



Beyond the tick box

Older Citizen Engagement in UK Local Government

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Preface

Mervyn Eastman

UK Director

Better Government for Older People

Some years ago, following an address I gave to an older people's forum about the importance of engagement, one of its members commented, "You know, they listen but they don't hear!" I have frequently repeated that line and now some five years on find it as pertinent and insightful today as then.

So what, we may ask, has actually changed since Better Government for Older People (BGOP), with its Network of public sector bodies and active UK wide Older People's Advisory Group (OPAG), back in the late 1990s advocated the full and active participation of older people in all public sector decision making?

At one level, much. We have a raft of both UK and devolved government guidance, a Welsh Older People's Strategy underpinned by engaging older people in all its 22 Local Authorities and the National Standards for Community Engagement published in 2005, by the Scottish Executive. The word 'engagement' peppers all and every document and if we were to judge commitment on the criteria of rhetoric, there could be no doubt that never before have older people been so consulted, so engaged, so influential and so key in the design and delivery of public services!

The challenge BGOP faced was somehow to benchmark what effective engagement meant, and in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions, Audit Commission (and in addition, for London the London Councils), the Policy Studies

Institute (PSI) were commissioned to survey and study the various engagement models that existed and to explore the levels of active citizenship engagement and the depth of that participation. Those Local Authorities agreeing to be the subject of closer analysis are to be commended for allowing their engagement processes to be opened to such scrutiny and we again thank them for their leadership and commitment.

The eight case studies proved to be insights into specific local engagement practices and some of the structures that circumscribe engagement activity in local communities. These locations were purposively selected for study not so much to highlight best practice, but to reflect a wide spectrum of activity undertaken by Local Authorities and their partners to interpret and implement the notion of engagement. It is therefore acknowledged that they do not capture the full extent of local government and older citizen engagement in the UK. Although older citizen councils or parliaments, modelled on democratic representation, are increasingly used, this structure for engagement was not included in the study.

This study will be judged according to the reader's experiences, whether as an older person attempting to 'speak out', to influence, or to be taken seriously by the Local Council, or as an elected member, at whatever level of governance, seeking meaningful dialogue with older people rather than simply being given a 'shopping list' of concerns which the council should

be addressing. That is not to say that such issue based concerns are not important, but they can never be a substitute for meaningful dialogue and engagement.

Not surprisingly, the findings from this study are a curate's egg for those of us seeking to redefine and reshape the meaning of engagement! Thus the study excites but also frustrates. It accurately captures the range and depth of active engagement, but if we were looking for overwhelming evidence that engagement across the UK is increasingly being located within the context of whole systems, citizenship and co-production, and hence reshaping the way the public sector views its role and relates to local citizens, we still have some way to go.

In addition, the study findings demonstrate that intention is not the same thing as outcome. Engagement processed can so often be viewed as ends in themselves, rather than as ways of thinking and working with communities of interest. Older people remain somebody else: yes, to be consulted, even engaged with, but, as so powerfully put by Professor Peter Beresford and Tony Carter in an earlier study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000), involvement processes are highly political and also about power¹. The numerous forms of engagement and of involvement that currently exist, from straight forward advocacy and information to user/pensioners groups, forums for citizens or user juries, provide evidence of the range of processes, but whether they reflect and evidence 'being heard' is perhaps debatable. Campaigning and direct action groups can at least point to a given outcome of failure or success, but forums and networks perhaps less so. How does one define co-production or citizenship focussed processes and ensure they underpin engagement processes?

This study does not necessarily answer these questions but it certainly helps us to frame them and to challenge that 'engagement' that is no more than consultation and a tick

box activity. Others, however, have enshrined within their way of working new and effective methods which ensure that older people, in partnership with their Local Authority shape and design these ways of working!

The research holds no surprises for those readers familiar with and involved in engagement and community development and perhaps that is our greatest disappointment. But it also remains our ongoing and greatest challenge when working alongside Local Authorities and other agencies in moving away from engagement as an end in itself to co-production based on citizenship, choice and control.

In our experience, very few Local Authorities ask when they begin to design their engagement process what sort of relationship they want with their older citizens. If a Local Authority is looking for a fairly cheap tick box process; a forum that can meet regularly and engage occasionally; and opportunities for the Leader to visit for seasonal festivals, this will hardly become a significant driver for change.

Likewise, do older people's forums, groups, juries etc, ask themselves what sort of relationship they want with the Local Authority? Too frequently, in our experience engagement processes between older people and governance (at any level) are derailed because the relationship was entered into without giving adequate thought to the very nature of that relationship.

The numerous partners that make up Better Government for Older People rightly advocate differing approaches to and strategies for engagement, but hopefully never claim one method is the correct and only one! Frequently there is a temptation to import a model as if it were some engagement utopia, rather than review the various models in existence and explore what fits the local organisational and

cultural history, working from the bottom up and from the top down towards designing that which older people and local authorities feel appropriate. The journey towards establishing a process is often as important as the process itself.

However successful these models of engagement, be it an independent forum, a supported group or a panel, as the study shows there are strengths and weaknesses in each and thus need to be regularly reviewed by all participants to check it remains fit for purpose and reflects the relationship one was seeking at the outset.

The study reflects the most frequent and commonly used engagement approaches. The messages are clear. Some disappointing, others encouraging.

1. Health and social care issues predominate the Local Authorities' thinking about older people.

Hence the business and the context of interaction are towards users of health and social care services. Arguably this organisational driver is important and obviously necessary but it can seriously undermine a broader based citizenship approach to engagement.

2. Traditional Models of consultation and information sharing are favoured by the Local Authorities. There was evidence of Local Authorities still wishing to drive the engagement agenda forward, but constrained by the resources and skills at hand. It is informative that the study findings noted the least frequently used methods of engagement. Less than a quarter of the responding Local Authorities had 'time banks', older citizens' delivery of services, older citizens as mentors/ inspectors and older people as researchers.

There is in cited literature evidence that older people's groups (panels, forums

etc) "concentrate on areas where they had the best chance of influencing policy makers" or "go for quick wins" (Thornton 1999)².

Inevitably, influencing policy can be frustrating especially as it means a shift in powerbases and quick wins can dry up. Traditional models can start with a good deal of enthusiasm and energy, but can eventually end up simply perpetuating their own existence rather than sustaining themselves as an important change agents.

3. The means of engagement determine those included and excluded.

A broad mix of approaches is required to ensure the diversity of the older population is captured. Forums are frequently seen by older people and Local Authorities as being still the most effective, need to be viewed in the context of those who exclude themselves or are excluded from a single mechanism. There is evidence of huge and active forums in a number of places drawing numbers over the 200s. Engagement, however, is not simply or only about quantity but how far they engage (outside formal meetings, a guest speaker and refreshments) with their Local Authority reflecting the whole forum's membership, not just the views or opinions of the forum's elected officials. Being a Chair or Secretary of a large active forum or advisory group does not necessarily make an opinion right! Thus, understanding the drivers for engaging with older people has implications for the ways older people can be attracted to being involved.

4. The most innovative forums of engagement typically contain an element of informality.

Committee, Steering, Advisory or Strategy group structures with formal agendas, resolutions and some debate

have a role but cannot be the only way to relate to a Local Authority. The study participants argue for a broader range of engagement formats which can include social events, entertainment and the performing arts, one to one peer research, etc. Too often engagement is not seen as potentially a 'fun' experience. As with the previous point there was little experimentation and innovation, not least with intergenerational approaches to engagement, though it is known through organisations such as the Beth Johnson Foundation that such methods can be very effective engagement tools, especially for the more hard to reach younger and older generations.

5. Older citizen engagement is a complex activity requiring added skills and experience and adequate resources.

The most common engagement models detailed in the study demonstrate the need for reciprocity, engagement feedback, the role of locality, communication and human resource management skills both at officer and elected official levels. It remains a surprise and challenge that today many Local Authorities do not adequately resource the very processes they use to engage with older people in their communities. Engagement is not a project or the responsibility of the third sector or a take it or leave it process. The recent publication of 'Shared Priority Older People Action Learning Sets' (IDeA 2007 a/n) is a positive move in explaining how to capture this broader direction³.

6. Local engagement processes mainstreamed across the whole council and its departments.

Though a given director (probably the Director of Adult Social Care Services) may have lead responsibility, he/she will

require the buy in of colleague directors, chief executives, leaders of the council and others. That buy in requires good communication links, trust, capacity building, development of process across departmental boundaries (e.g. education, leisure, community safety etc.) and releasing resources from their particular budget heads! Adult social care cannot be expected to fund fully the Local Authorities' corporate and citizenship based older people's engagement processes. Pat Thornton's paper referenced above emphasises that involvement "requires effort and stamina"⁴ and that older people also have a life outside being involved in engagement processes, arguing that "fatigue and disillusion can set in if involvement becomes burdensome and doesn't lead to tangible results." If the leadership of the forum, support group, panel or whatever model is used feel that the whole process has become burdensome with little result and if the Local Authority feels the same then self evidently it is time to fold the partnership and reinvent the whole basis on which engagement takes place in the future. Outside this current study we have come across many examples of tired and bored participants (Older People and Local Authorities) who no longer feel energised by their engagement with each other.

These six key messages thus represent a challenge for all of us involved in partnerships that have been established to ensure that older people's citizenship, aspirations, concerns and needs are met on their own terms. Not on the basis of "I'm old so I must necessarily be right, you're an official so you must necessarily be wrong" but rather based on a relationship of mutual reciprocity, co-production, trust and respect and where cynicism is not the predominant mindset underpinning engagement.

The position of BGOP in endorsing this important study is to add our support to all those who seek to improve the quality of life with and for older citizens within a community. To take the study's findings and together with older people, Local Authority elected members, staff and all partners confront the challenge and grasp the opportunities. As we look forward to the next few years and examine the outcomes of various national and UK older people's strategies, gauge the gaps between policy intentions and the day to day experiences of all older people in their relationship with the public sector as citizens regardless of being a user or not.

The wider engagement frameworks will need to look not just to existing cohorts of older people, but to those generations who make up the "baby boomers." Generations of two decades (1945-1965) who have totally different perceptions of rights, obligations, aspirations, needs and challenges.

Their construct of meaningful engagement will inevitably be different and will challenge all our existing models. The proportion of older people from black and minority ethnic communities is anticipated to increase; the number of older people (50 plus) are anticipated to extend their working lives; the proportion of those with increased spending capacity and the very population will be older. Public services generally and Local Authorities specifically will need to:

- Clarify expectations about engagement and how it will fit within the emerging Transformational Government context of
 - co-production
 - amplifying the voices of older people
 - citizenship
- Move away from a dependency, sick and deficit view of age and ageing disconnected from corporate and towards whole systems approaches based on older people as citizens.

- Expect central government (and where appropriate devolved governance bodies) to become increasingly 'joined up' in their policy and guidance pronouncements and performance and evaluation frameworks. In particular, how might active engagement fit in with capacity building within the neighbourhood agenda?
- Work with, across all levels of public sector bodies and agencies, in moving from command and control structures of decision making towards a different, more flexible, more responsive relationship with the public (McTernan 2002⁵).

The present structures arguably remain patronising and paternalistic in the experience of many older people. Future generations of older people will not tolerate 1970s, 1980s or even late 20th century approaches to service design and delivery.

The older people's policy direction, underpinned by effective older people's engagement; strong and prosperous communities and local partnerships; and citizenship and the process whereby citizens work alongside professionals as partners in the delivery of services, provides a significant and robust foundation on which to transform the framework in which engagement takes place. This study, based on a national survey for detailed analysis and eight English Local Authorities and a series of workshops, provides a platform not just for further debate but for older people and Local Authorities to work alongside each other to review their existing engagement processes – building a coalition that does not reinforce cynicism and disengagement with engagement processes, but gives voice to citizen choice and control.

It could be argued that we already have the policies in place; but the question remains. Have we the political courage to move power away from Town Halls to the present

16.5 million over 50s to help plan, govern and deliver services and to view their contribution not as a concession but a basic human right?

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¹ Carter. T and Beresford. P. Age and change. Models of Involvement for Older People. Joseph Rountree Foundation. 2000

² Thornton. P. Older People Speaking Out. Developing Opportunities for Influence. Joseph Rountree Foundation. 2000.

³ IDeA. Shared Priority Older People's Action Learning Sets. (a/b 2007).

⁴ Ibid. Thornton. P. P16

⁵ McTernan. J. Future Drivers of Change. In From Welfare to Wellbeing – The Future of Social Care. Ed by Kendell. L and Harker. L. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). 2002.

1. Introduction

This is a report of research carried out by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and Better Government for Older People (BGOP) between 2005 and 2006. It draws from a survey of UK local authorities about their engagement with older citizens and eight qualitative case studies on specific local engagement.¹

Background

Debates about active citizenship have been an enduring feature of the last twenty years, although both the tenor of the discussion and scope of the concept have varied considerably over this period. The 1980s saw active citizenship defined as forms of self-help by individuals and families, and presented as an alternative to various forms of state welfare provision (for instance encouraging family care of older and disabled people). But recent debates have emphasised the importance of engaging with people in the community as a means of restoring trust in participative democracy and enhancing social inclusion and community cohesion (Jochum et al, 2005, Barnes et al, 2007). Acting on the concerns of citizens and using this knowledge to inform and shape policy and services is increasingly being promoted as a means by which government can help individuals achieve a better quality of life.

Public engagement in governance and public services, alongside democratic voting, constitute the core of the government's current 'active citizenship' and 'civil renewal' agendas (Jochum et al, 2005). Recent national policy initiatives have provided a growing impetus for the citizen engagement agenda. In 2005, the *Together We Can* cross-government strategy outlined a 65 point action plan to bring governments and communities closer together through citizen engagement in delivering policies. That same year, *Transformational Government* set out the UK Government's vision for a long-term modernisation of public services using technology more effectively and ensuring that a diverse range of people are consulted, included and engaged in the design and the delivery of the services that they use. These ideas have

recently been reasserted in the 2006 Local Government White Paper on *Strong and Prosperous Communities* which calls for greater choices achieved through wider citizen consultation and involvement in developing and running services.²

Various government sectors have played a role in advancing the engagement of older people as a specific group. Community engagement is a central theme of the ten-year strategy on the future of local government (ODPM, 2004) which has since led to more detailed proposals for new forms of engagement at the local level. Improving the quality of life for older people was one of seven shared priorities agreed between central government and the Local Government Association (LGA) in July 2002. The Shared Priorities Action Learning Set programme was established with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, now the Department for Communities and Local Government (Capacity Building funds), Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions. The outputs of the Older People Shared Priority project are included in a series of documents published by the IDeA (2007a/b).

