

10 Questions for the Local Public Sector

Summary

In this short paper, Age UK sets out ten questions to prompt and encourage discussion with the local public sector on the key issues affecting services for people in later life within the current climate of spending cuts and public services reform.

In summary the areas covered include:

- Investing in engagement and transparency
- Protecting the vulnerable and ensuring fair treatment
- Shaping a changing provider market
- Integrating the approach to health and wellbeing
- Changing attitudes and enabling contributions
- Creating age-friendly communities

The full list of questions is on Page 7.

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Introduction

Age UK is a national charity and social enterprise working to transform later life in the UK and overseas. Our vision is of a world in which older people flourish. Together with over 160 local Age UKs, we work alongside national and local government to provide services and campaign for a better later life.

Changes to local public services, as a result of spending cuts and public services reform, will have a significant impact on older people, many of whom rely on these services to help them continue to live active and independent lives.

Age UK is keen to prompt and encourage discussion on the key issues affecting services for people in later life, to find ways of ensuring that current and future changes result in improved outcomes for older people.

Using a series of questions, this paper sets out ten specific challenges which we believe need to be urgently addressed and asks how the local public sector can work with local older people and other partners to find the solutions needed to improve later life for all.

1. Investing in engagement

There are many examples across the country where effective engagement with local older people has improved local service design and delivery. Unfortunately, however, not all local public bodies have succeeded in engaging effectively with their older residents – only 30% of people over 65 feel they can influence decisions in their area¹.

Involving and engaging local older people and their representatives in decision making processes is essential for ensuring improved outcomes for people in later life². Unfortunately the Government is currently sending mixed messages on engagement and partnership working, with some parts of government repealing duties and guidance, and others introducing new arrangements. Local public bodies will therefore need to make their own firm commitment to investing in meaningful dialogue with residents and to ensuring that opportunities for local representatives to participate in strategic decision making, alongside public sector colleagues, are strengthened not lost. Involvement and engagement needs to be embedded within the “culture” of all public bodies and remain a high priority.

How will local public sector bodies ensure that listening to and engaging with people in later life, especially those whose voices are seldom heard, is a high priority?

2. Developing accountability and transparency

Now that the previous performance management system for local government (CAA/LAA³) has come to an end, local authorities will need to find new ways of working with partners and the community to identify and set joint priorities for an area, and demonstrate progress. Providing transparent information on performance and expenditure is essential, so that local residents can hold their councils to account. However, this cannot simply be online as the majority of people over 65 have never used the internet⁴. Councils and other public sector bodies need to find a way of sharing information that connects with the older population they serve.

How will they ensure the community are involved in identifying priorities for an area? How will they ensure plans and strategies are integrated, clearly communicated, outcomes are measured and information is fully accessible to the public, in a variety of formats, so that they can hold local politicians to account?

3. Protecting the vulnerable

The care and support system is in financial crisis⁵. Already chronically underfunded, it is now being hard hit by spending cuts. Recent research carried out by Age UK estimates that even with additional funding from central government, local authority spending on care for older people has been significantly reduced⁶. Councils have told us they are cutting social care services, reducing care packages, increasing charges and raising eligibility criteria. These changes mean that people who need care services will go without and family carers will lose essential support.

While we wait for Government decisions on the long term funding of social care, councils need to look again at their spending decisions and avoid making short term savings which will only store up greater costs in the future. They need to be sure that the additional money allocated for care is being spent on care and look for ways to invest in longer term solutions which help people remain independent for as long as possible.

The Government is currently reviewing the statutory duties which protect the rights of people who need care, and new legislation on care and safeguarding is expected next year. In the meantime local authorities must of course continue to respect people's right to assessment and support to meet eligible needs. Cuts to regulation and inspection mean that the Government is looking increasingly to a 'vigilant community' to be the 'eyes and ears of safeguarding'. However, important though the role of the community is, public sector bodies must continue to support and promote local safeguarding structures and ensure that their scope extends to those receiving non-statutory care services. Local authorities need to continue to monitor care to ensure, not only that people are safe, but that they are able to live with dignity and to maximise choice and control over their lives.

In a climate of cuts, fewer duties and less regulation, how will the local public sector ensure older people's rights are still protected and they are safeguarded from harm?

