

londonage

Age UK London Magazine Spring 2017



Older Private Sector Tenants

What's wrong and how do we change it?

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Comment

Paul Goulden
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There are 146,000 household renting privately in London where at least one person is aged over 50, and that number is set to rise steeply in the coming years.

Age UK London have been working on a project focussing specifically on the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by older renters in the capital for the last year, using funding we received from the Nationwide Foundation.

While the project continues, we wanted to take an extensive look now to share some of our findings and begin to offer solutions.

This is not just a London problem - an Age UK report from last year stated that older renters across the country are living in 'squalor and distress', and we hope an overview of that research will give you a wider context of the problem.

Other articles about our conference on the issue and potential solutions are included,

We hope that this edition of London Age is a small but significant step in recognising, identifying and solving the array of problems older private renters face, and will go a long way towards continuing to make London a great place to grow older.



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Top news

'Please Offer Me a Seat' badge officially launched



Many disabled people, particularly people with hidden disabilities and conditions, tell us they struggle to get a seat when they need one.

In September 2016 Transport for London (TfL) trialled a badge and card to help people get a seat when needed. 1,200 people took part in the trial and 96 per cent recommended they launch the badge and card permanently.

We're delighted to announce that the badge and card launched on Friday 28 April. It is important to note that the badges and cards will not be available on stations for staff to give out on request.

Get a badge by visiting www.tfl.gov.uk or call TfL's contact centre on 0343 222 1234. If you have further questions please email TfLAccessibility@tfl.gov.uk

Lock it & Stop it



Age UK Lambeth and Safer Lambeth Partnership are working with Lambeth Council to help Lambeth residents to secure their homes to prevent burglaries.

'Lock It & Stop It' is a council funded scheme offered to Lambeth residents providing free security upgrades to households. The project started in July 2012 and continues to make Lambeth's homes more safe and secure.

For more information call 020 7346 6800 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/lambeth

Wheelchair law change

The Department for Transport (DfT) has announced a change in the law to protect wheelchair users using taxis and minicabs. From 6 April, it has been against the law for taxi and private hire drivers with wheelchair accessible vehicles to refuse wheelchair users, or charge them more.

Drivers found to be discriminating against wheelchair users face fines of up to £1,000 as part of provisions being enacted from the Equality Act 2010.

Ageing in squalor and distress

An Age UK report 'Ageing in squalor and distress' reveals the plight of vulnerable older people at the bottom of the private rented sector. This national report is based on calls to the Age UK Information and Advice line and gives an indication of the kinds of problems experienced in those parts of the private rented market which are more likely to be occupied by older tenants who are on a low income and who may also be vulnerable for other reasons, such as chronic ill health.

Experts predict that the numbers of older people renting in the private sector are set to soar in the coming years, but today some older private tenants are living in appalling conditions and not nearly enough is being done to help them, according to a new report published today by Age UK.

The media often reports high figures for the amount of housing wealth owned by older people, with one estimate putting the figure at £1.28 trillion . But these reports can obscure the fact that more than 21 per cent of older people over 55 have no housing wealth at all . This percentage is likely to grow as increasing numbers of older people find themselves living in rented property.

Overall, in 2014-15 there were 4.4 million households living in the private rented sector in England. This total now exceeds the 3.9 million households living in the social rented sector .

Traditionally, the private rented sector has served as a stepping stone to other forms of tenure. In future though it looks like it will become a permanent form of tenure for those unable to buy their own home or rent social housing. It would be fair to say that the current model of private renting does not universally offer secure, high quality, low

cost housing. This poses difficulties for some tenants of all ages today but could become a growing problem for older people in the years to come, who will want and will need to live in comfortable, warm and secure accommodation as they age.

In its new 'Behind the headlines' report, 'Ageing in squalor and distress', which draws on calls from older people and their families to its telephone advice line, the Charity describes the problems facing vulnerable older people living in awful privately rented accommodation, overseen by landlords and letting

Age UK says that problems like these show the need for urgent legal reform in the sector

agents who are disinterested, negligent or downright bullying towards them.

