



Response to Office of the First Minister and
deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) Consultation

Active Ageing Strategy 2014-2020

May 2014

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1 Introduction

Age Sector Platform (ASP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the 'Active Ageing' consultation from the Office of the First and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) as this strategy has the potential to improve the quality of life of older people across Northern Ireland if developed further and fully implemented.

ASP believes that the new Ageing Strategy must provide the overarching framework through which Government can deliver for all older people in Northern Ireland now as well as preparing for the opportunities and challenges presented in an ageing society.

Age Sector Platform, which was established in 2008, is a charity which supports older people to have their say on the issues that matter most to their lives. The organisation has a membership base of 34 older people's organisations and networks which represent approximately 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland.

Age Sector Platform also runs the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament (NIPP) each year which surveys pensioners from across each county to identify their key areas of concern. Since the NIPP was established in 2011 it has held 28 local parliaments in seventeen different towns and cities across Northern Ireland, conducted over 3,500 surveys and held three two-day parliaments where seventy-four motions have been passed by Members of the Pensioners Parliament (MPPs). The 4th Annual NI Pensioners Parliament will take place on the 29-30 May 2014. The results of this extensive engagement with older people has formed the basis of our response to this consultation and we have included references to relevant motions passed by the parliament throughout our response to demonstrate the support from older people for the views outlined in this response.

ASP members have played a key role in the development of the strategy over the past four to five years with a number of our member organisations active members of the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group (ASAG) throughout this process.

ASP welcomes the commitment the Department has shown to involve older people and their representatives throughout every stage in the process and while there remain a number of issues outstanding that need to be addressed in the strategy we believe that the process of involving older people is to be commended and we hope that this positive approach will continue as the Strategy is finalised and then implemented.

ASP strongly believes that if the Active Ageing Strategy is to succeed where the previous strategy failed then ongoing engagement with and participation with older people throughout the lifetime of the strategy needs to be a key cornerstone of the implementation process in the coming years. ASP would therefore welcome further

discussions with the Department on how this can be achieved in the coming weeks and months so a clear action plan on participation and delivery can be developed.

Age Sector Platform's various committees of older people have spent a considerable period of time considering the consultation document and the main comments from our membership are included in two main sections. The first section provides an overview of general comments about the quality of the draft Strategy while the second section provides comments on each of the proposed Strategic Aims. We hope the Department will find our comments constructive and that they will be fully considered as they work towards delivering a final strategy.

2 Overarching Comments on the Active Ageing Strategy

Participation with Older People

Age Sector Platform has actively participated with Departmental officials responsible for developing the Active Ageing Strategy in a range of ways throughout the development of the draft Strategy.

A number of ASP's member organisations have been members of the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group (ASAG) which has provided advice on the content and structure of the draft Strategy. While we have welcomed the opportunity to provide our views in this way and hope these have been helpful to the Department we wish to highlight that we remain independent from the Strategy and have not endorsed it as a result of membership of this group.

ASP remains committed to being part of this group following the publication of the final strategy to help with the implementation and monitoring process but this will only be confirmed once new terms of reference can be agreed for this group as it will clearly have a different role in future.

OFMdFM has also engaged with the NI Pensioners Parliament throughout this process. Junior Ministers have attended a number of Pensioners Parliament events over the past few years and Department officials presented the Strategy's draft Strategic Aims at the 2013 NI Pensioners Parliament to around 200 older people from across Northern Ireland. More recently, the Draft Strategy and consultation was launched at our Belfast parliament in February 2014. ASP welcomes this engagement with our members and with the older people who attend our events and believes this is very good practice and something that should be built upon as the Strategy is rolled out. More comments on this are provided under the Participation Strategic Aim later in the document.

Focus on Positive Ageing

ASP welcomes the focus on positive ageing that comes across in the consultation document. We believe that an effective ageing strategy should not only tackle the serious problems that many older people face but that it should also aim to promote the positive aspects of an ageing population and to take positive action to enable older people to remain active and involved citizens who can contribute to contribute greatly to our society.

This is an area where there has been a clear improvement in the draft strategy and ASP is pleased that the Department has listened and responded to the advice provided by the ASAG and that it has led to improvements in the tone of the strategy.

ASP believes that it is important that we focus on maximising the benefits of an ageing population and highlight the positive contribution that older people make to society. A key part of the strategy should be supporting and promoting the skills, experience and knowledge of older people and to highlight how they contribute to the economy, act as volunteers, carers, business people and act as leaders in their communities.

However, to enable this to happen and for older people to achieve their maximum potential government must put in place the policies to support active ageing and the Ageing Strategy has to be central in making this happen. Following the failure of its predecessor 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society' to make any measurable impact on the lives of older people, this time around older people have higher expectations that under our devolved administration this strategy can have much greater impact and it is important that these expectations are fulfilled. There is no further time to waste if Northern Ireland is to prepare itself properly for the ageing population and to ensure that this success story is harnessed and utilised rather than becoming a problem for policy makers in the medium to longer term due to the lack of action now.

Importance of baseline data and statistics

ASP notes that work is continuing to provide up to date statistics which can then be used to create Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to help measure progress against the aims of the strategy. This is extremely important but we are very disappointed that this work was not completed earlier so that it could be included in the strategy when it was launched for consultation.