4. Ensuring fair and equal treatment

Under the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must now systematically examine the effects of their policies and practices on older people to ensure that they comply with the public sector Equality Duty which came into force on 5 April 2011. This duty can be used to challenge public bodies to demonstrate that they are using public money fairly. For example, if local spending cuts are proposed which can be shown to disproportionately disadvantage a particular group and the council has not taken account of this in its decision making, then it could be in breach of the Equality Duty. Public sector bodies will need to be fully aware of the implications of this new duty and make sure that all spending decisions comply with it. Considering the implications of policy and budget decisions on older people should be a central part of all planning processes.

How will local public sector bodies work to increase awareness of the public sector Equality Duty and ensure that cuts to local services don't disproportionately affect older people?

5. Shaping a changing provider market

The move to personalisation and wider public services reform will change the face of provision for older people over the next few years. Increasingly the local public sector will need to use their role as commissioners to support and develop the changing market to ensure services are delivering better outcomes, and are of a high standard. They will need to support the principle of choice in securing a diversity of providers, in particular taking into account the wider social value of smaller, local, community based organisations and businesses. The voluntary and community sector have a key role to play, drawing on their experience and expertise in providing services responsive to people's needs and expectations and in supporting people with information and advocacy.

How will the local public sector work with the voluntary and private sectors to ensure that changes to the way services are delivered result in improved outcomes for all?

6. Integrating the approach to health and wellbeing

Health reforms will offer increased opportunities for local authorities to work with health bodies and other partners to improve health and wellbeing. Addressing joint priorities through the new Health and Wellbeing Boards must lead to a smoother transition between services for older people. Local partners need to find new ways to build on the community budgets model to address issues from the collective 'public purse'. A focus on preventative and re-ablement services will be essential. The return of the public health function to councils gives them the chance to bring together partners to address the wider determinants of health and tackle infrastructure and environmental barriers to healthy living.

How will local authorities and health bodies work with the voluntary and business sectors to find new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of communities?

7. Changing attitudes and enabling contributions

Older people make a significant contribution to their communities, with many providing considerable support as carers, grandparents, neighbours and volunteers. However, regrettably, endemic ageist attitudes are still preventing many people from being able to take full advantage of opportunities to participate in economic and community life. It is widely recognised that equality legislation, while necessary and valuable, will only get us so far in the fight against age discrimination. We also need a fundamental shift in public attitudes towards ageing and older people.

The local public sector has a key role to play in challenging negative stereotypes within their own organisations. Councils can help fight age discrimination in social care, for example, where methods used for calculating a personal budget can discriminate against older people. With many people likely to be working for longer, it will be essential for all public sector bodies to fight ageist attitudes in employment which restrict the opportunities for those over 50.

How will local public sector bodies work to root out ageism and age discrimination within their own organisations, and promote and encourage employment and opportunities in later life?

8. Improving incomes

Between £3.2 and £5.4 billion of income-related benefits are unclaimed by pensioners every year⁷. Latest figures⁸ show that around one-third of those entitled to Pension Credit are not receiving it. Maximising the income of local older people is essential for maintaining independence and enabling full participation in society, as well as benefiting the local economy. And at a time when many older people face financial pressures, for example due to rising energy costs, and when proposed changes to state benefits are causing uncertainty and anxiety, the need for local information and advice services is greater than ever. However many such services are having their funding cut or being closed altogether.

How will councils ensure that older people on low incomes receive the advice and support they need to maximise their income, so that they can have the opportunity of fully participating in their communities and contributing to the economy of the area?

9. Creating 'age-friendly' communities

The value of good local facilities (transport, public toilets, appropriate housing) in enabling older people to live active independent lives in their communities is well understood. However 'silo working' often means that these issues are not addressed 'in the round' as part of a coordinated action to make a neighbourhood 'age-friendly'. Age UK's new Pride of Place campaign is calling on all councillors to take a lead in improving neighbourhoods for older people in their ward or division. Councillors have both the local knowledge and the electoral mandate to work with local older people to identify areas for improvement, and to initiate and coordinate action to bring those changes about.

How will the local public sector improve joint working to ensure their area is a good place to grow older? Will councillors make an ongoing commitment to addressing neighbourhood issues?

