

Ageing: the silver lining

The opportunities and challenges of an ageing society for local government



Introduction

The Local Government Association Task and Finish Group on Ageing was established to explore the challenges and opportunities that an ageing population presents for local government and local communities, now and over the next 20-30 years.

Our population is ageing. The number of people aged 65 or over in England will increase by an incredible 65 per cent over the next 25 years. And within this, the number of people over 85 years old is due to increase significantly. Male life expectancy has increased to nearly 80 and for women it is already 83.

Our ageing population is becoming more diverse. By 2026 it is estimated that older people from black and minority ethnic communities will make up 28.4 per cent of the population compared to 21.2 per cent today. There will also be more open diversity in sexuality with a significant growth in the number of older people who are openly gay, lesbian or bisexual. Living arrangements will also be much more varied with more people living on their own and an increasing number of childless older people.

Our ageing population is experiencing greater inequality. Socio economic differences are growing and they have a very significant impact on older people's experience of life, especially as it affects their health and wellbeing. For example, the life expectancy of men in the most deprived areas is nine years shorter than those in more affluent areas.

Opportunities for local government

It is increasingly being recognised that **older people make a huge contribution to the life of their local areas** through providing unpaid care, involvement in civic organisations and other forms of volunteering. Leading councils are recognising the importance of nurturing and supporting this kind of input.

There is an opportunity to **mitigate future growing demand** on council services – most obviously social care and health. This requires a coordinated programme that combines the input of public health, transport, housing, leisure and culture, economic development, civic engagement, the NHS, etc. All of these areas have a role to play in improving the health and wellbeing of an ageing population and thereby reducing the demand for expensive reactive, emergency or institutional services.

An **ageing society presents some significant potential economic benefits**, from the spending and taxable employment of older people, which councils and their partners are well placed to maximize.

With the transfer of public health back to local government and the establishment of health and wellbeing boards, councils are best placed to **improve the health and wellbeing of their local population as a whole and to reduce health inequalities**.

The **Equality Act (2010) provides a legal imperative and statutory incentive** to remove barriers, prevent discrimination and advance equality of opportunity to unlock the potential of older people and foster good relations across the generations.

Older people are part of the solution to the challenges that face us.

Older people can contribute to and participate in society in many different ways, whether through employment, volunteering, spending patterns, or the taking on of citizenship roles in various community organisations. Supporting the economic and civic participation of older people as producers, consumers and investors is a key dimension of trying to address ageing strategically, particularly in the context of unprecedented austerity. New approaches can create significant opportunities for an ageing society to become a critical driver of local economic development.

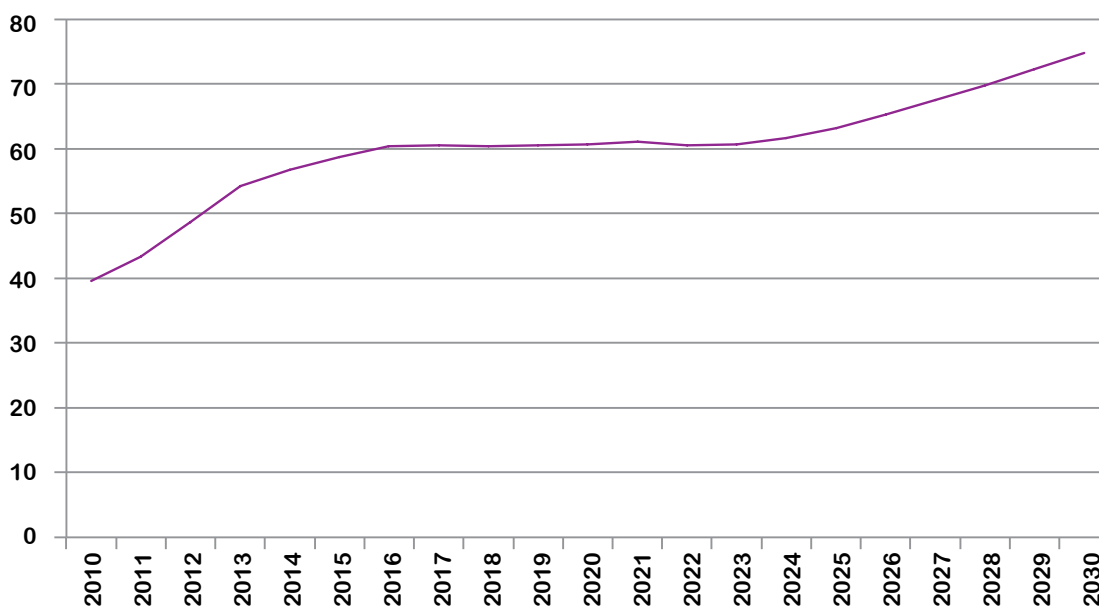
We have set out below a **‘Graph of Hope’**, which visually outlines the net contribution that older people provide to society – and by implication the potential for economic regeneration that this demographic trend represents. The aim is to provide a counter-narrative to the negative, doom-laden messages that focus on the perceived ‘burdens’ that population ageing will bring for councils and their partners.

