

**COUNCIL
23 JUNE 2004**

**REPORT OF THE PENSIONERS' CHAMPION
(Councillor Clifton Thompson)**

1. This is the second report that I have presented to the Council as its Pensioners Champion
2. The role and function of the Pensioners Champion of the Council is "To act as a positive focus for the local community at elected member level so as to ensure that full consideration is given to the impact of Council activities and decisions upon Pensioners"
3. The key tasks of the Pensioners Champion are: -
 - (a) To make contact with local organisations concerned with Pensioners and to establish effective and regular consultation arrangements with those organisations.
 - (b) To represent the views of such organisations to the Council, Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and other Committees and to officers in all relevant aspects of the Councils activities
 - (c) To act as an advocate on behalf of Pensioners within the Council as an organisation and to the wider community.
 - (d) To become familiar with the needs and priorities of Pensioners and to weigh up interests expressed in order to provide advice on the implications of alternative courses of action
 - (e) To feedback decisions of the Council and to explain the Council's position on specific issues of concern to relevant organisations and to individuals involved
 - (f) To publish an annual report on work undertaken over each year for consideration by the Council.
4. I have had regular meetings with Bracknell Senior Citizens Forum at which representatives of the Forum raise matters of concern for my attention. I also attend its committee meetings. I am the Council's representative on Age Concern Bracknell and attend its meetings. I am one of the Trustees. I have attended various meetings held under the auspices of Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action and attended public meetings of Bracknell & District Citizens Advice Bureau. I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Bracknell Branch of the University of the Third Age. I also attend meetings of the Bracknell Forest Elderly Persons Forum on which various bodies are represented. With Councillor Edger the Tenants and Leaseholders Champion I attend meetings of the Sheltered Schemes Residents Association. I attended the inaugural meeting of the Warfield Over 50's club. I have established contact with local representatives of the Pension Service and attended meetings organised by the Service.
5. In the last year I became a trustee of Age Concern Berkshire. I am one of the trustees of the recently established Bracknell Shopmobility. I am the Council's representative on the Berkshire Central & West Community Legal Service Partnership of the Legal Services Commission one aspect of which is social inclusion. I am a trustee of Crowthorne British Legion.

6. In regard to health I am a member of the Council's Health Forum. I have attended public meetings of the Bracknell Forest Primary Care Trust and other NHS trusts. I attend regular meetings as a member of Bracknell Forest Older Peoples Strategy Group which has a full agenda relating to older peoples health issues. I am also a member of the EMI sub group (Elderly Mentally Infirm) which latterly has included in its agenda the development of protocols or pathways. I am also a member of the East Berkshire Age Discrimination Scrutiny Group which meets at the King Edward VII Hospital Windsor.
7. In my involvement with the various bodies and in connection with my Council appointments I have pursued my role as Pensioners Champion. I monitor activities generally of the Council to promote the interests of pensioners. I attend Creative Partnership meetings. In connection with public consultations I have regard to the interests of Pensioners. I have attended as a witness working groups of Overview and Scrutiny Panels. I hold a weekly surgery at the Look In and a monthly one at the Sandhurst Day Centre. I contribute regularly to Town & Country.
8. On 25th May last I attended a conference held by the Department of Health and the Government Office of the South East "Engaging Older People's champion in the South East". This was instructive in how the role of champion is perceived nationally. Before that on 29th March I attended by invitation a limited group discussion to discuss an updated toolkit for older people's champions as part of a Department of Health consultation at Help the Aged's main offices in London. I was able to demonstrate my role and discuss how a champion might be effective. On 25th March I attended an Age Concern Conference near Oxford the subject of which was Practical Solutions for Rooting Out Age Discrimination.
9. The work of Pensioners Champion generates a good amount of correspondence related to problems. I do though have regard to the broader aspect of pensioners as a whole whether or not they actively call upon the council for services. This is particularly so in regard to the environment and to public facilities. I am monitoring Town Centre Development proposals. I have taken an interest in the development of Community Cohesion and attended meetings. I have noted the draft 3 Year Development Plan for Adult Education and am concerned that Pensioners are not overlooked.
10. In regard to personal issues I seek not to usurp the role of the ward councillor but at the same time I will not fail to respond to anyone seeking assistance. In general my method of working is to seek to identify facts and give such assurance as I feel able then refer by e-mail to the appropriate officer for attention and/or clarification of the position in relation to policy. Invariably I have met with a good and timely response from the various departments across the Council.
11. Particular topics in the last year include NHS dental services in Sandhurst and establishment of additional facilities, consideration of provision of care following closure of Crossroads, independence of the Senior Citizen Forum Newsletter, Grant for a small group provision of bathing facilities, replacement of windows, Social Services Charging, car schemes, bus information services, de-designation of older peoples flats, pension credit schemes, pedestrian improvements, garden services, attendance allowances, slippery leaves, roundabout road markings, provision of bus services, Council tax and pensioners, disabled parking, bus passes, assistance with removal expenses, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust Recovery Plan, closure of Johnstone Court and day service provision, internal decoration services for resident over 80, post hospital assistance and care, leisure saver pass, closure of COATS, Bobby Scheme and Handyman scheme, draft partnership board protocol,

