



A Fairer Scotland for Older People

what we heard

Contributions to the Scottish
Government's Policy Framework
for Older People

Outside the Box Development Support
March 2019

Who we talked to

In autumn 2018, the Scottish Government started working on a framework to support policies across their responsibilities that affect older people. They asked voluntary organisations that represented older people or were in touch with older people across the country to bring together the experiences and views of older people as part of developing the framework.

Outside The Box talked to people all around Scotland, including:

- People living in rural areas
- People who are part of the work we are doing around equalities and older people
- People who have higher needs and are getting care at home or similar supports
- People living in care homes
- Relatives and friends who were part of these discussions

Vision for a society that is fair for older people

Facing stigma

Older people want to be part of a society that respects and includes people, including them. Many people felt that there is more stigma and discrimination around ageing and against older people now.

There was a lot of concern about the distortion in the media about older people needing care – suggesting that everyone would need expensive care in care homes and it would cost a fortune, even though all the evidence is that it is a small proportion of people who need this support, and then usually only for a relatively short time. In their experience, this message caused worry for lots of people and their families. It also added to, or legitimised, resentment from younger people towards older people.

“Life doesn’t stop when you go grey!”

“Why has ageing become something to be afraid of?”

“The press are the main cause of the old ‘us’ and ‘them’ argument – they pit people against each other all the time. It happens all the time ‘young’ vs ‘old’ etc.”

"Get the facts. Most people manage well with community supports and good preventative policies and action means that there will be enough money to support those people who do need extra care."

"They wouldn't get away with the things they say about us if it was people from another equalities group."

Making a contribution

People also feel that the contribution that many older people make is not recognised or appreciated, and that this is closely linked to stigma and to people not being respected.

Many felt it was also a problem of people today, including decision makers, not taking a longer-term view – the contributions people made many years ago are still benefitting people today, and the contributions they make today will benefit people in the future.

"Older people should be recognised as contributors to society, but we are usually portrayed as 'taking from' other people."

"We look after grandchildren, run community groups, help out our neighbours of all ages, look after the environment, do fundraising and volunteering for other charities and so much more. But somehow we are invisible."

"There are fewer opportunities to contribute when we are denied access to learning or employment. Older people contribute in lots of ways, but these contributions are either not valued or recognised."

"It would be good to have more positive press' to combat the negative stereotypes. This is something the Government can help with."

Making decisions about your own life

People said they were frequently left out of decisions affecting them, or had very limited choices and options. This was a particular problem for people who live with dementia and for people with other significant health problems, and for people living in care homes or receiving other care services. But many

younger, fitter older people also had experience of people just assuming that they would accept other people's decisions.

"Our human rights do not stop just because we pass an age, or have a diagnosis of a condition such as dementia, or change where we live."

"Decisions are made for you because they forget you are a person."

"It is all about protecting us from risk, but we have experience and know our limits and our strengths. We can make judgements for ourselves and decide what risks we want to take."

Integration and inclusion

People from the range of equalities groups told us they often felt judged in their local community because of their disability and sometimes faced stigma in their social groups.

People from some minority ethnic groups felt there was a lack of understanding around people with mental illness, living with dementia or who have other additional disabilities. This included a lack of understanding regarding service provision. There needed to be more information, so families would be reassured about access to support when people needed it – and services needed to get it right so that support really is there.

People found that a lack of accessible information, particularly if English is not your first language, can be a major barrier to integration. People also felt disempowered by a lack of understanding from some services in their area about their cultural needs.

Older people who experience racism in their local community can be made to feel unsafe at times and that there is still a lack of understanding of different cultures and ethnicities in Scotland. Again, people told us that reporting in the mainstream media can fuel this.

In addition, people felt the mainstream media played a huge role in affecting older people's participation at all levels of society and was a main driver of fuelling discrimination.

People thought that opportunities to meet more people and get to know each other – across generations and across cultures and other circumstances –

was important. But it felt that there were fewer opportunities for this to happen outside special 'projects', and it needed to become an everyday thing.

