

Social Justice

Age And Experience – Developing The Strategy For A Scotland With An Ageing Population: Consultation Analysis

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Scotland's population is getting older with current estimates predicting that by 2024 over two-fifths of our population will be above the age of 50. The Scottish Executive has developed The Strategy for a Scotland with an Ageing Population (published March 2007), titled: "All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population", which will focus on making sure that our services and infrastructure are ready to deal with any different requirements brought about by our changing population. In order that the views of organisations and individuals throughout Scotland could be used to assist Ministers in determining the direction and content of the Strategy, a consultation took place between March and June 2006. George Street Research was commissioned to analyse the responses to the consultation.

Main Findings

- Although the focus of the document was on issues affecting an ageing population, there was a clear indication that people saw many of the issues as having broader implications across all ages. For example, health issues impact on all individuals and not simply older individuals.
- Concerns over the definition of older people, with comments that those aged over 50 cannot and should not be treated as a homogenous group.
- There are calls for a concerted information and communications campaign to counteract negative perceptions and media image of older people.
- Suggestions for greater levels of contact between young and old people to foster greater respect between generations and improve awareness of the skills and experience older people bring to society.
- Need to ensure that the skills, experience and knowledge of older people are respected, recognised and utilised. Additional concerns were that while unpaid roles as carers or in voluntary work benefits voluntary organisations and the government, there is a lack of recognition for these roles.
- Offering opportunities for flexible working in order to acknowledge and utilise the skills and expertise of older people in the workplace.
- No individual should be forced to work beyond pensionable age, but all should have the option to choose to continue to work if they wish to and are able to do so.
- The issue of social isolation among older people was noted as a key issue to be addressed.
- The importance of service providers consulting with service users in order to ensure that all services offered are relevant to needs and fit for purpose.

Introduction

The Scottish Executive has developed a Strategy for a Scotland with an Ageing Population, titled: "All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population". This will focus on the key role that older people play in society, with the aim of ensuring that our services and infrastructure are ready to deal with any different requirements brought about by our changing population. Consultation has been a key element in the development of the Strategy and a consultation paper was launched in March 2006 in order to ascertain the views of a wide range of organisations and individuals throughout Scotland. Responses from formal and informal groups were also encouraged, with the consultation questionnaire designed to be used for group discussion as well as for individual and organisational responses.

In total, 1,349 responses were received; some of these were very lengthy and others were relatively brief. The consultation was characterised by the relatively high proportion of replies submitted by individual members of the public, predominantly from those aged over 50. The consultation issues were clearly viewed by the public as relevant and pertinent to them. In order to ensure that any issues specific to older people in minority groups were included, the Equal Opportunities Programme carried out a number of surveys with over 50s from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. The range of responses from organisations was very encouraging, with the highest level of response from community councils. No significant gaps were identified in types of consultee.

Cross-Cutting Themes

This consultation exercise produced a large volume of responses and issues covered. However, from this wide-ranging material a number of general, common themes emerged.

The need to find a way to counter attitudes or discrimination and end what some described as "the stigma" of old age was a key theme; as was the issue of classifying all "older people" as a single group. Respondents noted that those over 50 do not present a homogenous group of individuals and their needs will differ enormously.

The problem of negative stereotypes generally associated with older people were also highlighted, especially the way older people are portrayed by the media. Respondents felt that these should be replaced with a more positive image.

Contribution and Opportunity

Present and future contributions

Respondents identified the wide range of voluntary work undertaken as the key contribution to society by older people. The wealth of knowledge, skills and experience they

have to offer was also highlighted. Other ways in which older people can and do contribute include as carers for family, friends and neighbours, and through economic contributions as workers, tax payers and consumers. Older people were also seen to maintain and to promote values including the upkeep of traditions and setting of standards.

Obstacles to contributing

Health issues, both physical and mental, were identified as the single greatest barrier to the ability to contribute. The need for access to appropriate facilities and services, especially transportation, was also seen as important. Respondents felt that financial restraints such as low pensions and unpaid caring were obstacles to contributing. A need for opportunities in employment and in voluntary work, as well as for training, were identified.

