

# Age-friendly government (England)

July 2018

Government at all levels, and all political parties, should take a strategic approach to making the UK a great place to grow older, where everyone is able to have a say in decisions that affect their lives.



“The UK population is ageing rapidly, but we have concluded that the Government and our society are woefully underprepared.”  
*Ready for ageing? Report of the House of Lords Committee on Public Service and demographic change, 2013*

## The UK at a crossroads

Localism and devolution over the past decade, plus the decision to leave the European Union, are changing the relationship between national and local government, the devolved administrations and citizens. Amidst such major change, the voices of older people are at risk of going unheard – particularly as national and local government have traditionally struggled to respond to older people’s needs and aspirations.

Older people have been protected from some of the recent pressure on public funding, through ‘triple lock’ increases to state pensions, for example, but the pressure on public spending has had a devastating effect on key services such as health and care, while the move to digital delivery risks excluding those not online (for example the 2021 Census will be ‘predominantly digital’).

## Key statistics

**£160bn**

Contributed to the UK economy by people aged 65+ in 2016/17<sup>i</sup>.

**1 in 4 (24%)**

Of the population will be 65+ by 2043<sup>ii</sup>

**77%/84%**

Of people aged 60-69/70+ voted in the 2017 General Election<sup>iii</sup>.

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## The case for age-friendly government

In the current financial and demographic context, there is a clear business and moral case for helping older people to remain healthy, active and independent: public bodies also have legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

The Public Sector Equality Duty created by the Act consists of a general equality duty and specific duties, which help authorities to meet the general duty. Under the general equality duty, central and local government must have due regard to their obligations to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share protected characteristics (eg age and disability) and those who do not. This should involve monitoring evidence, engaging people of different ages in decisions, and considering the impact of policies on people of all ages. While there is currently no UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, UN Treaty monitoring considers central Government's compliance with duties regarding other characteristics (eg disability).

Local authorities also have a duty under the Care Act (2014) to promote individual wellbeing, but the pressure on their funding is restricting their ability to have an impact.

## A patchy response

The Government has responded in some areas, such as its programme to extend working lives, and its industrial strategy. The Industrial Strategy introduced a 'Grand Challenge on Ageing', prioritising action for business to: adapt to an ageing workforce; use health data to improve quality of life; create new products and services; and develop new models of care. It is also developing a Civil Society Strategy. These responses are far from representing a truly cross-Governmental approach to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population, which is particularly important at a time of pressure on public spending (see Age UK's policy positions on [Reshaping public services](#) and [Digital inclusion](#)).

It is very good news, however, that some communities (e.g. Manchester and most recently London) have joined the World Health Organisation movement of age-friendly cities (see policy position on [Age-friendly neighbourhoods](#)).

## A voice for older people?

Separate national strategies on ageing exist in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with Older People's Commissioners in place in Wales and Northern Ireland, but there is nothing similar in England. The Department for Work and Pensions leads on ageing policy but can only act within its departmental responsibilities.

There are many local forums to give older people a voice, but many have lost their local government funding, and the UK Advisory Forum on Ageing ended in 2016.

An important part of Age UK's role is to give older people a voice, and our policy positions are developed with the aid of a Policy Sounding Board of older people. We regularly run listening events, and also run a Sounding Board for NHS England.

## Public Policy Proposals

- Older people must have meaningful opportunities to engage in and influence the political and service planning process, whether or not they are online.
- The Government should have a cross-departmental strategy and action plan for supporting people to live independently and well in later life. This should:
  - consider whether to introduce an older person's commissioner or a minister with specific responsibility for ageing and older people
  - set out how public services – including health, care, housing, transport and income – should meet the needs of our increasingly diverse ageing population, for today and tomorrow
  - be informed by the views of older people themselves
  - do more to encourage and enable organisations – public sector, private or voluntary – to respond appropriately to our ageing society, to adapt and innovate positively and to reduce fragmentation and duplication.
- Local and national government should:
  - be accessible, transparent and accountable to older people, maintaining alternatives for those who are not online. Access to information, often provided online, is not enough to provide transparency and accountability. Individuals must be able to assess the suitability and quality of services, with consistent data to allow benchmarking.
  - plan ahead for an ageing population, in partnership with the voluntary sector, business and older people themselves, and lead coordinated action to promote prevention, active ageing, health and wellbeing.
  - recognise the value of local infrastructure when planning spending – such as day centres and libraries where people can stay connected.
  - Protect access to essential services and opportunities to maintain health and wellbeing, particularly for socially or digitally excluded older people.
- All public bodies should adopt 'age friendly' policy making and service delivery, using tools like the Public Sector Equality Duty, to better address the needs and aspirations of older people and to challenge negative attitudes and practices with respect to ageing.
- The Government should consider the needs and opportunities of an ageing population in its spending reviews.
- Every political party should set out how they intend to improve later life in their manifestos.

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## Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice

### Further information

You can read our policy positions here [www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/)  
Individuals can contact us for information or advice here: [www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/) or call us on 0800 169 8787

### Further information

<sup>i</sup> Age UK calculations, see *The Economic Contribution of Older People in the United Kingdom – update to 2017*, <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/publications/reports-and-briefings/>

<sup>ii</sup> *National population projections for the UK, 2016-based*, Office for National Statistics, 2017

<sup>iii</sup> *How Britain voted at the 2017 General Election*, YouGov, <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election/>