

The Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Tuesday 9 July 2024, 12.15-13.15pm

On-line meeting

Meeting Note

Attendees

Mike Hedges MS (Chair)	Sophie Hunter, Linking Lives UK
Ryland Doyle, office of Mike Hedges MS	Jackie Marshall-Cyrus, Jackie's Revolution
Ioan Bellin, office of Delyth Jewell MS	Mel Minty, Care Forum Wales
Andrea Cooper, Older People's Commissioner for Wales	Michael Phillips, Age Cymru
Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru	Dereck Roberts, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Wales
Heather Ferguson, Age Cymru	Dr Ralph Stevens, Chair COPA
Matthew Hawkins, Alzheimer's Society Cymru	Prof John Williams, Chair Age Cymru
	Sam Young, Age Cymru

Apologies

Maria Cheshire-Allen, Swansea University	Steve Milsom, Age Cymru Trustee
Dr Bernadette Fuge, President Age Cymru	Lorraine Morgan, Jackie's Revolution
Bryan Godsell, Chair National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Wales	Gareth Parsons, Wales Seniors Forum
	Ross Saunders, Alzheimer's Society Cymru

Annual General Meeting Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

The Annual Report and Financial Statement 2023-24 was approved.

The election of the Chair and the nomination of the Secretariat for the Cross-Party Group were deferred to the next meeting.

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 26 June 2023 were approved, subject to an amendment to Andrea Cooper's presentation: Health Equality Committee was amended to Equality and Human Rights Commission.

'What matters to you?' Fifth national survey of people aged 50 or over across Wales – Heather Ferguson, Head of Policy and Projects, Age Cymru.

This research is the fifth national survey of current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales since the pandemic, delivered in partnership between Age Cymru and four national older people's organisations.

We're currently in the process of finalising the final report. Over 1300 older people responded to the survey, and ages ranged from 50 to 99. 67% of respondents were female and 31% male. 29% of respondents live with a disability. 7% of people served in the Armed Forces. Responses were received from all local authorities in Wales.

The survey covers a wide range of subjects - such as health and social care, transport, representation, employment, housing, physical and mental health, what people are looking forward to, challenges, finances and more.

Physical health at 51 percent is the most highly reported challenge. The cost of living is close behind with 48% of people telling us that this has been a challenge, and the next highly reported challenge was mental and emotional health, with around 30% of responses. Access to transport has been an increasing challenge around public transport.

We've also seen an increase in people experiencing scams. 18% of older people told us that isolation and or loneliness was a challenge. 20% of older people found bereavement or grief a challenge and 27% of people told us that access to face-to-face banking has been a challenge.

The next section is health and social care. GP access has been an ongoing issue for many older people. People have continued to tell us about the struggle to get appointments. Some told us that it's put them off trying to get the care they need, which is really worrying. Some people are just waiting until the issue becomes urgent or requires an emergency response.

Similar to last year we've heard from people who have been waiting a long time to get surgery that they need to improve the health. We also heard from more people who are now starting to pay for surgery where they haven't been able to get things available on the NHS. People did tell us that where there's good communication when they're waiting for healthcare appointments, that did improve things. While they would prefer to get their appointments sooner, that experience of being heard and connected while they're waiting does make a difference. People also talked about the difficulties they have in making and keeping appointments as they're struggling to get through on the phone, or the appointment arrived by post after the date of the scheduled appointment. There seems to be a longer timeframe for routine checks to happen with people worried about conditions worsening. Access to

dentistry is quite a strong theme. Some people felt they were being treated differently because of their age.

We've heard increasingly about how people are struggling to get to hospital appointments, and GP access. About a third of people found it hard to access healthcare appointments in relation to transport.

16% of older people told us that they'd accessed or tried to access social care - either for themselves or for someone else. Those who accessed social care were more likely to be experiencing poor mental health and poor physical health. Many of the concerns we heard were on delays in accessing the help they needed and some people told us that they ended up paying for care themselves.

Some people told us about poor information and advice from social services or not being given enough information about charging arrangements - some people have been charged which shouldn't have been.

32% of respondents provide unpaid care, and more than half have increased the amount of care they provide over the last 12 months. Older carers are more likely to tell us they're not seeing family and friends, more likely to experience loneliness, and more likely to have issues with the house being in need of repairs and having physical health and emotional health as a challenge.

