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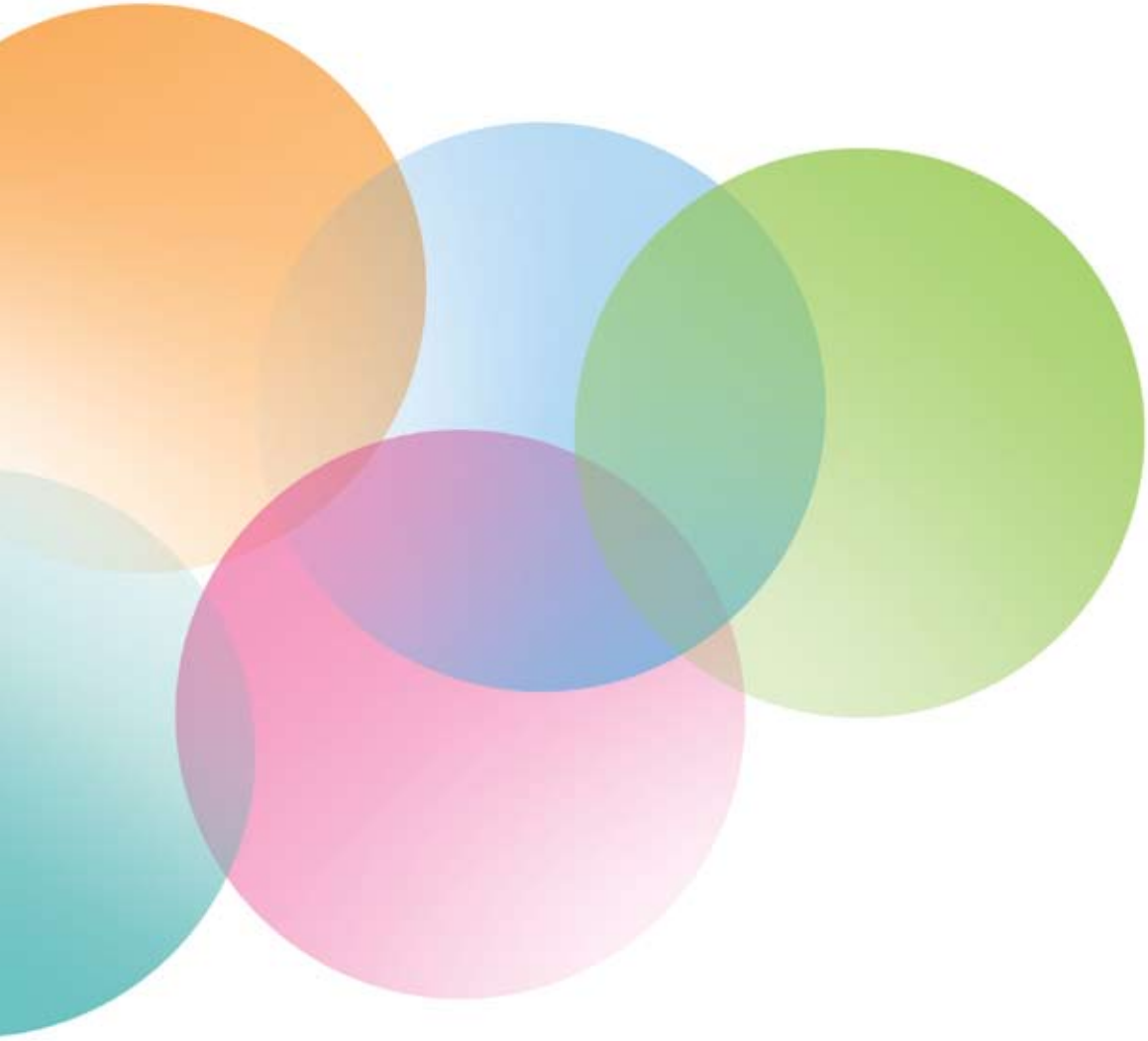
counsel + care
for older people, their families and carers

fair ageing

The challenge of our lifetime



Housing 21 is a leading specialist in older peoples care, health and housing services. We have sheltered and extra care properties all over the country and are one of the largest care providers. As well as home care we have a range of specialist care services including dementia care, end of life care, day care and combined health and social care services. We know that all older people, be they in good health or with a long term illness, can make lifestyle choices and enjoy a good quality of life if the opportunity is there. We remain committed to our vision of a life of choice for older people and believe as a society we should ensure a future where we can all look forward to a good later life.

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Foreword

Housing 21 and Counsel and Care are delighted to have initiated a programme of 'Fairness in an Ageing Society' seminars in collaboration with the Fabian Society which has led to this report. We were concerned that despite the many excellent government strategies being produced they were still being viewed narrowly and debated mainly within the older people's lobby.

We wanted to stimulate debate across all sectors of society – young and old. What is really at issue is how we all need to view our society differently – a society where one in four people are over the age of 65. How can we think inclusively about us as a society and not them – older people? Fairness is an issue for us all.

Through the launch event, the three round table seminars and the final conference held January to June 2009 it soon became clear that there was an enormous appetite to have this different debate – to think about what fairness means in a different kind of society. Speakers readily agreed to contribute and all events were oversubscribed.

We know what needs to be done. During the series of events we heard many examples of how older people are taking control of their lives and playing an active part in their community. Whether it is volunteering to help children's projects, shaping and improving local communities or providing mutual self-help, older people throughout the country are showing that they can and do contribute hugely to the quality of life in Britain. But too often, public services and society treat older people as part of the 'problem' rather than as part of the solution. This has to change.

Much still needs to change to promote fairness in our ageing society. This report, drafted by Donald Hirsch, which is followed by comments from some of the people engaged in our programme, focuses on the key issues that underlined all our discussions – attitudes, participation, infrastructure and resources. It also makes recommendations about what good leadership could achieve to make the difference we all want to see for this and future generations of older people. As the report states – with strong leadership and a clear sense of purpose Britain could become a fairer place in which to age.

We thank the Fabian Society for working with us and organising an incredibly successful, thought provoking programme. We urge you to continue the debate on the issues that have been highlighted and to press for change. Fairness in an ageing society is an issue for us all.

