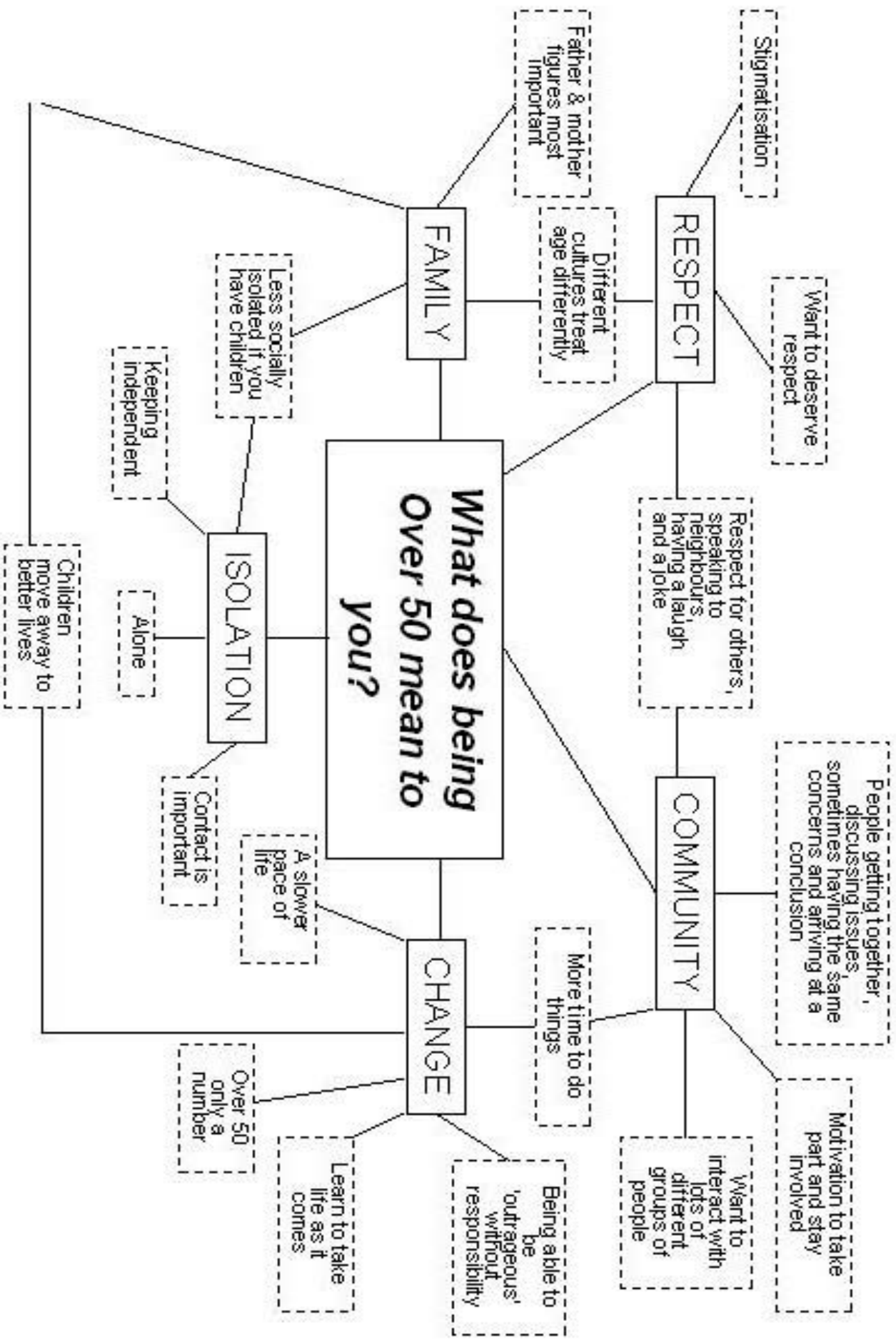
Due to the open nature of the question the responses given proved to be extremely varied. They covered a diverse range of subject areas and reflected both the barriers and opportunities that growing older presents. It is interesting to note that across the different groups the same key ideas were identified but that the same issues were seen in both a positive and negative light.

In analysing the information it became clear that the responses could broadly be split into two areas. These reflect the two strands of thought that the question generated amongst people in discussion.