"More positive language needs to be used by the media when they talk about older people. But positive language needs to be used all the time, especially at a national policy level."

"You need to have information about aspects of getting older in the community languages. Everyone can develop dementia and other problems and we all need to know how to get support, so we can get on with our lives".

"There are so many barriers to people who live in care homes being part of our local communities. They should be encouraging the links as part of keeping us active and well, people learning from us and more positive results that save money in the long run."

"We want to keep helping other people. Why don't they let us?"

Ways in which policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference include:

- Actively promote news and examples of the positive contributions older people make to all of society.
- Look at policies and procedures that have consequence of limiting contact between people from different situations – 'integration and inclusion proof' future policies and implementation.

How people contribute to policy development

Many people pointed out that older people need to be involved in the development of lots of policies. To do this:

- they have to know these discussions and consultations are happening;
- the process has to include methods and arrangements that let older people contribute.

Many of the comments related more to local policies and decisions, as these were the ones that often directly affected people. In many cases, this was a local public body implementing something that had been decided by the Scottish Government.

"The Government shouldn't just leave it to [the local bodies] to decide how they involve local people. They should tell them that we all have something to say, we can all be affected, and we should all be listened to."

"Communities have been consulted to death. There were a few running together a few years ago and the whole community got involved. The report took two years to be released. Little or nothing has come from that consultation. People are tired talking and seeing no action."

Most people had found that there were significant problems here in that:

- They did not know the consultations were happening.
- They did not know about public meetings etc, because the information was sent to groups they were not part of or put in places that they do not go to.
- Consultations and information about consultations that only happen online or through social media are a growing problem.

"How do you know when a topic affects you, when you don't know what the titles and jargon means?"

"Some council departments have these confusing names and I don't know which one to contact."

"The way they involve people needs to be more human."

"People that are doing these things [asking people their views and ideas] need to get out and speak to folk."

"We don't know what's happening with stuff like this, how are we meant to know about it and have our say unless someone tells us – even a wee chat like this."

"Very poor broadband in very rural areas means participating in an online consultation is impossible."

"Simplified information that everyone understands is important and keeping that up to date. It's hard to do that especially for people who don't use internet."

"There needs to be lots of different ways to interact, 'easy' means different things to different people."

"It feels like they're [Scottish Government, Local Authority, Health etc] always asking questions, and I'm not sure if anything changes."

"We are getting a consultation every month. Council and Health never seem to talk to each other, just send out surveys with lots of questions and no space for people to say what they think is important. And then they don't do anything with it, or if they do they don't tell you, and it makes no difference to our lives anyway."

"They have public meetings, but all in the town and mostly in the evening after the last bus home, so we couldn't get to it even if we did know it was on."

Some people knew about the National Standards for Community Engagement and thought this was good and would make a difference for older people, if the standards were used and really thought about. But Councils and others were not using them, or did not think about older people who live in rural areas or people living in care homes. The other problem is that there does not seem to be any mechanism or body to hold public bodies to account when they hold consultations and other public engagement that do not meet the Standards.

"If we could go to someone and say: this is how they got it wrong on that occasion, and then the Council or whoever had a fine and the money went to the group of people they had missed or ignored, then they would make an effort next time to see we are included."

"Part of the problem is assuming that all people have the confidence to take part. When older people are constantly told our views don't matter, that we don't matter because we are not young, then it is hard to believe in yourself. You can't speak out, even if you got the meeting. People need to come to us and behave as if our views matter."

People are also looking for more involvement in all stages of policy development, decisions and then implementing plans.

"It should not just be consulting us about the plans they have already made. We want to be part of coming up with the ideas and the plans,

making sure the experience of people who live here is built in from the outset.”

“Often the way they put plans into effect is more important, as that is what affects people day to day. But they don’t listen to us, they say ‘the public had a say earlier’ and ignore us.”

