

Parliamentary Briefing: Women & Equalities Committee – ‘The rights of older people’ February 2025

Overview

We welcome the publication of the [Women and Equalities Committee report](#) into ‘*The rights of older people*’. Age UK’s Charity Director, Caroline Abrahams CBE, was pleased to [contribute](#) to the inquiry alongside other respected colleagues from the age sector.

The Committee report concludes that **ageism is ‘widespread and culturally embedded in the UK.’** It highlights several important issues including the failure of equality law, the exclusion of older people from policy decisions (especially in digital services) and the lack of a cross-government strategy to address the needs of our diverse and growing older population.

As a charity working for older people, we regularly hear about many of the issues raised in the report. This ranges from capable older workers being denied jobs, to older people struggling to access essential services because they can’t get online. **We are concerned that the needs and rights of older people continue to be eroded.**

We support the Committee’s recommendations, particularly calls for a national digital inclusion strategy, initiatives to implement better cross-government working - including a review of the role of an Older People’s Commissioner - and a review of age discrimination law.

Key findings

- **Ageism:** The report confirms that ageism continues to be widespread across our society. It is often fuelled by harmful stereotypes and media narratives of older people as either ‘wealthy boomers’ or else extremely frail and vulnerable. Ageism can have a significant impact on people’s lives and lead to older people being overlooked in policies and service provision.
- **Digital exclusion:** Older people are at a higher risk of digital exclusion, which impacts on their ability to access essential services (including healthcare), local authority services (including benefits) and banking.
- **The failure of equality law to adequately protect and enforce older people’s rights:** Equality law currently allows the objective justification of direct age discrimination, leading to weaker protections for older people. The Public Sector Equality Duty has a role to play in tackling ageism, but it is currently not strong enough to ensure accountability and transparency.
- **The lack of cross-government understanding and focus on older people:** There has been a lack of focus on older people and ageing across successive governments, as well as the lack of a robust, cross-government framework to protect and champion older people’s rights

Key recommendations

New Digital Inclusion strategy

We strongly support the recommendation that the Government implement a new Digital Inclusion Strategy, with a detailed focus on the needs of digitally excluded older people. We would like to see any strategy to understand and include the importance of alternative pathways for those who cannot get online.

We are pleased that the Government has committed to updating the strategy but there is no announced timeline for this.

In addition to the development of a new Digital Inclusion Strategy, we would like to see the following to ensure no older person is digitally excluded:

- Straightforward offline access for all public services
- Sufficient funding for local government to provide offline services
- Funding to help people to get online who would like to do so
- A change in the law to require banks to provide face-to-face services
- Banks to accelerate the rollout of Shared Banking Hubs to meet the high and continuing demand for face-to-face services.

More information about digital exclusion can be found in our recent report, [Offline and Overlooked](#).

Review of equality law

We support the recommendation to review age discrimination law to ensure that equality law can effectively protect against ageism and age discrimination, while not deterring older people from making a discrimination claim.

We also support calls to strengthen the Public Sector Equality Duty and to consider how the Equality Act could be amended or strengthened in cases of intersectional discrimination.

The financial services exemption, which allows the financial services industry to discriminate on the grounds of age (meaning that older people may be denied access to financial products such as insurance or loans) should also be considered in any review of age discrimination law.

Government focus and wider government framework

We agree that the Government needs to implement a framework which can respond to the broad range of issues facing our growing and diverse older population, including:

- The development of a Government strategy for ageing and older people's rights
- The establishment of a unit within the Cabinet Office's Office of Equality and Opportunity
- Plans to consider the implementation of an Older People's Commissioner in England, similar to that which is already in place in Wales.

In particular, we believe that a [Commissioner for Older People and Ageing in England](#) could act as an independent champion and voice for older people and ensure that policy and practice across government considers the needs of people in later life and the implications of our ageing population.

What can Parliamentarians do now?

- Use your platform in Parliament to highlight the issues and recommendations raised in the Women and Equalities Committee report. Age UK is happy to support with written or oral questions.
- Write to Sir Chris Bryant (Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms) highlighting the need for an updated Digital Inclusion Strategy to address the needs of those that cannot get online so they are not shut out from essential services.
- Write to Anneliese Dodds (Minister for Women and Equalities) outlining the need for a review of equality law, a cross-government strategy, and the implementation of a Commissioner for Older People.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss the issues outlined in this briefing further, please contact publicaffairs@ageuk.org.uk.