

CONSULTATION ON THE STRATEGY FOR AN AGEING SOCIETY IN WALES – RESPONSE FROM CYMRU OLDER PEOPLE’S ALLIANCE

Questions for consultation

1. The Strategy sets out the areas we will prioritise in planning for our ageing society and why. Have we prioritised the right areas?

COPA are pleased to have contributed to the development of the draft Strategy through membership of MAFA and its working groups and in general are satisfied that it covers the right areas to make a difference. This co-productive approach involving and listening to older people must be sustained and further improved.

Whilst the commitment of the Health and Social Services Department to the Strategy is evident, this priority should be matched by other Welsh Government departments so that they transparently understand and take into account the demands of an Ageing Society in their policies. In particular, recognition that age (older people) is one of the protected characteristics in equalities legislation must be actioned across the Welsh Government including in Covid Reconstruction. This “cross-cutting” or joined up approach to ageing is also how Councils must respond to the Strategy and its implementation.

Until the Delivery Plan is available it is difficult to judge prioritisation since no details of priority, resource levels or timescales are provided yet. It is however clear that recovering from the pandemic, where older people have been significantly impacted is an essential priority as well as the consequences of the last year for us – digital exclusion, prevention and early intervention, NHS Waiting lists, isolation and loneliness etc.

2. Are there any issues that are not reflected in the Strategy that you think should be considered when planning for an ageing society?

- Funding of Social Care and Paying for Care get only a very brief mention whereas these are top priorities for many older people. As recommended in a number of recent reports, there needs to be an explicit commitment to develop a new system for both funding of and paying for social care in Wales that is fair for all, sustainable and sufficient to deliver high quality care to all including older people consistently.
- The Strategy should explicitly reference and embrace the World Health Organisation’s Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-30. This would also complement the Ageing Well in Wales programme.
- On Financial Inclusion, the Strategy should include details of the Wales Delivery Plan for the UK Strategy for Financial Well-being and how the two strategies will support planning for later life and ensure older people have sufficient resources during retirement. Benefits, their take up and seeking to maintain their future levels also should be included (e.g.,

Attendance Allowance alone is worth £500 million to older people in Wales)

- Grandparenting – this issue is absent from the policy narrative but essential in many families with e.g., childcare, financial support, learning but issues with access, surrogate/replacement care, family relationships. This has been an issue highlighted by the pandemic.
- Increasing Volunteering amongst older people including timebank systems that could enable people of all ages to provide informal support to older people in their communities on a basis of reciprocity. The response to the pandemic from volunteers has been excellent but this must continue on a sustainable basis
- Enabling older people to get easy access to services they need, when needed, without barriers - including use of Smart Cards - one card to access a range of local public services in all parts of Wales. Access to GPs has been a consistent problem over the last year, particularly where that has relied on digital access and capability.

3. Have we identified the key policies and mechanisms that can deliver real change in the lives of older people today and future generations?

The policies are comprehensively covered but the mechanisms for achieving them are not consistently covered. There are general aims and statements of intent in a number of areas without the supporting rationale for changing lives e.g., no coverage of the Government's future strategy/policy on:

- accommodation with care (i.e., care homes, home care, extra care, using technology in the home for safety, new models)
- aspects of housing for older people (e.g., demand and supply of homes for older people, lifetime home standards, DFG development, alternative options)
- Prevention – an explicit reference is needed to investment in prevention right across the life course. The message that its “never too late” to utilise cost effective prevention interventions to improve well-being and address social and economic inequalities should be included in the Strategy. We should not accept the ageist assumptions that with longer lives comes ill health.
- Inequalities in Ageing – this must be referenced more directly so that the growing poverty amongst older people and the significant differences in health outcomes and life expectancy between communities across Wales can be addressed.
- Transport – no explicit commitment to continue the Over 60s free bus pass or maintain the qualifying age requirement
- Intergenerational Solidarity – a stronger commitment needs to be made on this. The Welsh Government Strategy on Intergenerational Practice was successfully implemented by local councils and others up to 2013

and provides a basis for developed without as far as possible “re-inventing the wheel”. A commitment to a refreshed IP Strategy should be made.

4. Does the content amount to a sufficiently ambitious response to the major public policy issue of our ageing society?

The ambition of the Strategy needs to be realistic and built on the resources available to deliver the promises on a prioritised basis – otherwise it will just become a long “wish list”. The ambition therefore should be carefully judged against the prevailing public finance policy post Covid-19 and Brexit. If it is to succeed then there must be a commitment to resource its delivery – over and above programme monies as well. Whilst this might be difficult in the current circumstances, there should be a transparent mechanism established for co-productive assessment and monitoring of the resource requirements for delivery of the Strategy promises on an annualised basis, through MAFA. There should also be an on-going mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress with the detailed implementation of the Strategy, commitment by commitment – that goes beyond the Age Index approach set out.

5. Will the Strategy help to maximise the potential of the growing numbers of older people in our communities?

In principle it could provide the high-level framework to achieve this aim but it will be dependant on the delivery plan to fill in the detail and securing the commitment of Councils to support implementation. Unless this is a sustained “Team Wales” approach with Councils, third and private sectors fully involved, it is unlikely to succeed.

