



Advancing Well

**Improving The Quality Of Life
For Older People In Halton**

(2008 – 2011)

CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	3
1.0 INTRODUCTION	4
2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY	5 - 8
3.0 CONTEXT - Where are we now?	9 -20
3.1 Defining Older People	
3.2 National Approaches Impacting on Ageing	
3.3 Local Area Agreements	
3.4 Local Trends and Older People	
3.5 Local Consultation with Older People	
3.6 Local Programmes and Initiatives	
4.0 THE WAY FORWARD – Where do we want to be?	21 - 28
Creating a positive future by preventing ‘social isolation’:	
a) TRANSPORT – Allowing Older People to Travel Safely and Access Services around the Borough	
b) EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION - Enabling Older People to find Paid and Voluntary Work	
c) HEALTH - Ensuring Older People are in Good Health Longer	
d) SAFE & INDEPENDENT LIVING - Supporting Older People to Live at Home in Comfort	
e) ADVOCACY AND FINANCIAL SERVICES – Providing Reliable and Easy Access to Financial and other Advice Relevant to Older People	
f) COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION - Ensuring Older People are Involved in the Decision Making Processes relating to Local Services	
5.0 ACTION PLAN – How will we get there?	

FOREWORD

This strategy is about our vision for the future of Older People in Halton. It is a vision of a better quality of life for people in their advancing years.

The good news is that people are living longer and more independently, but this means that Halton, as a Council, needs to meet the new challenges associated with an ageing population. This Strategy aims to lay down how this will be achieved.

With age comes knowledge, experience, skills and abilities and it is important that we continue to nurture these attributes and recognise the value of older people in their local community in order to build a thriving older population in Halton.

This 'Advancing Well' Strategy aims to promote more independent living and reduce the social isolation often experienced by older people by working closely with all providers of services for older people.

Older people are just as varied in their personalities and interests as other citizens and therefore the issues that concern them are varied, ranging from: transport and access to services, education and employment, good health, safe and independent living, advocacy and financial services through to the need for good communication and

information from us as a Council and from our partners about the services we provide.

The Strategy will help to develop radical new approaches to address the issues raised by older people.

The success of the strategy will depend on positive joint action between the various departments of the Council and with other public and private organisations and with local voluntary and community sector groups.

We must also ensure that older people are at the very heart of the decision-making processes about the type and variety of services they want and need.

The Council and its partners are committed to ensuring that its older people can look forward to a positive future where they can live full and independent lives and this document is the first step towards that commitment.

David Parr
Chief Executive

Councillor Tony McDermott MBE
Leader, Halton Borough Council

1.0 INTRODUCTION

People in the UK population in general and Halton in particular are getting older. Already in 2007 there are more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18 and by 2020 the number of those over 85 is likely to double. At the same time an overall decline in mortality from acute diseases, that would typically require a prolonged stint in hospital, has been matched by an increase in people with long-term conditions that are treatable at home. Over 15 million people in England now have a long-term conditions treatable at home. This is good news, in that it means that people are living longer and more independently, but it also requires Halton, as a Council, to react to these changes in order to meet the new challenges associated with an ageing population. This Strategy aims to lay down how this will be achieved.

This 'Advancing Well' Strategy aims to promote more independent living and reduce the social isolation often experienced by older people by working closely with all providers of services for older people. The success of the strategy will depend on positive joint action internally, between the various departments of the Council, and externally with other public and private organisations and with local voluntary and community sector groups. To do this, Halton is committed to providing strong community representation for its older people and a network of services through local partnerships. This involves close links with various organisations, such as, transport, job centres, colleges, health facilities, sport and other leisure facilities, housing and other organisations involved in the delivery of services for older people.

The Strategy will help to develop radical new approaches to the way in which we deliver services for older people. These involve promoting health, well-being, quality of life, equality and independence. Such diversity of approach lies at the very heart of all the Councils strategies.

The Advancing Well Strategy concentrates specifically on those who are 50 or older and views an 'older person' as an individual who is doing more or less what they have always done. A key part of growing older is about maintaining independence. Otherwise social and, all too often, medical images of older people suggest that they are vulnerable, dependent and largely inactive.

Halton wants to ensure that its older people are able to lead independent lives that limit social isolation by providing accesses to suitable travel, work, leisure, health and social and financial care. In this way, *Advancing Well* aims to be a local response to the national identified problem of social isolation, so common among older people. Key to this is the ensuring older people have a say in the development of their local services.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

By having an Advancing Well Strategy in place the Council recognises that getting older is a natural part of human development, and older people are just as varied in their personalities and interests as other citizens. They have the same rights of: choice, respect, equal-access to services and dignified treatment as every other member of society. Consequently, the underlying emphasis of this strategy within the borough is to provide support to older individuals, so they can maximise their own abilities and independence and reduce the potential for social isolation in later life.



Vision

Halton will become a thriving and vibrant borough where all of its residents, including its older people, can learn new skills, develop their potential and enjoy a good quality of life within a modern urban environment. All will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, sustained by a thriving business and voluntary community, within a safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhood.

