

Active Ageing

Kent's Strategy for Later Life

This document summarises how people in Kent want to live their later lives, and what they want from public and community services and facilities. It is based upon discussions with people from all walks of life, and with representatives of all the major service providers. It also builds upon the Vision for Kent, Kent's Community Strategy, taking the themes identified there and scrutinising them from the perspective of older people. People said to us that they didn't think another detailed strategy document was needed, and indeed we have many plans in Kent already, some of them specifically targeted at older people. This paper is therefore an over-arching summary of the issues that are important to people in Kent, and highlights action planned or being taken. The aim is to help to focus agencies' attention on the cross-cutting issues, with older people themselves, and ultimately to provide a monitoring tool to enable people to hold agencies to account for achieving these collective objectives.

Because of the importance of planning ahead for health, fitness and economic wellbeing in old age, some of the issues raised are relevant to people in their fifties and sixties, or younger, none of whom would consider themselves to be an "older person". Many people in their seventies and eighties are active and enthusiastically involved in community life. Some people, particularly those in their nineties or older, but sometimes younger, need support or care in order to maintain their quality of life. Kent is a particularly diverse county, containing some of the most affluent and some of the most deprived wards in the country. The growing population of people in Kent aged 50 or older thus uses virtually all public and community services in Kent, directly or indirectly. Older people as a group are also incredibly diverse, with very different needs depending on personal circumstances. Nonetheless there are some clear common themes which emerge.

This strategy therefore aims to address those issues which older people currently face, but also to support younger people to plan and prepare for their ageing.

What do older people in Kent want?

Public services in Kent have ongoing engagement with local residents, particularly in connection with Community Strategies, so have built up a picture of the views of older residents. To supplement this, several workshops were held specifically on developing a Kent strategy for later life. These involved the public, the voluntary and community sector, representatives of BME communities, residential and domiciliary care providers, Saga, Health, Police, Fire, District and Borough Councils and KCC Directorates. This first draft reflects those discussions. It has also built on research from elsewhere, including the World Health Organization's work on Global Age-friendly Cities, and the work of the Better Government for Older People Network.

The key themes to emerge during the Kent discussions were:

1. **Valuing Later Life:** many people felt that the needs and perspectives of the older generations were sometimes overlooked, and that society as a whole did not always appreciate the many benefits that older people bring. The balance should be redressed. Those who run public services must ensure that older people's voices influence strategic planning decisions. Perhaps we should create a Kent Senior Citizens' Parliament? More widely, are there ways in which collectively we can promote positive images of later life, prevent discrimination on the grounds of age, and thus help society to value older people more?
2. **Planning for a secure old age** means individual planning for future financial security, continuing to have the opportunity of paid employment for those who want it, and ensuring that those who are entitled to benefits take them up. It also means taking action to keep fit and healthy as far as possible.
3. **Healthy Communities** are important for all age groups, but there are particular issues that are more likely to impact on older people (e.g. public transport, decent homes that are suitable as people become progressively more frail, safety in the home and on the street, accessibility of facilities, tackling social isolation, and so on.)
4. **Learning** is an essential part of adapting to the challenges that life brings at different stages, and lifelong learning was a key theme. People need excellent information to enable them to live their life as they want – stay healthy, get involved in community life, get the support they need, and so on. New technology provides particular opportunities here.
5. **Independent Living** is what everyone wants – to exercise choice and control over their everyday life. For most of us it is not an issue. But for disabled people, including frail older people, there are many ways in which the community and environment can support independent living. Good health care, housing, social services and access to transport underpin this.

ACTION PLAN

Theme 1: Valuing older people

Respect

People should have respect for each other – older people also recognised that they needed to respect young people. Part of respect is treating people as individuals, not a homogenous group, and this is an inherent part of treating people with dignity. Dignity in care was a strong theme.

Positive images of old age

In the media, all too often old people are either invisible and overlooked, or portrayed negatively. Whilst old age can bring disability and poverty, the balance needs to shift. Older people contribute a vast amount to the communities in Kent – most volunteering and unpaid caring is carried out by older people. Many people felt that in Kent we don't make the most of the wealth of experience and knowledge available amongst older people.

