

ANNUAL REPORT

2008 - 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

ESPOPF has existed since 2000 to represent 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 issues of concern.

The past year has been dominated by our campaign to persuade the Eastleigh Borough Council to restore travel tokens, the preferred concessionary travel option for disabled and older people. The campaign was begun at the 2008 AGM in July, when the decision by the Eastleigh Cabinet to axe the travel tokens was revealed. Despite a Petition of over 2,000 signatures, an extended letter-writing campaign in the *Daily Echo*, the widening of the campaign to include the rest of the Borough, support from parish councils and political parties and their parliamentary candidates, the Cabinet remained deaf to persuasion. Finally, ESPOPF referred the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman, who deals with maladministration. We claimed that the Council had not followed its own procedures in making the decision, in that it had not undertaken the required equality impact assessments and consultations to ensure that vulnerable people would not suffer.

Regrettably, our criticisms of the Borough Council led them to make unsubstantiated allegations about our Newsletter and to review our grant, which we regarded as an attack on our freedom of speech. We had no alternative but to decline to accept further grants in order to preserve our independence. The Committee was pleased that an Open Meeting endorsed this decision unanimously. Letters of support and donations have been received from individual members. Membership has increased.

In addition to our usual activities in Eastleigh, the Forum has continued to be invited to attend a range of events across the country: from giving a presentation on "Bleak Housing" at the launch of the merged Help the Aged/Age Concern Charity in London to assisting with the formation of new forums in Romsey, Winchester and Stoke-on-Trent. We were represented at receptions at the Department of Work and Pensions and 10 Downing Street to mark the UK Older People's Day and invited to London's magnificent BT Centre by Help the Aged for a Media Conference. Two of our Researchers were invited to present "Pills and Perils" at a research conference for pharmacists at the University of Brighton. Our community work as volunteers has been recognised in the award of certificates of honour.

2 MEMBERSHIP

We have a database of 2,444 addresses to which our Newsletter is sent. Membership is restricted to those over 55 who live in the six southern parishes and includes many new members, who signed the Travel Token Petition. We now have approximately 3,500 members of whom 291 are subscribing members. Our membership year runs from AGM to AGM. We also have 100 members in the 100 Club.

3 NEWSLETTER AND WEBSITE (www.espopf.org)

Our Newsletter continues to attract favourable comment. This year, it has been sponsored by Hampshire Adult Services and Hampshire & I.O.W Community Foundation. As usual, six issues including the Annual Report were distributed and one mailing included Prostate Cancer leaflets. The price of postage continues to increase, but the Royal Mail remains the best way of ensuring delivery. We acknowledge the excellent work of the Newsletter distribution team, and thank especially Margaret Phippard and the residents of Hambleside Court. The most regular comment we receive about the Newsletter is that it keeps people

in touch with what is going on. The Newsletter is published on our Website, which also contains our research, comprehensive information about ESPOPF activities and campaigns. We are most grateful to David Andrewes for the enthusiasm and drive he has committed to our website and we hope that more members will be inspired to become computer literate so that they can use this inter-active facility to keep in touch.

4 OPEN MEETINGS

We continued to meet at the Underhill Centre in Hedge End, and held one meeting at the Priory Centre in Hamble, when we were pleased to greet Hamble members we had not seen for some time. We were forced in an emergency to consider the option of local deliveries of fish and chip lunches, supplemented by *ad hoc* delicious desserts purchased locally and this proved so popular that we have continued it, in the absence of an affordable alternative. The Home Information Support Project (HISP) Workers and Stall provide 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. We raised £155 for the Mayor's Charities, Countess Mountbatten Hospice and *Vitalise*. The Hamble branch of the Royal Lifeboat Institution and the local branch of Save the Children Fund brought stalls in November .