Aims

The overarching aim of Halton's 'Advancing Well Strategy' is to reduce social isolation amongst Older People. Increasing the quality of life of our older people, especially those most excluded, will mean that Halton must develop approaches and systems that ensure Older People:

1. Are helped to get around through better **transport** links
2. Are given opportunities for **employment** whether paid or volunteer work
3. Remain in **good health** longer
4. Feel **safe** and secure and are given support to **live independently** both inside and outside their home
5. Have easy access to **advocacy services and financial advice**
6. Receive effective **communication** and **information**

There are already a number of initiatives that address issues of transport, employment, health, independence and finance and central to this is good two-way communication and sharing of information, ensuring that older people's views on these services are taken seriously and that they are empowered to take an active role in council decision making about their local services. In this way Halton intend to ensure that Older People are valued in families, the workplace and communities throughout the borough.

"This is a strategy that enables older people to maintain fulfilled lives."

Cllr **Ann Gerrard**
Executive Board Member
Health & Social Care

Cllr **Ellen Cargill**
PPB Chair
Healthy Halton

"This is a new way of working, and gives our older people plenty of scope to use their talents and wealth of experience. They will hopefully feel encouraged to mix and make friends in the community, while at the same time improving their health and well-being."

Objectives

This strategy is for all older people in Halton. Older people, in common with any other group in Halton, are complex and varied. Hence, Halton's approach must be equally varied. One of the main objectives of the strategy is to produce a set of clear-targeted actions that older people have helped to inform to contribute to a reduction in social isolation and improved ageing in Halton.



To do this, over the next 3 years, Halton will reduce social isolation amongst older people by:

Objective a): Transport

Ensuring older people can travel safely around the borough and access services by providing more effective information about existing transport schemes using contacts such as the Older Peoples Empowerment Network. In addition it will improve local media releases and involve older people in future decisions about their transport requirements through the media and relevant older people's forums.

Objective b): Employment & Education

Enabling older people to find paid and voluntary work by improving access to educational activities for older people, such as IT skills, and working more closely with job centres and businesses to encourage increased employment opportunities for older people in both paid and voluntary jobs.

Objective c): Good Health

Ensuring that older people remain in good health longer by developing commissioning plans through consultation with older people to ensure they have access to a wide range of suitable arts, culture, leisure and sports activities.

Objective d): Safe and Independent Living

Ensuring older people feel safe and can live at home longer and in comfort by developing multi-agency support services and a single assessment process to determine the most effective support for individuals, and allowing freedom of choice through direct payments.

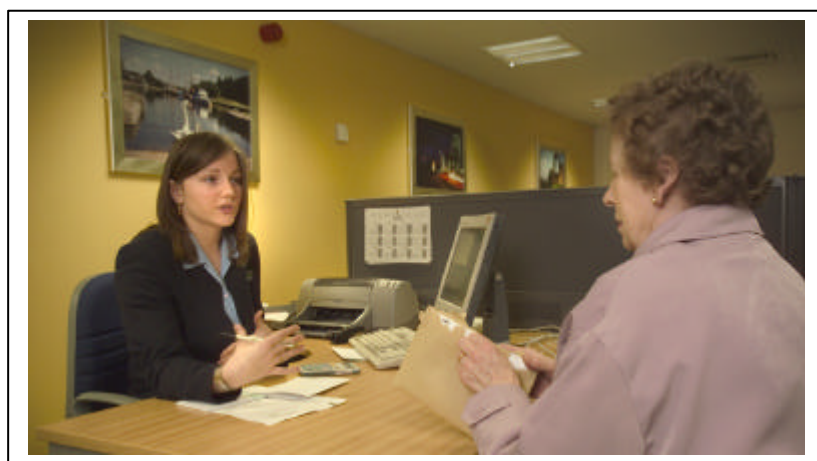
Objective e): Advocacy and Financial Services

Developing and supporting the newly formed advocacy service and providing information on financial matters, so that older people can manage their income and maximise its use, and also to maximise their income in relation to accessing direct payments and benefits in general.

Objective f): Communication and Information

Provide information on a range of activities and initiatives including: transport, employment, health and lifelong learning, financial services and so forth through the local media and Halton Direct Link and involve older people in the decision making process about services relevant to them.

Halton Borough Council intends to ensure that appropriate emphasis, planning and commitment are broadly directed across all services delivered either solely by the Council or in partnership with other organisations. In addition, it will ensure that services commissioned and provided in Halton recognise and make use of the diverse needs of older people.



3.0 CONTEXT - Where are we now?

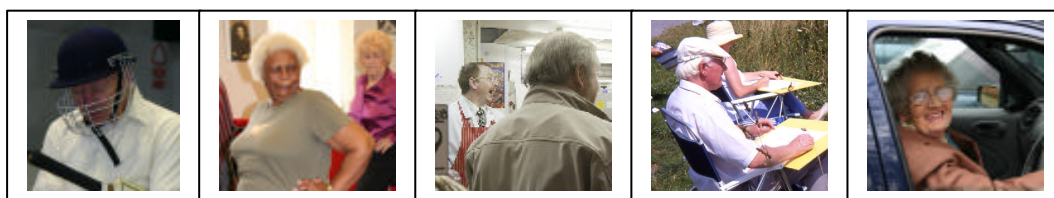
3.1 Defining Older People

Government statistics on older people will frequently use cut-off points at a variety of ages from 55 to 75 depending upon the issue under scrutiny, whereas Age Concern regards anyone over 49 as an Older Person. For the purpose of this Advancing Well strategy older people are defined as 50 and over.

