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Ageing Populations: strategies for best practice

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Some of the most significant contemporary political problems including the spectacular economic and social effects of the current 'credit crunch' can be attributed to the impact of a growth in globalized markets and instability in capitalist systems. The economic downturn has impacted adversely on whole societies and many millions of people living in different locations around the world. In such circumstances, a question that arises concerns the extent to which there needs to be much more focus on the study of societies as well as individuals to provide the in-depth knowledge and insights required to find solutions to current economic and social problems including the welfare of older people.

In the United Kingdom during the 1980s and 1990s a political focus on the role and responsibilities of the individual at the expense of an interest in the wider society in which they were located and thrived (or not) was strongly established. In 1987, Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Prime Minister, said:

*"There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first."*¹

It is pertinent now to reconsider the balance that exists between a collectivist or individualistic response to social problems including concerns about the distribution of wealth, pension entitlements, provision of services for an ageing population and poverty affecting older people. Many more people are living longer and it is necessary to develop views on what arrangements will need to be made to help ensure their health is maintained and they have a good quality of life. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission, remarked that in 2009 it is estimated that in England 17.7 million people or 34% of the population is aged over 50. In ten years time this figure will be 38% of the population and by 2029 approximately 22.9 million people or 40% of the population will be aged over 50.

The next part of this paper outlines recent central government policy regarding older people and draws on Audit Commission reports to highlight particular policy developments and objectives. Then the following sections draw on the views on services for older people obtained from participants in a one-day conference on ageing populations held at the University of Birmingham in January 2009. There are discussions on *living well in later life* (the involvement of service users and champions for older people in the development of service provision for older people and preventative activity), *strategy and planning* (the role of the council and standards of service provision) and society and older people.

¹ Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to Woman's Own magazine, October 31, 1987.

Policy and older people

In this section central government and Audit Commission literature is used to illustrate how official views on the older person and the provision of services for older people have been changing in recent years.

Some evidence exists that shows how health and social care policy has been shifting more from a 'needs-determined' to a 'people-centred' approach in developing services for people aged over fifty. There have been some significant shifts towards the principles and aspirations outlined in Opportunity Age a central government report that was published in 2005.² This report is the clearest statement by central government to date of its intention to develop a broader strategy for the provision of services for older people. The strategy contains four objectives to be achieved by central government, local authorities and the voluntary sector working together. The objectives are:

- Identify and tackle issues that limit older people's ability to get the most out of life, including rooting out age discrimination and dealing with crime and the fear of crime and poor housing.
- Ensure that older people can get actively engaged in influencing decisions that affect their lives like planning and public transport.
- Ensure that older people have access to opportunities for learning, leisure and volunteering activity.
- Promote healthy living at all ages – older people will be more able to enjoy good health in later life if they have looked after themselves when they were younger.³

In 2006, the Department of Health (DH) sponsored the Partnerships for Older People Projects that focused on providing integrated person centred service responses for older people. However, the projects tended to emphasise the need to *'prevent or delay the need for higher intensity or institutionalised care'* rather than the need to fully address broader well-being agendas.⁴ In turn, the initiative called Putting People First: A Shared Vision and Commitment to the Transformation of Adult Social Care was developed by the Department of Health in 2007. This initiative, supported by a wide range of partner organisations from the private, statutory and voluntary sectors, has signalled a radical rethink of the way in which adult social care services promote older people's independence and well-being.⁵

² HM Government (2005) 'Opportunity Age: Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century', p.xvi, Executive Summary.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Windle K., Wagland R., Lord K., Dickinson A., Knapp M., Forder J., Henderson C., Wistow G., Beech R., Roe B., and Bowling A (2007) 'National Evaluation of the Partnerships for Older People Projects: Interim Report of Progress', University of Hertfordshire.

