

Priorities for Local Government

Transforming
later lives

April 2021



About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

We have strategic locality partnerships with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Leeds City Council and Leeds Older People's Forum and Lincolnshire County and District Councils. We also support the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities. Currently over 45 places are part of this movement, from cities and towns, to districts and counties, covering around 22 million people.

About this paper

This document is for mayoral candidates, council candidates, and local government decision makers to help recognise the huge role they have in supporting healthy ageing. Ageing Better have highlighted key recommendations that you can use in your work to seize the opportunities of your local ageing populations. We'd also welcome conversations with you if you want any further help or advice.

Great places to grow old

Councils are at the heart of supporting local communities to thrive and enabling people to remain healthy and active well into their later lives. Now more than ever, they are under constant pressure to deliver more with less and to respond to an increasing number of priorities. However, few are taking into account the massive age shift taking place that means policies must serve a growing population in mid and later life.

By 2040 we can expect people aged 50 and over to make up over 40% of England's population for the first time, and one in three local authorities in England are already at that figure. The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. And yet the pandemic has highlighted the deep inequalities within society. Unless radical action is taken by national and local government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying quality lives in those extra years, with knock on implications for public services and communities.

National government must play a supporting role, and we will continue to advocate for sufficient finances and devolved powers to enable local action. A sustainable funding settlement for public health, regulation for higher accessibility and adaptability of new homes, and funding for social infrastructure are all examples of where national support is needed to enable local action.

Local government can champion a vision of inclusive growth that makes the most of the economic opportunities of our longer lives. Making new homes accessible and adaptable and existing homes warm, safe and comfortable; delivering the kinds of jobs and skills that recognise the realities of an older workforce; investing in physical environments and activities that help social connections thrive; and promoting health and physical activity all have a part to play. Local Economic Partnerships (LEP) can develop strategies that understand the future - local and regional economic success will be increasingly dependent on older consumers as well as older workers. The Industrial Strategy Ageing Society Grand Challenge offers a framework for innovation and is an opportunity for businesses to respond to the huge, and growing, spending power of older age groups.

Priorities for change

We've identified four priority areas where local government has the power to make positive change now: providing better housing, promoting a healthy later life, connecting people with their community and creating more opportunities for older workers.

Creating opportunities for fulfilling work

While over-50s account for the majority of UK employment growth in the past decade, one in four have been furloughed this year and face devastating financial implications. Over 50s who fall out of the workforce are twice as likely to become long-term unemployed. Local areas need to ensure there is strong employment support for older workers and that employers are age-friendly and inclusive. Just a 1% increase in the number of people in work aged 50-64 could increase GDP by around £5.7 billion per year¹ with knock on positive effects on local economies.

- Commit to becoming an age-friendly employer leading by example and encourage employers in your area to do the same. Think about the businesses you contract and whether they offer flexibility for older workers or how they recruit in a way that attracts older workers.
- Ensure that local services that support unemployed people back to work reflect the needs of those aged over 50.
- Use commissioning powers and work with local Further Education providers to ensure tailored skills training is available to those in mid to later life.
- Develop ring-fenced funding for retraining after unemployment or redundancy for those in mid to later life. This should include sector-based training related to labour market opportunities and transferable skills.

Enabling safe and accessible homes

The vast majority (over 90%) of older adults live in mainstream housing and this is also where most people wish to stay as they grow older.

At least 80% of UK homes that will exist in 2050 have already been built, but most housing in the UK does not meet accessibility standards and

¹ HM Treasury (2018), 'Managing fiscal risks: government response to the 2017 Fiscal risks report'. Available at: www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/725913/Managing_Fiscal_Risks_web.pdf

millions of homes that people live in during later life are deemed non-decent; a major cause of preventable poor health and accidents. Planning for the future means understanding the local need for more accessible and adaptable homes and ensuring these are built. Local authorities should take advantage of opportunities to decarbonise the housing stock across tenures in their area as this helps tackle one of the most common hazards, cold homes.

- Ensure new homes are built that are accessible and adaptable, and that effective enforcement and monitoring is in place. Develop local plans and spatial frameworks that set minimum targets for new builds to meet Part M(4) Category 2 standard of the Government's national technical housing standards and an appropriate proportion that meets the higher wheelchair accessible standard Part M(4) Category 3. Within these documents, also make the Nationally Described Space Standard mandatory for all new homes.
- Use opportunities through local authority led development schemes, or working in partnership with developers, to set a high benchmark for accessible homes and age-friendly communities.
- Work with partners to prepare an accessible housing database that makes finding the right home easier for people with specific requirements.
- Local authorities should drive transformation in the housing stock in their area, with benefits for population health and decarbonisation. They should identify poor quality homes and put a plan in place to address the issues before they become a problem. This should include consideration of advice, financing, adaptations, repairs, energy efficiency and retrofitting.
- Increase levels of collaboration between health and housing at the local level. Health and wellbeing boards and integrated care systems should include housing as a focus.