1) Personal / Abstract Comments

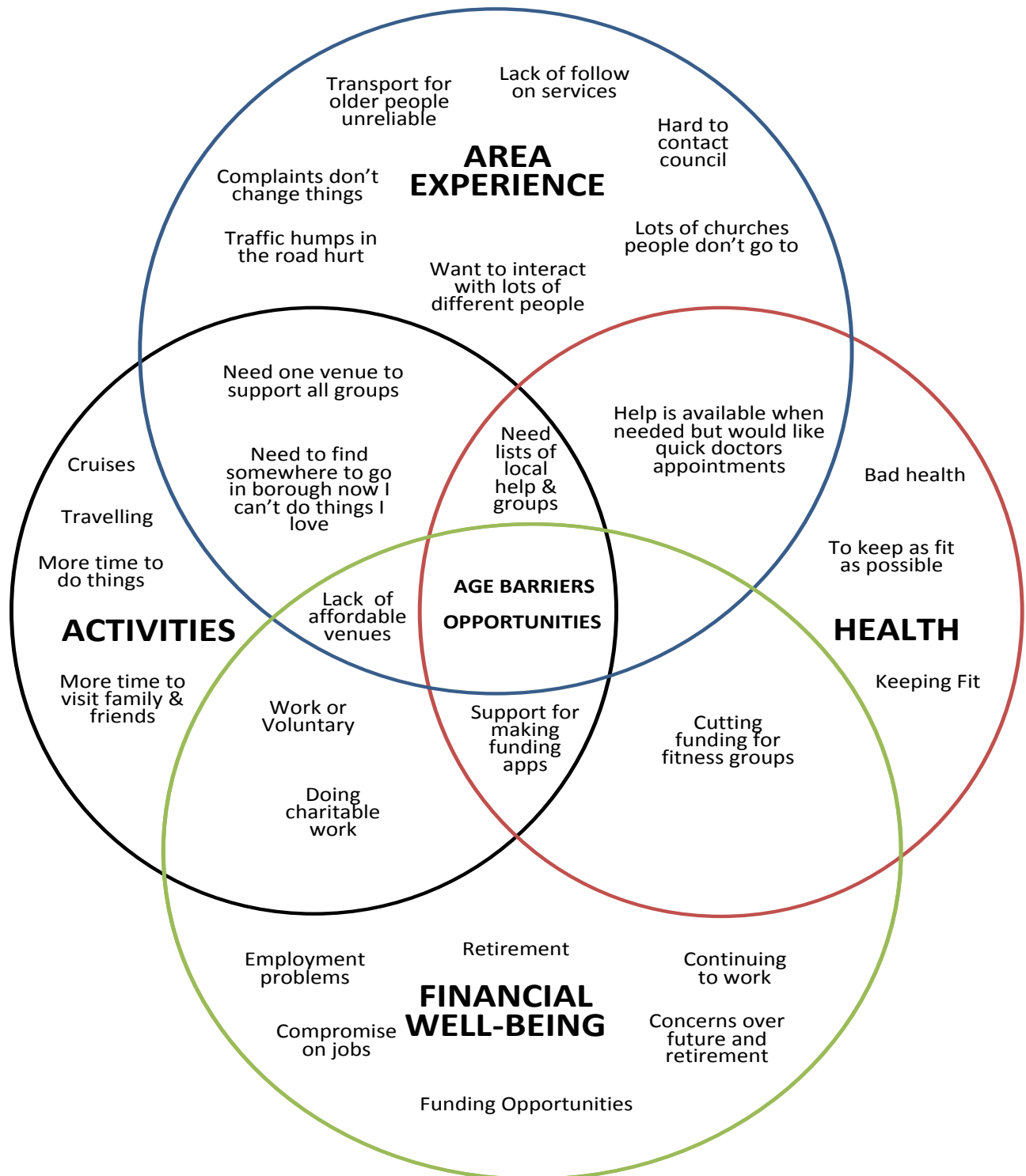
The results included here are representative of experiences of being over 50 that are not necessarily linked to specific issues within Waltham Forest. They embody ideas that are based on personal experiences but that cover concepts that are universal to people growing older.

The responses have been grouped across five topics that were raised more frequently than others: **Respect, Community, Family, Isolation and Change**. The diagram on the following page demonstrates how these topics interlink with one another to create a web of responses that link highly personal concepts (**Isolation**) through to the highly social (**Community**). This can aid our understanding of how changing one action can affect areas that might not previously have been considered. It is important to bear this in mind when developing actions within the strategy.