⁵ Department of Health (2007) 'Putting People First: a shared vision and commitment to the transformation of Adult Social Care', DH, http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081118

Meanwhile, an Audit Commission report called Don't Stop Me Now that was published in 2008 has discussed the preparedness of local public services to deal with the challenges and opportunities created by an ageing population.⁶ The report pointed out that most people will not need access to local authority social care services as they grow older and was critical of local authorities that saw their role in preparing for an ageing population as simply about social care spending and provision. The report concluded that:

*"The statutory duty to deliver social care is only one dimension of a much broader role. In addition to fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, councils need to: understand, engage and mobilise the community to maximise the opportunities in the older population; ensure that mainstream services are accessible to as many of the older population as possible, for as long as possible; and shape and deliver targeted services aimed at promoting independence and well-being in later life."*⁷

Overall, the Opportunity Age initiative had had little impact on local authority performance in terms of local public service provision meeting the needs of increasing numbers of older people because:

"The strategy is clear, but it has a low profile. As a consequence the aims are not commonly known, nor has the strategy been successful in challenging stereotypes".⁸

The upshot is the main themes concerning the development of an Opportunity Age strategy and the provision of services for older people that emerged from the opportunity age initiative are:

- Progress to date is evidenced in limited support from central government and the need to *'tackle stereotypes and myths that prevent older people being fully engaged in the community'*.⁹
- in most of the local authorities studied the process of implementation had a low profile because there is a need for *'a change of culture that ensures a shared cross-cutting approach, without sole responsibility resting with adult social care'*.¹⁰
- Various case study examples show how service outputs improve when people are involved in service design from the outset.¹¹
- Outcome improvement could not be measured because *'the outcomes that councils need to deliver are not defined'*.¹²

⁶ Audit Commission (2008) 'Don't stop me now: Preparing for an ageing population', Local Government National Report, July 2008.

⁷ Ibid, p.32.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.34.

¹¹ Audit Commission (2008) 'Don't stop me now: Preparing for an ageing population', Local Government National Report, July 2008, p.52.

¹² Ibid, p.32.

The Transforming Social Care agenda, established by the Department of Health in 2008, whilst still emphasising social care needs, recognizes the importance of *'a strategic shift towards early intervention and prevention'* and *'working across the boundaries of social care such as housing, benefits, leisure and transport and health'*.¹³ Central government has stated that *'the emphasis should be on enablement and early intervention to promote independence rather than involvement at the point of crisis'*.¹⁴ Policy developments are being funded over a three year period through the Social Care Reform Grant and a focus on outcomes rather than inputs and processes; the involvement of people in the design, commissioning and evaluation of services; a shift in culture and resources towards early intervention; and joined up service provision working with partner organisations.¹⁵ This policy shift is also enshrined in Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that set out the main outcomes central government wants to achieve in the Comprehensive Spending Review period from 2008–2011. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) leads on the priority to *'Tackle poverty and promote greater independence and wellbeing in later life'* working closely with the Departments of Health (DH) and Communities and Local Government (DCLG).¹⁶ Crucially, if you do not know where you are heading, how can you measure whether you are travelling in the right direction or whether older people are beginning to experience any improvement in their quality of life? The Audit Commission will work with the Department for Work and Pensions to contribute to the review of the Opportunity Age initiative. At the same time, the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime that started in April 2009 includes the assessment of safety, health and inequality in an area that are all relevant to the well-being of older people.

The next three sections on living well in later life, strategy and planning, and society and older people draw on material derived from a one day conference on Ageing Populations: Strategies for best practice held at the University of Birmingham in January 2009.

Living well in later life

How do we make later life a time of opportunity by making it easier to be active and have fun? What are the positive links between social and civic participation and benefits for people aged fifty and over in society? Much central government literature has focused on older people and targeted services to promote independence and prevent the onset of social isolation and physical and mental deterioration. The literature suggests that wherever possible improved services should be provided for older people who have not yet become dependent on particular organizations for help but who have started to develop early signs of ill-health or social isolation. The Director of

¹³ Department of Health (2008) 'Transforming Social Care', Local Authority Circular LAC, DH 2008, 1, p.2.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.2.

¹⁵ Department of Health (2008) 'The Social Care Reform Grant 2008/09', LAC, DH 2008, 1, Annex B, pp.23 -26.