Local Area Agreements (LAAs), launched in 2004, and now under the auspices of the DCLG, are being rolled out across England over the next two years. 'Healthier Communities and Older People' is one LAA theme, encouraging joint working across local agencies to improve outcomes for older people. More recently, the White Paper on Primary and Community Care (DOH, 2006) has advocated a new direction for community services with priority given to individual choice for improving the care of older people. In addition, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for 2005/06 required that 'excellent'

¹ The research was funded by BGOP and London Councils. A separate report for London only, *Engaging with older citizens: A study of London boroughs* is available at www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/bgop.

² Refer to <http://www.togetherwecan.info/> for further information about these strategies.



local authorities have a quality of life strategy for older people and area reviews include 'older citizen engagement' as an evaluation criterion.

Better Government for Older People (BGOP) has been promoting the 'voice' of older people in local government since it was piloted in 1997 in 28 local authorities. The pilot aimed to 'improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views, and encouraging and recognising their contribution' and tested the government's 'Better Government' themes such as citizen centred government, democratic renewal, joined-up working and Best Value (Hayden and Boaz, 2000). The success of the pilot has led to a UK wide network of partnerships including local authorities and other statutory organisations, older people's forums, and voluntary groups. The Older People's Advisory Group (OPAG), an elected body of older citizens, is central to this partnership. The BGOP membership (currently representing 95 Local Authorities and 216 forums, groups and agencies) is a leading force behind older citizen engagement in government processes, committed to:

'Increasing the profile of older people and ensuring that their diverse voices are reflected in policies and services, and their contributions are encouraged and recognised' (BGOP, 2003).

A recent Audit Commission / BGOP study (2004) offers a framework for developing comprehensive strategic approaches to improving the quality of later life. This includes an older citizen engagement component, which specifies that:

- Processes are in place to engage with a range of older people on a regular basis, including older people whose voices are seldom heard, using a range of methods;
- Older people are supported to participate fully, for example by offering induction or training sessions.

Separate legislation promoting the well-being of the older population has been enacted by the Scottish and Welsh national governments. Ongoing political issues in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly have resulted in less progress being made in this area.

Northern Ireland

In Ageing in an Inclusive Society (OFDFM, 2004) the government in Northern Ireland sets out its strategy to promote and support the inclusion of older people in the country. The strategy includes a citizenship component. Headed by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, the strategy was followed up in 2006 with an Action Plan. The Minister of State was designated the Champion of Older People in 2006.

The Older Person's Policy Forum was formed in May 2005, chaired jointly by Help the Aged and Age Concern, and meets quarterly. Membership is drawn from across the voluntary and community sectors, and is open to any organisation with an interest in older people's issues. Its aim is:

'To enhance the capacity of organisations within and beyond the older people's sector to make policy responses, coordinate policy information, participate in policy development, and influence decision making.'

Scotland

Scotland launched its older people strategy, *All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with and ageing population*, in March 2007. The document outlines key actions to ensure that the country benefits from the talents and experience of current and future older generations. Previously, an Older People's Consultative Forum, involving representatives of the major organisations working with older people, and chaired by the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, was established in 2002. There is also a dedicated Older People's telephone helpline. The Older People's Unit within the Department of Communities takes the lead on older people's issues in Scotland.

The Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on local authorities in Scotland to consult with community bodies in the local area, and this has been the main driver of engagement activity with older people. This has been recently reinforced in, *Better community engagement: A framework for learning* (SCDC, 2007) which presents guidelines for formal and informal transfer of engagement skills. However, research has identified that most of the older people consulted directly are those aged 65 and over who are using health and social care services, and that there is also an over-reliance on a small number of committed activists (Dewar et al., 2004).

Wales

In 2003, the Welsh Assembly launched its *Strategy for Older People in Wales* which placed a duty on all local authorities to consult with older people about the issues affecting their lives. All councils received Welsh Assembly Government funding for local Development Co-ordinators and to construct a local approach, including the establishment of Older People's Champions and Local Forums. By February 2005 it was reported that all local authorities in Wales had Strategy Co-ordinators and most had

Older People's Champions at the political level as part of their Cabinet.

To date, although the Strategy for Older People is seen to have improved relationships between older people and local authorities, and resulted in some gains for older people, overall awareness of the Strategy is seen to be low, and some local authority consultative activities are regarded as tokenistic (Help the Aged, 2007). Wales has recently legislated for the appointment of a Commissioner for Older People. More details on the approach to older people engagement in Wales are provided in Appendix A.

Definitions

Citizen engagement

Engaging citizens in policy making and service development has tended to be understood and achieved through consultation processes, i.e., asking particular groups of people to discuss and choose between a predetermined set of options. Recent commentators have provided a wider ranging and more complex framework for understanding the various forms citizen engagement can take. As depicted in Table 1, these can be viewed as a continuum, defined by the level of participation and control citizens have in the process, with 'informing' activities (involving little participation/control) at one end and 'empowering' activities (requiring fuller participation/control) at the other. In this context, consultation is more properly considered as one element within a wider engagement framework. Different types of engagement serve different purposes and multiple engagement strategies may be necessary in order to tap into the more interactive and participative dimensions of engagement (Wilcox, 1994).

Viewed as a form of deliberative democracy, public engagement can be developed as an arena for forging new forms of communication that do not derive from existing organisational contexts

Table 1: Levels of citizen engagement

Inform	Provide public with information without requiring any feedback
Consult	Enables choice between /feedback on predetermined options rather than an opportunity to propose alternatives
Involve/decide together	Views shared, options generated jointly and actions agreed
Collaborate/act together	Direct work with the public to make decisions and carry through agreed actions
Empower/Support local initiatives	Supporting groups to develop and implement their own solutions

Depth of participation ↓

Source: Adapted from <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=16452&CAT=2195> and Wilcox (1994).

(Barnes, 2005). This can be informed by utilising more informal communication exchanges in non-business settings. Styles of discourse that are typically excluded in the business context, such as narrative accounts of personal experiences, may prove to be more inclusive (Young, 2000).

Although there exists a clear legislative basis and policy rationale for local governments to seek to engage the public in the formulation and implementation of policy and services, some caveats have been raised about the public's willingness to participate and about possible unanticipated outcomes along the way (Jochum et al, 2005). The extent of public participation may have been overestimated and the processes involved may be more complex, slow and 'messy' than many local authorities would wish. Furthermore, the interests of government and members of the public are not necessarily identical, and some forms of citizen engagement may be deployed in such a way as to control and defuse agendas and debates which might otherwise have taken a more radical and critical turn.

Older people
Opportunity Age (DWP, 2005) presents the Government's strategy on older people and an ageing society. It presents older people

as active consumers of public services who have the right to exercise control, independence and choice over their lives. The recent Shared Priority Older People Action Learning Sets sponsored by the LGA (IDeA 2007a/b) advocate a community leadership model for interpreting ageing. This acknowledges that chronological age cannot be taken as a proxy for the diverse lives of older people. Rather, old age is considered a stage of the life course to which everyone belongs. For the purposes of this study, 'older people' is defined as:

'A socially constructed term for community citizens and customers of public services, typically in the later years of life, who collectively exhibit diverse needs and interests that can be found in the younger population but who, individually, set these needs and interests within the context of their unique life experience.'

The terms, 'older people' and 'older citizens' are used interchangeably in this report and are intended to imbue the same meaning.

Older people engagement

A prime rationale for seeking out and representing the needs and priorities of older people specifically is to improve quality of life in later life. Therefore, to inform public planning, policies and services that affect older citizens, governments need to understand older people's perspectives. Engaging with older citizens as a discrete group is promoted in the recently published LGA toolkit, *Engaging with Older People* (IDeA, 2007b) which argues:

- Governments need to respond to major demographic shifts in the size and profile of the older population;
- Older people are heterogeneous, not a single group;
- Certain sub-groups of older people are not adequately represented in current systems of policy and service development;
- There is a growing demand for input and choice among older consumers.

The label of 'older people' is inherently problematic, seeking as it does to bring within a single category people with very different characteristics and experiences in terms of ethnicity, gender, health and disability, sexuality, politics, work and life history, and so on. The diversity of the older population also makes it necessary to enlist a variety of engagement strategies, including individual and group approaches, in order to achieve representation (see for examples: Barnes, 2005; Carter & Beresford, 2000; IDeA, 2007b; Older People's Steering Group, 2004). Furthermore, the challenge of this diversity is compounded by the fact that many older people tend not to identify with the label 'older person', and often do not associate themselves as users or even potential users of services for older people (Darnton, 2005;

Barnes and Shaw, 2000). As the report will demonstrate, different models and structures have particular strengths and weaknesses in encouraging and sustaining effective engagement of older people.

This study has adopted the following definition for older citizen engagement with local government:

'The local authority – ideally working with partners – has sought to involve local older citizens to achieve many of the following: establish local priorities, devise plans, develop and design services, deliver services, monitor and evaluate processes and outcomes.'

Study purpose

The study aims to contribute understanding to inform practices of active, inclusive and ongoing engagement with older citizens. Although there is heightened awareness of the need for LAs to engage with the older population when formulating and delivering its policies and services, there is a gap in the knowledge of effective models for active engagement. The specific aims of the research were to:

- Scope the range of participation in local authority-older citizen partnerships;
- Identify gaps in partnership building;
- Identify LA and older people's perspectives on enabling factors and barriers for building continuous partnerships;
- Identify participatory models and innovative examples of engagement.

Methodology

The research was carried out between June 2005 and September 2006. It combines survey and case study approaches, soliciting evidence from multiple stakeholders. The study was conducted in three stages – two phases of fieldwork followed by workshops with stakeholders. This enabled both a broad overview of existing practices and an in-depth examination of specific initiatives of interest. The study reference groups provided advice and guidance throughout the course of the research.

National survey

A survey was administered by post to all 468 UK local authorities in June 2005. It was addressed to the Chief Executive officer who was asked in a covering letter to pass the questionnaire on to the member of staff who was best suited to respond. Postal and telephone follow-ups were used to boost the response rate. Most questionnaires were returned by post but, at the respondent's request, some were conveyed electronically.

The survey consisted of a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Respondents were asked if their LA followed a policy or strategy on citizen engagement and whether there was a specific strategy for engaging with older people. The survey also elicited views on what is currently helping or hindering progress towards older citizen engagement. It then asked respondents to indicate, from a list of common methods, what forms of engagement the authority uses and which of these are judged to be the most useful. The survey then asked for examples of projects or initiatives that illustrated existing approaches to older citizen engagement. (Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the survey instrument.)

Survey returns were logged and assigned a unique identifier to assure respondent anonymity. Responses were scanned into

electronic format and quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. Written responses were analysed and categorised into themes.

Local case studies

Eight English local authorities were selected for case study:

- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
- Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
- London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- London Borough of Islington
- Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Poole Borough Council
- Shropshire County Council
- London Borough of Sutton

Selection was informed by survey responses and discussions with the study reference groups. Selection criteria included the following:

- Evidence of citizen engagement mainstreamed within the corporate culture, as opposed to ad hoc projects;
- Examples of older citizens engaged beyond consultation and meetings;
- The local older citizen profile and diversity issues;
- Evidence of overcoming issues with the engagement process.

Case studies were purposively selected to include different types of local and regional government structures (district, county, metropolitan) and geography (urban and rural). They were also considered to be illustrative of the different activities taking place and to vary in the extent to which LAs had established engagement relationships.

A total of 64 interviews were carried out between April and September 2006. Eight interviews were conducted in each location: one face-to-face interview with a local authority representative; three telephone interviews with representatives from partner

agencies, and; four face-to-face interviews with older citizens. LA informants identified partners for interview and both LA and partner respondents facilitated access to older people who had taken part in engagement initiatives in the case study area. The case studies documented processes and probed the circumstances that enabled or deterred older citizen engagement, comparing the differing perspectives of older participants and LA officers and their partners. Depth face-to-face interviews with older citizen informants (four per LA, 32 overall) collected valuable detail on participants' characteristics, their roles in citizenship in the community, their perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the tasks they contributed to and what supports are needed. (Refer to Appendix C for the interview topic guides.)

For the three London case studies, fieldwork was facilitated by peer interviewers. This methodology is increasingly recognised as a useful means for promoting the inclusiveness of the research for a study population. Three associates from the Greater London Forum for Older People volunteered to serve as peer interviewers and were assigned to one of the study locations.³ Face-to-face interviews were conducted in pairs with a peer interviewer accompanied by a PSI interviewer. In order to aid the flow of the interview, it was agreed in advance which questions on the topic guide would be addressed by each of the interviewers. Peer interviewers attended briefing and debriefing sessions with PSI and contributed to the interpretation of results.

Interviews were recorded (with informant consent), transcribed and imported into the Nvivo7 qualitative analysis software. Interview respondents were anonymised through a unique identification code.

³ To reduce the chance of bias, none of the peer interviewers resided in the case study areas.

⁴ In one area feedback was on an individual basis as there was not an appropriate venue for a workshop.

Findings workshops

Early findings workshops were conducted with LA, partner and older citizen informants. These served to disseminate the research findings and to help validate the results. Workshops with older citizen participants were conducted in seven of the case study areas⁴ and were attended by study interviewees as well as other older citizens who had experience of engagement with their local government. Representatives from the local authorities that participated in the case studies and their partner organisations joined a feedback session hosted in London in January 2007. Discussions and issues raised at these workshops are incorporated into the findings of this report and were useful for interpreting the survey and interview results.

Report outline

Chapter 2 presents findings from the survey of local authorities. It scopes the range and predominance of different engagement approaches and includes views on what helps and what hinders engagement activities with older citizens.

Chapter 3 reports findings from qualitative studies of older citizen engagement within the eight local authorities. It presents models of how older citizen engagement is structured, emergent themes and issues related to engagement activities, older people's views on their engagement experiences and advice on how to improve engagement as stated by the various stakeholder groups. Throughout the chapter, examples of active engagement are presented in box format.