2. Community/Practical Comments

The second set of responses was grouped together around the practical considerations of becoming older. Four main areas covered these responses: **Activities, Health, Financial Well-being and Area Experience**. Once the replies were placed under these headings it became clear that there was a significant degree of overlap between some of the responses.



The diagram, on the previous page, demonstrates the overlap where different services (often from different providers) meet. In laying out the information this way it becomes clear that there are issues where local residents' experience of Waltham Forest (**area experience**) impacts on their ability to enjoy some of the perceived benefits of becoming older. For instance, increased personal time is frequently related to being over 50, *"more time to visit family & friends"*, *"more time to do things "* but action is constrained by a perception that there is a lack of suitable meeting space; *"need to find somewhere to go in the borough now I can't do the things I love"*, *"lack of affordable venues"*

Considering the responses in this way underpins the approach that the Council is taking to the Quality of Life strategy. It recognises there are key issues of importance to people over 50 but that these do not exist in isolation and that one of the central ways of providing solutions to them is through targeting the areas of overlap, as these may often be the areas that fall outside of traditional service boundaries.

This is reinforced by the two key phrases recorded and that sit at the centre of the diagram. These are *"age barriers"* and *"opportunities."* These two comments represent both the positive and the negative aspects of being over 50. One of the key roles of the strategy is to remove the former and promote the latter.

Quality of Life discussion groups

The main focus of the workshop sessions was on the key themes that had been outlined for the Quality of Life strategy. The aim of these discussions was to discover whether the themes, identified through research into national and international best practice and through studying a local evidence base for over 50's, are reflective of the concerns and priorities of our local residents. It also provided an opportunity to understand the way our current services are viewed from the perspective of service users and to discuss ideas for future provision.

The Exercise

Attendees were allocated to groups prior to the event and people who arrived on the day were assigned to groups with the aim of maintaining a balanced number across the six themes. In practice, due to non-attendance, some groups contained more people than others. However this allowed a variety of discussion styles to be used. In bigger groups a greater variety of topics and opinions were put forward whereas the smaller groups tended to focus on more specific issues.

Each group discussed two key themes. They had 30 minutes to discuss a topic, which was introduced by a facilitator. Each of the themes followed a structured questionnaire and the facilitators recorded the responses.

The Themes

The six themes discussed were:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Feeling Financially Secure | 2) Your Local Area |
| 3) Getting Involved in your Community | 4) Active and Full Lives |
| 5) Healthy Lives | 6) Housing and Help at Home |

Below are responses for each of the themes. These have drawn out the impact it has on people's quality of life, alongside the key issues raised.

Feeling Financially Secure

How does this impact on your quality of life?

Both groups that discussed financial security as a theme came to the same conclusion about the impact that it has on a person's life; the money itself is less important than the fact that *"feeling financially secure gives you peace of mind"*. People felt it was important to feel independent and be able to work, eat and care for themselves. Tied into this was a general dislike for receiving *"charity"*, whether this comes from the state or from voluntary organisations. It was felt that *"security breeds dignity"*.

Feelings of insecurity come from worrying about bills, council tax seems to increase faster than rises in the levels of pensions and there were feelings that the older you become the more you need to think about *"what you can afford"*. Alongside this was a sense that there is a big difference between those who have retired and those who haven't.

Key issues

- Information on services

It was felt that there should be a directory of services. This should be across providers and not just limited to the services the Council provides. The language used should be clear and simple. It was also felt that greater use could be made of free phone numbers.

- Local directory

There was general agreement that as people became older there were growing numbers of household jobs that they may no longer be physically capable of undertaking. This could range from jobs such as tending to the garden through to smaller tasks, such as changing lightbulbs. It was felt that if there was a centralised local pool of people, either paid or volunteers, who could be contacted to undertake these tasks then it would help build community spirit and greater local identity. It could be targeted at small businesses and odd-job men. User-feedback could become a central part of ensuring quality of service.

- Support and advice

A growing problem identified was the targeting of older and more vulnerable groups in society by private sector (and some voluntary sector) organisations. It was felt that people are often enticed with free products and then pressured to buy. Rates are often considered to be poor value compared to competitor products. It was felt that there could be better representation for those who cannot manage for themselves and people were unclear whom they would go to for advice on these matters.

- Hidden costs of caring

Both groups noted that many among them were both over 50 and an active carer for another person. It was felt that there was not enough flexibility on assessments and that not enough consideration was given to the 'hidden' costs of caring. These include the cost of taxi rides to hospitals and having to call expensive phone numbers.

