



Falkirk District Older People's Network (OPN)
Thursday 28 August 2025, 10am – 12pm
1st Falkirk Scout Hall, Pleasance Gardens, Falkirk, FK1 1BG

Present:

David Paterson (Co-Chair)	Falkirk OPN / NHS Retirement Fellowship
John McGhee (Co-Chair)	Falkirk OPN / Scottish Seniors Computer Club Falkirk
Eloise Wilson (Minute Taker)	CVS Falkirk & District
Kerrie Hoggan	CVS Falkirk & District
Dr Lisa Davison (Guest Speaker)	University of Stirling

Gavin Johnstone	Falkirk Libraries
Harrison Crawford	Falkirk Foodbank
Stefanie Paterson	Falkirk Delivers
Caroline Nisbet	Forth Valley Sensory Centre
Sara McPhee	Strathcarron Hospice
Jacinta Jaylo Barker	RISE Forth Valley
Helen McGarry	Unknown
Julie Hayward	Bailliefields Community Hub SCIO
Justine Nicolson	Strathcarron Hospice
Steph Davidson	Volunteering Matters
Mehar Shagufta	Playlist for Life
Chloe Mackie	British Red Cross
Munira Farara	The Braveheart Association
Jim Cowan	NHS Retirement Fellowship
Mel Ryan	SDS Forth Valley
Ethan Young	SDS Forth Valley
Donna Sinclair	Royal Voluntary Service Forth Valley
Rhona McColl	Royal Voluntary Service Forth Valley
Dawn Hill	First Step Development Ventures SCIO
Sharlene Rummage	Falkirk & Clackmannanshire Carers Centre
Isabel Sarle	Snowdrop Cafe
Anne Donoghue	Falkirk Council
CLlr Alf Kelly	Falkirk Council
Gillian Millar	Cycling Without Age
James Paterson	Falkirk HSCP

Apologies:

Kenny McLean	Stenhousemuir FC
Stuart Matson	Routes to Work
Margaret McGowan	Scottish Care
Donna Paterson	Alzheimer's Scotland
Diana Morgan	NHS Forth Valley

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks:

David Paterson (OPN) opened the meeting and reflected on the journey of the Falkirk Older People's Network (OPN), established in 2020 in partnership originally with CVS Falkirk & District. He spoke about the group's early beginnings, with initial meetings in the CVS office to draft a constitution, and development of the group was supported by former Provost Bill Buchanan and Cllr Alf Kelly (Falkirk Older People's Champion). Small grants from Community Choices and Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) were vital in getting the network underway.

David highlighted that the network arose from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which left many older people isolated. Those challenges remain, compounded by the cost of living crisis, rising inflation, and increases in heating and household bills. Falkirk OPN has worked with Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (FHSCP) to raise local concerns, particularly around difficulties accessing GPs and dentists and the rising costs of private dental care.

He also reflected on the frustrations of time and investment lost when national initiatives such as the National Care Service concluded. Nonetheless, the OPN has ensured that Falkirk's older people are represented at national events, including the Scottish Older People's Assembly, and have contributed to the review of the 2015 Health and Social Care standards.

The network has played a visible role in organising Falkirk Older People's Day: in 2022 with CVS Falkirk, and in 2023 and 2024 in partnership with Falkirk Delivers and Braveheart. For 2025, Falkirk Older People's Day will be delivered in partnership with Falkirk Delivers and Braveheart. Looking ahead, David noted the importance of refreshing OPN's focus, especially with Scottish elections due next year and local elections to follow. These will influence investment priorities and decisions on areas such as triple lock pensions and social care.

He emphasised the need for OPN to capture members' views regularly and ensure their collective voice continues to influence decision-making. The network will hold quarterly meetings, including another before the end of the year. Members were also reminded to complete evaluation forms towards the end of the meeting.

2. Guest Presentation - Dr Lisa Davison (Quantitative Research Fellow, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling):

Lisa introduced the Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project, now in its third year, which investigates the impact of stigma on ageing and disability. The project uses mixed methods, including lived experience diaries and community peer researchers, and works with a range of partners. Their presentation can be accessed via the [CVS Falkirk & District](https://www.cvsfalkirk.org.uk) website.