The fact is that for many people significant lifestyle changes occur roughly between the ages of 50 to 75. These can involve a financial, social and psychological shift from full-time employment to having to rely upon a retirement income and frequently much less social contact. Especially so, as children will generally have departed and formed families of their own. It can also involve bereavement of friends, partners and relatives and the experience of serious personal ill health.

At this time of their life, many older people are required to take on the role of carer for a partner or parent, which can mean less leisure time rather than more. Some will continue to enjoy good health and will remain active and independent, whereas others may be less so.

Clearly, there is some considerable variation. What is not in doubt is that older people of whatever age are, currently, healthier and living longer than in any previous time and future generations are expected to continue this trend.



3.2 National Approaches Impacting on Ageing

This strategy is preventive in scope and aims to enable older people to be: valued, informed, active, healthy, secure, comfortable, and independent in order to play an important role within Halton's community. This is in keeping with a number of national and local initiatives and policies. Nationally, the Green Paper 'Independence Well-being and Choice' and the White Paper 'Choosing Health' both promote prevention.

The Innovative Forum Project (2003) stresses that good housing and facilities such as transport, leisure, entertainment, family and friends all contribute to good health among older people. In addition, it promotes what can continue to be **ACHIEVED** by older people, enabling them to be widely recognised as an important part of the local community by encouraging and facilitating older people to be:

A ctive	through improved transport links and activity programmes
C omfortable	at home and safer within their surroundings
H ealthy	physically, mentally and spiritually
I nformed	have easy access to any information of interest to them
E mpowered	to make decisions, give advice, be employed or volunteer
V alued	through consultation
E nhanced	by having a much stronger profile throughout Halton
D etermined	to be taken seriously as an important political and social force

Age Concern locally through their Halton Information Service and nationally in their document 'Dignity, Security, Opportunity' (2006) have highlighted a complexity of needs, by stressing that an individual older person may require

“financial support, a care package from the NHS and at the same time access to some life-enhancing activities such as physical activity, volunteering or education.”

Hence, services need to reflect this individuality, by supporting independence and not falling into the common trap of fostering dependency, by assuming that all old people require the same type of help and support.

This '**preventive**' approach aims not only to support those who are most at risk of losing their independence, but also those who are currently healthy, by providing a network of services and activities to enhance their quality of life.

The crucial idea is to enable individuals to engage with their own community as a means of reducing the **social isolation** that can be so prevalent in older people's lives. Viewed in this way, prevention is the principal strategy for reducing future dependency by greatly delaying the drift from low or moderate to substantial need, potentially resulting in hospital admission.

In February 2006 the Democratic Health Network issued a policy briefing entitled **A Sure Start To Later Life: Ending Inequalities For Older People**. This proposed a model placing a strong emphasis on community involvement as a means of addressing the problems of social exclusion in old age.

A common observation among older people, often referred to as the '*inverse care law*,' is that those with greatest need often receive the fewest services. Further, those who face social exclusion in mid-life are less likely to improve their situation, as they get older. Evidence also suggests that life experiences such as illness, bereavement and poverty can also create exclusion among people who previously led full independent lives. Intervention in later life can significantly reduce or prevent inequalities in advanced age.

Consequently, intervening at the earliest opportunity to promote social inclusion represents best practice. A way of achieving this is to link together all of the different services required by older people (not just those such as health and social care, normally associated with older people), through a single, easily accessible point of access.

Halton's long-term plan (subject to funding) is to have an active ageing service called A Sure Start to Later Life operating across Widnes and Runcorn. This service will provide access for all low-level preventative services and a focus for all referrals into and out of the system. Offering a self-assessment and designed to give a consistent approach to service access. In addition, the service will cater for people with different needs and abilities ranging from complex care packages to opportunities for full and part-time employment or volunteering.

The overarching idea is that all care and support packages will be holistic, offering access to: housing, social care, transport, advocacy, specialist financial advice, volunteering, lifelong learning, information about benefits, safety and the environment, all of which contribute to the overall quality of life.

Having such variety of service at a single access point, promoted through 'Local Area Agreements' with a variety of providers, would offer Halton residents, especially older people, an ideal way to become more involved in their community.

Halton Direct Link will operate as the single access point and hence first point of contact, for any older person with a query about services and events relevant to their interests and needs. This service will be linked and there will also be a directory of services that is constantly updated and supported by information officers for a speedy response.

In addition, Sure Start to Later Life will not just be a referral service. For example, it might be necessary to direct an individual to the Benefits Agency and to do this effectively transport would also have to be organised. Hence, having links between services means offering the older person a faster more efficient and supportive approach, which attempts to match all of their needs.

3.3 Local Area Agreements

A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three-year agreement, based on local Community Strategies, which sets out the priorities for a local area agreed between Central Government (represented by Government Office North West - GONW) and a local area, represented by its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – in our case the Halton Strategic Partnership. LAAs relax central government constraints and allow better decision-making at the local level. Greater freedoms provide the opportunity to think innovatively, and develop new solutions to local priorities.