Ageism and age discrimination

Ageism and age discrimination affect many older people. Respondents felt that improving inter-generational relationships was one way to counteract this problem which many described as 'endemic'. Ageism was felt to exist in the workplace as well as in everyday life and respondents highlighted the need for Government action to combat the problem.

Work

What stops people working?

Health issues, both physical and mental, were again identified as the single greatest barrier to continuing in employment. In addition, a lack of flexibility on the part of employers was also a reason why many opt to retire rather than continue working. Additionally, older people may no longer continue working due to personal circumstances including duties as carers.

Help to continue in employment

More flexible working patterns were seen as the main way in which older people could be encouraged to remain in employment. Lower tax rates, increased benefits or opportunities for training would also help.

Income in retirement

Many respondents mentioned the need for higher pensions or for tax-free pensions. The need to save, to increase contributions to private pensions and the availability of good financial advice were also highlighted as ways in which people could plan for an adequate income in retirement.

Combining work and other activities

More support for carers would enable them to combine this role with other employment. This included financial rewards for carers, with carer allowances continuing after retirement age. Flexible working arrangements were also seen as a way to allow older people to combine work with other activities.

Services for Older People

Important services

The services seen as of most importance to older people were those related to health with the NHS, and especially waiting lists, mentioned most frequently. Suitable housing and help to remain living independently at home was another area of importance, while transport services also featured strongly in responses.

What makes services work well?

In order for services to work well they must be available when they are needed and staffed by people who are caring and professional in their approach.

Services working together

Good communication between services and more joined-up services were seen as the best ways to ensure services work well together. There was also some reference for the need for services to be offered at a local level. A key element for any service was the degree to which it helps to reduce social isolation and encourage ongoing social interaction.

Continuing to meet the needs of older people

In order that services continue to serve the needs of older people, communication and consultation with service users was identified as the best way to ensure services are enabled to fully meet these needs.

Health and Well-Being

Good physical and mental health

Responses showed close links between good mental and physical well-being, with a need for regular exercise, diet, mental stimulation and support of family and friends as the main ways to stay healthy.

Support of good health

More clubs, groups or activities for older people were requested, along with access to good health care and medical services. Advice and information on services available was also highlighted as an important factor in supporting good health.

Housing, Transport and Surroundings

Suitable houses and homes

Respondents noted the need to ensure that houses are suitable for people as they age. Attention should be paid to assistance for older people with reduced mobility. Safety and security issues were also highlighted.

Transport

Transport should be available, accessible and affordable and older people should feel safe when using public transport.

Suitable towns, cities, villages and neighbourhoods

The need to ensure that all necessary amenities are close to hand was a key feature of responses on community design. A well maintained environment was also seen as important and again the issue of safety was raised.

Planning for an ageing population

The need to consult with the people who will be directly affected by any developments was the most common theme in comments on planning.

Additional Issues

IT and new technology

Respondents supported work towards ensuring IT literacy for older people, with some comments on the need to ensure technology is 'age-friendly'. Innovations in design and technology will help improve planning and design of houses, so that older people can live independently in their own homes.

Support for marginalised groups

Specific groups including the disabled and minority ethnic communities were seen as requiring additional or differing support services.

Consumers

Respondents noted the increasing strength of older people as consumers and expressed the view that businesses would need to take more notice of the needs of this growing market.

Conclusions

While the Equalities Act and the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 will provide some protection from discrimination, work is also needed to change negative perceptions of older people as a burden or drain on society.

Many issues raised were not seen as only impacting on older people. Issues in relation to public transport provision, housing design, healthy lifestyles and so on were seen to be pertinent to all individuals. As such, comments were made in relation to the need for a holistic approach to life by all people.

While services need to be tailored to meet needs, there were also comments on the need to ensure that older people are involved in all aspects of society and can live within cohesive communities.

The consultation enabled a huge breadth of views to be aired on issues impacting on development of a Strategy for a Scotland with an ageing population. Responses suggested a desire to see change develop in an informed and sensible manner.

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The report, "Age And Experience – Developing The Strategy For A Scotland With An Ageing Population: Consultation Analysis", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Executive website at

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