Lisa shared data showing that stigma and discrimination often overlap; nearly half of people experiencing one form of stigma also reported another, highlighting the role of intersectionality. Issues are particularly pronounced in areas of deprivation, and Scotland shows higher prevalence of age-related concerns than England. Housing adaptations were identified as a critical area, with costs

considerably higher in private housing. Nationally, around £68 million is spent annually on adaptations, but many small changes that could help people remain independent are not easily accessible.

In Falkirk, around one-fifth of residents are over 65. Local data highlighted gaps in accessible toilets and changing places. Lisa noted that much academic research is sometimes less accessible to communities, so the project has produced creative outputs such as poems and short pieces, alongside traditional reports, to ensure inclusivity.

In discussion, members asked about how outputs are used. Lisa confirmed that findings have already influenced parliamentary debate on the Adaptations Bill and are being fed back to government, occupational health, and social work. Questions also explored definitions of deprivation, recruitment of additional community researchers, and links with projects such as Cycling Without Age, which share accessibility challenges with councils.

3. Group Feedback Session:

Members split into small groups to identify priorities and challenges. Feedback highlighted the need to build OPN's capacity and visibility, explore research into accessible housing, and strengthen campaigning activity, including through template letters of support. Improving awareness of services and opportunities for signposting was considered essential, as was recognising and supporting volunteers, widening audiences through libraries and Men's Groups, and encouraging intergenerational volunteering from schools and colleges.

Groups emphasised the importance of befriending services, particularly given reductions in provision, and of promoting local clubs more visibly in healthcare settings such as hospitals, GP surgeries, and pharmacies. Tackling loneliness and social isolation was a recurring theme, with community transport and greater use of hospital and community spaces for consultations seen as potential solutions.

Members also underlined the importance of ensuring OPN's voice is heard at HSCP Boards and in campaigning for an Older People's Commissioner. Support for older carers was raised, particularly in relation to carers allowance and pensions. Confidence-building initiatives to help older people overcome small barriers to participation were identified as vital, alongside better communication of activities and events to the wider community

4. Discussion:

In the plenary discussion, members reflected further on the issues raised. Concerns were expressed about reduced local services, including the loss of banking facilities and shops, which particularly affect people with dementia who rely on familiar environments. There was agreement that vulnerable older adults often do not know who to contact for support, and that in-person and outreach services are becoming increasingly important as posters and online information are not always effective.

Health and wellbeing concerns were also raised. These included continuing difficulties in accessing GPs and dentists, rising costs of private treatment, and the increasing impact of alcohol misuse among older adults. Loneliness and isolation remain pressing problems, and there is a clear need for affordable adaptations to homes to support independence.

Transport and mobility were discussed as significant barriers, especially for those in high-rise flats or with reduced mobility. While projects like Cycling Without Age were welcomed, more systemic improvements- such as drop kerbs and safer routes- were seen as necessary.

Volunteering and community capacity were another focus. Members reported a decline in older adult volunteering due to financial pressures and changes in funding and emphasised the need for incentives and recognition. Opportunities exist to involve schools and colleges to support intergenerational volunteering.

The issue of digital exclusion was discussed, with newspapers, libraries, and word of mouth still the most effective communication channels for many older people. Better promotion of groups and activities through healthcare services was also suggested.

Finally, there was a strong appetite for collaboration and campaigning. Members agreed OPN should strengthen its advocacy role, including for an Older People's Commissioner, and ensure representation at HSCP Boards. More support is needed for older carers, and members felt community champions could play a key role in outreach and engagement. Looking ahead, OPN's priorities should include building capacity, carrying out further research on accessible housing, and ensuring Older People's Day remains a prominent platform for visibility and influence.

5. Next Steps and Actions:

- Lisa to circulate presentation slides and research links.
- Opportunities for involvement in ISPA community research to be shared with members.
- Members to complete evaluation forms.
- John to continue planning for Older People's Day, with 20 organisations to be contacted.
- Dates for the next OPN meeting, to be held before year end, will be circulated.

**Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 20 November 2025,
10am – 12pm, Location TBC**