Melinda Phillips, Chief Executive, Housing 21
Stephen Burke, Chief Executive, Counsel and Care
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Contents

Thanks are due to:

Donald Hirsch who drafted the report

Josh Bicknell, research assistant to Donald Hirsch

Genna Stawski and Rosie Clayton from the Fabian Society who ran the series of Fairness in an Ageing Society events that led to the report

Jane Minter, Head of corporate policy and strategy, Housing 21, who managed the partnership

fair ageing

The challenge of our lifetime

The new demography of the 21st century requires us to make some fundamental changes in how society functions. For the first time in history, there are more pensioners than children. The majority of people who vote at the next general election are likely to be over 50. And on present patterns, many people will be in paid work for only half of their lives.

Britain has barely begun to adapt to its new age structure. Even though older people represent a growing proportion of the population, too often they feel ignored or relegated to the fringes of society. This is not just unfair but wasteful, as it prevents an ever larger section of the population from making a socially valued contribution.

The challenge posed by an ageing population tends to be viewed through an out-of-date prism, in which a growing number of older, dependent people require increased support from a younger, active group. Instead, we need to redefine what we mean by 'active' and 'dependent', to encourage people of all ages to take on new roles and to reorient relationships between the generations.

In five powerful events run by the Fabian Society in the first half of 2009, a wide range of stakeholders discussed what kinds of change are now needed to create fairer approaches to ageing. While each brought their own perspective, all agreed on three fundamentals about the future of an ageing society.

The first was that attitudes towards older people need to change.

The second was that older people need to be mobilised, not just helped. Treating them fairly is not just about giving them 'fair shares' when handing out resources. It is about giving them a 'fair crack', in participating in and contributing to society.

And the third, most fundamental point was that a better deal for older people is in all of our interests. We all hope for long and fulfilling lives, so making Britain a better place to grow older should be an aspiration for us all.

So we need a renewed debate about how we organise society so that we can get the most from and for all generations. In this debate, fairness in ageing cannot be seen as one group in society getting a better deal relative to others. It is about a lifetime challenge for everyone in Britain.

Taking a big step forward

The government and politicians from all parties have been saying for several years that older people's position in society needs to change.

This has produced significant outcomes. Following the Turner report, pension provision has been strengthened, and the state pension age will gradually be raised as part of an effort to lengthen working lives to give choice in retirement. Age discrimination has been outlawed – first in employment in 2006 and soon more widely through the Equality Bill. And some landmark government documents notably Opportunity Age and now its successor Building a Society for all Ages have produced much of the strategic thinking needed for a fresh approach.

But these efforts are still a long way from producing the transformation that is needed. Professor Alan Walker argued in introducing these events that:

"What is required now, and urgently, is their joining up, to reflect an exciting new vision, and a major allocation of resources. A powerful injection of ambition is required to tackle the huge level of unmet need and to convince many older people that their lives can be transformed."

In other words, there is a need for strong leadership backed by tangible change to show that society is committed to treating older people fairly.

Nowhere is this more clear-cut than in the way that we organise the social care system, on which many older people rely. The government has now published a Green Paper proposing an overhaul of this system to create a 'National Care Service', and promised a White Paper in 2010.

No single initiative such as improving social care can on its own transform social attitudes or the position of older people in society. Yet the way we deal with this particular issue can do much to signal our commitment to a fair deal in later life.

The signals have not so far been helpful. A decade after a Royal Commission identified this as a massive area of unmet need affecting older people, the government has only just set out consultative proposals for real change, without indicating which of three alternatives it favours or what level of resources will be needed for these plans to succeed. If there were as many holes in the provision of a basic standard of education for our young people as there are in the provision of social care for later life, is it conceivable that we would have had to wait so long for action?

The next year will produce a crucial test to our politicians of whether they are genuinely prepared to create a National Care Service that works. As with pensions, this will require cross-party consensus. With a White Paper and a General Election both due in 2010, there is a chance to show that this is one issue where the need for a lasting settlement transcends party politics, and that the time for procrastination is over.

On the day of the launch event of the Fairness in an Ageing Society programme, January 20th 2009, President Barack Obama took office in Washington and referred to *"our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age"*. It is now time for all of us to face up to necessary choices and to adapt to the new world we live in.

Five kinds of change

With strong leadership and a clear sense of purpose, Britain could become a fairer place in which to age. This report looks at five overlapping ways in which this can be so, which emerged from the Fairness in an Ageing Society discussions:

First, the ways in which society needs to change its attitudes.

Second, the ways in which older people need to be enabled to participate more fully in society.

Third, the ways in which our infrastructure needs to change in order to allow them to do so.

Fourth, the ways in which we allocate resources to helping people at different times in their lives.

And finally, the ways in which we can deploy resources wisely, in order to enhance people's opportunities to participate and to improve the quality of their lives.

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Changing attitudes

"Why has it taken so long to talk about fairness for older people?"

asks older peoples' community organiser Dorothy Runnicles. *"It is time to wake up to ageism as we did to racism and sexism."* Negative or unhelpful attitudes are an underlying cause of the raw deal that many older people feel that they are getting from society. Despite their growing numbers, they feel that we are living in a world in which youth is often esteemed and maturity is undervalued and degraded. In some cases, young people – particularly teenagers – are also maligned by the press and by older people, and speakers emphasised that they wanted equal respect and an end to all forms of age stereotyping.

In the course of these debates, people drew attention to various damaging attitudes towards older people.

First, there is the *prejudice and stereotyping* that lie behind so many forms of discrimination. In particular, it is too often assumed that people over a particular age are unable to work or to contribute to society. This ignores the huge amount of work, paid or otherwise, that they in fact carry out: *"Older people in their 70s and sometimes into their 80s are the unsung heroes,"* said Dorothy Runnicles, *"working below the radar screen, providing the glue to our local communities."*

Second, there is *blindness* to older people's very existence: older people often say that they feel as though they are invisible. This can lead to companies, services providers, architects and others ignoring older people's needs.

