SIforAge Mutual Learning Platform Session,
Sheffield, United Kingdom, July 30th 2015

Invitations and attendees
Partners from the University of Sheffield identified potential participants from a wide range of public institutions, private sector organisations and civil society groups from the city of Sheffield and the surrounding region. This covered a large geographic area including South Yorkshire that includes the city of Sheffield, north Derbyshire and West Yorkshire that includes the cities of Leeds and Bradford. In total, 100 people were contacted on up to three occasions by email with a personalised invitation to the Mutual Learning Platform session that was held at a conference and training centre (The Source) in an accessible location (Meadowhall) in Sheffield. A brief information sheet (below) was developed for the session that was held on the morning of Thursday, July 30th 2015.

Policy in active and healthy ageing: a Mutual Learning Platform

Thursday 30 July 2015 9:45-12:00

The Source, Meadowhall, Sheffield

Overview: This workshop, hosted by the University of Sheffield, will introduce attendees to the Mutual Learning Platform (MLP), a European platform to share good practice in policies for active and healthy ageing.   Attendance is open to those from local government, health services, charities, NGOs and other stakeholders in active and healthy ageing.

The workshop has two aims:

- To introduce the MLP and provide guidance for users
- To provide insight on best practice for participatory engagement of older people

The MLP has been developed by municipal authorities in Turin (Citta' di Torino) as part of SIforAGE, an EU project to improve the connection between science and society.   The MLP focuses on five relevant policy areas: Health and Care Models; Participation; Labour; Housing, and; Mobility.   For each policy area the network provide basic, introductory knowledge; related outputs from the SIforAGE project, and; a section for "Depth knowledge" which provides links to relevant literature and a forum for members to share their own experiences.

This workshop will have a focus on participation of older people, and present a range of user engagement models used in different contexts which are suitable for use in policy development.

Programme

9:45   Coffee and refreshments

10:00   Introduction to the Mutual Learning Platform

10:45   Participatory engagement of older people

11:30   Overview of SIforAGE

11:40   Q&A

Registration/contact information

To register please visit http://aha-mlp.eventbrite.co.uk

As an academic institution the University of Sheffield has a strong international reputation and is committed to serving the interests of the local community but the Department of Sociological Studies does not have strong and direct links with local organisations who could benefit from participating in a Mutual Learning Session. Despite contacting 100 people there were only 11 people who attended the session. While this was a disappointing number it was encouraging to see policy makers from different parts of the area attending and engaging with the MLP.

The session was organised as a morning event and ran from 9.45 through to 12 noon with further informal chat over lunch. The participants had a variety of roles in social care, public health and the voluntary sector with a particular focus on the needs and provision of services of older people. The session began with an overview of the concept of active and healthy ageing, social innovation and the SIforAge project as the context for the Mutual Learning Platform. This was followed by a step-by-step introduction on how to use the MLP starting with creating an account through the domains for active and healthy ageing (health and care models, housing, mobility, labour and participation) with the three levels of competence. The session included playing the animations from youtube.com and was interactive with questions answered throughout the presentation.

The specific focus of the session was on user engagement and participation so after the introduction of the MLP, there was a presentation on this topic. This covered the importance of user engagement and participation in research and establishing projects with a detailed account of issues to consider and possible courses of action. This presentation was based on experiences of user engagement in projects coordinated at the Department of Sociological Studies, such as the multi-research council New Dynamics of Ageing project that ran for nearly a decade from 2005 onwards and the guidelines developed by Age Platform as part of the Innovage project. This was again an interactive session with questions asked and answered throughout the presentation with interaction between participants as well as with the presenters, David Neary and Juliet Craig.

The user feedback on the MLP and the user engagement presentations and sessions was positive with some use of the platform during the session and interest in the SIforAge project as part of the wider active and health ageing agenda. There was a commitment from some participants to register when they had access to their ICT and to tell colleagues about the event and the project. However, it is likely that registration and use of the MLP from the participants will be relatively low as it is a type of innovation that they are not familiar with in their daily working lives. Engaging policy makers with the MLP is a difficult challenge and it is unlikely that UK-based participants will complete the online self-assessment tool to consider the level of social innovation in their activities.