Currently households aged over 65 account for fewer than one in ten of all those living in the private rented sector, but their numbers are reportedly rising fast: a recent survey by the National Landlords Association (NLA) found that the numbers of retired people in the UK moving into the private rented sector has increased by 200,000 over the last four



years and one estimate is that a third of over-60s could be living in private rented accommodation by 2040.

However, calls to Age UK's Advice line between 2013 and 2016 uncovered the following experiences among older people who are renting at the bottom end of the market:

- Repeated failures to carry out timely repairs to essential services such as heating and cookers, with potentially serious implications for those already in poor health.
 - Damp, mould and cold going unchecked, causing or exacerbating chronic illnesses
- Over the top rent rises imposed following necessary improvements – the law allows this to happen within reason but there are concerns this provision is sometimes being unfairly exploited.

- Insecure tenancies and an all too realistic fear of eviction acting as disincentives to challenge poor conditions and services.
- Local environmental health services stripped to the bone and unable or unwilling to intervene to protect vulnerable older tenants
- Landlords refusing to allow the installation of aids and adaptations that older people need, like ramps or handrails.
- Older tenants feeling harassed and bullied into leaving because their landlord wants to sell.

Age UK says that problems like these show the need for urgent legal reform in the private rented sector, to strengthen the rights of older tenants and ensure they are treated fairly. They also call for more resources for local environmental health services, so the law is properly enforced; better access to



aids and adaptations for older people wherever they live; and more comprehensive and more available local housing advice, so older people understand their options.

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director of Age UK said: “Calls to our advice line show that some highly vulnerable older people are enduring grim living conditions in the private rented sector and this is truly shocking. No one should have to put up with such squalor at any age, but the idea that a chronically ill older person could be living on their own for weeks or even months with no proper heating, or cooking facilities or hot water is sickening. The law is far too feeble and the withering away of local environmental health services is making the problem worse. The upshot is that older tenants in the private sector are almost entirely reliant on the decency and professionalism of landlords and letting agents, and sadly this is leaving some

at risk of neglect and in the worse cases of bullying and abuse.”

“As it is at the moment, the bottom end of the private rented sector is no place for a vulnerable older person, but if that is what we believe as a society we need to do something about it and create better alternatives. Our first and immediate priority though should be to improve the appalling plight of older tenants like those described in our report.

“The poor practice that older people have told us about is an embarrassment to the many decent private sector landlords and so we hope the private rented sector as a whole will want to work with us, and with Government, to turn this unacceptable situation for older people around.”

You can read the full report by visiting www.ageuk.org.uk

Real Stories of Squalor and Distress

Christina is a private tenant who has lived in the same property for 54 years. She has health problems and her daughter Kim says the disrepair is affecting her health. This includes dampness, a broken boiler, a leaking tap that causes occasional flooding, but the landlord has taken no action. Kim is not sure if the agent has explained the full extent of disrepair to the landlord. Kim thinks the landlord and agent are waiting for Christina to die before they will do anything to improve the property.

Richard is house-bound and very frail. He rents his house from a private landlord and pays £590 a month. It has an outside toilet and no bathroom. There is only running water in the kitchen. The only heat is an electric radiator. When something breaks the landlord uses the cheapest contractors they can find – so it inevitably breaks down again. He's had no hot water in the kitchen for 6 weeks because the workmen they sent to fix it were incompetent. They have asked Richard to move out temporarily to do further work. He is completely alone and terrified to leave his home, for fear they won't let him return.

Colin and Jenny's house is rented from a private landlord in a rural area. They like the house but it's difficult to heat. They have a wood burner but it only heats one room. Jenny has a terminal illness. They are confined to one room and cannot afford to heat the whole house.

Jim's wife Rose is 85 years old and has dementia and a heart condition. They were told they would have to leave their rented home of 45 years because they are in arrears. Rose is very upset and afraid something might happen to her if they are forced to move. The council is prepared to offer them a one bedroom flat. That means they would lose most of their belongings and would have to give up their beloved pet. Jim needs help to cope.