Third, there is *deafness* to what older people have to say. Underlying the reluctance to listen to older people's voices is the assumption that they are too feeble-minded to articulate their needs and preferences. In a world in which consumer choice has become a paradigm for the young, service providers too often believe that they must decide what is best for anyone over 60.

The loudest plea from older people and their advocates at these events was that they should be treated with respect. By this they were not referring to a traditional notion of *"respect for your elders"*, based on deference to age. Rather, they meant listening to what older people say they want, recognising the contribution that they can make and treating them as full, contributing members of society.

How can such change in attitude be brought about?

Anti-discrimination legislation can help, as it has in other areas, by forcing people to think about unfounded assumptions about age. But on its own it is not enough. To change hearts and minds, older people's contributions and capabilities need to become more visible.

Anyone attending these seminars, hearing about the many ways that older people are playing their part, and witnessing the power of strong older voices such as Dorothy's speaking for themselves, would quickly have shed any prejudices about age being a period of passive infirmity. But how can such awareness be spread to a wider audience?

Part of the answer must lie in wider dissemination and celebration of older people's lives and activities. Heroic tales of hang-gliding grannies are not the most helpful way of doing this, as they (literally) fly in the face of the realities of many older people's lives. More convincing than cases of people refusing to age are cases of people ageing well. This may mean using the assets of age – such as maturity, experience, time availability – to make worthwhile contributions to society, as illustrated in the next section.

It can also involve older people taking control of their own lives, planning for their own futures and making real choices. But this control needs to be supported, by giving older people good information, real options and allowing them to take responsibility. For example, speakers at these events voiced exasperation at the ways in which organisations such as care homes sometimes 'protect' older people against risk, and in the process restrict their lives. This effectively treats them as children, rather than as adult decision-makers capable of weighing up risk for themselves. Others expressed anger that older people are often defined by the care they receive not the people they are. Life then becomes about care yet life does not – and should not – stop when people need care. By putting older people more in control, public services can help reverse public attitudes that see them as passive and helpless. The personalisation agenda in public services aims to do just that, but without fundamental changes in social attitudes and norms, it will be hard truly to enable older people to be in control.

As well as being listened to in decisions that affect individuals, older people's voices need to be heard in the wider debate about the ageing society. In taking forward Building a Society for all Ages the new UK Advisory Forum on Ageing needs to have some teeth so that its voice can be heard across government. At the same time, at the local level, more needs to be done to hear the voices of older people in local government and communities.

And older voices and faces need to be heard and seen more in the media. Joan Bakewell, the 'voice of older people', has estimated that 95% of people who work in the media are under 55. With the huge influence that the media now exerts on social attitudes, a more balanced representation of the generations would do much to change public views of older people.

All these aspects of audibility and visibility can help counter images of older people as weak and feeble, just as they have done in the case of women's voices over the past 30 years.

Enabling participation

How can older people be helped to participate more in society, and barriers to such participation lifted?

Older people often feel excluded or marginalised – yet there are plenty of inspiring examples to build on. Speakers at the Fairness in an Ageing Society events drew attention to a wide range of ways in which older people are already taking a lead in community and economic activity. Large numbers of older people are heavily involved in the lives of their communities through volunteering, participation in community groups, as carers and increasingly on forums and groups engaging with local councils and health bodies on service development and policy change. Older people play a leading role in local politics: 58% of councillors are aged over 55. And nearly 1.4 million people over pension age do paid work, a rise of 75% in the past decade.

Unpaid activity can have many benefits to those who participate, helping to maintain older people's health and well-being by keeping active. At the same time, it provides a range of benefits to others. About three million people aged over 50 are carers. Older people provide the time and experience needed to keep many community groups running. One in four participates in formal volunteering activities.

These basic facts about how many older people go on serving society outside the context of paid work underlines that for many, participation is not just about fulfilling personal goals but about being part of a social effort. Participation in this context is not individualistic, but mutualistic, and often seeks to recreate co-operative norms that have too often been absent from social relationships in recent years.

A particularly important set of activities highlighted by these seminars are those that bring generations together. For example, older people can play an important role in working with disadvantaged children. They can help fill some of the gaps that time-pressured professionals miss, such as spending time reading to children in schools.

Intergenerational activities can be a powerful tool to combat the segregation of generations which contributes to the uninformed attitudes discussed above. A good example is a series of projects run by ALL-FM, a community radio station in Levenshulme, Manchester, bringing together young and older people to engage in discussion and learn new skills. These projects have helped to dispel many of the misconceptions that generations have had about each other, allowing them to find common ground and identify common values. Another example is a North London project in which older people go into schools to tell their stories and learn computer skills from young people.

Older and younger people also work together to campaign on issues of mutual concern. Examples were given of older people sharing students' concern about loans and indebtedness, while younger people saw pension's issues as affecting their own futures. Gemma Tumulty from million+ stated that a common cause for both generations is the negative portrayals that each can have – in different ways – in the media. While the idea of bringing generations together in such ways is spreading, a lot more needs to be done to make this commonplace. Elizabeth Hoodless, Director of CSV, believes that we can learn much from developments in the United States where in some cases intergenerational activity has become more than just a project but a way of organising communities. For example, in North Carolina a care home has been built on a university campus, allowing its residents to attend some lectures and students to earn money as carers.

What can be done to extend best practice and to remove barriers to older people's participation?

The two themes that emerged as particularly important in this regard were networks and voice. Too often, older people find themselves isolated rather than linked into local community networks. A growing issue today is the importance of internet access and linkage into online communication. The explosion of social networking and other sites and their impact on the ways in which young people communicate is in stark contrast to the sense that many older people feel of being left out and left behind by these technologies. This does not necessarily mean that the only option is for as many older people as possible to join these social networking sites. Rather, older people need to be enabled to develop appropriate means of communicating using new and old technologies. Sometimes this will mean acquiring computer skills, sometimes finding new means of meeting people face to face.

A crucial aspect of participation by older people is engaging them in planning for the future. The Audit Commission report 'Don't Stop Me Now' in 2008 recommended that much more needs to be done to engage with older people of all ages as part of planning for our ageing society. There was a strong feeling among many speakers that local authorities and others have often failed to create structures that are good at hearing older voices – and that much consultation that does take place is 'cosmetic', seeking to legitimise decisions that have already been taken.

