

Chapter 8 Healthy ageing and independent living

The ultimate goal of prevention of ill health is not to extend life expectancy but to extend the proportion of each life lived in a healthy state. Improving lifestyles, prevention and early detection of disease and robust and effective treatment of illness will contribute to this aim. However, to fulfil aspiration for healthy living, people also need safe, secure environments, with financial assurance for their future years, independence, with support if required, and to be included in general society. Too many of our older people do not have these prerequisites for healthy older age.

National estimates suggest an increase in the number of older people (aged 65 years and over) in Walsall from 45,100 in 2010 to 50,400 in the year 2020. This poses particular challenges for Walsall to accelerate current actions to improve health with those in middle age, thus ensuring that good functioning is maintained as these citizens become older.

The key local issues:

- *There has been an increased number of falls in older people (particularly in institutional settings) with the resulting loss of independence*
- *Oral health – the first 4 years of age is a vital stage for oral health promotion for children and parents. The Care Homes Survey, 2011 will provide valuable information on oral health for older people and will highlight where improvements can be made*
- *With the current and predicted rise in the number of people with dementia, the societal response has lagged behind. The proportion of people with dementia having an early diagnosis in Walsall has been one of the lowest in the West Midlands. Raising awareness of dementia amongst the population is a priority*
- *Excess winter deaths and fuel poverty – central government changed the definition in August 2013, and as a result, the percentage of households in Walsall that are fuel poor is less than regionally and has narrowed the gap with national levels*
- *High levels of older people living alone with no access to their own transport limits their ability to participate in a range of activities and often leads to social isolation. This in turn places added pressure and increased reliability on public transport.*
- *Making use of results and analyses from the 2012 Lifestyle survey will provide a valuable insight into what people's views are on quality of life, wellbeing and future aspirations. This potentially leaves gaps in any strategic service planning*
- *Crime can have a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of victims, particularly the elderly and vulnerable. It may adversely affect pre-existing health conditions, reduce confidence and the ability to live independently*

This chapter addresses healthy ageing, focussing on extension of independent living and end of life care in Walsall.