Older people provide a net benefit to society through the taxes they pay, their contribution to the labour market, their spending as consumers, the contribution they make to childcare and the care of loved ones and friends, voluntary work, political, cultural and community activity. In many ways, older people are the ‘glue’, keeping communities connected and underpinning much of the mutual support activity which is going on, largely unsung and undervalued by formal civic society.

To realise this benefit to society and the wider economy councils need local flexibilities and funding to enable them to support their older residents.

The LGA’s ‘Future funding outlook’ shows how an increasing proportion of council spending is being consumed by adult social care now, and escalating in the near future if nothing is done to address public funding. Without a radical change in government funding of local public services this scenario is very real. By putting adult social care funding on a sustainable footing, councils will be in the best position to harness the positive contribution older people can make to wider society.

Net economic contribution by older people (£bns)



Source: SQW

After taking account of all the costs associated with an ageing population (especially social care, health and pensions) and then factoring in the positive financial contributions that older people make, it is calculated that older people made a net positive contribution of £40 billion to the economy in 2010.¹ Furthermore, as the overall number of people over 65 increases and people remain healthier for longer, by 2030, the positive net contribution of over 65's is projected to rise to an estimated £77 billion.²

Summary

- **Older people can be net contributors to the country's economy**, if local government has the financial sustainability, freedoms and flexibilities to support them. There is even the opportunity for councils to harness this demographic change for local economic benefit. However, not addressing ageing collectively now and strategically will store up problems for future years and place further strain on social care funding and provision.
- Preparing for an ageing society is a **place shaping opportunity** that councils should be financially and legislatively empowered to address. Enabling councils to apply an **'ageing lens'** to their local functions will help them to understand what needs to be done to improve the quality of life of this growing segment of the population.
- Older people make a huge contribution to society and are **part of the solution**.
- Through their democratic mandate, councils have the opportunity to exert significant **leadership and change**. Working in partnership with voluntary, community and private sector partners, they have the potential to lead a radical change in how we think about old age and how services and other initiatives are configured to respond. By leading the promotion of a positive narrative about this time of life, councils are in a position to generate better outcomes for all.
- Through local engagement of older people systematically and regularly, and through coproduction and co-design in the production of local policies and services, councils are in a position to underpin this more **positive outlook on ageing**, ensuring that older people are regarded as full citizens, rather than objects of charity or pity.
- The impact of an ageing society **extends well beyond social care and health**, embracing all areas that affect older people's lives, including transport, housing, culture and leisure, built environment, etc.
- Health and social care services become even more important as society ages. **Government must fund them properly and integrate** them so councils can ensure they meet the needs of older people and that users experience a seamless and coordinated response.

