

## **Brampton and District 50+ Forum**

Meeting held on Tuesday 28 November 2006 in Brampton Community Centre.

A group of 33 had a soup and sandwich lunch and about 44 assembled for the meeting.

The Chair, Ann Oswin, welcomed the members and introduced the main speaker, Cheryl Cowperthwaite and her colleague, Danine Kirk.

A radio microphone was again used to improve audibility and the newly fitted induction loop system was in operation.

Mrs Cowperthwaite began her talk by describing some of her personal experiences of living in Cumbria without personal transport and how she, working for Cumbria County Council, had helped to develop 'Rural Wheels' over the last 4 years. The scheme was started in South Cumbria. It uses existing transport providers - taxis, minibus and small coaches - to provide subsidised transport where there is no scheduled bus service, or where using a bus service is not an option, for example because of disability. Individuals living in rural areas are given improved access to local facilities such as shops, surgeries, bus and train stations. Also, the services of the local transport providers are retained within the community. Rural Wheels was asked to pilot a smart card system which would provide an alternative to using cash and also give a means of auditing the provision of transport services. The service costs 30p per mile. It is a service subsidised by local government (unlike bus concessions for the elderly which are funded by central government) and the extent of the service is limited by the funds available. The Rural Wheels leaflet explains how to join the system and gives details how to put credit onto the smart card, for example at a Post Office.

Two Forum members offered their personal thanks for the Rural Wheels service.

In the discussion with Forum members towards the end of her talk, Mrs Cowperthwaite outlined how the scheme needed to be developed further: for example, there is a limited number of vehicles with wheelchair access at present and whilst bus companies have ten years to upgrade their vehicles, there is no such time limit for taxis; there is currently a problem getting a taxi licence from the city council for a vehicle with full rear access.

Payments to bus companies for concessionary fares are still based on a formula rather than on actual journeys made. Extending the use of smart cards to service buses (due to happen in a few months time) will allow precise auditing of concessionary fares and provide better data for local government and perhaps convince them that the Rural Wheels service is both fulfilling a need and is cost-effective.

Ann Oswin thanked the speaker and her colleague and then gave the meeting information on leaflets and schemes which give advice about transport for both local journeys and for travelling further afield.

### **Updates, given by the Chair.**

1. A local research team is about to embark on a project to investigate how institutions find out whether elderly patients are being properly fed.
2. Help the Aged have a campaign to persuade the Chancellor to restore the £200 payment to the elderly to help pay their council tax.
3. Keighley Forum is holding a seminar on 5 April for people interested in doing research.
4. The local Primary Care Trust is now Cumbria PCT. It still has only an interim Chair.  
The Whole System Review has been completed; information may be available for our January meeting.
5. Education Adventure. Ann has details of a project which provides an opportunity for people over the age of 55, who have not previously benefited from further education. Participating students spend one term at one of the colleges participating in the project and with the help of a tutor, produce an independent original research project in an area of personal interest.

After a 'travel' slide show given by Ann Oswin, the meeting closed with tea and coffee.

**The next 50+ Forum meeting** is on Tuesday 23 January 2007. The speaker is Eric Lowe of 'Independent Age' who will talk on supporting older people at home.

### **Other events:**

Friday 15 December 12.30 Advent Lunch Brampton Community Cafe £2.50  
Thursday 15 February Two performances of "Who's Helen?" More details at the next meeting.