Chapter 4 presents the conclusions from the research.

2. Survey findings

Summary

- Completed questionnaires were received from 162 UK local authorities, a response rate of 34 per cent. It was not possible to make comparisons across the different nations due to small numbers in some regions. Most respondents (55 per cent) were based in the social service and health units of the LA while close to a third came from the corporate level.
- Most local authorities had systems in place that supported and facilitated public engagement. Nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of respondents said that their LA has a corporate policy or strategy for engaging with citizens, and a third of these had a separate policy for engaging older citizens. Seventy per cent said that their authority had plans to increase engagement activity with older citizens. But fewer than half (44 per cent) indicated that their LA currently provides training/support to help older citizens engage with them.
- Local authorities have tried a variety of means for involving older people in their activities. Six of the 18 methods listed had been used by at least two thirds of the responding LAs, while 11 were used by at least half. Those with a separate policy for engaging older people reported the most variety in their engagement activities.
- 'Information newsletters/publications' and 'user feedback surveys' were the most common methods of engagement, used by 90 per cent of the LAs. 'Older People Forums', present in 75 per cent of LAs, along with 'consulting expert older citizens', which was less frequently used, were judged to be the most effective means of engagement. Although 'Information newsletters/publications' and 'user feedback surveys' were among the most popular means of engagement, they were not judged to be the most effective.
- The least frequently used methods of engagement were 'timebanks', 'older citizen delivery of services', 'older citizens as mentors/inspectors' and 'older citizens as researchers', all of which had been used by fewer than a quarter of responding LAs.
- Respondents cited a range of issues that could impact on their efforts to engage. The lack of resources (funds, staff, time) was the main concern for driving engagement forward.



Completed questionnaires were received from 162 UK local authorities, representing an overall response rate of 34 per cent. Responses varied by nation, with Wales displaying the highest rate at 64 per cent (n=14), followed by England (35 per cent, n=136), Scotland (25 per cent, n=8) and Northern Ireland (15 per cent, n=4). Due to small numbers, it was not possible to draw comparisons on the results among the four nations.

More than half (55 per cent) of the respondents were associated with social and community care and health, LA departments that traditionally provide services to older people. Approximately a third (31 per cent) reported from the corporate level of the LA: the office of the Chief Executive or policy divisions. Smaller numbers of respondents identified themselves from housing (9 per cent) or other departments such as communications (5 per cent).

Corporate support

Results for the closed questions relating to corporate level engagement are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Corporate level engagement

	Percentages			
	Yes	No	UD	Missing
Local authority has a corporate policy/strategy for engaging citizens	72	11	15	2
Has corporate policy/strategy and a separate policy for older citizens	33	37	28	2
Has plans to develop engagement with older citizens	70	7	19	4
Provides training or support to enable older citizens to engage	44	31	19	6

Note: UD = Under development

Close to three quarters (72 per cent) of respondents reported that their local authority has a corporate policy or strategy for engaging with citizens and a third of these had a separate engagement policy or strategy that was specific to older people. A further 28 per cent indicated that a separate policy for older citizens was under development. In their written responses, many stated that their LA's approach to engagement was a generic one, including older people with the wider community. It was also the case that most of this activity specifically targeted service users, for example:

'Our policy is all enhancing and comprehensive and includes all service users and potential service users.'

Others who indicated their LA had a separate engagement policy/strategy specific to older people mentioned partnerships (PCT, BGOP/OPAG, Age Concern) and the establishment of specific groups (older people forums and councils) that served

as the key mechanism for engagement activity. Specific approaches to engagement are discussed in the next section.

Furthering engagement with older citizens was a priority for most as 70 per cent of respondents reported that their LA had plans to develop engagement activity with older citizens. This finding aligns with the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment which seeks evidence of active engagement towards enhancing the well-being of older citizens locally. The written responses indicated that the direction for developing older citizen engagement would vary according to whether the LA wished to pursue plans specific to the older population or adopted a more generic approach to citizen engagement. In the latter approach, respondents referred to strategies aimed at the wider public such as user participation strategies and a community cohesion agenda. The authorities who planned to target older people specifically divided between those who had already established vehicles and partnerships which they wished to further develop and those who intended to initiate forums, reference groups, councils and parliaments of older citizen representation.

Fewer than half (44 per cent) of the respondents indicated that their local government provides training or support to help older citizens engage with the community. Most respondents referred to a dedicated budget to fund older people groups and volunteers' expenses or to buy in services of outside agencies such as Age Concern's *Voices and Choices* programme and Interlink. Fewer mentioned dedicated staff within the LA who were responsible for training (both staff and older people), and out reach activities. A further fifth of the respondents reported their LA had plans to supply training or support towards future older citizen engagement.

Common methods of engagement

The survey asked respondents to indicate, from a list of 18 activities, what were the most frequently used methods of older citizen engagement used by their LA. They were also asked to rank the methods used according to frequency of use and effectiveness of use (with a rank of 1 being most used/effective and a rank of 5 being least used/effective, among the top 5)⁵. The findings are displayed in Table 3 and suggest that although local authorities have tried a variety of means for involving older people some methods are infrequently used.

Among the 18 activities listed, six were used by at least two thirds of the LAs while 11 were used by at least half. The average number of different methods used was 9.7, approximately half of the listed options. Authorities used as few as two of the methods and one reported using all 18. As would be expected, authorities with an existing corporate strategy or policy for citizen engagement used slightly more methods of engagement (9.7 types, on average) compared to those without a recognised corporate approach (7.8 types, on average). Those with a separate policy for older people reported the most variety in their engagement activities (11.7 types, on average).

⁵ It was left to the individual to define what was meant by 'effective'.

Table 3: Most commonly used means of older citizen engagement

	We use this	% Chosen in top 5 most used	% Chosen in top 5 most effective
	%	(average rank)	(average rank)
Information newsletters/publications (n=147)	92	71 (1.6)	57 (3.0)
User feedback surveys (144)	90	58 (2.5)	55 (2.7)
Community events and festivals (132)^	83	47 (3.2)	44 (2.9)
Voluntary & Community sector representation (132)^	83	47 (2.7)	44 (3.1)
Older People Forums (120)	75	74 (2.0)	64 (1.8)
Citizen's Panels (109)	68	49 (2.5)	46 (2.5)
Older People's Champions (101)	63	38 (3.5)	39 (2.9)
Steering Group representation (99)*	62	37 (2.9)	38 (2.8)
Local Strategic Partnership representation (99)*	62	34 (3.4)	34 (3.3)
Open board/general meetings (95)	59	30 (2.9)	24 (3.2)
Sessions in day / recreational centres (87)	54	31 (3.3)	26 (3.2)
Community planning/regeneration representation (70)	44	26 (3.2)	20 (2.6)
Sessions with cultural / faith groups (68)	43	13 (4.0)	15 (3.5)
Consulting 'expert' older citizens (59)	37	27 (2.7)	27 (1.9)
Older citizens as participatory researchers (36)	23	NS	NS
Older citizens as peer mentors / inspectors (31)	19	NS	NS
Older citizens as service delivery agents (25)	16	NS	NS
Timebanks or other forms of co-production (13)	8	NS	NS

* and ^ indicate ties.

Note: Percentages were calculated using all respondents as the base. Average ranks appear in parentheses and were calculated from among those who assigned the activity a rank of 1 to 5: 1 being the most used/effective and 5 being the least used/effective of the activities. NS means there were not sufficient numbers for a figure to be calculated.

To interpret the figures, for example, 92 per cent of respondents reported they have ever used 'information newsletters/publications'; but 71 per cent said they use this method frequently (in their top five most used engagement methods) and 57 per cent ranked this in the top five of their most effective activities. Among those 71 per cent who assigned 'information newsletters/publications' a top five ranking, they typically gave it a ranking of 1.6. But only 57 per cent of respondents ranked 'information newsletters/publications' in the top five most effective and they gave it a typical ranking of 3.0. These results suggest that, although printed materials are commonly used by the majority of respondent LAs, they are not considered to be a very effective means of engaging with older people.

'Information newsletters/publications' and 'user feedback surveys' were the most common methods of engagement, used by 90 per cent of the LAs. Seven of the activities were used by fewer than half of the LAs. The least frequently used methods were: 'Timebanks' (8 per cent), 'older citizen delivery of services' (16 per cent), 'older citizens as mentors/ inspectors' (19 per cent) and 'older citizens as participatory researchers' (23 per cent).

Older People Forums existed in three quarters of the respondent areas and along with 'information newsletters/publications', they ranked most frequently as one of the top five most used methods. Older People Forums were also chosen as one of the most effective means for engagement with an average ranking of 1.8 out of 5. Similarly, although 'consulting expert older citizens' was used by fewer local authorities, the method was judged to be relatively more effective than other means of engagement, assigned an average ranking of 1.9 out of 5 by those who used it. Interestingly, although 'information newsletters/publications' regularly ranked in the top five most used methods, it received only a moderate average rank (3 out of 5) for effectiveness.

Value of older citizen engagement

Respondents were asked what they felt were the advantages of involving older citizens in policy processes and initiatives. A variety of benefits were cited both for the LA and for older people themselves.

By far the most common response addressed the match between LA services and user needs. Engaging and including older citizens in local government processes brought 'providers and older people around the same table'. Tapping into older people's knowledge and experience would enhance awareness of service needs, challenge the

assumptions of professionals and help build understanding on the complexities of ageing. The aim was for a more client centred approach leading to more relevant services. For examples:

'Simply any policy or initiative is more likely to succeed in its purpose if the people it's meant to help are involved in the design. Older people have a huge amount of direct experience and knowledge we need to tap into.'

and;

'Users' active involvement is an asset which increases the chances of success at each stage of service planning and the care management process. It brings a different perspective on problems and can lead to imaginative and innovative solutions.'

Other perceived benefits to the LA included the promotion of inclusiveness and social cohesion and ultimately, better informed decision making within the LA. Some respondents mentioned the contribution to the 'active citizenship' agenda.

Fewer respondents mentioned benefits to older citizens. These included the promotion of service ownership and empowerment in the local community; enhancing awareness among older people of LA procedures and the political process; improving user satisfaction and citizen well being. Active engagement was also

promoted for social and psychological reasons, viewed as something that contributed to older citizens' confidence and self worth as a valued part of the community. As one respondent stated:

'Involvement can be an important means of readdressing the power imbalance that service users feel when dealing with LA officers. Group forms of involvement can be an important social contact for people who are more isolated. And the simple act of sharing experiences in a safe environment can in itself be an empowering as well as an uplifting experience for people who come to feel that they are not alone in their problems.'

Helps and hindrances

Two of the survey questions focused on ongoing engagement of older citizens and asked respondents their views on what would help further engagement and what barriers they were coming up against. The need for resources (funding, staff, time) was cited as both a help when they were available and a hindrance, where they were less forthcoming. Other factors seen to further and reinforce engagement were:

- corporate endorsement to make engagement a statutory requirement across LA departments; promotion of engagement as a shared priority and advertising this to the public;
- introduce the monitoring of LA engagement activity in order to ensure implementation and regulation;
- share awareness of older citizen engagement activities across LA departments (and across local authorities); examples of good practice; national guidance;
- improve partnerships with existing forums and older people groups;
- improve communication and access for reaching out and *'taking engagement to where older people are'*;
- a data base of interested participants;
- include mechanisms for feeding back to citizens the results of their involvement, including some *'quick wins'* to demonstrate that their involvement made a difference.

In addition to a general lack of resources (funding, staff, time), respondents cited a number of issues that make older citizen engagement difficult for them:

- lack of capacity (among both staff and citizens);
- difficulties reaching older citizens, e.g., diversity in population, social isolation, second language needs, transport needs, carer needs;
- unsupportive attitudes within the LA; lack of direction, lack of political will;
- older people lack awareness of engagement activities; poor communication of this;
- poor policy planning and tight timelines.

There was also mention of older people's prejudices towards the LA, perhaps deriving from bad experiences of *'tokenism'* in the past:

'Older citizens need to see that where they have engaged with us, they have had an influence on outcomes – the belief that their involvement won't make any difference can be a real disincentive.'

The lack of older citizen confidence, both with LA engagement activities and within themselves as valued contributors to the process was also cited as a barrier to enabling ongoing engagement. This was expressed as older people's *'lack of confidence in their own skills'* and their need to become familiar with LA activity, *'so that older citizens aren't overwhelmed by the bureaucracy and jargon'*.

3. Engagement case studies



Summary

The research identified three primary models that structure engagement partnerships, each with distinctive strengths and weaknesses:

- **The independent forum model** involves a separate organisation, typically led and administered by older people, that lends autonomy to older people's concerns. Individuals often directly engage with LA staff. However, engagement can involve only a few core members, and there are also sustainability issues due to low funding and time pressures on key members. A sub-type of this model involves a forum of older people that is funded by the LA and facilitated by a LA officer. This helps to sustain the group but could also be seen to limit independence.
- **The older citizen's panel model** is characterised as a large 'pool' of older people who can be contacted on an ad hoc basis, allowing wide representation and the involvement of those who are not interested in traditional meeting structures. Individuals often directly engage with LA staff but engagement tends to be reactive. Because the group does not exist as a separate entity it lacks independence and opportunity for older people to build a common cause is limited.
- **The supported group model** entails a third party organisation as host to a group of older people. The host agency acts as intermediary between older people and the LA. This facilitates engagement and ensures financial and administrative stability, yet engagement is often reactive and contact between older people and the LA is sometimes indirect.

The means of engagement often dictated the composition of the older people represented. Common methods like open board meetings and committee/ steering group representation rely on formal means of communication while more informal means in less business-like settings may be better suited to some older people. A variety of engagement models and approaches were advocated to improve the inclusiveness of the activity and to ensure wider representation of the older population. Other issues raised were the need for reciprocity in the engagement partnership and the need to manage parochialism.

Older people identified a number of reasons for being involved with the work of the LA: replicating skills and an identity previously realised through work; activity taken up following the loss of a close family member; satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a particular service; a wish to serve the community. Key obstacles to engagement identified from interviews with older people included health, disability, care commitments, issues with transport and language and a perceived lack of action on the part of the LA.

