

SEEFA Policy Panel on Later Life and Ageing

Key Points on the Future Role of Local Government in an Ageing Society

(From the Local Government Association Task and Finish Group – the Role of Local Government in an Ageing Society - Involving Older People)

1. The need for local government to adopt a positive portrayal of later life

- We'd like to see local government celebrating people living longer, not portraying older people as a burden.
- The older population makes an enormous and positive contribution e.g. to the local and national economy through work and taxes, in providing care and support, in volunteering, etc. This fact should be central to all planning.
- Local government should adopt a new narrative and vocabulary about life course planning and the ageing pathway. These are notions relevant to all age groups.
- As older people we often feel we are viewed as a problem to society. The 'ageing society' is often used to explain over stretched services and the use of language such as 'frail elderly' impacts very negatively on those categorised as such. Local government could play a more significant role in discouraging ageist attitudes and promoting intergenerational tolerance.

2. The leadership role of local government in an ageing society

- In order to respond effectively to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing society, the leadership role of local government should be strengthened across all stakeholders in the community. This could release as yet unseen potential. Local government should play a proactive role in encouraging and enabling businesses, health services, voluntary sector, police, housing, national government to work together more effectively.
- The leadership role must take place at all tiers of local government (namely county, borough/district and parish/town council). There must be a joined up and coherent approach which acknowledges and enhances the individual contributions of each tier for maximum effectiveness on the ground.
- We would like to see elected members working alongside local government officers, actively exhibiting leadership qualities out in the local community.
- We see a role for local government in sharing and enabling good practice

3. Effective engagement and consultation means better decision making

- Local government should avoid ineffective consultations which appear to be tokenistic. Effective engagement needs to be properly structured and resourced. We have many examples of good practice in effective engagement and consultation.
- We'd like to see co-production involving service users both as recipients of services but also as part of the delivery mechanism. The Local Government Association could play a leading role in identifying and promoting effective co-production arrangements and techniques.
- People understand the need for cost savings and can be actively helpful in identifying workable solutions, provided they are part of an effective consultation mechanism.

- All councillors (including new ones) should have a good understanding of later life issues as part of an induction/orientation process. It's possible this isn't always happening.
- We are concerned that most of the population probably do not understand their local authority structures and responsibilities, nor how to be involved or heard.

4. Preventive support for independence and good health and wellbeing

- We are concerned that the notion of investment to prevent future expenditure is not properly embedded. Is local government good enough at planning ahead for prevention? Is short term expediency prevailing? A small investment to say increase the number of volunteers will bring disproportionately large returns. However, supporting volunteers to do a good job is never cost free.
- 'Neighbourliness' and community 'self help' are naturally and widely in existence and already preventing ill health, expensive interventions and care. How can local government further understand, extend and maximise these very positive existing behaviours?
- It remains essential to ensure age friendly environments with good access to public transport and community facilities such as meeting places, public toilets, seating etc and to ensure community safety.
- There is a long way still to go in integrating health and social care.
- Good housing, including housing advice and support, is integral to good health and wellbeing. It is sometimes left out of the equation but it should be the 'third leg of the stool' in an integrated system.

5. The challenge of digital inclusion and the opportunities of new technologies

- Older people are disproportionately affected by digital exclusion. There is a lack of awareness that this relatively new phenomenon is actually a new form of poverty. The closure of libraries and other community facilities will exacerbate the problem. SEEFA would like to see digital inclusion explicitly present in local government planning.
- New technology has the potential to open up opportunities for social inclusion, better care, communication and information access. We'd like to see local government embracing the opportunity for people of all ages to be digitally involved, starting with broadband access and drawing on the insights from SEEFA and SE Age UKs' recent Symposium in the Palace of Westminster.

SEEFA is the South East England Forum on Ageing and aims to bring people together to influence later life strategies, policies and services to make life better for current and future generations of older people. SEEFA's Policy Panel comprises people who by virtue of their own life experiences are experts on later life and who can actively engage with policy makers and commissioners to influence later life policy.

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