Around 48% of people said cost of living was an issue. A lot of what we're hearing is similar to previous years is that so many people are just on the edge of falling into serious financial difficulty, one extra bill, one extra thing they need to pay for and they're tipping over into real difficulties. 7% of respondents are currently receiving Pension Credit; in our surveys, we include extra information to encourage people to reapply if their circumstances change.

Ageism is a theme that we pick up through our survey. 11% of people told us they were discriminated at some point in the workplace due to age. 70% of respondents don't think that older people are well represented in society. Many people felt that societal views of older people are still bound up in ageism and patronising stereotypes. People also told us that they felt that public spaces were becoming inaccessible for older people, such as a lack of public toilets, benches and dropped kerbs. We also heard from some people from ethnic minority backgrounds who told us that their voices were unlikely to be heard, whether in the public sphere, media or politics, due to both age and ethnic minority background.

67% of respondents were retired, 30% were employed, and 4% were looking for work. Some people told us that support needed in looking for paid work would be opportunities where 50+ is publicised in advertising and recruitment, and internships. We also heard from people who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, or to disability or long-term health conditions.

Digital exclusion - while many older people are online and able to access the services they need, there's always going to be a cohort of people who aren't able to access online services and are always going to be at a disadvantage the more we move to an online first approach. People told us there's an over reliance online

information and a lack of alternatives. Some told us that they don't have access to the internet or a smartphone and how important it is to access information offline.

People have told us that it's increasingly difficult to access services and support by phone, with more automated messages or getting through to someone and then being told they need to go online to find the information they need.

We've also heard more about access to banks with the closure of local banks and post offices. We've heard from people worried about being online in terms of trusting the information they see and also being scammed.

We have concerns that this is starting to create a two-tier society with reference where those who are online are accessing information and support and those offline are in a much more difficult situation.

In terms of the year ahead, 45% of people are not optimistic about the year ahead. A lot of people reflected they are worried about their finances, and access to services and support.

17% of older people find it difficult to get out and about, citing poor physical health, mobility issues, and worries about falling over. Public transport came up again as the reason that people are struggling to get back out of the communities, such as poor bus services or no bus services, unreliable infrequent services which make it difficult for people to get out and about, whether it's for medical appointments, shops or seeing friends and family. People reflected how much they valued the bus service and valued the bus passes. We also heard about an inaccessible built environment, lack of public toilets and benches.

Many people told us their main method of transport is their own car, but a lot of people did tell us that they have to rely on their car. Some people want to give up driving but feel they can't because they live in a rural area and they're really worried about being cut off.

We'd like to share our survey with members of the Cross-Party Group when it's published.

Questions and Discussion

Mike Hedges - we talk about older people acting as carers but what about those looking after grandchildren?

Heather Ferguson - there are many older people looking after grandchildren because of the cost of childcare.

John Williams – read in The Independent that in Sweden parents can transfer part of their parental leave to grandparents – they provide an estimated £3.9bn worth of care in the UK. We should look at the Swedish model.

John Williams also noted the 10% who stated they had difficulty in accessing a pharmacy.

Sophie Hunter - re grandparents, we have seen parents getting older, as will grandparents. Some older people look after grandchildren, but it can become a

strain for families. Some grandparents want to work but face workplace discrimination, but how do they challenge this.

Heather Ferguson – age is a protected characteristic, but discrimination is often overlooked in the workplace.

Andrea Cooper – the work you're doing is picking up on similar issues to ourselves. We've published the Access Denied report which is around digital exclusion, and we're in the process of producing a guide that informs older people of their rights when trying to access a GP, and I'll share the links to these.

Dereck Roberts – transport is an issue and the issue of care is not being addressed. Things will only get worse – the situation with the Port Talbot steelworks will have an impact on the local economy, but people will look after each other as best they can. Paying for care is leading to panic amongst families re top-up payments. Access to cash and bank closures also an issue. We need to educate the new MPs about these issues, so we will be sending an updated copy of our manifesto to MPs and MSs. We're also keeping our fingers crossed for the new Bus Bill.

Mike Hedges – it should be announced this afternoon.

Matthew Hawkins – we found working with people living with dementia that they have different experiences dependent on which local authority that they live in.

Heather Ferguson – what we're generally finding is that local authorities are lacking in capacity to provide support and advice. Perhaps we could have a catch up to compare our findings.

Action points

Age Cymru will distribute the published survey to Group members and would appreciate if members could share amongst their networks.

Any other business

We will be looking into hosting the online meetings on Teams rather than Zoom.

Date of next meeting

There will be an online meeting in October – date to be confirmed.