¹⁶ Department for Work and Pensions (2008) 'Public Service Agreement 17', http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/service-agreement.asp

Studies at the Audit Commission has pointed out that local authorities can play a crucial leadership role in delivering targeted services and undertaking low-level interventions, often in partnership with others, to help older people.

However, the Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies, at the University of Birmingham, suggests that the commissioning of services for older people is likely to be a disaster if it starts from the premise of healthcare services being the principal agency affecting people's health. For example, he comments that research undertaken by the institute shows that older people stand to benefit a great deal in the first instance from improved access to relevant information about a range of services that can help them to remain independent and living in their own homes. In addition, older people can benefit from having friends that they can talk to when they are having difficulties. A manager working at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, says:

"We have friendship circles, people going to each other's homes for a chat, coffee etc. It is about [...] managing the risks to wellbeing that later life can present by providing better support to those in need. Action in this area [...] helps to mitigate specific conditions that can prevent people from working, helps people to stay in contact with others, helps to prevent isolation and helps to create an age friendly society by ensuring that older people can remain active and contribute in the community."

The Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies felt that sometimes a simple matter like knowing what to do if the local authority says they will not launder dirty curtains and getting help to put them back up when they are laundered can be important for an older person. Meanwhile, it is necessary to target the right people at the right time to be better at delaying dependency. For example, there are older people who lose a partner and two years later they are living in a run down property, they have become socially isolated and their physical and mental well-being has deteriorated. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission stressed that it was important to have information on people that could be used to identify vulnerable individuals and provide appropriate services at the right time to avoid an unnecessary deterioration in their physical and mental well-being.

The involvement of service users

Sometimes older people can take the lead in helping to create effective integrated services that focus on delivering people centred outcomes that ensure an individuals real needs are met. What older people say about their needs and services is important and they have the potential to be involved in the design of services and initiatives that will deal with their priorities for action to improve their quality of life. A Strategic Commissioning Manager at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, says:

“I come from a mental health background and think the involvement of older people in matters could be improved.”

Local authorities need to engage with, understand, and mobilize older people in the community to promote volunteering, self-help and the delivery of tailored services according to the Director of Studies at the Audit Commission. He felt that without a means of obtaining an in-depth understanding of their communities local authorities could not effectively plan or deliver services designed to meet the needs of older people. Meanwhile, a representative from the Older People and Ageing Society Division at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) pointed out that effective and sustainable preparation for later life is likely to involve empowering people so that they make the best possible decisions concerning their finances, home, work and health circumstances. The aim is to encourage early light touch service interventions to aid the prevention of social isolation or deteriorating physical and mental health well-being. For example, more joined-up working between central government, local authorities and private, voluntary and community organizations can help to facilitate the innovative use of shared knowledge and finances to provide a diverse range of coordinated service provision for older people.

In Hartlepool some local authority leisure programmes rely a great deal on help from older volunteers. For example, a walks programme exists in the town that depends on older volunteer leaders for its survival. The local authority provides training in navigation skills, weatherproof clothes and hiking boots for the volunteer leaders. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission stressed that the programme had been funded by the British Heart Foundation initially and then became self-sustaining with over forty trained older volunteers. In Cornwall effective engagement with older people is driving change and influencing local authority behaviour and actions. The aim is to identify what services are missing or need to be improved. For example, there was evidence that older people were waiting two years or more to get their disabled facilities grants dealt with. The process for dealing with grants was overly bureaucratic and some people were dying while they waited. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission described how a partnership board was formed to examine the grant-making process in 2004/5 when some eighty assessments a year were completed. In 2005/6 the number of assessments completed doubled after improvements were made to the operation of the service. The work of an Older People's Board was instrumental in getting the disabled facilities grant assessment service improved.

