

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 2 – Senedd

Meeting date:

Thursday, 15 May 2014

Meeting time:

10.00

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



For further information please contact:

Sarah Beasley

Committee Clerk

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Agenda

1 Introductions, apologies and substitutions (10:00–10:05)

2 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business: item 3

3 Consideration of Correspondence from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (10.05 – 10.30) (Pages 1 – 79)

4 Housing (Wales) Bill – Stage 2 – Consideration of amendments (10.30–15.00)

In accordance with Standing Order 26.21 the Committee will dispose of amendments to the Bill in the following order:

- Sections 2 - 6
- Schedule 1
- Sections 7 - 38
- Sections 40 - 47
- Schedule 2
- Sections 48 - 123

- Schedule 3
- Sections 124 - 128
- Section 1
- Section 39
- Long title

Supporting documents:

[Marshalled List of Amendments](#)

[Groupings of Amendments](#)

In Attendance

Carl Sargeant, Minister for Housing and Regeneration

Ceri Breeze, Deputy Director, Housing Policy Division

Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer, Legal Services.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) ix of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted



Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
CELG(4)-15-14 Paper 2

Cambrian Buildings
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Cardiff CF10 5FL

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To: Christine Chapman AM, Chair, Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
CC: Sarah Beasley, Committee Clerk

7th May 2014

Dear Chair,

I write to you regarding my report on community services, 'The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales', which was published in late February¹.

The report has been well received and has helped to generate discussion on the future of community services in Wales. As my report emphasises, older people must not be disproportionately affected by any changes to community services. Older people make a significant contribution to our communities and require key services to allow them to continue as economic assets.

Recent debates in the media and in the Senedd on the future of public buses, public toilets, libraries and day/community centres has demonstrated the importance of these services, not only for older people but for others in society. Removing these services will lead to a range of physical and mental health problems for older people, which will ultimately cost public service providers more in the medium to long term.

The Committee may wish to consider the evidence provided in the report, which may be useful for the forward work programme. Should the

¹ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-02-25/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.aspx



Committee decide to carry out a public inquiry on the effects of reducing community services and their consequential impact on older people and others then I would be happy to participate and provide evidence, as well as advise on the shaping of the inquiry should the Committee find this useful.

With further difficult decisions ahead for public service providers in an increasingly challenging economic climate, this is an opportune time to highlight this key issue and ensure that older people can continue to contribute to the economy and play a full and active role in communities across Wales.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my Communities, Local Government and Wellbeing Lead, Iwan Williams (iwan.williams@olderpeoplewales.com, 02920 445 045), should you wish to discuss the report in further detail.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Rochira". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'i'.

Sarah Rochira
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales. The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services that they need.

The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that Wales is a good place to grow older, not just for some but for everyone.

How to contact the Commissioner:

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Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)

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Foreword

Since taking up post in June 2012, I have met and spoken with older people across Wales as part of my Engagement Roadshow and I will continue to do so over my term of office. Their voices, and the voices of those who care for and support them, are at the heart of my work.

This report builds on my “Framework for Action 2013-17”, which reflects the change that older people want and need to see, and my “A Thousand Little Barriers” report, which explores the minor obstacles that cause major challenges for older people in their daily lives.

One of my priorities in my Framework for Action is protecting and improving community services, facilities and infrastructure. Whilst high-quality health and social care matters enormously to older people, they consistently raise the need to focus more strongly on key local and community-based services and facilities, such as buses and community transport, public toilets, pavements, public seating, outdoor areas, libraries, leisure facilities, and community and day centres. These are the services talked most about by older people and they are concerned that they are disappearing.

These services are not luxuries – they are essential to the maintenance of older people’s health, independence and wellbeing. These services are also essential to the delivery of national priorities relating to prevention, citizen focus and community resilience, containing the costs upon statutory services and maintaining the wider health of the economy. These services should be seen as essential community assets.

I understand the current budgetary pressures being placed upon local authorities and that difficult decisions on expenditure and savings must be made. It is vital, however, that as spending decisions are made, essential community services are recognised as being as impactful and as important as statutory services and older people continue to be able to access them, albeit in different ways.

Traditionally seen as costs, community services should instead be seen as assets. Assets that enable individuals to maintain their health, wealth and wellbeing and, through doing so, benefit their wider communities and the Welsh economy.

This report makes a strong business case for community services. Community services are essential to the health, wealth, and wellbeing of our villages, towns, cities and communities, but, more than that, are integral to

the public service and public health priorities within Wales and the overall health of our economy.

For many older people, community services are, quite simply, an indispensable lifeline. I look forward to working with our national and local governments and other key partners as these decisions are being made.

I am grateful not only to the older people who shared their views and experiences with me, but also to partner organisations who have contributed to this report and helped to demonstrate the robust case for protecting and improving these services.

Together, we can help protect these vital services and, in doing so, make Wales a good place to grow older, not just for older people, but for everyone.



Sarah Rochira

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Introduction

Reductions in public spending are now a real concern in Wales, with the Welsh Government budget facing a total cut of £1.68bn by 2015/16 compared with 2010/11¹ at a time when demand for services is rapidly growing. In her response to the Welsh Government's budget for 2014/15², the Commissioner welcomed the additional funding for health and social care over the coming years, as well as plans to introduce a £50m Intermediate Care Fund. However, the Commissioner also expressed real concerns over the reduction in financial support for local government.

Local authorities, the providers of essential community (non-statutory) services for older people, are now experiencing significant budget reductions: general revenue funding for local government over the next three years will have declined by 4.8% on the 2011/12 baseline. In order to ensure financial balance, non-statutory services are at risk of disproportionately high budget reductions due to the budgetary protection afforded to statutory services such as social care and education. To meet targets and reduce deficits, some non-statutory services may be reduced by up to 52%³ or permanently closed down⁴.

Community services should be renamed community assets. This better reflects their vital importance, not only to older people, but to long-standing and emerging policy imperatives in Wales. Older people have been very clear that these services are not luxuries that we can afford to lose, they are the foundations upon which not only the lives of individuals, but also our communities are built.

Traditional or old-fashioned 'salami-slicing' budgetary reductions are not the answer to modern public service delivery. 21st century approaches must be considered, such as radical efficiency⁵ (cost savings whilst improving service outcomes), community budgets⁶ (local public service providers working together and sharing budgets to meet local needs), community asset transfer⁷ (preserving community buildings and services through alternative delivery models) and zero based budgeting⁸ (everything included in the budget must

1 <http://wales.gov.uk/funding/budget/draft-budget-2014-2015/?lang=en>

2 http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/13-10-08/Statement_on_Welsh_Government_Draft_Budget_2014-15.aspx

3 Institute of Fiscal Studies - Local government expenditure in Wales: recent trends and future pressures, 2013

4 <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Policies/UNISON%20Future%20for%20Wales.pdf>

5 <http://www.innovationunit.org/knowledge/our-ideas/radical-efficiency>

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-local-authorities-more-control-over-how-they-spend-public-money-in-their-area--2/supporting-pages/community-budgets>

7 <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/stronger-communities/asset-transfer-and-capital-programmes>

8 http://people.bath.ac.uk/mnsipc/Reading/Management%20Accounting/Budgeting%20Process/zero_based_budgeting_briefing.pdf

be considered and justified). Local authorities must embrace innovation and new approaches which are underpinned by a clear understanding of the impact of community services and the consequent impact of reductions on these.

This report builds upon the excellent work carried out by the Toilets, Transport and Bins Taskforce, established by the Commissioner, to assist her in understanding the importance of these services. Special thanks to **Community Transport Association, British Toilet Association, Welsh Senate of Older People** and the **'P is for People' Campaign** for their continued commitment and campaigning on these issues. The information provided by these organisations was invaluable.

The report also draws upon a series of focus groups with older people across Wales (held in Aberystwyth, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Colwyn Bay and Llandrindod Wells).

In addition to the focus groups, advice was also sought from a range of partners to offer expertise on specific areas of the report, in order to provide supporting research evidence. Evidence was received from:

- British Toilet Association
- Bus Users Cymru
- Community Transport Association
- NIACE Dysgu Cymru
- 'P is for People' Campaign
- Public Health Wales
- Royal Voluntary Society
- Society of Chief Librarians Wales
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Welsh Senate of Older People

An Asset Based Approach

There are almost 800,000 people aged 60 and over in Wales, over a quarter of the population, and, in the next twenty years, this is expected to exceed 1 million people. The fact that Wales is a nation of older people should be seen as something positive.

Community services are essential to enable older people to continue to make a contribution and to undertake activities that have economic benefit.

Many older people remain economically active past retirement age, participating in full or part-time employment and continuing to pay tax, volunteering and providing invaluable childcare services for friends and family. They have a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience and, provided with adequate services and facilities and infrastructure, they can continue to make a significant contribution to their communities and the wider economy.

After accounting for costs relating to pensions, welfare and health, older people:

- Make a net contribution worth over £1 billion a year to the Welsh economy, almost £3 million a day;
- Their contribution will total almost £27 billion over the next twenty years;
- The value of volunteering by older people in Wales, the 'hidden army', is estimated at £469 million. Together with childcare, the value is around £750 million per year;
- A 2011 study suggests that by 2030, older people will benefit the economy by around £291.1 billion, compared to projected welfare costs of £216.2 billion⁹.

Community services are key enablers that allow older people to contribute towards economic growth, and removing key community services risks preventing older people from doing so.

