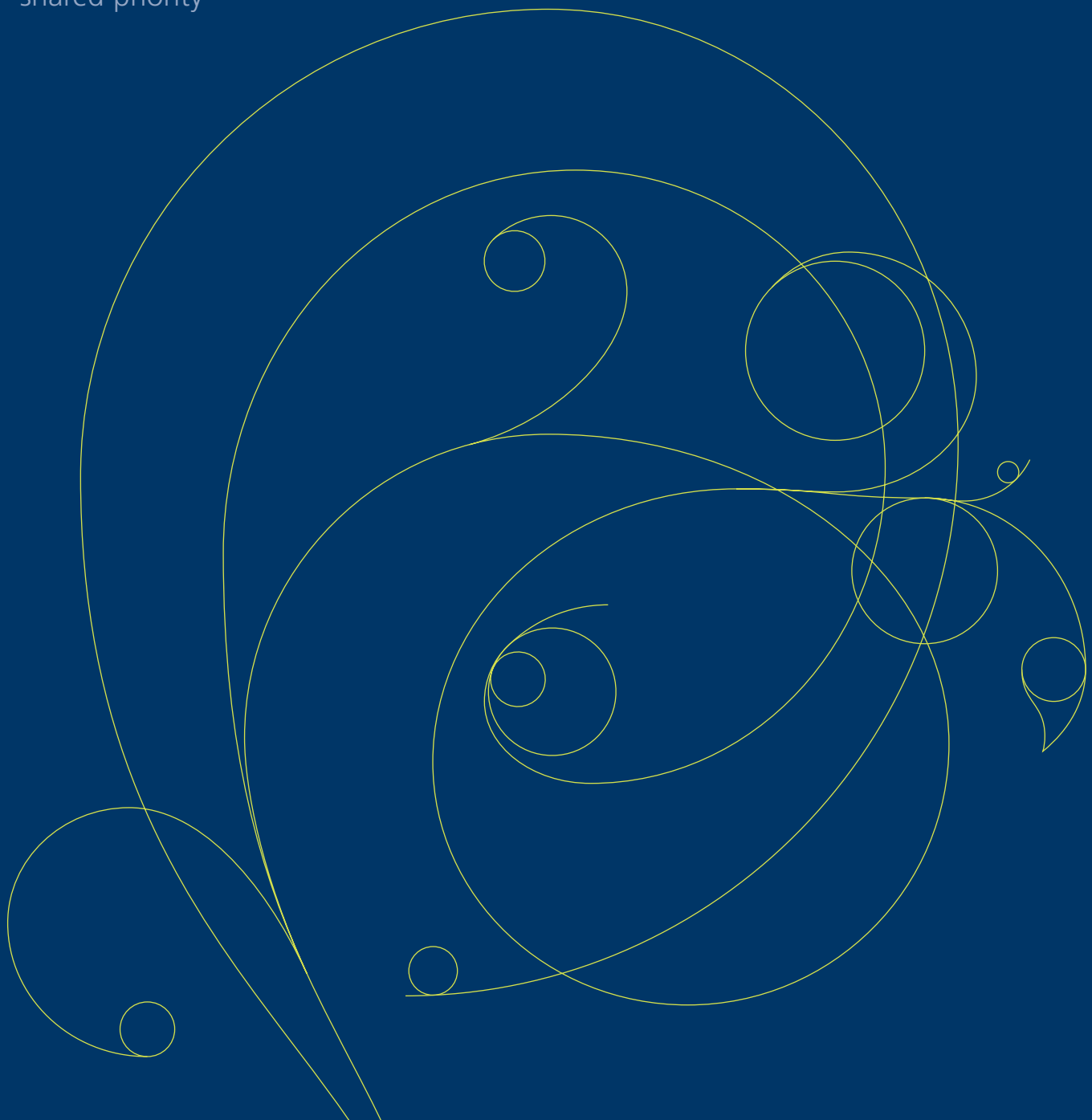
why bother?