Champions and preventative activity

A representative from the Be Birmingham Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) board talked about the role of the seven community champions on the board and how they can influence discussions and decision-making affecting the development of Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities on a range of issues including services for older people. Meanwhile, a champion for older people on the housing group at Dudley Age Concern described a recent investigation

carried out to ascertain how older people gained access to medical centre services, shops and other facilities in a part of the borough using public transport. Another champion for older people on the housing group at Dudley Age Concern commented that she tries to keep abreast of information that older people might find useful and share it with others at an Older People's Forum in the town. Champions are close to communities and individuals on the ground and can raise awareness of their priorities to improve an area or services in relevant meetings that they attend. In the case of champions for older people they are advocates working on their behalf to help prevent deterioration in their quality of life by highlighting their needs during discussions to develop appropriate service provision. Meanwhile, Dudley has a community-based falls prevention service that is a partnership between the local authority and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). The new service has resulted in medical care savings by carefully identifying and assessing older people at risk and referring them on to a twenty week community-based falls prevention programme where it is appropriate. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission reported that a falls prevention manager had suggested that a fall in the number of hip fractures, costing around £20,000 each to carry out, had occurred whilst the improvement in older people's quality of life is immeasurable.

Strategy and planning

There are financial implications of an ageing population for strategy and the planning of service provision as well as questions concerning who knows best about older people's needs and how to meet them. In 1986 the National Consumer Council has elaborated on local authority services, what they are supposed to do, whether they do what they are not supposed to do, what they are like to use, how much they cost and what consumers say about them?¹⁷ The sector had grown but productivity had remained broadly static. Measurement was an important feature of the development of strategies to improve service performance and productivity. However, difficulties in measuring performance effectiveness particularly for services with intangible outputs was recognized. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission reported that recent Audit Commission research had shown that approximately 50% of councils are only in the early stages of developing a strategy for older people and approximately 30% of councils had not started to develop a strategy for older people.¹⁸ Nevertheless, when local authorities are developing their strategies for older people they need to consider what it is that older people value and want. As John Stewart (an academic who was not present at the one-day conference on ageing populations), from the Institute of Local Government at the University of Birmingham, says:

*“Services are only of value if they are of value to those for whom they are provided”.*¹⁹

¹⁷ National Consumer Council (1986) 'Measuring Up: Consumer Assessment of Local Authority Services, A Guideline Study'.

¹⁸ Audit Commission (2008) 'Don't stop me now: Preparing for an ageing population', Local Government National Report, July 2008.

¹⁹ Stewart, J. (1988) 'Understanding the Management of Local Government', Longman, p.44.

There is also a need to carefully define strategy and planning outcomes and the intended benefits of a service to communities and individuals. For example, three broad outcome categories might be happiness, safety and development. Happiness might include living and dying well, safety remaining well and development growing well according to the Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies. At the same time, there are issues concerning service planning and fairness (including the balance between older people's access to private versus public services or personalised versus holistic local authority budgets).

Standards of service

There are central government calls in its literature on older people, including the Opportunity Age documentation, for strengthened national and local leadership to promote innovative strategy and planning activity and improved service delivery standards. There is an emphasis on ensuring service delivery is age-proofed at every level. For example, not having access to a computer might mean an older person is disadvantaged when they try to obtain information or access to some services. An older person might ask their local authority for a leaflet about a service and be told that the local authority does not provide that service. They are not effectively directed to the organization or individual that can deal with their inquiry. The action that the local authority should take in such a situation is really quite simple and inexpensive and involves the re-writing of the script for reception or telephone call centre staff says the Director of Studies at the Audit Commission. A Project Manager working for Leeds Adult Social Care service felt there might also be opportunities to improve relations and communications between private, public, voluntary and community sector organizations with an interest in providing services for older people.

