

The Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Tuesday 8 March 2022, 12.15 - 13.30pm

On-line meeting

Meeting Note

Attendees

Mike Hedges MS (Chair)	Rachel Lewis, Welsh Government
Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services	David McKinney, Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Ryland Doyle, office of Mike Hedges MS	Lorraine Morgan, independent consultant
A Hughes-Howells, office of Dr Altaf Hussain MS	Andrea Nicholas-Jones, Action for Elders
Anna Jones, office of Peredur Owen Griffiths MS	Faye Patton, Care & Repair Cymru
Huw Bendall, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA)	Michael Phillips, Age Cymru
Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru	Dereck Roberts, National Pensioners Convention Wales
Gethin Edwards, Welsh Government	Dr Roiyah Saltus, University of South Wales
Carys Henry, Age Cymru Trustee	Barry Stephens, Active Wales
Rhys Jackson, Older People's Commissioner for Wales	Professor John Williams, Chair Age Cymru; Aberystwyth University
Sion Jones, Alzheimer's Society Cymru	

Apologies

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS	Dr Bernadette Fuge, President Age Cymru
Charles Carter, Age Cymru Trustee	Joshua Hayman, Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Maria Cheshire-Allen, Swansea University	Lynda Wallis, Vale 50+ Strategy Forum; Welsh Senate of Older People

Mike Hedges MS welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes and updates

The Minutes for the meeting held on 19 October 2021 were approved.

Action: With reference to discussions held at the previous meeting about the abuse of older people, Mike Hedges MS asked Ceri Cryer to invite the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, to a future meeting of the Group.

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services introduced the Welsh Government's Strategy for an Ageing society:

We're all getting older, thanks to advances in health and social care, as a nation we have increasing numbers of older people, more than ever before. This creates challenges as well as opportunities. Covid-19 has had a significantly detrimental effect on the lives of many older people in Wales. However, this pandemic has also brought out the best in many people, showing the willingness and fortitude of older people to reach out, to volunteer and to help others in need.

The challenges we face in delivering this strategy are both short term and long term. In the short term we need to get back on track as we recover from the pandemic. In the long term we will do all we can to support the development of age friendly communities across Wales. Communities that enable and support older people to live and age well.

I'd like to start by emphasising the importance of this strategy in the context of the newly revised Programme for Government which will run until 2026. This programme is aligned in so many ways with the issues highlighted in the strategy.

- Providing treatments which have been delayed by the pandemic
- Delivering better access to doctors, nurses, dentists and other health professionals, and
- Prioritising mental health and reviewing patient pathways.

These are all built in, and will be delivered as part of our Age Friendly Wales strategy.

I'd like to give you an overview of the strategy, where we have reached and what we plan to do next.

Our Strategy for an Ageing Society was published on October 7th, 2021 following an extensive programme of engagement with older people and their representatives. The strategy sets out our vision for an age friendly Wales, which supports people of all ages to live and age well.

The strategy challenges ageist stereotypes of older people as passive recipients of health and social care - I am concerned that the pandemic may have helped to embed such stereotypes in people's minds. It is all too easy to overlook the many ways older people support our communities to flourish.

We should not forget that many older people living with dementia are cared for by their partner, siblings or a neighbour who are often older too, or that many working adults rely on grandparents for childcare. The value of older volunteers certainly became clear during the pandemic as many charities struggled to cope without their support. Before Covid-19, older people's contribution to the Welsh economy was estimated to be over £2 billion a year.

The Strategy for an Ageing Society aims to change the way we all think and feel about ageing – we want to create a Wales where everyone looks forward to growing older. A Wales where individuals can take responsibility for their own health and well-being whilst feeling confident that support will be available and easily accessible if needed.

Thanks to ground-breaking developments in healthcare and technology, the global population of people aged over sixty has been growing faster than any other age group, but the pandemic showed how easily these gains can be taken away.

It also showed how important it is that different generations understand each other so they can pull together at times of crisis and play to our strengths as strong, vibrant communities across Wales. Working in partnership across generations, sectors and communities is fundamental to the creation of an age friendly Wales.

To turn our vision into reality, this year we have allocated £550,000 to local authorities to support their work to become age friendly and to gain membership of the World Health Organisation's Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities. To gain membership, local authorities must show how they are engaging with older people. Our vision is shared with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, who is providing valuable support and guidance to local authorities as they work towards age friendly status. I will be increasing this funding to £1.1million for 2022-23 with £50,000 to be distributed to each of the local authorities. Each authority will have a lead officer. A networking group is being coordinated by my officials to support delivery and the sharing of good practice.

