**Tea with your MP**

**We hosted Josh Simons, the Labour MP for Makerfield, to discuss ways to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over.**

Through a questionnaire conducted with over 100 of our customers, we identified several common concerns, such as digital exclusion, travel difficulties, and financial hardships including the winter fuel payment. We invited Josh Simons to discuss these important matters and our customers and volunteers asked the questions.

Please find below the questions that our volunteers asked on behalf of customers who could not attend the event, along with the discussion we had with Josh:

**Digital Exclusion**

**Question:**

Our customers are worried about not being able to access essential services, such as local councils or scheduling doctor's appointments because everything is required to be done online. What is the government doing to ensure that people are not left behind?

**Discussion:**

Josh believes it is essential to communicate in person, especially with groups that may not have access to digital platforms. He has been inviting constituents to attend coffee mornings to share their views. Additionally, he sends out letters that include a phone number for easy contact to his office and emphasizes the importance of being active in the community. While shifting towards digital communication has its advantages, such as the convenience of speaking to a doctor from home, maintaining both in-person and digital connections allows for better outreach and engagement.

**Travel**

**Question One:**

Several customers from Orrell would like to know if there could be a reliable bus route to Wigan Hospital, as they struggle to attend essential appointments.

**Question Two:**

Several customers are asking if the senior bus pass age can be lowered to 60, as it is in London, instead of the current state pension age of 66.

**Discussion:**

Josh discussed the Bee Network, which is publicly owned, and mentioned that he will be gathering feedback from the community regarding bus routes. Here is the link to the consultation: [Consultations and engagement | Bee Network | Powered by TfGM](https://tfgm.com/consultations-and-engagement)

This feedback will be used to voice community opinions at an upcoming route planning meeting hosted by the Bee Network, allowing for proposals on adjustments to be made based on the community's input.

He emphasized the importance of collaboration between different modes of transportation, such as rail and buses, which currently do not work together. Josh views this as a significant opportunity to enhance travel options. He believes that integrating all transportation services into a single system could greatly benefit the community.

**Financial Hardships**

**Question One:**

Our customers want to know how you are working with the government to ensure income security and reduce poverty for individuals aged 50 and over in our community.

**Question Two:**

Our customers are currently calling us with concerns about the Winter Fuel Payment. What is being done locally to ensure that those entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment will receive it?

**Discussion**

Josh discussed the Make Work Pay plan, highlighting the need for job stability and security to help reduce poverty. This plan will increase the minimum wage and reduce unstable employment, such as zero-hour contracts.

Josh discussed the importance of individuals accessing the benefits they are entitled to and that locally delivered benefit check services are essential. Last year, Age UK Wigan Borough helped people claim a total of £2.8 million in unclaimed benefits. Josh has reached out through letters to provide information and hopes that those eligible will receive the benefits they are entitled to. The council's welfare team is available to assist attendees with benefit checks at Josh's coffee mornings.

**Have your Say Group**

We have a Have Your Say Group where you can share your important views. If you have a few minutes or would like to participate in a group discussion in person, and get involved in projects like this one, please reach out to Kim at kim.beardsmore@ageukwiganborough.org.uk. Your input is valued!