Halton's LAA has been prepared in accordance with these principles. The five "blocks" of the LAA reflect our Community Strategy objectives and are set out below:

- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Halton's Urban Renewal
- Employment Learning and skills
- Children and Young People; and
- Safer and Stronger Communities

The theme of older people is picked up in the first of these blocks, although many of the issues that affect older people are also reflected in the other blocks due to its cross-cutting nature. This strategy sets out the key priorities for older people in Halton, however, in order to achieve these priorities for older people it is essential that they form part of a wider strategy for improving life in Halton as a whole.

3.4 Local Trends and Older People

The population of older people within Halton is extremely varied. It includes a wide range of age and socio-economic backgrounds resulting in very different individual experiences of life within wards. Trends within Halton show that:

- The number of individuals over 50 is increasing from 37,044 in 2001 (last census) to a projected 60,000 by 2021.
- From birth, men can expect to live 74.1 years in Halton and women 78.1 years, both of which are less than their respective national averages for 2006 (men 77.3 years, women 81.7 years). Life expectancy also varies across the borough, to the extent that there is a gap of 6.4 years between the poorest and the most affluent areas – the largest gap nationally being 10.1 years and the smallest 2.7 years.
- A larger number of older people are helped by social services to live at home than the regional and national average. Current estimates from the 2001 census data suggest there are 16,000+ carers in Halton. Of these 3,083 are unpaid carers aged 60 and over. In Halton carers provide approximately 340,000 hours of unpaid work each week. This represents a weekly value of services equivalent to £1.8m (£93.6m annually)!
- There are 12,085 individuals in employment who are aged 50 and above. Nationally, the employment rate for men aged 50 – 64 and women aged 50 – 59 has increased. Nonetheless, the local picture in Halton is still one of high unemployment among these groups. Research has indicated that older people who were unemployed and seeking work had a significantly poorer quality of life (ESRC, Growing Older Research Programme, 1999 - 2004). A recent TUC document (One Million over-fifties 'dumped on the scrap heap,' Trades Union Congress, 11 August, 2006) highlighted the fact that over one million 50 – 60 year olds who want to work can't get jobs because employers either won't recruit older workers or are unwilling to retrain those they already have. However, since government Employment Equality Regulations came into force in October 2006, it is illegal to discriminate against individuals on the basis of age in employment and vocational training.

3.5 Local Consultation with Older People

A consultation in Halton (September 2006) revealed that older people preferred to remain independent at home for as long as possible. Older people through focus groups, workshops and meetings, produced a list of ideas they felt would either support or hinder independent living. A selection of these are shown below:

Helping people remain independent	Interfering with or preventing independence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better and integrated transport • Better housing advice • Locating trustworthy and reliable workmen • Adaptations and equipment • More flexible carers • Better communication • Better assessment process • Strong support network • Shopping online • Benefits and direct payments • Activities in community centres • Easily accessible local facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor transport • Social isolation • Lack of information and choice • Few nearby facilities • Poor financial literacy • Assessment and sheltered housing delays • Family or carers overprotective • Poor coordination between health care and social care • Lack of confidence • Crime, vandalism and behavioural problems with neighbours • Routes difficult for wheelchairs

In particular the following key comments were made:

“Healthy Ageing means being able to act normal and get out and about.”

“Healthy ageing is enjoying good physical and mental health.”

“Eating the correct foods and being able to do my own shopping would help me to maintain my current health.”

“Staying healthy can be summed up in one word -TRANSPORT!!”

“We need more help in getting around.”

“I think that having access to a local doctor or dentist would help enormously.”

“I would like far more help and assistance with transport.”

The following information is taken from a local survey that was carried out in Halton during August 2006. The survey was carried out on a one-to-one basis and focused on people's perception of their own ageing, in particular their current and future health. It was deemed important to include this, as it is the thoughts and comments of the target group that we are considering with this strategy. The questionnaire was in two sections and looked at *personal profiles* and *personal views on health and service provision*.

Personal Profiles

- 94% of respondents were aged over 55.
- 74% lived alone.
- The majority of respondents were female (63%), only 8% were male while 28% didn't respond to this question.
- 78% of people classed themselves as White British, 20% Irish and 2% other.
- 76% of all people questioned classed themselves as having a limiting long-term illness.
- We received responses from 17 of the 21 wards in the borough. The majority of responses were from: Windmill Hill (13%), Grange (13%), Castlefields (10%), Ditton (9%), Hale (9%), Norton North (9%).

Personal Views on Health and Service Provision

This section of the questionnaire sought to examine through specific questions how 'Healthy Ageing' was interpreted locally:

"What does being healthy mean to you?"

Responses were varied, but the overall view was to stress the importance of remaining independent. For example 60% felt that **getting out, driving** or simply **maintaining their own independence** were the most important aspects to continued health in old age. A further 17% related the question to their own particular mental or physical health. 8% stressed **activity and exercise** and other factors such as **diet, cooking** and **meeting people** were also highlighted. One individual placed emphasis on the **environment** (locally and nationally) as crucial in maintaining health well into old age.

