



Consultation response

How do we assist Welsh Ministers in measuring a nation's progress?

Welsh Government

April 2019

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation in relation to measuring a nation's progress, and have provided comments regarding selected National Indicators.

National Indicator 18

Percentage of people living in households in income poverty relative to the UK median: measured for children, working age and those of pension age.

We support this National Indicator and believe that it is important that older people are included in the age groups to be measured.

All older people should enjoy an adequate standard of living and a level of income which enables them to live comfortably and afford essentials. No one should have to endure a calamitous reduction in their standard of living when they retire. However, currently over 120,000 pensioners in Wales are estimated to live in poverty¹ and Wales is the UK region/country with the highest percentage of pensioners on a low income outside of London.

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation briefing, 'Poverty in Wales 2018' <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-wales-2018>

National Indicator 22

Percentage of people in education, employment or training, measured for different age groups.

We support this National Indicator and believe that it is important that older people are included in the age groups to be measured. The increase in the State Pension Age is based on an assumption that people will be able to work for longer, on the grounds of increasing healthy life expectancy. Statistics show that many people are working to a later age than ever before.² For some this is a positive choice based on a desire to continue to stay in work, whilst others may feel unable to retire for financial reasons.

However, unjustified age discrimination is still rife in employment, despite it being illegal under the Equality Act 2010. Polling by YouGov commissioned by Age UK in 2017 found that 36% of over 50s felt they had been disadvantaged at work because of their age. We deem that everyone should be able to remain in work as long as they desire and are capable of doing so, and no-one should be disadvantaged because of their age. We believe that more must be done to tackle age discrimination in the workplace, including educating employers and managers to avoid discrimination and to challenge stereotypes. Furthermore, the support provided to older jobseekers must be better tailored to individual needs.

Lifelong learning and the opportunity to take part in educational activities are important for many older people to gain new skills and knowledge. Additionally, community learning can increase participation in wider community life. We believe that the Welsh Government must work with learning providers to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for older people to access suitable and affordable learning opportunities.

Lifelong learning and the opportunity to take part in educational and cultural activities are important for many older people. There is evidence of the benefits of learning for older people, in terms not only of personal enjoyment, but also for physical and mental health, social engagement and ability to manage their lives.³ The value of non-vocational learning to older people must be recognised. We believe that the Welsh Government must work with learning providers to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for older people to access suitable and affordable learning opportunities.

National Indicator 23

Percentage who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area.

We strongly support this National Indicator. During 2018, Age Cymru undertook a survey called the Community Calculator, which gauged older people's views about their community. More than a 1,000 people from across Wales responded to the survey.

² Office of National Statistics (2013) Labour market statistics December 2013.

³ Age Cymru (2013) EnvisAGE No.10. Active ageing in Wales. Article by Stephen McNair (NIACE) 'How important is learning for older people?'

Participants were asked to rate several elements about their community, such as local services, public transport, neighbourhood safety, by awarding each element with marks out of 10. One of the worst performing elements was that relating to ‘Your Voice’ which asked participants ‘*how well do you think your opinion is taken on board in community decisions and plans?*’

Out of 970 responses to this question, 330 rated it as *poor*, 376 rated it *fair*, and only 264 rated it as *good* or *excellent*. Clearly, older people feel that their views are not being sought in helping to shape the communities in which they live.

National Indicator 29

Mean mental well-being score for people.

We support this National Indicator and believe that older people should be included within the milestones for adults.

Older people, wherever they live, should have free and fair access to health and care services that maintain and promote their physical, spiritual and mental health, treat illness and support those living with chronic conditions. This principle applies to all older people whether they are in their own homes, in care homes or in hospitals. Health services should be designed to support people’s well-being and independence, but our NHS too often appears to be set up purely to treat illness on a ‘condition-specific’ basis with a goal of ‘curing disease’, rather than focusing on needs of the person in an holistic manner.

Loneliness and isolation are a daily reality for many older people. 75,000 older people in Wales reported ‘always or often’ feeling lonely⁴. Being socially isolated has many detrimental effects on older people, including a lack of the stimulation that social contact brings, and an inability to contribute to society or fulfil their own potential. There is increasing evidence that this can have severe implications for physical and mental health.

Low-level preventative services can make an important contribution to people’s well-being. Such services, including befriending and advocacy, are often provided by the third sector. However, many third sector projects have a limited life span as a consequence of the way in which work is currently funded. It cannot be assumed that successful schemes will continue unless they have managed to achieve sustainability or they are successful with a grant application to a different funding provider. Services can thus appear or disappear, even when they have been successful and helped a large number of service users.

⁴ Age Cymru (2017), No one should have no one: tackling loneliness and isolation in Wales.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of social support for carers. Caring can cause isolation from family, friends and colleagues, and can lead to carers feeling as though they have lost their identity. According to a survey carried out by Carers Wales, 87% of respondents felt more stressed as a result of their caring roles and 79% of respondents also reported feeling more anxious.⁵ In a survey of older carers across the UK, more than 75% of carers aged between 60 and 69 reported that caring had had a negative impact upon their mental health.⁶

⁵ Carers Wales (2015): [State of Caring 2015](#). NB, both of these figures have increased from the 2014 survey.

⁶ The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (2011): [Always on Call, Always Concerned](#)