In order to evaluate the impact of the strategy it is vital that we have as much data as possible to illustrate the situation in which older people find themselves now across a wide range of areas from poverty to healthcare to fear of crime. Following the production of these papers then clear strategic targets need to be set to make progress across all the main areas with resources provided to ensure there is a realistic opportunity to make progress.

UN Principles

ASP welcomes the use of the UN Principles for Older Persons as providing a framework for the strategy and linking these principles to the strategic aims.

Lack of Targets

ASP is extremely disappointed that the strategy does not provide detailed strategic outcomes which can be used as measures to evaluate the impact of the strategy on older people's lives.

We are aware that work is on-going to develop a set of high-level outcomes together with a more detailed statistical paper providing baseline indicators. These statistics and related outcomes are a key element of the strategy and it is very disappointing that these were not included in time for the public consultation as the absence of this information makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive response to what is being proposed.

Once the statistical paper and strategic outcomes are developed it is vital that there is consultation on them before any final strategy is signed off as these will be core to the potential success of the ageing strategy.

It is also extremely important for the evaluation and monitoring of the strategy that there is a series of KPI's to measure against, otherwise the evaluation process will be extremely difficult and it will be hard to see what impact the strategy will have.

We recognise that a number of action plans with specific projects have been developed but again there is an absence of clear targets in some of these and what the impact of the projects will be. For example, the development of Northern Ireland as an age-friendly region is a positive and ambitious aim but it is unclear how this will be achieved and what the impact on older people will be as a result.

While the action plans and related signature projects are to be welcomed, much more need to be developed and the aims of the strategy can only be achieved if there are also newly developed policies across government departments and their agencies.

Back in 2012, the NI Pensioners Parliament passed the following motion which highlighted the importance of a strategy with adequate resources and clear targets.

M2 NIPP calls on the NI Executive to develop a comprehensive, well-resourced and challenging Age Strategy with specific targets and timescales to improve the lives of older people.

Lack of Budget Commitments and allocation

ASP believes that if this strategy is going to deliver where the previous one failed then it must be properly resourced in terms of financial commitments to projects and staff resources across government to ensure agreed actions are carried out effectively to achieve the required impact.

All of the action plans need to be resourced as do all government departments responsible for tackling key ageing issues. Unfortunately, not even all the current signature projects listed have had budgets confirmed yet and it remains unclear what size of budget is attached to the implementation of the Strategy in general.

The lack of detail in relation to budget allocation again makes it difficult to comprehensively respond to the proposals contained in the consultation document and we would call on OFMdfM to provide more clarity around this before any final strategy is implemented. It is also somewhat unclear whether such a budget will be ring fenced for older people's issues given that the funding will come from the Delivering Social Change (DSC) model which will be responsible for a wider range of strategies.

Although OFMdfM did explain the DSC model to the ASAG on a couple of occasions there is still significant concerns about whether the structure will deliver for older people. Concerns have been raised from a number of our member organisations on whether this structure will ensure that older people's needs get the priority they deserve. ASP would seek assurances from OFMdfM that the model of delivery being proposed will ensure that the strategy gets the priority and focus it needs if it is going to deliver for older people.

ASP also believes that there should be clear linkages with commitments in the Programme for Government (PfG) and any other relevant policies and strategies across Government departments.

Where money has been allocated to projects it is unclear whether this is additional funding or part of departments existing budget and ASP requests that clarity is provided on this also. ASP is also concerned that a number of Government departments have little or no mention in the strategy as it seems unlikely the vision of an 'Age Friendly' society can be achieved without all government departments working together in partnership.

Signature Projects

ASP welcomes the commitment to provide a range of funded new signature projects to help meet the aims of the strategy and while we welcome a number of the proposed projects listed in the action plan we would seek further information and clarity on how these projects were decided upon.

We also believe that a number of the projects listed are not additional or new projects but simply a continuation of current work programmes from parliaments. It is clear that in order to tackle issues like low incomes, fuel poverty and fear of crime that there is a clear need for additional projects that are properly funded.

It is unclear what the proposed impact of the signature projects will be due to a lack of strategic outcomes for many of them although we do note that some, such as the benefit uptake campaign, do helpfully provide a target figure. This level of detail needs to be replicated across all projects so we can see what the impact of any work will be.

Programme for Government Commitments

ASP is extremely concerned that the commitment to 'extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services.' is not included in Annex 1 of the draft Active Ageing Strategy. This is a key programme for Government commitment for older people and we firmly believe this should be included in Annex 1.

We are also concerned that the reference to this important piece of legislation in the Action Plan is a weaker version of the Programme for Government commitment and seek assurances from OFMdfM that this legislation will be introduced as planned.

Gaps in Issues

While the strategy covers many of the top issues facing older people in Northern Ireland there are some significant omissions that need to be addressed in the final strategy.

Tackling Low Incomes

There is very little in relation to older peoples incomes which is a major gap given the impact that low incomes and poverty has on the quality of life for older people. While accepting that Pensions policy is the remit of the UK Government at Westminster and that most decisions on pensions and benefits like the Winter Fuel Allowance are also made there it does not mean that the Stormont Executive should not have a role in improving income levels for older people.