Innovative examples of active engagement included: older people performing service evaluations; LA officer presence at older people meetings; local level engagement; capacity building for BAME elders; community events; and informal activities such as health walks, international exchange visits and pub outings that helped nurture relationships between older people and their LA.

The eight English local authorities that were selected for case study represent a cross section in terms of locality, older population profile and local government structure. They also exemplify local authorities who have engaged with older citizens beyond the more passive approaches of information sharing and consultation to include methods at the participatory end of the engagement spectrum, such as service evaluation. In many cases the LA had support systems in place so older people could promote local needs and interests. Yet the local authorities differed in how they organised and implemented the activities.

The case studies provide opportunity for deepening understanding on some of the dynamics around older citizen engagement: models on how local authority-older citizen partnerships are structured; important issues and caveats, and; older people's perspectives on their involvement, including reasons why they do and do not get involved with their LA. This chapter covers these dynamics and finishes with formative advice supplied by 64 individuals who have taken part in older citizen engagement initiatives – representatives from local authorities, other statutory and voluntary agencies and older people.⁶ Illustrative examples of active engagement are provided throughout.

Engagement models

Older citizen engagement in the case study areas represented a wide spectrum of topics, timeframes, depth of involvement, and scope in terms of numbers involved. Yet common patterns were evident in the ways in which the engagement was structured. These are summarised in three basic models:

- Independent forums model
- Older citizen's panel model
- Supported group model

The LAs tended to work with a hybrid of more than one model for engagement, but it was rare that all three models were applied in one area. Although the models primarily represent access to groups of older people, it is acknowledged that engagement can and does also take place on a one-to-one basis, between LA officers/councillors and individual older people.

Independent forums model

The independent forums model, as depicted in Figure 1 by the two intersecting circles, represents local authority-citizen engagement that is channelled through a group of older people that exists as a separate entity from the LA (for instance, having their own premises and meeting cycle). A generic older people's forum is managed by older people and generally operates a formal committee structure led by a Chair who directs a volunteer membership (fee paying or non-fee paying). As the survey findings suggest, older people forums (e.g., Pensioners' Forum, Seniors' Forum) were reported as both a common and useful means for organising citizen engagement – three quarters of survey respondents ranked older people forums among the top five methods for engaging with older citizens.

There was an active older people forum in each of the case study areas, some of which had more than one forum to represent different local interests. The Over 55s Forum in Basingstoke and Deane is a typical example. The Forum was founded in 2004 as a response to the Promoting Quality of Life for Older People Strategy consultation in which older citizens expressed a need for an ongoing group to voice concerns of the over 55s. The group of over 300 members has contributed to the development and delivery of the *55Plus*, a guide for over 55s living in

the area and it continues to serve as a major consultative force on local governance. Similarly, the Bolton and District Over 50s Federation started in 2000 through the BGOP pilot scheme. The council provides funding to support room hire and the administration of a bimonthly postal newsletter for the groups' 300 members. Speakers from organisations such as the Council and the PCT attend meetings and this is followed by a question and answer session. The Federation has been a key contributing partner in the development of the Bolton Better Government for Older People strategy which sets out a framework for local engagement and was launched in 2004.

The Senior Citizens Forums in Shropshire reflect the two-tier government structure of the county and its districts. Started in 2000, the network consists of six district Forums that are coordinated by a County Association of Forums with a combined membership approaching 8,000. The Association receives unconditional funding from the council to maintain a website, administrative support, and news publications. The Forums are represented on Local Strategic Partnerships, topical scrutiny panels and regularly provide input into council department consultations.

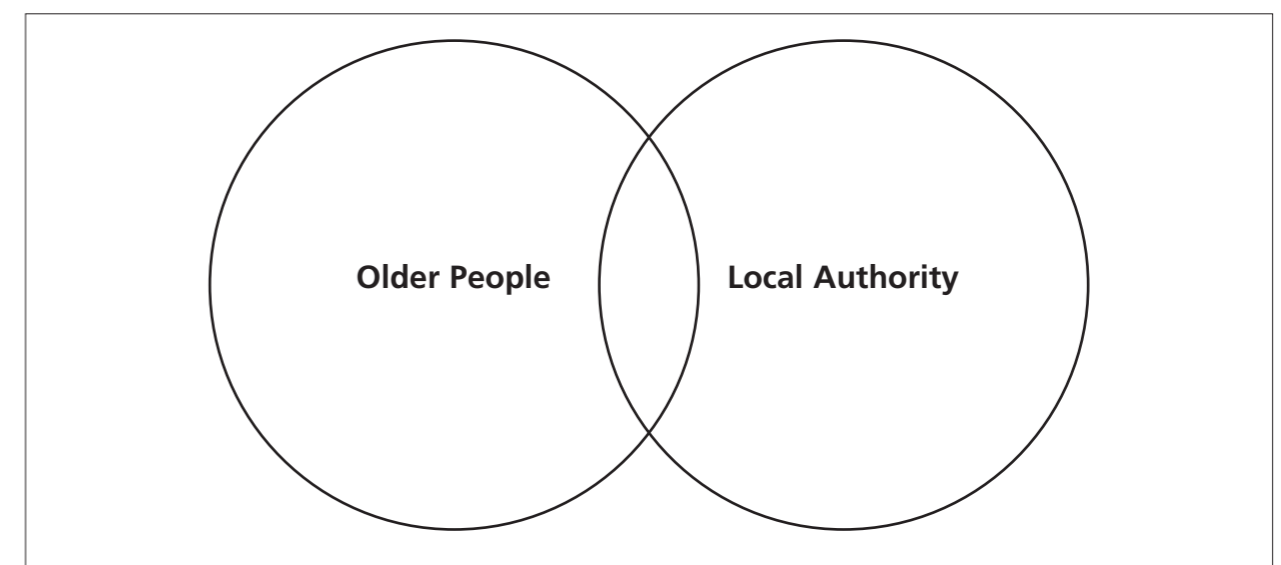
The district Forums also identify issues which are raised at regular meetings between the Association and the county council.

A sub-type of the independent forums model is more closely linked to the LA. For example, the Hammersmith and Fulham Better Government (BGOV) Forum is facilitated by a council officer. The Forum was established in 1998 as one of the BGOP pilots and is a partnership among older citizens, the LA, the health authority and voluntary organisations in the borough. It offers older residents the opportunity to get involved with the work of the LA, to make their views heard, as well as a social venue. The LA has helped to organise various special interest groups (e.g., transport, regeneration, health, proof reading) for members to sign up to. LA officers can then draw on the existing structures to involve older citizens when needed. Likewise, there were instances where the older people identified issues for action and used existing communication channels to raise awareness amongst LA staff.

Older citizen's panel model

Most of the case study LAs utilised an older citizen's panel (or a broader citizen's panel) to access their older population for engagement activities (refer to Figure 2).

Figure 1 – The independent forums model of older citizen engagement



⁶ The 64 interviewees were comprised of: eight LA representatives; 24 partner interviews were conducted with representatives from health organisations, other statutory and voluntary agencies, and members of older people forums; and 32 interviews with older people who participated in engagement activities with their local government.

The older citizen's panel model is structured around an active mailing list or data base of older people contact details which ideally represent the citizen profile of the area. These sets of named volunteers provide ready access to potential participants in various engagement initiatives. Typically, older people volunteers specify topics they would prefer to be included in, matching interests and expertise with engagement activities.

The older citizen's panel is not a physical entity and the group of volunteers do not assemble independently of a specific engagement initiative. (This is depicted in Figure 2 by the broken circle.) Rather, sub-groups of older people 'become live' when called upon to participate in an engagement activity.

This model was the primary engagement structure used in Islington and it is an emerging structure in Poole (outlined in the next section). The I-Opener database (Islington Older People Empowerment Network) was initially constructed from a mail-out based on GP and Freedom Pass lists. The database is comprised of around 3,000 older volunteers and recruitment is ongoing. It is maintained by the PCT and made available to LA officers and any

partners who wish to initiate engagement. Listed volunteers have identified which topics they wish to be involved in. To date, names have been 'pulled from the database' to access volunteers for consultations on social benefits, drafting a 'flu letter' and participating in a mystery shopper exercise for mobility access.

Supported group model

The supported group model, as depicted in Figure 3, is characterised by the presence of three key players: the local authority, older people and a third party partner who acts as both host to the group of older people and intermediary between the older people and the LA. In this structure, engagement is organised and overseen by the partner, typically a voluntary sector agency specialising in older people issues, who is contracted by the LA. This model was utilised somewhat differently in three of the case study areas: Knowsley, Sutton and Poole.

The Knowsley Older People Voice (KOPV) was established in 2003 by Age Concern with funding from Social Services and the PCT. Dedicated Age Concern staff help to administer a 300 strong membership of older people who represent over 45

groups, including local older people clubs and local branches of national groups such as the University of the Third Age. There is an elected steering group of eight members who liaise with the LA, PCT and other statutory and voluntary agencies. The KOPV host quarterly themed events for older people (e.g., age discrimination awareness, IT, housing) and also provide volunteers who are seconded to sit on various Council committees. They have contributed to a local information pack for older people which provides answers to frequently asked questions related to topics such as, health, community safety, home life, leisure and finances.

In Sutton, Age Concern has been commissioned to run a User and Carer Involvement Group for older citizens. The group is comprised of 30 older people volunteers and is partly funded by the LA and PCT but also carries out commissioned work for its numerous functions, with a peer participatory focus, e.g., quality monitoring evaluations (homecare, hospital nutrition and hygiene), research surveys, training (age discrimination), proof reading documents. In Sutton, engagement activity following this model is typically initiated by the Local Implementation Group (LIG),

a partnership between the LA, PCT and health agencies. Age Concern then organises the older people who engage in the activity.

Poole uses a hybrid of the supported group and citizen's panel model in the Older People's Strategy Group (OPSG) and the Poole 500. These are managed by a voluntary sector agency, Help and Care, and are funded by the LA in partnership with the PCT and health authority. The OPSG offers continuity to the engagement process through an ongoing group of approximately 20 volunteers. The group has regularly contributed to policy and service development in areas of social care, hospital care, transport, and personal finances. More recently, Help and Care has expanded older people involvement through the Poole 500, a network that more broadly represents the diversity of Poole's older population. People were asked to sign up to a data base from which they would be called upon to share their views on the local community through a means that suits them, e.g., collectively through a club, survey response, focus groups, telephone conversation, home visits. The aim is to match individuals to their preferred means of engagement.

Figure 2 – The older citizen's panel model of older citizen engagement

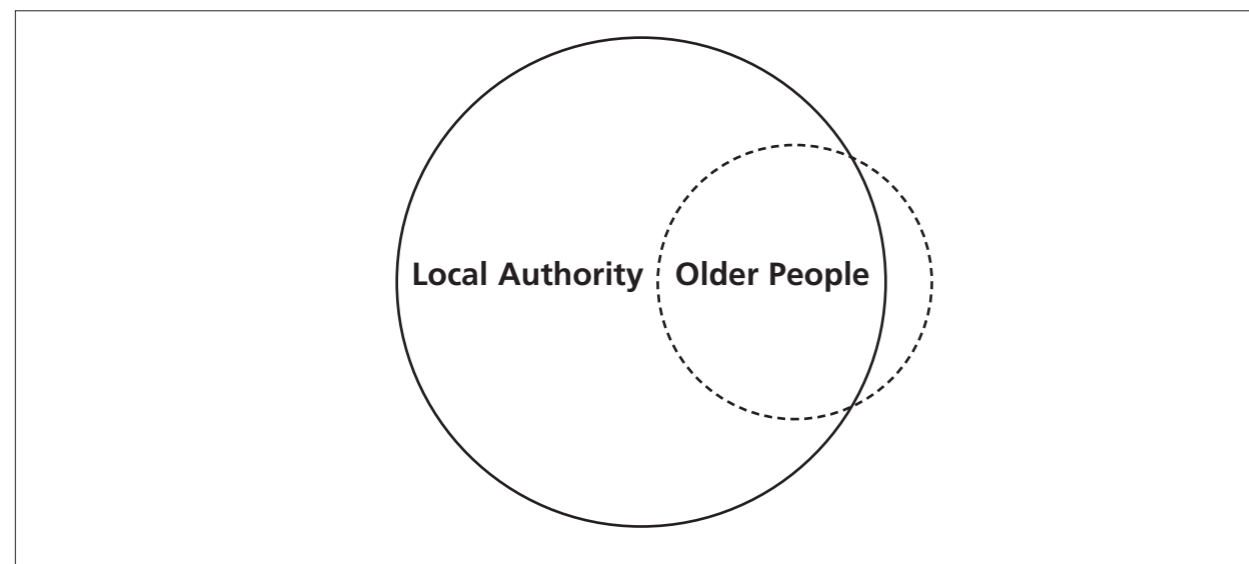
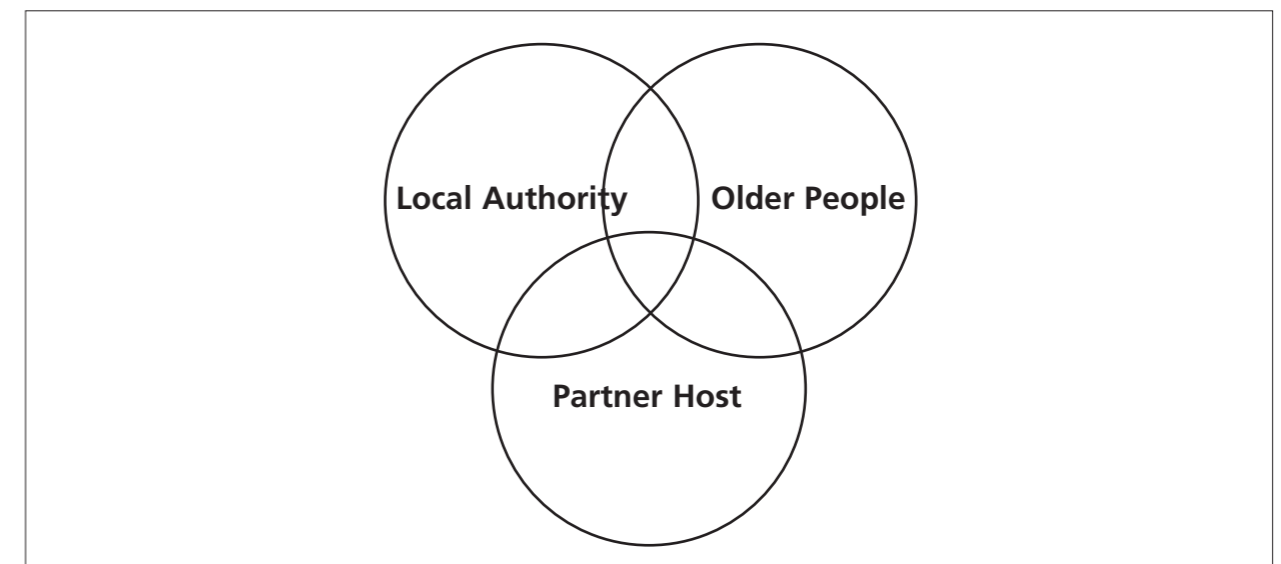


Figure 3 – The supported group model of older citizen engagement



Active engagement 1 Older people delivering engagement

One example of active engagement entails older people managing or facilitating engagement activities. This could be initiated by a group of older people or carried out on behalf of the council. It was common for older people forums to survey their membership on a regular basis. Results would then be fed back to the council. For example, the Shropshire County Association of Forums regularly polls its members via a return slip survey that is attached to their newsletter. A recent survey soliciting opinions about concessionary fares for transport attracted 2,000 responses.