Better communications from Government will more generally be essential to change the culture of society towards getting older and securing the views and actions of those within or approaching their later life. Images of ageing portrayed in the media in particular need to be more positive and use role models more consistently. The attitudes and views of older people need to be surveyed in a more consistent and structured manner and the results taken into account in policy decisions. Better data about the lives of older people is essential including a return to the Older People’s Monitor previously published by Welsh Government. The Review of Engagement will need to encompass this wider and important but challenging objective.

- 6. Do you agree with our ambition to work towards an age friendly Wales? If so, please state what you, as an individual or organisation, are doing to help us to create an age friendly Wales.**

Absolutely. Cymru Older People's Alliance has had an explicit policy of creating age friendly communities since it was established as a registered charity in 2017. We have co-produced guidance on AFCs with the Commissioner for Older People and are currently working with her team on this. COPA have made a proposal to Welsh Government that if they/Councils can help reform and revitalise 50+ Forums in Wales then at a local level the Forums could make a vital contribution to the creation of AFCs. The ambition to create AFCs must be backed by a clear and resourced plan that engages all of society intergenerationally – children and young people, adults who have elderly parents and grand-parents, older people at different stages of the ageing process.

- 7. How has Covid 19 changed your ability to do things that matter to you, or the way you deliver services to older people?**

COPA initiated and then participated in an Age Cymru led survey of older people about the impacts of Covid 19. Over 1000 responses were received and have been published. A follow up survey is planned in February. This evidence published is important in deciding how the responses to the pandemic are shaped. An area of priority to address is in Care Homes and the devastating impacts the pandemic has had on the residents, their lives and their human rights. A pathway of recovery for the sector including sufficient funding is needed that puts residents at the centre.

- 8. How can we involve older people in the re building our communities following the pandemic?**

The Welsh Government plan on reconstruction of society post the pandemic should be amended to explicitly and fully recognise the impacts on and role of older people in this agenda. COPA and 50+ Forums can play a vital part in re-building through engagement with their 10,000 members. Support for re-start of the Forums on a face-to-face basis as soon as is safe is something COPA are currently planning. More broadly the Councils will have a key co-ordinating role to engage with their communities in a variety of ways but it is essential that also happens at a national level with sharing of approaches and good practice. There must be recognition that many of the issues highlighted in this response existed before the pandemic and have been exacerbated over the last 12 months. A long term, sustained and serious commitment to the Strategy and its implementation is needed by Welsh Government and Councils across Wales.

Welsh Government Review of Engagement

Questions for older people

9. Are you a member of a 50+ group or forum? If yes, how successful do you think the forum is influencing local and national policy decisions?

COPA is a national registered charity whose purpose is to provide a Wales level voice for older people in 50+ Forums. Our Trustees are either Chairs or Vice Chairs of Forums or Champions. Our recently published evaluation report on engagement with Chairs of Forums provides an informed response to this question <https://www.copacharity.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/11/Report-on-Engagement-with-50-Forums-Chairs-final-version1.pdf>. The short answer is that Forums have been left to “wither on the vine” over the last 5 years in a number of areas of Wales and therefore the picture is mixed and patchy one. There are some reasonably effective forums, others who are neglected but have potential and around a third who struggle to or do not operate. COPA have written to the Minister to propose a programme of reform and revitalization for 50+ Forums to enable them to provide practical and local support e.g., on isolation and loneliness, intergenerational solidarity, well-being. A Development Framework for Forums has been outlined in our Report. If Forums are to thrive in the medium term, a positive response for Welsh Government and Councils to our proposals is essential. Influencing of national policy decisions is undertaken by COPA in consultation with Forums on a range of issues and is evidence of how the independent voice of older people can be heard. A more systematic means of communication from Welsh Government about consultations opened and their outcomes would be beneficial.

10. Does the 50+ forum benefit your local area in other ways? (E.g., by reducing social isolation or building community resilience?)

Our Evaluation report provides a number of examples where forums are running and participating in projects that benefit the locality in these ways and others. The problem is that Forums need strengthening for this to be replicated across Wales and for the good practice developed to be shared with and actioned in all areas. Digital inclusion, isolation and loneliness, intergenerational solidarity and ageing well are particular concerns that forums have been able to influence directly.

11. How do you think local and national government can better engage with older people?

This can be achieved through the action recommended in our Evaluation Report with regard to 50+ Forums and a dialogue held with COPA about how forums can be reformed and revitalised. The continued support for National Older People's Organisations would also be important in order to secure effective engagement with government at all levels. The Joint Working Partnership Agreement between us helps to ensure collaboration, avoid duplication and importantly maintain the independence of different organisations with diverse memberships of older people. It should be noted that COPA (and Forums) is the only network supported that is not made up of retired trade union representation. However, the agenda of engagement is a much wider one

than this and (as above) encompass national level engagement to influence and survey the older population, establish new engagement mechanisms as well as continue to fund current engagement projects such as those successfully delivered through Age Cymru and their partners. Engagement with small local community groups is an essential element in any engagement plan. "Hard to reach groups of older people is another important objective. COPA would welcome further discussion about how the Review of Engagement can be extended beyond the initial questions posed in this consultation.

S G Milsom, Chair, Cymru Older People's Alliance www.copacharity.com February 2021