However, the Audit Commission also emphasises that a minority of councils do create effective structures for involving older people both in services targeted at them and in influencing 'mainstream' services for everybody. For example in Dudley, an Older People's Board supported by seven Themed Action Groups is responsible for ensuring that all council services are 'age-proofed' and support independence. These efforts are overseen by seven 'older people's champions', ensuring that consultation with older people becomes part of day-to-day planning rather than an added extra. This demonstrates the integrated role that older people can play in service delivery. If we really take the involvement of older people seriously, such structures need to become the norm rather than the exception.

Adapting infrastructure

How can we build and adapt our homes, neighbourhoods and communities to serve us for a lifetime?

Housing, recreational facilities, outdoor space and many other aspects of society are too often oriented towards the participation of the young. We need to learn to build new infrastructure that does not penalise people for being old – which will penalise us all eventually.

Among the examples of insensitive provision or poor planning cited by speakers were:

- The loss of public places where people can safely congregate and meet, like local shops, clubs and local pubs;
- Lack of satisfactory access to parks and public spaces;
- The moving of some services into out-of-town locations;
- Lack of sensitivity in building street infrastructure, such as awkward kerbs;
- Products such as mobile phones that are not designed with older users in mind.

A crucial consequence of many of these shortfalls is that older people often feel disconnected from society, and lonely. Those who find the world outside their homes a hostile place are tempted to spend less time going out, and this can greatly reduce their well-being.

While there can be much debate about how specific planning or design decisions could better address the needs of older people, the more important point that they make is being excluded from the process. Older people would like to be much more involved in designing their own communities.

This is not just a matter of stating their point of view but of having a dialogue with the rest of society about what makes a sustainable community in which to age. Older people's representatives emphasised that they were as interested in seeing young people having places to congregate as older people. The present situation where teenagers with nowhere to go hang around on street corners and are seen as threatening serves nobody well.

One older people's representative, Vera Bolter, described how groups in Newcastle aim to draw up Neighbourhood Charters for each local ward, identifying particular changes that would help improve quality of life. This is not easy, due to constraints in the planning system and the need to reconcile many vested interests. However, such a dialogue can help to bring out what aspects of design of outdoor spaces can best serve the needs of an ageing population, with the initiative coming from the bottom up rather than the top down.

infrastructure

As with measures to enable older people's participation (discussed in the previous section), the creation of a better infrastructure depends on routine involvement of people of all ages in design and planning of mainstream services and amenities. As set out by the Audit Commission, this can involve older people in challenging the ways in which provision is structured.

For example, Hartlepool has worked closely with its older community to ensure that a wide range of leisure services are accessible to the over 50 population. This involves not just giving discounts through an Active Leisure Card, but also ensuring that a wide range of leisure services attractive to older people are on offer. Older people are able to say which forms of provision put them off (gyms full of 'ladies in lycra'; swimming pools with water that is too cold) and which services they would welcome (e.g. low-level exercise; walking groups).

'Mainstreaming' implies bringing older people's perspectives into all decisions that affect a community's services and infrastructure. This means not just public providers but private businesses getting the message: your future markets are not a homogeneous group of people under 40, but a diverse range of individuals, with a higher average age than ever before.

Fair shares across the lifespan

How can we create a fair distribution of resources across the lifespan and across the generations?

"The big debate over the next year", said Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman Vince Cable at the last of these events *"is to force me and other politicians to be much more precise than we are about where choices have to be made, that have enormous implications for the generations."* He emphasised that these choices will be extremely tough ones in the context of the huge deficits presently being incurred and the need to take decisions that will rebalance the public finances.

Renegotiating a fair distribution of resources between young and old in an ageing society will not be easy. The number of children relative to pensioners has fallen dramatically, but nobody has explicitly called for a redeployment of money for schools to pay for pensions and long-term care. But such decisions could become implicit in policy-making: Mr Cable suggested that political commitments to preserve real levels of health spending at a time of likely cuts, but not to do the same for education, could add up to a big intergenerational transfer.

In the UK, there has been a resistance to explicit political competition for resources among different age groups. This is partly because each age-group is itself a diverse group that cannot form easily into a political coalition. But it is also because people do not think about their interests just in terms of their current age-group: grandparents want money spent on the education of their own grandchildren; working-age adults can see that cutting pensions will affect their own futures. Political commentator and pollster Peter Kellner believes that the impetus for meeting older people's needs will come neither from older people voting as a bloc nor from moral sympathy for their cause, but from everyone seeing that they have a stake in such outcomes.

Much has been said about conflicts of interest between different age cohorts, and in particular the need to avoid the 'boomer' generation getting more than their fair share of resources, at the cost of their grandchildren. This poses a different set of arguments from debates about old and young, which are developed below. Resources that we are allocating to older people today may not be supported by younger people as representing their own futures if they think they are part of an unsustainable system.

However, people in Britain today do not have an appetite for intergenerational fights, but rather for sustainable settlements. The Turner settlement in pensions is an example: a stronger guarantee of a state pension that keeps its value, in exchange for a raised pension age that makes this sustainable. In the case of long-term care funding, there is a yearning to create a similarly clear-cut system in which future entitlements are clarified. Such stability and clarity over meeting basic needs in later

life is more important to people than whether there is some theoretical transfer of resources from one generation to the next.

Alongside this desire for entitlements is the issue of which kind of 'universal' benefits for older people are justified. There is a case for at least some means-testing to target those older people who have least, but at the same time there is an appetite for some basic entitlements that are not withdrawn as a 'punishment' for those who have saved for their retirement. A basic pension and basic support for long-term care are certainly among this category. What is less clear is whether some recently-introduced concessions such as free bus travel and free television licenses are considered essential in the same way. There is certainly a case for debating how such entitlements are prioritised, and the extent to which people are willing to pay taxes in their working lives to support different types of universal entitlement in retirement.

To make such settlements sustainable on terms that are acceptable, it will be essential to rethink the age and structure of working lives. Andrew Harrop of Age Concern and Help the Aged points out that each successive generation is richer and lives longer, but that to continue to benefit from this trend we cannot continue with present working patterns. Many people of working age have disabilities that affect their capacity to fit into a conventional work pattern. All of us may need to work for more years, but perhaps less intensively in order not to 'burn out'.