A prime function of the Sutton User and Carer Involvement Group is to engage with older citizens in the community, often on a one-to-one basis. Volunteers have built up their capacity to perform peer interviews for research and

evaluation exercises. These skills have been used for monitoring services such as private home care provision and hospital health and safety and for face-to-face interviews that contributed to the local older people strategy consultation. Those who take part feel valued for the experience and empathy they can contribute. They mentioned how people open up to someone they can relate to, someone in their own age group, for example:

'What is often called the hand on the door knob syndrome, this is not until you're going that somebody suddenly mentions something which is very important indeed.'

It's very open, they know who the officers are or the members are who they need to see, so there's a constant ongoing communication, all the time.'

However, the evidence shows that a balance needs to be struck so that a Forum's efforts at raising awareness do not evolve into a

'them' and 'us' scenario. Some Forum members viewed their role as a pressure or lobby group and referred to the 'power of groups'. Yet study informants stressed the importance of maintaining trust and respect among all parties in the engagement relationship. They acknowledged the need to maintain awareness of local government limitations in terms of what can be achieved and when, as stated by one partner respondent:

Table 4: Strengths and weaknesses of different engagement models

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Independent forums model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an independent group, usually led and administered by older people – opportunity for older people initiated topics for engagement; empowerment – direct contact between paid officers and older people representatives – a sub-type of this model entails the LA as facilitator for the forum which contributes to sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sustainability an issue with person turnover and lack of funding but a lesser issue when the group is facilitated by the LA – engagement may be limited to a few core members; individual's agendas – forum as lobby group or 'watch dog' can strain engagement relationship
Older citizen's panel model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a readily accessible group, usually large and with varied interests and expertise – a wide spectrum of people can provide variation in older people representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – group not a physical entity; therefore lacks continuity for older people – engagement can be ad hoc and reactive
Supported group model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – funding and administration usually sustainable – third party can act as a facilitator for engagement between older people and the LA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – older people engagement can be indirect if filtered through partner host – engagement activity usually initiated by LA and/or funding partners; older people as reactive participants

Comparing the models

The models represent different underlying structures of engagement and, to some extent, delineate relationships between older citizens and local governments. Analysis of these structures operating in the case study areas reveals both strengths and weaknesses in the engagement partnerships that can form. These are summarised in Table 4.

The independent forums model provides the greatest opportunity for older people led initiatives. Independent forums are generally 'for and set up by older people' and provide the opportunity for members to operate a separate agenda from the LA while offering channels for exchanging information and views with LA officers.

Citizen engagement could be initiated by either the LA or the older people but it was more often the former. Committee representation on local policy and strategy initiatives was a common engagement method for Forum members. But it was not uncommon for a Forum, particularly as the group matured and as networks were forged, to bring issues to the LA. For example, referring to the activity of one Forum, a respondent observed:

'It's not always [LA] chasing up somebody else. They're interested in issues, like transport and they will go and see the people concerned.'

'We have to make them understand that we also have our restrictions in fulfilling their desires in a particular service delivery. I always find that the needs are never ending, but these places are always restricted.'

Similarly, one older person described how her committee involvement had led to an appreciation of the limits within which LAs operated:

'It's nice to have insight into how the LA has to work and their restrictiveness. They haven't got magic wands and it's not just always money, they have restrictions that they are working to. So you do get an insight into why certain things can't be or can be as we would hope.'

An awareness of the limitations on LAs to respond and deliver to public input was important for all engagement partnerships described in the models.

The older citizen's panel model probably encourages the least autonomy for older people as the group is not a physical entity (providing little opportunity for members to get to know each other) and engagement is primarily a reactive process on the part of the older citizen. In this regard, participation in specific projects could be fragmented and appear ad hoc. On the other hand, an extensive list of volunteers potentially increases the breadth

of older people's voices, offering a say to those who don't want to join an ongoing group and a solution to engaging with 'the same old suspects':

'That's why we did the database ... because up till then, yes, it was the Pensioners Forum. Everyone went to them and asked them because once you'd talked to them you got the views; you've done your consultation. But that's not everyone's view ... So what we've tried to do with the database is pull different people out.'

Both the supported group model and a forum that is facilitated by the LA, can offer the security of funding and administrative help towards sustainability. This provides continuity for older people in the group. Lack of financial resources was an issue for some of the Forums where older people struggled to find core funding to cover administrative expenses. Fund raising strategies included membership fees, events like coffee mornings and direct applications to funding bodies. One Forum that had received LA funding for a limited duration reported they were struggling to secure money from other sources. This was seen to detract from their other activities, including LA engagement, as stated by one Forum member:

'If we don't get the finance then we will struggle. And if the LA or the government are not willing to put the

money there then this excellent project will go down the drain like a lot of other things.'

A benefit of the supported group model is that the LA can capitalise on the strong community relations that their partners have established, thus providing access to individuals who may have been less interested in attending engagement activities if they were directly organised by the council. Furthermore, by maintaining staff outside the organisation, the LA can ensure that the engagement support officer does not get pulled on to other council business when the pressure is on. However, in some cases, the relationship between the LA and older citizens could be more distant in the supported group model. This was particularly evident when the partner is commissioned to broker engagement and when communication of the older people perspective is channelled through the partner host. In some areas, LA officers were not present during the engagement activity, and, when they were present, they were less visible. This could potentially minimise the perceived role of the LA in community engagement and lessen its control over the form and content of engagement activities. In one area, some of the older people interviewed were not aware that the LA were involved in funding and organising the events they attended; they attributed these successes solely to the partner organisation.

Active engagement 2 Direct LA presence

Survey and interview respondents all reported on the importance of whole LA buy-in to the engagement process. In particular, it was considered vital that high-ranking officers and especially the Chief Executive play an active role in engagement. Some case study areas had the advantage of a regular, ongoing LA presence within the context of older people meetings. In some instances, paid officers gave topical presentations to a group. These would occur at the regularly scheduled meetings of the older people group. In other cases, paid officers attended these meetings as an observer.

The relationship between the LA and older people groups was shown to vary and mature over time. For example the BGOV forum in Hammersmith and Fulham has forged a partnership with

the LA over 12 years. The forum is included in local decision making which, in the past, has extended to scrutinising LA budgets. The principal aim of the Knowlsey Older People Voice is to provide a voice for older people in local decision making and policy review. KOPV meets about five times a year. Officer presence at the meetings enables direct communication between older people and local government:

'We have had a council representative who have come to the major meeting and then, of course, any problems we have we bring to them directly. So we can have a contact with them.'

to work together across different departments and share that information.'

Tied to broadening responsibility for engagement was the recognition that engagement ought to be integrated into the work of the LA, rather than a 'bolt on' or 'tick box' exercise. This would elevate engagement to being part of 'the culture of how people work' so that it was part of daily working practice, i.e., in the words of one LA officer, 'making engagement a part of the day job rather than an add-on.'

The development of a local older people's strategy also provided a focus for partnership working across the LA. A positive outcome of the process was that it helped to establish networks of interested agencies working with older people: 'There's an already existing knowledge of the community that they have, that we can tap into and it helps us.' One LA officer attributed the increase in joined-up activity to their recently launched Older People's Strategy:

'Particularly since we launched the Strategy ... I think since then, we really have been very connected to what's going on, influencing and working with people across the council and partners who are often not dominated by older people's issues, and are often looking at issues for the whole population.'

Another respondent highlighted the importance of an engagement network

that runs up to the Chief Executive, across to various statutory and voluntary agencies and to the people on the street. The older people forums and, to a lesser extent, the supported group of older people, were also viewed as partners in the engagement process⁷ and it was evident that this relationship matured with time:

'To engage successfully you need to build really close relationships with the groups that you're trying to work with, not just come in and go and then come back a year later. It takes time to build the relationships.'

Means of engagement

As discussed in Chapter 2, LAs can use an array of methods for collecting older citizen input, including surveys, community events, open board meetings, steering group and committee representation and that some methods are used more frequently than others. The research supports the view that the means of engagement can dictate who gets involved. LA staff and partners were aware that many engagement activities take place in a formal group setting and respondents from all quarters noted the monotony of the meeting format. But there was also concern that the meetings present an unfamiliar environment to some older people and one that places them at a disadvantage. As, one partner noted:

'I think it's often to do with the whole structure of meetings which can be quite intimidating, particularly if

Emergent themes

Partnerships

As in the national survey, much of the older people engagement in the case studies centred on health and social services with a user and carer focus. Leadership for engagement within the LA was typically housed in social services with key partners being the PCT, other health agencies and voluntary organisations serving older people. This partnership reflects traditional approaches to older people services which are reinforced by recent initiatives like the National Service Frameworks, Local Public Service Agreement targets and Local Strategic Partnerships. Though social services tended to be the hub for older people engagement activity on behalf of

the LA, other departments were becoming increasingly aware of their own role in engagement, with encouragement from the more experienced staff. For example, social services staff in one of the LAs felt it was their responsibility to mobilise other departments who were gradually taking on the engagement agenda:

'It is starting to filter through the organisation for them to say we'll identify a particular target group and then engage: 'Okay, what are your issues in that particular strategy?' And we'll try

⁷ Indeed, some LA representatives nominated for partner interviews members from the local older people forum.

you haven't perhaps come from that working background or that kind of background where they're used to being in kind of formal types of meetings.'

Another partner respondent described a less formal exchange where older people prefer to relay a personal story to illustrate their point. It was felt that this form of discourse was not always compatible with the committee structure:

'The way they engage with us is to say, 'Well, this is what it means for me, and this is my experience', and I think sometimes we can dismiss that and it's a bit like, 'Well, actually we're not talking about that today, this is the project group and we're commissioning this and we want to talk about that, and we don't really want to be bothered too much with hearing about your husband for half an hour today'. ... We've got to think about how we structure our meetings and about whether the formal way that we do it, is the best way to allow people to engage with us; the sort of committee set up type of thing, does that allow people to participate and

engage, or is there a different way of doing it?'

One solution to this 'clash of cultures' was skills training for both staff and older people. This tended to be more a case of building up the capacity of older people to become aware of and able to perform in a formal committee structure. In one LA, the Chair of a committee made it a practice to brief older people representatives on the content and order of the meeting prior to meeting start-up. Time was always set aside for older people to voice their concerns. LA staff also attended awareness training on ageism, for example.

An alternative strategy, was to acknowledge the restrictions of the meetings format and to 'de-formalise' engagement. In some cases it was found that engagement events that centred on one topic (e.g., transport) raised other issues of concern (e.g., housing) or sometimes issues could emerge at a leisure or social event (e.g., swimming club, learning event) that did not have engagement as the primary focus. Although resource intensive, one LA combined engagement in the community with other traditional, group approaches:

'We are finding more and more that people respond to much more informal types of consultation, smaller groups, actually going to visit people on a one-to-one basis within their own homes.'

Active engagement 3 Local level engagement

In Bolton, the 'Neighbourhood Network for Older People' was set up to address local community concerns. In one area, made up of two electoral wards, meetings regularly draw together older citizens to discuss common issues with local councillors and partner organisations. Meetings are held in the afternoon in accessible and popular local venues, such as a church hall or a sheltered housing community room. This format has encouraged attendance from some people who may not wish to get involved in town centre events or meetings, nor attend area Forum meetings which are held in the evening.

The Neighbourhood Network was a response to the 'A Better Bolton for Older People' strategy consultation where older people stressed the importance of neighbourhoods and community facilities as part of their involvement. To date, local older citizens have worked with the council to raise awareness on various community needs for action (e.g., social isolation, safety, transport, housing) and new initiatives are addressing these concerns. Discussions are taking place to identify how to expand the model to other parts of the borough, recognising the diverse needs of the different areas.

Representation

An issue relating to the inclusiveness of different engagement methods was older people representation. Most respondents felt that a mix of older people was represented through their engagement mechanisms. But, when pressed, some identified sectors of the older people population that were underrepresented – noting gender, age and class biases, BAME groups – although this was not uniform across the areas. There was, however, a general concern about accessing those defined as 'hard to reach', often those who were housebound and living alone.

Representation was also limited to those older people who volunteer to join in, as some people are drawn to the separate social function of a group and were not interested in getting involved with the LA. It was acknowledged that within one older people forum, only a small number wished to be involved with the local government:

'The majority join because they want companionship but a few join because they want to make an influence, but a very few.'

There was a view amongst respondents that people could not be 'forced' to be involved in local government and some people opt out by choice. For example, one older person noted:

'I think the answer is that there are some people who are interested in being part of a consultative process and there are some who, for whatever reason and quite properly, don't see it as something they are very good

at or want to be involved in, and that's not true just of older people that's true of people generally.'

