

The Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Tuesday 21 October 2025, 12.15-13.15pm

On-line meeting

Meeting Note

Attendees

Mike Hedges MS (Chair)	Huw Bendall, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA)
Mark Isherwood MS	Thea Brain, Care Forum Wales
Ryland Doyle, office of Mike Hedges MS	Ruth Cann, Cardiff and Vale UHB
Freddie Phipps, student at office of Mike Hedges MS	Maggie Hayes, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Rhian Bowen-Davies, Older People's Commissioner for Wales	Dereck Roberts, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Wales
Katherine Evans, Care & Repair Cymru	Christopher Williams, Age Alliance Wales
Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru (Secretariat)	Prof. John Williams, Chair Age Cymru
	Sam Young, Age Cymru

Apologies

Bryan Godsell, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Wales	Gareth Parsons, Wales Seniors Forum
Lorraine Morgan, Jackie's Revolution	

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

Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 were approved.

Matters arising

The Chair received a response from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning regarding access to banking in Wales, which was circulated to members.

Age Cymru's annual survey report (2025) was circulated to members.

Creating a Wales that leads the way for older people - Rhian Bowen-Davies, Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The end of September marked my first year as the Older People's Commissioner for Wales and I'll serve the term of seven years, the first older People's Commissioner who's been given that amount of time to be able to drive change and improvements in terms of the lives of older people. The presentation will take us through my vision and strategic priorities for the next three years and the work programme and the key pieces of work that I'm undertaking during this financial year. Early on during my term, I set my vision for Wales: 'A Wales that leads the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.'

Older people's voices are at the heart of my work, and I've been out across Wales meeting with older people and hearing about the things that are important to them and the areas of their lives that they'd like to see improvements or change. I also undertook a national consultation for older people to share their views and experiences. Engagement with older people helped identify four key national outcomes, ensuring that older people:

- Can access the information, services and support they need
- Feel safe in their communities, homes and relationships
- Are treated fairly and their contribution is recognised and valued
- Can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives.

The four outcomes translate into my work programme. I encourage public bodies to use these as a framework for their own work in terms of delivering and improving services for older people.

Digital exclusion remains a priority. A third of people over 75 don't have any access to the internet, but it's wider than that - it's not being able to see information on local authorities, GP practices or health boards on a day-to-day basis. We may hear narrative that as we age as a population that digital exclusion will become less. But technology has changed in the last 10 years, and what will that mean for the next 10 years or 20 years, as we may then be excluded from some of that technology development. Many older people feel confident and have skills that they use the technology that's available to them, but there is a group of our population who don't feel confident, who don't feel that they have those skills and feel left behind.

Feeling safe within communities, homes and relationships. People have concerns and fears about antisocial behaviour in the communities they live and the impact that has in terms of feeling safe. It's also about older people feeling safe in their own homes, about their homes being warm, secure places, and having adaptations and repairs done so that their homes are safe, enabling people to maintain their independence and well-being, and being safe within relationships.

Previous Commissioners have had a focus on addressing and tackling the abuse of older people. As we age we are more at risk of certain types of abuse, particularly physical abuse, neglect and financial abuse, so that remains a key part of my priorities.

Older people are the largest group who volunteer, enabling activities and groups to participate in our communities. Older people are more likely to provide over 50 hours of unpaid care a week in Wales. The contribution of older people is not recognised and celebrated as much as it should be, and the outcome is about older people feeling that their voice is heard and they have choice and control over their lives. I published a report of the state of Growing older in Wales, and we could see a positive impact with over 70% of older people saying that they felt empowered, able to do the things that matter to them and had choice and control.

In November, I'll be launching a national conversation around people's experiences of social care in Wales, with the aim of being able to influence and inform what our care service looks like in Wales going forward.

I'm looking at opportunities to improve the support available for older people to live independently within their homes. I'm doing a piece of work around the disabled facilities grant – what are the challenges being experienced by older people and also by local authorities who are administering that grant.