representation at Sandhurst policing summit, cycling in Bracknell town centre, speaking at a pre retirement course, bed blocking, fire risk in care homes, night time closure of Heatherwood Minor Injuries Unit, youth behaviour, Christmas dinner 2004, national care standards, forms for benefits, noisy tenants, continuance of benefits following move, continued education for isolated old, terms of grants, rehousing, waiting at Wexham Park, location of provision of health services, property boundary, composters, Voice of Experience III. The variety of involvement is self evident.

12. Looking back broadly the pensioners of Bracknell Forest are generally well served as regards council services. There were questions in relation to policing and perceived fears of safety and also to changes in and provision of public transport. Community transport is the subject of enquiry by one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels but compared to 2002 little or no complaint has been made to me. Provision of and access to medical services continues to feature. The major issue was the closure of Johnstone Court. In regard to this I heard the reasons and then examined them. It is an important aspect of the role to examine reasons given for any action. I had to agree with them. I then as Pensioners Champion when asked if I could do anything to stop the closure had to say that I could not. As Champion I made it evident that full support be given to all those affected. After the closure was announced I visited Downside twice and saw the work done to welcome those coming from Johnstone Court. I shall be visiting again very soon. I was impressed with what I saw at the annual general meeting of the Bracknell U3A. This is a thriving organisation catering for a wide variety of interests and will make new members welcome.
13. There are a large number of voluntary groups and organisations in Bracknell Forest as well as the Bracknell & Wokingham College and the role of Champion is not to supplement but to support such groups and organisations. I have not originated any new initiatives but will hope to be able to support others and facilitate their efforts.
14. Looking ahead Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action is developing an initiative to provide on Christmas Day a dinner for the lonely. I have attended a small working group.
15. Also looking ahead on 12th November the third Voice of Experience conference is planned to take place with the support of the Council. The day will be at no cost to the individual and there are some 150 places available for pensioners and near pensioners. The theme is Wellbeing and I hope we can get a good cross section of the community. The previous two conferences were successful. A number of agencies are involved including the Senior Citizens Forum, Voluntary Action, the Primary Care Trust and the Police.
16. Without support from fellow members, officers and of outside agencies it would not be possible to carry out the role of Pensioners Champion. I am pleased to record with grateful thanks full support all round. In the year I have had the support of a small team of individuals whose experience I have relied on. I thank them. They are Mrs Adrienne Jones, Mrs Eve Marshall, Mrs Isabel Mattick and Mr Ray Simonds.
17. I submit the report to the Council.

Clifton Thompson
23rd June 2004