Therefore, in some instances, the same individuals or a 'core group' repeatedly served on LA led committees as 'the voice' for older people in the area. This was particularly evident with the Forums where it was acknowledged that a few individuals 'do all the work'. Those few individuals were considered to be a valuable asset for public engagement. As one respondent explained, LAs can tap into informal networks where a few older people, through their networking, can serve as messengers:

'Those people are also soaking up what their groups and their neighbours and friends tell them, and they have the confidence to come to meetings that other people won't have.'

Still there was an acknowledged need to ensure that the few well meaning individuals are in fact representing the concerns of a wider group and that messages are getting back to the wider target audience when filtered through an individual. For example, one older person who served on numerous boards and committees, when asked if they fed back to their Forum stated, 'If there's anything interesting, I report it back.' Some LAs were increasingly aware of this issue and were moving away from the notion of 'inviting a token older person to a meeting and expecting them to be the voice of all older people.'

The outreach strategy, mentioned above, of going into the community and accessing

older people where they naturally congregate was also promoted as a means for improving representation as was the use of a data base reflecting the older population profile.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was a key factor fortifying positive relationships between older people and the local authority and other organisations with whom they engaged. The notion of reciprocal exchange in the engagement process could operate at different levels, as immediate or deferred engagement participation. In relation to the former, older people described how they were happy to take part and offer their views and skills, but they also appreciated getting something in return, whether this was refreshments, the provision of lunch or because efforts had been made for the activity to also be fun and provide an opportunity for socialising. Several LA officers echoed this point, recognising the need 'to offer incentives to get involved and not to expect someone just to, you know, give up their free time' in order to demonstrate that older peoples contributions were valued. Another explained:

'If you want to engage with the people, then you have to treat people. You have to find something in it for them and you have to give them, to treat them in effect.'

This mechanism could also be seen to operate in a more indirect form in the way LAs and partner organisations provided entertainment, leisure activities or services for the benefit of older people and in doing so increased older people's commitment to the organisation. The goodwill generated by these activities provide a means for local authorities to reinforce future participation.

One older person explained that she was quite happy to be phoned up regularly and asked to participate in focus groups because the voluntary organisation that hosted them had done so much for her over the years, such as installing light fittings and securing a chain on her front door.

Active engagement 4 Engaging BAME elders

The 'BeMe' initiative in Hammersmith and Fulham was a direct response to low BAME representation in older citizen engagement activity. It was set up to encourage and support elders from African Caribbean and Asian communities to participate in local planning and decision making and ensure their voices are heard. The aim was to build capacity through training on skills that would facilitate engagement, including: public speaking, confidence building, instruction on the conduct of meetings and on government processes. Training took place in local community centres and was facilitated by centre staff. BeMe has contributed to the numbers from these communities who now engage directly with the LA and to the mainstreaming of BAME elder participation within public service decision making. BeMe has been incorporated as a subgroup of the LA facilitated older people's forum. The initiative has stimulated continued consultation and discussion of issues amongst community elders:

'Plus the elders that were involved in that piece of work ... they still do continue to meet as a group where they look at specific issues that might be affecting elders from their community.'

The Asian Elders Initiative (AEI), in Bolton is managed by and offers support to the Asian over 50 population. It receives funding from Social Services. One aspect of the initiative involves older volunteers from a mix of ethnic and religious backgrounds serving as senior health mentors. This support is facilitated by Age Concern. The AEI recently opened a resource centre which offers a one-stop-shop for information and advice. Entertainment and activities promote healthy living.

Engagement feedback

Notification of engagement outcomes and the follow through of engagement activities to include feedback was valued as an integral part of the process. LA and partner respondents acknowledged the need to brief older people on the products of their engagement and to ensure there are 'quick wins' to reinforce their continued involvement. But respondents from all stakeholder groups identified this as something that was not practiced enough.

For older people, a perceived lack of action on the part of the council sometimes contributed to cynicism and the perception that engagement was tokenistic. A major contributing factor was the lack of palpable outcomes; the time lag between engagement participation and results and the absence of follow-up and debriefing on engagement outcomes. For example:

'They are planning for the future but its my grandchildren's future. I'm also interested in ourselves, immediate, and this is the thing that is lacking, some policies that affect us now.'

In some instances, older people felt that the biggest problem was that they were not aware of whether their engagement had made a difference. Referring to feedback from an older people initiated survey, one person observed:

'I report it back to the membership, the council and the police giving them information on what concerns older people... they listen to us but I'm not satisfied that

it finishes up. It's frustrating from that point of view.'

Similarly, there was mention of direct, one-to-one contacts between older people and LA officers not being followed through. One person appreciated a recent event but expressed dismay about a lack of response to her questions:

'The man about council properties, I did say to him that I wasn't interested immediately but I would like to know how to go about it. He took my name and address and that was it.'

Locality and Parochialism

The importance of people engaging on a very local level was raised by respondents in all areas, urban and rural, and reflects the concerns revealed in other studies of individuals with local issues and services. One older person explained why it was hard to recruit participants to engagement activities because issues did not resonate with their personal or local concerns. It was felt that people can relate better to their local area rather than the wider government jurisdiction and some older people sometimes expected engagement that was specific to one area or 'bit of the borough.' LA and partner respondents echoed this observation about local boundaries, for example:

'Trying to involve the community, which is quite tricky. ... We have residents' associations and community associations but they're quite often focussed very much on their locality rather than

the bigger issues so it is trying to put the larger issues that would cross the whole borough or cross the particular population on to their agendas and that is quite difficult.'

One officer noted how the voluntary sector organisations in the area tended to be situated within particular geographical boundaries that, to a certain extent, reflected how far older people were prepared to travel. They explained that the fact that older people were often reluctant to travel across particular postcode boundaries needed to be taken into account when organising engagement activities.

Parochialism was not necessarily seen as a negative issue for local authorities; it simply required managing expectations and decentralising means of working with older people through outreach work and local meetings. Shropshire's multi-forum structure was an embedded and formalised version of this. The response in Bolton has been a Neighbourhood Network for Older People which entails holding topical meetings at the ward level. But other respondents talked about it in more informal ways for example, going out and accessing older people in multiple local settings:

'You really look at the places they are going to and you work with them there rather than say 'Come to the civic centre' or 'Come to the community centre.'

Active engagement 5 Community events

Some LAs hosted large scale events for older citizens. The remit of these differed by area but essentially they were promoted as fun days out and an opportunity for older people to meet and talk to members of the LA, PCT and other service providers in an informal and relaxed setting.

In Poole, 'Speak up/Speak out' is a regular event run by Help and Care which are funded by the PCT and local authority. They are large, day long events, incorporating a meal. They consist of workshop activities designed to address older people's priorities and small group sessions are often facilitated by older people. Service providers and council departments run stalls, providing an opportunity for informal information giving. The event is well attended and, although the refreshments were a particular highlight, older people also enjoyed the workshop element and the chance to have their say. One older person described in detail the activities and the range of people who attended:

'There are representatives from NHS, Bournemouth university, fire, police, council, various parts of the council...Social Services... They hold a sort of fairs either before the main

meeting starts and during the intervals which is when you can pop up.'

Hammersmith and Fulham hold a similar event called 'Time of Your Life'. The event includes taster sessions, information resources, workshops and activities such as aromatherapy and massage. Involving older people in the organising of the event, aims to ensure that it is meeting the needs of older people in the area. The event is free to attend and is advertised in local press and via posters in the main shopping area of the borough. One LA officer identified its potential for broadening participation:

'We tend to find that people come along to 'The Time of Your Life' because it's fun. We see people there that we wouldn't necessarily see anywhere else and we always have, that's the way to get people involved, to make it enjoyable, to make it something they want to go to.'

Older People Champions

All case study LAs had an Older People Champion who was an elected member of the council plus some had statutory staff within the PCT or LA who served as Champions. It was also noted that some staff may not be designated an Officer Champion but due to the nature of their work with older people, they assumed the role for their team.

The role was commented on by a limited number of respondents. In most areas there was concern expressed about a low profile and general lack of awareness both within the LA and across the older people community, for example:

'Those who have been engaged in the [older people] strategy will probably know that we have a Champion but whether everybody does, I don't know. I don't think it's been promoted properly.'

The Champion role seemed to be more effective when it was carried out by LA or PCT staff with specific responsibility for the well-being of older people. These individuals seemed to be better placed as ambassadors for older people and, more importantly, they were more likely to remain in the role for longer, as one respondent stated, 'People move on, especially elected officials.'

Individual personalities

Without exception, all respondents were genuine and passionate about the engagement work they did. Older people and individuals from the LA and partner agencies relied on their own skills, personal networks, drive and volunteered time to help make engagement happen in their community. In all case study areas, single

individuals were named as crucial to initiating and sustaining older people engagement. Sometimes these were LA officers who served as the key personality within an area, developing personal relationships with a wide range of older people. Several older people referred to these individuals as being crucial in sustaining their participation. One older person explained their participation with reference to the LA officer:

'I guess I was hooked. [Council officer] is a great influence there, she's a Champion really I would say. I think her heart's in the right place where older people are concerned and if there was a vote to be had I think she would have my vote, you know.'

Similarly, older people's forums and networks might be driven by a particularly charismatic and skilled older person who is able to motivate other older people to participate. One respondent highlighted the value of having these active players in a partnership:

'They depend to a large extent on particular people. You know, some people have an interest and act as a real lynchpin. And in a way that's a lot more effective, because people will actually do it and be enthusiastic about it ...'

However, they went on to raise an important issue, 'but then you think, what happens if that person leaves or resigns?'

While individuals have a key role to play, if they leave, it can create problems of continuity and lead to a loss of momentum for forums, networks and partnerships. It may not be possible or desirable to avoid the key role played by individuals but in recognising this role it is also important to highlight the issue of sustainability and the need to establish an approach that is embedded within the system, ensuring responsibility for public engagement is more widely shared.

Older people's perspectives

The previous sections describe the structures and forms which engagement can take. This section focuses on older person perspectives on engagement, gleaned from interviews with 32 men and women who have been involved with their local government. Their levels of participation varied, ranging from those who held several positions in different groups and organisations to those who had attended a single engagement event, raising questions about the different drivers and obstacles to older people's engagement.

Drivers for involvement

A number of themes emerged from the older people's accounts in relation to why they became involved in voluntary work generally and engagement activities in particular. These themes could be categorised as: work, bereavement, service use, and service to the community. These echo findings by Bains et al (2006) in their study of older people volunteering for Age Concern in Newcastle. Individuals often cited two or three of these factors when they talked about their motivations and their reasons for continuing their involvement in various activities. These highlight issues for the way LAs and partners retain their active older people and recruit new participants.

Work

This was an important driver for older people particularly those who had held

professional, administrative or managerial positions over their working life. For many of the older people interviewed, representation on forums and user groups provided a form of work replacement or simply constituted a new occupational stage in their working life. The activities connected with engagement such as attending meetings, undertaking research and lobbying, gave them a chance to recreate formal work relations and status positions, and make use of skills they had spent years honing in earlier periods of their career. One man described how he ended up volunteering for his local Age Concern after going in to enquire about computer courses in their new resource centre:

'They were looking for volunteers obviously at that stage, this new place, they wanted people to staff it and as soon as they knew that you'd got an ever so slight knowledge of this particular aspect, this very persuasive lady said, "Oh no, you're not coming on the course, you're teaching it.'

For some, the move into unpaid work coincided closely with retirement or redundancy in later life and others had different reasons for not being in employment such as caring responsibilities. For instance, one man set up the older people's forum in his borough after retiring at the age of 70:

'A friend of mine runs the Forum and I phoned him up and I said, what can I do? There isn't one in [LA]. ... And yes I started it.'

Work was not only a driver for those who had a professional background. In areas with an industrial past some men who had found themselves facing redundancy and unemployment as industries declined had taken up different forms of work with a social or voluntary element and these had led them into involvement with their LA.

Bereavement

For several interviewees the death of a spouse, partner or parent(s) had a dramatic impact on their lives, caused not only by the loss of a loved one but also, in several cases, by the loss of an important functional role in their life as they were no longer required to care for that person. They had either felt the need to or had been advised by GPs and family to find an activity to fill the gap. Several had become involved in voluntary work and recounted how this had helped them over this difficult period. One woman in her eighties who had cared for her partner for many years after he suffered a stroke explained how she started volunteering:

'Our doctor suggested that apart from my former interests I would need to have some pursuit to help me cope with my loss. I had heard talks on strokes at a group to which I belonged so I contacted her to offer help.'

The process of getting involved in activities was not always easy. One older person explained the difficulty she had going back to the day centre she attended with her husband while she was caring for him, despite the encouragement and support from staff:

'I was a little bit depressed, you know ... but they managed. They pulled me out of it, they were pretty good ... And then they asked me if I'd be Treasurer, so I took that up volunteering which I still do. Nearly eight years I've been doing that.'

This participant quickly found herself involved in a range of activities, from reading in schools to representation on user groups. As with many of the trajectories of the older people interviewed, one voluntary position led to another and to another. In the words of one woman 'you do one thing and it snowballs'.

Service use

Several of the interviewees had been service users and were eager to promote a particular service where they felt they had really benefited. Often this was couched in terms of giving something back to the organisation that had helped them. This was particularly true for those who had cared for a partner or parent and who had benefited from the support of carers groups. One woman explained how she got involved in the local branch of Carers National Association while she was caring for her husband:

'I'm on the management now at the local branch ... they said, "Come on, we want you, you're an expert now".'

On the other hand, there were those who had found certain services so poor they felt strongly that changes needed to be made and community engagement provided a

mechanism to raise these issues. One woman described how her experiences in hospital after a fall in which she broke her hip had been the trigger for her involvement with Age Concern:

'My experience at hospital was the worst, most horrendous experience of my whole life. So when I came home and started to get better I thought what can I do, and I looked in the newspaper one Friday and Age Concern were asking for volunteers and I thought, Ah this is it.'

Local community and social service

A small number of older people explained their involvement in terms of giving something back to society and improving the lives of those in their local community. This could manifest itself through their participation in formal representation on forums and committees. One man who had been heavily involved in his local older people's forum explained

'It felt right when I retired, sold my business and so on, that we should start helping to form the society in which we lived and making a contribution to it and having some input to it.'

An older lady in her 80s was also keen to support older people in her local community and she helped several older people in her local area, visiting them and doing their shopping and other odd jobs.