The United Nations' Principles for Older Persons have informed the development of this strategy and run throughout it. I want Wales to be a nation that celebrates age and, in line with the UN Principles, a nation that upholds the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people at all times. This year, we will allocate £100,000 to promote awareness of older people's rights and inspire a common understanding of the transformative effect of a rights-based approach.

We are fortunate that we have a firm grasp on the circumstances of older people in Wales. In 2019, we commissioned the internationally recognised Centre for Innovative Ageing at Swansea University to benchmark the situation of older people in Wales against the other 3 UK nations. This measure was updated in 2021.

The centre used a range of measures to create a UK Age Index. The results show that Wales was ranked 1st, with the highest overall score, followed by Scotland, England and finally Northern Ireland. This shows that there is much that we are doing well, and we should feel proud that our commitment to support older people is clearly evidenced.

In addition, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales' State of the Nation reports of 2019 and 2021 offer a firm statistical and empirical grounding to build on, which charts the impact of Covid-19. Collectively, these reports provide a clear indication of where action is needed to improve lives for older people across Wales.

Older people have been directly involved in creating this strategy and will be involved in its delivery via the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing. We will put the voice and experience of older people at the heart of our policy process and continue to support five national older people's groups and forums, hosted by Age Cymru. Collectively, their work helps us to understand and respond to the key issues affecting older people today. We will work across government to address the wide range of factors that influence how we age – from our health, social care and transport systems to the way we socialise, work and care for others. The strategy aims to unlock the potential of today's older people and tomorrow's ageing society.

The delivery plan for the strategy is almost ready to be published, it sets out clear actions, milestones and timescales to monitor the strategy's implementation and was developed in collaboration with the Ministerial Advisory Group. The delivery plan will help to focus the attention of teams across Welsh Government on ensuring that the needs of older people are built into all of our projects and work programmes.

This strategy is about how we look to the future, based on sound knowledge and understanding - a strategy developed with and for the people of Wales. By acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all older people in Wales, we can reject ageism and work across generations to create an age friendly Wales.

Questions and Discussion

Dereck Roberts – In terms of Welsh Government support to local authorities to have plans in place for engagement, what will be the response of local authorities – is the funding guaranteed for three years? There is a problem with the proliferation of champions as there are 24 in Swansea! How do we respond to the tidal wave of inflation? Also, our members are still nervous to go out.

Deputy Minister – I expect the money to be there. Welsh Government will do all it can but the macro-economic levers are with Westminster. We are aware that older people are worried about going out.

Andrea Nicholas Jones – The sustainability of funding is a critical issue. The previous strategy was successful until the money became unhypothecated and was absorbed into local authority budgets, and the strategy co-ordinator roles became diverted. How do we support older people in getting back to normal?

Huw Bendall – We support age friendly communities and engagement. COPA felt it was not discussed at a local authority level in Cardiff – reality of engagement.

Lorraine Morgan - Had similar experiences. Consultations never came to us. Nothing about rural communities; there needs to be equity around Wales.

Professor John Williams – This is exciting but challenging. Older people suffered during Covid-19 – it's a shame there is no Inquiry for Wales. Can we be sure that older people's experiences are included within the UK Inquiry?

Sion Jones – We welcome that the strategy links to the Dementia Action Plan and the Unpaid Carers Strategy. It's important that there's alignment with the announcement to create a National Care Service; Alzheimer's Cymru is included in the expert group.

Responses of Deputy Minister:

- I did hear that the money previously allocated to local authorities petered out.
- I am sorry if Cardiff engagement seems tokenistic as they are the only ones to apply and join the World Health Organisation's Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities
- And Lorraine I'm sorry if consultations didn't reach you.
- Regarding a Wales only Inquiry - I think we are too closely bound up with England. But the First Minister has said he will talk to the Prime Minister to make sure we will not just be a footnote, especially bereaved families who have met with Ministers. We want clear scrutiny of what happened.
- National Care Service – we're excited about this – it needs to be free at the point of need eg mental health services. We need to look at a living wage.

Dereck Roberts – NPC doesn't want a Wales Inquiry as the unions are involved with the UK Inquiry

Lorraine Morgan - supports a Wales Inquiry.

Action point

Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice to be invited to a future meeting.

Date for next meeting: Tuesday 26 April 2022 12.15 – 13.30 pm to discuss Social Care Funding.