

Queen's Speech 2021

Age UK briefing

As we emerge from the pandemic, we know that many older people have been profoundly impacted by the experience of living through the fear, enforced isolation and inactivity of the past year. It has sharply accelerated the care needs of significant numbers of older people. Age UK's key concern is reform of the social care system so we can enable older people across the UK to live with dignity and security as they age. Many of the Bills announced today will affect older people's lives and we very much look forward to working with parliamentarians to achieve positive legislative change.

In response to the Queen's Speech, Caroline Abrahams, Co-chair of the Care and Support Alliance and Charity Director at Age UK said:

"After an awful lot of dithering the Government has finally nailed its colours to the mast by formally committing to social care reform this year. The question now is how good the Government's proposals will be, not whether there will be any at all, so this is an important step forward for the millions of older and disabled people and carers who deserve so much better than what's often on offer to them today.

"Ministers have made it clear that they see a cap on sky high care costs as the centrepiece of their reforms, because it is so evidently unfair for anyone to be financially ruined by long term care bills. However, this is not the only unfairness in how care operates today, and it would be a bizarre outcome if we gave more protection to home owners, while leaving those with fewer assets to the current underfunded system. This would especially disadvantage sick and disabled adults who have just as much right to decent care as older people. So as well as bringing forward some kind of cap, there is no avoiding the need for the Government to invest billions more into care - topping council budgets back up again after having allowed them to fall so disastrously over the last decade.

"The final essential element is the need for the Government to professionalise the care workforce, giving care workers the terms and conditions, and career structure, that should rightfully be theirs' after their magnificent performance during the pandemic. It's high time we ended the situation in which care staff are constantly the poor relations of their equivalents in the NHS."

"If the Government brings forward a package of reforms of scale and ambition, backed up by the funding required, we will be able to hold our heads up high again as a nation, consigning our current, shamefully neglected social care system to the past, where it belongs. If this happens older and disabled people, and their carers, will be able to breathe more easily, confident that they will get the help they know they need."

Newly announced proposals

Health and Social Care Bill

Older people have been hugely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with Age UK's latest research showing a significant decline in many older people's mental and physical health and the extent to

which older people have struggled to access the treatment, care and support they have needed since March 2020. Age UK was pleased to see the White Paper's focus on improving integration between different parts of the health and care system. Older people and their families frequently tell us about the challenge posed by disjointed, fragmented care and the harm it can cause to their health and independence.

The Government have formally committed to full-scale social care reform outside of this Bill. But there are elements of the Health and Social Care Bill which could be used to strengthen support for the social care system. We welcome the acknowledgement and intention to address some key challenges that exist within the social care system, including an emphasis on improving the collection of social care data and the introduction of assessing how well local authorities are meeting their statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. We also believe that professionalising the social care workforce must be a key agenda within this Bill to ensure social care can meet the growing complex needs of older and disabled people.

What Age UK would like to see from the Bill:

- Professionalising the social care workforce through registration
- Improved rights for care home residents
- Improved collection and publication of social care data
- Safeguards surrounding the discharge to assess process
- Support for informal carers
- A statutory duty for integrated care systems to include people with lived experiences and the VCSE organisations which represent them.

Renters' Reform

The proportion of households headed by older renters has doubled in the last fifteen years, with the proportion of households headed by middle-aged renters trebling, which means more and more people will be growing old in the private rented sector. Renters' Reform is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make changes that will protect their rights, ensure they have the power to use them and give them long-term security in their home. Age UK has joined forces with housing organisations to call for an end to Section 21 evictions and for renters' rights to be strengthened so that everyone who rents has a safe place to call home – now and in the future.

What Age UK would like to see from the reforms:

- New or extended grounds for possession do not create a backdoor for the continuation of 'no-fault evictions', such as landlords only having to provide a very low standard of proof for selling their property.
- Reforms are designed to make it easier for private tenants and private landlords to make home adaptations.
- Measures to speed up the courts do not undermine the ability of tenants to challenge possession proceedings through the courts. Any changes are simple and easy for tenants to understand.

Electoral Integrity Bill

Age UK is concerned that this Bill will introduce compulsory individual Voter ID at polling stations. The introduction of Voter ID requirements will act as an additional bureaucratic barrier to already existing physical barriers for older people who wish to vote. Whilst electoral fraud is an important

issue that must be combatted, there is no evidence that personation fraud is a significant risk to voting integrity.

There is a risk that Voter ID requirements will have a disproportionate impact on older voters. We know that older people often face barriers when they are asked to prove their identity. Many older people do not hold Passports or Driving Licences and would find it difficult to travel to apply for Council ID certification. They may not have a utility bill, particularly if they live in a care home or a relative looks after their bills. Age UK believes that any scheme put in place to address electoral fraud should not inadvertently disenfranchise people who are less likely to hold nationally recognised forms of ID, including older people.