Towards a more caring and compassionate society

People need companionship and friendship, and communities need to tackle social isolation (which can affect all age groups, but particularly very old people). People need to be educated to look out for each other. They also need to be educated about ageing – if younger people had a better understanding of ageing perhaps they would be more tolerant, considerate and respectful of older people.

Ensuring people retain self-sufficiency and self-confidence

Part of enabling people to take responsibility for their lives, and exercise choice and control, is to ensure they have the confidence to carry it through.

Actions: Addressing and changing the nature of the society within which we live will inevitably be a slow process, and some of the issues above are very fundamental. There are actions, however, that can have a positive impact. The anti-ageism legislation is already making people think more about whether they are inadvertently discriminating against older people. Specific actions could include:

- All Kent public services, and their contractors, should reinforce the message that their staff must treat people with dignity and respect.
- Engage in a media campaign to raise the profile of older people in Kent, and have more positive images of ageing. Kent TV could be particularly useful here.
- Develop a discussion about how to create a more caring and compassionate society, greater understanding of the impact of ageing and thus empathy with older people, and how to equip people to retain their self-sufficiency and self-confidence as they age.

- Develop more schemes that enable youngsters to learn from older people's skills and experience, particularly in fields where there are skills shortages.
- Create a Kent Council or Parliament for Senior Citizens?

Theme 2: Preparation for a healthy, financially secure old age:

This needs to be a lifetime quest for people. However, it becomes particularly important that people in their middle years or beyond are planning for their future if they have not already started to do so.

Good health

During the consultation, the majority of people commented on how important it was to have good health. Whilst some poor health cannot be avoided, there is a lot that individuals can do themselves to stay healthy. Health promotion was therefore seen as very important, as was access to healthy activities such as sports facilities, walking, dances and so on. It was also seen as important to provide support and services for people that prevented further deterioration of existing conditions, and enabled them to remain independent for longer.

Prevention

The saying 'prevention is better than cure' is just as valid today as it was a hundred years ago. The drive to promote good health as a way to prevent avoidable ill health problems in later life needs to be a major priority. We need to build upon and use the experiences of successful smoking cessation initiatives to begin tackling other issues such as obesity and diabetes. We need to ensure that those people who do have long term conditions are prevented from being admitted to hospital or residential care unnecessarily. For example harnessing the benefits of new technology to support people in their homes is increasing through such schemes as Tele-health and Tele-care.

Actions:

- The Kent Public Health Strategy sets out priorities for improving public health.
- The Annual Public Health Report has a specific chapter relating to older people, with priorities for action.
- The Kent Local Transport Plan has specific targets to improve access to hospitals and GP surgeries.
- Negotiate with leisure centres to provide free (or very cheap) access to leisure facilities at off peak times?! NB strategic discussions are already underway on this, led by Peter Gilroy
- Ensure leisure centres and other healthy activities have good public transport links.
- Learn from the Sure Start model (for children and families), and develop prevention/health promotion strategies across health services and adult services that are delivered very locally.

Enough money

Although the proportion of pensioners in poverty has fallen, economic wellbeing was a major concern of people in the consultation, who thought it important for people to plan ahead for their financial security in later life. Some thought the basic state pension should be increased so that it is sufficient to enable people to have a good quality of life so that other forms of subsidy would not be necessary. Some thought that more services should be means-tested, so that wealthier pensioners should be expected to pay for services they could afford in order to provide greater subsidy for those who could not afford to pay. The proportion of income which had to be spent on care needs, for those people who needed support, was felt to be too high, leaving them very little money to spend on anything else. Fuel poverty is a particular issue.

Actions:

- Ensure that people claim the benefits to which they are entitled and provide incentives for long-term financial planning with the correct advice. KCC's Towards 2010 document already includes a target on benefits maximisation for older people.
- Some people will choose to continue in paid work, part-time if not full-time, past state retirement age. It is important that those who do want to have paid work are not discriminated against in finding suitable employment. Ensure age discrimination legislation is applied in spirit and practice.
- Lobbying to remove the disincentives to working which exist within the benefits system.
- Develop accredited financial and insurance products specifically to benefit older people.
- Action to reduce fuel poverty.