And the present squeeze on credit, much of it acquired through overconsumption by working-age people relative to their earned incomes, may be a signal of the need for another kind of adjustment. To preserve relative living standards in later life, we may have to learn to put most or all of our future growth in earnings into savings for retirement, rather than seeing it as a chance to raise our living standards further.

How should we think of fairness across generations? Three perspectives.

The idea of 'intergenerational equity' has never been more relevant to social and political debate. Global warming has made us acutely aware that our consumption today could have costs for our grandchildren. And in the past year it has become clear that accumulation of private and public debt could affect opportunities for years or decades to come.

However, fairness across generations has raised several different issues that should not be confused.

One perspective looks at the opportunities that each successive generation has over their whole lifetimes. In some respects, people born just after the Second World War have had a unique combination of advantages. They were the first generation in which large numbers were able to access free higher education on a large scale, and probably the last for whom salary-linked pensions were a realistic

shares

expectation. A fair society should avoid making one generation a lot worse off than another over their lifetimes, for example by curbing consumption to avoid long-term indebtedness. And as demography changes, each generation needs some reassurance that over their lifetimes they can expect to take out of the welfare state something broadly similar to what they put in.

A second interpretation of fairness across generations looks at how we treat people of different ages today. For example, do we give sufficient priority to someone needing long-term care, compared to someone requiring pre-school education? Today's retirees may have done well on average, but 2.5m pensioners remain in poverty, including a third of over 85s. We should take particular care not to neglect this older 'forgotten generation' who remain much worse off on average than the newly-retired 'boomer' generations. And even those older people who have reasonable pensions often face dire choices when they need long-term care. Now that over 60s outnumber under 16s, we need to ask whether our social support systems are really adequate in providing for far greater numbers than they were ever designed to serve.

But thirdly and most importantly, we need to think about how we reorder society to cater for ourselves in the future as we age. This is neither about competing age cohorts nor about competing age groups, but about serving our own interests over each of our lifetimes. There have always been understandings in families and societies about responsibilities and entitlements at different stages of life, which in the long term work to everybody's advantage. With our new population structure, and new expectations at different stages of life, we need to redraw the terms of this lifetime compact.

Each of these versions of intergenerational fairness can be applied both to the allocation of resources and more widely to the ways in which society functions. Particularly when thinking about the lifetime compact that we want to buy into, it is not just money that counts, but respect and involvement. It is in younger people's long-term interest to help build a society in which they will be able to continue to participate without prejudice, as they themselves age. This makes it essential to bring the facts and issues about ageing into the forefront of public debate, raising the awareness of everyone in society about the importance of decisions that will affect their own futures. And this need for a better educated public can start with teaching in schools not just 'life skills' but the basics about the 'life course', ensuring that young people know something of the realities of what their needs will be when they get older.

Deploying resources wisely

How can existing resources be directed to purposes that will better meet older people's needs?

Politicians, economists and lobby groups find it easiest to debate big decisions about how much to put into the pension or long-term care system. Yet for many older people, it is smaller scale actions that will make a difference.

One speaker described how an older person in a residential home was unable to wear her best outfit because the rail in her wardrobe where she would have hung it was too high to reach. Repositioning it would have cost almost nothing. Until service providers really listen closely to older people, such examples of opportunities to improve their lives in small ways will continue to be missed.

One important issue is whether government has got the balance right between supporting different kinds of need for older people with impairments that restrict their daily activities. Much of the support available is focused on intensive packages of help such as personal care, but older people often say that practical help that could improve their quality of life (such as someone to help with gardening) can be just as important to them. It can also help put greater emphasis on 'prevention', by contributing to the health and well-being of people with relatively low-level impairments. But in making difficult decisions about how to use scarce resources, we need above all to listen to what older people themselves say about what would really make a difference to them.

Another way in which wisely deployed spending could go a long way is in providing the information and advice that older people need to allow them to participate more fully and to become more 'self-managing'. Indeed, one aspect of good information can be to enable individual older people to tap into their own resources more effectively, for example to make use of their housing wealth to pay for things that they need.

Similarly, efforts to link older people up with opportunities and networks, and to give them the extra skills they may need in order to participate, will pay off. In particular, many older people need extra help acquiring the IT skills that will allow them to communicate within 'modern day' networks and to use their other skills effectively to help themselves and their neighbours.

There are plenty of examples where a small but well-designed initiative can make a substantial difference to communities. One example cited in these events was the setting up of a community radio station in Penwith Cornwall for just £10,000 for training and equipment. Run on a voluntary basis, it is now a very effective tool in tackling isolation. In the London Borough of Camden, video equipment was lent to older people to film the frustration of using public buses. The videos were given to Transport for London, which thereby gained better understanding of the issues of public travel for older people and allowing it to adapt mainstream services to meet their needs.

resources

These examples were suggested by Audit Commission Chief Executive Steve Bundred to illustrate how the right kind of spending can leverage significant change. Nobody pretends that such decisions can substitute for the big choices about resources that are needed from government. However, with huge unfulfilled potential among older people who are willing to play a larger part in society than they are now able, the payoff from wise spending which helps to mobilise this untapped resource could be huge.

In Building a Society for all Ages there are plans for funds to test new and innovative approaches to delivering services for older people. We have seen a number of initiatives such as POPPS (Partnerships for Older People Projects) and Link Age Plus. All these are welcomed by stakeholders, but they also ask how such approaches can be mainstreamed, and what role central and local government should take in ensuring that this happens.

Moving the agenda on

A dozen steps that could be taken now

This report has argued that a step change is now needed in the ways in which we adapt to an ageing society. We need to adopt new approaches in engaging and involving older people, in listening to their voices, in deploying resources and most importantly in our attitudes to older people and ageing. Of course, this is a process that cannot be achieved through a government announcement or the publication of a strategy paper: it will take many years. But such an agenda needs to start somewhere. If our country's politicians were to show real leadership in taking up these challenges now, what could we expect to see happening in 2010?