1

improving the quality of life for older people

the older people's shared priority



1

why bother?

we need to embrace the contributions older people make to their communities and think in terms of inclusion, engagement and well-being, rather than illness, frailty and dependency

1.1 introduction

To truly foster older people's independence, choice and well being, we need to think differently. We need to re-assess our understandings of older age and challenge the prejudices that shape the way services organise themselves. We need to embrace the contributions older people make to their communities and think in terms of inclusion, engagement and well-being, rather than illness, frailty and dependency.

This set of five guides is designed to help policy makers, commissioners, managers and practitioners reflect on these changes. The guides make the case for change, offer examples of approaches that can support change and consider what makes successful action possible.

This first guide sets out the case for change and emphasises the need to think differently about older age and the role of public services. The other guides focus on

- Engaging with older people
- Working as a whole system
- Developing quality of life strategies

The guides highlight examples of innovation and good practice from around the country and include four case studies in the fifth guide. These case studies highlight experiences from four authorities that have been working in this area for some time, some of whom were part of a 'peer challenge' programme.

The guides are based on the work of three Action Learning Sets, which were set up as a part of a shared priority programme focused on improving older people's quality of life. Members of these Action Learning Sets were policy makers, commissioners, managers and practitioners from Government Departments, Local Authorities, Health Services, Police Services, Voluntary Agencies and Fire Services from across the country.

1.2 the need for change

We need to change radically the way public services engage and work with older people. This is because the growing population of older people is creating powerful economic, social and political pressures and services are too often out of step with the aspirations and expectations of today's – let alone tomorrow's – older citizens.

- By 2030 nearly half the population of Western Europe will be over 50 and life expectancy at age of 50 will be into the nineties. In the thirty years from 2001 to 2031, the UK population aged over 65 will have increased by 63%. This will include a significant increase in the proportion of older people from minority ethnic communities.[1]
- Research shows that the burgeoning power of 'Baby Boomers' is creating a profound collective transformation in the experience and meaning of old age with increased expectations of choice and quality and a perspective of consumerism, rather than citizenship.[2]

Significant barriers need to be overcome if we are to address these challenges.

- The significant disadvantage and social exclusion that already exist among older people needs to be tackled. Statistics suggest, for example, that older people are more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the population (particularly fuel poverty), reside in properties that are in poor condition and be socially excluded through fear of crime, poor access to local transport facilities or by living alone.[3]
- Ignorance and prejudice need to be addressed. Negative pre-conceptions of older age abound, which isolate, disempower and disable older people. People find it hard to identify positive images of older age; the language of age is heavily laden with stereotypes; ageing is still often poorly understood by Council members, managers, frontline staff and prejudice about older people is often institutionally engrained.

1.2 the need for change

Indeed a recent survey found that more people of all ages (29%) reported being the target of ageism more than any other form of prejudice[4]. This creates a pervasive and disabling mind-set both within services and among older people themselves.

- The increasing diversity of older people needs to be better understood and fully embraced. Older people are too often thought of as a single group, but are far from homogenous. Depending on people's definitions, older age can cover a period of life from 50 – 111 and if there is a definable 'community of older people', there is a huge diversity of communities within this.

The chart following offers one profile of older people that emphasises the wide range of different needs and circumstances.

by 2030 nearly half the population of Western Europe will be over 50

1. Department Work and Pensions [2005] Opportunity Age – Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century. The Stationary Office. http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/
2. Huber J., Skidmore P. [2003] The New Old: Why the baby boomers won't be pensioned off. Demos with Age Concern England
3. Social Exclusion Unit [2006] A Sure Start for Later Life Ending Inequalities for Older People. The Stationary Office. http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/page.asp?id=573
4. Ibid

Old and infirm	Poor people in public care homes	2%
	People private nursing home/supported at home	2%
Over retirement age	Poor, possibly widowed, reliant on state pension	18%
	Poor, cultural issues, reliant on family	1%
	Disadvantaged, rural	3%
	Comfortable, retirement locations	20%
	Affluent, cruises, private medical etc	2%
Working age	Unemployed, failing health, state dependent	10%
	Still working, modest incomes, self-reliant	24%
	Still working, successful careers	8%
	Early retirement, fit, active, affluent	10%

Source: Transforming Services for Older People – Pensions Service

1.2 the need for change

Sadly it is far too common for public services to deny this diversity and as a result respond to older people solely in terms of being clients, or potential clients, of social care or health care services. This sustains a culture of dependency and marginalises and diminishes the contributions older people make to their communities.