Theme 3: Healthy Communities (Infrastructure that promotes independence and choice):

Transport and Accessibility

These two issues can have a huge impact on people's lives, and came out strongly in the consultation as an area for improvement. Issues raised included:

- Timings of buses/trains – to ensure they enable people to access particular facilities (eg theatres/cinemas – so people don't have to leave before the end of the show)
- Transport after hospital discharge was a particular issue highlighted
- Need for more flexible solutions – dial-a-ride schemes, taxi vouchers – with vehicles that can cope with wheelchairs.
- Can we negotiate for free bus passes to be used on trains?

- In order to effect any significant change we need to break through some of the complexity which surrounds public transport. This matter needs to be pursued with Central Government.

The accessibility and availability of public transport is critically important because many older people are more reliant than the majority of working-age people on public transport. Local authorities are required by the Transport Act 2000 to produce a Local Transport Plan considering how the transport needs of various groups will be addressed. The current Local Transport Plan (2006-2011) addresses the issue of accessibility and particularly social exclusion and its impact on quality of life.

About 80% of bus services in Kent are provided by private, commercial bus companies, for example Arriva and Stagecoach. Kent County Council spends around £7 million a year from the transport budget to offer the remaining 20% of bus services that are not "commercially viable", in other words services where the running costs are more than the money received from passengers fares. A large amount of these resources pay for rural bus services in the County, which provide links to villages and country areas. Without this funding these services would not exist. This budget also provides journeys that are early morning, late evening and at weekends. Priority for funding socially necessary bus services in Kent is based upon the Government's social inclusion model using access to health care, food shopping, learning and employment as the key considerations.

Only 17 per cent of disabled people are born with a disability, therefore the majority of people develop a disability later on in life, many of whom are older people. Accessibility must therefore be a key issue when considering the needs of older people. This is not only good practice, but is a requirement under the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005. Service providers such as local authorities, shops, cafes and leisure centres have a duty not to discriminate against disabled people. Where physical features make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of a service, the service provider must either remove the feature or alter it so that the disabled person can make use of it. Examples might be ticket machines at stations, a step leading up to a shop or a toilet that isn't wide enough to manoeuvre a wheelchair into.

Transport providers such as those who run buses and trains are also required to ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled people. This could be by ensuring staff are trained in disability awareness, as well as ensuring that new vehicles are made fully accessible, and that existing vehicles are amended to ensure they are accessible for disabled people. Making a vehicle accessible means things like step free access, colour contrast within the vehicle and audible/visual information systems which can assist many older people who might not be registered disabled but nonetheless have restricted mobility or sight and hearing difficulties.

Actions:

- Identify the accessibility needs of older people in the County particularly focussing on the targets highlighted in the Accessibility Strategy for Kent (eg pedestrian access to town centres, percentage of buses with low floor access, access to fresh food etc).
- Ensure that older people continue to be a focus when improving access to key facilities such as healthcare and social opportunities.

Decent homes

KCC's recognition of the importance of decent housing in improving community well being and the quality of living is established in the 'Vision for Kent'. The provision of high quality homes is one of the Vision's nine themes. For the 50+ population, it is particularly important to plan for future housing needs, in relation to both economic wellbeing and independent living. For frail older people, the nature of their housing can have a significant impact on their degree of independence and thus quality of life.

Adapting a person's existing property to make it more suitable for them can be hugely expensive – for the individual or the state. It is also therefore very important that new housing is built to "lifetime homes" standards, making it easier to adapt, and for people to plan ahead where possible. Older people who were home owners were keen to have accredited companies to do home maintenance, because they were worried about "cowboys". Affording house maintenance and home improvements was also an issue – people were not generally aware of the schemes promoted by the Kent Housing Group which include the ten Home Improvement Agencies across the County. The Kent Handyvan scheme was greatly valued, and people also made the connection to feeling safer in their homes (in terms of accidents and crime).