While parity applies on most financial decisions relating to older people, the ongoing 'standoff' on welfare reform shows that Northern Ireland does have some role, if limited, in agreeing on the implementation of UK policy. Pensioner poverty remains a serious problem in Northern Ireland and the strategy needs to have a target to reduce it during the lifetime of the strategy as financial poverty is interlinked with other responsibilities of the NI Assembly including health, fuel poverty and community safety.

The fact that Westminster controls the majority of decisions in relation to income makes it even more vital for the NI Assembly to create alternative, local based solutions to help older people on low incomes, such as special tariffs for energy bills.

Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty has been the top concern of pensioners in Northern Ireland since the NI Pensioners Parliament was established in 2011 yet there is very little in relation to energy prices or pensioners incomes in the strategy, two of the three strands that constitute fuel poverty. This is a serious weakness in the strategy and urgent steps need to be taken to provide the same levels of financial support available to vulnerable consumers including older people which are available throughout the rest of the UK and Ireland.

Older people face a range of income-related issues such as savings, debt and financial elder abuse but again there is little in the strategy in relation to tackling these important issues.

Vision and Purpose

ASP believes that this section of the strategy is not strong or ambitious enough and doesn't set the necessary tone that the strategy is going to deliver for older people and impact positively on their lives. We recommend that this section is revised to make it stronger.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The consultation document contains a proposal to develop a statistical paper with indicators baseline data when the strategy is finalised following the public consultation, which will include the most appropriate and robust statistics to measure the impact and outcomes of the Strategy and inform its reviews.

While a paper with this data is welcome and an essential part of the strategy, again this information should have been contained in the consultation document. The absence of the statistical data and strategic outcomes makes it impossible to comment on what should be key elements of any strategy.

ASP believes that this information is too important not to get feedback from the public on and therefore requests that the Department conduct a further consultation on the high level outcomes and baseline indicators once they become available.

ASP believes that there should be a regular review of the strategy built into the process to ensure a close eye is kept on all the actions required for delivery and it is vital that older people play a central role in the monitoring process.

ASP is aware that OFMdfM see a role for the ASAG as part of the monitoring of progress of the strategy as it is implemented and this is to be welcome. However, this would only be useful if there are clear, measureable targets in place for the Group to assess how the strategy is working.

Communications

Communication with older people throughout the lifetime of the strategy will be vital and should get the attention and resources required. It is vital that mechanisms are put into place to enable older people to give their opinions on developing or implemented policies on a regular basis during the strategy.

ASP welcomes OFMdfM's commitment to engaging with our membership base in the development of the strategy and we would hope this engagement can be developed further so that older people remain closely involved with the strategy during its implementation.

ASP's motto is 'Speaking from Experience' because we strongly believe that the best way of getting feedback on how policies and services are being delivered is by hearing the views of those receiving the services i.e. older people themselves. Through our extensive network of membership across Northern Ireland and through the NI Pensioners Parliament ASP can play a key role in supporting the communications with older people and in facilitating their ongoing engagement throughout the strategy.

ASP is currently reviewing the future development of the NI Pensioners Parliament from 2015 onwards and believes there may be an opportunity to link the parliament into the communications, review and monitoring processes around the Strategy.

3 Strategic Aims

In this section we have provided a number of comments on the Strategic Aims and Action Plans which hopefully the Department will find helpful. However, with the lack of detail around the financial support and timescales for some projects listed it is difficult to provide a full and comprehensive response.

STRATEGIC AIM 1: INDEPENDENCE

ASP agrees that supporting older people's independence should be a core strategic aim of the Active Ageing Strategy and that achieving this will require a series of commitments and actions across a range of government departments. We have outlined below some of the key issues that older people have raised with us over recent years which need to be addressed if the strategy is to achieve its first aim.

Tackling Fear of Crime

Fear of crime remains one of the top issues of concern for older people across Northern Ireland and is something that needs to be reduced significantly to enable more older people to live active, healthy lives. While the fear of crime is much higher than the actual likelihood of being a victim of crime, that fear is real for older people experiencing it, and it can have a serious impact on their mental and physical health.

We also know from our research that fear of crime affects many older peoples everyday lives in different ways. We know that the levels of fear and the regularity of it differ among older people and the various underlying causes will need to be dealt with in different ways.

Unfortunately, some older people are living in constant fear while others only experience it a few times a year but we need to take steps to tackle each of these levels of fear using a mixture of traditional and innovative ways. ASP currently has a committee of older people working hard with key partners to identify ways that the issue can be tackled.

The 2013 NI Pensioners Parliament survey revealed that 64% of older people were fearful of crime and this made it the third biggest concern for older people across NI.

From the research conducted into fear of crime at our Pensioners Parliament events during 2013 a number of clear themes emerged. These were grouped under the following six headings

- Communication with Older People
- Connections between Older People and the Police

- Vulnerability of Older People
- Media Impact on Fear
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Intergenerational Issues
- Conviction Rates and Sentencing

Since April 2013, ASP has received funding from the Department of Justice to try to uncover the reasons behind the high levels of fear and to identify what steps can be taken to reduce it. The funding for the two year project into fear of crime is a welcome first step from government to try to address this complex problem but there is a requirement to establish a longer term strategy for trying to reduce the fear of crime across the lifetime of this new Active Ageing Strategy.