Despite the overwhelming need for change, there are limited incentives for services to change. Services are too heavily driven by narrow measures of performance and, as discussed in Guide 4 in this series, performance indicators and financial incentives relating to the well-being of older people pale into insignificance against mainstream measures of performance.

To create a real and sustainable momentum for change, we must change the way we think about older age.

older people pale into insignificance against mainstream measures of performance

1.3 changing the way we think

The way we think about older age – how we define it and what we believe it entails – is a powerful force. Indeed, research in the United States suggests that our views about getting old affect our very health. It showed that people who had negative perceptions about ageing tended to live shorter lives. More surprisingly, it showed that having a positive attitude towards ageing could do more to contribute to a longer life than leading a healthy lifestyle.[5]

The way public services think about older age – the 'models' of older age they adopt – are also a powerful force. This is because they shape what services see as possible, the priorities they establish, the strategies they employ and ultimately the way they define their roles. Despite this the models are rarely explicitly recognised or discussed.

Deficit and the Service Delivery Model

Many authority's strategies for older people focus almost exclusively on the 15% of older people who use intensive health and social care services, at the expense of the remaining 85%. This betrays an over-riding model of older age as a period of increasing losses, deficits and problems, caused by deteriorating health, the loss of physical and mental abilities and the loss of friends and loved ones. The model creates a pessimistic world view of older age, 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.

This 'deficit model'[6] may not be unrealistic ... in so far as it goes: older age does indeed involve loss and for some people it entails real

5. Levy B., Slade M., Kasl S. [2002] Longitudinal benefit of positive self-perceptions of ageing on functional health. Gerontological Society of America
6. For further discussion, see: Reed J., Cook G., Childs S., Hall A. [2003] Getting old is not for cowards. Comfortable, healthy ageing. Joseph Rowntree Foundation

frailty. However, its pessimistic and narrow assumptions about older age marginalises debate about the opportunities and gains in older age, the strengths, capacities, aspirations and potentials of older people and the contributions they make to their communities. Arguably, by marginalising these issues, the model creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of deficit and dependence.

The roots of this model are complex, but they have undoubtedly been nourished by cultural perceptions of older age, long standing policies and a pre-occupation with health and social care budgets and targets. One way or another, however, they have compounded to make services from all sectors see older age predominantly through the narrow lenses of health and social care delivery.

Engagement and the Community Leadership Model

A number of factors are, however, coming together to create a different model of older age. This is because the voice of older people is getting clearer and louder and there are shifts in national policy, which are opening up new, wider and more optimistic possibilities about the way services can engage and work with older people. [A summary of key national policies is provided in the appendix].

At the heart of this lies an emphasis on older age as a period of both losses and gains, frailties and strengths, contributions and intra-dependences. This 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 is an approach that calls for a service response of Community Leadership, because it demands new ways of working that are focused and driven by the views of older people. As discussed further in Guides 3 and 4 in this series, it requires a much broader strategy, so that agencies work as a whole

Guide 3
working as a whole system

Guide 4
developing quality of life strategies

1.3 changing the way we think

system and operate well beyond existing service configurations and structures. It requires an emphasis on engaging, enabling and empowering, rather than constraining and disabling.

This Community Leadership approach recognises that older age can't be adequately defined by chronological age. This is because age isn't the main determinant of how most older people see themselves. They commonly define 'being old' in terms of feelings and perceptions, rather than chronology. ['It made me feel old'; 'I felt half my age'; 'I'm 80 but feel young'; 'Age is a state of mind'; 'He's old before his time']. It is also because the boundaries between older age, mid life and youth are blurring: indeed in many respects the wants and needs of older people mirror those of the rest of the population.