Alan rents a property privately through a landlord and his contact is through a managing agent. Last November Alan was told that his gas hob was unsafe because of poor ventilation to the outside of the property. He was left without cooking facilities for several months but then received a two ring electric hob. The hob is faulty with an electric flex which has to stretch over the front of the kitchen unit because the lead is not long enough. Alan is also worried that the windows may fall in because the frames are broken.

Ben lives in private rented accommodation with an assured shorthold tenancy which is regularly renewed. The landlord is unhelpful with improvements and because he takes so long to resolve problems, Ben ends up paying for things himself. Ben is aware the landlord can serve notice if he wishes, so 'doesn't want to rock the boat'. He has terminal cancer and needs a warm house. He could get free loft insulation but the loft has to be cleaned before they will install it. The landlord has refused to do this. Again Ben is considering paying for this himself and wants advice on getting the best deal.

Longer tenancies for older private sector tenants who ‘live in fear’

On January 24th Age UK London hosted its Interim Conference on Older Private Sector Tenants. Here we set out the findings announced on the day, and hear from a couple of the speakers. Another conference will be hosted later in the year.

Age UK London’s work to raise awareness of the needs of older private sector tenants in London has found that they need longer, more secure tenancies.

There are 146,000 households renting privately in London where at least one person is aged over 50, and projections suggest this number will rise. Between 2009 and 2014, the number of flat sharers nationally aged 45 to 54 soared by 300%.

Age UK London’s project has identified five key areas of concern, many of which could apply to renters of any age, but are likely to have a particularly negative impact on older private sector tenants in London:

Security of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs): Older tenants looking for a ‘home for life’ don’t feel safe renting with ASTs, which often last only six months and allow short notice eviction. Older tenants we spoke to talked of living in fear, unable to feel at home or invest in a property that they can never make their own.

Finances and rent: Many older people we spoke to fear sudden increases in rent that would be unaffordable without either moving or cutting living costs. The prospect of moving is so threatening that some older people cut down on heating and eating, a situation nobody should ever be forced

into. Older people in employment face problems when ill health impacts their ability to work fulltime hours and meet rent costs.

Repairs and maintenance: We heard reports of landlords not responding to requests for repairs, repairs of a poor standard and a fear of asking for a repair under the belief that it may result in a rent-increase or, worse still, being seen as a troublesome tenant and potential eviction.

‘This project has highlighted the horrifying situation facing many older Londoner’s...’

Relationship with the landlord: With the power discrepancy so great between tenant and landlord, especially in ASTs, a good relationship with a landlord was important to private renters. Issues in transition between landlords were common and older tenants feared a new landlord with new terms or plans for the property.

Health & Access to Support: Older people shared concerns around adaptations being implemented. Mould and poor insulation are widespread and properties that do not meet decent home standards can increase incidence of falls, rheumatism, depression, respiratory illness and arthritis among many other health concerns.



Paul Goulden, Chief Executive, Age UK London, said: “This project has highlighted the horrifying situation facing many older private sector tenants in London. We urge local government, the Mayor of London and the many reputable private landlords in London to work together to change this.

“The most urgent change needed is to give older tenants longer tenancies, which would provide a greater level of security and give them the prospect of feeling like the space they are living in is their home. Assured Shorthold Tenancies are simply not working for many older people who do not own their own homes but, rightly, want a ‘home for life’ in their later years.

“Age UK London are committed to making London a great place to grow older, and we believe that the private rental sector needs to

change to make that a reality.”

Cordelia McGowan, an older private sector tenant who spoke at the conference, said: “Since being suddenly widowed two years ago, at the age of 53 (my husband was 54), I have faced the constant knowledge and fear that I could be made homeless at any time. This is as a direct result of having rented in the private sector for the last twenty years. That fear is about to become reality - despite the best efforts of family and friends.”

For more on Age UK London’s suggestions to solve these problems, turn to page ten.

For more information on Age UK London’s Older Private Sector Tenants Project, funded by The Nationwide Foundation, please visit our website.



What would help older private sector tenants in London?