ASP notes that the funding outlined for Community Safety Partnerships in the strategy is only up to 2015 and ASP strongly believes that a longer term commitment to tackling fear of crime is needed. We recommend the department look at a signature project that could tackle this issue throughout the lifetime of the strategy. ASP would be happy to meet officials to discuss learning from the DOJ project to date and keep officials updated as the second year of the current project is rolled out.

Accessible Transport

Being able to remain active and access goods and services is a central part of older people living independent lives. Older people need transport to do shopping, attend medical or hospital appointments, meet friends and family and to volunteer. These are just some of the activities that the Smartpass is currently used for.

The decision to introduce the Senior Smartpass remains one of the most forward thinking and effective policy measures introduced by the NI Assembly since devolution and it is without doubt something that older people appreciate and value because of the impact it has on their daily lives.

In recent times, suggestions have been made that free travel for all older people may not continue in the future but this is something that older people would oppose very strongly as they know how it supports their independence and enhances their quality of life.

The following motion in relation to the 'Bus Pass' was passed at the 2012 NIPP.

T1 NIPP calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give older people a concrete guarantee their Bus Pass is safe thus, enabling them participate more fully in society.

ASP believes that this strategy offers an opportunity for the NI Executive to be unequivocal about the future of the Senior Smartpass and we recommend that the Strategy commits to protecting free travel for all people aged 60 or over during the lifetime of the Active Ageing strategy.

Rural Transport

ASP believes that the Government needs to support existing community transport schemes that provide a vital service to older people living in rural and remote communities. Our 2014 Pensioners Parliament survey is highlighting increasing numbers of older people listing isolation and loneliness as a concern so it is vital that existing methods of connecting older people to key services are strengthened so that older people in rural areas are supported to remain active.

The following motion supporting these views was passed at the 2012 NIPP.

T2 NIPP calls on the Minister for Regional Development to improve transport in rural areas to enable older people and others to make the necessary trips to doctors, hospitals and other essential appointments.

Pensioner Income levels

ASP is disappointed with the strategy's proposed actions in relation to improving pensioner income given the continuing high levels of pensioner poverty across Northern Ireland.

While we welcome continued efforts to increase benefit uptake and are pleased to see the recorded increases in uptake we feel that much more is needed if there is going to be a measureable reduction in pensioner poverty during the lifetime of the strategy.

ASP is calling for the establishment of a pilot to be established in NI where pension credit will be paid automatically to a number of older people for a period of time to encourage uptake of the benefit in the longer term.

The following motion was passed at the 2011 NIPP.

PB3 NIPP calls on the NI Assembly to call for the automatic payment of pension credit in Northern Ireland so that all pensioners get what they are entitled to and so many of the most vulnerable in society are able to have a decent quality of life.

Fuel Poverty

Since the Pensioners Parliament was established, 'Keeping Warm in Winter/Energy Prices' has been the top issue of concern for older people across every part of Northern Ireland. In the 2013 NIPP survey, almost 4 out of every 5 (79%) older people surveyed listed keeping warm in winter as a top concern and the issue is coming out on top of the draft 2014 NIPP survey as well.

Fuel poverty is made up of three strands – income, energy prices and energy efficiency. While we are aware that DSD does not have control over all these factors, as the Government Department with lead responsibility for tackling fuel poverty, we believe that it is incumbent on the Minister to take the lead on this matter and organise a cross departmental approach to tackling this serious issue.

The statistics shows that Northern Ireland has the highest level of fuel poverty compared to any other part of the UK, with around 42% of homes recorded as being in fuel poverty.

However, the figures when it comes to older people are even worse with 61% of over 60s and a shocking 75% of people over the age of 75 suffering in fuel poverty.

ASP is particularly concerned about older people who rely on home heating oil as the cost is even higher than gas and the payment system for oil means that those who can't afford a large delivery end up spending even more on their fuel. As a result of this, the NIPP passed the following motion at the 2012 Pensioners Parliament supporting DSD's announcement of a 'Pay as you go' scheme to help to address this issue (see below).

E7 NIPP welcomes the development of a 'pay as you go' oil scheme and hopes that this will help older people to manage the cost of heating their home and alleviate the hardship that many are currently facing.

However, we are aware that this scheme has now been stopped and ASP would ask the Department for Social Development (DSD) to reconsider how older people, and particularly those reliant on oil, can be assisted with the energy bills in future.

Fuel poverty figures show that while energy efficiency measures are very important and necessary, much more needs to be done to increase income and lower energy prices if we are to significantly reduce the levels of fuel poverty in the foreseeable future. Age Sector Platform and the NI Pensioners Parliament accept that DSD cannot tackle this alone and this is why it passed the following motion at the 2012 NI Pensioners Parliament.

E5 In recognising the increasing levels of fuel poverty in NI, the NIPP calls on the NI Executive to develop and implement an action plan to eradicate fuel poverty.

ASP is therefore calling on the NI Executive collectively to make tackling fuel poverty a top priority for the next ten years. The stark statistics in relation to Excess Winter Deaths each year illustrates that being able to keep warm is a matter of life and death for older people.