Keeping older people active and engaged through the provision of community services allows them to leave their homes to work, volunteer and contribute to the wider economy. Older people can also visit local shops and businesses and spend on local services, strengthening local economies by doing so.

⁹ <http://www.goldagepensioners.com/Uploads/PDF/main-report.pdf>

Community services are therefore vital if older people are able to continue to make this financial contribution to the Welsh economy.

Community services are fundamental to the prevention of frailty and maintenance of health and wellbeing of older people

Older people want to retain their independence and health for as long as possible and frailty and dependence should not be seen as an inevitable part of growing older. Community services are not luxuries – they are essential to the maintenance of older people’s health, independence and wellbeing. Being able to get out and about, access online information, develop new skills and have social contact are key determinants of health and wellbeing. They are key to the public health agenda in Wales and the health of the people of Wales.

Older people rarely talk about services or systems, their priority is to stay safe, as healthy and independent as possible, and to lead lives that have value, meaning and purpose.

Over the past decade in Wales, there has been a strong focus upon improving health, particular in terms of chronic health conditions, but, to date, the role of community services has not been fully reflected in the policy or provision of health improvement programmes and actions.

- Without the means to get around, older people are at an increased risk of loneliness, isolation and depression, sometimes referred to as ‘silent killers’¹⁰. More than 75% of women and a third of men over the age of 65 live alone. Without the means to leave their homes, or with fewer visits from community workers and service providers, an increasing number of older people will feel lonely and isolated, resulting in damaging effects to their mental health¹¹.
- Without public or community transport, older people often cannot get out and about. They are unable to walk to the local bus stop or shops, for example, and are prevented from participating in physical activity classes in the local community/day centre. This contributes towards an increase in obesity amongst older people; nearly one in four older people are now considered obese in the UK¹². As a result, older people are more at risk from diabetes, heart disease and strokes.

10 <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/scotland/article3906350.ece>

11 <http://www.agealliancewales.org.uk/admin/content/files/Age%20Alliance%20Report%20Final.pdf>

12 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/elderhealth/10473122/Obesity-crisis-more-than-one-third-of-60-70-year-olds-now-dangerously-overweight.html>

- Without reliable and accessible public toilets, older people are at a higher risk of heart attacks and strokes, and lack the confidence to leave their own homes.

However, the maintenance of health, or prevention of ill health, is in itself not sufficient. There is an increasing focus in Wales on the wellbeing agenda. Begun with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill, the intent to realign public services in Wales around this concept is also embedded in the Future Generations Bill.

The Commissioner's Framework for Action 2013-17, which outlines her priorities, includes a wellbeing model based upon the direct views of older people (Appendix 1). Community services are identified by older people as a key enabler to achieving wellbeing, in particular, **being able to do the things that matter to them, living in a place that suits them and their lives, getting the help they need and feeling valued.**

Older people have been clear about wanting to:

Feel safe and listened to, valued and respected. Older people must have opportunities to voice their concerns regarding proposals to cut or close down toilets, libraries, adult learning classes, community/day centres and local buses and their knowledge, skills and experience must be used when redesigning and planning alternative services.

Be able do the things that matter to them. Older people must have access to adequate public transport and public toilets so they are able to get out and about and access essential services. Older people must also be able to access the venues and facilities they need to remain engaged, participate in activities and volunteer, such as libraries and community/day centres.

Get the help that they need. Older people must be able to access information and advice. With a number of information services increasingly reliant on online provision, it is important that older people can access lifelong learning and internet classes in community centres/libraries and can use digital services to prevent discrimination and exclusion.

Live in a place that suits their life and needs. Older people must feel secure in their communities, have adequate public seating, age-friendly pavements and roads, and street lighting to make them feel safe after dark.

The importance of these is not yet sufficiently understood and reflected in the planning and everyday delivery of public services and public service priorities, in particular the link between community services and overall wellbeing.

In order to provide alignment and keep the focus on wellbeing, public bodies need to strengthen the use of wellbeing indicators within their work and see the community services as fundamental to ensuring the maintenance of wellbeing. More detail about the above can be found in the Commissioner's [Framework for Action 2013-17](#).

Community services are integral to the delivery of key policy priorities and statutory services cost containment.

Notwithstanding the significant financial challenges facing local authorities, it is vital that community services are seen not as optional costs, but as vital community assets. These community assets are integral to the delivery of emerging policy agendas within Wales, such as prevention, citizen focus and community resilience. These new agendas will be significantly undermined by the loss of these community assets.

These community assets are also integral to containing longer-term costs upon statutory services, in particular through the prevention agenda and the maintenance of physical and mental health.

Older people who are lonely and isolated will increase visits to local GPs and non-urgent appointments in hospitals and will place greater pressures on care services and friends and family, resulting in greater amounts of public spending in the process.

Providing adequate infrastructure to get around reduces dependency on others and long-term health costs; it is estimated that reducing the number of older people admitted to hospital could save the health service £2bn a year¹³.

Improving healthy life expectancy by just one year each decade could generate a 14% saving in healthcare spending and an 11% saving in benefits spending by 2025¹⁴. The removal of key community services risks undermining the prevention agenda, making it more difficult to prevent, delay or reduce older people's need for care and support.

Community services often prevent or delay the need for more costly intensive services, or promote the wellbeing of older people and engagement with the community. Essential community services therefore need to be given proper recognition as preventative services that can prevent deterioration, frailty and social isolation.

¹³ <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2011/11/03/service-cuts-increase-isolation-among-elderly-finds-survey/>

¹⁴ <http://www.niace.org.uk/news/adult-learning-investment-can-co-exist-with-deficit-reduction>

A medium to long-term view of community services is needed. Enabling older people to be independent for as long as possible should be of paramount importance. Making relatively small-scale investments in community services will save larger health and social care costs in future years.

Given the strong focus within Wales now placed on the integration agenda, reducing these services is counter-productive in the medium to long-term. Research suggests, for example, that when local authorities have reduced social care costs, there has been a significant increase in the number of older people using unscheduled health care services¹⁵.

Community services are integral to the prevention and community resilience agendas and must be seen as a key part of the ‘invest-to-save’ agenda.

A joined-up approach is required for community services, with a far greater focus on outcomes.

An integrated approach is needed to ensure that service planning undertaken by Local Authorities, Local Health Boards and Local Service Boards addresses the needs of older people across public service delivery in Wales, including community services.

Local authority Single Integrated Plans (SIPs)¹⁶ (incorporating Community Strategies, Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies and Community Safety Partnership Plans) and Strategic Equality Plans (SEPs)¹⁷, must both fully address the needs of older people when developing integrated community strategies.

There must be a greater focus on outcomes across public service delivery, and new ideas and innovation must be embraced. Service providers must reconsider how they plan and deliver community services to address the overarching concept of wellbeing and must ensure that the needs of older people are fully considered. A failure to do so will have a significant impact on the lives of older people.

Older people must be involved in community service planning and changes to community services must be underpinned by robust impact assessment.

¹⁵ <http://www.walespublicservices2025.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Mark-Jeffs-WPS2025-Full-Report1.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/publications/130205sharedpurpdeliveryv2en.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/publications/120405sepfinal.pdf>

Older people have been clear that they often feel that their views regarding community services have not been taken on-board by decision-makers and that there is insufficient consultation and a lack of proper consideration of the implications for older people of removing key services.

Older people have a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding community services. As frequent users of community services, older people must be partners in decision-making about the future of community services and increasingly involved and consulted in the design, development and delivery of community-based services, facilities and infrastructure.

Direct engagement with older people and examining a wide and innovative range of partnership processes can lead to positive outcomes for both older people and the public sector¹⁸. Older people must not be an after-thought when it comes to community planning.

Future changes to local community services and infrastructure must not proceed without a full and robust analysis of the impact that these will have on the wellbeing of older people, with effective plans put in place to mitigate this impact.

Community Assets in Wales

Transport

Public transport is vital to reduce physical and mental health problems among older people. Transport is often seen as a lifeline to being able to access key services and amenities, especially for those living in rural communities. With the population of those aged 75 and over predicted to increase by 60% by 2035¹⁹, the need for adequate public transport becomes ever greater.

Without appropriate services and infrastructure and a practical means of getting around, older people can become isolated from their community and society, unable to access essential services, participate in activities or visit friends and family. Public transport is crucial to the maintenance of public health, inclusion in society and the prevention agenda; active transport use amongst older people can help reduce the effects of obesity and cardiovascular risk²⁰.

¹⁸ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/john-elbourne-181108.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/publications/psgd/140120-psgd-full-report-env2.pdf>

²⁰ http://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-policy/Policy_news/TransportAndHealth_BriefingSeminar_Digital__1_.pdf

Reliable local transport becomes increasingly significant as people get older, with essential journeys becoming more of a challenge. In Wales, two-thirds of single older people have no car, whilst one in four people in Wales feel that the local hospital is one of the most difficult locations to access via local bus services²¹.

Whilst Wales is likely to see an increased growth in rail passenger numbers of 38% between 2005 and 2026²², older people often tell the Commissioner that they feel more comfortable using buses than trains. Concessionary rail fares for older people are important in areas where bus services are limited²³, but older people still require bus services to get to and from the train station. Older people who can and want to use trains require reliable rail travel supported by adequate infrastructure, such as seating and accessible toilet facilities in stations, as well as age-friendly trains, which include audio visual announcements and sufficient grab-handles to cater for their needs.