Gordon Deuchars, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Age UK London outlines solutions which could help the many older Londoner's who are renting privately.

We're just over halfway through Age UK London's project to raise awareness and find solutions for older private tenants in London. We've heard a lot from older people about the conditions they live in and their concerns for the future.

This research has led us to ask a series of questions: What are the main areas of concern for older private tenants? What changes could be achievable and would help these older renters? What can be done in London, and what would need national legislation?

So far, older private tenants have told us about five main areas of concern:

- Security of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs)
- Finances and Rent
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Relationship with the Landlord
- Health & Access to Support

You can read extensively about these areas on pages eight and nine.

What could help solve these concerns?

Security of Tenure

Older people we've spoken to living in ASTs overwhelmingly want longer leases. In

principle that could be achieved by changing the law on leases nationally, by building more social or affordable housing with longer leases, or by finding private landlords willing to agree a longer lease in return for having a good, settled tenant. Of course changing the law on leases needs national political action. The recent Housing White Paper signalled some intention by the Government to help private renters, but how much real change can we expect any time soon?

On the supply side, Sadiq Khan is proposing two new schemes which might provide up to around 60,000 homes in London over 5 years – but how many of these will go to older renters? London Living Rent will target middle income earners and some employed people in their 50s and 60s might possibly be eligible for it, but most people using it will be younger. Meanwhile, London Affordable Rent is aimed at people on lower incomes and will be filled mainly using the boroughs' social housing allocation criteria. So whilst some older people will probably benefit, this is not necessarily because of their age.

There might theoretically be some mileage in social letting schemes to match (older) people with landlords who want a settled, reliable tenant. But some experience suggests the landlord might compensate the



commitment to a longer lease, by setting the initial rent too high for many older people.

Which brings us to...

Affordability

Arguably in the long run, the only thing that will make renting affordable is to build affordable housing to meet the demand! That comes down to influencing national policy debates – see the consultation following the Housing White Paper – and the forthcoming London Housing Strategy and London Plan. There is a possible discussion about influencing the Government’s position on Housing Benefit to take account of London conditions.

To a limited extent, longer leases could help

affordability by limiting how often rents can be increased. Many (including me) would instinctively think of rent controls. However this meets with a lot of scepticism in policy/ expert discussions, including from those who clearly want to improve the private rented sector. The view seems to be that in London at least, market forces are simply too rampant for rent controls to work. Of course, the national political situation is not at all favourable to policies like rent controls.

Repairs and Adaptations, and Relations with the Landlord

Some London boroughs already have landlord licensing schemes aimed at ensuring basic standards in the private rented sector. Of course these haven’t solved all problems overnight – they need resources for one thing

– but they seem to have helped address some problems in some places. With the support of the Mayor and more of the boroughs, it might be possible to extend landlord licensing to more of London, or even have a standard scheme across the whole capital.

Similarly, boroughs have duties to enforce the law through trading standards and environmental standards departments. Stronger enforcement could help many older private tenants. While boroughs do try to do this, there is a serious lack of capacity whether in terms of funding, or (to some extent at least) a lack of the skilled staff needed. Some boroughs are aware of the problems and would like to do better. This may be something that could be pulled together across London.

We've been thinking about what could be done to raise people's awareness of their rights – though clearly the main problem is the power imbalance in the market, rather than a lack of knowledge. Some older tenants we've met know that they have legal rights but feel powerless to get them enforced.

On the other hand, it seems that it could perhaps help to raise people's awareness of their rights to have necessary repairs done to their home, without these repairs being regarded as improvements – which would lead to a rent increase. There is also a clear lack of legal advice for private renters: most boroughs do not have a specialist renters' organisation, and we know about the impact of funding cuts across voluntary sector advice provision.

Health and Access to Support

This links to the issues about repairs and adaptations. There seem to be gaps in awareness of older private tenants across various types of organisation. This might be because for the last few decades, most older people have either been homeowners or social housing tenants. But the picture is set to change as many Londoners aged from 45-50 upwards are now private tenants. If more people are living with age related health conditions and also in poor conditions in the PRS, this is likely to cause increased need for health and social care services. Possibly one of the most useful things we can do is simply to make public and voluntary bodies aware that in the future, more and more older Londoners are going to be renting privately.