"What would help you to maintain or improve your current health?"

Responses were again varied and seemed dependent upon individual circumstances. 38% viewed **exercise** or **remaining active** as important in maintaining or improving health, with specific activities such as: **Tai Chi, walking, indoor** and **outdoor bowling** considered important. A further 16% of people stressed **transport** and **access to health professionals** and discussed problems getting about in the area and how they were restricted in the times they could access activities. One particular respondent said they would want **"entertainment which one can get to, as there is no bus service at night."**

When talking about access to health, local people were very concerned about travelling to GP's or health clinics and said that they would like to be able to contact GP's more easily. **Socialising, diet, getting out and about and help for carers** were the other main themes that were mentioned. Less common, but nonetheless important additional areas highlighted were: a **cleaner environment, better policing, a gardening service and volunteering opportunities**.

“Do you know the types of services that are available to you to support healthy ageing?”

71% of people answered “no” to this question, demonstrating the difficulty in successfully communicating information about services to older people. Those who answered “yes” were further asked which services they knew about - responses are shown below:

Service Provider	No. of Respondents with Knowledge of Service
Age Concern	8
Services Through Health	6
Healthy Living Programme	5
Transport	3
Halton Voluntary Action	1
Vision Support	1

“How would you find out about services or access them?”

People generally found out about services by adopting different approaches: phoning up appropriate service providers themselves, via GP surgeries, through attendance at meetings and clubs, from the local newspaper, through friends, through existing services they attend. Not surprisingly, **the vast majority (70%) wanted to be informed about future services by post**, with a further 24% favouring the telephone or being told in person. Only 3% wanted to be told by email with a further 3% preferring a text message.

“What services and support would you want /need/like to see in the future?”

Responses to this question fell into two categories – people either wanted more of what they already had or preferred access to new services. Examples of the former are: better information, social events, leisure activities, nighttime support, police and gardening. Preferred new services are: improving the environment, computer courses, supported holidays, access to luncheon groups. Irrespective of whether the spotlight was on an existing or a new service, people overwhelmingly stressed the importance of having assisted good quality and reliable transport. Indeed 45% considered public transport a future service they would want/need/like in the future.

3.5 Local programmes and initiatives

A combination of approaches is central to encouraging the lifestyle changes that are so important in countering depression and social isolation, so common in older people. Halton currently does this in the following ways:

a) Transport

Halton provides return transport from a person's home to Day Services and also facilitates service users to access other community activities throughout the day. This service is provided for those who are unable to walk or use public transport.

There is also another scheme based on the *'Travelsafe'* strategy. This highlights the importance of targeting the safety and security of those using public transport, particularly older people. It includes the use of CCTV at bus stops to make them safer, in addition to faster bus shelter repairs.

b) Employment

Halton firmly believes in fully supporting those Older People who would like to continue in employment or become involved in voluntary work. Local Jobcentre Plus network and Halton Direct can provide information on government services such as: New Deal 50 plus and New Deal for Disabled People. These schemes tackle employment barriers such as: ageism, long-term unemployment, benefit dependency, health and disability and other key issues like caring responsibilities, confidence, motivation and transport.



c) Health

Halton's "Healthy Living Programme" has a number of basic components. These stress the importance of: healthy eating, continuing physical activity through sport, maintaining creativity to keep the mind active and engaging in social, emotional, psychological and spiritual relaxation bundled together as complimentary therapies. In addition, regular health checks are strongly promoted.



d) Safe & Independent Living

A recent survey found that 87% of individuals spoken to felt that law and order was a significant factor affecting their way of life. Halton is addressing this issue with its **Blue Lamp** scheme, which involves enhancing the visible police presence throughout the borough. Its overall aim is to increase feelings of public safety in retail, residential and parks areas by reducing youth nuisance, vandalism, anti-social behaviour and graffiti.

Blue Lamp relies heavily on local people and actively welcomes community engagement in decisions about policing priorities and practice. Meetings where people can participate to inform policies and initiatives are held monthly in each of seven different sectors of the borough. It is a partnership approach that includes: voluntary and community groups, public sector agencies, local elected members, community representatives and individuals.

Halton is also fully committed to helping older people lead independent lives in their own homes for as long as possible. Key components are timely intervention and 'joined up care.' The idea is to identify potential problems and respond accordingly. Preventing the onset of a crisis frequently avoids the need for hospitalisation. Even in situations where a crisis occurs, a rapid response can quickly restore independence and well-being. Thus timely intervention not only improves outcomes for older people, but also reduces the high costs of depending upon longer-term care services.

Independent care systems in Halton are being developed and strengthened to improve prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and care. Halton's Rapid Access and Rehabilitation Service (RARS) provides assessment, treatment and care in order to help those who have been unwell, back into health and independence. Central to this, is an assessment process that enables the health and social care needs of older people to be tracked as they move through the system. This Single Assessment Process (SAP) is crucial in delivering Halton's personalised care programme.