The loss of public transport services is a key concern for older people, particularly the future of local bus services. Older people have told the Commissioner that the uncertainty regarding public transport creates real anxiety and fears about their independence. Reduced bus services affect the poor, older people and most vulnerable more than other groups in society²⁴. Four times as many journeys are made with the bus than the train, yet Welsh Government expenditure on bus services in 2013/14 was estimated at £105m, compared with £225m on rail services²⁵.

Royal Voluntary Service Research last year²⁶ found that 17 per cent of older people in Wales have seen a reduction in the number of public transport services in their area. Public transport is often not very accessible to people with impairments or disability and nearly 11 per cent of older people said that public transport was not accessible for their disabilities.

The study found that lack of suitable transport had a devastating effect on wellbeing; 4% of older people felt lonely because they were unable to get out and about and 4% felt depressed.

In her discussions with older people, the Commissioner has heard some really distressing stories about the devastating impact on older people's lives when local buses are cut or re-routed, leaving them effectively housebound

21 http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s11193/Consultation%20Response%20IPT15.%20Age%20Cymru.html?CT=2#_ftnref6

22 <http://www.walespublicservices2025.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Mark-Jeffs-WPS2025-Full-Report1.pdf>

23 <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/rail/railfares/?lang=en>

24 <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/files/13.09.09.welsh-bus-guide-english.pdf>

25 <http://www.bevanfoundation.org/blog/buses-a-lifeline-and-necessity/>

26 <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Wales%20transport%20report.pdf>

in the absence of an accessible local bus route. The word that came up time and time again, was 'lifeline'; good dependable public transport is seen as a link not just to get to the shops, Post Office or visit friends and family, but also as a link to the wider world and to independence.

"I have a friend who lives in Penparcau and she used to get the bus, but now that bus route has stopped altogether. She can't walk to the next stop because she has cancer, and I'm not available all the time...She's housebound because of this and it's so sad."

Gwen, Ceredigion

Research suggests that more than 18,000 older people over 75 years old feel trapped or isolated in their own home due to the lack of suitable public transport²⁷. A reduction of public transport services is very likely to cause this figure to increase, with wide-ranging implications for the physical and mental wellbeing of older people.

As identified in the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People, a lack of transport contributes to higher levels of social isolation²⁸. Withdrawing bus services therefore risks leaving older people isolated, lonely and disconnected from society, leading to a need for support from the state that is much more costly in the long-term than subsidising a local bus.

Changes are happening today that are significantly affecting the day-to-day lives of older people. Across England and Wales, 46% of local authorities reduced their support for buses in 2013/14²⁹. In Wales, there were 25 service withdrawals or alterations (13 reductions or alterations, 12 entire service removals)³⁰ during the same period. Some areas are facing the prospect of losing all funding for subsidised bus services³¹. With bus services disappearing and no railway stops nearby, there are real fears that communities, and older people in particular, will become increasingly isolated and marginalised³².

Older people require age-friendly buses e.g. low floors for easier access, audio-visual announcements, wider corridors and sufficient grab-handles, and also adequate bus infrastructure. Older people need safe bus stops that are

27 <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Wales%20transport%20report.pdf>

28 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

29 <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/blogs/bus/Almost-50-per-cent-of-local-authorities-cut-spending-on-buses>

30 http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/files/Buses_In_Crisis_Report_AW_PDF_09.12.13.pdf

31 <http://www.leaderlive.co.uk/news/128985/wrexham-bus-cuts-would-leave-people-totally-isolated-.aspx>

32 <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/transport-gap-opens-between-welsh-6312260>

easy to access, have adequate seating, shelter them from the elements, and provide clear and visible travel information with alternatives, such as ‘talking bus stops’ for those who are visually impaired.

Free bus travel

Older people make up a disproportionately high number of bus users in Wales, with over-50s amongst the highest users of bus services³³. Many older people are entirely reliant on these buses, as they cannot drive and do not have access to private transport.

Since 2002, the introduction of free bus travel for older people in Wales has been a real success and has made a huge difference to their lives, with an estimated 400 million journeys having been made since its launch³⁴, and local authorities managing in excess of 650,000 passes annually. As outlined in the National Transport Plan³⁵, maintaining free concessionary travel on local bus services for older people remains a Welsh Government commitment.

Free travel through the concessionary bus travel scheme is an indispensable part of the lives of many older people. The Commissioner’s own research shows that 80% of older people believe their quality of life would suffer and they would be more lonely and housebound without the free bus pass³⁶. Our research also shows that the scheme “offers people the opportunity to remain integrated in society, improving their quality of life...brings wider benefits in terms of relieving pressure on health and social services transport budgets”³⁷.

Many public transport routes across Wales are, however, under threat and a free bus pass is worth little to older people should certain bus routes disappear or if they are unable to get to the bus stop. The impact of reduced public transport services is already being seen; bus use in Wales fell by 6.9% in 2012, more than twice the fall in England or Scotland. At the same time, bus fares in Wales increased by 6.9%, more than twice the rate of general inflation and outstripping fare increases in England and Scotland³⁸.

A reduction in bus services often disproportionately affects older people and, all too often, older people’s voices are not heard when changes to services and routes are considered. The Commissioner has heard real concerns about

33 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2011/110311sdr422011en.pdf>

34 <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/transport/2012/6596039/?lang=en>

35 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/det/publications/100329ntpen.pdf>

36 <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s10513/04.07.12%20Correspondence%20from%20Older%20Peoples%20Commission-Annex.pdf>

37 <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s10513/04.07.12%20Correspondence%20from%20Older%20Peoples%20Commission-Annex.pdf>

38 <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/bus-travel-wales-lowest-launch-4694681>

the concessionary bus travel reimbursements to operators for 2014-15 and in December 2013 the Commissioner raised her concerns to the Transport Minister about the proposals to reduce the percentage of reimbursement rates to operators from 1 April 2014, which could result in up to 30% in reduced services³⁹.

These proposals will have huge implications for older people across Wales, creating a greater demand for community transport services that is unlikely to be met without significant extra resource allocation. Whilst the number of older and disabled concessionary passenger journeys in Wales remained broadly constant between 2009/10 and 2012/13 at 48 million journeys a year⁴⁰, any reductions in reimbursement rates to bus operators will affect service provision and reduce the availability of much-needed public transport.

Rural transport

Reductions to bus services are a real concern in rural areas. In these parts of Wales, the population is generally much older than in urban areas⁴¹. In Wales, people are also less likely to be able to access bus routes than the UK population: 83% of Welsh households are within 13 minutes' walk of a bus stop with a service at least once an hour, compared with 90% for the UK as a whole⁴².

The need for effective rural connectivity has been heightened by the closure of local banks, shops and other services, meaning older people have to travel further to access these services and other vital amenities. Lower levels of car ownership and car use amongst older people can also lead to them becoming marginalised and unable to access community services in rural areas, leading to significant impacts on their wellbeing⁴³.

Key concerns for older people in rural areas are getting to and from hospitals for appointments, how to cope with emergency admissions and the difficulties of visiting close family at hospitals far away. With specialist units concentrated in fewer hospitals proposed as part of NHS health care reorganisation in Wales, the need for effective transport planning with adequate public transport networks becomes ever more important.

39 http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/files/Buses_In_Crisis_Report_AW_PDF_09.12.13.pdf

40 Department for Transport Table Bus 01015

41 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/922/page/61604>

42 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2013/130124-public-service-vehicles-2012-en.pdf>

43 http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/14063/2/Shergold_Parkhurst_Musselwhite_UTSG_Finalpre_print.pdf

“When you’re taken to Hereford in an ambulance...you can be kept all day and thrown out at 3am with no means of getting back to Llandrindod. So you have a choice of £90 for a taxi or getting a friend to pick you up.”

Marjorie, Powys

“We live in the back of beyond, there are only four houses in our postcode...what’s going to happen if both of us can’t drive anymore? We’d become reliant on buses. From 9am until about 7pm, our nearest bus goes every hour. For us to catch that bus it’s a 2.5 mile walk...there’s virtually no night transport, so if you visited someone at Withybush Hospital you’d have a devil of a problem getting back.”

Henry, Pembrokeshire

Another key concern is that rural areas may be losing out on funding for community transport. Following changes made by the Welsh Government in 2012, the total funding for community transport in Wales was £2.5m in 2013/14. Although this is a significant figure, its distribution across Wales was not equitable. The money was allocated to the four regional transport consortia (whose futures are currently uncertain) on the basis of population and existing public transport networks, and not on need.

As a result, the mid-Wales region, with its low population density and sparse public transport levels, received the smallest allocation for an area that has one of the largest number of community transport schemes. The loss of revenue has resulted in a real impact on older people living in mid-Wales, restricting, for example, their ability to access key services.

“We’re afraid that people won’t attend their appointments at these hospitals because they’ve got no way of getting there.”

Doreen, Powys

While older people in rural areas rely on these bus services, they are also crucially important for other people as well, helping Wales’ tourist industry, for example, and the drive towards better connectivity.

The loss of public transport routes can be just as damaging in urban areas.

Reduced mobility and inaccessible transport infrastructure can mean that older people are left isolated and cut off from society in towns and cities, severely impacting on their physical and mental health.

“On the last day our subsidised bus ran before it was cut, there were six passengers...It was a lifeline. I can’t go out now.”