¹ WRVS, Gold age pensioners: valuing the socio-economic contribution of older people in the UK. 2011, WRVS

² SQW, Valuing the socio-economic contribution of older people in the UK: Economic Model. 2011, WRVS

The LGA Task and Finish Group on Ageing's recommendations

The LGA Task and Finish Group on Ageing recommends that government recognise councils' unique, democratically mandated, community leadership and place shaping role to make this paradigm shift a reality. To enable local government to make the most of population ageing, the Group recommends that government:

- **Develop a national 'Ageing Well' Strategy**, in recognition of the scale of the opportunity that needs to be seized. This should:
 - be a **cross-government responsibility**, led at ministerial level
 - be rooted in an **assertively positive vision** of the opportunities created through population ageing, as well as the very real challenges
 - facilitate the key role of **local government** through the provision of sustainable funding, the devolution of power, local freedoms and flexibilities
 - **tackle age discrimination** and negative attitudes towards older people across society and in the media.
- **Continue to enable the devolution process to local government.**
 - Central government can trust local government to fulfil its potential to be a real **agent of change** in relation to ageing and to work constructively with its local partners and citizens to make this happen.
 - **This means central government giving up control over many areas of responsibility** – in order to enable local government, in turn, to cede power to local older citizens.
 - Devolution should be for all councils, including core cities, unitary authorities and two-tier areas of local government.
- **Agree a new, improved financial settlement for local government.**
 - There is widespread agreement that the financing of social care is completely inadequate and that there is also a need for further resources for the NHS. A new and integrated financial settlement in these areas is crucial with an ageing population.
 - The principles underpinning The Care Act are consistent with a strengths-based approach, focusing on personalisation, a self-determined definition of individual wellbeing, and integrated care and support. However, unless councils are **properly funded to do their work, including implementing The Care Act**, these laudable principles will remain only ideals; and councils will not have the scope to be truly creative and empowering with communities, beyond their statutory responsibilities.
 - The long term prize would be to enable councils to deliver a transformation in the way they (and their local partners, including health services) work with older people, delivering services in completely new ways.

Specific issues

The implications of ageing extend far beyond the realm of adult social care and health. By viewing their local roles and responsibilities through an 'ageing lens', councils can strategically support their older residents in planning, culture, leisure, transport, housing, and a wide range of other areas.



Economic activity and civic engagement

Older people can contribute to and participate in society in many different ways, whether through employment, volunteering, spending patterns, or the taking on of citizenship roles in various community organisations. Supporting the economic and civic participation of older people as producers, consumers and investors is a key dimension of trying to address ageing strategically, particularly in the context of unprecedented austerity. New approaches can create significant opportunities for an ageing society to become a critical driver of local economic development.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- acting as good employers themselves, supporting those employees who wish to work longer by enabling flexible working arrangements, and helping people to plan for a phased retirement, if that is what they wish
- recognising the potential economic benefits from an ageing population and devising a strategic approach to maximising the potential advantage for the area

- exploring asset-based approaches to build on the talents of older citizens and enable older people to be part of mutually supportive communities.

Housing and neighbourhoods

Housing is important to the health and wellbeing of older people, particularly given the meaning that attaches to 'home' in later years. Not only are people's houses of critical importance, but so too are the neighbourhoods within which they live. This is especially true for older people as they tend to spend more time in their local areas as they age.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- developing a strategy to address the housing needs of older people, undertaken jointly with health and social care, and as part of that, encouraging and facilitating the development of more specialist housing options for older people
- in so far as budget pressures allow, commissioning the kind of practical services provided by care and repair schemes
- assessing the opportunities to create neighbourhoods which are more age friendly, particularly where significant numbers of older people live.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

Older people are major users of public spaces. They provide much of the vibrancy and diversity that make towns and cities interesting places to live. They are also major users and financial supporters of green and open spaces. Through their voluntary involvement in organisations they contribute to maintaining much of the civic heritage and open spaces. The built environment has a major impact on the mobility, independence and ability of older people to age in place. Important issues include the provision of seating, toilets and open spaces that are both safe and attractive.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- committing to the provision of enabling, inclusive and inviting urban and rural environments for older people
- actively involving older people in the planning processes and regeneration programmes, as well as in the maintenance and improvement of the local environment.

Transport

Good transport supports the huge net contribution that older people make to the economy and is vital to enabling older people to live active and healthy lives in later life. The concessionary fares scheme is popular and effective but it must be properly funded by government. Projects to improve cycle infrastructure, coupled with the growth in availability of assistive technologies such as electric bicycles ('e-bikes'), could have a significant role in creating opportunities for older people to return to cycling or

prevent them from giving up. Physical exercise such as walking is crucial to healthy ageing and the nature of a local neighbourhood can greatly influence the extent to which older people will engage in this kind of activity.

