

Julie Morgan MS

Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services,

Welsh Government

Cardiff Bay

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21 September 2020

Dear Minister

WELSH GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT OF OLDER PEOPLE IN WALES

I am writing to ask you to adopt the recommendations that the Board of Trustees of Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA) has agreed are essential for the reform and revitalisation of the role and impact of 50+ Forums in Wales and which would provide support for the creation of Age Friendly Communities.

Following dialogue with the Commissioner for Older People in Wales, we understand that the commencement of the Review of Engagement for Older People has been further delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. As I mentioned at the recent MAFA meeting you attended, this Welsh Government Review is of fundamental importance to the future of COPA and the 50+ Forums across Wales. We believe that a new clear policy direction is needed to ensure that the independent, self-determined and coordinated voice of older people's forums continues to be heard at national and local level in the future.

I attach the recommendations that have been agreed by the COPA Board of Trustees and that have been subject to consultation with our Voting Members. The detailed rationale for each of these is available if required. We believe that if Forums are to survive, then urgent action is needed now and Welsh Government needs to make an early commitment to agree these recommendations in advance of completion of the wider aspects of the Review of Engagement. If this is delayed for another year or more until the Review has been completed then it is doubtful that many of the Forums will survive and the benefits they have brought and the investment made in them – both financial and volunteer's time - over a number of years will be lost forever.

Since 2015, Forums have been allowed to "wither on the vine" and reductions to Council's budgets have led to significantly curtailed levels of support for them. There are a wide variety of arrangements across Wales that amount to unfair and unequal access to local representation for older people. Despite this, there are still examples of Forums at County level proving the effectiveness of this model of engagement and undertaking innovative work. If these approaches were strengthened and replicated

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consistently across Wales, it could make a real difference in the post Covid-19 period and provide a catalyst for the creation of Age Friendly Communities at a more localised level. This would clearly require a small level of financial investment but we believe that the benefit that Welsh Government and Councils can gain from the contribution of active and dynamic Forums across Wales would be more than a reciprocation.

We hope that you can give early consideration to our recommendations and we would of course be pleased to hold further discussions with you and your officials. We in COPA have been undertaking a fundamental review of our registered charity during this year and are nearing completion of that process including a revised Constitution. However, agreement to reform of COPA due to be ratified at our January 2021 AGM, is very much dependant on your response to the issues we have raised in this letter. There is therefore some urgency for us to have a clear policy direction for the future of 50+ Forums in Wales.

More generally, COPA is of course committed to participating in and contributing to the Welsh Government Review when it is undertaken and our recommendations include the initial proposals (section B) that we have agreed should be submitted to you. As I raised at the recent MAFA meeting, a clear timetable, process and capacity should be agreed to take forward the Review as soon as that is feasible and a further lengthy delay avoided.

I am copying this letter to the Commissioner for Older People and the Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing.

Your sincerely



S G Milsom

Chair

Cymru Older People's Alliance

On behalf of the Board of Trustees

Appendix 1 – COPA Recommendations to Welsh Government

Annex A – Principles and Outcomes for Welsh Government Review

Annex B – Draft National Standards for Older People's Forums

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CYMRU OLDER PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE –WELSH GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT OF OLDER PEOPLE IN WALES