In Conclusion

We've heard some really shocking things from older private tenants about the conditions they live in and how they've been treated. Of course many landlords are decent and responsible, but the private renting relationship may be intrinsically difficult for an older person on a normal income who needs some support. With the way the housing market is going, this could become an increasingly important issue in the future. We are at an early stage in tackling the concerns of older renters but hopefully we can at least put their needs on the map.

For more information on Age UK London's Older Private Sector Tenants Project, funded by The Nationwide Foundation, please visit our website.



Volunteering for Age UK London

Susanna Bass, Traffic Modelling Specialist in the Operational Modelling and Visualisation Team at Transport for London, and her team joined Age UK London last month, volunteering time to host a Techy Tea Party. What's it all about? Find out here!



I was recently on the look-out for a volunteering opportunity for my team, and came across Age UK London's 'Techy Tea Parties'. These involve different organisations running sessions to tell older people a little about the work that they do, and then give them a chance to ask questions about any of their own devices that they were having issues with.

More importantly though, Techy Tea Parties provide an opportunity to have a cup of tea and a chat with some older people. I work in a technical team at Transport for London responsible for building complex models to help plan London's road network, so I thought a Techy Tea Party would be an ideal way for us to help make a difference. As it transpired a lot of the older people who attended were much more technically savvy than we were!

I would highly recommend organising a Techy Tea Party to any team or organisation wanting to help support this wonderful charity. It's so important - we were shocked to hear the statistic that 44,000 older people in London have not had a conversation with friends or family in a month, and recognised the great work being done to tackle this. Our Age UK London contact, Danny, couldn't have made the planning part easier for us. He let us know exactly what to expect, and enabled us to plan a really enjoyable afternoon.

We started the event off with tea, cake and biscuits, and as our guests arrived my colleagues and I started introducing ourselves and having a chat. I met some fascinating people; someone who used to be a bus driver from the days before our

organisation was called 'TfL', a lady who was really interested in sociology and how people's behaviour towards travel was changing, right through to a gentleman who admitted he wasn't really interested in technology but was just there for the cake!

We then went through three short presentations; one covering the role of my team and the sort of projects we get involved in; one talking about the different services offered by TfL (such as Journey Planner, 'Please Offer me a Seat' badges and dial-a-ride); and finally covering some of the non-TfL apps which use TfL data and/or help make travel easier, introducing some of the popular journey planning and air quality monitoring apps available. Throughout these presentations we received a lot of interesting questions, comments and feedback, which made for a fun and interesting discussion, and it was great to hear the perspectives of older people about travelling around London.

Afterwards there was time for us to help with any technical queries, and this was where many of my colleagues fared a lot better than I did, being a lot more competent than I am when it comes to smartphones and tablets. One gentleman taught me a few things about tablets whilst I was meant to be helping him! We helped to install apps, send texts and emails, clear out filled-up memory cards and offered to take a few trickier queries away with us. We also noted down some feedback to take back to the office and submit to our Customer Enquiries team for a formal response.

We received some lovely comments at the end from our very attentive guests, and my colleagues and I had a very fun afternoon. I found some of the older people's ideas and

perspectives about travel in London really thought-provoking, and I have met some funny, lovely and interesting people.

One of my colleagues, Carmen, Muriana, Cobo, who also volunteered at the Techy Tea Party, said: "The techy party was a very enjoyable experience and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to help older people. The I cannot think of a better opportunity to help those people who helped us when we were growing up! With a little of our time, we can make a huge difference to their lives and make their day to day lives easier.

"I was very surprised and amused at the same time when all of them took out their smart phones and iPads to take notes, especially because I have never had an iPad. I was also very happy when I discovered that they already had some of the apps that we mentioned during our presentation but they only needed a few hints to understand how to use them. I was speaking with a funny older man who knew how to use the app but he wanted to save the route in his phone; we laughed a lot and we learned together how to do that. I also showed him how he could take screenshots and he showed me his grandson's pictures. He was very lovely and grateful. I had a great afternoon and what it is more important, I made the lives of people who have helped us in the past a little bit easier."