The Community Leadership model therefore advocates a 'Life Course Approach' that emphasises the inter-linkages between phases of people's life course, rather than seeing old age as a phase in isolation.[7]

Starting change

A critical step in moving from a culture of dependency and deficit and in opening up new possibilities for all our tomorrows is to engage more fully, more openly and more constructively with older people. The next guide in this series considers this.

older age can't be adequately defined by chronological age

7. Katz L. and Monk J. [1993] Full Circles – Geographies of Women Over the Life Course. Routledge and Hockey J. and James A. [2003] Social Identities Across The Life Course. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

Over the last decade, there has been a growing recognition that national policy has focused too exclusively on the 15% of older people who are intensive users of health and social care services.

Much of the momentum behind this thinking has come from pilot projects that were established by Better Government for Older People in the mid 1990s. These projects, which involved over 300 partners, promoted experimentation at a local level to find ways of improving public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views and encouraging and recognising their contribution. A series of national reports brought together the findings.[8]

As a result the national policy focus is now broadening out to address the quality of life and well-being of the whole population. In 2004 a discussion document, 'Public Services for Tomorrow's Older Citizens'[9], captured much of the thinking behind this shift.

> 'We need to stop thinking in terms of dependence and deficit and start thinking about independence and well-being. This means adopting a much broader approach that goes beyond health and social care services, and that is based on the issues that older people say make the most difference to their lives. Most importantly, it means listening to older people and engaging with them as citizens about their concerns and about the communities in which they live.'

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

A series of related policy documents emphasise the importance of engaging with older people, highlighting a growing commitment to put older citizens at the heart of planning and delivery. These policies also strongly advocate the need for whole systems working and the need for a strategic approach. They are therefore relevant to all the guides in this series.

8. See for example: Making It Happen [August 1999] The report of the first year of the BGOP Programme 1998 – 1999 It's in Our Hands [November 1999] Report from the Ruskin Conference Making a Difference Evaluation Report. [May 2000] http://www.bgop.org.uk
9. Audit Commission, LGA (Local Government Association, ADSS (Association of Directors of Social Services), BGOP, Nuffield Institute for Health and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [2004] Public Services for Tomorrow's Older Citizens: Changing Attitudes to Ageing http://www.housingcare.org/downloads/kbase/2290.pdf
Joseph Rowntree Foundation Older People's Steering Group (2004) 'Older people sharing policy and practice' Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Carter, T. and Beresford, B. (2000) 'Age and change: Models of involvement for older people' Joseph Rowntree Foundation
University of Greenwich (2005) 'Civic engagement of older people'

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

The Local Government Association/Association of Directors of Social Services – All our tomorrows: Inverting the triangle of care (2003)

The Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Social Services produced a policy discussion paper ('All Our Tomorrows. Inverting the triangle of care' (2003), which set out a vision of changing the way services are commissioned, delivered and governed to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by an ageing population. Key to the approach advocated was the need for a shift in the balance of resources through inverting the triangle of care so that resources for acute care and the most frail elderly move from the top to the base of the triangle, being replaced at the top by the promotion of well-being of all older people.

The paper also emphasised the importance of professional and community leaders listening to older people, understanding what really matters to them and involving them at every stage of the process. It recognised that to achieve this end, older people need access to information, advice and resources to take action for themselves in relation to their own care.

http://www.lga.gov.uk/Publication.asp?lsection=0&id=SXCA75-A781BC84

The Audit Commission on independence and well-being (2004)

The Audit Commission's study on whole systems approaches to services for older people. Audit Commission [2004] Older People – independence and well-being: The challenge for public services. Although focused

primarily on NHS and social care services, it found that the foundation of a whole system approach is rooted in the views of older people.

It argues that to take full account of the whole range of issues important to older people, ensuring that policies met their aspirations, required listening to older people, and engaging with them as citizens with future hopes and desires as well as contributions to make.

http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/1462310B-E6F1-448e-9E59-4A9FF9480F45/OlderPeople_overarch.pdf

Opportunity Age (2005)

Of particular note is the cross-governmental national strategy on older people and an ageing society co-ordinated by the Department for Work and Pensions, ['Opportunity Age. Meeting the challenge of ageing in the 21st century', 2005, HM Government strategy paper]. This provides endorsement of the whole systems approach by encouraging a stronger focus on older people's independence, well-being and citizenship.

It advocates that local authorities take the lead role in planning for the ageing of their communities and that these plans take account of the diversity of older people as active consumers of public services, who want to exercise control and choice not simply be passive recipients.