What Age UK would like to see from the Bill:

- Age UK believes that the Government should reconsider proposals to require voters to provide standardised forms of identification when they vote in person.
- Within the Bill, safeguards must be put in place to ensure no individual is disenfranchised in circumstances that they do not have the required documentation and cannot travel to an electoral office to confirm their identity. An 'exceptions process' should be outlined for those affected.

Online Safety Bill

The Government published the 'Online Harms' White Paper in April 2019. Its principle purpose was to examine the issue of online harms – abusive, extremist and bullying content and accounts - and how new legislation could help prevent users of online platforms from being exposed to it. A lot of the debate has been framed in terms of how to best protect younger people.

Age UK welcomes many of the announcements about the scope of the proposed Bill and a new code of conduct to protect online users against harmful and illegal content. However, we believe the proposed legislation does not go far enough to protect citizens against online 'economic harms', namely exposure to fraud. The impact of fraud can be as serious as other harms within the legislation's scope, and there are existing laws to protect citizens from. Improving the safety of the internet will allow more digitally excluded older people to take full advantage of the benefits it brings.

What does Age UK want to see from the Bill:

- Sites need to take stronger action to prevent fake profiles and scam ads from appearing in the first place. Whilst reporting tools are in place, they are often of no use if people have already fallen victim.
- Given the increasing scale and sophistication of online fraud, tech firms must face the same responsibilities as banks to work with law enforcement and protect the public from it.
- Expand the scope of the legislation to include fake and fraudulent content that leads to scams.

Reform of Mental Health Act

In undertaking necessary improvements to the Mental Health Act (MHA) it is vital to ensure reforms appropriately consider the needs of older people. Older people make up 20% of the total of people who are detained under the MHA in hospital, mental health units or other specialised secure services.

Age UK welcomes the Government's commitment to improve the experiences of people impacted by the MHA through legislative change, as well as through policy, practice, and service delivery. In particular, we welcome the emphasis on ensuring older people, and their significant others, have a greater say in their treatment options, more involvement in care planning and have the opportunity to be better supported by an advocate, as well as addressing race inequality through the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework.

What Age UK would like to see from the reforms:

- The involvement of the person and their significant others in treatment options before, during and after detention placing the individual affected and their carer at the heart of this process.
- Ensuring facilities that admit older people are equipped to meet wider health and care needs, including specific training to understand the needs of older people.
- A review of the current funding streams for older people who have been detained to ensure they receive the best care possible following detention.
- A clear framework for tackling race inequality in policy and practice.

Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth

We welcome the commitment to the Lifetime Skills Guarantee and agree with its aim that everyone, no matter what age they are, should have access to high-quality training. It's right to prioritise adults without an existing Level 3 qualification for free training, which should, if aligned correctly with local labour markets, help people move into decent jobs. We also welcome the proposed reforms to funding for post-18 education loans - older workers must be able to afford to take up the offer of re-training.

However, the current turbulent labour market has shown that many over 50s with existing Level 3 or above qualifications can find it difficult to remain in work. For many older workers, qualifications gained many years ago do not carry the same weight as employers and so need to be refreshed.

What Age UK would like to see from the Bill:

- Older workers must have access to the same training opportunities as people of all ages, and everyone should be able to re-train to meet changing skills demands within the labour force.

Violence against Women and Girls Strategy

180,000 older women aged 60-74 were victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales in the past year. We know that domestic abuse can happen at any age, but there's no doubt that older victims can face unique barriers in being recognised and getting help.

What we want to see from the Strategy:

- The Government must ensure services are suitable for older women and not primarily designed with younger women in mind. At the moment, few older victims of domestic abuse are accessing any kind of professional support.
- Mandatory, ongoing training for healthcare practitioners in how to recognise and support an older person who may be experiencing domestic abuse. This is particularly important for those who interact with older people during admissions and discharges from hospital.

- Better links between the NHS and police are also needed to ensure older victims of abuse are properly protected and supported. There is a need for the police, NHS and Social Services to be able to more effectively differentiate between a social care need caused by a condition such as dementia and a pattern of behaviour that can be considered abusive.

Planning Bill

The need for accessible homes is urgent and growing larger all the time. Whilst poorer health as we age is not inevitable, as we age some of us will need help with one or more activities of daily living, and we need to live in accommodation that enables us to move around safely and remain in our homes for longer. Government proposals to make it easier to build new homes must ensure these homes are suitable for our ageing population. Higher accessibility standards must be made mandatory.

What Age UK would like to see from the Bill:

- Accessible and adaptable design standard (set out in volume 1 of the Building Regulations M4 Category 2) to be made the mandatory baseline for all new homes.
- More social housing is necessary to enable older people on low incomes to live in an accessible and affordable home.

Please get in touch

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss how we can work together please contact **Roshni Mistry, Senior Public Affairs Officer**, at roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk.