

The Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Tuesday 26 June 2023, 12.15 - 13.30pm

On-line meeting

Meeting Note

Attendees

| | |
|--|--|
| Mike Hedges MS (Chair) | Dewi John, office of Older People's Commissioner for Wales |
| Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services | Jackie Marshall-Cyrus, Jackie's Revolution |
| Ryland Doyle, office of Mike Hedges MS | Rhian Morgan, Age Cymru |
| Philip Mulraney, Welsh Government | Michael Phillips, Age Cymru |
| Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru | Andrew Pithouse |
| Heather Ferguson, Age Cymru | Becky Ricketts, Care & Repair Cymru |
| Dr Bernadette Fuge, President Age Cymru | Helen Twidle, Age Cymru |
| Nick Kelly, Hourglass | Christopher Williams, Age Alliance Wales |

Apologies

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Peredur Owen Griffiths MS | Gareth Parsons, Wales Seniors Forum |
| Llyr Gruffydd MS | Dereck Roberts, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Wales |
| Carys Henry, Age Cymru Trustee | Danny Tatlow, Hourglass |
| Louise Hughes, Age Cymru | Prof. John Williams, Chair Age Cymru |
| Lorraine Morgan, Jackie's Revolution | |

Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Mike Hedges MS, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The Minutes for the meeting held on 23 May 2023 were approved.

Mike Hedges MS, Chair, is awaiting a response from the Minister for Health and Social Services to his letter regarding issues around hospital discharge.

Poverty, abuse, and the cost-of-living crisis – Nick Kelly, Parliamentary and Policy Officer, Hourglass.

Presentation was circulated.

Hourglass supports older victims of abuse and neglect. We've found an increase in the number of cases of abuse and neglect, but there hasn't been an increase in awareness and discussion of abuse.

Older people are victims of the same types of abuse as victims of other ages. This includes financial/economic, physical, sexual or psychological abuse. Many others suffer abuse due to neglect. At least one in five of adults aged 65 have been affected by some form of abuse.

The cost of living crisis is having an effect on older people as inflation takes its toll, while others are taking money from older people to survive. 18% of pensioners in the UK population are living in poverty, and for longer periods, especially single men and women.

Poverty can be seen as a form of structured violence. Violence especially affects women in poverty. 21% of women suffering abuse are forced to take leave from work.

Victim-survivors who leave their abusive partner may be a risk of homelessness, with 32% of homeless women indicated that they suffered from previous domestic violence.

In 2022 the Hourglass Helpline received 1,844 cases where economic abuse was seen, and these cases amounted to over £19million stolen or defrauded from older victims.

The challenges are that there is low reporting and a lack of data and research. The age of victims of crime isn't always recorded. We need accurate data collection. Hourglass is developing a Safer Ageing Index looking at the data that do exist in the UK, and we aim to update it every year to see where more resources are needed.

80% of abuse happens in the person's home, including financial abuse, which is often perpetrated by a family member - the person's son or daughter, partner, and other family members, and is unlikely to be reported.

Questions and discussion

Mike Hedges MS – grandchildren still expect money from grandparents who can no longer afford it.

Becky Ricketts – what data are you using for the Safer Ageing Index, is it Wales-based?

Nick Kelly – data from Wales will be available shortly, and we often use crime surveys and health data.

Jackie Marshall-Cyrus – we've heard about financial abuse but what about sexual abuse within people's homes, in the community and in institutional settings?

Nick Kelly – we do deal with incidents of sexual abuse and have some live cases at present. We are calling for more independent specialist sexual abuse advisors.

Jackie Marshall-Cyrus – Do you signpost?

Nick Kelly – we have specialist support to provide to people but we sometimes signpost when appropriate.

Age Cymru 2023 survey – 'What matters to you? Current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales' - Heather Ferguson, Head of Policy and Projects at Age Cymru.

Presentation was circulated.

This is our fourth national survey since the pandemic, which was delivered in partnership with the four national older people's organisations - Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Active Wales and National Pensioners Forum and Wales Senior Forum. Nearly 1200 older people took part in the survey, aged 50 to 100. We gathered responses from all local authorities across Wales.

The survey focused on a number of key areas including: communication, unpaid carers, access to health and social care, physical and mental wellbeing, employment, accessing communities, cost of living. These are our preliminary findings as we're still analysing the survey.

20% of respondents accessed or tried to access social care for themselves or someone else in the last 12 months. Many reported a negative experience of accessing support, and frustrations due to long waits for care packages, unavailable services, struggles with inadequate support packages, and exhaustive time spent chasing up social workers and the local authority for help. Those in need of social care were more likely to say they were experiencing poor or very poor mental health. Three quarters provided unpaid care for at least one person.

There was an increase of 55% in the amount of people who found caring a challenge in the last 12 months, in comparison to last year. In addition 37% of people said that they were providing unpaid care.

GP access is an ongoing issue for many older people and the struggle to get appointments. We also heard from people who have been waiting a long time to get the surgery they needed.

Dentistry is an increasingly mentioned issue with many people struggling to get an appointment. We heard that some people used to be with an NHS dentist which have now changed to be private, and many are sitting on waiting lists.

Many people told us that their challenge for the coming year was their health, whether this was staying fit and healthy, regaining fitness after an operation, or waiting for appointments. 11% of people told us that they tried to access healthcare but haven't been able to get the support they need.