Pat, Cardiff

When older people across Wales tried to highlight their concerns to the bus companies or local authorities, they often felt that they were not being taken seriously, or were not consulted in a meaningful way.

“If there is a consultation, it’s for their benefit...if they were owned by me (bus services), I’d never let them get away with cutting services.”

Lynda, Vale of Glamorgan

“There’s never a consultation or a review which doesn’t lead to a closure”

Louise, Gwynedd

Community transport

Local authorities, bus operators and other key partners must now find new and innovative ways of providing essential public transport services. For some older people, taxi services are too expensive and can be difficult to access for those with hearing or visual impairments.

Community transport has a larger role to play and is highly praised by older people. Community transport services plug gaps in the public transport network and are particularly important for older people and those living in isolated communities in rural areas. Many services use specialist vehicles that are essential for older people with mobility issues. Despite the praise, community transport is viewed as the ‘neglected link’ and must be better supported and integrated with other modes to fully address the needs of older people⁴⁴.

44 <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s17569/Report%20on%20Integrated%20Public%20Transport%20-%20May%202013.pdf>

“Neath Port Talbot community transport is excellent, the system is in place and works well, and there are voluntary drivers.”

George, Neath

“Community transport is a logistical nightmare to organise, and the people who do it do a fantastic job.”

Harold, Wrexham

Community transport in Wales is viewed much more positively than regular public transport⁴⁵, with older people praising the vital role it plays in helping them to access their communities and essential services. Community transport also provides excellent value for money, worth £3 for every £1 spent on it⁴⁶. Whilst community transport provides much-needed support for older people, it cannot meet their needs entirely and must be sufficiently supported by public transport.

Good practice

Community transport makes a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda, helping older people to maintain their independence for longer, and combating loneliness and isolation by enabling participation in community life. There are over 80 organisations across Wales delivering generic community transport services, providing an estimated 1.6 million passenger journeys per year, according to the **Community Transport Association (CTA Cymru)**.

Despite the importance of initiatives to support community transport services in Wales, the Welsh Government Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative (CTCFI) for 15 transport schemes in Wales ceased in April 2013 after 8 years as a result of funding restrictions⁴⁷.

45 http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Global/Age-Cymru/Policy_and_Campaigns/Key%20findings%20of%20the%20Community%20Calculator%20ENGLISH.pdf?dtrk=true

46 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

47 <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/decisions/dr2013/janmar/transport/cs3138/?lang=en>

“The CTCFI was a pilot scheme...if it works, we implement it, if it doesn't work, we don't implement it...it was proven beyond all reasonable doubt that it worked, but funding has been stopped.”

Peter, Powys

Some participant operators have indicated that the cessation of the CTCFI is having a negative impact on older people, particularly those in their 80s or 90s, and severely disabled people who used it. Since 2004/05, over 1.4 million passenger journeys were provided to some of the most vulnerable members of the community through the CTCFI scheme. The cessation of the initiative has left service users who previously enjoyed concessionary transport now being asked to pay, leading to a reduction in the number of people using these services in some areas.

It is not yet clear whether the Welsh Government's new Bus Services Support Grant and Local Transport Fund, succeeding the Regional Transport Services Grant and the Regional Transport Consortia Grant, will adequately address the public transport needs of older people. Whilst the new structure could provide an opportunity to improve, increase and integrate bus services, there is cause for concern regarding the significant reduction in public subsidy for public transport, with the combined value of the two previous funding streams falling by 22% between 2011/12 and 2013/14⁴⁸.

Good practice

In addition to their traditional door-to-door accessible services, community transport operators are increasingly running demand responsive local bus services in Wales. These include 'Grass Routes' (Monmouthshire), the 'Green Dragon' (Pembrokeshire), Neath Port Talbot CT and DANSA (Western Valleys), 'Bws Bro' (Ceredigion) and ACT and Connect2 (South Wales valleys). The 'Bwcabus' service, launched by Carmarthenshire County Council in 2011, is a commercially run service that allows passengers to book their bus journeys from home or the nearest bus stop and links with conventional bus and train services. These services are making a huge contribution to the health, independence and wellbeing of older people in their areas.

⁴⁸ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/37166/Buses%20-%20a%20lifeline%20for%20older%20people.pdf?dtrk=true>

In her discussions with older people, the Commissioner has heard some positive stories about transport services, with some respondents stating they had very good access to public transport, helping them with their independence, health and wellbeing. These comments were, however, very much in the minority. A consistent message was older people's sense of powerlessness over transport issues, coupled with the sense of inevitability that they would continue to lose out on access to transport.

Toilets

Public toilets and public transport are inextricably linked. If older people cannot use local buses and find a convenient public toilet when the need arises, they will lose their independence and their links to wider society, which will have a detrimental effect on their overall health and wellbeing.

A survey by the Welsh Senate of Older People's 'P Is For People' campaign found that 80% of respondents said that there would be an impact on their lifestyle if the public toilets they used most were not available, whilst 19% said that they would be able to go out less often, or not at all⁴⁹.

During her discussions with older people, the Commissioner frequently heard about the public health necessity of good public toilet provision. Closing public toilets affects physical health (older people are more likely to suffer from bladder or bowel incontinence), mental health (the fear of being unable to access toilets can lead to social isolation and depression), and environmental health (the risk of infection from street fouling increases with the closure of public toilet facilities)⁵⁰.

Whilst toilets are often seen by local authorities as a soft target when savings need to be made, the closure of public toilets is a real concern for older people across Wales. Despite being one of the key concerns for older people in terms of community services, public toilets are consistently identified as the worst element of local communities by older people in Wales⁵¹. In one recent survey, older people in Wales rated their access to public toilets at just 3.32 out of 10⁵².

Public toilets are an important factor in creating a public environment that

49 <http://www.welshsenateofolderpeople.com/Documents/P%20is%20for%20People%20Questionnaire.pdf>

50 <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s6040/Public%20Health%20Implications%20of%20Inadequate%20Public%20Toilet%20Facilities%20-%20Report%20-%20March%202012.pdf>

51 http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Global/Age-Cymru/Policy_and_Campaigns/Key%20findings%20of%20the%20Community%20Calculator%20ENGLISH.pdf?dtrk=true

52 Age Cymru Community Calculator survey on public toilets

meets older people's expectations⁵³. However, it is estimated that 40% of public toilets have closed across the UK in the last decade⁵⁴.

Protecting public toilets will not only benefit older people. Closing these toilets is damaging to public health and has a detrimental effect on the economy, with older people, including local residents, visitors and tourists, less likely to visit villages, towns and cities. Closing public toilets means older people are more housebound and the places that matter to them are effectively 'no-go' areas. Evidence suggests that the lack of publicly available toilets can deter older people from visiting an area⁵⁵.

“In the St David’s shopping centre, there’s an intercom, and you have to press a buzzer and ask to be allowed to use the disabled toilet. I’m a woman, and it’s inevitably a man I’m having to ask. It’s embarrassing...when I need the toilet and can’t find one, I’m in agony – I mean agony – and I don’t know where to put myself, because I’m shaking.”

Pat, Cardiff

Everyone in society needs public toilets, including children, people travelling large or short distances and older people. Public toilets play a part in reducing anti-social behaviour as well, providing a convenient option for people on a night out, for example. People in Wales have the right to expect access to open, clean and accessible public toilets.

“It isn’t just older people who need toilets, people with disabilities, young people on a night out, people with young kids. We’re all in the same boat.”

Ron, Vale of Glamorgan

The closure of public toilets poses a real public health risk that affects everyone, increasing the risk of heart attacks and strokes, for example, due to a temporary increase in blood pressure caused by not being able to empty one's bladder⁵⁶.

53 <http://www.welshsenateofolderpeople.com/Campaigns.htm>

54 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2358088/Closure-public-toilets-increases-risk-heart-attacks-strokes-health-experts-warn.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

55 <http://www.britloos.co.uk/externals/downloads/publications/PubliclyAvailableToiletsProblemReductionGuide.pdf>

56 <http://www.stroke.org.uk/news/closure-public-toilets-increases-risk-heart-attacks-and-strokes>

These facilities need to be recognised as vital and necessary components of our villages, towns, cities and main transport routes. Without them, people of all ages, but especially older people, are left embarrassed, cut off and isolated.

In the Commissioner's discussions with older people, a sense of frustration was expressed that public toilets were seen as a soft target for spending reductions. Interestingly, a point made consistently during the discussions was that the majority of respondents said they would be willing to pay to use public toilets (a common feature in countries such as France or Belgium) if it guaranteed that they'd be kept open and would be clean. The 'P Is For People' campaign found that 85% of respondents would be prepared to pay a small amount in order to use a public toilet.

“People would be willing to pay 20p, or more possibly, if they could go into a toilet that was well-kept, had someone to look after it and was a nice place to ‘go’. As an alternative to no toilets, people would far rather have the opportunity to pay knowing they were going into a clean, well looked-after and hygienic public toilet.”

Ron, Vale of Glamorgan

The Commissioner has heard about some awful experiences due to the lack of public toilets with real devastating and demoralising impacts on older people.

“I saw a lady, 83, in floods of tears on the high street in Tywyn. She'd wet herself because the council had closed the local toilets. She was so embarrassed, mortified. That's wrong...it's not dignified, it's not healthy, it's not fair”

Louise, Gwynedd

“I always like to know wherever I'm going that there'll be a suitable toilet. People who are older than me and have continence problems need to know where a toilet is. Sometimes there's such a big gap between toilets they can't do it so they don't go out...”