The latest figures show that in the winter of 2012/13, 560 people in Northern Ireland died and 550 (98.2%) of these people were aged 65 or over. A further breakdown of these figures shows that exactly 500 of these deaths were people aged 75 and over and this again mirrors the higher levels of fuel poverty for this age group. Age Sector Platform and the NI Pensioners Parliament believes that much more needs to be done to address the scandal of hundreds of older people dying each year in Northern Ireland due to cold related illnesses.

Review of Warm Homes Scheme

The current 'Warm Homes Scheme' has a clear target of 9,000 homes per annum helped by the measures. However, the recent 'Affordable Warmth' consultation proposed changing this scheme to an area based approach in future.

While ASP is not against adopting an area based approach in principle we require further evidence to suggest it is likely to be more effective in lifting more consumers out of fuel poverty than the current scheme.

The proposed new scheme does not make it clear how many homes will be helped per year in the new model. The consultation document refers continuously to the 33,000 homes in severe fuel poverty which will be the main target of the scheme but provides no guarantees that there is the budget to alleviate fuel poverty in these households. ASP has asked the Department in its response to this consultation if the money needed to get these homes out of fuel poverty been secured and over what timescale is this likely to be achieved.

The absence of clear targets means that it is difficult to measure the potential impact of the proposed new model against the scheme currently in place and therefore it is not possible to support any major shift in energy efficiency measures without this information.

Warm Homes Discount Scheme

In Great Britain many older people benefit from a warm homes discount scheme which provides them with a discount of £130 off their electricity bill during the winter.

The Warm Homes Discount Scheme was established in 2011 as a new mandatory scheme worth up to £1.1bn over four years.

Under the scheme

- Up to 2 million homes in Great Britain would be helped per year
- The Warm Home Discount requires energy companies by law to give a discount on energy bills to more of their most vulnerable customers.
- The plan is for older, poorer pensioners to receive up to £130 off their electricity bills. Other groups such as low income families and those with long term illnesses and disabilities may also receive this discount.
- This mandatory scheme replaced the previous voluntary agreement with energy suppliers to provide better focused help to vulnerable consumers.
- Over the four years of the scheme to 2015, the Warm Home Discount will be worth up to £1.1bn and projected to help around two million households per year.

ASP would like to see a similar scheme set up through Power NI in Northern Ireland so that pensioners here get the same help as those in the rest of the UK and the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment should take the lead in developing such a scheme.

E6 NIPP calls on the NI Executive to take steps to encourage energy suppliers in Northern Ireland to introduce the Warm Homes Discount Scheme that is available to pensioners throughout the rest of the UK.

ASP has been conducting research into older people's heating bills over the past few months during our local parliaments and the results, which will be unveiled at the 2014 NI Pensioners Parliament, highlighted again the cost of heating for older people across Northern Ireland. The survey has also highlighted how reliance on home heating oil is a particular problem and that steps should be taken to regulate the oil industry in Northern Ireland. The following motion was passed at the 2011 NI Pensioners Parliament.

E4 NIPP calls for the oil industry in Northern Ireland to be regulated to help ensure that oil customers get value for money.

Immediate Response to help older people

In the short term an opportunity exists to help those most in need of fuel poverty at this time. ASP strongly recommends that some of the additional £136 million received in the block grant this year should be used to assist older people on low incomes to pay their energy bills. Two years ago, the NI Executive announced a package of measures to help a number of vulnerable groups with the cost of energy and this included a payment of £100 to all older people receiving pension credit and we would urge the NI Executive to respond to this serious issue again.

ASP would urge the Ministers in OFMdfM, both the First and deputy First Minister and the Junior Ministers responsible for older people, to support the proposal to use some of the additional money to assist older people struggling to pay their energy bills at this time.

STRATEGIC AIM 2: PARTICIPATION

ASP believes that engagement with older people has to be a central part of this strategy and there needs to be a strong commitment to support older people to engage with government on all aspects of the strategy throughout its lifetime.

While we welcome the commitment to involve older people the section on participation needs to be significantly strengthened to show how this aim is to be achieved.

It is vital that the voices, views and experiences of older people are heard and taken into account by government in designing, delivering and monitoring implementation of all policy, legislative and service development which impacts upon the lives of older people. While this is already a legislative requirement under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 it also makes sense from a strategic planning point of view.

We recommend that high level strategic outcomes are developed to support the strategic aim of participation in the strategy and that key commitments are made to support older people to have a key role in the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. These commitments need to be properly resourced to ensure that this strategic aim is achieved so that older people can gain a sense of ownership of the strategy going forward.

We welcome the commitment to involve older people more in the development of government policies so that government can benefit from their skills, experience and knowledge so that the services that are produced as a result best meet their needs.

This principle aligns exactly with the principles and values of Age Sector Platform and we have a number of ideas about how we could provide support to the Department in meeting this key strategic aim over the strategy's lifetime. We would welcome discussions with officials in relation to potential projects that could be established to see how we can meet this aim in the most effective way.

The NI Pensioners Parliament was established in 2011 and since then it has succeeded in engaging with thousands of people from across all areas of Northern Ireland in discussions around policy development on issues that matter to them.

We note the reference to the Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing which mentions the particular involvement of older women but are disappointed by the lack of any proposed projects to deliver this aim. Around 70% of the NI Pensioners Parliament in 2013 was made up of older women so again this may be a useful vehicle to support this international action plan as part of the strategy.

