

FIFE FEDERATION OF TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS (FFOTRA)

RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY FOR A SCOTLAND WITH AN AGEING POPULATION

3.1 CONTRIBUTION AND OPPORTUNITY

The main ways in which older people contribute currently are as unpaid carers for young children or other family members which allows others the opportunity to work.

They also tend to take an active lead in the community in organisations such as Tenants and Residents Associations / Federations / Community Councils / Gala Committees.

Older people can pass on life skills (act as 'granny' social workers), and are important to keep local history alive. Contact with young people should be encouraged possibly through education.

Their skills should be recognised and those who act as childminders and carers should be paid without loss of any other benefits.

Red tape/access to transport/new technology can all be a barrier to older people taking an active part in society. Widening access to I.T. facilities has already increased the knowledge and computer use of older people (as we know from the groups we deal with). Improving transport links and making transport accessible when its needed where it's needed too would be a huge improvement. People are becoming more social and will want to continue this when they get older, they won't expect to end their social activity just because the last bus goes at 9pm.

Ageism and age discrimination is around but it isn't everywhere. Those who took part in this consultation were of the view that it depended how active you were as to whether you were discriminated against and this may come down to health and mobility as oppose age.

It was felt a way around this was to encourage people from an early age to see older people as a valuable resource. Suggestions were put forward such as using 'lifetime experience' as an educational tool.

3.2 WORK

Barriers were identified as ill health or ill health of close relative, redundancy at close to retirement - some employers may be reluctant to employ someone close to retirement age. Employers imposing statutory fixed retirement ages, younger workers favoured for promotions over older.

Employers could help people continue working (if they wanted to) by offering constant upgrade of skills to ensure people remain in touch with technology,

job share or part time rather than full retirement (allowing pension to be supplemented). Where for health and safety reasons it isn't possible to continue in the same position an alternative should be found. If work with the same employer isn't feasible, the employer should help those employees who wish to continue working to find suitable paid work utilising their skills possibly in the voluntary sector.

To increase the income of older people, tax should be abolished on pensions and consideration should be given to reducing or abolishing the amount of tax payable on extra income earned by working (sometimes it doesn't make sense for older people to work if they are in receipt of a pension as the majority of their income is taken up by income tax).

The support people may require to continue in employment were considered to be financial were the grandparent was the main carer for a child/children or other family member without loss of other benefits or income.

The role played by particularly grandparents in bringing up children where the parents are drug/alcohol dependent or have just abandoned is saving the Executive money and keeping the children in a fairly stable family environment. This should be recognised without penalising the people carrying this out i.e. loss of benefits. If the same people were foster carers they would be paid, a similar solution should be found.

3.3 SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Community based services will be important to older people but they will want services they need not services someone thinks they might want. Services should be flexible and have the ability to change as needs alter.

Services which worked well did so because there was communication across more than one service i.e. housing, social work and community services. There needs to be more of this if service provision in future is to work well. It is up to statutory agencies to have more of a willingness to work with a properly funded voluntary sector (they are able to adapt more quickly to change than statutory organisations) and each other.

Services enabling people to remain in their home for longer will be important in the future and these should be under development now. Support should be available early and should not depend on whether the person is an owner or a tenant.

Contact with other people will be important as people get older and should be encouraged therefore transport will be important and transport links. Transport not only to town centres but to out of town shops and cinemas. It is true that future generations of older people will be more technologically aware but social interaction should still be encouraged.

To ensure older people get the service they require and that it is constantly developing and meeting the needs of the people it is aimed at you need to speak to a range of people. Certainly older people to ensure the service is the right service, those just over retirement age to find out what they want from the service in the future, people approximately 5 years from retirement age and people in their mid to late 40s. This should give a continual development of the service with constant input from the end user and those who will eventually be in need of it.

3.4 HEALTH AND WELL BEING

This is no different than with other groups exercise (in moderation), good diet, active mind, alcohol in moderation, don't smoke.

Contributions to mental health were thought to be an active social life, volunteering, and gardening, taking on a college course and generally keeping fit and active.

People can feel isolated especially in rural arrears due to lack of proper transport, improved transport links could rectify this. Some activities incur a cost and this is restrictive to those on a low income. Activities for older people provided by the local authority should be free as should those by the colleges.

Older peoples' mental health can be affected by how safe and secure they feel in their home. Priority should be given to ensure that they are. This could be by improving lighting / locks / installing door entry phones etc. It could be something as simple as seeing a community policeman regularly in an evening but if it improves their quality of life it should be done.

Thought should also be given to where older people are housed and who is housed near them. If in Social Housing but not in need of sheltered or special needs accommodation an older person can find themselves with a much younger neighbour. There is an immediate clash of lifestyles and an anti social behaviour problem has been created. It makes sense that if you have a mainly older person block of 4 you don't house a young person in the middle.

More grandparents are bringing up children and in some cases great grand children, sometimes they have to deal with the drug/alcohol abusing parents turning up demanding to see the child/children and maybe have to be turned away, older people in situations like this need support and should have access to breaks.

3.5 HOUSING TRANSPORT AND SURROUNDINGS

New homes built for older people should not always be the 1 bed bungalows which tend to be the norm for social housing. Some people will have carers or partners who are carers who are unable to share a bedroom.

Now that families are dispersed people have families who visit and whilst it might not be 'needs based' an extra room is something older people will be looking for in a home in the future.

Homes should be as adaptable and accessible as possible. Where required adaptations should be fitted as quickly as possible without the necessity for waiting time.

There is concern that whilst homes should be accessible to shops they should not necessarily be constructed close to town centres which tend to be a magnet for anti social behaviour, this does nothing to increase older peoples' sense of security. It would be better to build away from the centre and put in place improved transport links.

Homes should also be affordable and should take into account running costs including energy costs. There is little point having property available at low rent if people are unable to afford the cost of heating. Social landlords should be encouraged to build with energy efficiency in mind and should be taking the opportunity to reduce energy costs by the installation of solar panels or other where possible. People remaining in their own home should be offered help towards achieving energy efficiency or help towards achieving 'greener' energy (solar panels/turbines etc).

Transport needs to be fully accessible and it also needs to link busses and trains. All railway stations should be fully accessible. People, (not only older people) in rural areas can feel isolated if they have no access to a car when buses stop running in the early evening.

To ensure older people feel safe in their community more visible policing is necessary.

Planning for an ageing population should be done by listening to what this group of the population wants and implementing it. If extra funding is required to support this, it should be provided. It should not be imposed on Local Authorities to find any extra money by raising Council Taxes or reducing other necessary services and therefore impacting on the people they are supposed to be supporting.

3.6 OTHER

It is important that older people are a valued and respected part of the community. Some perceptions of older people can be challenged by showing the positive role they play in society.

Integrating older people is important. This could be done by bringing together children, young people and older people to learn from each other.