



Response to
'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities'
April 2011

‘Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities’

Background

Age Sector Platform (ASP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on ‘Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities’.

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 emerged from the Age Sector Reference Group (ASRG) which had been in operation for seven years supported by Help the Aged and Age Concern NI. Age Sector Platform has a membership base of 30 older people’s organisations and networks which represent approximately 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland.

Introduction

Age Sector Platform (ASP) supports the older person’s right to live free from fear of crime within their home and community. We recognise that fear of crime can have a serious impact on the lives of older people in Northern Ireland and can cause social isolation and poor health.

The ‘Safer Ageing’ strategy which was developed in 2009 highlighted that older people were a particularly vulnerable group and that specific actions were required to address fear of crime in relation to this age group. ASP believes that the strategic aims and objectives of this strategy remain as important today and that these issues must be prioritised in the new community safety strategy.

Age Sector Platform has recently conducted research with older people across Northern Ireland as part of the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament and the results of this show that fear of crime is one of the biggest concerns for older people in every county (see appendix).

Almost two-thirds (64%) of older people who took part in the survey listed fear of crime as one of their top priorities, which illustrates the need for a community safety strategy for Northern Ireland to tackle this serious issue. The seven local Pensioners Parliament events held across Northern Ireland since early March have all included discussions on fear of crime and highlighted the impact that this has on older people's quality of life.

'Safer Ageing'

ASP has welcomed the engagement with Community Safety Unit officials in the Department of Justice (previously the NIO) in developing and monitoring action plans in relation to the 'Safer Ageing' strategy.

While the strategy has made progress there is still much to do to tackle the impact of crime and fear of crime on older people and ASP believes that the steering group set up to monitor the Department's work on this issue should continue. 'Safer Ageing' has led to increased engagement with older people and the relevant authorities and this is a very welcome move. Events such as 'Safety Matters', held in June 2010, which allowed older people to directly engage with the Policing Board and feed into the NI Policing Plan are positive developments and must be built on in the new strategy.

Priority Group

ASP welcomes the Department of Justice commitment to make older people a priority in the new strategy however there is no detail in the consultation document on how this will happen in practice. If the objectives and actions of 'Safer Ageing' are to be subsumed into the main strategy then there needs to be a firm commitment and detail provided on what the strategy will deliver.

The alternative would be to create a revised version of 'Safer Ageing' to bring it up to date and set out a clear action plan for going forward. It is vital that any agreed action plan receives the necessary support and resources to enable it to be implemented and successful.

The Consultation refers to linking up with OFMDFM and with the 'Ageing in an inclusive society' strategy to co-ordinate cross-departmental actions to address older people's issues. While we support this link and believe it can help ensure a better joined up approach to the issue, ASP does not believe that the new Ageing Strategy is the appropriate vehicle for leading on tackling fear of crime and a more focused group is needed to ensure progress is needed on community safety matters.

Fear of Crime

ASP agrees that building 'Confident communities' should be a key part of the strategy as confidence and the perception of feeling safe is something that can positively impact on the quality of people's lives.

The strategy quotes research from the NI Crime Survey that shows that 31% of people in NI believe that 'fear of crime' has a moderate impact on their lives and only 5% believe it has a great impact. The research conducted for the Pensioners Parliament has shown that after having enough money to heat their homes and eat properly, fear of crime is the next biggest concern for older people in Northern Ireland. This shows that fear of crime is a particular concern for this age group and ASP believes that the strategy needs to recognise this more and set out actions to tackle this.

ASP welcomes the department's proposal to review its approach to measuring and understanding fear of crime as this will be important when it comes to measuring progress on this issue. ASP would be pleased to engage with officials in this work at an early stage.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs)

One of the key problems raised during the development of 'Safer Ageing' was the lack of older representation on the Community Safety or District Policing Partnerships. While we understood at the time that there was a review taking place and no recommendations could be made then, now that there are plans in place for a merger of these two bodies, ASP believes it is vital that older people are represented on the partnerships in each area across Northern Ireland.

During the 'Pensioners Parliament' events, older people's knowledge of the existing community safety schemes was tested and it was clear that most older people had little or no knowledge of the partnerships and their work. The new merged partnership must take positive steps to address this problem as this is one avenue for addressing fear of crime. ASP believes that once established, these new bodies should promote a strong commitment to tackling fear of crime among the older population by offering seats on the partnership for older representatives in that area. Age Sector Platform believes if the right people are appointed to these partnerships then communication between the work of the partnership and older people could be significantly improved. If this strategy is going to deliver for older people then better grassroots engagement and cooperation is needed with the age sector and the various groups and forums that exist across Northern Ireland.

Intergenerational Research

Age Sector Platform believes that it is important that intergenerational issues are considered in the context of community safety and supports plans to develop this approach in the new strategy.