Many of Halton's older people can currently access the following services to help them keep their independence by living at home longer:

- Home Care
- Direct payments – following an assessment of need, money from Social Services enabling people to choose who provides the support they need
- Nursing care
- Respite care
- Meals service
- Intermediate care
- Day care
- Keysafe – a secure way of letting known people have access to a person's home
- Outreach support for people with physical and sensory disabilities
- Equipment and adaptations to a person's home
- Tracking movement through sensors – Telecare
- Supported housing and housing related support services
- Supported employment for older people and adults with physical, learning or mental health problems
- Financial and benefits advice

Telecare is a particularly useful addition to Halton's routine care services. It's a set of electronic sensors designed to learn an individual's pattern of activity at home. Telecare can automatically summon help when it detects that something untoward has happened, like a serious fall or a person unable to get out of bed. After piloting limited versions of Telecare to the end of March 2006, Halton is now extending the service to the whole borough.



e) **Advocacy and Financial Services**

Halton has created a state-of-the-art mobile benefits and financial information system that reaches customers directly in their own homes and an advocacy service that is supportive and experienced at problem solving.

The **Benefits Express Bus** is linked electronically back to Halton's benefit system, enabling people to visit the bus and have their claims dealt with immediately. Staff from the **Benefits Express** team can also visit individuals at home in areas where the bus



is located and copy documents electronically onto their laptops, sending revised data to the benefits office. The claimant is then advised of their new entitlement. This facility has proved enormously successful with older people, especially those who are housebound or who have mobility problems. As a result of the **Benefits Express** turnaround times are typically hours or days rather than weeks.

Some comments from users:

“I couldn't believe it, I'm housebound and frequently it takes weeks to get changes in my benefit sorted, but now thanks to the 'Benefits Bus' it's all been done in a couple of hours and in my own house!”

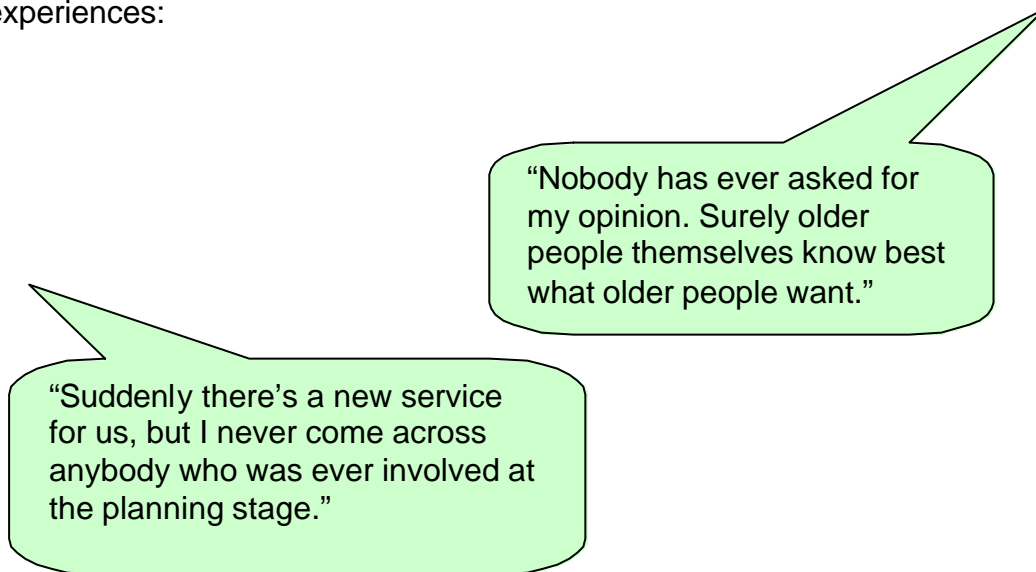
“It's really good, they photographed my benefits book, sent all my details by computer and radio to the benefits office and here I am, in no time at all, bang up to date.”

Halton PCT has supported a **Citizen and Crisis Advocacy** service for its most vulnerable and socially isolated people for the past 11 years. Under a new partnership agreement Shap Ltd will take over this role for Adults, Older People and Carers who are receiving social care and/or health services in the borough.

f) Communication & Information

This is at the very heart of ensuring that older people feel valued. It is integral to understanding an individual's needs as well as helping to support developments within the community.

At Halton Borough Council this is achieved through Halton Older Peoples Empowerment Network (OPEN) Forum and Halton's Older Peoples Champion. The Forum is under the umbrella of Age Concern Halton and consists of a committee of people aged 50 plus and their carers who act as key contacts for local older people's groups throughout Halton. In addition, it operates a database of people interested in having a 'say' on how services can be improved. In this way we strive to avoid the following common experiences:



4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal thrust of Halton's *'Advancing Well Strategy'* is to reduce social isolation amongst Older People. Halton will continue to emphasise the importance of: excellent transport and accessibility to services; continuing employment, volunteering, or changing employment according to circumstances and will endeavour to use its resources to assist older people to keep their independence, while maintaining a full and active role in society, even if health problems complicate matters in later life. Central to this approach is the fundamental belief that older people are entitled to dignity and respect at all stages of their lives. This means protecting the vulnerable and at all times, setting high standards for services accessible to all based on individual need, with the requirements of the individual at the centre.