“We get asked to contribute to consultations all the time, we get asked the same questions time and time again, but nothing ever changes, we need to see concrete targets so we know if things are changing”

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference include:

- Ensure all Scottish Government policy-making involves older people, both when an issue directly affects them and when they have experience to contribute.
- Hold public bodies to account on meeting the National Standards for Community Engagement.

Views on the range of issues on which Scottish Government makes policy

Older people are very clear that they have views on, and are affected by, the whole range of issues that the Scottish Government has responsibility for.

“Do they not realise that older people want to contribute our views, that we can bring our lifetime of experience to plan for the future?”

These are the policy areas people talked about. Equalities and digital access ran through the discussion of all topics.

- Arts, Culture and Sport
- Economic Development
- Education
- Food
- Health and Social Care
- Housing, Building, Planning and Design
- Local Services
- Rural Affairs
- Social Connections

- Social Security
- Transport and getting around
- Volunteering

Arts, Culture and Sport

People talked about the arts, culture and sport as issues that benefit the whole community and that mattered a lot to them. They thought it was important that as people get older and may have some more challenges in their lives they should still be able to enjoy the things that enrich their lives. This was distinct from arts and sport as activities to help older people keep well and be socially included, which are also important.

Some people had experience of being involved in discussions about the arts or sport in their Council area that were about the whole community and had been very inclusive. Other people gave examples of discussions and consultations that had been focussed on getting young people active or engaged and had only involved children and young people and younger adults.

“Everyone forgets that us ‘oldies’ still love things like music and sport. I love going to gigs.”

“That’s the stuff that makes life worth living!”

“We have a huge amount of history and culture in the village, I think we do really well in celebrating that. I want policies that are about wee places as well as the big national museums.”

“The new V&A in Dundee has been great at involving people. They should encourage other museums and galleries to engage with all the community, especially older people who can contribute our history.”

“More opportunities for sport and being active for all of us, including people living with dementia and people who live in care homes. There are some great initiatives and they should be seen as part of sports, not part of health services.”

"Of course, I've got views on how football and other sports should be developed for the future. I've been involved in this for over 70 years and plan to keep being involved for a good while yet."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Include older people in discussions about national policies on arts, culture and sport.
- Include positive images of older people in these contexts.
- Celebrate the examples where strategies and actions are inclusive to encourage more local bodies to follow.

Economic Development

The older people we heard from are interested in many aspects of economic development, even if they did not describe it this way or recognise the term.

- Having access to local shops and other commercial services was often a way to keep in touch with other people
- People wanted shops and other services to work as customers got older, and to see them as a valued source of business
- Older people wanted to see jobs for people living in the area
- Some people were still working and wanted these opportunities to continue.

People thought that businesses should do more to reflect the growing numbers of older people in Scotland and not lose out to businesses in other places that are targeting this market.

The responses of businesses as part of older people- and dementia-friendly communities came up in several places. There are people who live in places that are working on this who know the impacts for them. Some also knew of the evidence that this brings significant benefits to businesses and thought that this should feature in Scottish economic development policies.

In the rural areas we met people who are in their 70s and 80s who are still working as farmers and in other small businesses. They were looking for more support for them and others in these roles.

- Ways to pass on their experience and skills, such as more flexible apprenticeship schemes and support for people doing this

- Help with the practical aspects of business support, such as when all the systems are administered on-line.

"They don't seem to ask older people's views on issues like this. But we live here. We are the customers of these services."

"Many people here like to shop locally as it supports small businesses and keeps the shops going."

"With the closing of banks, post offices and many small local shops, we no longer have the same opportunities to chat to people whilst in the queue or in the street when out to buy the paper."

"Older people are a growing part of the population, so a growing potential market. Some businesses are good at recognising us but many seem to take us for granted."

"We can help shops and other people adapt so they get the support of older customers and also get business from other people."

"You want to see more ways for local businesses to continue, otherwise the rural towns will just die. The problem is that no-one is encouraging young people to take on jobs like an electrician or tradesman in a small place like this. We want to hand on our skills, but it is hard to do it on your own."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Include the experiences and views of older people in discussions on economic development, both for their roles as customers and as contributors to the local economy.
- Encourage businesses in Scotland to develop products and services that work well for older people.