Lynda, Vale of Glamorgan

The discussions regarding public toilet provision generally focuses on towns or city centres. However, discussions with the Commissioner and her team highlighted that the availability of public toilets on major travel routes, such as the A470 connecting North and South Wales, is equally important for older people. Older people will be forced to stay at home or cancel journeys if there are no public toilets on their route.

Good practice

The **British Toilet Association** is developing an interactive UK toilet map which will identify and map all publicly accessible toilet facilities across the UK. In addition, the “sat lav” initiative has been trialled in London to allow people to identify the location of the nearest public toilet using their mobile phone. These initiatives will be of immense benefit to older people who can access digital technologies and are struggling to find decent, clean, publicly accessible toilets that are open and available when they are most needed.

Older people understand the budgetary pressures faced by local authorities and also understand that very difficult decisions have to be made about community services. Many older people believe that the Welsh Government and local authorities could do more to apply national standards and establish common levels of public toilet provision. The ‘P Is For People’ campaign found, for example, that 93% of respondents thought that the Welsh Government should be doing more about public toilets.

“Going to the loo is a normal human function....I believe the Welsh Government should have a lawful, legal responsibility to keep them open for the whole population.”

Harold, Wrexham

“Should there be national standards? Every shopping centre should have at least one male, female and disabled toilet.”

Ron, Vale of Glamorgan

“The mindset of the local authorities needs to be changed. The one thing the Assembly could do would be to instruct local authorities to look at toilet provision. All the main routes need toilets...if there’s nowhere to stop, you don’t go.”

Michael, Powys

Community Toilet Schemes

If a decision is made to close down public toilets, then some older people can adapt and would welcome innovative alternatives if it means they can continue to get ‘out and about’. However, these alternatives are by no means substitutes for clean, accessible and open public toilets, a public health necessity for all age groups.

The Welsh Government’s Community Toilet Grant scheme is an alternative model, which sees grants given annually to local businesses that allow the public to use their toilets and place signs to advertise this. Whilst the principle of the scheme was welcomed by many, what emerged strongly is that it should not be seen as a replacement for public toilet provision; research suggests that the public often feel uneasy or embarrassed about using Community Toilet Schemes⁵⁷.

Some older people responded by saying that the toilets on offer through the Community Toilet Grant scheme are often very difficult to access, whilst others felt uncomfortable about entering a pub or café just to use the toilet facilities.

“The Community Toilet Grant idea isn’t really workable. I wouldn’t feel able to use it, I would feel embarrassed about going into a café, using the toilet and then leaving without buying so much as a cup of tea.”

Lynda, Vale of Glamorgan

⁵⁷ http://www.hhc.rca.ac.uk/CMS/files/Toilet_LoRes.pdf

“Wetherspoon’s are brilliant...they’ve got the best toilets...but they’re always 20-odd steps up or 20-odd steps down – they never put them on the same level as the pub!”

Peter, Powys

Another concern with the Grant scheme was the lack of advertising or poor and inadequate signage, with many older people not aware that they could use the toilet facilities of local businesses. Some of the Commissioner’s focus groups were not even aware of the scheme.

“The feedback...is that the signs are too small and not always shown clearly”

Margaret, Anglesey

Community Centres, Community Spaces

Community centres

Community and day centres are important for older people and others. These are places where older people can socialise, carry out activities, take up learning opportunities and volunteer. They play a vital role in combating social isolation and loneliness amongst older people, both for people living alone and with others.

“If I can’t come here, I have nowhere to go. Coming here is everything to me; the thought of losing this is just too much.”

Evie, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Research suggests that older people attending day services, including community centres, lunch clubs and day centres, benefit from doing so because of increased social interactions and improved social wellbeing⁵⁸. In the Commissioner’s case for community services to be seen as a core component of the prevention agenda, social and productive activities are as important as physical activities in reducing the likelihood of premature

58 http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Day_services_evidence%20-%20of_effectiveness_October_2011.pdf?dtrk=true

mortality and institutionalisation⁵⁹. These centres can make a real difference to older people's lives, and can prevent or delay the need for more costly interventions⁶⁰.

With local authorities looking to make substantial budget savings, community and day centres are being scheduled for closure across Wales. This is a real concern for older people, particularly those living in rural areas. In her discussions with older people, the Commissioner has heard about some real concerns regarding the future of community and day centres. Community centres and village halls are valued more by older people than other age groups⁶¹, and closing down centres or cutting opening hours could have real implications for older people.

Good practice

The **Age Well Centre** in Llangefni, Anglesey, provides older people with activities and facilities to enable them to keep active and healthy.

Good practice

The **Widdershins Centre** in Torfaen includes a number of facilities for older people, including a Learning Suite with specialist tutors available, conference and catering facilities, and a Health Suite.

Good practice

Deva House in Wrexham provides high quality day care for older people, providing essential services to help older people remain independent, combat isolation and improve their health and wellbeing.

In the current economic climate, a flexible approach is required towards centres. Older people and others require venues to improve their wellbeing and the traditional community or day centre is being replaced by multi-functional centres, hubs or wellbeing centres which address the needs of all age groups in society.

Day services are increasingly being seen as an out-dated model of service

⁵⁹ The evidence base for preventative services. Research briefing number 8 (2005) Age Concern England

⁶⁰ http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Day_services_evidence%20_%20of_effectiveness_October_2011.pdf?dtrk=true

⁶¹ [http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/WP%20Analysis%20No.2%20-%20Local%20Services%20Under%20Siege%20\(Besemer%20%20Bramley%20May%202012\).pdf](http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/WP%20Analysis%20No.2%20-%20Local%20Services%20Under%20Siege%20(Besemer%20%20Bramley%20May%202012).pdf)

provision. The challenge now is to ensure that new approaches and models, such as more personalised, community-based services or hubs, adequately address the needs of older people and contribute towards their health, independence and wellbeing. There are concerns, however, that existing collective provision (community or day centres) will close without adequate investment in alternatives⁶².

Good practice

'Your County Your Way' run by Monmouthshire County Council has been recognised as good practice in taking an innovative, creative approach to public service delivery, shifting the culture of an entire organisation in the process.

Befriending and Meals on Wheels

The loss of community and day centres will have far-reaching implications for older people and affect the provision of other indispensable services that older people require.

Befriending schemes are hugely important to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst older people. Befriending services, usually undertaken by volunteers, have the aim of alleviating social isolation, as well as preventing or reducing loneliness and depression.

For many, feeling lonely in old age is the biggest problem. In a survey of loneliness among older people, The Royal Voluntary Service found that 17% of people aged 75 years and over reported feeling lonely⁶³ and also that 36% of all respondents lived alone. The findings of the study revealed the fragmented nature of families today and the large number of over 75 year olds whose closest children live a substantial distance away from them. For 11 % of older people in Wales, their nearest child lives more than an hour's drive away (40 miles plus).

Research demonstrates that loneliness has an effect on mortality that is similar in size to cigarette smoking⁶⁴. It is associated with poor mental health⁶⁵ and conditions such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension⁶⁶ and

62 <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/HSMC/publications/2012/what-is-happening-to-day-centre-services-Unison-report.pdf>

63 http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/How_we_help/Loneliness-amongst-older-people-and-the-impact-of-family-connections.pdf

64 Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Med* 2010;7(7).

65 Cacioppo JT, Hughes ME, Waite LJ, Hawkley LC, Thisted RA. Loneliness as a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Psychol Aging* 2006;21(1):140-51.

66 Hawkley LC, Thisted RA, Masi CM, Cacioppo JT. Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in

dementia⁶⁷.

Loneliness has a much wider public health impact too, as it is associated with a number of negative health outcomes including mortality, morbidity, depression and suicide as well as health service use⁶⁸.

Research suggests that by engaging with older people and reducing the need for treatment and support for mental health needs, befriending schemes can save around £300 per person per year⁶⁹.

With public spending budgets being squeezed, acquiring funds from external partners, such as the £1m Big Lottery Fund befriending scheme for older people in mid and west Wales, will take on added importance in the coming years⁷⁰.

Meals on Wheels provide hot, nutritious meals for older people who cannot cook for themselves. Some local authorities are considering reducing this service from 7 to 5 days, or increasing prices.

Older people can become malnourished for a range of reasons, both medical and social, including: dementia, poor oral health, bereavement, depression/anxiety, medication, poverty and isolation.

The British Dietetic Association's 'Mind the Hunger Gap' campaign in 2012 highlighted that 50,000 older people living in the community in Wales suffer from malnutrition on a daily basis⁷¹.

Malnutrition can lead to: impaired survival, increased infections, poor motivation, increased falls and propensity to illness, delayed rehabilitation and prolonged hospital stays. It is estimated that 40% of older people admitted to hospital are either malnourished or are at risk of it.

Meals on Wheels help maintain the long term independence of frail elderly people who wish to remain in their own homes and supports people to continue to remain independent and live at home for as long as they would like, with all the care they should need.

Some people who would be at severe risk of losing their independence

middle-aged and older adults. *Psychol Aging* 2010;25(1):132-41.

