Improvements in health and social care across Wales and the UK are contributing factors to people living longer which welcomed and celebrated in Bridgend County Borough. Of equal importance, is enabling and maximising opportunities that encourage independence and social inclusion for older people which in turn promotes their potential and participation within their communities.

The Council recognised the need to plan services to appropriately support the growing numbers of older residents. Whilst they recognised that general services should not necessarily be segregated for older people, some specific issues with a focus around older people needed to be addressed.

From consultation, the Council learned that service users and families valued the services they received. Excellent examples of good working and collaboration in the delivery of front line services also demonstrated that partnership working was embedded in the organisational context and therefore a joint commissioning strategy was deemed to be the next step in service delivery.

This recognition directly led to the development of the local *Never Too Old* - Strategy for Older People in Bridgend County Borough in 2002. It was recognised that a strong partnership approach was important in delivering improvements across the wide agenda of meeting the different needs of older people.
The development of this strategy was a pioneering process. Bridgend was one of the first authorities in Wales to state, in the form of an action plan, its intentions towards supporting older people and healthy age ing. The Bridgend Strategy predates the development of the National Strategy for Wales. Bridgend’s local *Never Too Old Strategy* was designed to outline their values and aims as a partnership to help ensure that the people whom they serve have the right to live independently and with dignity with services that are delivered at the appropriate time, place and manner. The development of this landmark strategy provided the older persons partnership with a direct framework for commissioning of services related to ensuring the main values locally and nationally could be achieved.

Some of the key factors of success, that the Council will continue to build on, were:

**Engagement of customers and their families**

Also highlighted, and therefore central to the strategy and is developments, is the involvement of older people. It is accepted that no individual is better placed to identify and speak for the needs of older people than older people themselves. Therefore a critical element of this strategy development and delivery has been older people not only being consulted upon but actively empowered them to be part of the partnership, from the beginning.

A commitment was therefore made to change consultation and planning mechanisms in order that the views of older people were central to the drive forward of service design and change. This prompted the further development of the older person’s forum who were actively involved in the subsequent design and delivery of the *Never Too Old Strategy* for Older People in Bridgend County Borough.

In Bridgend County Borough there has always been an active voluntary and community sector in terms of people over the age of fifty. Through Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations, Bridgend Carers Centre and existing residential and housing forums, the Council were able to bring together a wide variety of people with a common interest in developing services for older people. Harder to reach communities were targeted through other Council services such as carers, community first networks, the Social Services database for “unmet needs” etc.
The strategy for the development of services for older people in Bridgend is ambitious in its plans and targets. It was acknowledged early in the planning stages, that there was a need for a multi-agency partnership approach in its development and sustaining the principles and aims within the strategy. A partnership was developed involving Bridgend County Borough Council, Bridgend Local Health Board (LHB), Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust, Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations and older people themselves. The Joint Strategy Planning Team for Older People was the main driving force behind the development of this strategy. In 2001 the planning team began to address the re-modelling of existing services, the re-investment from existing resources and the targeting of new resources. It was recognised that re-pooling resources would likely have short term consequences especially around alleviating pressures on existing service provision.

The Strategy Planning Team for Older People is central to all decisions made around services for older people in Bridgend County Borough. All policies, innovative projects, service change and delivery are directly accountable to this group. The Joint Strategy Planning Team for Older People endeavours to effectively deliver upon the National strategy’s aims as a collective body under the overarching framework of the Health Social Care and Well-Being Partnership Board and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Collectively, the team were tasked with the development of a framework to ensure the planning and delivery of a coordinated integrated service for older people and also to ensure that links were made into other strategies.

The development of the *Never Too Old* structure and brand ensured that Bridgend County Borough had the mechanisms and processes in place prior to the launch of the National Strategy that has effectively become recognised across the borough. This structure and branding could also have contributed to strengthened feeling of identity and purpose within the Partnership.

Attached to the *Never Too Old strategy* is a 5 year action plan, which is linked to the goals and aspirations of the Strategy for Older People in Wales. Due to the fact that the Local Strategy was corporately owned by the Council, LHB, NHS Trust and the Voluntary and community sector, this has meant that the delivery of their aspirations were also jointly owned.
The early development of the strategy and planning structures in Bridgend has ensured that effective links and partnerships to develop integrated planning and service delivery, are not only in place but has resulted in a more responsive diagnostic and support service.

**Making a Difference**

Other projects have developed from the authority’s direct empowerment, engagement and involvement of older people, include:

- Service directory for older people
- Help at hand directory for older people
- Website for older people
- Forum Development Grant for Older People
- Older Persons Champion (Council, LHB, NHS Trust)
- Independent Advocacy Service for Older People
- Carers Forum

In July 2006, an Older People’s Development day was held in partnership with groups representing older people and those interested in services for older people. The day was held with support from the Welsh Assembly Government and Wales Institute for Health and Social Care. The outcome of the day has been to propose a more dynamic planning arrangement for carrying forward the action plans for the National Standards Framework for Older People in Wales and the National Strategy for Older People in Wales.
Future Developments

The Joint Planning Team ensures it always has an eye to the future and to this end it chose to review its work, achievements, stakeholder involvements and the ability for everyone to participate in the processes.

For older people, the Bridgend Partnership has established a Never Too Old Action Team, out of which there are two work streams. One of which considers the health and social care needs of older people and the other considers the wider issues that have direct implications upon older people’s health and social care such as well-being and social inclusion. These two work streams have priorities to work to, and engage stakeholders in task and finish groups to deliver on the objectives of the relevant action plans for older people.

The progress from the health and social care works stream will continue to report to the partnership board; and the well-being and social inclusion issues will be reported directly to the Local Strategic Partnership. In this way the Council are striving to ensure the voice and views of older people are heard across the higher strategic planning groups within Bridgend County as well as the whole community of Bridgend.

Lessons Learnt

Clear vision and purpose - Agreed by all partners.

Effective Engagement - This includes all stakeholders and partners listening and responding to messages that are not always nice to hear!

Working closely with stakeholders - To identify gaps in service and to work towards a more holistic service provision for our older people in partnership with our customers and older population.

Being organised - To ensure all stakeholders are able to participate and are fully aware of changes.

Invest in maintaining relationships