Audit Commission fieldwork, using mystery shoppers who rang a sample of local authorities saying I am an older person coming to live in the locality can you tell me about the relevant services that I can get access to, resulted in mixed responses. The mystery caller was often asked if they wanted an assessment. The caller then said no I am fit and active and want to know about employment opportunities and leisure services. A number of local authorities, especially those with call centres, ran into trouble at this point. Only 1 in 5 mystery callers got advice on socializing activities, for example, and less in the case of volunteering opportunities. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission described a situation where there was often poor sign posting to relevant voluntary and community sector organizations and poor information on employment and volunteering opportunities. One mystery caller said she asked a local authority switchboard operator if there was any leaflets on service provision for older people that they could send her and could not get an adequate response. Then the local authority member of staff asked a colleague for help. The mystery caller was sure that she was put through to the wrong department for assistance after being kept on hold for several minutes. The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission recalled how a local authority member of staff eventually said the mystery caller could

go onto the local authority website to obtain information on social care and social welfare services.²⁰

The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission pointed out that having a free bus service does not mean it is good. Secret filming found rude and inconsiderate driver behaviour in a study carried out in Camden that involved older people filming their own poor experiences of local bus services. The local authority used the films to influence Transport for London (TfL) discussions on how to improve driver awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of older people. Likewise, obtaining a bus pass is fine if there is an effective bus service that you can use. Often older people cannot get to doctor or hospital appointments because there is a poor bus service in the area where they live or the buses regularly fail to turn up on time. In addition, older people are less likely to go to leisure centres that focus on meeting the needs of younger people. Meanwhile, a local authority removed a recycling collection service from flats and issued letters saying residents would need to take their refuse for recycling to a point three streets away from their property. This was not a practical option for many older residents. Some part of the local authority was not thinking about older people in a joined up way. In Knowsley an Older People's Group is represented on the LSP for the area and on various thematic partnerships. The group has influenced a range of discussions and decisions including having wheels fitted to refuse containers so that older people are not denied an opportunity to make their contribution to recycling initiatives.

The Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies elaborated on the LinkAge Plus programme that was sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) aimed at creating a comprehensive approach for accessible joined-up service provision for people aged fifty and over that puts them at the centre of policy making and service delivery.²¹ The eight pilot programme areas comprised Devon, Gateshead, Gloucestershire, Lancaster, Leeds, Nottinghamshire, Salford, and Tower Hamlets in London. More than fifty projects in these different locations were set up to make better use of existing services or develop new ways of providing services for older people. In Leeds Capacity Building Grants were used to enhance people's skills and knowledge and organizational practice resulting in better ways of working with existing services. The Nottinghamshire First Contact Service focused on preventing falls and the targeting of referrals for information and advice on services. There were fewer examples of joined-up organizational working leading to fully integrated service provision for older people. However, in Tower Hamlets a number of Community Network Centres were set up that provided new opportunities for older people to socialise through involvement in various networking, educational and leisure activities. The Devon Deep Outreach mentoring service stimulated the development of new preventative

²⁰ Audit Commission (2008) 'Don't stop me now: Preparing for an ageing population', Local Government National Report, July 2008.

²¹ See, Willis, M. and Dalziel, R. (2009) 'LinkAge Plus: Capacity Building – Enabling and Empowering Older People as Independent and Active Citizens', A report by the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham and the Local Government Centre, Warwick University, for the Department for Work and Pensions.

services created by private, public and voluntary sector organizations working with and for older people. In Gateshead there is an Older People's Assembly and older people are more involved at the centre of policy formulation and service design and delivery as well as empowered to identify outcomes and help to find innovative solutions to problems. The Gloucestershire Village Agents project enables volunteer workers in rural areas to provide support for older people that is not simply confined to accessing health and social care services. An easy to use electronic referral system was developed as part of the project that facilitated joint working and the holistic provision of information and services by a number of organizations.

The role of the local authority

The Audit Commission report Don't Stop Me Now has identified issues around better engagement with local authorities and reducing fragmentation in service provision and delivery. The representative from the Older People and Ageing Society Division at the DWP, commented on lifestyle opportunities associated with increased longevity matched by healthier, wealthier more fulfilling lives and the implications for economic productivity and prosperity. However, demographic change indicators show that strategy needs to set out how society can successfully position itself to make the most of opportunities. There is a risk that longer years lived will too often result in older people experiencing more financial insecurity, debilitating ill health and poverty. The representative from the DWP said four themes concerning older people and their welfare had been identified.