Events at the 6 Open Meetings – average attendance 70 - have included launching our research, “Pills and Perils”; an Information/Networking Day; contributing to the HCC Scrutiny Review on Age-Proofing Older People's Services; checking the Bursledon, Hamble and Hound Age-Friendly Action Plan; hustings for the European Parliament elections. We have also run workshops on discharge from hospital, various consultations, first aid, community matron services, housing priorities. At the May meeting, a small group engaged in a research project to test electronic equipment at the behest of Help the Aged.

We continue to consider other venues for our meetings and, now that we do not need catering facilities, we should welcome some indication from our members about whether they would prefer us to hold our meetings in their villages.

5 COMMITTEE

Our hard-working Committee of 14 representatives of all six parishes has met 10 times with an average attendance of 10.4 members. At our first meeting, we thanked Jackie Charles and John Taylor for their sterling work as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, and elected Patience Sambrook as Chair and Jackie as Vice-Chair. Meetings are held at Bursledon Community Centre, which has good disabled facilities and access. Out-of-pocket travel expenses are provided. Members undertake many responsibilities which ensure the smooth running of the Forum and they also represent their villages. Our Officers, especially Chair, Patience Sambrook, and Hon. Treasurer, Betty Lawrence, deserve special thanks. Judith Cam, our Consultation Officer, attends meetings when necessary and we appreciate the professional way in which she undertakes this role. We have been very pleased to co-opt our Webmaster, David Andrewes from Bursledon, and Gloria Bowles from Hamble and sorry to accept the resignation of Pat Jenkins from Hedge End. Gloria and Pat gave us insight into the problems faced by Atlantic Housing Association tenants, this year, and involved us in finding solutions. Shirley Driscoll, a founder member of ESPOPF, who has represented West End, has decided to step down. We thank her warmly for her service over many years. In March, we received a Borough Council delegation. Diccon Bright, the BHH Co-ordinator, attended the May meeting.

6 ESPOPF GROUPS

ESPOPF Researchers have been pleased with the response to “Pills and Perils” from pharmacists and university departments across the country, but disappointed, though not

really surprised, by the lack of response from local GPs. As part of their next task of researching the whole topic of *Information* for older people, recognised as the most important dimension of their independence, ESPOPF Researchers have been approached by Hampshire County Council to do a *Mystery Shoppers* exercise to test the provision of information and advice to older people in the county. This project is under way already and two brain-storming sessions for information gathering have been held.

The Hamble Culture Club continues to expand its activities and a Dance Club has started in Netley, following the classes delivered by The Point in Bursledon, Hamble and Hound and financed by the Local Area Committee, at our request. The Hamble Valley Branch of the University of the Third Age attracted over 100 people to its first meeting and now has 130 members and 11 interest groups. Patience Sambrook must be congratulated on running with this particular ball to such great effect, recruiting and inspiring an effective and willing committee and a stimulating programme of speakers for the year.

We have been pleased, also, to note the continuing progress and initiatives of the Bursledon Good Neighbours Group and the efforts made by our members to start and keep going the Beacon Good Neighbours group in Butlocks Heath. We are totally convinced of the best value of these volunteer groups which do so much good in the community and we call on our members to support them in whatever way they may.

7 CONSULTATIONS

In addition to those consultations already mentioned, we have contributed responses to the Elbourne Report on Older People's Engagement with Government and Lord Darzi's Review of the NHS; HCC's Fire & Rescue Strategy and Single Equalities Scheme; EBC's Strategies on Public Art, Walking, Environmental Enforcement and changes to criteria for grant-giving. ESPOPF is a consultee for Borough planning applications on housing development for older people. It is not known what effect our responses have, if any!

8 PARTNERSHIPS

We want to work with organisations and individuals who share our aims and value our contribution as an organisation representing older people. We have continued to work closely with Help the Aged and were glad to contribute to a publication charting the history and achievement of the charity, using the opportunity to pay tribute to the support and inspiration ESPOPF and other forums have benefited from over the years. Our association with the National Pensioners' Convention was rejuvenated and cemented by the visit of Neil Duncan Jordan at last year's AGM; their Transport Briefing in London in September with the Department of Transport fuelled our campaign to save our travel tokens.