The Pensioners Parliament is now being recognised as a model of best practice for older engagement and advocacy and over the past year our CEO has been asked to speak across the UK about its development and success and to advise other groups

in society who are interested in developing their own forms of engagement with hard to reach and vulnerable groups.

ASP is currently in the process of reviewing progress to date with the Pensioners Parliament with a view to developing it further in the future and we believe that there may be the opportunity for the Pensioners Parliament to play a role in the implementation and review of the strategy going forward. As this internal review process is in progress, ASP would request the possibility of meeting with officials in the coming weeks to identify whether there is potential to form partnerships around elements within the strategy.

Strengths of NIPP Model

The NIPP is an inclusive, cross community and Northern Ireland wide project that reaches out to older people from every area and background. Its grassroots, 'bottom-up' approach to advocacy appeals to a wide range of people and its format has been specially designed to ensure that every single person who takes part gets an opportunity to have their say on the issues discussed. As well as being cross-community in nature it also has an excellent urban/rural mix of participants and has also involved garnering the views of the main ethnic minority groups of older people living in NI.

The NIPP has also been successful in getting more men actively involved in talking about the issues that affect them which is something the age sector has struggled to do in the past. The Pensioners Parliament has captured the imagination of a large section of older people in Northern Ireland and has captured the views of more individuals not involved in older peoples groups and networks.

The results from the evaluation of participants at the 2012 NIPP show that:

- 9 out of 10 older people (90.3%) who attended the NI Pensioners Parliament in 2012 said that they were more aware of local and regional decision making structures as a result of attending the NIPP.
- 69.4% of older people who attended the NIPP said they were more aware of the benefits to which they might be entitled.
- 71% of older people who attended the NIPP said they knew more about the services/facilities in their local area.
- 9 out of 10 older people (91.1%) who attended the NIPP said their knowledge of issues affecting older people had increased.
- 8 out of 10 older people (79.7%) who attended the NIPP said their level of knowledge about their rights had increased.

- Almost 9 out of 10 older people (88.8%) who attended the NIPP said they were now more confident to share their views.
- 8 out of 10 older people (79.9%) who attended the NIPP said they were now more aware of the channels through which they could influence.
- 9 out of 10 older people (89.6%) who attended the NIPP said they were now more interested in reading and responding to government consultations.
- 84% of older people who attended the NIPP said they felt more connected to their own age group
- 4 out of 5 (79.2%) older people who attended the NIPP said they had made new friends
- 4 out of 5 (79.3%) older people who attended the NIPP said they felt more active

The following motion backing the need for a Pensioners Parliament was passed at the 2013 NI Pensioners Parliament.

M11 NIPP calls for the Pensioners Parliament to receive the financial support needed to be maintained and developed further in the future so that the voices of older people are heard on key debates that affect their lives for many years to come. (100% of delegates backed the motion.)

Therefore, for the above reasons we believe that OFMdFM should consider more fully the role the NI Pensioners Parliament can play in the ongoing development, review and monitoring of the Active Ageing strategy over its lifetime.

Funding for Groups/Sector

The document highlights the importance of the involvement of older people and organisations representing older people in the development of public policy, and the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group has advised that practical and financial support for older people's groups is needed to enable this to happen.

It is disappointing that there is no commitment in the strategy to this and we strongly recommend that this is revised in the final strategy. Many older peoples groups could benefit from small amounts of funding and more must also be done to help groups access existing funding schemes that could support them in their valuable work.

Action Plan

ASP welcomes the commitment to involve older people and their representative groups in the development and implementation of the Active Ageing Strategy in the Action Plan and that the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group will be a key group involved in the monitoring of the Strategy.

However, the Action Plan does not specifically reference this monitoring role for older people and representative groups and ASP believes strongly that these organisations must also be involved in the action plan monitoring as well. It is vital that the monitoring arrangements are developed along with age sector representatives to ensure this role is meaningful and effective and ASP would seek discussions with officials at an early opportunity once the consultation period has ended.

Isolation and loneliness

We note that isolation and loneliness are referred to at the Strategic Aim, but there does not appear to be any specific projects in mind to tackle this issue. Provisional findings from the 2014 Pensioners Parliament survey has shown a significant increase in the number of people listing isolation and loneliness as a top concern and this is something that ASP and the NI Pensioners Parliament will want to see further action on in the coming year.

STRATEGIC AIM 3: CARE

Age Sector Platform (ASP) and the NI Pensioners Parliament (NIPP) has supported the general principle behind the Compton Report that home should be the hub of care for older people where possible but as long as there are the resources in place to ensure this care can be delivered to a high standard.

In 2012, the Pensioners Parliament passed the following motion.

HS8 NIPP welcomes the main thrust of the Compton Report that accepts that the home should be the hub of care for older people, with more services provided at home and in the community.

The following motion was also passed at the same parliament by 95% of delegates.

HS10 NIPP calls on the Health Minister to ensure that any changes proposed to health and social care takes into account any negative impact on older people and takes measures to mitigate this impact to ensure that older people receive high quality healthcare.

Over the past year it has become increasingly clear that older people's confidence in the Transforming Your Care (TYC) process has been undermined by a number of factors. This has included the uncertainty surrounding the future of statutory residential homes as well as increasing concerns over insufficient levels of domiciliary care packages in the community.