Education

Older people talked about education in its broadest sense, and about the importance of good schools as well as the opportunities used more by older people

"It is our human right to be able to go on learning at any age."

"We want education policies that include lots of learning as well as schools. I still like learning new things. Some courses and that would be good – but they can't cost the earth or folk won't go."

"I want to contribute to policies to get the best education for my grandchildren and for every child in Scotland."

"Support for rural schools is very high on my priorities. I want it for the children. But it also matters for me and everyone living here, as if a school goes the whole village becomes more vulnerable."

"I want to be able to contribute on policies about schools. I want children to have good opportunities and I want more ways for families and neighbours to have links with schools. One school near here has involved older people in some joint activities. It was good for all of us – older people, children, parents, everyone. But it was a huge amount of hassle to get it going."

"There needs to be more ways for communities to get involved in schools, like helping children who are less confident and giving older pupils experience of work and going for interviews, stuff like that. But the schools are so busy meeting their targets they don't even respond to offers of help."

"Learning needs to be inclusive. Attitudes and language can pose barriers to learning in older age but that shouldn't be the case!"

"Some people need help to attend groups or access continued learning. It is good when there are volunteers to help us with access or when we lack confidence, and that needs to have enough support."

"Remember to keep coming out to rural areas. We have very limited transport and internet access is not good enough to take up on-line learning."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Include opportunities for older people to contribute to policies on education, reflecting the range of their interests and roles.
- Look at the ways communities get involved in supporting schools and children – the practice as well as the policy.

Food

People talked about the importance of food and the ways government policies have a direct impact on this part of their lives.

- Policies around food production and retailing were usually geared around families and older customers were forgotten.
- Health promotion focussed on younger people being overweight and forgot about the impacts of older people having poor nutrition and risks when they were not eating enough.
- Community supports and services that should help older people eat well were often not working, especially care at home and replacements for the old meals on wheels.
- There is patchy access to services that help older people around eating and cooking at home where this is not a priority for their area or the staff have not had the right training and awareness.

The impacts on this were far-reaching, with older people becoming more socially isolated and impacts on their mental wellbeing, as well as on their physical health.

The impacts when the policy and practice were right were very positive:

- When people are at home and managing to eat well it saves money on care services as well as benefiting the individual people
- Older people buy food in local shops, helping keep the local economy thrive
- People want to support Scottish producers and retailers.

"So much of our social life revolves around food and eating with other people. Get that right and many other benefits follow."

"It would be good if shops and other people doing food understood how our food needs change as we get older. What is right for young adults is not right for us."

"You can't have policies on reducing social isolation and prevention older people having poor mental wellbeing, and then cut back on lunch clubs and think that giving someone a sandwich to last until tomorrow's breakfast is a good idea."

"If they do have meals at home services, can they get older people involved in tasting the food before decisions are made and feeding back on whether that business should still have that contract?"

"Buying fresh food and cooking are very important to me, and to many other people too. We want support to keep doing this."

"If it was easier to buy food in sensible quantities and be able to read and open the packaging, life would be a lot simpler, and I'm sure there would be fewer people needing expensive health care because they are not eating right."

"Once we worked out which local cafes and restaurants worked better for people living with dementia, we were out there. Eating out makes me feel happy. It is good for us and good for the people who work there too."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Ensure older people are part of discussions around policies on all aspects of food.
- Make the links across policy areas and remind other public bodies of the potential positive and unintended negative impacts of decisions around food for older people.

Health and Social Care

Access to health services

The point people raised most often was getting transport and other barriers to accessing services. This was a big problem in rural areas but also came up for people with higher needs who lived in cities

"Services at the Health Centre are good, but this is on a busy road in a one-way system with no safe parking. Getting Mum down to the Centre is a nightmare as she can just manage from the car into the building with support. Then no seats inside the building, so I can't leave her to move the double-parked car. Can they think more about how people actually get to the health services?"

