

Mary Creagh MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Tuesday 17th April 2018

Dear Ms Creagh,

AGE UK WRITTEN EVIDENCE: ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

I am writing to you on behalf of Age UK in response to the Environmental Audit Committee's recent call for evidence for the inquiry into heatwaves and adapting to climate change.

Age UK is keenly aware of the adverse health impacts of overheating on people in later life. We receive hot weather alerts from the Met Office and we issue press releases in response, alert our network, and do media interviews to publicise our leaflet *Stay cool in a heatwave* - see www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/information-guides/ageukil1_staying_cool_in_a_heatwave_inf.pdf

However, we believe that more could be done to ensure that all services that older people come into contact with recognise and plan for these risks. This includes developing a more nuanced understanding of 'vulnerability' where people's changing circumstances – such as bereavement, incapacity and mobility – as well as other long standing illnesses and difficulties, can put them especially at risk. Improved planning would also make a difference. As unseasonably warm weather early in the year and high temperatures in summer become the norm, local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) should consider the effects on elderly and disabled people and make provision for them in their budgets. There are also practical measures that can be taken: for example, dehydration, which is already a problem that faces older people in the health and care system, will become more of an issue during heatwaves, and adequate planning needs to ensure this problem is countered.

Decent housing is one area where improvements can be made to the thermal comfort of older people during a heatwave. We are very concerned by reports that up to 20 per cent of homes may exceed defined thresholds for overheatingⁱ. However, while overheating is now receiving more attention in building design, building regulations in general need to do more to take into account the needs of older people, including overheating. In addition, as a nation we face the same issue already faced in relation to energy conservation – how to ensure the existing housing stock (including health facilities and care homes) meets acceptable standards. We agree with the APPG on Healthy Homes and Buildings that holistic solutions are needed to ensure that everyone can live in comfort.

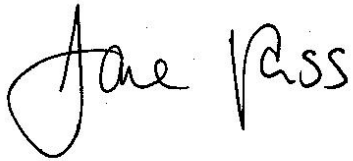
We are also concerned that, according to the Committee on Climate Change 2017 Risk Assessment, the risk of overheating in hospitals and care homes is unknown. Care homes that are not purpose built are particularly likely to be an issue, and residents' rooms can be on top floor or even in what might be considered the eaves. Much more needs to be done to evaluate the risks of over-heating in care settings, and to put in place appropriate contingency programmes, and this could be built into inspection systems and programmes. Staff should be made aware of the best ways in which to keep older people comfortable and safe during heatwaves, both in care homes and non-domiciliary care. While this may seem like a common sense approach, Age UK has had worrying reports that it doesn't always happen – for example, one caller to our advice line reported that his mother, who was in a care home, had her fan taken away without consent during a heatwave. Better training must include the importance of temperature control for older people.

While knowledge of the negative effects that exposure to cold weather has on older people is well known and communicated, the same cannot be said of the damaging effects of prolonged exposure to heat. People often underestimate the physical toll hot weather has on older people, which can lead to heat exhaustion and dehydration. In this instance, those who are most isolated are also most at risk as it can make them less able to protect, prepare and recover. Local initiatives are often in place to reach out to isolated older people in the event of cold weather, and emergency planning frameworks should also ensure that hot weather is considered in the similar way. It is also worth building 'weather preparedness' into any programmes designed to alleviate the effects of loneliness – an area where we are pleased that the Government has recently taken action.

At Age UK we are pleased that the Heatwave Plan for England identifies the vulnerability of older people with particular characteristics such as lack of mobility, and pays specific attention to the vulnerability of care home residents, including hydration, but its advice relates more to actions to take during a heatwave or on general pre-heatwave planning, rather than on longer term strategies to improve the heatwave resilience, such as the design of care homes. We find the National Adaptation Programme is also having a positive impact by raising awareness. However, our overall conclusion is that to truly improve outcomes for older people with regards to heatwaves it would be necessary to take into account their needs in every aspect of our health, social care and building sectors.

If you would like to discuss our evidence or services in more detail please contact, Robert Henderson on Robert.Henderson@ageuk.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Vass". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

Jane Vass
Director of Policy and Research, Age UK

<http://www.zerocarbonhub.org/sites/default/files/resources/reports/ZCH-OverheatingInHomes-TheBigPicture-01.1.pdf>