We need more awareness amongst the public and society around ageism and age discrimination, and the harmful impacts not only on individuals but on society more widely, and how that can influence the services that older people receive within our communities, how older people are perceived, and how older people perceive themselves. I'm developing a training resource that would be available to public bodies and members of the public, in terms of what ageism is, its harmful impact and how this can be challenged within society.

I'll be looking at older people's access to independent advocacy, particularly in terms of when there are safeguarding procedures. How often are we proactively making that offer of advocacy? How are we reporting and monitoring the uptake, and how effective is that in terms of meeting older people's needs.

Later this month I'll be publishing a report on digital ageism and artificial intelligence. We've seen developments in terms of technology and AI, but how are we ensuring that we're not building ageism into the systems and processes that are being developed? We know the benefits that technology can offer in terms of Telecare and advances in diagnostics etc, but how will it be balanced against older people's rights and ensuring that we're not building ageist algorithms and perceptions into our systems.

Age friendly communities are a World Health Organisation initiative and the real drive for age friendly communities is that we support everyone to live and age well. Each local authority in Wales receives funding on an annual basis to support age friendly community work and 11 of our 22 local authorities in Wales are now members of the World Health Organisation Global network.

I published a report on Ageing without children. There are more older people in Wales who are ageing without children and we expect this number to be over two million in England and Wales by 2030. Key learning from that report is assumptions in our policy and practise that older people have children or families who can provide care and support and we need to challenge that in terms of the demographics.

I published the Growing Older in Wales report which brings together research and trends. There are things to be celebrated, people talking about feeling fulfilled, empowered, having choice and control. But there are significant inequalities in terms of access to health services, dissatisfaction with social care, being able to access digital information and discrimination that's been experienced.

I will continue to scrutinise and hold public bodies to account in Wales, including Welsh Government. We are an ageing population and we need to see a shift in how our systems and services are designed and delivered to ensure that everyone in Wales can live and age well. Where appropriate I will use legal powers where required when decisions have been taken where older people have been impacted.

I have an advice and assistance team who are contacted by hundreds of older people and their families every year to help ensure people's rights are upheld and to empower older people to challenge poor practice and decisions. This is a service that is open to professionals and practitioners, as well as older people and their families, and I would encourage you to take this information back to your organisation, and make it available for individuals as the team would be more than happy to assist and provide support and assistance where possible.

Questions and discussion

Mike Hedges MS - a lot of older people like to use cash, it helps them budget. Digital inclusion, especially QR codes for car parking, and the issue of it 'being simple - it's all online'.

Rhian Bowen-Davies - we know since the pandemic the use of cash has increased and not just in terms of older people, but people who are wanting to budget, people who prefer to use cash as an option. I'm exploring the issue of not being able to use cash for parking, the expectation being that you can do it by phone or by app or a QR code. People fear being scammed. The work will be published in December. Also linked to cash is the closure of banks and the difficulty to access cash and use cash locally.

John Williams - the worry about AI is that AI learns from what's out there and what's out there is essentially ageist, so we do need to be very alert. The other is supporting older people experiencing abuse, including sexual abuse. There's a message to get out there that older people are sexually abused and not everyone believes that happens. It does. An area of great concern to me is the extent to which those who experience all forms of abuse are denied access to justice. We do not use the criminal law as much as we should. Prosecutions are very rare and for sexual offences in general when involving older people and also access to civil justice. In abusive relationships, there are certain civil remedies that may not be 100% effective, but again, the feeling is that very often older people are put into safeguarding – which is excellent - but are denied justice.

Thea Brain - a book came out recently about the future AI and digital sexism and the point about AI learning from what's out there, and what is out there being ageist and the risk that we create a future where these problems that we're trying to work to eradicate as a society are being replicated.

The idea of feeling safe within your community - we know that violent crime is low and has been decreasing for years. Anecdotally, the older people that I know consume a lot of legacy media, and seem to be under the impression that it's never been higher. Feeling unsafe and being unsafe are not the same thing, and given that burglaries, robberies, rapes, violent assaults, murders have been steadily decreasing for years, is there any strategy to try and present older people with an accurate picture of the communities in which they live, to assuage some of these fears they have about antisocial behaviour?

Rhian Bowen-Davies - there is a difference between feeling safe and being safe, and we considered the language that we used within the outcomes. But some work that's been done by the Violence Prevention Unit in Wales highlighted that between 2019 and 2024, older people were the victims in 27,000 violent offences and were reported victims in nearly 1000 sexual offences. In terms of the data, we know that this is happening. We know that this will be under reported so people's own experiences are valid and the antisocial behaviour reports that I get through the advice and assistance team and when I'm out meeting older people are real experiences. I'm meeting with the Wales Community Safety Network next month to explore what this looks like nationally and what steps we can take in terms of messaging for older people, in terms of what they should expect in terms of services' responses where they can go for support. I think that if somebody feels unsafe within their home or their community then we have to explore what that means to individuals, because it's not just around offences, it's around antisocial behaviour. It's also about

infrastructure within our communities, not making it feel safe - lighting in our communities, unsafe pavements and structures where people don't feel safe walking, so it's safety in its wider sense.

Mark Isherwood MS - on this issue last Tuesday in the Senedd, there was launch of the Centre for Social Justice's 'Lost Boys, State of the Nation' report referred to worrying the high levels of boys and young men, falling behind educationally, socially, economically, with long term consequences, not only for them but our communities and society at large. Regardless of the actual figures for crime, people, particularly older people, feel less safe if they see groups of young people hanging around, even if they're not actually any threat whatsoever.

In the past I've been involved in some of the situations as a Member of the Senedd, and am aware of many cross-generational projects which have been introduced on a localised basis to tackle situations like that by bringing those young people and the older people who are reporting the threats that they sense when they go out of their house, and bring them together, and finding actually what the young people are missing is a sense of belonging, a sense of community, often older people in their lives. At the end of many of these projects not only do you find the older people and the younger people working together on common projects for the benefit of the community, but friendships and bonds have been built. They've become quasi grandparent figures, the younger people doing their shopping for them, going around for tea, and working on voluntary project together in the community. To what extent do you think more focus again on those sorts of cross-generational community projects might tackle some of that sense of discomfort and fear experienced by older people in their communities?

Rhian Bowen-Davies - agree with you in terms of the value of cross-generation intergenerational work and the benefits that it brings to all generations and being able to tackle social isolation and loneliness. Age friendly Swansea looked at that intergenerational focus around antisocial behaviour in Swansea city centre, and it's the tangible outcomes such as sharing skills and expertise and friendships that develop, and I'd like to see a greater focus on that in Wales. Sometimes they can be quite small, localised initiatives in villages and towns. But the difference that they make and how we could think about that in terms of supporting young people into work, employment and training going forward. There's a huge potential there because our older population have decades of experience, knowledge and expertise.

Housing disrepair and the impact on older people in Wales - Katherine Evans, Policy & Research Officer, Care & Repair Cymru

Care & Repair is a Welsh charity helping older people to live independently in safe, warm and accessible homes by delivering housing adaptations and home improvements. We have 13 agencies which cover all 22 local authorities in Wales and we support older people aged 60+, or 50+ if they're living with sensory loss, dementia or have had a stroke. The housing tenure that we deal with is owner occupiers and the private rented sector.

Our home adaptations work supports independent living and Care & Repair adaptations reduce hospital admissions for older people from injurious falls by 17% (equated to saving around 35,000 Welsh NHS bed days each year).

Something we're finding more challenging to address is housing disrepair, it's an issue that we often can't address in our agencies. Every day we see older people living in poor housing who can't afford to do basic repairs to their homes, and with no funding solutions available. Disrepair can be linked to risks of trips and falls. We see severe damp and mould, dangerous electrics, broken windows, doors and roofs which result in draughty and cold properties. The last Welsh Housing Conditions Survey published in 2018 showed that 18% of homes in Wales had a health hazard present. These official figures are out of date, and we think that those figures are much higher for Wales's older population, and there are plans to introduce a new Welsh housing conditions survey soon.

