summary of key messages

from the Older People Action Learning Sets

improving the quality of life for older people

the older people's shared priority

Summary of key messages

from the Older People Action Learning Sets

These key messages are drawn from the work of the action learning sets, which were set up as a part of a shared priority programme focused on improving older people's quality of life.

Separate publications expand on the messages, offers examples of practice from around the country and provide guidance on 'making it happen'.

Message 1

We need to think differently about older age.

There must be a clear strategic focus on older people

This is because:

- the growing population of older people is creating powerful economic, social and political pressures and opportunities
- people's expectations are changing and yet services are too often out of step with the aspirations and expectations of today's – let alone tomorrow's – older citizens
- there is already significant disadvantage and social exclusion among older people.

To address these challenges, we must think differently

We need to think differently about older age, the of role public services and the way services engage with older people. In particular we need to:

- think in terms of inclusion, engagement and well-being, rather than illness, frailty and dependency
- embrace the contributions older people make to their communities
- recognise, embrace and respond better to the increasing diversity of needs and expectations among older people
- pro-actively tackle the ignorance and institutionalised prejudice that exists about older people – both within and beyond our own services
- take a life course approach to thinking about older age, emphasising the inter-linkages between phases of people's life course, rather than seeing old age as a phase in isolation.

Message 2

Public services need to develop a more coherent strategic approach, based on a 'Community Leadership Model'.

We must widen the focus and role of public services

The most common strategic approach taken by authorities to older age can be characterised as a 'Service Delivery Model'.

- This is exemplified by the fact that the strategies of many authorities focus almost exclusively on the 15% of older people who use intensive health and social care services, at the expense of the remaining 85%. As a result older age is seen predominantly through the narrow lenses of health and social care delivery.
- The model is based on a pessimistic world view of older age as a period of loss and deficit and is supported by an analysis of older people as an ever increasing challenge to the tight public purse. It is a model that calls for increasingly targeted service delivery responses.

However, in some areas, a new strategic approach is evolving. This is opening up new, wider and more optimistic possibilities about the way services can engage with older people. It can be characterised as a 'Community Leadership Model'.

- The model recognises that older people's priorities extend well beyond use of traditional age related health and social care services. It is an approach that places an emphasis on a broad range of social, economic, emotional, physiological and psychological forces that affect people's well being. It places emphasis on engaging, enabling and empowering, rather than constraining and disabling.
- The model calls for Community Leadership, because it demands new ways of working that are focused and driven by the views of older people. It requires a much broader strategy, so that agencies work as a whole system and operate well beyond existing service configurations and structures.

Message 3

To deliver these changes, we must engage better with older people – but to do this we need to re-think what 'engagement' means.

Engagement covers a spectrum of activities

- Engagement all too often means 'consultation' – in all its various guises. This is especially so where the focus of local services is constrained by the narrow lens of health and social care delivery.
- A much broader view of engagement is emerging in those authorities who are developing a community leadership approach. This enables and embraces the contributions that older people make to their communities – be they formal or informal – across a whole spectrum of activities.

Informal social engagement

Participation in voluntary and community groups

Participation in policy, governance and service delivery

Informal engagement matters and must be supported

- The choice about – and primary responsibility for – participating in community life and keeping active, lies with older people themselves but local agencies need to work with older people to remove barriers and unlock potential.
- There is good evidence that the health, well-being and independence of older people can substantially benefit from this type of engagement.
- Across the country, there is an increasing number and range of imaginative projects that are opening up new opportunities, strengthening communities and building social capital.

Message 3

Participation by older people in policy formulation, governance and service delivery needs to improve

- There is a new requirement of CPA to engage older people. This is important because many of the issues that face local agencies cannot be resolved by the actions of services alone and the engagement of older people brings new capacities and opportunities. Despite this, engagement is all too often limited to traditional models of relaying and collecting information through literature, surveys and meetings.
- Older people's forums are, however, growing in popularity and new models of engagement in policy and governance are beginning to emerge – including directly elected Older People's Councils.
- Alongside this, there are also an increasing number of examples where older people deliver services. Models of 'co-production' enable older people (who are normally the object of services) to be actively engaged in providing mutual support. Research indicates that this kind of engagement may have disproportionately high value in terms of health promotion and illness prevention.

Message 4

'Whole systems working' is key, but is typically too exclusively focused on only one part of the system – health and social care. Strong leadership is needed to change this.

'Part systems working' marginalises

- Whole systems working entails a wide-ranging, cross-cutting and holistic approach to improving older people's quality of life. This means looking beyond health and social care services and embracing the wider spectrum of services and issues that impact on people's quality of life. Failure to do this means older people remain marginalised and services continue to promote dependence.

There isn't one definitive, strategic approach to whole systems working, but strong leadership is always critical

- Leaders need to be able to operate in an open, collaborative and joined-up manner, breaking down departmental and organisational silos. This can be supported by locating leadership in a corporate setting as this enables a more cross-cutting, corporate focus and allows the contributions of others to be drawn in more easily.
- Political and senior officer leadership is imperative to make whole system working a strategic priority and Local Strategic Partnerships can provide strong leadership. Older people themselves can play a vital role in creating this leadership, but it is also important to clarify and give weight to the role of local Older People's Champions.
- While individual leaders play a vital role in developing a momentum for change, over time leadership needs to become embedded within the system. This requires a process of organisational change, not just in terms of structures, but also a change of mindset.

Message 5

Successful partnerships rest on a clear vision and a strong sense of purpose that are driven by a shared understanding of what matters – and what counts – for older people.

- The energy and momentum created by engaging with older people provides a real impetus for partnership working. This is because their concerns often cut across the system and this helps departments and services to think through the contributions they can make.
- Shared aims are key. Partnerships need to find new ways of looking at what they are trying to achieve and the gains and rewards this will bring to different members of the partnership. In doing so partners need to find ways of balancing risk across the system
- Flexible partnership arrangements can work better than formal ones. A lack of bureaucracy and formalisation can encourage more innovative thinking, risk taking and change.

Message 6

'Domains of quality of life' provide a powerful framework for developing a whole systems strategic approach.

- A great deal work has been carried to define the 'domains' that contribute to quality of life. This has been informed by research and an evolving understanding of what matters most to older people.
- These domain provide a basis to understand the factors that affect people's quality of life, to identify priorities, to develop and sustain a focus on outcomes and to make connections across services.

Message 7

Current performance measures distort the focus and behaviour of the system. We need to approach measurement differently.

Measures need to be developed and used in new ways

Measures must keep the focus on outcomes and what matters to older people locally – as a whole community, as well as to different communities of older people.

- Measurement must support a whole systems approach, creating and sustaining a shared view of what's happening across the system of services.
- The focus of measurement must be on encouraging the whole system to shift its focus 'upstream' towards the promotion of well-being by helping people to understand what works and the impacts of interventions.
- Measures need to help partners to understand their actual and potential contributions to quality of life so they can exploit the connections between quality of life and their other agendas and priorities.

Summary

- We need to think differently about older age.
- Public services need to develop a more coherent strategic approach, based on a 'Community Leadership Model'.
- To deliver these changes, we must engage better with older people – but to do this we need to re-think what 'engagement' means.
- 'Whole systems working' is key, but is typically too exclusively focused on only one part of the system – health and social care. Strong leadership is needed to change this.
- Successful partnerships rest on a clear vision and strong sense of purpose that are driven by a shared understanding of what matters – and what counts – for older people.
- 'Domains of quality of life' provide a powerful framework for developing a whole systems strategic approach.
- Current performance measures distort the focus and behaviour of the system. We need to approach measurement differently.

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