In other words, the *Advancing Well Strategy* is a preventive strategy that aims to tackle social isolation in Halton on a number of different fronts in order to maintain the following:

- Personal dignity
- The ability to exercise choice and control
- The ability to make a positive contribution
- Protection from discrimination and harassment
- An improved quality of life
- Better health
- Economic well-being



In addition to those programmes and initiatives it already operates, either on its own or in conjunction with other organisations it will also look to do the following:

a) Transport

Getting around in Halton is not just about public transport, but also involves any individual feeling safe and secure within their local neighbourhood.

Halton will strive to ensure that:

- It will continue to support **Halton Community Transport** in order to provide a number of specialised transport services for residents unable to use conventional public transport. These services include: Halton Dial-A-Ride a door to door service for people with disability or mobility problems; Women's Safe Transport in Halton – an evening door to door service enabling women and girls to travel safely, free from harassment; Accessible Links To Work – enabling disabled residents to access work or training and all residents to access local hospitals, colleges and shops.
- It will provide free transport surgeries to community groups, workplaces, job agencies or any organisation that identifies lack of transport as a problem.
- Promote social inclusion by providing a wide range of community and accessible transport services and a half-fare concessionary scheme for elderly and disabled residents of the borough.
- Will consult widely through Halton OPEN, Halton Older People's Champion, voluntary agencies, and partners to improve transport policies and services.
- It will develop targeted transport information for all age groups, increase the use of the travel information team and monitor the use of community transport to cultural or sporting venues by all user groups.

Outcome

Halton is determined to ensure that older people and their representatives will be consulted in all future plans involving the street environment, crime and local transport. Halton's overall aim is to ensure that older people can travel as safely and easily throughout the borough as anyone else in order to explore or take advantage of employment, social and educational and other opportunities.

b) Employment

The trend towards early retirement, which has been prevalent over the past 50 years, has lately begun to reverse. For many, finding or remaining in employment is important, because pensions are no longer adequate, while others simply miss the social connections associated with work.

Halton will:

- Continue to work tirelessly to improve the IT, educational and physical skills of older people.
- Seek to improve the employment prospects of those older people who wish to work through its employment, learning and skills agenda.
- Strive to raise the overall employment rate by tackling pockets of unemployed such as the over 50's and those in receipt of incapacity benefit, especially in deprived wards.
- Address ageism in: Council business, employment opportunities and service delivery throughout the borough.
- Provide equality of access to services for all residents and service users, through the use of technology, imagination and hard work
- Continue to provide information on volunteering opportunities through 'Halton Direct Link' (Runcorn and Widnes).

Outcome

Halton is fully committed to tackling issues of discrimination of older people by employers and service providers and will continue to provide opportunities for older people to access a wide variety of services and activities to obtain new skills or update old ones with a view to keeping them socially and economically active enabling them to have a more financially secure and active sociable future.

c) Good Health

Incapacity in later life is not an inevitable consequence of growing older. Maintaining some form of regular exercise such as walking or swimming, in combination with a healthy diet, can strengthen muscles, reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis and back pain, all of which are traditionally associated with advanced years. Improving lifestyle through a change in diet and exercise, not only makes people healthier, but also enhances their psychological well-being, making them feel and look better.

Halton will:

- Increase the profile and availability of a wide variety of Complementary Therapy workshops and awareness raising events to community groups, health professionals, carers and local people living and working in Halton.
- Through its **Arts For Health** programme, encourage creativity and self-expression, enabling people of all ages to improve their health and share experiences with others in a supportive environment.
- Support ways in which people can improve their health through a variety of physical activities. These will aim to address specific health issues such as cancer, depression, respiratory problems and coronary heart disease and stress.
- Through its **Food For Health** programme facilitate healthy living by increasing opportunities for the community to access good quality affordable food.
- Through its **Recipe For Health Referral Scheme**, GP's Practice or Community Nurses, refer people who need to be more physically active, to a 10-week activity and exercise course to improve their health.
- Through its **Carers Sanctuary Clinics** and **Recharge** programmes, offer free support to carers and those experiencing or recovering from health problems.

Outcome

By continuing to support a varied series of physical, creative and intellectual programmes and initiatives it will help older people maintain their confidence and health and encourage them to develop socially, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and physically in a positive way in older age maintaining their independence into later life.

d) Safe & Independent Living

Among the older population, it is often the perception of crime, and the importance placed upon it, rather than the actual local picture, that makes people fearful of going out, particularly at night. Actual recorded levels of crime within Halton are low in comparison with the national average and inner city areas. Halton will continue to operate the Blue Lamp scheme and Travel safe programme in response to this. In addition people want to feel safe in their own homes and able to live comfortably with the appropriate support.

Overall, Halton's principal aim is to maintain people's independence by offering them greater choice and freedom over the way in which their needs are met. We aim to give older people the major voice in any decisions that are taken and responsibility for how they choose to live their lives. Halton will help them to achieve this while providing practical help, advice and support enabling them to live independently, for as long as possible in their own homes.

Halton will continue to:

- Expand its use of direct payments
- Review its falls prevention programme and extend the use of Telecare to summon appropriate help quickly in the event of falls and other problems at home.
- Ensure that vulnerable older people will continue to have access to a set of flexible housing options, through its partnership links with registered social landlords
- Provide a flexible mobile library service to those who cannot or find it difficult to visit local libraries.
- Develop extra care supported housing so that vulnerable older people will have an alternative to residential care.
- Raise awareness with front line staff in health and social care settings to identify hidden carers.
- Assist carers to meet their own, training, health, leisure, education and employment needs.
- Develop Intermediate care services to reduce the need for older people being hospitalised.
- Develop and implement the Single Assessment Process (SAP) for all professionals as a crucial component of personalised care.
- Ensure that Day care facilities such as the meals service, advocacy support and respite care services are sensitive to different cultural groups and their needs.

Outcome

Halton promises to provide high quality coordinated services for health, social care, housing and the voluntary sector that reflect the needs and cultural diversity of local people. Our future aim is to enable all older people to fulfil their personal goals, while as far as possible, maintaining a high quality of life.

Advocacy and Financial Services

Frequently, older people have difficulty keeping track of their weekly or monthly income and expenditure. As a consequence, levels of debt among those over fifty, is becoming more of a problem. Halton has plans to target this particular group and is developing financial information leaflets, which through simple examples will help individuals to keep track of their weekly/monthly income and expenditure. Many older people shy away from this kind of information or appoint others to do it on their behalf. These leaflets will help individuals to take control of their own finances and where necessary will act as a starting point for managing debt.

Halton will:

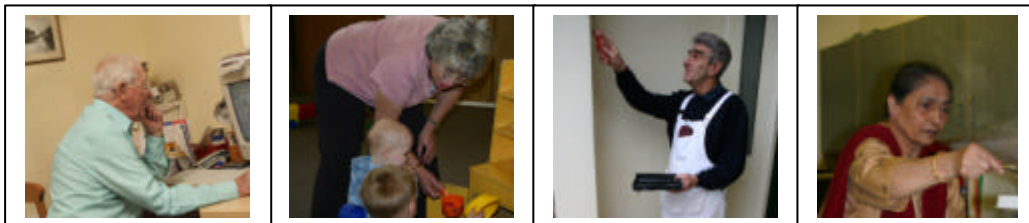
- Continue to develop its mobile benefits and pensions service to meet the needs of locally isolated people.
- Strive to maximise the take up of benefits within the borough.
- Continue to develop and target its advocacy service to meet local need.
- Strive to improve financial literacy among Adults over 50.

Outcome

Halton will continue to develop advocacy and financial services for older people to ensure they maximise their income and optimise their economic well-being.

e) Communication and Information

Halton fully recognises the importance that older people play in society and will strive to make use of their skills and experience through consultation, communication and information sharing.



Halton will strive to ensure that:

- We provide frequent information and advice on a range of areas including: social care services, health, housing, transport and lifelong learning through local media and Halton Direct Link.
- We will increase opportunities for the involvement and representation of older people in decision-making across all of our services through our Older People's Champion and Halton Open Forum. This will ensure a cross section of different voices informs our policies.
- Our Community Strategy will facilitate the involvement of different cultural groups through interpreters, regular events, targeted transport and 'own language' information.
- All information will be available in a variety of formats such as: large print, audiotape, CD or Braille on request.
- Older people can easily contact the council: in person, by letter, by e-mail, telephone or through the Internet.

Outcome

Throughout the borough, any older person or individual acting on their behalf, will have easy access from their home or local area, to information about the full range of council services. They will find all council employees engaging and helpful and they will be able to obtain efficient advice on a range of services through a single access point.

In summary, the purpose of this strategy is to move away from fostering dependency amongst older people to developing a more preventative approach by providing a network of services and activities that give older people choice and independence, the same as any other citizen.

Older people should feel they are a part of Halton's community. They need to be able to travel safely, easily and affordably throughout the borough in order to follow their interests and needs. This is an important way of reducing social isolation and is supported nationally in the Green Paper 'Independence Well-Being and Choice' and the White Paper 'Choosing Health', and by national organisations such as Age Concern. It is also supported by the 2006 Democratic Health Network 'A Sure Start to Later Life': Ending Inequalities for Older People, which places a strong emphasis on community involvement as a means of addressing social exclusion in old age. One of the main ways of achieving this is to link together all of the different services older people may wish or need to use. Halton Direct Link will act as a 'Single Access Point' to assist this process.

Excellent transportation, remaining healthy and being able to live at home as long as possible, are key issues the Council will need to consider as revealed by the responses to recent consultations. The first consultation with older people revealed the importance they place on transportation. Being able to get around to the shops, to the doctors or dentist and to see family and friends or take part in leisure activities, which they viewed as vitally important to sustaining their health and independence, enabling them to enjoy an active life that keeps them healthy.

The consultations also demonstrated another of the major obstacles facing any council – people are largely unaware of the services available to them or how to access such services. This indicates that another way of Halton assisting healthy, active ageing and prevent social isolation is to solve communication problems, not just keeping older people informed but empowering them to become involved in the decision making processes relating to the provision of services for them.

The population statistics also show that the population of older people in Halton is varied and therefore there needs to be a wide range of services to accommodate this. There are important consequences for Halton as the number of people over the age of 50 is expected to almost double by 2021. The following action plan aims to address these issues.