Promote healthy ageing

Although, on average, we are living longer than ever before, millions of us are spending our later lives in poor health and disability. While ageing is inevitable, poor health as we age is not. The pressure on statutory health and care services is huge, but by shifting some of that focus into a more preventative approach, statutory and other agencies can focus on maintaining good health rather than just treating illness. The Centre for Ageing Better and Public Health England have developed a consensus statement on healthy ageing that sets out our vision for making England the best place in the world to grow old.

- Identify the key drivers of health inequalities and health conditions that cause disability in midlife in your local area and develop a plan to increase disability-free life expectancy and prevent poor health as part of Health and Wellbeing Strategies. Sign and promote the Healthy Ageing Consensus statement across your local authority.
- Adopt a whole system approach to address physical inactivity and obesity. Invest in weight management services for older adults. Invest in evidence-based community physical activity programmes for people in mid to later life and in cost-effective strength and balance programmes to help individuals maintain their independence and functional ability as they age.
- Use allocated funding from the Department for Transport’s Active Travel Fund to implement approaches that increase walking and cycling among groups currently missing out, including adults in mid to later life, those with lower incomes, health conditions and disabilities, and people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds.

Keep people connected

It’s increasingly important for population health and wellbeing that we live in connected communities – places with the right physical, social and digital environments to support connectivity; which are inclusive and accessible to people as they age, regardless of health, ability or income; and which make it easier to make and maintain social relations. Inclusive design of local social infrastructure – the places and people which together make communities work – provide the foundations for social connections, participation and communities to thrive.

- Invest in community organisations and infrastructure to create the conditions in which social connections can thrive and people can participate in ways that matter to them.
- Encourage opportunities for people to contribute by promoting age-friendly and inclusive volunteering practices which build relationships across generations and diverse communities.
- Involve local people and local infrastructure levies to design infrastructure projects and regeneration schemes that help people remain actively involved in their neighbourhood as they grow older, staying connected to those who matter to them. Shared spaces like libraries, marketplaces, high streets and community centres help build a range of social ties and environments where people of all ages and backgrounds can interact.

Age-friendly Communities

The Age-friendly Communities Framework was developed by the World Health Organization and is based on the evidence of what supports healthy and active ageing in a place. The eight domains of age-friendly provide a framework for understanding needs and preferences as well as barriers, local priorities and opportunities to support healthy, active ageing.

It involves local groups, councils, businesses and residents all working together to identify and make changes in both the physical and social environments, for example transport, outdoor spaces, volunteering and employment, leisure and community services.

The [UK Network of Age-friendly Communities](#) was set up to support members of the WHO's global network and shows a local authority's commitment to addressing the concerns of older residents and taking a collaborative and strategic approaches to these issues.

What does great local leadership look like?

We have learnt a lot from working with local authorities and have identified a few characteristics of good local government leadership on these issues:

Demonstrate commitment by becoming an Age-friendly community, joining over 45 other places in the UK including our major cities and small towns, in taking steps for more people to enjoy later life, and sharing learning as part of the [UK Network of Age-friendly Communities](#).

Join the UK network of Age-friendly Communities to show your commitment to older residents and be part of a growing global movement.

Think beyond the immediate pressure of health and social care. Local authorities and the NHS have demonstrated that we will never get ahead of the curve without addressing the impact on later life of wider determinants such as homes, jobs, community infrastructure and transport. Covid-19 has highlighted the need for holistic strategies that enable good health.

Collaborate across all sectors and departments, not just those seen as 'responsible for older people'. A life course approach and starting with the person can help cut across boundaries, which are irrelevant and confusing to most people.

Involve people with experience and those affected by these issues to bring a diversity of voices. As well as skills, energy and insights.

Create a positive, compelling and simple vision for people to get behind and make it a clear strategic priority. Leeds aims to be 'the Best City to Grow Old in' and Greater Manchester 'one of the best places in the world to grow up, get on and grow old.'

Challenge ageist language. Framing increasing numbers of people living longer as a burden, a challenge or a 'time bomb' affects how we feel as we age. It can also lead to skewed and misguided decisions on ageing-related issues, being rooted in stereotypes rather than real people and experiences.

Look down as well as ahead. Focusing on future growth in numbers of people aged over 85 can distract from the fact that these people are currently in their 50s and 60s. We can act now to make a difference to their later lives.

Be an exemplar. Alongside other anchor institutions, such as universities and hospitals, local authorities can create lasting legacies for the places they serve. For example, by becoming an age-friendly employer and pushing supply chains to do the same.

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

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