- Creating an age-friendly society
- Preparing for later life
- Living well in later life
- Stronger protection and support

Local Authority strategies for supporting older people and service provision will need to consider how these different themes are addressed. The aim is to produce strategies that deal with stereotypes of older people, change attitudes towards them, make sure they have access to the information and services they need, and are empowered so that they can make the best possible decisions concerning their finances, health, home and work.

At the same time, there is the problem of people living longer, often in deprived circumstances, and local authorities not having enough money to keep them living independently in their own homes. The chair of scrutiny at Oxfordshire County Council, suggested there are matters to consider like the stereotypical view of a leafy and affluent Oxfordshire that conceals the problem of pockets of deprivation that are ignored unless they are proactively sought out and dealt with. In the case of Durham the city itself is generally quite affluent but parts of the surrounding hinterland are in the top ten list of deprived areas in the country. A councillor confirmed the Labour administration in control of Durham County Council took the view that it should continue to focus on looking after people from the cradle to the grave. However, the Director of Studies at the Audit Commission stated that there

are people in some local authority departments doing things to help older people while people in other local authority departments are taking action that frustrates the work that is done to help older people. Meanwhile, the role of the local authority needs to extend beyond social care to include a well-developed understanding of older people's views and concerns about their welfare to ensure there is effective age proofing of services. In many instances the provision of services that help to maintain older people's independence will require local authority and partner organizations to cooperate and collaborate whilst keeping costs under control. Nevertheless, for some older people social care provision will require local authority and partner organizations to cooperate and cope with high costs. Crucially, The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission says, local authority departments, health and social care organizations and older people need to work together in a genuinely collaborative way to decide how to use pooled budgets and plan for the provision of services.

Society and older people

The Chief Officer at Dudley Age Concern, felt the language that is often used to describe older people as the problem is not helpful. At the same time, some parts of society had become more fragmented. One of the champion's for older people at Dudley Age Concern wanted to know how damaged communities can be re-built? The chair of scrutiny at Oxfordshire County Council wanted to find out who knows best about how to plan for the provision of services for older people? The representative from the DWP stressed that older people face new problems including the decline in the value of their pensions. Tension exists over the balance between the role of central government and the responsibilities of the individual in maintaining personal well-being. As the councillor on Durham County Council says,

"[There are issues concerning] cohesiveness and resentment, people who have planned for later life, what about those who have not planned and what about costs, what about personal responsibility".

The problem that arises concerns planning for old age. The chair of scrutiny at Oxfordshire County Council says, "At seventy-six I am too young to think about what I need when I am frail". The Director of Studies at the Audit Commission claimed there was a central and local government policy issue that existed concerning ways to make it easy for people to do the right thing around decisions on pensions for example. He said an opportunity exists for increased longevity and a good quality of life in later years that will have profound implications for personal well-being, economic prosperity and social progress. However, a failure to effectively adjust to changing circumstances may result in unexpectedly difficult challenges. A revitalised strategy for the provision of services for older people must set out how society can change to make the most of the opportunities and minimise the risks that an ageing society creates. Otherwise, people will live longer in poor health and poverty and there will be a failure to capitalise on the human and social capital represented by some 40% of the UK population.

A Researcher from the Institute of Local Government Studies suggested a cross-cutting theme exists that is about achieving cultural and attitudinal change towards older people at every level to create an age friendly society. The aim is to empower older people and enable more of them to participate in discussions to decide priorities for action to provide the services that they need to live independent and purposeful lives. The task is to eliminate arbitrary age barriers so that older people's lifestyle choices reflect their capabilities and needs and not how old they are. In developing a best practice model of older people's involvement in discussions and policy formulation there is scope for more shared power and resources at the local level, a heightened awareness of the value of older people's views and ideas, and an increased level of activity to provide services focused on user outcomes.