Through our consultation with older people and from hearing first-hand the concerns of residents and family members affected by some of the changes, it is clear that there is a lack of trust and confidence in the process and this uncertainty is leading to high levels of anxiety among some of those directly affected by changes.

Concerns about health and social care provision in general have increased amongst older people over the past year with 47% of older people listing it as a top concern in the 2013 NI Pensioners Parliament survey, a 16% increase on the previous year's survey.

The issue of the future role of statutory residential homes was a key concern at our 2013 Pensioners Parliament and the following motion was passed at the parliament.

HS14 NIPP expresses serious concern regarding the recent announcements about the closing of statutory residential homes and in particular on the impact this had on current residents. NIPP is particularly concerned with the lack of engagement and communication with older people affected by the changes and calls for an urgent review to ensure this situation does not reoccur in future.

Equality Impact Assessment

Age Sector Platform remains concerned that there has been an inadequate equality impact assessment carried out on this policy and the wider impact of Transforming Your Care on older people in general.

This led to the following motion being passed at the 2013 NI Pensioners Parliament.

HS15 NIPP calls for a full Equality Impact Assessment to be carried out on the Transforming Your Care proposals as a matter of urgency to establish the full impact of them on older people.

This motion was supported by 99% of the NIPP and we still believe such an action is needed to identify the full potential impact on vulnerable older people as a result of major changes to the health and social care system.

Age Discrimination in Healthcare

The extension of the age equality legislation to health and social care is important due to the wide ranging services included in health and social care.

Comments from the UK Government highlight the value of this legislation. It has said that the introduction of age legislation in Great Britain will 'require practitioners in health and social care to make a thorough assessment based on an individual's needs in order to objectively justify a decision. It will allow practitioners to take into account an individual's age where it is right to do so, but not where it is not'.

The UK Government is also of the view that the legislation 'will ensure better access to services allowing older people a fairer or more equitable access to diagnoses and treatment by ensuring that age is no longer used as an arbitrary indicator, rather than the individual's health' .

The following motion was passed at the 2012 Pensioners Parliament.

M3 NIPP welcomes the commitment in the PfG to outlaw age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services and calls on the NI Executive to ensure this legislation is in place by as early as possible but no later than the end of this Assembly term.

Preventative Health Measures

The Active Ageing strategy has to make preventative health measures a key priority as well and many of these measures overlap with other strands of the strategy.

ASP strongly believes that free travel, increasing incomes, reducing fuel poverty and tackling fear of crime all can have significant positive impacts on older people's health and this is why it is important that a holistic approach is taken by this strategy so that these linkages across various policy strands are recognised and supported.

The very first Health and Social Care motion passed by the Pensioners Parliament in 2011 was the following:

HS1 NIPP calls for increased funding for preventative healthcare programmes to help maintain the quality of life and independence for older people living at home.

STRATEGIC AIM 4: SELF-FULFILMENT

ASP believes that this section is very narrow in its focus and does not include many issues that contribute to older people experiencing self-fulfilment in their later years. While employment and training are growing needs for older people there are a huge range of other issues that older people value that enable them to live rich and fulfilling lives.

These include attending arts events, learning IT skills, social events, friends and family, going to church, travel, learning new hobbies and skills, sport, volunteering, being with grandchildren and also being provided an opportunity to give their views and opinions on issues, as proven by the popularity of the NI Pensioners Parliament.

ASP believes that this section of the strategy needs much more detail although there is again a clear overlap with other sections of the strategy as in order for older people to be able to do the above activities they need a decent income, transport, reasonable health and the confidence to partake in a broad range of activities.

STRATEGIC AIM 5: DIGNITY

ASP welcomes the inclusion of the UN Principles for Older Persons in relation to dignity but believes that the Strategic Aim needs to include the commitment to fulfil the human rights of older people – it is not enough to promote and protect. The United Nations defines the obligation to fulfil human rights as ‘States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.’

The Commission on Dignity in Care for Older People report, *Delivering Dignity*, highlighted the undignified care of older people in hospitals and care homes. They recognised that the undignified care of older people is rooted in the discrimination and neglect evident towards older people in wider society. The report stated how we are all “richer when older people are respected, valued and cherished” and ASP would fully support this statement.

There have been alarming numbers of reports of abuse of older people in care homes and hospitals in recent years and it is essential that steps are taken to alleviate the risk of this happening in all residential and medical settings across Northern Ireland.

It is unacceptable that some of the most vulnerable members in society could be treated with such a lack of respect and dignity and it is important that anyone convicted of displaying such callous behaviour receives a serious punishment to try to eradicate this from what are meant to be caring settings.

Last year, the Health Minister agreed to adopt the ‘Dignity Code’ in Northern Ireland which was an initiative developed by the National Pensioners Convention.

The purpose of this Dignity Code is to uphold the rights and maintain the personal dignity of older people, within the context of ensuring the health, safety and well-being of those who are increasingly less able to care for themselves or to properly conduct their affairs.

