

MELKSHAM & DISTRICT SENIORS FORUM 55+

NOVEMBER 2019 REPORT TO THE MELKSHAM AREA BOARD

1. These last two months have been very interesting and saw a sea-change in the direction of our Forum with the active encouragement and guidance of Melksham's Community Engagement Manager in an attempt to utilize County resources and thereby reduce our operational expenditure.

2. We wholeheartedly welcomed Wiltshire Council's Healthy Communities services to our Thursday meetings held at the Riverside Club. This has enabled us to offer a wider range of physical activities which differ every two weeks with the objective of finding the right mix of exercise and entertainment to encourage our members to engage with each other whilst enjoying fun and healthy competitive activities. We hope to use this as one more weapon in our arsenal to combat social isolation and the attendant physical and mental problems that ensue. We must record here the professionalism and friendly attitude that the staff of Healthy Communities have shown towards our members; we appreciate them and the work they do.

This unique and tailored delivery has been met with enthusiasm with our membership but caused a slight re-organization in our committee structure in our attempt to enhance and change our service menu. Once the Healthy Communities activities are firmly established at Riverside we will expand the program to our Forest Community Centre menu.

3. Our well attended Film Club at The Assembly Hall and our Monday Club at the Forest Community Centre are running hitch free.

4. On October 22nd the Melksham Area Board, in association with Forum 55+, held a special older persons area board with a focus on defining and delivering policies that will enable the fulfilment of Melksham as the UK's first rural Age Friendly town; a fact recognized by The World Health Organization . Many guest speakers delivered a wealth of information to the attending seniors which later gave way to working groups who recorded their opinions, suggestions

regarding policies and services which specifically affect the lives of our community's older citizens and deliver our Age Friendly agenda.

5. Forum 55+ is an active member of The South West Seniors Network which is a grouping of all the South West forums including the Scilly Isles. On October 30th, as an indication of the high regard held for Melksham's multi-faceted and mainly volunteer led services to our community, the Chair of Forum 55 was elected Chair of the regional organization. However this does not mean that we have completed our mission, we have barely started and must continue to strive to build upon the strong foundations built by many others in our community.

6. In the coming months the Executive Management Committee of Forum 55+ has resolved to focus on seven priorities:

6.1. To work in close cooperation with and total support of Melksham's Age Friendly project including assisting in the planning, policy formation and community outreach. This will entail our close collaboration with consultants brought in to craft a plan of action.

6.2. To encourage and actively work towards closer cooperation and resource sharing with other Melksham organizations with similar aims and objectives as our Forum

6.3. To expand our service menu to cover a wider range of activities on more days but bearing in mind our absolute need to recruit more volunteers to achieve this.

6.4. To explore how we can establish the much needed permanent and dedicated Seniors Drop-in Centre, a place where seniors can drop by to socialize, to receive advice and signposting to available County and Voluntary Services, to be able to use a 'Keep-In-Touch' (KIT) system using WhatsApp or other available free methods through which they can communicate with family and friends throughout the UK and worldwide. This is an essential part of combating the effects of depression caused through isolation. As people live longer the need for human contact

increases whilst the opportunity for such decreases. A dedicated Drop-in Centre would provide a bulwark upon which we can build a happier healthier and inclusive senior community.

6.5. The Canberra Youth Centre refurbishment is now complete and after more detailed discussions with Jon Hubbard we are committed to commencing intergenerational activities in 2020.

6.6. We have completed a draft layout of our 'Look for it, Find it and Do it' pocket reference booklet which will be made available to all seniors within our community. It is a simple signposting tool which tells seniors where they can get trusted repairs and services including personal, home, garden and specific information needed by seniors. We will be applying for a grant from the Area Board to complete this project.

6.7. And probably the most important we have embarked upon a plan to expand our cadre of volunteers because everything else, expansion and efficient delivery is dependent upon this.

7. Phase One of our very successful 'Socialize n' Shop' outreach program will come to an end in November 2019 at which time we will evaluate its efficacy and decide whether or not to expand or modify a Phase Two.

8. Finally, we must thank the Chair and Members of Melksham Area Board for their commitment, close cooperation, valuable aid and advice they have provided Forum 55+ including the tireless efforts made by the Melksham Community Engagement Manager.

Thank you.

Martin Pain

Chair

For and on behalf of

Melksham & District Seniors Forum 55+