Such leadership would need to produce:

- A clear-cut settlement for long-term care, agreed across political parties and stated in each election manifesto. This would set out what entitlements older and disabled people can expect in the future from a National Care Service.
- The scrapping of compulsory retirement ages by abolishing the exemption from age discrimination in employment of people over 65, signalling a real commitment to extending choices about work and retirement.
- A specific duty on local government to engage with older people in making decisions about local policies with a clear link to a national forum (such as the UK Advisory Forum) that has some teeth in challenging decision making by government.
- A commitment, expectation and robust review process that ensures that all central and local government policies and proposals are age proofed so that ageing issues are mainstreamed in public policy.
- A new impetus in the next Parliament, building on previous initiatives to create smarter policies on ageing. Perhaps comparable to the 'Every child matters' initiative, 'ageing matters'. This would bring policies and services together at a national and local level, under a small, clear-cut set of principles.
- A tangible step forward in the 'prevention' agenda. 'Invest to save' is crucial not only because it saves money but it can delay the negative aspects of older age. Smarter government can play a crucial role in pushing prevention. Linking, for example, health, housing and care, and using small amounts of money in focused ways to make a big difference to people's lives.
- A highly visible initiative that addresses the negative portrayal of and attitudes to older people in the media. This could be a national programme of awards for positive attitudes run by the industry itself, accompanied by a commitment to make older people more visible across the media.

agenda

- A refocus towards building homes and communities for a 'lifetime', designed to create neighbourhoods with better integration across age-groups and digital inclusion for all. This needs to be backed by a clear monitoring framework to assess progress.
- The setting up of a Commission to recommend ways of extending links across generations, building on what has been learned from existing intergenerational projects.
- The development of a national network of local advice and information services available at times of life change. This would help to galvanise the private sector in responding to new demands and mainstream older people's needs and aspirations in the consumer market.
- A review of the present balance between universal and targeted entitlements in later life. This would need to look at which non-means-tested entitlements are really considered essential, how willing taxpayers are to fund them, where they might be extended and where, potentially, reduced.
- A set of explicit measures to help address the needs of the today's over 80s – often called the 'forgotten generation'. This should include further measures to tackle pensioner poverty, a programme of small adaptations and repairs to make homes comfortable and safe, immediate help for older people to pay for care prior to a longer-term settlement and greater support for older carers, such as enabling them to get carers' allowance.

Conclusion

It would be tempting to let the consequences of an ageing society work themselves through in due course.

Fewer younger workers will eventually create a market demand for older ones. More older voters will cause politicians to adopt policies attractive to those groups. A rising chorus of older voices may one day be heard.

Professor Alan Walker argued, in introducing the present debate, that it is not acceptable simply to muddle through. If we rely on market forces rather than strong leadership, society may eventually adapt to its new structure, but there will be many casualties on the way.

We can already see some of them, in the form of the frailest and quietest older people, having to accept a world in which they are rarely heard and too often have to put up with isolation and misery.

More generally, without powerful forces to counterbalance the pervasive influence of a youth-oriented media, it may be decades before growing cohorts of older people get a fair hearing, let alone a fair crack when it comes to participating in society.

And we will all be the losers, in the future as each of us grows old to experience a sense of exclusion and isolation, and in the present as older people are unable to realise their full potential in contributing to our communities.

This report has argued that to create a fairer deal for older people we must first and foremost hear their voices and recognise their contribution.

Giving older people a fair hearing and a fair deal needs to start with strong leadership from our politicians, but cannot end there. It requires new actions and attitudes from us all, including private businesses, the media, local authorities and ordinary people of all ages.

In all of these cases, there are already those who are leading by example. They are showing the way by *"being the change we want to see"*, as Gandhi once advocated. To build on these practices requires a huge change across the population to overcome the prejudice and blinkered assumptions that have too often held older people back.

Five years from now, we should aim to make Britain a country in which older people's position is recognisably different from today. This change would have many aspects, of which the following five are indicative.

- It would be a country in which we would no more raise an eyebrow at the hiring of a 65-year-old than we do today at the hiring of a woman.
- Where town centres have areas where 80-year-olds and their grandchildren find it natural to mingle.
- Where it is normal to see older people on television – telling jokes, doing interviews, reading the news, and not simply representing the perspectives of an outdated view of older people.
- Where companies thinking of how to sell fashion goods, leisure services and holidays think as routinely about the over 60s as about the under 40s.
- And a country whose older citizens can tell you in broad terms what underlying public entitlements give them peace of mind – a confidence that they will be protected from hardship through poverty, isolation and an inability to look after themselves. It would be a fairer Britain where we all feel supported, included and listened to as we grow older.

Many people contributed to our debate through the events and via personal comment. We have asked a selection of commentators to offer their response to the report and we hope that the debate will continue.

Enabling participation

Getting older does not mean leaving the past behind. It does not mean that life stops. It does not mean that you suddenly change from being an active contributing member of society to a passive, needy person who is defined by the care, the housing or the services received.

At Housing 21, as a leading provider of care, health and housing, we have always seen our role as offering the kinds of services that enhance the lives of older people. We provide care, health and housing options for older people in very different circumstances – from those who need just a little bit of support and company to those who have long term health conditions or dementia and need regular care and health interventions. But what makes us proud is that in all our services we focus on the individual and their lifestyle. Life is about having fun, enjoying good company and feeling valued and engaged whatever your personal circumstances. And services need to enhance not diminish the networks older people have and the contributions that older people make. Many older people are, after all, the fundraisers, the activists, the carers and the volunteers – and very often the 'glue' for their local neighbourhoods.

The issues that challenge us in debating what we mean by a fair society are not just about fair shares, though fair shares for all is important, but about a fair role for older people in society. And this is about how we can make Britain a better place for all of us by seeing older people as a resource not a burden, as 'doers' not 'receivers' and as participants not spectators.