This Code recognises that certain practices and actions are unacceptable to older people, such as:

- Being abusive or disrespectful in any way, ignoring people or assuming they cannot do things for themselves
- Treating older people as objects or speaking about them in their presence as if they were not there
- Not respecting the need for privacy
- Not informing older people of what is happening in a way that they can understand
- Changing the older person’s environment without their permission

- Intervening or performing care without consent
- Using unnecessary medication or restraints
- Failing to take care of an older person's personal appearance
- Not allowing older people to speak for themselves, either directly or through the use of a friend, relative or advocate
- Refusing treatment on the grounds of age

This Code therefore calls for:

- Respect for individuals to make up their own minds, and for their personal wishes as expressed in 'living wills', for implementation when they can no longer express themselves clearly
- Respect for an individual's habits, values, particular cultural background and any needs, linguistic or otherwise
- The use of formal spoken terms of address, unless invited to do otherwise
- Comfort, consideration, inclusion, participation, stimulation and a sense of purpose in all aspects of care
- Care to be adapted to the needs of the individual
- Support for the individual to maintain their hygiene and personal appearance
- Respect for people's homes, living space and privacy
- Concerns to be dealt with thoroughly and the right to complain without fear of retribution
- The provision of advocacy services where appropriate

Age Sector Platform believes that if the Dignity Code is implemented and monitored properly then it would help tackle the problems surrounding a lack of dignity for older people whether they are being cared for at home, in hospital or in residential or care homes and we would urge the Health Minister to bring this code to the forefront of good practice in all these care settings throughout Northern Ireland.

Legislation to outlaw Age Discrimination

ASP is concerned with the weakness of the wording at both paragraph 7.6 and Action Plan, Action 18 with regards to legislation to end age discrimination in accessing goods, facilities and services. This legislation provides a major opportunity to enhance and improve the lives of older people, through prohibiting age discrimination in accessing goods, facilities and services, removing barriers to older people participating in society, and challenging negative stereotypes about older people.

After campaigning for many years to get this vital legislation for older people Age Sector Platform strongly welcomed the announcement that the legislation would be introduced in this NI Assembly term. Age Sector Platform is calling for this undertaking to be stated more strongly in the document to provide reassurance to older people that this legislation will be delivered as promised.

Concerns over the slow progress being made to introduce the legislation were made at the 2013 Pensioners Parliament, at which the following motion was passed.

M8 NIPP expresses concern over the slow pace of progress in relation to the introduction of age discrimination legislation and calls on OFMdFM to ensure this issue is progressed urgently so that older people can avail of the extra legal protection that the legislation will bring by 2015 at the latest.

Elder Abuse

ASP is concerned that abuse of older people by physical, psychological, sexual and financial means is on the increase and believes that more needs to be done to tackle what appears to be a growing problem given the number of cases being reported in the media and elsewhere.

However, it is still an area with limited research and we believe that more needs to be done to try to identify the scale of the problem within Northern Ireland. The Pensioners Parliament surveys over the past few years, combined with comments from older people attending our local parliaments, highlights that this is an issue that older people are getting more concerned about and we believe the Strategy provides an opportunity to look into this complex issue in more detail.

Financial elder abuse in particular seems to be a growing problem and with increasing numbers of people suffering from conditions such as Alzheimer's we believe that more must be done to help people from becoming victims of this type of abuse.

4 Conclusion

Age Sector Platform (ASP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the 'Active Ageing' consultation from the Office of the First and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) as this strategy will have a great impact on the quality of lives for older people in Northern Ireland over the next six years and beyond.

This strategy must provide the strong overarching framework needed to support older people both now and in the future so we can achieve the vision of making Northern Ireland a region where older people are valued, respected and enabled to live as full and as active a life as possible.

If this vision can be achieved, society here will benefit greatly from the important role that older people play in a range of areas and will reap the rewards of tapping into the vast experience and skills that this age group possess. ASP members have played a key role in the development of the strategy over the past number of years and we strongly recommend that the Department continues to seek the close involvement of older people as the strategy is finalised and implemented.

There is clearly much more work needed to the strategy is to achieve its vision but Age Sector Platform and the NI Pensioners Parliament remains committed to doing everything it can to achieve the Strategic Aims outlined in this strategy.

We look forward to further discussions in the near future on how the draft strategy can be improved in the coming months and to how other signature projects can be developed to help meet the aims of the strategy going forward.

5 Age Sector Platform Members

- ABC Seniors Network
- Age NI
- Age North Down and Ards Over 50s Forum
- ALLY Foyle
- Amicus Retired Members
- AT&GWU Retired Members Association
- Belfast East Seniors Forum
- Carers NI
- Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum
- Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance (CSPA)
- COAST (Causeway Older Active Strategic Team)
- Communications Workers Union (NI Regional Retired Members)
- Engage with Age
- GMB Retired Members
- Greater Shankill Senior Citizens' Forum
- Hoi Sum Chinese Elderly Group
- ICTU Retired Workers Committee (NI)
- Indian Community Centre 50+ Club
- Mid and East Antrim Age Well Partnership
- Mid Ulster Seniors Network
- NASUWT Retired Members Association
- National Federation of Occupational Pensioners
- National Pensioners Convention (NI)
- Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens' Consortium
- Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum
- NIPSA Retired Members Association
- North Belfast Senior Citizens' Forum

- North West Ageing Well Together (NVAWT)
- Older Women's Network
- NI Public Commercial Services Union (Associate and Retired Members)
- South Belfast Lifestyle Forum
- South West Age Partnership
- UNISON Retired Members
- West Belfast 50+ Forum

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