67 Wilson RS, Krueger KR, Arnold SE, Schneider JA, Kelly JF, Barnes LL, et al. Loneliness and risk of Alzheimer disease. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2007 Feb; 64(2):234-40

68 Victor C, Scambler S, Marston L, Bond, J & Bowling, A (2006) Older people's experiences of loneliness in the UK: Does gender matter? in *Social Policy Society* 5: 27-38

69 <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/pdf/dp2772.pdf>

70 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-west-wales-17182398>

71 <http://www.bda.uk.com/news/120524SWalesTUC.html>

accept community meals support intervention over other forms of support. Meals on Wheels becomes the 'feedback link' between this group and statutory services.

In particular, the Meals on Wheels service works well for the 'oldest old', people in their 80s or 90s who are determined to live in their own home but have frailty and safety issues which make meal preparation difficult.

Older people with high levels of need including disabling conditions, who might in the past, have moved into a residential or nursing home, may be able to stay at home with the support of Meals on Wheels. Meals on Wheels plays an effective role in short- term re-ablement functions, enabling people to avoid admissions to hospital or to residential and nursing homes.

Meals on Wheels may be viewed as a preventative service, where an investment by the council prevents much higher expenditure on domiciliary, residential or nursing care. For each individual service user a Meals on Wheels service will, on average, pay for itself if it reduces the time spent in hospital by two days and delays admission to a care home by just one week⁷².

These meals are incredibly important for the health and general wellbeing of older people, not only because of nutritious value but also the social interaction with deliverers on the doorstep or sharing lunches with others.

Food and meal times bring structure and a sense of purpose to a day as well as social interaction. In some cases Meals on Wheels drivers are the only point of human contact an older person will have throughout the day and may help reduce social isolation and loneliness. The drivers make regular, often daily, contact with vulnerable people, not only bringing them meals, but also a friendly face.

The Royal Voluntary Service⁷³ delivers 2 million meals a year across the UK to people who have difficulty with shopping, carrying food home or cooking for themselves. Despite the real need for this service, some local authorities in Wales are proposing the cancellation of Meals on Wheels services on cost grounds. The cost of retaining this service could help reduce medium to long-term health care costs for older people.

72 Apetito (2012) The Real Value Of Meals On Wheels <http://www.apetito.co.uk/news/apetito-news/value-of-meals-on-wheels/>

73 <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/how-we-help/services-we-provide/practical-support-at-home/meals-on-wheels>

Community spaces

Older people play a vital role in supporting and sustaining communities across Wales. However, in order for this to be the case, communities must be age-friendly and the built environment should accommodate the needs of older people. Many older people have told the Commissioner that they do not feel confident outside their own homes due to the lack of adequate infrastructure, reducing their mobility and increasing isolation as a result.

As people get older, their needs change. With high streets across Wales changing as a result of the economic downturn, the rise of digital services and the growth of retail parks, older people may not feel at ease in their new surroundings, and require accessible services and facilities adapted to their needs.

In addition to public transport and toilets, older people require good public seating, well maintained pavements, well lit streets, clear and visible signage, and streets that feel safe and secure to help older people retain their sense of confidence and independence.

Good practice

The **Age Cymru Community Calculator** is a tool which enables older people to audit their local community on how 'age-friendly' it is.

Older people need to feel that they play a full part in the community, and have the infrastructure in place to do so. Research shows that if older people live in an easily accessible environment, they are more likely to be physically active and satisfied with life, and twice as likely to achieve recommended levels of healthy walking⁷⁴.

Older people face a range of challenges outside their homes. A key challenge is coping with unfamiliar environments, which are much more likely to lead to falls. Falls have a significant adverse impact on the confidence of older people affected by them. In a report on falls by the Royal Voluntary Service⁷⁵, 15% of people aged 75 years and older in Wales had a fall within the past year resulting, in over a quarter of cases, in extensive injuries.

Research has shown that a fear of falling is one of the main barriers to older people spending time outside and leads to disability and decreased mobility⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ http://www.local.gov.uk/first-blogs/-/journal_content/56/10180/4035099/NEWS

⁷⁵ http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Falls%20report_web_v2.pdf

⁷⁶ <http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/pdf/appendixf/OPENspacewebsiteAPPENDIXFresource42.pdf>

In Wales, over a quarter of respondents in the Royal Voluntary Service falls survey reported feeling worried about having a fall. The same survey revealed that over a quarter of respondents aged 75 years and older agreed that the bad state of pavements and poor street lighting makes them feel less confident about going out.

Nearly one in ten people over the age of 65 trip or fall because of uneven or broken pavements. Making sure that planning reflects the needs of older people e.g. safe pavements to walk on, roads clear of ice and rotting leaves, is a pivotal challenge in reducing older people's fear of falling.

Research also suggests that older people generally report feeling less safe in their homes, local area, and town or city centres at any time than do younger adults, particularly after dark. Older people also find it more difficult than younger age groups to access local amenities⁷⁷.

Being able to get 'out and about' enables people to maintain their wellbeing through accessing goods and essential services, social networks and leisure activities. Public transport not only connects people to places but also links people to each other and is a key factor in an inclusive society.

Lack of public seating, particularly in shopping areas, is a problem for older people and reduces the diversity of public spaces. Older people require adequate spaces to rest and take their time when getting out and about. Research suggests that to cater adequately for older people, some form of seating should be provided at 100m intervals, and that in central areas (such as local shops) extra seating should be provided, if possible with more than one seat in a space.

Age-friendly communities

Wales has the highest proportion of older people of any nation or standardised region within the UK, a trend that is projected to continue in the coming decades⁷⁸. The ageing population means that there is a continued need to help older people age well and attain a better quality of life. The World Health Organization (WHO) has adopted the term 'active ageing' to describe the process for achieving this vision⁷⁹.

The Commissioner is proud to chair the Ageing Well in Wales Programme⁸⁰, a partnership programme for collaborative action across Wales. Central to

⁷⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

⁷⁸ Institute of Welsh Affairs (2012) Welsh perspectives on ageing. Cardiff: IWA

⁷⁹ World Health Organization (WHO), (2002) Active ageing; A policy framework

⁸⁰ <http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Ageingwell/The-programme.aspx>

the programme is developing age-friendly communities, a key priority in the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People as well. Continued support from the Welsh Government will be important to ensure the European Commission's 3 star Reference Site Status that has already been achieved in 2013 continues and that Wales remains an exemplar in its treatment of older people across Europe and beyond.

Excellent initiatives are already taking place in Wales to make local communities and environments age-friendly, driven by Older People's Champions, Strategy coordinators and 50+ Forums in every local authority. Achievements include organising or contributing to various health improvement initiatives in the community such as promoting flu immunisation, falls prevention, walking schemes and exercise classes, lunch clubs and food co-ops.

All local authorities in Wales are committed to creating age -friendly communities via the Dublin Declaration⁸¹. The challenge for local authorities is to keep these commitments whilst undertaking severe budgetary cuts and austerity measures. Age-friendly communities will not be sustainable without adequate investments in pavements, park benches, street lighting and other key infrastructure.

Lifelong Learning and Skills

Learning for older people has a range of benefits. In an ever-changing world, the need to keep up-to-date with modern technologies, in order to access information and advice through digital learning, acquire new skills for employment and modernise working practices, is incredibly important. Lifelong learning can also help older people by⁸²:

- Promoting full economic and societal participation
- Enabling them to be better informed and more active citizens
- Contributing towards personal wellbeing and fulfilment
- Supporting creativity and innovation
- Increasing efficiency as workers or volunteers

Learning helps keep older people physically and mentally active, increases confidence and instills a sense of resilience in a rapidly-changing society. In her discussions on lifelong learning with older people, the Commissioner frequently heard about the need for older people to be visible and valued, for the learning needs of older people to be fully understood and for learning

81 http://www.ahaconference2013.ie/dublin_declaration

82 http://www.age-platform.eu/images/stories/EN/AGE_leaflet_lifelong_learning.pdf

opportunities to be easy to access.

For many older people, learning offers something substantial and worthwhile to do. Being involved in learning, especially in a class or club environment, helps older people to maintain a sense of identity following retirement and helps to combat isolation and loneliness.

With an ageing population, an increasing number of older people will be unable to afford retirement and will need to work for longer. Many older people will need or want to continue working far beyond expected or planned retirement, but to do so they will need opportunities to learn, re-learn and acquire new skills. Learning and education is therefore significant as the role of older workers in the economy continues to change⁸³.

For older people who have retired or can afford to retire, access to ongoing opportunities to develop and learn new skills is an essential element of maintaining their health, independence and wellbeing. Many older people engage in adult learning for social contact and increasing physical activity as a place to 'go to'. As many older people have told the Commissioner, learning keeps the mind active and also increases self-esteem, confidence and personal development.

For those older people who cannot afford to retire, adult learning is crucial to acquire new skills that will increase employment prospects on the jobs market. Whilst the term 'NEET' – not in education, employment or training – largely refers to younger people, an increasing number of older people may be referred to as 'NEETs' due to the necessity, largely for financial reasons, of working beyond the former State retirement age of 65.

With the traditional retirement model affected by the economic downturn, Wales has an alarming number of older people not in education, employment or training: it is estimated that there are three times as many 'NEETs' aged over 50 as those aged under 25 years old and ten times as many as those under 19 years old. Furthermore, it is also estimated that over 1 in 3 people in Wales between 50 and the state pension age, over 200,000 people, are currently unemployed.