We are delighted to be working with Hampshire County Council on our research, safeguarding older people, and on Well Being issues, which included a Government consultation afternoon on The Ageing Society led by Baroness Jay. We were invited to participate in their External Equality Assessment, having attended their Single Equality Workshop. We are impressed by the County's desire to age-proof its older people's services and to involve us in their scrutiny of them. We are continuing our productive relationship with the EBC Housing Officers and were grateful, in particular, for assistance with our Information/Networking Day, which brought together providers of older people's statutory services. We were pleased to establish links with The Point and to persuade them to do some outreach dance work on our patch. We involved parish councils in our Travel Tokens campaign and have started to work with three of them on our BHH Age-Friendly Action Plan and the introduction of *hubs*, as village information and activity points.

We involve our MP, Chris Huhne, in many ways, hoping to keep him aware and supportive of all matters affecting us. In addition to signing various Early Day Motions, he has written

to Ministers on our behalf, undertaken case work at our request, and remains interested in the plight of older people in sheltered housing when under threat of re-development. However, we were disappointed that he did not feel able to give our Borough-wide Travel Tokens campaign his unequivocal support.

We have been very pleased to begin a relationship with the National Drug Research Unit at Bursledon Hall as a result of our recent research on prescribed drugs. One upshot has been the kind offer of their very well-appointed conference room for our committee and research meetings, which we are very happy to accept. Another health-related breakthrough has been the invitation to attend monthly meetings of the Eastleigh Southern Parishes Practice-Based Commissioning Group. In our research, "Sic transit...", in 2004, we called for more health services to be brought closer to home to ease our travel-to-hospital difficulties. This PBC has been set up to facilitate that and our first joint achievement has been to bring the supply of hearing-aid batteries to pharmacies in Hedge End and the Hamble peninsula – a small step but an invaluable one for us.

9 CAMPAIGNING ISSUES

In addition to many other matters mentioned in this Report, transport issues have continued to demand our attention, as services deteriorate. The introduction of the national free bus pass, though offering freedom to travel to many who are able to access buses, has left a significant minority stranded. The Borough Council has failed to recognise their plight and discriminates against them, insisting that the Council knows best what travel options are needed by older and disabled people. It was noted at one of our committee meetings that our travel tokens campaign, SOTT, which was widened to include all parts of the borough, would not improve our relations with EBC - and so it has transpired. However, if we are not here to challenge ageism and discrimination, who will? We have been verbally abused by Cabinet members and were threatened with withdrawal of funding. (Our website has more details). Asserting our independence, we have to consider what more we need to do to persuade our council to observe their statutory duty to involve us in meeting the Equality requirements of local government soon to be enacted in law.

10 THANKS

The Underhill Centre provides our Open Meeting facilities, which enable us to offer a wide range of speakers and workshops and we are especially grateful to John Reynolds for his assistance with the sound system. We are grateful to Botley Neighbour Care Group for use of their bus, so that members without transport may travel free and door-to-door to our Open Meetings; we thank the volunteer driver, Ian Jordan, for making this possible. We thank all those organisations which have given us grants as shown in the Accounts and without whose support we should falter; all the speakers who have attended our Open Meetings; Diane Rodaway for her enjoyable armchair exercises; all our subscribing members, members of the 100 Club, those who contribute to our funds by bringing raffle prizes, buying raffle tickets at our Open Meeting and giving donations. We are fortunate to have so many active and willing members who take on necessary jobs: Sue, who organises the raffle at Open Meetings, May and Peggy, who serve the refreshments and those who set out the furniture; Jean, who chooses and buys food for those with special requirements; David, who, besides organising the main desserts for our Open Meetings, masterminds the database of members, produces address labels and analyses our research; John, for his computer designs. We thank them all.

11 CONCLUSIONS

Many of our aims and hopes are centred on our Age-Friendly Action Plan blueprint, launched today, which sets out our vision of our villages providing environments in which older people may flourish. Our task is now to work with others to implement it.