Although she was sometimes contacted by the council to take part in engagement activities such as focus groups, she was quite clear that the only activities that really interested her were those where she could help someone and 'put a smile on their face'.

Active engagement 6 Other activities

There were many 'other' types of activities that did not appear to be engagement in the conventional sense of gatherings and information exchanges nor were they necessarily linked to a specific service or policy exercise. Nonetheless, these activities were valued by all participants and, it can be argued, enhanced quality of life and addressed real areas of concern. These activities often contained a social element and attracted people who might not ordinarily participate in traditional forms of engagement.

In Basingstoke and Dean the health walks were organised as a way of helping older people to exercise and stay active but they also provided an informal setting for communication and were seen as an alternative way to reach people. As one older person who served as a walk guide explained:

'I'm just the back marker, I lead either the older people, really older people with walking sticks and we take them round the town... because some

of these people, they spend all the weekend on their own, mainly widows who don't want to get out, so we get them there. They are coming really out of their shells.'

Islington was particularly innovative in their informal strategies for engaging with older people in the borough. Their European exchange programme gave older people the opportunity to meet other older people and to look at public provision and services in other European countries. At the same time it was seen as a way to cement relationships between the council and older people and to stimulate commitment and buy-in from the older people which, it was acknowledged, was useful when it came time to recruit for other, possibly, less interesting activities. This was also true of the outing to a local pub which was designed to give older people a chance to reclaim areas and spaces in the community that they felt were no longer accessible to them.

Obstacles to involvement

The research did not include the views of older people who had no involvement in engagement activities but even amongst the interviewees who were highly motivated to participate there were a number of barriers operating to limit or curtail their involvement. Most often these were health related such as where illness or a medical appointment coincided with a forum meeting and prevented them attending. One person explained her recent absence:

'I haven't been able to do it for a few months, because I've had all sorts of peculiar things happening to me health wise, and I had to take a back seat. But I've been very frustrated and I'm hoping this month to get back in again.'

Some of the more industrious people found they quickly became over-committed and had to drop roles, or limit themselves to particular organisations so that their weekly commitments were manageable. These issues were magnified when health problems entered the equation. One very active person, referring to a previous role, explained how he had found it necessary to take a break for a few years:

'It involved rushing around London and my health wasn't good at the time. I used to come home literally exhausted and my wife said to me, "Look ... you've got to give it up." So I did after a year.'

Some had caring commitments which limited their availability or had particular physical disabilities which made some forms of engagement difficult. One person was involved in home care monitoring in her community but did not volunteer to represent at committee meetings:

'[They] aren't my thing because of being deaf. If there are too many people in a room and there are 20 people and I am trying to listen to the person at the front ... well it's lost on me I'm afraid.'

Mobility and access to suitable public transport was an issue that affected many of the older people interviewed although it was more important for those in rural areas. The recent introduction of a free bus pass and monthly minibus service to transport older people to the meetings in one area were mentioned as making a difference to people's ability to participate. Transport was also a key issue for older people in one urban area. Whilst benefiting from a new free bus pass, recent changes to the routes following privatisation made it more difficult to get to the places people needed to go, such as doctor and hospital appointments, as well as the engagement events put on by the LA:

'I couldn't get into (town centre) either for the doctor or the hospital without a great deal of travel, changing buses, going one way to come back another way ... they were not convenient for time because

doctors surgeries shut at half past ten and they didn't go until, you know, later.'

Language was an important barrier to engaging with the council as most channels such as forums, meetings and focus groups were conducted in English. The Chinese association in one area was well attended by a large number of Chinese older people, a number of whom could not speak English. Although this group were very active with regular local walks and exercise classes provided by the centre, the opportunities for engagement and consultation within the structures offered by the council were limited.

Issues raised by engagement drivers and obstacles

These drivers for and obstacles against engagement raise a number of issues for the way local authorities and partner organisations recruit and retain their active older people. The barriers highlighted the importance of health in shaping people's participation and this meant that flexibility was a key issue. People needed to be able to drop in and out of activities which highlights the importance of holding events and activities on a regular basis to extend opportunities for involvement. While issues with public transport may have been outside the council's control, they often posed as fundamental barriers to attendance. The provision of other forms of transport to enable more people to attend was welcome.

The drivers highlighted the importance of the life stage in understanding triggers for involvement. Conversely, finding ways to tap into the diverse array of skills, knowledge and interests that older people had to offer is also important. This raised a particularly salient point in relation to engagement; the different interests and capabilities of those who take part (such as a familiarity with committees or a drive

to provide personal help and support) can lead to different forms of participation. The more varied and diverse the LA's strategies for engagement, the more diverse the group of older people they were likely to reach.

Formative advice

Respondents were asked what advice they would give to enhance citizen engagement in their area.

For local authorities

Communication and trust were seen as central themes in building engagement relationships. Respondents stressed the importance of appropriate communication (both written and spoken), including speaking slowly and clearly, avoiding jargon; listening to older people in their own words and not 'interpreting' the words. As one older person stated: 'Don't tell us what you are giving us; ask us what we want.'

LA and partner respondents stressed the need to listen to older people with an open agenda, to respect them as a 'critical friend' and partner and to always provide something (e.g., refreshments, transportation, payment for time, respite care for carers) in exchange for the information received. Both older people and those who organise engagement on behalf of the LA felt that staff (especially 'young people') would benefit from training in engagement and communication skills.

It was also felt that LAs need to ensure that a range of methods are used, tapping into existing older people networks, venturing out to where older people already assemble in the community (e.g., clubs and day centres, shopping malls, doctor surgeries) and engaging through less formal means.

Leadership was identified as crucial to the process. Credibility for engagement could be won through senior officer buy-in and

through designated staff who served at the interface of the LA and the community.

For older people

Older people who were already participating in LA engagement activities generally saw plenty of opportunities for older people to get involved with their local government. It was common for these people to recommend that someone simply 'get involved' or 'join a group'. As one older person stated, some people need to be encouraged to get involved:

'So if I meet new volunteers, and I go out looking for them everywhere you see, then I'll say to them, 'Come along you'll enjoy it. You're going to be needed ... they will welcome you. You will get enormous satisfaction out of it, come and try.'

But it was also acknowledged that some people do not feel comfortable becoming a group member or lacked the confidence to speak up in a group setting. Some advocated the need for a buddy system, whereby veteran members accompany or befriend new members to help them settle in.

For national government

As in the survey, the provision of resources for carrying out engagement, especially financial support, was a key issue identified for national government. Funding was viewed as necessary not only for 'kick starting' initiatives but to support continuity of engagement, ongoing financial support was also viewed as important. As one respondent from a partner organisation noted:

'We are encouraged by the government to engage but we have been given no additional funding to do this.'

Additionally, some respondents asserted that national campaigns that promote citizen engagement need to be matched with practical guidance and know-how in order to take shape. It was advocated that national government ought to have a role in facilitating the sharing of good practice and the networking of local LAs to achieve this.

Finally, one respondent envisioned an ideal future where it was not necessary for older people to assemble to promote their views, where systems were in place that allowed for direct communication among the older person, the LA and the service provider:

'In years to come I'd like people to say we've got an active, knowledgeable, well-informed population of people over 55 who have the information they need or the support they need and the care they need. They would just ring up the service provider or an information point and say "I need this" or "I want this" ... We'd just have people, citizens in [LA] who have the services they need and they'd know how to access the services.'

4. Conclusions

The completion of this study coincides with an increased UK national momentum to encourage community involvement in decision making about local and national services and policies. Completed in 2005, the national survey occurred at the forefront of several government initiatives promoting citizen involvement more generally. It therefore provides a baseline for engagement activity between local authorities and older citizens and future investigations may detect changes following these recent developments.

The eight case studies provide insights into specific local engagement practices and some of the structures that circumscribe engagement activity in local communities. These locations were purposively selected for study and, it is acknowledged, do not capture the full extent of local government and older citizen engagement in the UK. For example, although older citizen councils or parliaments, modelled on democratic representation, are increasingly used, this structure for engagement was not included in the study.

The research presents the following key messages regarding LA engagement with older citizens:

- **The main organisational driver for older citizen engagement comes from the health and social care perspective.** The 'business' and content of interaction with older people is still weighted towards contact with users of health and social care services (and their carers) and usually with the express purpose of discussing services related to health and social care. Other LA departments tend to defer to this lead.
- **Though valued, engagement approaches that saw older people more actively involved, such as service delivery and evaluation, were infrequently used.** Although LAs enlist a variety of methods, there is more reliance on traditional forms of consultation and information sharing which relinquish little control to the public. Encouragingly, LA staff were aware that more needed to be done in order to drive the engagement agenda forward. But they are limited by the resources and skills at hand.

- **The means of engagement delineates who is included and excluded.** A mix of approaches is optimal to maximise representation and to capture the diversity of the older population. This includes employing different models for structuring the engagement relationship, e.g., independent forums, facilitated forums, groups supported by partner agencies, citizen's panels, because each has its strengths and weaknesses.
- **Older people represent a diverse range of skills, interests, needs and priorities and these need to be reflected in the range of engagement activities available to them.** Respondents to the LA survey reported older people forums to be a popular means for accessing the 'voice' of older people and they were judged to be the most effective. However, a single mechanism such as a Forum will capture a particular group of older people but may well exclude others who are interested in a particular issue, who prefer to work with people in the community, or who are not comfortable in a group setting. Understanding the drivers for older people's engagement has implications for the ways older people can be recruited to engage and how this relationship can be maintained.
- **The most innovative forms of engagement typically contain an element of informality.** Many of the more frequently used methods of engagement take place in a business-like setting (e.g., committee membership, steering and strategy groups) that corresponds with the day-to-day conduct of the local authority. Those who took part in citizen engagement stressed the need for alternative formats. Social events, one-to-one peer research and engagement at a very local level all provide an alternative to the strictures of meetings. Some older people may prefer the informal means of communication that these approaches offer. In response, LAs could build up their capacity to engage in this way.



- **Older citizen engagement is a complex activity requiring added skills and experience.** Several issues that emerged from the research, such as the need for reciprocity and engagement feedback, and the roles of locality and parochialism, require communication and human resource management skills that can not be overlooked. Some of these skills may be taught while others may be acquired more intuitively in the field. Yet, the importance placed on citizen engagement and as part of a job description, as responsibility is more widely shared within local authorities and across the wider community, needs to be matched with investment in education and support for the activity. The recent publication of the Shared Priority Older People Action Learning Sets (IDeA 2007a/b) is a positive move in this direction but more resources are needed.

- **Formative advice for advancing local partnerships for engagement included:** Corporate mainstreaming of engagement procedures; maintaining communication links; nurturing trust and building ongoing relationships; varying engagement approaches and settings; and ensuring adequate resources (funds, staff, time) and guidance for engagement.

Glossary of Terms

Active citizenship *	Citizens taking opportunities to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life. One of the three key elements of civil renewal.
BAME BGOP Civil Renewal *	black, Asian and minority ethnic Better Government for Older People The renewal of civil society through the development of strong, active and empowered communities, in which people are able to do things for themselves, define the problems they face, and tackle them in partnership with public bodies. Civil renewal involves three essential elements: active citizenship, strengthened communities and partnership in meeting public needs. Its practical process is community engagement.
Community organisation or group *	A community organisation or group differs from a voluntary organisation in that the control lies in the hands of the beneficiaries as individual users, members or residents. Community groups or organisations tend to be smaller organisations with limited funding and no or very few staff however they cannot be defined in this way. There are some larger organisations that are community organisations such as some community centres, or residents' organisations by virtue of the fact they are for mutual benefit and are controlled by their members.
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This is a central government assessment of local authorities' performance in delivering services for local people, as a basis for improving services. Authorities are categorised as 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak', or 'poor' and results are updated annually.
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation

LSP *	Local Strategic Partnership. A single non-statutory, multi-agency body, which matches local authority boundaries, and aims to bring together at a local level the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. LSPs are key to tackling deep seated, multi-faceted problems, requiring a range of responses from different bodies. Local partners working through a LSP will be expected to take many of the major decisions about priorities and funding for their local area
LOPSG	London Older People's Strategies Group. An umbrella forum for older people's organisations and individuals that was established in 2000 to engage with the Mayor of London on issues affecting the lives of London's older people. LOPSG is the Mayor's principal forum for consultation with older Londoners.
National Service Framework for Older People	Launched by the Department of Health in 2001, this sets out a programme of action to improve services and service delivery covering the range of care older people might need.
Older People's Champions	Initiated through the Older People's National Service Framework, Older People's Champions are designated individuals who aim to enhance older people's services and to use their position in the community to promote older people's interests.
Older People Forums	An independent group of older citizens, typically attached to one local area, organised and run by older citizens.
Opportunity Age	This is the first cross-government strategy on issues facing Britain as people live longer healthier lives, including strategies to enable people to extend their working life, support for active ageing and more choice and independence in service use.
PSI	Policy Studies Institute
Volunteer *	A person who spends time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or people, either individuals or groups other than or in addition to close relatives.

* Terms with an asterisk are sourced from the *Together We Can* website: www.togetherwecan.info/glossary.html

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Appendix A

The Welsh Perspective

The Strategy for Older People in Wales

The Strategy was published in January 2003 and was the product of extensive consultation, research and expert views about the lives of older people in Wales both now and in the future. The Welsh Assembly Government initially made available £10 million over a 3 year period to specifically support the implementation of the Strategy. A further £3 million was made available to extend the funding to March 2008 while a review of progress was undertaken in order to make recommendations for the second five year block.

The 5 key aims of the Strategy for Older People in Wales are:

- Reflecting the United Nations principles for Older People to tackle discrimination against older people wherever it occurs, promote positive images of ageing and give older people a stronger voice in society.
- To promote and develop older people's capacity to continue to work and learn for as long as they want, and to make an active contribution once they retire
- To promote and improve the health and well-being of older people through integrated planning and service delivery frameworks and more responsive diagnostic and support services.
- To promote the provision of high quality services and support which enable older people to live as independently as possible in a suitable and safe environment and ensure services are organised around and responsive to their needs.

- To implement the Strategy for Older People in Wales with support funding to ensure that it is a catalyst for change and innovation across all sectors, improving services for older people and providing the basis for effective planning for an ageing population.

