

# Hourglass Response: Strategy for an Ageing Society: Age Friendly Wales Consultation

15<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## **Question 1: The Strategy sets out the areas we will prioritise in planning for our ageing society and why. Have we prioritised the right areas?**

The consultation document explores four areas: enhancing well-being; improving local services and environments; building and retaining people's own capability; and tackling age-related poverty. Within these areas the document identifies priority areas for action. Hourglass broadly feels in all four sections the consultation prioritises the key issues but would like to comment on certain areas to highlight where the abuse of older people fits into all of these themes. This is to avoid isolating reactions to the abuse of older people into a single set of policy responses. This form of harm needs to be considered in all areas.

### Enhancing well-being:

#### 1. Support for unpaid carers

Hourglass agrees the lead priority, support for unpaid carers, is highly appropriate. The consultation document highlights that Wales has the highest proportion in the UK of older carers caring for those people living with complex needs. The priority area highlights the need for preventative support available to carers. Preventative support, or a well-being approach, for older carers is a right for older people and a key part of ageing well and safely.

Ensuring that carers are well supported and have effective training and recognition is also hugely important for those who carers care for. Caregiver Stress Theory or Situational Theory suggests that abuse of older people occurs when an adult family member caring for an impaired older adult is not able to manage caregiving responsibilities. The dependence of the victim on the caregiver is such that the caregiver has the potential to become overwhelmed and overburdened by the realities of caregiving and creates an environment where abuse and mistreatment is more likely to occur. There are valid concerns and limitations to this theory, which can carry ageist assumptions, treat crimes as solely a safeguarding issue, and obscure the gendered dynamics of violence in older age. While the validity of caregiver stress as an abuse theory is still debated this does not mean that measures should not be taken to alleviate its possibility. In the area of homicides affecting older people, Dr Hannah Bows' research found one in four domestic homicides involve people over 60, the vast majority female – 25% of the total, the fastest-rising domestic homicide rate. The Guardian recently reported on accounts of so-called 'mercy killings' highlighted by the Femicide Census. Of 27 known mercy killings only one resulted in a conviction of murder. In nine of the 27 mercy killings, the perpetrator committed suicide.

The report shed light on the tragic account of Angus and Margaret Mayer.

*'Margaret Mayer was diagnosed with dementia in 2012. For four exhausting years, her husband was her carer. "Out of the best intentions, my father was very regimental in my mother's care. She'd been such an independent person. She had all her choice taken away by the person she loved. They both needed help." In 2016, Angus Mayer, 86, killed his wife, 85, and threw himself under a train, dying seven weeks later.'* (Guardian, March 2021)

In Hourglass's own recent research on elder homicides utilising English and Welsh Police FOIs, carers appeared as principal suspects in the homicide of older people in 5.2% of known cases (n=6,) however it must be assumed these were professional carers rather than unpaid family members taking on a caring role.

The strategy for an ageing society must take an end-to-end approach to delivering improvements in carers lives, considering those cared for as well as their caregivers.

## 2. Improving access to health and social care services

Hourglass welcomes the recommencement of the evaluation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and would also encourage the release of an early interim report examining the impact of the safeguarding duties (to report when an adult is at risk and to enquire when reports are made), as well as the use and impact of Adult Protection and Support Orders in relation to how services are accessed.

Often when discussing the mental health of older people, we focus on deterioration of mental health due to forms of dementia. Across the nation we have seen the rise in reports of ill mental health, amongst the wider population due to the impact of COVID-19. The lockdown measures have seen some older people become more isolated, experience loneliness and becoming more anxious or displaying symptoms of depression. All these can raise the risk of abuse or exploitation. The strategy should consider the issue of mental health more widely and how we reach those older people who need the support of mental health services.

We suggest the strategy take care to consider how ageism impacts access to and experiences of these services.

### Improving local services and environments:

Hourglass believes the identified priority areas for improving local services and environments are comprehensive.

In terms of housing, the priority to support the growth of new housing models is of particular importance. It is useful to look at how this might be explored to reflect the different needs of those older people with protected characteristics. For example, on-going plans should consider the example of Tonic Housing, the UK's first LGBT+ retirement community. After securing a loan from the Mayor of London, this project will be open from 2021. This will be the UK's first LGBT+ affirming retirement community to support people in later life, ensuring they don't feel the need to go back in the closet, which is a typical story for many older LGBT+ people accessing care or housing.

### Building and retaining people's own capability:

#### 1. Community participation

On community participation, Hourglass agrees with the three priority areas identified: tackling loneliness and isolation; improving access to and availability of places to meet and encouraging intergenerational contact. However, we would like to add some nuance to the document's information on action being taken now to support community participation. The Welsh Government is improving digital inclusion – an ambition Hourglass agrees with. However, the priority could usefully reflect on the need for digital equality, as well as inclusion. In particular this means exercising caution for a 'digital by default' approach to information sharing. While programmes seeking to improve digital literacy and close the digital divide are to be commended, policy

strategists must consider the right for older people to choose to access information through non-digital avenues and ensured these avenues remain open and avoid exclusion.