"There are no bus services from the village to the Health Centre, so it's an expensive taxi fare each time I go. I can't see the GP and the nurse on the same day, so 2 trips each time. Is that the health policy or the transport policy?"

"Hospital receptionists who give out early morning appointment to people living several hours drive away are our biggest bugbear. It's gone on for years. We've all asked, complained, talked to Councillors and MSPs. Nothing changes."

"Hospital appointments is a big issue for us in the Borders, we are often given early morning appointments in Galashiels that we just can't get to because there isn't public transport to get us there and if you book community transport you are out for the whole day, hanging around for a 10-minute appointment"

Some people who had lived with long-term health problems, especially those using mental health services, found that the level of support they got changed when they were 65. They thought that services and policies should not reflect such an inequality.

Social care

Many people did not know what was available or where to go if they or someone they cared about needed help.

Some people knew about the Social Care/Self-directed Support policy and thought this was the right approach, but their experience was often that the practice was not as good as the legislation.

There are older people who have had good support which works well for them and is making a difference to their lives.

A lot of the people who had received social care described problems with social care services - delays getting assessments, little choice in what is provided and especially the use of 10/15 min slots for personal care.

People came up with many suggestions – all of which are already part of how this system is supposed to work:

- Older people being part of designing the services
- More smaller, local services rather than big ones – smaller teams would let clients and workers get to know each other and improve quality of care
- Support covering a wider range of things as part of people's care plans to give better quality of life
- More links between care services and the ordinary activities that keep people well and part of their community
- Getting information about what is possible in ways that are relevant to older people, including people who live alone and people who live with dementia
- Support to use a Direct Payment to arrange care themselves or employ a Personal Assistant
- Making it easier to change the support you get from the care provider you know and like.

People living in rural areas generally had less choice, and sometimes effectively had no services, when bigger providers had pulled out of the area. people had to use Direct Payments to arrange care themselves.

The problem of not enough care services or care workers in some areas was a problem for people in towns as well as in rural areas. Some people saw this in the context of government needing to do more, or lead others, in promoting social care as a career and making sure that services can pay care workers enough.

"It seems that older people have fewer choices than younger people, and that there are differences in the types and levels of support offered."

"In our area there does not appear to be any choices for older people, even though the literature says it is all about choices."

"It feels as if what a good life means changes as soon as you are 65. Our expectations are supposed to be much lower. There is not much equality in access to social care."

"The quality of care varies too much – great from some staff, not good from others. It is very hard to raise this."

"I'm very happy with the care workers who come to me, but they are so rushed, no time to talk."

"Information about help from social services is all online, we don't know what we are looking for. We don't know what we are supposed to do if our neighbour needs help. Red tape stops people getting help."

"There are some places where services are good, and it would help if Government did more to share what they are doing and encourage other areas to make older people's mental wellbeing a bigger priority.'

"Our experience is that decisions are made by services in isolation of people without having full knowledge of people's circumstances and not thinking of rights."

"Feeling part of decision making processes, particularly in relation to how Self-directed Support is allocated, is usually about relationships with workers. It makes a huge difference to people when we feel workers are taking the time to get to know us and explain the process."

"It feels that care homes still have a lot of stigma attached to them and there is a lack of awareness then when people consider coming here."

"It is a worry how your choice is affected by being placed in an institution and who makes that decision for you."

"Having little autonomy and no activity diminishes your health and humanity."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Involve older people when assessing how the implementation of policies is progressing
- Ensure that the experiences of older people for themselves and for the people they care about are part of all inspections and reviews of health and care services

- Get Councils and Health and Social Care Partnerships to work alongside older people when planning for care services
- Promote care work as a profession
- Look at the links between social care and economic development, to encourage more local care providers that will lead to people having more choices.

Housing, building, planning and design

Housing was one of the main priorities for many people. They are also concerned about the planning regulations – both the policies and how these are implemented.

The impacts of housing that works as people gets older is far-reaching: this includes letting people stay in the place they know for as long as possible or they want, and adapting to people's changing circumstances. People were clear that this has to involve both the types of house that are in an area and the design and other features of the houses. It is also about a mix of housing tenures – as people may want to choose between social and other renting, home ownership, and sharing with other people.

People were also clear that housing needs to be there for all the people who make a community. This includes younger people who are working in shops and all parts of the local economy as well as care and health services. Problems arise when they can't afford to live in the area they work in or there are no homes the right size (and the issues links to not having good enough transport links for people to travel in). This combination of issues is causing a lot of difficulties in some rural areas.

"Help with keeping our houses warm. Is that about housing or about the money side? Or energy efficiency?"

"If you can't find the house that works for you as you get older you have to move away. People move into care homes because they have no other option. How is that a good housing policy? How is that good for anyone?"

"Wouldn't it be good if housing designers thought about ageing – you know, houses that can adapt and age with people."

"We need a mix of housing – smaller places that young people can afford and that older people can move to if they want. That would make this area work for everyone. But the Council policy seems to be new build and big houses that give the builders more profit. They don't seem to realise that they are driving young people away."

"We need something that discourages people buying up so much for holiday homes or investment. Round here there are villages with 75% of houses unused for most of the year. There are no neighbours around to support each other. Our village is dying. But no-one is interested in that."

"My priority would be more houses for younger people, 1 and 2 bedrooms, easy to run. That's what will keep the rural areas alive."

"Mixed housing options in a new development would allow families to live near an older people they are supporting, not too close you take away their independence. "

'Sheltered housing options' are not part of the affordable housing quota that developers build as part of their development. The Government should change that."

"There are limited options for downsizing. It would be possible to build a suitable house in my garden. The red tape is so arduous, I have given up. I will have to leave the area to find suitable housing."

"Those developments across the road from us, all the plans are online. Someone popped in to speak to us which was good. That wouldn't have happened if we didn't know them. But otherwise we wouldn't have known about it until the building work started."

The physical environment around people's homes also had a big impact on people's lives. People told us they sometimes lack the confidence or will to go out because of the poor state of repair of pavements and how this can have a huge impact on mobility.

"Streets need to be safe for people to get around. People live in a place, not just a house."

"The state of the pavements make it difficult for me to get out and about on my mobility scooter or with the frame, the pavements are uneven, to cross a road I need to go half way up the street to get the dipped pavement and I dare not want to go anywhere on bin day."

"The road works and how they've changed the pavement means you've got to walk along the road - it's a nightmare in a wheelchair. How am I supposed to access the shops never mind anything else."

"There's very little thought given to places to rest, it'd be better to have more benches to sit but that doesn't seem to happen anymore."

"If they told the builders to have proper pavements along the main road to the wee development so it links with the rest of the village, and put in a few things such as improving the broadband for the area, it would benefit the whole community for many years to come and meet the policies about sustainable rural communities."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference include

- Take older people's experiences into account when developing policies on housing and physical planning.
- Take a whole community and whole lifetime approach to housing and related developments.
- Make strong, clear links between policies and decisions on housing and other issues such as rural development and creating jobs.

Local services

Access to local services is the issue that government influences that people thought had a big impact on their lives and the lives of other older people, as this affects the services that support most people's day-to-day contacts and relationships. This includes people who live in care homes, who want to continue to be part of their community.

People were concerned about losing the services that are there. People in many places were also experiencing problems as a result of recent decisions about the location of these services, with fewer larger services and services being merged with schools, for example.

They saw the links between these services that everyone can use and the impacts of older people's wellbeing, and so on their need to health and other more expensive services, when the services were not there.

People knew that these decisions are made locally, but thought that the Scottish Government and MSPs could do more to encourage councils to take a wider and longer-term view.

"We worry a lot about the way our town is struggling – shops closing, library on restricted hours, café closing, places where community groups meet also closed. There needs to be places for people to go as part of day to day living, especially folk who don't have cars and can't do things on-line."

"Things need to be on your doorstep, and open at times that work for local folk."

"How are you supposed to get to these things when there's no decent transport?"