A huge thanks to Age UK London, and I really look forward to doing something similar again in the future.

For more information on how your company or organisation could volunteer with Age UK London, please visit our website.

Isle of Wight Challenge

We were absolutely delighted when university student Tom Leslie decided to take on the Isle of Wight Challenge on behalf of Age UK London. Tom's fundraising efforts will go a long way to making sure we continue to make London a great place to grow older. It was only upon reading his write-up of the event that we truly understood just how gruelling a task this was...

So, after a few months (though probably not quite enough!) of training, the day arrived and I stood on the start line of my first ever ultra-challenge – a 65 mile walk all the way around the Isle of Wight. The biggest endurance event I had done prior to this was a half-marathon, so this was a giant step up, but I certainly felt relaxed and ready at the start, 07:40 in the morning on Saturday 29th April.

The first few kilometres went flying by as I strolled along the wondrous coastal path of the Isle of Wight. After the first taxing hill at about 6km I started chatting with an incredibly friendly gentleman and he kept me company to the first checkpoint at 10km.

It was early in the second stage, at around 13km, that I had my first moment of panic. I was developing hotspots in my shoes under both of my heels. I stayed calm and carried on strolling along the coast path, but then it really hit me that I couldn't risk developing blisters this early on.

The 25km checkpoint gave me a timely chance to properly sort my feet out. It was on the next stage that I was given my greatest weapon for getting through the challenge. My legs were starting to fatigue a little and I couldn't help but think about the 16+ hours more I still had to go. Walking along one of the beaches I was told I had 'the most relaxed walking style' he had ever seen, 'he' being a bloke called Paul and his mate called Richard.

This was just what I needed at that point. They had previous experience of events like this and were happy for me to walk along with them. On our way to the 36km rest stop we chatted about football, snooker, jobs, university and (of course) walking. With my feet starting to develop more hotspots and even blisters, it was comforting listening to their advice and being able to understand that everyone was experiencing similar feelings. I knew now I was just three hours or so from the halfway point, so re-filled my water bottles, had a snack and set off for the half way stop.

About 2 and half hours later we had made through to the halfway point. A little over 11 hours of walking and we knew we had to do it all over again – mostly at night too, which was not a very comforting prospect. I can honestly say that tiredness was starting to get to me at this point as I helped myself to some food.

Little did I know at this stage that around 40km of the 54km or so remaining would be on road or at least hard ground.

As we neared the 66km checkpoint night was starting to draw in. We'd been on our feet for the vast majority of 14 hours and I would have to say a couple of negative thoughts were creeping in. I was very, very glad to get to this next rest stop.

The rest of my group were soon ready to get going again but I felt I needed a bit longer



due to a bit of light-headedness. Paul gave me the rest of glucose tablets and simply told me not to give up and suddenly I felt energy pumping round my body. The fact that people I had only met hours ago were being so supportive and considerate was an amazing feeling.

The next stop was at 80km, when I felt the finish would be in sight for the first time. I had been walking through the night for a few hours which was as difficult mentally as it was physically. At this rest stop thoughts of quitting were definitely kicking in.

After a few kms I felt confident walking on my own, with great advice in my head and music in my ears. I walked along the seafront for about an hour without seeing anyone, not even in the distance – walking alone at 02:30 in the morning with the waves crashing against the shore of the Isle of Wight is a strange experience. There was a tough climb from 89km up past the 90km marker which is where (at last!) I met another human being. I was incredibly happy to have Beth's company up to the final checkpoint at 94km.

The black sky had now become a shade of blue as sunrise drew nearer and nearer. At the 99km marker the sun started to come up – and what an amazingly empowering feeling it was! Having walked through night, to now be out in nature and see and feel the warmth of the sunrise was just so relieving. It gave me a renewed burst of energy that I was now certain would get me over the line.