## 2. Ending abuse of Older People

On ending the abuse of older people, the consultation offers little detail. While Hourglass is glad to see the commitment to continue to work with the Older People's Commissioner and key partners to publish and implement a national plan to prevent abuse of older people by the end of 2021, it is concerning that the document otherwise holds so little detail of the key areas relevant to the abuse of older people. Hourglass would further add that the document reproduces a problem common in the discussion of the abuse of older people, which is to foreground scams in the explanation of the impacts of abuse in later life. While scams are a serious form of harm against older people, an explanation of the impact of scams in lieu of detail on the experience and manifestations of abuse perpetrated by those an older person trusts, such as family or a carer, elides the most grievous forms of harm. The document could have usefully featured Hourglass' definition of the abuse of older people, used as the formal UN definition, 'A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person'.

Additionally, on the actions being taken now to prevent the abuse of older people, Hourglass would like to see reporting on where the Welsh Government is with these actions. For example, the document states the funding of 500 additional community support officers, we would ask that the baseline number is reported.

Bearing in mind the above comments on digital equality, Hourglass would take this opportunity to commend the practice of the 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign, which has been successful in utilising digital and non-digital avenues. We would like to see reporting on the engagement with this campaign by older people and specifically older people with other protected characteristics.

We welcome the continued implementation of the VAWDASV act but would request that all information and training associated with the act goes beyond simply acknowledging that victims can be across the whole spectrum of society, but actively promotes this. It is so important that professionals receiving training, and the wider public, are clear that, for example, older men can be victims of domestic abuse, and sexual violence, which is not currently the case.

With all of the actions undertaken to prevent abuse and protect older people we would like to see the strategy ensure that there is a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to understand impacts and progress against outcomes.

### **Question 2: Are there any issues that are not reflected in the Strategy that you think should be considered when planning for an ageing society?**

Comments: The strategy would be well-placed to codify a commitment to awareness-raising and public education on the issue of abuse of older people. While there is good work in developing a response to abuse, to end the abuse of older people there must be a seismic shift in understanding.

In February 2020 Hourglass conducted a survey looking at experiences, attitudes and perceptions towards the abuse of older people, 'Growing Old in the UK 2020'. The second round of the survey took place in June, to account for the changes brought on by the pandemic, 'Growing Old Under Lockdown in the UK'. The outcome in Wales found that as many as 143,000 people over the age of 65 have experienced abuse in older age. This is an unacceptable prevalence. Through polling

people's attitudes and perceptions, Hourglass has identified how poorly understood the issue of abuse in older age is. Ageist attitudes and perceptions over who can be a victim of abuse, or what counts as abuse when the victim is older no doubt contributes to the epidemic of abuse faced by older people.

Key findings in our polling:

- 1 in 5 people in Wales believe that inappropriate sexual acts directed at older people don't constitute abuse.
- A fifth (21 percent) don't view 'pushing, hitting, or beating an older person' as abuse.
- A third (31 percent) don't see 'taking precious items from an older relative's home without asking' as abuse.
- Over half (52 percent) of those surveyed in Wales believe that the abuse and neglect of older people increased as a result of the lockdown.

As well as communication campaigns that reach out to victims, the Welsh Government needs to directly engage with changing attitudes across society. This includes improving understanding in children, through education programmes; professionals, through training, and the general public through accurate communications that avoid ageist stereotypes and engage head-on with abuse to tackle the taboo surrounding abuse in older age.

**Question 3: Have we identified the key policies and mechanisms that can deliver real change in the lives of older people today and future generations?**

Comments: Yes.

**Question 4: Does the content amount to a sufficiently ambitious response to the major public policy issue of our ageing society?**

Comments: Yes.

**Question 5: Will the Strategy help to maximise the potential of the growing numbers of older people in our communities?**

Comments: Yes.

**Question 6: Do you agree with our ambition to work towards an age friendly Wales? If so, please state what you, as an individual or organisation, are doing to help us to create an age friendly Wales.**

Comments: Hourglass strongly agrees with the Welsh Government's ambition to work towards an age-friendly Wales. Our organisation is committed to the eradication of the abuse of older people.

We have developed the idea of safer ageing, which seeks to provide a foundation for approaching the policy landscape that surrounds abuse. The safer ageing approach understands that older people face physical and attitudinal barriers that create circumstances of actual or presumed age-related vulnerability – an environment which puts older adults at risk. Policy initiatives must seek to remove these barriers to empower older people to age securely and live free from abuse.

**Question 7: How has Covid-19 changed your ability to do things that matter to you, or the way you deliver services to older people?**

Comments: In response to the pandemic Hourglass launched a text message and instant messenger service, to diversify the ways in which people could contact us for support and advice. We are also developing a specialist Knowledge Bank to provide access to information on the abuse of older people.

**Question 8: How can we involve older people in the re building our communities following the pandemic?**

Comments: Older people should be consulted in a consistent and on-going manner regarding the re building of our communities following the pandemic. The Welsh Government should be aware of the realities of grief, experiences of harm, neglect and abuse and a broad reduction in wellbeing as Wales emerges from the system of national lockdowns.