Examples of good practice from leading councils:

- acknowledging the value of specialist transport such as dial a ride and other forms of community transport
- successfully accommodating personal mobility (eg mobility scooters)
- promoting walkable neighbourhoods
- making provision for modes of transport not stereotypically associated with older people (eg cycling)
- facilitating transport at a community level to ensure that older people can easily access local amenities and health and other services.

Information and advice

The ability to prepare and plan for later life is fundamental to promoting the health and wellbeing of the local community. Access to good quality information and advice is crucial now and will grow in importance as society ages. Finance, housing and care options in later life are inextricably linked. Access to integrated, impartial, good quality information and advice is vital to informed decision-making. Integrated information and advice is a central component of the Care Act 2014, where it is recognised that quality information for older people goes way beyond information on health and social care services. Councils can play a key role in ensuring that provision is coordinated and offered in a range of formats, ranging from online to face to face, as different options are needed to meet a range of needs and capabilities in a diverse ageing population.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- engaging with older people when planning and reviewing their information and communications strategy
- in meeting their Care Act 2014 requirements regarding the provision of information, leading councils are aiming to include other forms of information that are important to older people
- supporting older people to learn how to use new forms of communication such as digital technology
- making non-digital sources of information available in order to avoid digital exclusion.

Social participation

Having and maintaining social relations, feeling part of a network of family, friends and community, and being involved in social activities that are meaningful and stimulating is important to most older people. Most civic organisations would collapse without their involvement. Recent social trends have increased the risk of loneliness and there is now

much greater understanding about how this can cause significant detriment to health and wellbeing. With the increasing separation between young and old, intergenerational initiatives have huge potential to strengthen community cohesion. The arts, leisure activities and sport can be as important to older people as the rest of the population and leading councils have managed to increase the involvement of older people from excluded communities in them.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- taking a strategic approach to addressing loneliness and including it as a priority within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- encouraging local cultural organisations (eg theatres, orchestras, art galleries etc) to come up with ideas for making events accessible and attractive to older people
- supporting intergenerational volunteering and active citizenship initiative
- developing a strategic plan for access to learning and leisure services for older people (including, for example, monitoring participation levels by older learners)
- making the most of what older artists, performers, musicians and athletes or sports enthusiasts can offer to the delivery of their local offer.

Respect and social inclusion

Ageism can have a significant disabling impact on the health and wellbeing of older people. One tactic for counteracting ageist attitudes is to promote the huge contribution that older people make to local communities and society as a whole. It is also important to highlight the many positive aspects of getting older – for example the general increase in happiness and emotional wellbeing. Including such messages in staff training programmes can be very effective.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- committing to monitoring and challenging ageist attitudes in policy making
- promoting a positive narrative and images of older people and ageing
- devising age awareness training programmes for frontline staff and managers which challenge ingrained stereotypes and ageist practices
- having a structured means of maintaining active engagement with older people.

Health and wellbeing

Promoting the health and wellbeing of older people is now a key statutory responsibility for councils and their new public health capacity provides exciting opportunities for addressing this. Most council functions and services have a role to play, but it requires some explicit thinking and targeting to make their interventions effective. At the same time the demands on health and social care resources arising from an ageing society are very significant and there has to be a huge injection of funds from government. There are some good models for harnessing more capacity from local communities, but

these initiatives are no substitute for a radically overhauled system of funding for health and, crucially, social care.

Summary of good practice from leading councils:

- public health services are paying systematic attention to older people's issues especially loneliness, cold homes, fuel poverty, winter deaths, nutrition, physical activity, fires, falls and immunization
- working with health partners to address the health inequalities experienced by some groups of older people
- working with health colleagues to integrate health and social care services in ways that are most effective for meeting the needs of the growing number of older people
- maximising the opportunity offered by the implementation of The Care Act to promote health and wellbeing of older people, and supporting older people with health and care needs to have better outcome
- taking action to support the capacity within local communities to promote their own wellbeing
- prioritising support for informal carers in their caring role.



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