Age Sector Platform representatives took part in an intergenerational focus group on community safety in March 2011 in partnership with the NI Youth Forum. This event, which was facilitated by the Centre for Intergenerational Practice, highlighted that these two age groups shared common concerns but

also highlighted differences of opinion on certain issues. As a result, ASP believes that it would be beneficial if some of these issues are explored further as part of the forthcoming strategy.

Anti Social Behaviour

ASP agrees that the strategy needs to focus on tackling anti-social behaviour as this can impact negatively on the lives of many citizens including older people. ASP believes that early intervention and prevention plans need to look at the facilities available to younger people, particularly later at night and at weekends. This issue was raised at our recent Pensioners Parliament events, where older people said that part of the problem was that facilities to keep younger people occupied, particularly those run by statutory bodies like Education boards, were often closed when they were needed the most. We recommend that the Department undertakes a review of recreational options for young people as part of its work on tackling anti social behaviour.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Age Sector Platform welcomes the strategy's commitment to continue to promote and develop Neighbourhood Watch schemes across Northern Ireland. The local Pensioners Parliament events expressed support for existing schemes and recommended that they should be expanded and receive more support. One particular issue that was raised as a barrier to the development of schemes was that there was sometimes reluctance from volunteers to co-ordinate the schemes, given the responsibility that comes with this role. Older people also said that more needs to be done to increase awareness of how people can get involved in the schemes.

Resources/Budget

Age Sector Platform is disappointed that there is no firm commitment in the strategy to provide resources and believes that that this is something that needs to be developed and included in the final strategy. We recognise the difficult financial climate and pressures on public spending but believe that effective spending on well structured schemes can bring about great health and wider societal benefits.

Indicators

ASP believes that the strategy needs to have clear goals and objectives so progress on key issues can be measured. We understand the rationale offered for not including crime statistics as a key indicator as we are aware that there is under reporting of some crime and overcoming this should be a target in itself. ASP would like to see the strategy focus on increasing the percentage of crimes solved and would also like to see harsher sentences for attacks and crimes against vulnerable members of society, including those against older people.

Conclusion

Age Sector Platform welcomes the opportunity to comment on the 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' and is pleased to see the Department of Justice making community safety and fear of crime a key priority of its work. Crime and fear of crime has been identified by older people across Northern Ireland through the Pensioners Parliament survey and events as a top priority and the Department must act on this evidence to address this situation.

ASP knows that this issue cannot be tackled by the Department itself and that the issue requires a real partnership approach across government departments and agencies and with the wider community and voluntary sector to deliver progress. Better communication with older people on the various community safety initiatives that are in operation is vital if the levels of fear of crime are to be reduced, and Age Sector Platform stands ready to work with the Department and other agencies to facilitate this work.

ASP believes that the strategic aims within 'Safer Ageing' remain key components of a successful community safety strategy. Reducing crime and the fear of crime can not only increase the quality of life for older people and improve their health but can also ensure older people remain valuable contributors to society. In an ageing population we have got to make sure that older people can continue to play an active role so that they can benefit

from society and that society can benefit from the experience and expertise they offer.

Appendix:

Fear of Crime Results from Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament Survey 2011

People aged 60+ in Northern Ireland were asked to rank the top 5 problems facing older people today

Locality	Average ranking for 'Fear of crime'	Percentage that listed 'fear of crime' as a major problem facing older people
Belfast	2nd	60%
Co. Antrim*	3rd	61%
Co. Armagh	Joint 1st	75%
Co. Derry/Londonderry	3rd	55%
Co. Down	2nd	72%
Co. Fermanagh	2nd	60%
Co. Tyrone	2nd	73%
Northern Ireland	3rd	64%

* Excluding Belfast

(Based on 1,166 completed surveys)

Age Sector Platform Members

Age NI

ALLY Foyle

Amicus Retired Members

AT&GWU Retired Members Association

Carers NI

Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum

Chinese Welfare Association

Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance (CSPA)

Communications Workers Union (NI Regional Retired Members)

East Belfast Seniors Forum

Engage with Age

Friendship Federation

GMB Retired Members

Greater Shankill Senior Citizens' Forum

Indian Community Centre 50+ Club

NASUWT Retired Members Association

National Federation of Occupational Pensioners

Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens' Consortium

Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum

NIC ICTU Retired Workers Committee

North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum

Northern Ireland Pensioners Convention

Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Retired Members
Association

Older Women's Network

Pensioners Actively Lobbying Services (PALS)

Public Commercial Services Union (Associate and Retired Members)

Sperrin Lakeland Senior Citizens' Consortium

UNISON Retired Members

University of the Third Age (NI)

West Belfast 50+ Forum

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