Conclusion

What are the main findings from the one-day conference on ageing populations and people's views on the provision of services for older people? Much of the discussion focused on correcting a perceived imbalance in policymaking that favoured an individualistic rather than collective approaches to dealing with age related issues and the provision of services for older people. At the same time, central government literature shows there has been a shift in emphasis away from a simple 'needs-determined' to a more sophisticated 'people-centred' approach to the formulation of strategies and plans to deal with issues affecting older people. Central government recognises that the achievement of its objectives for older people and their welfare will depend on continuing culture change in its own departments and local authorities to deal with negative stereotypes that cause older people to be viewed as a problem.

The main points emerging from the conference and participant discussions were:

- Local authorities have an important leadership role in the delivery of targeted services and interventions to help older people in partnership with other relevant organizations including service providers.
- Scope exists to improve older people's access to information about services that can help them to remain independent and living in their own homes.
- The importance of older people having friends, contacts and links into relevant networks that can help them to maintain a good quality of life was highlighted.
- Older people should be taking the lead and helping to create more integrated and effective services that deliver people centred outcomes.
- There should be an emphasis on empowering older people so that they can make informed decisions concerning their finances, health, work and home circumstances.
- Scope exists for more coordinated working between private, public, voluntary and community sector organizations to plan and deliver a range of services for older people.

- Champions representing the interests of older people can through their close contacts with people on the ground help to ensure that their genuine priorities for action to improve services are addressed.
- There are financial implications for local authorities in providing services for older people but half of all councils are only in the early stages of preparing a strategy for older people.
- It is necessary to ensure the delivery of services for older people are age-proofed at every level to improve access to information and help.
- Older people need to be involved from the outset in the development of policy on service provision and finding ways to solve problems that affect them.
- Local authorities need to have an in-depth knowledge of the area that they serve and the people who live there to effectively manage tensions over the use of funds to provide services for older people.

With regard to society and older people the emphasis should be on changing the language that is often used to describe them as a problem. Meanwhile, new issues have emerged in terms of an ageing population, more people living longer and matters like future pensions provision. Opportunities exist to harness the capacities and capabilities of older people and the risks associated with a ageing population can be managed to help to ensure older people have a good quality of life and are able to remain independent and active for as long as is possible.

Importantly, research shows that better performing local authorities have an organizational culture and capacity that facilitates change for all citizens They provide effective leadership and demonstrate a willingness to embrace new ideas and ways of working to improve people's quality of life. Crucially, a local authority's ability to reflect on its performance and adapt to meet citizens demands for new or improved services is affected by different contextually situated factors like the history of relations between itself and different organizations in the area that it serves.²² In the case of a local authority programme intended to focus on helping some of the most disadvantaged people in the labour market find work it was found that well coordinated inter-agency working helped to empower not only the people looking for work but other members of their family. This was achieved through increased household income for example. Society in general also benefited from the programme because it reduced people's reliance on benefits and levels of crime in some areas for example.²³ The Linkage Plus programme introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions has stimulated the development of new ways of working at the local level that have facilitated access to information and advice on a range of services for people aged fifty and over. For example, the Gloucestershire Village Agents project adopted a community

²² Dalziel, R. (2005) 'Capacity Building and Improvement in Poorly Performing Councils', a report prepared by the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, April 2005.

²³ Coulson, A., Dalziel, R., Bokhari, S. and Dunstan, E. (2008) 'European Social Fund Co-Financing Plan 2005-2008, Birmingham City Council, An Interim Evaluation, by the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, for Birmingham City Council, August 2007.

development and empowerment approach through older volunteers providing people with information and access to services in different rural locations. The evidence of the success of this work in being able to respond flexibly and creatively to unexpected events such as the 2007 floods is one of the most outstanding examples of the success of the LinkAge Plus approach to local community engagement and empowerment.²⁴

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²⁴ Willis, M. and Dalziel, R. (2009) 'LinkAge Plus: Capacity Building – Enabling and Empowering Older People as Independent and Active Citizens', report prepared by the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham and the Local Government Centre, University of Warwick on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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