Having been viewed as a neglected minority in the past, future systems will need to better understand the needs of older people in adult education. As the shape of later life changes, educators and policy-makers need to consider the extent to which learning can help older people to lead more rewarding

83 <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/too%20much%20to%20lose.pdf>

and healthy lives⁸⁴.

The future of community services and adult learning for older people are intertwined. NIACE Dysgu Cymru found in their discussions with older learners, for example, that the location and timing of courses, as well as a lack of transport choices act as real barriers to participation.

“I’ve used adult learning often and always found it beneficial. The benefits are knowledge, understanding and sharing. There’s also the enjoyment of learning at an easily accessible venue.”

Sylvia, Monmouthshire

As previously stated, removing free, reliable and accessible transport for older people will prevent them from getting to the places they need to go, which includes opportunities for learning. Lifelong learning opportunities mean very little if older people cannot access them.

Skills and learning for employment

Lifelong learning for older people helps the individual and the State: learning enhances employability and reduces expenditure in unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early retirement pensions⁸⁵. Having accumulated a significant amount of knowledge and expertise, it is also in the interests of employers to retain older people in employment, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, education and healthcare, which are heavily reliant on older workers⁸⁶.

Learning opportunities at work are important for older people. Acquiring new knowledge and developing skillsets are particularly important for older people who need to work for longer. Whilst learning opportunities for full-time older workers are now more readily supported than in the past, part-time workers and job seekers over 50 are less likely to be engaged in learning⁸⁷.

Learning opportunities that help older workers prepare for retirement or semi-retirement should be more widely available, especially for those whose jobs are physically demanding. These opportunities can lead to further learning and wider economic activity beyond their chosen career path. However, few

84 http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/o//olderpeopleslearningin2012_full_web.pdf

85 http://www.age-platform.eu/images/stories/EN/AGE_leaflet_lifelong_learning.pdf

86 <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/too%20much%20to%20lose.pdf>

87 http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/o//olderpeopleslearningin2012_full_web.pdf

employers offer such courses, especially for lower paid and less skilled staff.

Learning for wellbeing

The importance of lifelong learning for older people cannot be underestimated. Lifelong learning and education are related to life as a whole, not just to work. Learning can be about pleasure and does not need to be linked to the attainment of formal qualifications.

“Keep learning” is one of the five regular activities needed to maintain wellbeing⁸⁸. Engagement in learning has many benefits in later life, including health improvements, social inclusion, life satisfaction and lengthening working life for those who want to stay within the workforce.

Learning can provide a real sense of purpose and contentment, motivating older people to get out and about⁸⁹ and can help to counter the dangers of loneliness and isolation, providing companionship in the classroom/ workplace.

As older people are more likely to lack basic numeracy and literacy skills than younger people⁹⁰, adult learning also provides new opportunities to learn new skillsets as well that make a real difference in their daily lives.

There are also cost benefits of investing in learning in later life. Research suggests that by investing in learning provision, older people’s independence and capacity to look after themselves is strengthened, delaying the need for care or support. Delaying this need by even one month could save Wales £1.8 million per year⁹¹. Research also suggests that participating in adult education can increase subjective wellbeing and that this is equivalent to an increase in annual household income of between £2500 and £5100⁹². Participating in part-time learning for adults can also raise life satisfaction by the equivalent of £1600 of income per year on average⁹³.

Funding for lifelong learning

The future of adult learning in Wales is a real concern. At a time when more older people require employment and opportunities to contribute to the wider economy, adult learning figures in Wales are decreasing. Research shows

88 <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being>

89 <http://www.theguardian.com/adult-learning/lifelong-learning-key-to-happiness>

90 <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales/library/how-fair-is-wales/>

91 <http://shop.niace.org.uk/ifll-learningthroughlife.html>

92 http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/fi/file_1_50.pdf

93 <http://www.niace.org.uk/news/adult-learning-investment-can-co-exist-with-deficit-reduction>

that today there are a third fewer people over 50 years of age engaged in further education and other community learning compared with 2005/06. In 2012, older people's participation in learning was at a particularly low level across the UK: 16% for 65-74 year olds and only 7% for those aged 75 and over⁹⁴, with lower overall participation rates in Wales and a significant fall in the number of learners in further education in Wales aged over 65 – 17% from 2009/10 to 2012/13⁹⁵.

Good practice

The **Anglesey Agewell** project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, supports older people and responds to their learning needs by offering an appropriate range of learning opportunities.

Between 2006/7 and 2010/11, the number of older people (50+) participating in courses funded by the Welsh Government dropped by 32%, twice as much as for adults as a whole. Between 2003/4 and 2011/12 there was also a 43% decrease in the number of learners supported by Welsh Government funding and, over the same period there was a 20% drop in the proportion of learners aged over 50 in further education provision⁹⁶.

Adult community learning

Funding for adult community learning (ACL) in 2014/15 is to be reduced by 37.5%, while budgets for part-time further education will be reduced by 33%⁹⁷. The scale of these reductions will mean fewer opportunities for older people to learn new skills, contribute to economic growth, and gain from health and wellbeing benefits, community cohesion and social mobility. As older people represent a large proportion of ACL learners, reduced budgets for community learning will have a disproportionate effect on them.

The scarcity of funding for adult learning hinders the development of a curriculum for later life, preventing older people from receiving key information and new skills, such as managing finances, using digital technologies and keeping healthy through exercise and nutrition. This is a real concern for older people, who require education to find or retain employment.

94 <http://shop.niace.org.uk/2012-participation-survey-headline-findings.html>

95 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2013/131127-further-education-work-based-learning-adult-community-learning-2012-13-provisionala-en.pdf>

96 <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Search?Query=llwr>

97 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-25755799>

“We had a very good place for adult learning in Abergavenny... people came from all over to learn skills. It was closed down 2-3 years ago. It was a bitter blow...people really miss it.”

David, Monmouthshire

Research suggests that the needs of learners over 65 years old are not being answered adequately. A 2012 Estyn report⁹⁸, for example, found that whilst the 15 adult community learning (ACL) partnerships across Wales are at their most effective when supporting learners aged between 50 and 65 years old who are not in employment, the focus on skills for employment resulted in gaps in the provision for other older learners.

Working with the statutory sector and voluntary organisations, ACL partnerships have a key role to play in avoiding duplication of provision and ensuring there are high quality learning opportunities for older people. Again, effective adult community learning that reflects the needs of all older people must be complemented by the provision of community services.

Higher and Further education institutions are recognising the challenges facing older people and are responding: the Cardiff University of the Third Age (Cardiff U3A)⁹⁹, for example, meets at various locations within the city to help older people take part, whilst Swansea University’s outreach service takes adult learning into the community¹⁰⁰.

Good practice

The **University of the Third Age (U3A)** is an independent, self-sustaining learning cooperative for people no longer in full time employment providing educational, creative and leisure opportunities. Inspired by the ‘learning for pleasure’ approach, U3A has 53 networks across Wales.

As in other areas of community services, lifelong learning will need to find new and innovative ways of responding to the needs of older people and other age groups. The Commissioner has heard a number of suggestions by older learners, including increased funding through social enterprise, increased support for volunteer-led groups and using community currencies,

98 <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/231367.5/skills-for-older-learners-the-impact-of-adult>

99 <http://www.cardiffu3a.org.uk/>

100 <http://www.swan.ac.uk/riah/researchgroups/cecsam/outreachcommunityactivity/>

such as ‘taffs’ in Cardiff¹⁰¹, to enable individuals to access courses in return for other volunteering contributions.

Older people also recognise the need for creative and innovative approaches, including flexibility regarding venues for adult learning, with people’s homes, communal spaces in sheltered accommodation, or pub rooms proposed as alternatives to traditional and often more costly venues. There is, however, still a fundamental need for accessible and dependable public transport and toilets, regardless of the location of learning venues.

Digital inclusion

Lifelong learning covers a wide range of subjects and disciplines, including digital inclusion. With an increasing number of financial and other services only being delivered digitally, it is crucial that older people are digitally literate and are able to use digital technologies to help with their daily lives. Not being able to access digital services can discriminate against older people – paying utility bills or other services online can, for example, be cheaper than over the phone or in person.

Levels of IT literacy amongst older people in Wales are critically low: only 17% of people aged over 70 have access to the internet at home¹⁰², whilst 309,000 people aged over 65 have never surfed the internet¹⁰³. This has led to an information gap, with older people increasingly unable to access information or services.

Good practice

Communities 2.0 is a Welsh Government programme that aims to use technology to break down barriers to engagement. Commencing in 2009, the scheme has launched a range of projects to engage older people in digital technologies, such as the ‘Reaching Out’ project and ‘Digital Heritage in the Community’. Libraries play an increasingly important role in the scheme, offering free drop-in computer sessions for people.

It is estimated that nearly 400,000 older people are digitally, and therefore financially, excluded in Wales. Furthermore, older people are nearly twice as likely not to use the internet as younger people. Not being able to participate in digital services means that many older people are paying the price, with households that are ‘offline’ missing out on savings of up to £560 per year

101 <http://www.cardiffaffs.org.uk/drupalnew/>

102 <http://www.independentage.org/media/9425/gulbenkiannewreport.pdf>

103 <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/latest-news/archive/older-people-and-it/>

from shopping and paying bills online. For 3.6 million low income households in the UK, this results in savings of over £1bn a year being lost from shopping and paying bills online¹⁰⁴.

