

Greater London Forum (July 2008)

Pamela Holmes Healthy Ageing Programme, Help the Aged

Older Londoners were acting as detectives as part of this year's National Falls Awareness Day (NFAD). Along with former Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Brian Paddick, they were asking members of the public why more is not being done to prevent falls on pavements when we know that over 2,300 older people fall every day as a result of broken paving.

A new report, *Falling Short the state of our pavements; an investigation for the National Falls Awareness Day campaign* published on NFAD revealed local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland hold back millions of pounds to cover the potential cost of personal injury claims when people fall on pavements. This is at a time when many councils also say they face funding shortfalls to keep public walkways safe.

The 66 councils which responded to the Charity's questionnaire set aside an average of £250,000 each to cover potential legal costs when people fall. The Charity believes some of the funds councils hold in legal and compensation reserves could be better spent on making pavements safer and are calling for safer pavements to be pushed further up the local government agenda.

This year's NFAD was more successful than ever with over 600 events organised across the UK and overseas, some 23 in London. The theme of this year, 'Stepping out' led several local groups to organise 'poor pavement' events. Groups toured the area to determine the state of local pavements and then contacted the local authority using the Charity's dangerous pavements campaign postcards.

One part of the postcard is to send your local authority to identify an area of bad paving and alert the council to the problem. Send the other half to the Charity which will then follow up with the local authority to see how repairs are going. Help the Aged has lobbied 90 councils in this way since work began in 2007 and have received about 10 postcards a day since NFAD showing that many people are keen to get involved with the campaign.

Poor pavements repair is clearly a topic that strikes a chord with many. There was extensive media coverage of the issue on NFAD. Breakfast TV, national newspapers and many local radio stations including LBC ran stories featuring Help the Aged spokespeople and Annie Hunt from Harrow who had experienced a horrific fall on bad pavements.

Anyone who wants to report a poorly maintained or broken pavement can obtain a pavement postcard by calling 020 7239 1982, collecting one from a Help the Aged shop or ordering one from www.helptheaged.org.uk/fallsday.