

ACTIVE A.G.E.
Managing Change A.G.E.
Impact of demographic Ageing for cities.

LOCAL ACTION PLAN WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL UNITED KINGDOM



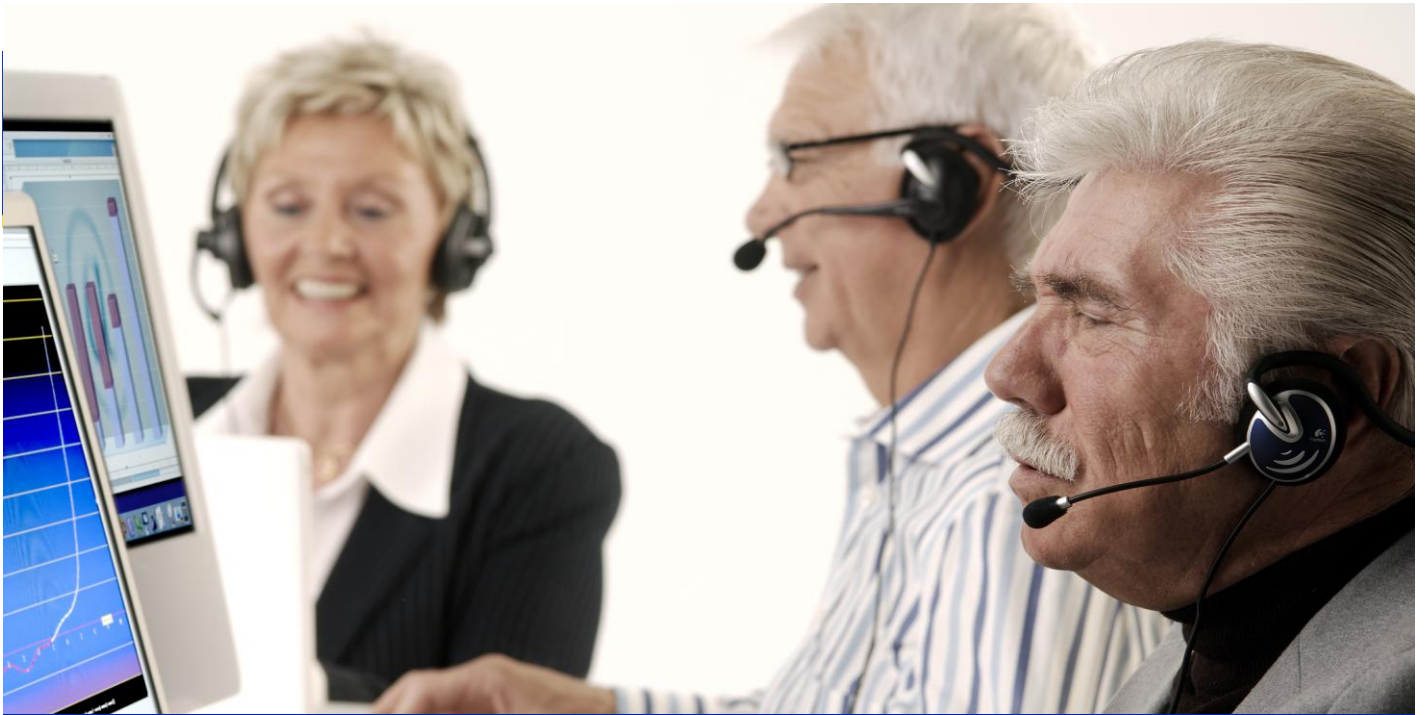
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Connecting cities
Building successes





LOCAL ACTION PLAN

MUNICIPALITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON, UNITED KINGDOM

Introduction

In November 2008 the Executive Director of PISCESwM, a Community Interest Company based at the EVCAP centre in Ettingshall responded to an advert placed by the City of Rome for City partners to look at issues relating to demographic change, increasing numbers of older people and the impact this would have on services and resources.

This is an EEC programme entitled URBACT

With the agreement of the Director of Adult and Community services for the City of Wolverhampton the City was accepted into a consortium of 8 other cities facilitated by Brussels based Consultancy, QEC Eran to participate in a 3 year programme which will culminate in a Conference in Rome in May 2011.

The 9 Cities involved are:

- Rome

- Starogard Gdanski, Poland
- Dobrich, Bulgaria
- Edinburgh
- Thessaloniki
- Seville
- Prague
- Maribor
- Wolverhampton

The City has fulfilled its commitment to the overall programme through the co-ordination of the PISCESwM organisation and has not made any direct financial contribution towards its implementation. This was one of the key conditions given, because of restrictions on and general scarcity of resources.