That is why at Housing 21 we develop our housing schemes as local community resources to enable older people in our schemes and in the surrounding community, to feel connected and to participate – a 'part of' not 'apart from' the community in which they live. That is why the care and support we provide is about enabling people to take control recognising that no older person can be written off as Professor Alan Walker said in our first event *"in the ageist expectation that their frailty is an inevitable consequence of the ageing process".*

Focusing on enabling participation and combating the isolation and loneliness that affects far too many older people is a crucial issue for Housing 21. We see, in our schemes and services everyday, how people's lives are transformed by feeling engaged, listened to and valued. This might be about getting good flexible care or moving to a new home in a lively retirement housing community. It might be about getting help to have the right financial support so better choices can be made or it might just be about starting new things because you feel good about yourself.

Those of us that provide services have a responsibility to value and respect people as they age and to focus on 'enabling participation' in all that we provide so that we can all look forward to a good later life with excitement and with optimism.

Melinda Phillips, Chief Executive, Housing 21

A sense of fairness

'That's not fair' is one of the first arguments we learn to make as children. Perhaps that elementary sense of fairness helps to explain why this is one of the most powerful concepts in public debate and politics too. Recent Fabian Society research into public attitudes to inequality, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, found that a conception of what is 'fair' is very often a more powerful driver of people's attitudes and beliefs than their own self-interest.

But appeals to 'fairness' can not simply settle public policy arguments. Rather, they are the terrain on which many debates take place. Almost all of us combine a range of different fairness conceptions – particularly of need, merit and entitlement – in discussing fairness, and trade these off in different ways, and so how 'fairness' claims impact on public debates is also complex.

So sense of fairness helps to explain why the minimum wage is cited, across income groups, as the best thing the Labour government has done, while there is similarly broad support for caring responsibilities to be given greater recognition. Yet it also underpins deep public hostility to taxing inherited wealth, where different 'fairness' principles collide, while grievances about perceived unfairness helps to explain why immigration and asylum frequently feature as among the issues which voters think most important. How ideas of need and merit combine is reflected, too, in generally high support for the claims of pensioners, yet vociferous opposition to means-testing regimes where these are thought to unfairly penalise effort and thrift.

This has important implications for a fairness and age agenda and for dealing with enormous demographic change, particularly at a time of strong pressure on public finances, several of which are reflected in the report of this seminar series.

Firstly, fairness arguments can be used to mobilise both broad and narrow political coalitions. The seminar report reflects a limited appetite for a politics of intergenerational conflict, but reflects that distributional questions will become increasingly urgent. Fairness claims can drive a politics of competing grievances if there are not sustained attempts to derail this. The idea of joint campaigns by those in civic society articulating the interests of the young and old would certainly make for more effective political advocacy towards decision-makers where this can be achieved.

To achieve this, any account of fairness and age must be embedded in a broader vision of equality. There is an important 'business case' argument that we cannot afford to fail to utilise the social resources of an ageing population, and an appeal to individual self-interest across the life course, but these need to be rooted in a broader vision of 'what sort of society do we want to be'.

The idea of 'equal life chances', or equality of capacity, offers the most promising foundation for this, proposing that the core objective of a fairness agenda is to ensure the widest distribution of autonomy over our own lives. This agenda must be about interventions needed to ensure autonomy across the life course, not a one-off starting gate 'meritocracy'.

Of course, inequalities in resources, voice and power among the older population reflect outcomes and opportunities across the life course, and are unlikely to be narrowed if these broader social inequalities remain unchallenged.

But concepts of social justice have often been relatively static – and both demographic change and sustainability concerns make a sustained focus on how these should incorporate concepts of intergenerational equity increasingly important.

Sunder Katwala, General Secretary, Fabian Society

Fair ageing and the media

Any vision of a fairer society for older people must include fairer representation of them in the media. There is no question that media organisations do not reflect our ageing population, whether in terms of their personnel or the issues they cover, and that their portrayal of older people is demeaning and often offensive.

As a journalist, it frustrates and angers me to see my trade persistently caricature older people as weak and vulnerable. Why do we do it? Because we deal in stereotypes; they are our stock in trade. And changing the stereotype is hugely difficult and not something that you can expect the media to do unprompted and in isolation.

When backed into a corner over instances of prejudicial coverage of any kind, the media's traditional response is to plead: 'We hold a mirror up to society. We reflect its views, its prejudices, its language.' While this is too easy a get-out, there is a grain of truth in it in this context.

Consider the media's approach to some other groups that in the past have suffered pejorative and/or patronising treatment: people with mental illness, for example, or those with disabilities or long-term health conditions. On the whole, such groups now get a much fairer deal in the press and on TV and radio. Why? Not because journalists acted on their own to ditch old stereotypes, but because society's attitudes shifted.

In particular, it cannot be a coincidence that the media changed at the same time as there was a seismic change in the way professionals treated these groups. Where health, social care and welfare professionals once saw their role as ministering to them as passive recipients of services, the relationship became one much more of partnership and of helping them to care for themselves.

This kind of transformation has yet to occur in professional attitudes towards older people. Still the power balance rests squarely with the provider of care or support. Indeed, the health and social care systems seem to set the whole tone for society's view of older age: a problem that needs solving.

So the media will move on when the professionals do. But we journalists need help in another regard, too. What, in the 21st century, are we supposed to regard as older age? With experts saying that babies have already been born that will live to 125, are we seriously to follow the lead of some official agencies and consider a 50-year-old as an older person?

The life-cycle needs recalibrating. Just as Australia is contemplating introducing new seasons that better reflect its climate, we should introduce new life stages that better reflect the reality of people's lives today. Yes, there is a point at which most people become dependent, but it obviously is not 50 or even 65. With better categorisation of older age, media stereotyping would necessarily become less of a blunt instrument.

Yes, the media have a lot of room for improvement in their portrayal of older people. But the responsibility, and the solutions, do not rest with the media alone.

David Brindle, Public Services Editor, The Guardian

Adapting infrastructure – fairness in care

People told the Commission for Social Care Inspection that it was important to retain their autonomy in older age. When people talked about services, they talked about what they could be assisted to do, not just how to manage their 'dependency'. People wanted services which were flexible and which based practical and emotional assistance on their choices and aspirations. They wanted to decide where, how and with whom they lived and how their services were delivered. They wanted to be supported by staff who were competent, reliable and who made them feel safe. They wanted to have the same opportunities and to take the same risks as anyone else.