Your Local Area

How does this impact on your quality of life?

It was clear in discussions that the biggest impact on people's quality of life in relation to the local area was feeling unsafe. There was a very strong perception among the groups that it was not safe to be outside after dark. Whilst the groups were aware of statistics that said crime was falling, in general there was suspicion about them and fear of crime was still very high. This is partly related to the consequences it has for the individual; *"if you are mugged, it has long lasting affect on your life"*.

This fear of crime affected most aspects of the local area with people reporting that there was a fear of young people in groups and reluctance to use public transport after dark. An issue identified by one of the groups were empty streets and it was felt that if more people were out at night then it would help others to feel less vulnerable.

On a more positive note the general *"greening"* of the borough was recognised. Reference was made to the tree planting and flowerbeds and there was a feeling that the borough is generally cleaner now, with less litter and rubbish on the street.

Key issues

- Mobility schemes

A key issue raised was the provision of community transport schemes. It was felt that services, such as Computer Cabs and Dial-a-ride, were not meeting local needs. Other boroughs could be looked at for good examples, with Redbridge noted as having a particularly good scheme.

- Public Spaces / Parks

It is important to involve older people in the design process for urban spaces and parks. It was felt that paper plans make it hard to visualise what an area looks like and that other design models might work better for understanding what change will mean to an area.

- Fear of crime

Support for victims of crime was regarded as very important. The effects of crime on the social and psychological aspects of a person's life last for longer than the event itself. The idea of a *travel buddy scheme* was raised. This would help reintegrate victims of crime back into the community and support them into feeling confident about going out and travelling in the local area.

It was also felt that there should be more intergenerational activities, which bring the young and older members of the community together. This may help challenge the perceptions of young people in the area.

Getting Involved in your Community

How does this impact on your quality of life?

There was general agreement in both groups that being involved in the community is very important. However there were big differences between the two discussions. One of the groups contained a lot of people who were already active in the community through community councils, LINKS and other forums. The second groups had residents who were interested in community activities but did not take as much part in it. This may reflect the divergent opinions of some of the comments.

The benefits include being involved in decision-making; *"so our voices can be heard"*, and also as a way of staying informed; *"when I was 50 I was still working, then I retired and had no idea what was going on"*.

However the most commonly identified benefit of involvement was the social aspect; *"I used to work in the West End, then I retired and became lost around here – the local community is important for the social aspect"*, and it *"prevents loneliness"*. Despite the positive focus negatives were also highlighted around groups potentially segregating society; there are *"not enough groups of mixed ages"* and *"everyone seems in their own little cultures – this isn't a good thing"*.

Key Issues

- Local decision making

The group that was actively engaged in community decision-making felt that council meetings often involved people that *"talk to us and tell us things, and don't listen"*. They also felt intimidated speaking at more formal meetings. It was felt that local organisations are more able to affect decisions than individual could. This is because *"we all speak with one voice so we have*

an impact". The second groups also didn't feel they affected decision-making but some members felt this was what they had elected councillors for. Experiences of community councils were mixed; one member had very positive experiences and liked the idea of having money to spend on issues for the local area. However another stopped attending as they *"always spoke about children's things"*. There was a strong desire to be actively involved in decision-making rather than being communicated to.

It was felt that there was not much information available about how to become involved in local decision-making. One member asked whether it would be possible to have information located in supermarkets. The fact that meetings take place at night can be a disincentive to attend, as some people did not like to go out that late.

- Service Involvement

A lot of the group members had not heard of the LINKS programme. However they were very interested in health and the way the health service communicates with them. It was felt that there should be more older people involvement in this area. They were also looking for greater involvement in policing, buses and education.

The group that was already more involved in community forums felt that older people should have a more active role in commissioning services. There was a desire for service to be designed around the user. The commissioning process was felt to be far too bureaucratic with *"the same questions being asked five times"*. The problem of short-term funding was also raised with people enjoying classes only to seem them cancelled if the funding stops.

- Hard-to-reach groups

It was noted that there was a need to engage with harder to reach groups. The people who had come to the event were people already quite active in their community and still have the capability to travel across the borough. People who live in sheltered accommodation were felt to have fewer options for getting involved.

Active and Full Lives

How does this impact on your quality of life?

Leading as active and full life as possible was regarded as *"absolutely essential"* in having a good quality of life. The health benefits were mentioned and it was regarded as a factor that *"prevents people going into care"*.