The City did however make a major impact in hosting the first of 4 International Workshops in June 2010. A highlight was a civic Reception hosted by the Lord Mayor and attended by each of the 9 delegations plus other invited guests from within the City.

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At no direct cost to the City delegates have since attended and addressed Workshops in Starogard and Maribor.

The theme of the Wolverhampton Workshop was unlocking the talent and experience of older people in relation to entering work/remaining in work or in enterprise development.

In Maribor the focus was upon Service Innovations in relation to Health, Social Service, Community care and Domestic provision. A Presentation was made about the Wolverhampton's innovative practice around 'housing with care'.

In Starogard the emphasis was on good practices in relation to promoting intergenerational solidarity as well as issues relating to the protection of Vulnerable Adults. This is a subject area that, within the European context, Great Britain does have considerable knowledge and expertise to offer.

The programme has been conducted within a period of significant political change and upheaval both in Britain and within Europe particularly within the economies of most of the participating countries.

In terms of the specific areas addressed within the programme the context within Great Britain and Wolverhampton specifically has also been shifting at a great speed. Some of this has been generated by the enforced restriction on Budgets for Local Authorities and the changes in Political control at both a local as well as national level.

There have also been major changes in national Policy particularly at Adult and Communities level in each of the themed areas with increased emphasis being placed upon individual decision making and choices of personal outcomes under a general theme of 'Transformation'.

Other issues that have needed to be factored in to the programme have been:

- Rising unemployment in Great Britain with the West Midlands being the worst affected;
- Total overhaul of the Welfare benefits system with increasing emphasis on getting people with health and social care considerations back into the workplace;
- Growing levels of obesity, poor diet and health;
- Loss of investment funding into regional and community infrastructure particularly from EC sources including the dissolution of regional development Agencies;
- Differences in local political and community management. (Most of our partners have civic management systems with far greater direct management control through their Mayor);
- Outsourcing to private and 3rd Sector operations particularly in relation to Employment Services and Health and Social care;
- Staff turnover and organisational changes at all levels;
- Movement towards Social Enterprise as an acceptable way forward for the management of community services;
- Increasing withdrawal or 'threat' of public authority subsidy and management of community services including community venues

Within the context of this overall programme which has been administered from the EVCAP centre in Ettingshall well over 50 organisations have been enjoined within the process at some time. In each of the themed areas it has been necessary to recruit new partners and individuals reflecting the difficulty there is in transcending all sectors of influence and interest within one single programme and the absence within the U.K of NGO organisations like PISCESwm who can achieve this.

Local Action Planning – The Challenges

It is not the purpose of this document to be critical or judgmental. The context of significant change and the uncertainties that change brings with it has influenced many of the outcomes and limited some of the opportunities the involvement of the City of Wolverhampton might have enjoyed in a more stable and secure environment.

There have been some achievements and a considerable amount of cooperation at a number of levels aided and abetted by the absence of

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bureaucratic structures and procedures that have enabled this programme to continue. It was this very freedom of action based on trust and goodwill that enabled the City of Wolverhampton to be represented in the first place within the programme.

The downside has been obtaining a continuity of engagement and ongoing collaboration at corporate level. This has prevented the Council and other agencies from becoming fully engaged within the financial and administrative reporting structures required within an Urbact and other EC programmes.

Subsequent initiatives, however, some of which have involved the Council, have drawn lessons from this initial involvement and the overall outcome has seen a number of European Partnership programmes being managed or planned within the Black Country and the West Midlands involving 15 different countries and including some of the partners met within this programme, especially Prague and Maribor.

Wolverhampton within the context of the Black Country has a fair amount of heritage and history of which it should be genuinely proud. This is comparable with many of our European partners who have also witnessed a decline in industry and manufacturing over the past 2 decades, subsequent losses of jobs and the challenges associated with this including low incomes and other deprivations.

Throughout the duration of the project we have been posing the question as to how more economic prosperity and particularly the engagement of older people can be stimulated by using the industrial heritage of the region. A strategy is now emerging whereby this might be achieved and will form part of an additional paper annexed to this document.

What is of critical importance is the creation and development of services on which people can develop their own interests and lifestyles in a way that also promotes better health and well being.

This points to a need for greater and accessible information using ICT and other technologies and an increasing network of services and resources within the community which allows this to happen.

For older people the use of ICT does provide some of their greatest challenges against an environment which all too often now assumes that everybody is both networked and also has access to personal computers. Direction to the world wide web is frequently the only advice offered to people wishing to source information or to order goods and services.

Addressing this specific issue is an overriding priority emerging from the URBACT programme and permeates each of the three areas addressed within the total programme.

Key facts about Wolverhampton

These figures originate from the Office of National Statistics and at the time of publication are the most recent figures available.