Summary of Recommendations to Welsh Government

A: Reform of Older People's Forums in Wales

1. Independent 50+ Forums in Wales have a vital role to play to enhance community engagement of older people in the post Covid-19 period but are in need of a fresh approach and revitalisation of their support arrangements.
2. The revitalisation and reform of Local 50+ Forums that provide support for the creation of Age Friendly Communities (AFCs), is the policy direction that should be agreed and supported by Welsh Government. We want the long-standing role of and commitment to Forums to be enhanced and not dismissed. They are needed more now than they have ever been in responding to the post Covid-19 challenges for older people.
3. This model also requires a national voice to co-ordinate the local voice of older people in Forums. This should be in the form of a reformed Cymru Older People's Alliance as the only national organisation for older people in Wales that does not include retired Trade Union representative bodies in its membership.
4. 50+ Forums should be supported and funded to develop their role with smaller local groups on a more consistent and purposeful basis across Wales, particularly to address isolation and loneliness.
5. Welsh Government should establish a clear and consistent all Wales policy for 50+ Forums. We want to see an end to the post code lottery of access to engagement for older people and piece-meal dismantling of the 50+ Forum Structures by Councils. The dilution of the independence and strength of older people's voice locally - by reducing or withdrawing support or amalgamating them with other community interest groups – should be halted.
6. Continuing to let Forums “wither on the vine” is not an acceptable Government policy position – a clear rationale for local engagement of older people and accompanying policy should be established urgently so that Forums are fit for purpose to provide self-determined, independent and co-ordinated challenge to Councils and Government.
7. A new model of National Standards for Older People's Forums in Wales (draft at Annex B) should be agreed that establish a consistent expectation of both what Forums will do and how they will be supported on an equal basis by Councils in Wales including arrangements for sharing information.
8. In the future no specific age definition for engagement should be used, particularly as we are aiming for an “Ageing Society”. In moving towards responses to an Ageing Society, the guiding principle on Forums should be encouragement of individuals who want to contribute rather than their age. The generic title ‘older people's Forums/Councils without any age definition would be a better approach.

9. There is further work to be completed on creating AFCs in Wales which COPA would support and help facilitate but it is not a model that could replace Forums. Indeed, Forums could if revitalised play an important role in supporting the implementation of a policy of local AFCs and help make it a reality. Council engagement in the creation of AFCs should not attempt to replace the role of Forums and the independent challenge they provide.
10. The very localised model of engagement of older people based around Community Hubs could be developed to fit in with the concept of AFCs but is not in any way a practical model to replace Forums in Wales.
11. The case for regional forums should continue to be rejected. Welsh Government agreed in 2019 that COPA no longer needed to create Regional Forums as specified in its 2017 Constitution, as their policy is now creating Age Friendly Communities. There are fundamental problems with this model that remain i.e. purpose, added value, undermining of local forums, development capacity for and costs of Regional Forums.
12. Welsh Government should make an early commitment to agree all of these recommendations in advance of completion of the wider aspects of the Review of Engagement.

Nb 50 + Forums around Wales have different titles including older people's councils.

B: Welsh Government Review

1. Further clarification by Welsh Government of what they mean by engagement is needed and how co-production with older people can be made a meaningful concept.
2. The "Dublin Declaration" on Age Friendly Cities and Communities (2013) should be reviewed and renewed in a Wales context alongside the forthcoming Strategy for an Ageing Society in Wales. Councils in Wales should agree their commitment to the new "Wales Declaration" to include support for independent and co-ordinated engagement of older people at a local level.
3. The way in which engagement of older people across Wales is currently undertaken should be simplified and strengthened. Welsh Government should include the wider picture of the effectiveness of the current structure of older people's engagement in their review.
4. The right COPA principles for the Review are the 7 we have agreed. (Annex A)
5. The minimum COPA want to see from the Review are the 9 outcomes we have agreed. (Annex A).
6. Support to improve partnership working between the National Older People's Organisations should be facilitated but as part of the Review, discussions about the future structure and funding needed for these arrangements should be held.

Annex A

Cymru Older People's Alliance: Principles and Outcomes for Welsh Government Review of Engagement for Older People

In undertaking the Review of Engagement, there are a number of key principles that emerge that could drive this agenda forward:

- i. self- determination by older people themselves on a rights basis, with professionals contributing knowledge and skills but informed by older people's experience;
- ii. evidence based development of engagement;
- iii. co-production – decisions made together;
- iv. inclusivity and diversity – all groups and representatives equal;
- v. acceptance of the need for change but building on current strengths;
- vi. an emphasis to include vulnerable older people and those who are not engaged;
- vii.** effective and meaningful engagement of older people in a consistent and fair manner across Wales,

The Review of Engagement of Older People must be seen as a significant opportunity to shape the structures and support for engagement for the next decade. Whilst there are a number of uncertainties about what lies ahead, notably the impact of Covid-19, we must aim to achieve progress and improvement. COPA have agreed the outcomes it wants from the Review:

- I. Continued Government commitment to improve the lives of older people
- II. Continued support for the Ageing Well Initiative
- III. More consistency in engagement structures, funding and support across Wales
- IV. Empowering older people consistently – strength in numbers
- V. More joining up locally and regionally
- VI. Less duplication and dilution of effort
- VII. Wider age and diversity of representation including inter-generational
- VIII. Greater focus on the key issues for older people – a prioritised agenda
- IX. Better links between relevant age sector bodies

Annex B

DRAFT NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUMS AND GROUPS IN WALES

National Standards for Forums/Groups

These Draft National Standards set out the expectation and commitment needed for the operation of local Forums and groups for older people at the County level in Wales. They set out the governance, organisational and main activities of Forums/groups with the aim of raising standards and establishing consistency across the Wales so older people everywhere can participate on an equal basis and influence decisions that impact on their lives.

- Purpose – as an independent organisation, promote the interests, participation and engagement of older people in each County Borough and provide them with an opportunity to express, publicise and present their views, opinions or complaints. Promote the creation of Age Friendly Communities in Wales.
- Constitution – agree a straightforward Constitution to ensure good governance of the Forum/Group.
- Appoint Forum Officers – appoint officers to provide leadership to the Forum which is administered by a Steering Group. All executive powers of the Forum are exercised through the Steering Group voting members.
- Meetings – hold regular meetings of the Steering Group that are minuted and invite participation by the Council and Third Sector organisations and others on an observer status. Hold an AGM.
- Membership – promote and seek contributions to the Forum/group by registering for Membership, residents in the County to make it possible for the Forum/Group to contact them directly to provide information or seek their opinion. Keep a register of members in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1988.
- Communications – raise awareness of the Forum/Group and provide information and guidance relevant to older people through a website, social media, written form, leaflets etc or through contributions to other organisations.
- Projects – undertake (subject to funding and/or support) local projects in partnership with others to improve the lives of older people including intergenerational work.
- Finance - Raise funds, receive grants and donations, apply for funds to carry out the work of the organisation.
- Partnership - Co-operate with and support other groups with similar purposes. liaise with Council officers and elected members, and statutory bodies, as appropriate, to promote the aims of the Forum.

- Consultation - comment on various policy and other documents from national and local government and related bodies so the forum's voice is heard.
- National Representation - Act as the fulcrum in the 2-way exchange of opinions and information between Forums members and COPA to ensure the views of older people in local Forums are represented nationally and issues for older people that may have a national significance are raised.
- Cymru Older People's Alliance - participate in the democratic processes of COPA- the national voice for local Forums/groups - including appointing representatives who attend AGMs, periodic meetings and participate in fulfilling the aims of the charity.

Draft National Standards for the Support of Local Older People's Forums and Groups

These draft Standards set out a minimum requirement of Councils to ensure vibrant and successful engagement of older people through representative Forums/Groups is achieved on a consistent and equal basis across Wales.

- Coordinating Support by Councils is provided through close partnership working with the Forum/Group officers to meet statutory duties for the engagement of older people and to create Age Friendly Communities. Facilitate contributions from across relevant Departments to ensure the interests of older people are recognised and reflected in relevant policies and services.
- Funding – provide small scale funding to enable the Forum/Group to achieve its ambitions on a basis of reciprocity in recognition of the benefits and added value the Forums/Group provide in respect of supporting Council objectives.
- Attendance by Council officers by Department is arranged as relevant to the agenda of the Forum/Group and that they receive appropriate information to help achieve an effective dialogue.
- Attendance by the Older People's Champion, Councillors is facilitated on a regular basis, ensuring they are appropriately briefed to contribute effectively.
- Partnership – ensure that a coherent contribution is made to Forums/Groups by facilitating the contribution of other relevant Council groups such as Carer's, dementia, healthy living etc and through communication networks.
- Projects - Joint working with Forums/Groups on projects that have mutual benefit and promote both the work of the Council and the Forum/Group e.g. inter-generational, Care Homes, Sheltered Accommodation, Safeguarding, ageism, loneliness and isolation etc
- Accommodation – provide or facilitate the availability of a room and related support for meetings of Forums/Groups where required.

- Support for special events is provided where feasible e.g. AGMs, conferences and seminars etc.
- Advice and training e.g. Information Technology, website, social media is provided where feasible to promote digital inclusion of older people in the County.
- Ownership of the member database by the forum is recognised and supported to ensure compliance with GDPR.