I was able to really enjoy the last 3km as I strolled back along the coastal path and the finish line which I had crossed a little over 23 hours earlier came into sight. Before I knew it I was metres away from finishing my first ever ultra-challenge and what a great feeling it was. Still, across the finish line I went with a couple of morale boosting high-fives from the event staff.

All in all, the Isle of Wight challenge was an unforgettable experience with some incredible memories and feelings and I am sure it will not be my last ultra-challenge!

For more information about other fundraising opportunities, visit our website.

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

The Age UK London blog has been relaunched and we have some great new content. As a taster, we've included the below piece, written by George Harvey, Communications Assistant, Age UK London.

Age UK London is proud to support the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, a group of organisations working together to combat the silent epidemic of isolation throughout our society. Started as a cross-party campaign during her time as an MP, the commission works with thirteen charities – including Age UK – to come up with ideas for change and lobby the government to take action. The commission's work is more than just raising awareness – this is a call to action.

The Campaign to End Loneliness defines 'loneliness' as a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship, which happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships we have and those we want.

Whilst loneliness affects people of all ages and walks of life, older people are especially at risk as they are more likely to experience deteriorating health and the death of a loved one. Disability, poor health, poverty and limited access to transport all contribute to older people feeling cut off from their family, friends and local communities, meaning many older people have little or no social interaction.

Accordingly, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness shone the spotlight on isolation amongst older people between March and April.

On a national level, 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with friends or

family for a month. Meanwhile here in London, 44,000 older people identify as 'chronically lonely', meaning that they often or always experience feelings of isolation.

As part of our commitment to supporting the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Age UK London organised a 'Techy Tea Party' at Amazon Audible, which was attended by Deputy Mayor Matthew Ryder.

We run many techy tea parties throughout the year alongside a number of different corporate partners. These events help to combat isolation in two ways. Firstly, they are social occasions, allowing older people to meet up and have a chat over tea and cake. Yet these tea parties also tackle isolation by teaching digital skills to older Londoners.

A recent report by Age UK discovered that technology plays a vital role in reducing isolation and bringing communities together. Techy tea parties can play a role in reducing loneliness amongst older Londoners.

Additionally, our Scams Awareness Workshop also highlighted the difficulties faced by isolated older people.

Although the Jo Cox Commission's spotlight is no longer trained on older people, we must continue to combat loneliness in every way we can. We must act now to continue the Commission's work from the past four weeks whilst the isolation of older people is still a point of national discussion.

In the hotseat...

Danny Elliott, Communications and Fundraising Officer at Age UK London shares his thoughts on his role.

Why are older people's issues important to you?

I lived with my Granda when he was in his early eighties. I can remember the joy with which he greeted me when I came home every day, and how we wanted to hear all about what I'd done. Despite living a full and varied life, he had got to the stage where he was at risk of being isolated, if I hadn't been living with him. That shaped my thinking and, eventually, led to me being inspired to work for Age UK London.

What projects are you involved in?

I run the communications for the charity; I set out the strategy for how we put across our message, and then implement it, along with my colleague George. I have also been the Editor of London Age for the last four years, so you can blame me for anything you haven't enjoyed! Additionally, I head up the organisation's community fundraising programme and I'm pleased to say things are going well - but we could always do better!

What are the biggest concerns you hear from older people?

I've seen the media narrative of older people's issues change over the last four years - but the core issues remain the same. Loneliness and isolation, health and social care, accessibility and adaptability all remain at the centre of what we need to improve.

What has been your best experience in working with older people?

I spent a few hours with a gentleman called Tony - I was helping him gain digital skills. We had a ball, the highlight of which was watching a YouTube clip of Chelsea's 1970 FA Cup win, which had Tony jumping up and down; it was a special moment I'll never forget.

What is your vision for your work at Age UK London?

That we continue to make London a great place to grow older. I think I've achieved many things in my years here, but there's still a way to go.

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London Age highlights issues which affect older people in the capital. It is produced to support Age UK London's mission to improve the quality of life for older Londoners and to enhance their status and influence.

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If you have any comment on the magazine content or ideas for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you: delliott@ageuklondon.org.uk

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