- The City has a total population of 238,500 of which: 118,000 are male
- 151,900 are aged between 16 and 64
- 104,400 are said to be economically active i.e. employed, self employed or available for work
- 46,500 are said to be unavailable for work for a variety of reasons but this figure masks a statistic of a number of people over 50 particularly not willing to classify themselves as unemployed and living off other sources of income i.e. partners income, savings etc

Arguably the most significant statistic is the one for 'Key benefit' Claimants i.e. in receipt of ESA and Incapacity benefits, Lone parents or Disabled.

This shows that 22.4 % of the working age population in Wolverhampton as opposed to 16.5% in the West Midlands and 14.7 UK wide are classified as key benefit claimants.

Wolverhampton also shows similar trends in terms of qualifications from NVQ1 through to graduate levels.

At least 24% of the population also originate from other cultures and countries and particularly amongst older people there remains a small but significant issue around language and communication.

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Wolverhampton is socially and economically complex and in need of genuine innovation.

Economic Engagement and Employment for over 50's

When the City of Wolverhampton was invited to host the first workshop in June 2009 to address the theme of employment and economic engagement of people over 50 the most difficult challenge was to find any initiative at all within the City which catered for this.

Whilst unemployment in general was causing great concern involving a large number of agencies from all sectors the specific needs of older people were clearly not being addressed in a concerted and focused way.

The presentations from other countries and the issues raised within the workshops generated a great deal of anecdotal evidence of need at grass roots level within the City. This included.

- Older people made redundant felt devalued and lost esteem. They felt humiliated by having to 'sign on' often after more than 30 years of employment.
- They had no transferable skills within the modern day employment profile. Many had originated from Engineering and Manufacturing profiles whereas the Service Industries lead by the City Council are now the predominant employers;
- They felt disadvantaged and discriminated against in respect of ICT Skills with most employers now demanding high technical ability including only accepting applications by E'mail.

A number of Government funded initiatives not least the Future Jobs Fund specifically excluded older people and the media also seemed preoccupied with getting younger people into employment.

Immediately following the Workshop within the City through the Local Steering Group we launched a number of enquiries at different levels to find out exactly what support was available in reality.

This was done within the context of mounting unemployment and heightening concern particularly within the West Midlands.

Good practices

We found a number of examples of good practice both within the City and beyond.

A few major Employers particularly in the Retail Industry have taken a positive stance towards the employment of older workers recognizing that experience and reliability allied to basic know how were invaluable for their operations. High on this agenda were B and Q and ASDA (Walmart Group).

In terms of tailor made initiatives offering support and guidance PRIME, an offshoot of Age Concern England and inspired by the success of the Princes Trust and direct input from the Prince of Wales was a shining exception to a depressing rule of no concern.

PRIME however focuses entirely on Self Employment for older people.

Health and Leisure Initiatives for over 50s were also in evidence throughout the City with discounted rates at community venues and a well publicized campaign for older people to avoid illness and disability, particularly Diabetes and Heart complaints

The Launch of the Unlocking the Potential of Older people Initiative

Using the evidence accrued from the Workshop an application was made for funding within the Grass Roots Grant scheme administered by the Black Country Consortium. £8700 was awarded to allow an intensive survey of older people within a number of venues across the Black Country but primarily within the City.

The model allowed for a complete morning set aside both to engage as well as involve people in employment related issues and in the process over 300 people were interviewed.

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This process very much confirmed our early fears of disillusionment and, in some cases, helplessness. It also revealed intense levels of anger amongst many older people about the way in which their cases were managed within the system starting with the national agency Job centre Plus.

Of even greater concern however was the pervasive feeling that the management of unemployment of all ages had become a process in its own right with complaints coming from staff involved that they were being forced to meet statistical targets without much consideration for quality of work. Insufficient time was allowed for individuals to receive the counseling and mentoring suited to their particular personal requirements.

27 separate initiatives supposedly offering Careers guidance, support and training within Wolverhampton and the surrounding area were recorded. These were provided in a variety of locations across the City from community venues to offices within centrally located buildings.

The product was very much of a muchness with focus on cv writing, ICT training and Job Search, trawling the internet for vacancies across the region. Industry placements were a rarity.

What was also apparent that not only was there age discrimination in terms of the offer of opportunities – Future Jobs Fund disbarred older workers - but older people were significantly less skilled in an ICT driven economy where many applications for jobs were by E'mail only.

Not one of the 27 agencies identified as offering advice, guidance, training and support had made any special provision for older workers.

Training for new employment

Associated with a lack of special provision was also the hurdle of older people undertaking new training to meet current employment possibilities.

