

Ageing

Building a society for all ages and Working together for Older People in Rural Areas

Purpose

This Briefing summarises the new Government Strategy on Ageing: Building a Society for all ages and the related document *Working Together for Older People in Rural Areas* that examines evidence on the social exclusion experienced by older people in rural areas and identifies examples of innovative service delivery that is making a difference.

Introduction

- [*Building a society for all ages*](#) is the new Government Strategy on ageing published in July 2009. It is the follow on from the previous Strategy, [Opportunity Age](#) that has 'largely been delivered'.
- The Strategy is part of a formal consultation process. Government is keen to hear from stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector. It would especially like to receive answers to [10 questions \(an online questionnaire\)](#). The questions include:
 - What would help keep people mobile once they have stopped driving; and
 - Which services should be included when developing one-stop shops?

Background

Most people will be aware of the backdrop to the new strategy in respect of the UK's ageing society and the consequent need for clear policy making with timely and in some cases urgent responses. This situation is summed up in the strategy's introduction:

*'More of us are living longer than ever before...life expectancy has been growing steadily for over a century, but **the UK has just passed a demographic tipping point**. In 2007 for the first time in the UK there were more people over State Pension age than children; an ageing society is no longer coming tomorrow – it is here with us today'.*

As implied above, the ageing population 'continues to be of policy concern in relation to meeting the needs of older people now, and for future welfare provision' ([Managing Resources in Later Life, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009](#)).

However, along with the many challenges, there are of course opportunities, with many older people enjoying greater wealth and health and wishing to maintain or develop their involvement in activities and community life to a greater extent. The strategy states that:

'For the first time pensioners are now less likely than others to be in poverty. Older people have more opportunities to keep working if they want to – over 1.3 million people over State Pension age now have a job. They have been the fastest growing group in employment and report high levels of job satisfaction. Beyond the world of work, life expectancy has continued to grow by around 2 years a decade, and improvements in health waiting times and treatments has helped ensure that three quarters of these extra years are spent in good or fairly good health'. (Building a society for all ages, 2009)

The 'Ageing Strategy' is published alongside [Working Together for Older People in Rural Areas](#) (The Social Exclusion Task Force and Defra, July 2009). This report examines evidence on the social exclusion experienced by older people in rural areas and identifies examples of innovative service delivery that is making a difference. Several practical actions identified in the study have been integrated into the Government's new ageing strategy.

Key Aspects - Working Together for Older People in Rural Areas

- The rural population is ageing faster than other areas of the country
- Many rural areas will increasingly face challenges in delivering services for older people
- Socially excluded older people can be hidden from view in rural areas
- Timely and responsive transport is key to accessing local services
- Public service reform is central to ensuring ageing is a positive experience
- Public services and local communities are already adapting, innovating and learning to thrive in the context of rural ageing
- Policymakers should not create silos for rural areas – but additional support and guidance can be appropriate to assist planning for an ageing rural population

The context of ageing in rural areas

In rural areas, the population is ageing faster. At the last Census (2001), 28% of the population in England were 55+ while in rural areas the figure is 31%. Almost 1 in 3 people in rural areas were aged 55+, compared with 1 in 4 people living in urban areas. ([The Housing and Support Needs of Older People in Rural Areas, CRC and the Housing Corporation, 2006](#))

There are also various issues of disadvantage experienced by older people in rural areas. The CRC also published [Rural disadvantage: Quality of life and disadvantage amongst older people – a pilot study \(CRC, 2006\)](#).

The study concluded:

'Above all, the research highlights the dispersed, and often hidden, nature of disadvantage in rural locations'

... 'rural older people tend to play down their experience of disadvantage. While most of those taking part in this study identified themselves as getting by reasonably well financially, several interviews provided evidence of real hardship'.

In spite of the above evidence, older people are also a 'dynamic force in English rural life', making an increasingly important contribution to local economies, and the cultural and social welfare of their communities ([The Ageing Countryside, Age Concern 2006](#)) – not available free online but can be bought from Age Concern's Bookshop).

These findings are echoed by the full report of [Working together for Older People in Rural Areas](#).

Key Aspects - Building a society for all ages

Improving the design of places for an ageing society

To continue to deliver the agenda set out in [Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods](#) including:

- Publishing a report on lifetime neighbourhoods and implementation
- Working with external partners and people in later life to provide practical guidance for local authorities in turning existing neighbourhoods into lifetime neighbourhoods. This will include **consideration of the different needs of different places including urban, market towns, coastal and remote rural areas**
- Encouraging an holistic approach to preparation for later life
- Launch a 'Life Planner' that will support individuals in planning ahead for later life. This will provide advice and information about financial planning for retirement and links to other services, including the NHS Mid-life LifeCheck, FirstStop (a care and housing advice service), and information about what to consider when thinking about moving home or area, including to the country

Support for people to travel

- Develop a resource guide later this year to support areas in designing transport solutions that promote the well-being of people in later life including, among other things, raising awareness of different transport options, particularly for people living in rural areas. These options include **community bus services that are available on request rather than to a set timetable or route**
- Support for drivers as they get older. The 'driving for life' package will establish standards for schemes to offer self-review, self-assessment and, where appropriate, encourage refresher training from specifically qualified driver trainers. We will also increase the provision of mobility services to provide advice and support to older drivers around adaptations and driving safely in later life

Improving access to opportunities

- Build on and complement the work to **address digital inclusion by providing mentoring and support to assist socially excluded older people to benefit from the opportunities of technology**. This will involve young people helping older people to get the most out of new technology. The projects will initially directly target 21,000 people but will build on this with the aim to reach the 600,000 people who live in sheltered housing, in the vicinity of sheltered housing schemes **or other possible community hubs like village halls in rural areas**

Helping people with a disability or in ill-health

- Introducing a 'keeping well in later life' programme of health prevention measures that will bring together information on existing 'entitlements'; advise people in later life about how to access help with falls, foot care, and other preventative services; as well as address other conditions that impact on the quality of people's later lives, including continence care, depression and arthritis
- The strategy highlights the **LinkAge Plus approach** for example through **mobile Village Agents in rural areas of Gloucestershire providing joined-up services to older people through an initial point of contact** including benefits, care, health, transport, home security and adaptations. Delivery is tailored to local circumstances and needs

Summary

ACRE welcomes the new strategy especially in the way it has integrated the findings from the Social Exclusion Task Force report Working Together for Older People in Rural Areas.

ACRE through its membership, RCAN (the Rural Community Action Network) and partnership work with other key stakeholders through for example the Rural Affairs Group would welcome the opportunity to shape the development of the Strategy and how it will evolve and operate in rural areas.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

Somerford Court, Somerford Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1TW
Tel 01285 653477 Fax 01285 654537 news@acre.org.uk www.acre.org.uk