All councils received Welsh Assembly Government funding for local Development Co-ordinators in each area to develop their local strategic approach, establish Older People's Champions and Local Forums, etc. By February 2005 all local authorities in Wales had Strategy Co-ordinators and most had Older People's Champions at the political level as part of their Cabinet. Progress had also been made on the establishment of 50+ Forums in most areas.

Response to BGOP/PSI national study on older citizen engagement

Active Engagement Seminar, June 2006 – attended by Strategy Coordinators

There was general consensus that the Strategy for Older People had raised the profile of involvement and engagement in Wales. For example, the Assembly has now provided a high profile National lead (including a designated Older People Deputy Minister, and a government Sub-Committee). It has also established an Older People Unit at national level and has provided financial assistance, co-ordination, advice and support on implementation of the Strategy.

It was highlighted that the Assembly had undertaken extensive consultation as well as sought to engage older people during the development of the Strategy – evidence

that engagement is being taken seriously at a national level.

Much of the general findings of the study resonate with colleagues in Wales;-

- Whilst generally there was a high profile and commitment by local authorities across Wales, the engagement arrangements were very different and success “patchy”. It was apparent that different levels of commitment are associated with where coordinators are located within departments.
- The slant on engagement continues to be driven by concerns for users of health & social care issues.
- Engagement is still interpreted as focusing upon consultation and simply “listening to the voices of older people”, engagement tends to be “tagged on afterwards”.
- Since the launch of the national strategy, there is evidence of improvement in the way coordinators are undertaking the engagement of older citizens as a corporate activity. There is a heightened corporate understanding of the importance of involving older citizens in local policy and decision making.
- Older citizens are increasingly being represented on policy groups and mainstream decision making processes.
- Area coordinators reported it was possible and practicable to draw upon a “pool” of involved older citizens.
- It is the general experience that colleagues in health are difficult to “get on board”.
- In practice, engagement frameworks and models show little variation. There is still an emphasis on Forums as the main focus of engagement.

- There is growing interest and support for Co-production – for example, timebanks and related social capital networks, e.g., Wales Institute for Complementary Currencies.
- The “hard to reach” are still hard to reach! Coordinators reported on the challenges of developing inclusive approaches.
- It was recognised, inevitably that “the usual suspects” were the first to become engaged and participate – especially over issues they were personally interested in.

Advice to others based upon the Welsh perspective

1. It was felt that older citizen engagement should be further strengthened by making it a statutory requirement, with responsibilities for coordination clarified especially with local partner organisations.
2. The development of “sharing & learning” networks will have a crucial role in the exchange of illustrative practices regarding implementation.
3. Whilst the National lead has been crucial to ensure local corporate “buy-in” and commitment, the success of engagement relies upon personal commitment by passionate individuals, key officers and elected members as well as older citizens.
4. As in the English case studies, coordinators emphasised the importance of utilising and respecting existing networks rather than seeking to develop new structures of engagement.

5. Local voluntary sector groups and networks can be instrumental for successful engagement. A real partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors is important to be fully effective in seeking to reach a wide range of local older citizens.
6. In making provision for engagement, time and resources are critical. This would include induction and skills training for citizens to develop understanding and confidence and for local authority staff to change traditional service attitudes and to embrace engagement, developing listening skills and to alter the “balance of power”.
7. Overall, importance was placed on allowing time for change and to nurture engagement as a mainstream activity.
8. Finally, there is the continued need to vigorously challenge the social shackles of ageism.

Appendix B

Older Citizen Participation: Survey of UK Local Authorities

This research study seeks to ascertain the extent to which older people are involved in local policy initiatives across the UK. Specifically, we are interested in describing the variety of older citizen engagement that exists. By **engagement** we mean where the local public sector – ideally the local authority working with partners in a ‘joined up’ approach – has sought to involve local older citizens to actively establish local priorities, devise plans, develop and design services, deliver services, monitor and evaluate processes and outcomes. In this study we are not focusing upon local community involvement nor general volunteering. Rather, the focus is on local strategic approaches to older citizen engagement.

We are particularly interested in hearing about instances whereby a specific group of older citizens are or have been involved throughout all stages of a policy process or local initiative, as outlined above, and to find out how their input made a difference.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETION

- Please answer the questions to the best of your knowledge. Your responses will be treated in strictest confidence.
- Please complete this questionnaire in **BLACK** or **DARK BLUE** ink.
- If a selection is required from a number of alternatives, please consider your answer carefully, then mark the **CENTRE** of the appropriate box with a **NEAT CROSS**, like this ☒
- If you mark the wrong box, please fill in that box completely like this ■ and make your correct selection with a cross.
- Please return your questionnaire in the self-addressed envelope provided by **17 June 2005**.

QUESTION 1

Does your local authority have a corporate policy or strategy for engaging with local citizens in the policy process? (Please mark ☒ ONE box only.)

- Yes No Under development

If yes, does your local authority have a separate policy or strategy for engaging older citizens (both service users and non-users) in the policy process? (Please mark ☒ ONE box only.)

- Yes No Under development

Please expand:

QUESTION 2

Does your local authority have plans to develop their engagement with older citizens? (Please mark ☒ ONE box only.)

- Yes No Under development

If yes, how?

QUESTION 3

Does your local authority provide training or support to enable older citizens to effectively engage with their community? (Please mark ☒ ONE box only.)

- Yes No Under development

If yes, please briefly describe (e.g., dedicated staff, designated budget, etc.):

QUESTION 4

In your view, what are the benefits of involving older citizens in policy processes and initiatives?

QUESTION 5

As highlighted in the introduction to this research, we are particularly interested in learning more about policy development and initiatives in which older citizens are or have been involved on an ongoing basis.

In your opinion, what would further the engagement of older citizens in the policy process in your organisation?

QUESTION 6

In your opinion, what are the barriers to enabling ongoing older citizen engagement in your organisation?

QUESTION 7

The following table lists common methods for engaging with older citizens. Please:
 i) Indicate those methods your local authority uses. (Please mark EACH applicable box.)
 ii) Rank the top 5 most frequently used methods (where 1 = most and 5 = least).
 iii) Rank the top 5 methods that have been most effective (where 1 = most and 5 = least).

	WE USE THIS	TOP 5 MOST USED	TOP 5 MOST EFFECTIVE
Information newsletters/publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community events and festivals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open board/general meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
User feedback surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older People's Champions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older People Forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizen's Panels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steering Group representation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community planning/regeneration representation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary & Community sector representation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Strategic Partnership representation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sessions in day / recreational centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sessions with cultural / faith groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consulting 'expert' older citizens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older citizens as service delivery agents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older citizens as peer mentors / inspectors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older citizens as participatory researchers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timebanks or other forms of co-production	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 1 (please specify below:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 2 (please specify below:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION 8

While older citizens are sometimes consulted prior to the design or implementation of an initiative, and are often involved in evaluations as service users, it is far less common that they have active and ongoing involvement at more than one stage in the process. We are particularly interested in hearing of examples where older citizens have been involved in this way. Please provide up to 3 examples where a cohort of older people are or have been engaged in initiatives on an ongoing basis over time. (Provide type of initiative, nature of ongoing involvement, outcomes, etc.)

Initiatives	Type(s) of involvement	Outcomes	Comments

Appendix C

Interview Topic Guides

QUESTION 9

Please supply some information about yourself:

What is your job title?

What is your department?

What is your local authority?

QUESTION 10

We are interested in following up a selection of respondents to find out more about their engagement activities with older citizens. Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview? (Please mark ONE box only.)

Yes

No

QUESTION 11

Please write any additional comments about your work to involve older citizens or about this survey.

Thank you very much for your time.

By Friday 17 June, please return your questionnaire in the self-addressed envelope.

For further background information about the study and its association with current policy issues see the PSI www.psi.org.uk and BGOP www.bgop.org.uk websites.

Council representative topic guide

I. Background [stay brief]

1. What is your role with respect to citizen engagement?
– past and present
2. What is your role with respect to older citizen engagement?
– scope of your remit, i.e., cross departments, outside gov't
– what other council staff are important to this process?

II. Corporate input [refer to survey responses]

3. Would you please briefly describe the history (if aware) of involving older citizens in council initiatives?
– when did engagement with older citizens become important?
– were there any drivers from local or national policies in relation to older people?
4. If have a formal strategy on citizen engagement, may we have a copy?
5. If have a formal strategy on engagement specific to older citizens, may we have a copy?
6. What resources committed to older citizen engagement [budget, dedicated staff, staff training, older people training, etc.] are available?

III. Partnerships

7. How is older citizen engagement organised within and across council departments?
8. Who are your key partners for promoting active involvement of older citizens?
– within council/authority
– other government
– people/organisations
– what are the prevalent ethnic/faith communities and what is their age profile?
9. How are initiatives originated? (i.e., council/partner/community/ combinations)
10. How are the partnerships working?
– What are your views on linkages among departments and partner agencies?
– how are they working with various sectors? (e.g., voluntary sector, OP groups/forums, BME groups, community elders, sheltered housing, etc.)
11. Are there any stakeholders you are aware of that you are not engaging with?
– If so, who are they?

IV. General engagement

12. In your view, what is helping the council to engage with older people in the community? [refer to survey response]

13. In your view, what is making it difficult [refer to survey response]
 - in the past, how was this overcome? [ask for examples]
 - currently, what is being done about it? [ask for examples]
14. What forms of engagement work best?
 - Are some forms better suited to types of activity or target groups?
15. What kinds of people typically participate in engagement initiatives?
 - Do they differ by type of engagement? (e.g., written vs face-to-face contact (language issues))
16. What more would they like to do? (specific issues that need tackling)
 - Why is that?
17. Does the authority have an Older People Champion(s) ?
 - Who are they, from what sector? (e.g., elected member, council services)
 - For how long?
 - How does it work?
18. Generally, what have been the impacts of including older citizen engagement in processes like policy planning, implementation, evaluation, etc. ?

V. Specific engagement

[Go over responses to the survey (Q. 8) that provide specific examples of initiatives that actively involved older citizens. Update on progress.]
ASK FOR REPORTS, LITERATURE

Take each initiative in turn.

- What kinds of partnerships were there?
- What helped make it work?
- Were there any difficulties?
If so, how were they overcome?
- Update

19. Are there plans to build on any of these projects?
 - any continuity of involvement? i.e., same people, same organisations, maybe in a different initiative?
20. Any new projects not reported in the survey? [ask for details]

VII. Developing active engagement of older citizens

21. What advice would you give to other local authorities who are working to develop active engagement of older citizens?
22. Any advice that would assist central Government?

Is there anything else you would like to add before I explain the next steps in this research?

Thank you very much for your time.

Partner topic guide

I. Background [stay brief]

1. What is your role in [organisation] ?
 - how long in post
2. How does your role relate to the council's work in engaging with older people?
3. How important to your organisation is engagement with older citizens?

II. Partnerships

4. Why do you think your organisation has been named by the council as a key partner in the engagement of local older citizens?
5. How are the partnerships around older citizen engagement working?
 - What are your views on links among council departments and partner agencies for this purpose?

III. Specific engagement

[Connect this section to background information on specific council engagement project(s) the partner has contributed to. E.g., Go over responses to the LA survey (Q. 8) that provide specific examples of initiatives that actively involved older citizens. Update on progress.]
ASK FOR REPORTS, LITERATURE

6. Is there anything in particular that stands out about the engagement activity(ies) you've been performing along with the council?
 - What helped make it work?
 - Were there any difficulties?
If so, how were they overcome?
 - What were the outcomes?
[for council, older people, own organisation]
 - Update on work [future plans]

IV. General engagement

7. From your experience, what kinds of older people typically participate in engagement initiatives?
 - Do they differ by type of engagement? (e.g., written vs face-to-face contact (language issues))
8. How is the council engaging with various sectors of the older people population (groups identified by their ethnicity/faith/sexuality; vulnerable groups)?
 - Any barriers to engaging with specific groups?
 - If yes, any suggested solutions?
9. What forms of engagement work best?
 - Are some forms better suited to:
 - types of services/activity
 - target groups?

V. Developing active engagement of older citizens

10. What advice would you give to other local authorities (and their partner organisations) who are working to develop active engagement of older citizens?
11. Any advice that would assist central Government?

Is there anything else you would like to add ?

Thank you very much for your time.

Older people topic guide

I. Opening [stay brief]

1. What is your current involvement with [.....]?
 - When/why became involved [refer to above responses]
2. Before we go into details on the [above project] can you tell me, are you currently involved in any other community committees or groups?

II. Specific engagement

3. You said you have been involved with [-----] that is connected to the local government: [repeat for other projects]
 - What kinds of things do you do? Is this ongoing?
 - How did you get involved in this particular role? [establish how much choice they had]
 - Anything that makes it hard for you to do this?
 - What do you enjoy the most about it? What do you like the least?
 - What difference do you think you have made? [for yourself, other people like themselves, the council]
 - Were there any difficulties? If so, how were they overcome?
4. Is there anything in particular that stands out about the activity(ies) you've been performing?
 - Why is this?

III. General engagement

5. Do you have any ideas why the local government (with partners) might be engaging with older people?
 - Have you noticed any changes in engagement activities over recent years?
 - In your view, what impact has engagement with older people had in your community?

6. From your experience, what are the typical ways the local government tries to get older people involved in what they do? (e.g., written vs face-to-face contact, one-off meetings vs regular, ongoing meetings)
 - What do you prefer for yourself? Why is this?
 - Can you think of particular groups of older people who might need different ways of engaging? [ask for examples?]
7. From your experience, what are the main agencies in your area that promote the involvement of older people?
 - How well are they working together / how effective are they?
8. What kinds of people become involved? [is there a typical 'involved person' or a typical 'non-involved person'?]

IV. Formative advice

9. What advice would you give to older people who would like to become more involved in what their local council is doing?
10. How do you think the local council can improve their engagement with older people? [involving people more effectively, reaching out to those who tend not to get involved at present]
 - Ask for examples of what has worked best

V. Background [stay brief]

11. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
 - retired/paid work? marital status, family, household composition, caring responsibilities, other interests, etc.
12. In the past, were you involved in any community projects/committees/groups?

Is there anything else you would like to add ?

Thank you very much for your time.



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