"They closed the small places and now everything is in the new campus with the school at the edge of the town. Bus times are geared round the school start and finish and it is much too far to walk. In theory it is for everyone, but in practice it is not for us."

"The charges for the community halls all went up – just happened, no discussion or asking us if we could think of other ways to bring in more money or reduce the costs. Now they have less money because most groups can't afford it."

"I was going to a Knit and Natter group in the library. No transport but luckily my son could take me. After a couple of weeks everyone stopped coming, I kept going but soon it was just me and the library lady. It was a shame. She said they didn't have any money to pick folk up. My son couldn't pick everyone up as he was working too."

"When you don't have these services, you just stay indoors and get miserable, not so active, so end up with falls and pills for depression. They are not saving money, just creating bigger problems for someone else."

"It is the way we check on people you may not have bumped into for a while. You ask if others had seen them around and so on. When you find out that someone is unwell so you know to pop by to visit or see if they need anything."

"These services are essential for reducing social isolation."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Involve older people in discussions about libraries and other local services.
- As a matter of routine, seek their ideas on ways to find alternative solutions when money is tight.
- Encourage other public bodies to learn from each other and share ideas that have good impacts of local people.
- Create stronger ways for local decision making to be accountable for the wider consequences and link up across topics and responsibilities.

Rural affairs

The main issue people talked about was the different age profile of rural communities, with a higher proportion of older people than for Scotland as a whole. People understood why policy makers want to encourage younger adults to stay or return to rural areas, but felt that often the policies were not working for the people who currently do live there.

There was a lot of agreement that developing rural communities should include work to develop dementia- friendly and older people-friendly communities.

People talked about the importance of local care services such as the Care and Wellbeing Co-op in Highland Perthshire and now other rural parts of Perth and Kinross, and other forms of support across Scotland that are very local. They understood that the way services are organised and paid for by councils make this harder to do, and thought that was wrong – the main point was what produces good, reliable care for people living in and wanting to stay in rural areas.

Some people see the issue of improving access to social care as one of developing opportunities for people in rural areas to get work.

- The lack of enough housing makes it hard for younger people to be able to take on jobs in the care sector
- The rates people are paid mean they can't afford the housing that is available, and can't afford to travel from outside the area
- If there were small, local care businesses then more local people would have work and could stay in the area, spend money in local shops etc
- This is all in addition to older people and others who live in rural areas getting the support they need and the benefits for them.

"What does Rural Affairs actually mean? Is that farming and stuff? We live in a rural place but we're not farmers. Does it include things that matter to us?"

"We want good support that lets us stay in the place we know and gives jobs to local people, not go away to an expensive care home where we can't see our friends."

"Policies for rural areas should include all the people who live in rural areas and what we contribute. So many facilities and activities would vanish if it wasn't for older people volunteering and being good neighbours."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Ensure that older people are included in the development of rural policies.
- Ensure that policies aimed at supporting older people, and how they are implemented, also work for those living in rural areas.
- Remind other people how much older people contribute to rural communities.

Social Connections

People talked about the importance of social connections throughout their lives, and most thought that this was now even more important as they got older. It was one of the aspects of anticipating changes in our lives that did not get enough attention.

Policies that gave people opportunities and spaces to make ordinary connections were important, as well as some of the extra supports for people

who needed help to do this – for example because they had lost confidence or needed help to get to places.

People were also clear that losing social connections was a consequence of some care arrangements, where keeping in touch with friends was not seen as a priority. This was another example of how government policies did not always join up.

"We like the government's policy on social connections. We liked the way they asked people's views too – some really good conversations about that."

"Can they make it free for older people's groups to use local halls? That would increase people's connections."

"Much more to encourage ways for people living in care homes to be part of our communities – real relationships, using the everyday facilities like cafes and shops and libraries. And bringing younger people into our gardens, that sort of thing. But they tell us that there are rules to keep us safe and it can't happen."

"Staying connected with all our communities should be an essential part of health and care services. People want to be part of faith groups and keep in touch with others who use our languages and share our backgrounds and cultures."