The social aspect of this was highlighted as being particularly important, *"love to go to a club and meet with other people"* but there are barriers to this, which include *"lack of disabled parking"* and *"a need for a proper community centre. There is a lack of affordable venues"*.

Key Issues

- Information on clubs

The discussion highlighted the fact that the groups were able to identify a number of different clubs but information was often highly localised. People felt that what was needed was access to a comprehensive list of all services and clubs in the borough. This information should also contain information on how a service would meet specific cultural needs. WFN was identified as a useful tool for information and the potential to use its advertising opportunities should be promoted among local groups.

- Transport

The unreliability of transport was also highlighted in these discussions. They criticised the dial-a-ride service but questioned the amount of influence the Council had over the quality of the service provided. However this unreliability acts as a barrier for people to go out, particularly as it is coupled with a fear of being out later in the evening.

- Olympics

There was a lot of interest in the Olympics and the opportunities that might arise from it. Questions were raised across a wide range of areas in relation to it, including the opportunities for older people to volunteer, how they could get tickets and how they could access funding opportunities associated with it?

Healthy Lives

How does this impact on your quality of life?

Having a healthy life was regarded as a combination of elements that link together to provide the basis for a good quality of life. A healthy life can mean you are more active, more independent and have improved mental, physical and spiritual well being. It is important to be healthy as it enables a life of dignity and respect and also allows active participation in society.

The quality of services received was closely linked by the groups to the quality of life. Specific issues identified were raised in relation to GP's – people only went to visit when essential as they didn't want to be seen as 'pests' but quick access was raised as a problem and more flexibility would be useful. Concern was also raised over a number of issues at Whipps Cross Hospital – these included the general quality of care, the fact that there is a lack of respect and people are not always treated with dignity.

Key Issues

- Communication

It was felt that communication is not as good as it could be and information on activities and services could be shared across the public and voluntary sector more effectively. The possibility of there being an umbrella group for charities, which would help to disseminate information to a wider section of the public was raised. The Council could also have a role in letting charities know what other voluntary organisations are doing and where they are located.

- Community Health Programmes

People appreciated that physical exercise and good nutrition are essential for keeping healthy. They were really keen to access local guided walks and other alternative exercise including yoga. The benefits of GP exercise referrals to the gym were highlighted. Advice and information on healthy lifestyles would also be appreciated, most people understood the concept of good eating and cooked home made food, but tips on healthy eating would be particularly helpful.

- Public Spaces

There was some dissatisfaction over how the Council deals with the public spaces. Concern was raised over the state of pavements and trees. Overgrown roots are hazardous and in some parts of the borough this is seen as a real problem. From the perspective of health this is linked to the aim to reduce the number of injuries occurring through falls.

Housing and Help at Home

Key Issues

- Help at home

It was felt with home help services that often there were too many people taking on different tasks. It would be easier if you get a couple of people who were skilled across a range of tasks. There was also concern that people did not qualify for support until they had reached the poverty line and that some people on benefits did not qualify for funded help. Care packages could also be more suitably tailored to the individual.