Actions:

- Greater promotion and marketing of schemes that already exist to support older people in house maintenance, home improvement, gardening and so on, including Home Improvement Agencies, the 'Warm Front' scheme, and schemes that quality assure traders (need references/contacts).
- Ensure older people's needs are fully reflected in plans for new communities and developments (sustainable communities agenda).
- See also reference to community volunteering schemes later.
- Safety in the home (eg fire prevention – a key priority for the Kent Fire & Rescue Service)
- Handyvans – further expansion? More publicity?

Perceptions of crime

Although, perhaps surprisingly, this was not a major theme that emerged during the consultation, we know from national and local research that fear of crime can prevent people from accessing social activities, and contribute towards the creation of social isolation and loneliness.

Actions:

- Refer to crime prevention initiatives for older people.
- Role of Community Wardens – any further action needed?
- Perhaps a Kent “Be Smart Be Safe” handbook, with information, advice and contact details, would address a number of issues across the themes raised, not only in relation to safety.

A broad range of activities geared for older people

To increase people’s participation in community life, social inclusion and the contribution they make to society, it is important to ensure that communities have a broad range of activities geared towards older people. It is essential that such people are involved in the planning of such activities. In some cases, older people themselves run activities specifically for older people – for example, over 50s clubs, Pensioner Forums, the Active Retirement Association, and so on. The World Health Organization’s work on Age-friendly Cities has emphasised the importance of older people meeting with their peers and supporting each other. But in addition to this, people also want to mix with different generations and have social activities that are geared to all age groups. We must ensure that older people shape and influence the development of community activities in general, or there is a danger that their particular interests, needs and expertise could be overlooked.

Actions:

- Develop a process by which older people are involved in strategic planning for community infrastructure (if a Kent Council for Senior Citizens is created, this could be one mechanism)
- Improve access to leisure facilities by public transport and walking
- Access to support/advice to set up local activities or events – local communities taking the lead
- More publicity of existing schemes? (eg Adult Education’s programmes for older people; District & Borough targeted activities, Sports Development Unit work)

Volunteering

The majority of volunteers (and those caring for people who need support) in Kent are older people. Voluntary work is important in its own right, providing community support and activities that would otherwise be unaffordable, and enabling knowledge, experience and expertise to be put to good use. There are also benefits for the volunteers in terms of the “feel good” factor from contributing to community life, which brings good self-esteem and mental wellbeing.

In Kent we are fortunate to have a thriving voluntary and community sector. Central government and local public services alike see the need to expand and enhance the “third sector”. Voluntary agencies were keen to emphasise that a strategic approach is needed to ensure their sustainability and to enable them to maintain their ethos, which is distinct from that of the public sector. Considerable action is already underway, including:

- the development of a Kent-wide Voluntary Sector Compact (setting out the relationship between the public and voluntary sectors in Kent)
- targets to increase volunteering in both Towards 2010 and Kent Agreement 2 (the new Local Area Agreement, starting April 2008).
- Other action needed??

Theme 4: Learning

Innovations

The pace at which new ideas and technologies come on stream seems to get faster all the time. A number of older people were anxious about new technology and felt left behind and excluded. There are courses specifically targeted at older people, but perhaps even more are needed. Is there a market here that the private sector could fill, leaving the public sector to focus on the more socially excluded older people? There is a potential virtuous circle, because the more confident older people become with new technology, the easier it is for them to access information, support and social interaction, and there is a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Webcams, telecare and telehealth are not a complete substitute for personal contact, but can be a tremendous supplement to it, enabling people to have virtual face-to-face contact with relatives, friends and professionals on a regular basis and as needed.