"The social connections policy needs to link to policies about care workers. The workers don't have the time to help people keep in touch with friends and so on, it is not a priority in the care plans so it doesn't happen."

"Most services are 9-5 and groups for older people are during the day, what about those of us who want to do things in the evening either because we are looking after grandchildren or nowadays still working during the day but want to still have a social life? "

"Encourage people to look ahead, to build and keep friendships. Think about this when you are looking at where you live, for example."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Include older people in the implementation of the Social Connections Strategy.
- Make sure other policies and their implementation do not have the impact of reducing people's social connections.

Social security

People want a system that is fair to older people, and to people of all ages, who need or apply for support, and that makes the links between different types of payments.

We heard of the difficulties people have when being assessed for benefits or for PIP under the recent or current system. Points included:

- Difficulties for people who have poor mobility, or sensory impairments, or need help for other reasons.
- Difficulties for people who do not have a relative who can go with them, and not knowing what support from other people is allowed.
- Distance and other practical access problems for people living in rural areas, including assessors not turning up for home visits.
- Payments stopping for reasons that are not the fault of the person and taking a long time, and often intervention from people like MSPs to get started again.

"It is such a worry. If my assessment changes I lose all sorts of other supports."

"It is hard to get reliable information. You hear so much about cuts and changes."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Involve older people in discussions about policies around social security.

Transport and getting around

Many people said that poor transport was the biggest problem for them, and that it affected almost every aspect of their lives.

People talked about the range of types of transport and made the links between public and community transport, and the way transport operators work.

Between them people knew of a wide range of ways people got help with transport from friends and neighbours, community transport, transport provided by businesses for customers, commercial services in rural and outlying areas and public transport services. People thought it would be good if there was more encouragement for this diversity of responses, and ways for people to share information to create more options and choices.

“Everything hinges on transport. You sort out transport and lots of other things will work better.”

“We need policies and processes that encourage the development of innovative solutions to community transport – ways to involve volunteers, ways that don’t rely on volunteers, different types of vehicles, different types of journeys, and ways to find and book a ride.”

“Taking away town centre car parks is a big problem in our rural area with a high percentage of the older population relying on their car to access shops and services. It will mean they find it more difficult to access shops and services.”

“We need car parks that allow people to fully open their car doors in a safe environment, having time to exit the car in safety. It isn’t just people who have a blue badge that are relying in cars to get about.”

“No buses come into the village so if you can’t walk to the main road – on a road with no street lights - you need to use taxis which is really expensive”.

“There are not enough spaces for wheelchair users on the buses. If someone who uses a wheelchair is already on the bus then you can’t get on and have a 2 hour wait for the next bus where you hope that no other wheelchair user has got on that bus!”

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Involve older people in discussions about all aspects of transport policy.
- Find more ways to for people to share information on what is happening, to create more solutions that reflect local circumstances.

Volunteering

People talked about volunteering in several ways.

- This was a way many people contribute to their community – in a formal volunteer role or giving their time in a more informal but planned way.
- Volunteers were an important part of the activities and services many people used.
- There were concerns about the rules about volunteering which may be making it more difficult for people to participate.

"All the rules and regulations mean that I am scared to become involved. I want to help out but don't want to be a volunteer. All the health and safety rules and stuff around 'if I take petrol money I become a service provider' has put me off."

"Volunteers are often key to supporting older people to attend groups but they are offered very little support."

"If there was more meaningful support offered to volunteers coupled with clear information about their role, more people would be willing to help."

"People who fund groups need to consider when things are on and how volunteers can be there. I need support to attend groups but because of the times they're held it means I can't get anyone to come with me."

"You want people to be safe, but the risk is that the rules are chasing away people who have contributed for many years."

"It feels as if they don't want older people as volunteers, even though we have a lot to contribute to the whole community."

Ways policies and actions by the Scottish Government can make a difference:

- Include older people in discussions about volunteering, both for their contribution and for their experience of using services that include volunteers.
- Celebrate the ways older people contribute in formal and informal volunteering roles.

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