10. Making localism work for all

The Localism Bill, now being debated in Parliament, offers increased opportunities for local communities to be involved in making decisions about their area. Voluntary and community groups will have the right to bid to run local services, buy community assets, submit planning proposals and call for referendums on local issues. However, these new community rights will only be of value if they are properly communicated to the groups who might use them. Councillors have a key role in working with local older people to suggest ways in which they can use these opportunities and help them to develop the skills they need to take full advantage of them.

How will councils ensure that local older people and the voluntary and community sector have information about the new opportunities arising from localism?

References

1. Citizenship Survey: April-June 2010, England, CLG, Oct 2010
2. The value and impact of the performance management system on older people, Deborah Klee consultancy for Age UK, June 2010 (unpublished)
3. CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment, LAA – Local Area Agreement, as outlined in statutory guidance *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*, CLG, 2008
4. Internet Access Households and Individuals, Office for National Statistics, 2010
5. Care in Crisis: Causes and Solutions, Age UK, May 2011
6. Freedom of Information Request May 2011. Age UK asked every English Council with responsibility for Adult Social Services for their planned net expenditure on older people's social care in 2011-12. Based on their responses we estimated net expenditure on older people's social care will fall from 2010-11 to 2011-12 by 8.4% (approximately £610,135,932).
7. Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 2008/9, Department for Work and Pensions, 2010
8. Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 2008/9, Department for Work and Pensions, 2010

To download this publication please visit www.ageuk.org.uk/governmentandsociety

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Further reading:

Are You Listening? This booklet has been produced to share good practice on the effective engagement of older people. Stemming from our work with older people's forums over many years, it demonstrates the value of forums and a wide range of other engagement initiatives. www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/older-peoples-forums

Age UK's response to Best Value Consultation This response sets out Age UK's arguments against plans to repeal the Duty to Involve and asks that the new Guidance incorporates the important principles of collaborative working and the role of the local community and voluntary sector in strategic decision making. www.ageuk.org.uk/governmentandsociety

Care in Crisis: Causes and Solutions This report provides evidence to prove that care and support for older people in England has reached breaking point. 800,000 people who currently need care receive no formal support from either the state or private sector agencies. That figure may well rise to one million people within four years as a result of estimated cuts to already threadbare social care budgets. www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/care-in-crisis-the-human-cost

Pride of Place – How councillors can improve neighbourhoods for older people This report outlines what local councillors can do to improve neighbourhoods for older people in their ward or division. Age UK is inviting councillors to become Pride of Place advocates and work with us to improve neighbourhoods for older people. Visit www.ageuk.org.uk/prideofplace to download the report and sign up.

Localism Briefings Age UK has been working closely on the Localism Bill to make sure the proposals lead to better outcomes for older people. There are both opportunities and risks in this new approach and this series of briefings show our policy response to date. www.ageuk.org.uk/communities-and-inclusion

Age UK Blog For regular postings on these and other areas of our work, please visit the Age UK blog at <http://ageukblog.org.uk>

Summary of questions

1. How will local public sector bodies ensure that listening to and engaging with people in later life, especially those whose voices are seldom heard, is a high priority?
2. How will they ensure the community are involved in identifying priorities for an area? How will they ensure plans and strategies are integrated, clearly communicated, outcomes are measured and information is fully accessible to the public, in a variety of formats, so that they can hold local politicians to account?
3. In a climate of cuts, fewer duties and less regulation, how will the local public sector ensure older people's rights are still protected and they are safeguarded from harm?
4. How will local public sector bodies work to increase awareness of the public sector Equality Duty and ensure that cuts to local services don't disproportionately affect older people?
5. How will the local public sector work with the voluntary and private sectors to ensure that changes to the way services are delivered result in improved outcomes for all?
6. How will local authorities and health bodies work with the voluntary and business sectors to find new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of communities?
7. How will local public sector bodies work to root out ageism and age discrimination within their own organisations, and promote and encourage employment and opportunities in later life?
8. How will councils ensure that older people on low incomes receive the advice and support they need to maximise their income, so that they can have the opportunity of fully participating in their communities and contributing to the economy of the area?
9. How will the local public sector improve joint working to ensure their area is a good place to grow older? Will councillors make an ongoing commitment to addressing neighbourhood issues?
10. How will councils ensure that local older people and the voluntary and community sector have information about the new opportunities arising from localism?