As one person put it *"Fundamentally, it comes down to doing things with people, not to them or for them".*

There should be three universal elements in the care and support of older people. First, they should expect – and receive – a proper assessment of their needs, in which they are fully involved and which they can control and direct. Next, they should expect good information about their entitlements and options together with independent advice to enable them to make decisions. Finally, people should expect to have access to a supply of quality services, including social work services, which support their human rights and dignity.

Councils need to ask: What is it like to be an older person living here? Can people find the services they need? Can people living here grow old in the way they want? Can carers get the help and support they need? And if the answer is 'no', or the council can't answer the questions then these are the challenges they, their community and their partners need to address. Councils need to recognise that they are responsible for everyone in the communities they serve – not just those people who rely on publicly funded support, but also those who arrange and pay for their own care. Councils need to encourage a sufficiency of supply.

Good care is dependent on skilled and trained staff – but vacancy and turnover rates are high. The number of care and home care assistant vacancies notified to Job Centres almost doubled between 2003 and 2008. The Skills for Care workforce survey indicated that at any one time there were between 98,000 and 120,000 vacancies in the sector. Where will the trained workforce of the future come from if it cannot already keep pace with current demands?

Fairer ageing goes right to the heart of the relationship between the citizen and the State. The step change required to reshape the services and to translate good projects into the mainstream requires leadership, passion, commitment and resources from politicians and professionals in equal measure. The future relies on creative leaders with a vision for putting in place the involvement, the participation, the partnership and the services that people expect and a radical change in the relationship between those providing care and those people who need it.

Dame Denise Platt, previously Chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)

Changing attitudes for the better

Attitudes – we all have them, but what is attitude? What is its function? And how do we acquire one?

In 1935, American psychologist and founding figure of personality psychology, Gordon Willard Allport, defined attitude as *"A mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects with which it is related."* Or, *"An attitude is an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions to a particular class of social situations."*

He believed attitudes are learned, formed and developed in order to understand our world. They protect self-belief and help the individual adjust to the complexities of life.

To understand and evaluate our world we need a choice of correct behaviour patterns, which we then develop into concepts to summarise the complex information bombarding us in our daily lives.

Attitudes express our fundamental values – powerful stuff, in terms of culture, community and family. Attitudes change things for better or worse.

In the not too distant past, older people were respected for their knowledge, wealth of experience, skills and wisdom. In the UK, this has changed significantly by the widespread practice of classifying people by age in the workplace and economy. The value of experience in productivity has been lost, and has given way to negative stereotyping.

Often, media reporting on older people is far from empowering, using language which infers that older people are an annoyance, an encumbrance and a burden to the rest of society.

That this representation of older people reaches the younger generations to form their attitudes is bad enough, but worse still is the concern is that older people begin to absorb this negativity about themselves and sadly accept that they are worthless. By 2025, it is predicted that over half of the UK adult population will be over 50, so change must happen soon.

How do we create more positive approaches to our older people?

We are already making a great start – A new report by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) found that so-called 'third age entrepreneurs', aged between 50 and 65, were behind 27% of successful UK start-ups between 2001 and 2005.

During this time, more than 350,000 new companies were established, with third age founders at the helm of 93,500.

We need to wake up to a dynamically changing environment, accept demographic changes, and learn from the good practice in other countries, including the valued role of older people in dealing with global change. Attitude change is a complex area and can be an extremely difficult process, but there are a number of ways to assist the change:

- Take it to the top. Anti-ageism legislation does not always ensure implementation. We need to lobby and campaign to ensure that government makes this a priority.
- Fight back. Organisations and individuals need to work at getting the alternative information and messages out to the public.
- Get involved. Across the country intergenerational projects are bringing people from different age groups together, a new experience for many young people and an almost forgotten memory for many older people. And the learning is both ways; children teaching older people to use computers and the older adults getting into schools and helping children to read.

A new experience can alter attitude, and if we realise that everyone is needed and we all play our part, change can happen.

Evelyn Pellow, Enabling Concepts and Counsel and Care Voting Age project

Bringing the generations together

Action for Children is a UK wide charity working to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. Where once we ran children's homes, now we are almost exclusively an organisation working in communities and a large part of this is centred around the 250 plus children's centres that we run. This brings us into close contact with families on a daily basis, underlining the importance of extended kith and kin in providing children with love and stability, particularly when families are under stress. And we are seeing more and more initiatives involving older people in our children's centres.

These children's centres are at the heart of communities, often literally. They are vibrant, light, buzzing buildings where children and their families can meet up with friends and access a huge range of services including social care, health care, employment advice and training. Each is different because it is of its' community, reflecting the interests and character of the people who live there.

More and more, children's centres are developing into resources that serve whole communities. While their genesis was as Sure Start Children's Centres, highly targeted services for the poorest children, increasingly they are flexing to offer more. At their very best they exemplify all that can be achieved when a deep understanding of the value of intergenerational work is being developed as one of their key principles.

From the perspective of ensuring best use of resources, a huge amount of public money has been invested in children's centres in areas where modern and flexible community buildings are in short supply. They should be available to as many members of the community as possible, with every effort made to do this in a way that encourages integration, so that as many as possible can benefit from the investment without detracting from their original purpose.

Even more important is the incredible value of intergenerational relationships and benefits that they can bring, both to those immediately involved and to those around them. We see wonderful and enduring relationships leap frogging generations in our work, and often it is these relationships that provide resilience in families when parents are under the most pressure. The patience and unconditional love that grandparents, and great grandparents, offer children and young people is extraordinarily important and affirming for them. The joy and energy that is provided in return is invigorating and energising.

More and more initiatives involving older people in our children's centres are flourishing. Often these start as parallel activities and then spread and integrate as the benefits become apparent to everyone. The relationships need to be worked on, of course. Intergenerational work needs to establish its rules of engagement as both ends of the continuum have their thoughtless or intolerant moments. The benefits, however, are great, providing a tangible and important marker for how we can do things to strengthen families, their resilience and the richness of their wider communities.

Claire Tickell, Chief Executive, Action for Children

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