



EXCLUDED OLDER PEOPLE

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Background to the project

The SEU report *Breaking the Cycle* (2004) highlighted progress made since 1997 in addressing social exclusion but recognised that some groups still suffer from persistent inequalities. Older people are often excluded because they have too few material resources. Other factors matter too. These include lack of contact with other people, poor access to services, and lack of involvement in civic and neighbourhood activities.

The Excluded Older People project was launched in October 2004. It forms part of the Unit's current work programme, which aims to ensure that public services are delivered effectively to the most excluded groups in society.

E-questionnaire and interim report

The first phase of the project was to gather the views of service providers, academics, the voluntary sector and older people's groups/forums to identify what the issues and barriers are which prevent excluded older people achieving a good quality of life. This was achieved through meetings, visits and a formal online consultation exercise - to which 74 responses were received. The interim report was then launched on 15 March 2005 and reflected the views collected and highlighted the areas which need improvement in order for excluded older people to achieve a good quality of life. Feedback on the interim report is also being considered.

Area studies

The second phase of consultation has included work on 4 area studies in Sunderland, Cornwall, Tower Hamlets and Nottinghamshire. The purpose of these was to understand how services currently run for excluded older people in these areas.

Focus groups

Focus groups were also arranged and held across England to enable excluded older people to give their views on quality of life issues. These groups were mainly arranged through voluntary sector projects and older people's groups. Examples of groups consulted with include: carers of older people with dementia, ethnic minority groups, older people with sensory impairments and physical disabilities, and older people living in deprived and rural areas.

Policy development workshops

The project has run workshops in Manchester, Camden, Coventry and Stroud involving older people and officers from local government and health authorities. The aim was to discuss the emerging findings and directions with a small group of local experts.

Early results of consultation

E-questionnaire

The main barriers preventing excluded older people achieving a good quality of life have been reported as: Lack of accessible services (13%); Inadequate social networks (12%); Poverty (11%); Health (8%); Transport (8%); Age discrimination (8%)

The recommendations for areas to change generally were: Service delivery (the need for flexibility, joining-up, and individualised); Transport; Age discrimination; Finances, Leisure and education, Funding, Housing

"Quality of life is about having choices. Services for older people are still often designed to suit the provider and lack flexibility"

"Social networks suffer as people get older and it becomes harder to make new friends. Social isolation leads to depression, loneliness, anxiety, which in turn stop people from interacting with their local community and accessing services they need."

Feedback on the interim report

Feedback on the three cross cutting themes highlighted in the interim report - early intervention and low level services, joined up and coordinated services and the importance of user involvement and choice - has been supportive. There has also been overwhelming enthusiasm for the proposal for a 'Sure Start for Older People'.

Responses to the interim report have stressed the significance of income poverty on the exclusion of older people.

Focus groups

The focus groups highlighted a number of areas that are important for quality of life including: good health, a decent pension, good social relations, a safe environment a decent home and being able to understand and use transport services. A lack of information was highlighted as being a barrier to accessing services and again, people had enthusiasm for a scheme that would bring services together and provide them in a way that is suitable for the individual.

"You get your pension Monday, it pays your rent, it pays your gas, it pays your light, you go for your grocery, you come back and you have nothing again."

"...you want to feel that you are of some use to society. That you're not just shoved on the scrap heap and that nobody you know, that nobody cares about you or that the thing with, the things that you've done in your life the experiences that could be

useful to other people are not being passed on in some way or another or helpful to other people"

"I'm doing nearly every class here, absolutely everything and this is the happiest I've been in 20 years..."

Next steps

The consultation results and feedback we have received are helping us to understand further what needs to change and how to improve service delivery, as well as providing examples of good practice. At the end of July we began negotiating proposed actions with other government departments. We aim to launch the final action plan in the New Year.

The action plan on excluded older people will be part of an integrated programme, including plans of action on disadvantaged adults who move frequently, young adults with troubled lives and inclusion through innovation (information and communication technologies).

This Autumn the Unit is also publishing an interim report on service delivery for disadvantaged adults which will set out the key themes emerging from the work programme of the Social Exclusion Unit as a whole. Final actions from across Government will be published in 2006.

All reports will be available at www.socialexclusion.gov.uk

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