A key strand of the strategy was the development of third age service networks, Link Age, offering an integrated 'front end' that allows older people to access all the information they need on a wide range of issues from a single source. Fundamental to the success of Link Age is partnership working between

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

the whole system of organisations that deliver services to older citizens, encompassing government agencies, local authorities, special interest groups and voluntary organisations.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/

Transformational Government (2005)

The Transformational Government Strategy was published in November 2005 by the Cabinet Office. It sets out the Government's vision for a long-term transformation of public services to provide efficient, effective services that citizens want. The Strategy is closely allied to the Comprehensive Spending Review and proposes that 'Cross Government Customer Group Directors' are established to take forward the delivery of joined up operational services from the customer view point.

Two Customer Group Directors have been appointed initially: one is for a 'citizen group' – older people (Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of The Pension Service) and one is for a 'business group' – farmers.

The role of Customer Group Directors

Customer Group Directors bring a strong and reliable customer voice into the design of services and give service providers a better understanding of the expectations of their customers.

- To optimise outcomes for all older people and to enhance service providers' understanding of their customers, the Customer Group Director has commissioned customer journey mapping around the key life event of becoming a carer. This involves working with older people and front line staff

to build up a picture of older people's experiences during their interactions with services and the emotional responses these provoke, their thought processes and reactions.

- The Customer Group Director is helping to change the focus away from single service outputs to outcomes that promote well being and quality of life. The Director is working, for example, with the Audit Commission to build the age and ageing quality of life indicators into their forthcoming area profiles.
- Sometimes services need to be integrated to ease the burden on the customer and to simplify an individual's experience of accessing that service. The Director is therefore leading a project which aims to replace the current council tax benefit system with a system that would provide older people with an automatic rebate on their council tax if they are in receipt of pension credit.

The Customer Group Director provides a means of better integrating policy and delivery as the Director's sole focus is on improving the well being of older people across the whole system. By regularly engaging with stakeholders within government (both policy makers and agency chief executives) and with service providers from other sectors, the Director is able to bring them all together to hear from front line staff and customers. The Director is therefore influencing policy and helping to co-ordinate a more joined up implementation of what's already out there.

www.cio.gov.uk/documents/pdf/transgov/transgov-strategy.pdf

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (2005/6)

To ensure that the strategy is driven forward, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities for 2005/06 considers local authority performance within this strategic joined-up framework for older citizens. For the first time local authorities are asked what the council with its partners and with older people have done to develop a strategic approach to older people as citizens.

This looks further than just health and social care and covers the areas that older people themselves say are most important. It is anticipated that the process of implementing CPA will exert greater pressure for a more systematic approach towards older people's well-being.

http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/index.asp.

A Sure Start to later life (2006)

The Social Exclusion Unit's report, 'A Sure Start to Later Life. Ending Inequalities for Older People', Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006, advocated services for older people being reorganised along the lines developed for the Sure Start children's initiative. It recommended that older citizens should have 'one stop shops' for access to information and services such as housing, volunteering opportunities, health advice and social care. The Sure Start approach also requires that older people feel empowered to lead and participate in the changes proposed. The report argued that not just social services, but services as a whole should play a role in empowering older people to improve their quality of life.

appendix for guide 1: key national policies

The report announced a pilot programme, Link-Age Plus, to test out the Sure Start approach, building on the principles of independence, choice and prevention to tackle poverty, social exclusion, disadvantage and ill health amongst older people. The Sure Start model is also being piloted through other government programmes including Partnerships for Older People Projects (POPPs), and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=797

White paper 'Our health, our care, our say' (2006)

The Department of Health's white paper on primary and community care, 'Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services, 2006' develops the theme of giving people a stronger voice, so they are empowered to become the major drivers of social improvement. It highlights the importance of making services flexible and responsive to individual needs thereby meeting people's aspirations for independence and more control over their lives.

There is strong focus on the role of preventative services in improving the well-being of older people. To meet the challenge of an ageing society, a key goal of the white paper is to ensure that health and social services work in effective partnership to provide better prevention services with earlier intervention.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4127453&chk=NXIecj

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