Information

At all the workshops this was discussed – people feel that they don’t know how to find information about services, facilities or support at the point they need it. How do we enable people to be well informed without bombarding them with information when they don’t need it? So much effort has already gone into this, so it is disappointing that it is still passing some people by. For example, Kent’s Library Service is now so much broader than simply book lending. The “Ask a Librarian” scheme is fantastic and could be more widely used. Many Kent Libraries have free internet access so people without their own computer can access the web from their library. GP surgeries also need to be information hubs – people expect a great deal from their GPs, and don’t always get it, and perhaps don’t use their pharmacist as much as they could. As more new Gateways open (and they will be based in retail centres where people frequently visit), they will be a valuable source of information for people, as will Kent TV.

Actions:

- Greater publicity, targeted at older people, about the different ways in which people can find out information - face-to-face, by phone, or on the internet.

- Investigate the implications of providing subsidised or free broadband connections for socially isolated or vulnerable people? Could the benefits justify “investing to save”?
- Something specific on adult education?

Theme 5: Independent Living

People want to retain their independence for as long as possible, and need the community to support them in doing so. This is the major objective in ‘Active Lives’, KCC’s ten year vision for adult social care, which sets out a number of commitments for KCC and its partners to deliver.

Person-centred approach

Increasingly people have moved away from the ‘one size fits all’ model of service delivery. Today people rightly expect services to be flexible and targeted at their individual needs rather than expecting people to fit around the service. Over time this is becoming more of a reality through such mechanisms as:

- Direct control of resources – direct payments and individualised budgets for social care
- Involving people directly in the planning and development of future services
- Planning support in a way which focuses on the needs of people

The challenge is to enable the person-centred approach to become universal, and to be applied across different agencies.

Reduce isolation:

The demographic projections for the future strongly indicate that there will be a far greater percentage of people living alone in later life than there has ever been in the past. What action can/should be taken to reduce social isolation? This is a community responsibility. There is plenty of evidence to show that social isolation leads to poor mental health, physical deterioration and generally a poorer quality of life and prognosis for the future. People have a fundamental need to be engaged in society.

Actions:

- How can we create more attractive housing options (across all types of tenure) for older people, which better meet their needs, reduce social isolation, and could also free up more ‘family homes’ for new families?
- How can we encourage more “befriending” voluntary activity?
- Develop more imaginative and available respite for people caring for friends and relatives (including respite in people’s own homes, and holidays for the person being cared for)

- Increase advocacy for vulnerable groups, including people with dementia and people in residential and nursing care, to ensure that their voices are heard.
- Commission more ‘intermediate care’ (a half-way house for people leaving hospital) to help prevent people from moving into residential care.
- Implement “Active Lives” (the 10 year vision for social care in Kent), which includes the above actions, and more.

TAKING FORWARD THE STRATEGY

Older people were keen to know the process by which decisions were made about planning future services. They understood that resources are finite and difficult decisions have to be made about priorities, but wanted the decision-making process to be transparent so that they knew how to influence and were confident that decisions were based on a good understanding of the issues.

Once there is agreement about the priorities for action within this strategy, what mechanisms do we need to deliver the outcomes and monitor progress?

- How should we ensure that we have a mechanism for capturing older people’s input into strategic service development?
- Do we need an ‘older people’ equivalent of the Children’s Trust – ie a Management Board where older people’s issues are brought together?
- Do we need a Kent Older People’s Council/Parliament?

NB To secure discussion and ‘sign up’ to this strategy, need to develop a timetable of discussion with relevant groups/agencies/boards.

Probably need a page of reference documents, and/or glossary e.g.

1. *A Sure Start to Later Life (Dept Communities and Local Government, 2006)*
2. *Our Health Our Care Our Say (Dept Health, 2006)*
3. *Travel, Access and Older People - A review of local transport accessibility planning (Help the Aged, 2006)*
4. *Towards Lifetime Neighbourhoods (Dept Communities & Local Government, Nov 2007)*
5. *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide (World Health Organization, 2007)*
6. *Active Lives, the 10 year vision for social care in Kent (KCC, 2007)*
7. *Local Transport Plan (2006-2011) (KCC, 2006)*
8. *Accessibility Strategy*
9. *Communities Vision (KCC, 2007)*
10. *Regeneration Strategy (KCC 2008, in draft)*
11. *Etc...*