- Home adaptations

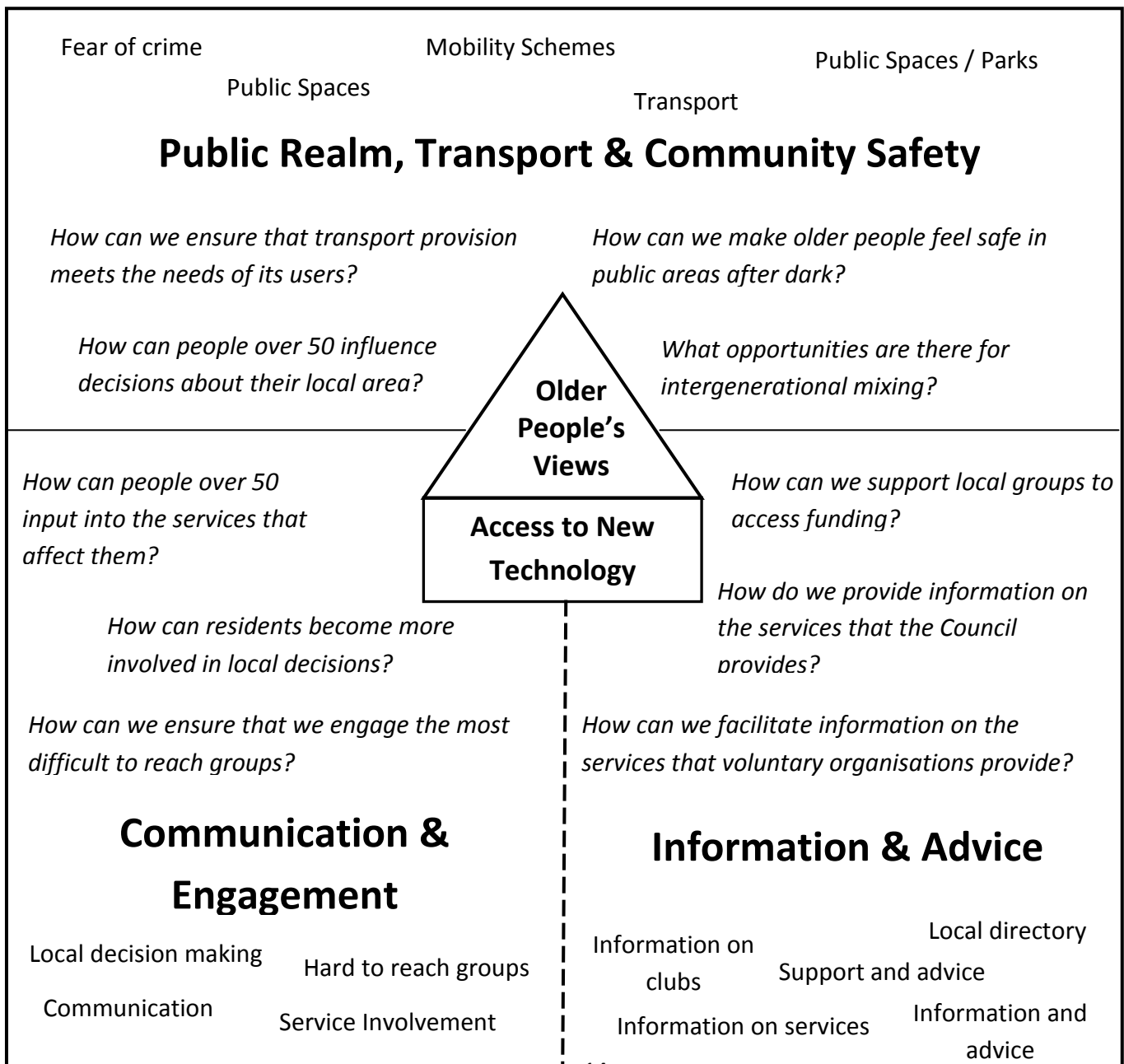
In some cases the process of getting home adaptations can take a long time. One group mentioned a stairlift that took 3 years to be installed. It was noted that the quality of service provided by housing providers was variable. Private repairs can be very expensive and the possibility of there being a council-approved list of traders was raised.

- Information and advice

There was a general desire for more information about available services. These should be located in public spaces and ensured that they remain up-to-date with relevant information. Alongside this was a desire for greater support when filling in the forms that enable access to these services. This includes recognition that there is a technological disadvantage for older people, as more services are pushed onto the Internet. There was general support for more and better access to information technology.

Event conclusions

Examining the key issues that emerged across the six groups it becomes clear that there are some common aspects that are at the centre of what the attendees felt were important to them. This can be broadly be grouped under three key themes.



The diagram on the previous page demonstrates how these themes could be linked together through a mechanism for engaging with older people on a more regular and coordinated basis. This could help to ensure that information on services could flow down to the community, local organisations would be able to circulate information across the borough and issues of local interest would have a channel to be raised with service providers.

The diagram also highlights the importance of providing access and promotion of new technologies to older people. This acknowledges the fact that an increasing amount of information about local services and activities is available on the internet but that there is a question over access and skills among some sections of the older community.

The other issues that have been raised are also important for the Council and its partners to consider when developing the Quality of Life for People Over 50 strategy. Some of these are clearly linked to specific service areas within the Council, the Health service or our voluntary partners and the practicalities of introducing these will be a core part of developing a sustainable and achievable action plan for the strategy.

Next Steps

The next steps for the project are shown below:

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| • Draft Strategy Completion | - | Mid June 2010 |
| • Consultation Start Date | - | Beginning of July 2010 |
| • Consultation End Date | - | End of July 2010 |
| • Final Strategy Completion | - | August 2010 |
| • Present to Cabinet | - | September 2010 |

During the consultation period the draft strategy will be made available through the Council's website to stakeholders, partners and local residents for comment.