In many parts of Wales there isn't any public funding to tackle serious disrepair, so this leaves vulnerable low income older people living in these disrepair conditions. Our caseworkers will spend time trying to access pockets of benevolent funding or hardship funds, and sometimes these applications might be unsuccessful or only partially successful, leaving older people in poor housing conditions with no way to improve their situation. These limited funding options leave older people living in poor quality cold homes with a major detrimental impact on health and well-being and the ability to live safely and independently at home. Public Health Wales research show that poor quality housing costs Welsh NHS more than £95 million in treatment costs per year. Improving the poorest housing could lead to 39% fewer hospital admissions.

There's a clear link between prevention and improving the poorest quality homes. Older people are one of the demographics that are most at risk from cold homes as a result of disrepair, such as accidents, falls, circulatory, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Falls were the largest call to the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust in 2023 and 77% of falls related calls are from people aged 65 and over.

Not being able to address housing disrepair also means that we may not be able to install our adaptations. Damp plaster walls might not be able to structurally support some handrails and poor quality electrics might not be able to power a stair lift.

We've been calling for a national safety net grant to tackle instances of hazardous disrepair where no other recourse is available, to make sure every older person in Wales can live in a warm, safe, accessible home. It would also be a more efficient use of our caseworkers' time because they wouldn't be required to spend extensive amounts of time making multiple applications to local hardship funds.

Conwy & Denbighshire Care & Repair ran a small pilot testing our safety net grant fund, and the average cost per intervention from that pilot was £2,050. Compared to this, we see the cost of doing nothing is substantial, with increased strain on our health and social care services and on the lives of older people across Wales. The safety net grant is our main ask of our Senedd election manifesto; there are links to our manifesto and our services in general on the presentation slide and we're also encouraging people to pledge their support to our safety net grant ask.

Mike Hedges MS – 80 years ago the government realised the relationship between health and housing that doesn't seem to have been understood since then.

Ruth Cann - I frequently meet people living in disrepaired housing, and the impact is if your housing isn't suitable and it's not safe, you can't have care support coming in either. People are being denied social care support at times if the property is not safe to access. I have seen some improvements in recent years with the use of our multi

agency adult neglect toolkit - when we come across people living in such circumstances we can put in a referral using a toolkit which gives us a standardised way of putting in an assessment and flagging risks and concerns around people living in the community.

John Williams – regarding geographical spread of Care & Repair, how might people in Aberystwyth be able to access your services?

Katherine Evans - we cover the whole of Wales and have 13 agencies that cover all 22 local authorities so we are available in Aberystwyth.

Maggie Hayes – we're looking to create arrangements where individuals can go to shared lives' carers homes, in some cases that person would move into that person's home rather than go to a residential placement. We have shared lives carers who may need adaptations done to their home to enable them to support somebody. Regarding eligibility, would your work be excluded from that because the person's moving into somebody else's home? They would be a tenant of that person.

Katherine Evans - we cover tenants in the private rented sector and have experience of helping where our client has a landlord. We can have a conversation about this.

Huw Bendall - a MAFA (Ministerial Advisory Group on Ageing) subgroup is going to look at housing for older people. Older people have the same problems as the whole population in terms of affordability, disrepair and the availability of housing. COPA has produced a manifesto for the forthcoming Senedd elections, which includes housing, and we're working with other older people's representative groups to produce summary combined manifesto, which will feature housing.

Dereck Roberts - there was an all Wales meeting of COPA with NPC Wales, Active Wales etc. NPC Wales has produced them a manifesto, the main focus being health and social care, transport and housing. I have heard about housing developments being on hold due to planning issues re Natural Resources Wales. Housing schemes for vulnerable people, including older people and housing for social rent, need funding, but it's limited.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their presentations.

Any other business

Huw Bendall enquired about a withdrawn report referenced in an email to members, to which the Chair provided an explanation.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be in the new year, the date to be arranged. The Chair reminded people that the next meeting would be the last one of this Senedd Cross-Party Group, and thanked members for the last five years.