What had become evident was the scarcity of new jobs in manufacturing and engineering thus placing an onus on the Job seeker to retrain for a new profession or alternatively take on short term, unskilled, low paid contract work.

The only industries of special noted offering opportunities and potential growth are ICT and the Care Industry. Particularly for male workers the transition from a hands on Factory based job to one providing personal care to sick and vulnerable people can be challenging. There have been some notable exceptions to this which, by the very reason of their publicity, underlines how unusual it has been.

Funding

This has also proved itself to be problematical particularly in the provision of Training and Reskilling.

The Learning and Skills Council has been closed down and responsibilities transferred to other employment based agencies.

Nevertheless the tendency of public bodies to allocate provision to Colleges or larger corporate and often national agencies has meant in practice a disproportionate amount of investment into locally and community based programmes.

Whilst attendance at college/university is now a norm amongst younger people it still does provide a barrier for older people, many of whom have no qualifications and who feel incapable of attending college to obtain qualifications.

Attempts to bring education and training into community venues through the Adult Learning Partnership using funds and resources of local Colleges has proved problematical despite the presence on the Local steering Group of one of its officers who has single handedly promoted the potential and requirements of older people in the work place.

There are some notable exceptions throughout the City but funding for existing as well as new initiatives still remains an increasing mountain to climb particularly as public funding is being put under pressure at every level and particularly in areas which are not considered priority. Budgets are being cut and jobs lost throughout every part of the public sector.

An irony of this is that many of the people who have either lost their jobs or who face the prospect of redundancy fall into the very category that we had

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been addressing within this Action Plan ie. The over 50's.

The Unlocking the Potential Initiative – continued

A sequel to the Survey and consultation was the establishment of a Job Club for people over 50 and the hosting of a number of events for employment and training agencies. The Club was visited by the national Minister for Skills and Enterprise and was featured in programmes on the BBC and within the BBC website.

As a consequence we received communications from across Britain about our initiative all of which mirrored the negative picture around official policy relating to employment of older workers.

Since the completion of the initial tranche of work on the Local Action Plan there has been heightened media attention across the country as well as a positive recognition of the URBACT based initiative by national agencies such as Job Centre Plus. JCP were particularly concerned by the statements made by members of our Over 50's Job Club published on the national Web Site suggesting that the system in place was ineffective and demeaning for older people and a fear that the City was being highlighted nationally as being a 'trouble spot'.

Resources have not allowed some of this work to continue and following the closure of this specific piece of work the PISCESwM organisation has moved on to another dedicated and evaluated initiative including Employment and Enterprise funded by the Social Experimentation budget of the EC in partnership with Prague, Maribor and Edinburgh.

However the broad basis of an Action Plan emanating from this document remains in place with Key recommendations for action which will feature in the appendix. These include:

- Increasing Volunteering and short term subsidised employment for older people along the lines of the current FUTURE JOBS FUND;
- Reality checking –will some people ever become reemployed or should we be refocusing
- of alternative strategies for economic engagement;
- The strengths, weaknesses and positive advantages of Self Employment;
- The value and use of Social Enterprise as strategies for employment and engagement particularly in the arena of community development, care and support;
- Intergenerational exchange of skills and expertise particularly around ICT and crafts including engineering, manufacturing;
- Identification of new talents and skills amongst older workers;
- Creation of environments that allow time to build people's confidence and esteem;
- Training and orientation of Employment Agencies towards the particular needs of older people who are unemployed;
- Alternative strategies to an ICT biased application and recruitment policy. Not all people have access to personal computers nor are computer literate let alone have E'mail addresses;
- Greater awareness of the resistance of older people to College based learning and the need to promote greater use of community access points;
- Redistribution and allocation of funds to promote community access to employment and engagement and the development of community based projects to utilise skills and expertise of older workers in partnership with younger colleagues;
- Greater corporate awareness and responsibility for the challenges faced by people who are unemployed. This isn't the responsibility of just one local authority department or Job centre Plus;
- Greater engagement of Employers at a local level in meeting this challenge and the sharing of the responsibility to bring older people back into the workplace;
- The encouragement of Employers to become more involved in Community focussed activity allowing their workforce as a general principle to have engagement in community based programmes;
- The use of alternative practices to both induce older people to become reengaged, rebuild self esteem and perhaps discover new skills and talents and interests;

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- Greater attention provided to demystify and encourage entrepreneurship amongst older people both at an individual as well as a corporate level maybe using the Social enterprise model as a means of achieving this;
- Recognition that, within the preoccupation on younger people being unemployed we do run the risk of demotivating and deskilling older people in the process.

This section will be subject to ongoing consultation and development particularly within the context of evolving national policy relating to employment and the growing demand for specific initiatives catering for older people who are unemployed.

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants.

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