Digital inclusion is also key to the continued participation of older people in lifelong learning. Since 2005, despite a significant decline in those learning at college or university, there has been a 12% rise in those aged 50 and over who are learning online¹⁰⁵.

Libraries

Libraries play a significant role in the lives of older people across Wales, providing physical spaces in which to interact with a public environment that is increasingly restricting itself to the internet and online engagement. The local library provides a social and civic role within communities, contributing towards people's sense of social wellbeing. 'Bibliotherapy', for example, can make a considerable difference to an individual's health and wellbeing¹⁰⁶.

Libraries play a central role in our communities and contribute to our social, educational, cultural and economic wellbeing. Libraries help bring people together. Across the UK, the number of older people using libraries is increasing, 43% of adults aged 65-74 visited a library in 2010/11 compared to 39% in 2009/10¹⁰⁷. Despite this, 439 libraries have closed across the UK since 2010, with another 280 under threat¹⁰⁸.

Compared with other cultural facilities, libraries are used by a high percentage of people from deprived areas. For older people living in poverty, the free resources provided by libraries are indispensable.

Wales has a network of public, educational and specialist libraries that provide access to a wide range of resources. Libraries are inclusive, are open to all members of their communities and are free to join, providing a wide range of services for older people¹⁰⁹, including:

- free internet access and courses e.g. 'silver surfer' sessions to assist with e-health literacy, address a lack of IT skills and the digital divide, increase confidence and motivation by providing activities and support

104 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/publications/comm/101208deliveringdien.pdf>

105 <http://www.niace.org.uk/news/older-peoples-learning-is-changing-new-survey-from-niace>

106 http://welshlibraries.org/fileadmin/documents/Documents1/SCLWPublicLibrariesinWalesHealth_Wellbeingand_Social_Benefits2012_1_.pdf

107 <http://www.goscl.com/public-libraries-in-waleshealth-wellbeing-and-2/>

108 <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/nov/06/austerity-measures-libraries-vital-needy-people>

109 <http://www.goscl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Wellbeing-in-Libraries1.pdf>

to engage with the internet;

- access to high quality resources in a range of formats, including those in the Welsh language;
- support for older people to live independent lives and reduce isolation;
- instilling confidence and encouraging socialising amongst older people through e.g. shared reading/reading aloud groups
- a network of easily accessible, non-threatening, inclusive environments;
- ‘talking books’, large print books or specialist computer software for those who are visually impaired;
- social and community links to people who may otherwise find it difficult to socialise.

Public libraries in Wales have an excellent track record of partnership working and, by helping the burden on social services and NHS care, reduce isolation, empower people to access free information and provide social and community links. The benefits of libraries for older people are therefore substantial.

“As a senior citizen and living on my own, visiting a library gives me the opportunity of meeting people even if it’s a ‘good day’ and a smile from a librarian, otherwise I may not converse with anyone from week to week.”

Library User, Carmarthenshire

Libraries also help engagement with hard to reach groups in communities. Housebound and home-link library services, for example, take books to people who are unable to leave their own homes. The combination of personal contact and reading material addresses social isolation and contributes to the wellbeing of older people unable to visit their local library.

“I’m 97 and due to arthritis am totally housebound...thanks to the home library service I can still enjoy my reading and would be lost without it.”

Library User, Conwy

Despite being cost efficient venues – libraries cost on average just 5p per person, per day to run¹¹⁰ - the future of many public libraries across Wales is uncertain. Local authorities across Wales are proposing to close down libraries to make efficiency savings, with many earmarked for closure by March 2014.

Local authorities have a statutory duty, however, to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964¹¹¹. Despite this, research in 2011 showed that 10% of participating local authorities identified libraries as the cultural service that would be most severely affected by budget reductions¹¹².

Good practice

In May 2012, Conwy was the first public library authority in Wales to provide access to **Boardmaker** (picture symbol) software that can be used by anyone who has language difficulties, including older people with some forms of dementia or anyone who has lost some language skills after a stroke.

Good practice

Powys Library Service launched a '**Healthy minds, healthy bodies**' campaign, building on links with local leisure centres. Participants, including older people, visited their local libraries, where they were shown how to access the family history software free of charge and were given a demonstration of e-readers.

Should local authorities continue with proposals to close libraries, then they have a legal obligation to provide library services, which mean so much to older people and other age groups, via other models and approaches.

New ways of delivering local library and learning services must be considered in light of budgetary reductions for adult learning and the proposals to close down a number of libraries across Wales. In London, Tower Hamlets Council has developed Idea Stores¹¹³, a radical rethink of the traditional library

¹¹⁰ <http://www.goscl.com/public-libraries-in-waleshealth-wellbeing-and-2/>

¹¹¹ <http://www.assemblywales.org/lco-ld7557-em-e.pdf>

¹¹² [http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/WP%20Analysis%20No.2%20-%20Local%20Services%20Under%20Siege%20\(Besemer%20%20Bramley%20May%202012\).pdf](http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/WP%20Analysis%20No.2%20-%20Local%20Services%20Under%20Siege%20(Besemer%20%20Bramley%20May%202012).pdf)

¹¹³ <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/idea-stores-tower-hamlets>

concept. Idea Stores focus on highly accessible buildings that combine a public library and state-of-the-art learning spaces with community facilities. The impact has been significant: visitor numbers have increased by around 1.5 million people over ten years.

In a context of reduced public service budgets, free public libraries are needed more than ever by older people and other age groups and, with adequate levels of recognition, support and investment, public libraries could do so much more for older people in Wales.

“I come to the library nearly every day. I’ve lost my husband and get quite lonely at times. It’s so good to have somewhere to come and sit and read the paper, go to a class or just to have a chat with people.”

Library User, Vale of Glamorgan

Conclusion

As this report shows, there is strong evidence to show that reductions in community services have a hugely detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of older people. Austerity is affecting older people in Wales significantly and in a number of ways.

The business case for protecting community services is compelling. **Older people can, and want to, contribute significantly to society and to the wider economy.** However, they require adequate services, facilities and infrastructure to allow them to do so. Reductions in local community services will affect older people disproportionately¹¹⁴. These community services are not 'luxuries' that cannot be afforded in the current economic climate, they are **essential resources, community assets, vital to the maintenance of older people's health, independence and wellbeing.** In turn, they reduce demand on statutory services already under significant pressure.

The principle of wellbeing must continue to be used by the Welsh Government and public bodies to drive decisions about service change across every aspect of public service, which requires a longer-term view on spending decisions. Community facilities must be given proper recognition as 'preventative services' within the scope of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Bill.

Local Authorities must engage and consult more effectively with older people when key decisions are made about community services and to fully consider the impact on older people of closing down or reducing services and facilities. Simple either/or options should not be presented to older people, a stronger outcome-focus should underpin engagement and consultation. Community services mean more to older people than other age groups and yet many older people say they have had little or no opportunity to voice their concerns about proposed changes to local bus services or learning classes, or the closure of toilets, libraries or community/day centres.

A real culture shift is required in terms of community service planning and delivery. Moving towards a more sustainable, innovative, long-term, integrated approach will secure better outcomes with fewer resources: spending on community services today will mean avoiding much larger costs in the future.

Research shows that with an ageing population there will be a 61% increase in likely demand for community-based services by 2030 and that this demand

¹¹⁴ <http://www.radstats.org.uk/no103/Ginn103.pdf>

will be particularly high among those aged 85 and over¹¹⁵. This demand must be met, as research suggests that restricting access to community and social services for those with the most acute needs will result in a greater deterioration among people with ‘low level’ needs, with their issues becoming more expensive to respond to further down the line¹¹⁶.

Given the importance of an accessible and age-friendly public environment, local authorities need to be given stronger guidance, in conjunction with expert advice, on creating a built environment that reflects the needs of older people. Needs assessments must consider the impact of removing key community services on older people. **A far more joined-up approach is therefore required across public service delivery in Wales** to ensure that community services enable older people to continue to be valuable assets in communities and the wider economy.

The Commissioner has published this report so that local authorities can fully understand the vital importance of community services for older people and other age groups when making crucial public spending decisions and the future provision of services. This report clearly shows the importance and impact of these services, not only for older people but also the wider community and economy. In making spending decisions on public services, local authorities must fully understand the consequences of reducing or closing down these services. The Commissioner recognises the significant financial pressures being placed on Local Authorities, however, short-term financial savings on community services will have longer-term consequences which, ultimately, will cost public service providers more in the medium to long term.

115 <http://www.walespublicservices2025.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Mark-Jeffs-WPS2025-Full-Report1.pdf>

116 <http://www.walespublicservices2025.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Mark-Jeffs-WPS2025-Full-Report1.pdf>

Commissioner's Follow-on Work

This report has used the voices of older people, as well as an extensive research base to support the case for protecting basic but essential community-based services.

In line with the Commissioner's Framework for Action 2013-17, protecting community services, facilities and infrastructure for older people will continue to be a key priority in the coming years and the Commissioner will work with all relevant partners to continue to make the case for these services and the importance of the views of older people being taken on board before decisions are made. In addition to this report, the Commissioner will:

- Publish a 'toolkit' for older people on how to engage with local authorities and influence the decisions that affect them;
- Publish guidance in partnership with local authorities and others including common standards on consultation and engagement with older people on community services;
- Host three regional conferences (North, South West, and South East Wales) to present the case for the retention of community services, facilities and infrastructure in Wales, bringing together key partners to discuss the way forward.