In terms of challenges - for the past three years not seeing family and friends is the most widely reported issue, however this has dropped since our last survey by 37%. Poor physical health has increased by 4%. Caring has increased by 10% from 18% to 28%. Bereavement and grief have also increased by more than 10% from 15% to 26%. Loneliness and isolation has dropped from 30% to 20%, likely to be connected to the increase in people who are now able to see family and friends, but 20% is still a lot of people.

A theme that has been strongly reflected in this year's survey is issues with transport particularly public transport. 18% of people reflected that transport was a challenge. Many told us of the difficulties of unreliable bus services, some had local services which didn't run at the weekend or stopped early during the week, severely limiting their ability to get out into their communities. Poor transport was cited by a number of people as something that would prevent them from accessing the activities they enjoy. People also told us how it was becoming more difficult to access hospital appointments via public transport, and that taxis are becoming unaffordable, leaving many to rely on family and friends if they have them nearby.

Cost of living - 22% of people told us that they were not confident that they would have enough money to live on this coming year. Many people told us about their worries about the rise food and fuel costs and how they would be meet this on a fixed income. Many are on the cusp of falling into financial difficulties in the coming year. Only 5% of respondents currently receive pension credit, with 79% who have never applied, only 12% told us that they had applied but had not been eligible. We included information about pension credit in the survey.

11% of respondents to our survey told us that they had been discriminated in the workplace due to their age, and 70% of respondents don't think that older people are well represented in society.

Respondents told us that changes in society and infrastructure made them feel invisible such as closures of banks and Post Offices. People told us that they don't find it easy to access information about services and support, for many this was because of the over reliance of online information, and the lack of alternatives for those not online. People told us of their worries about online fraud and scams.

Of those people who told us that they don't or can't get out and about the most cited reason was poor physical health at 67%, followed by lack of

confidence at 37%, finances, and lack of own transport at 35%, closely followed by poor mental health and lack of facilities like toilets and public seating at 29%. Lack of public transport was cited as an issue by 25% of people. 74% of people told us that their main method of transport is their own car, with second is public transport at 12% and then relying on friends and family.

We will complete the in-depth analysis of the survey and using this information as evidence in our influencing work, and we'll share a copy of the final report with the group.

Questions and discussion

Mike Hedges – has free bus travel had an effect?

Heather – free bus travel supports people to get out and about. Bus services are being withdrawn and are not being replaced.

Becky Ricketts – in the survey 25% reported that their homes need repair. Do you have any other information on this from previous surveys? Also is the WASP (Wales Against Scams Partnership) partnership still running.

Heather - a new category that we added to our survey this year as a potential challenge was 'House in need of repair'. 25% of people told us that this has been a challenge, with many people telling us that due to the cost of living crisis they can't afford to make the necessary repairs, and we will be keeping this in future surveys. WASP will be revived, so please get involved.

Dewi John – do you have any data on public toilets?

Heather – we're still analysing the report so we will look into this. Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey also covered this area.

Jackie Marshall – what proportion of responses were received from black and minoritised ethnic communities?

Heather - we're still analysing the survey and will be including these data in our final report.

Mike Hedges – older people that have retired find it harder to afford things the things they could when they were working.

Welsh Government's National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People – Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS

The Deputy Minister began by setting out very brief outline of the journey to date in respect of Welsh Government's National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People.

A Consultation Summary Report was published in April 2023.

Since then, key stakeholders have made further representations and officials are discussing with them how to progress this important piece of work. Our aim is to publish a revised National Action Plan before the end of August.

The overarching objectives of the Plan are:

1. Older people are protected from becoming at risk of abuse or neglect.
2. Older people are supported to live independently and with dignity and are able to access relevant support from safeguarding services where they are at risk of abuse or neglect.
3. Older people experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence are able to access relevant support from Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) services when required.

The Deputy Minister explained that we have worked across Welsh Government to ensure the Action Plan references and aligns with the Violence Against Women, domestic abuse and sexual violence strategy 2022-2026, and the work of the Older People's Needs workstream.

We intend to set out more explicitly the role that the VAWDASV strategy can play in achieving the objectives of the Action Plan.

This is really important because we know that, collectively, we are able to achieve better outcomes by working in partnership through a coherent and collaborative approach nationally but also regionally and locally. We are confident that many of the goals and aspirations we share can be best addressed via that workstream.

The Action Plan is a cross government piece of work with a focus, not only on addressing abuse and neglect of older people, but on creating the conditions in which abuse and neglect of older people is less likely to take place.

There are some additional small adjustments we are making but I am hopeful the Plan will be published during August, and we would like to come back to the Cross-Party Group to discuss when the Action Plan is published. We are working closely with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. We are also planning to produce an Annex setting out target dates and responsibility for each action. More research data are needed about the abuse of older people.

Questions and discussion

Nick Kelly – with reference to research data we will be publishing our Safer Ageing Index. Services are not always designed for older people and more specialist support services are needed.

Deputy Minister – refuge centres are not always suitable for older women.

Mike Hedges thanked the Deputy Minister for the presentation with an invitation to come back to a meeting in the Autumn.

Date of next meeting

To be arranged for the autumn when the Deputy Minister will be able to return to give an update on the finalised Action Plan.