



Review of the Needs of Older People in Somerset

Interim Report, August 2010

Commissioned by Hastoe Housing (as trustee of Bernard Herridge Trust)

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Introduction and Background

SCF has been commissioned by Hastoe Housing Association to undertake research to highlight the needs of older people in Somerset and what might be done to improve and enrich their lives, in particular by local voluntary and community organisations. Hastoe Housing is the trustee of the Bernard Herridge Trust which has funds available to support a local grants programme for older people in Somerset.

Methodology

This interim report is the result of numerous telephone interviews with key voluntary and statutory organisations in Somerset, desk research from local, regional and national sources, and supported by national and local statistics. We have also used quotes from 'real people' captured in the Community Council for Somerset's Somerset Voices report (2003) to illuminate each issue and we have also drawn on information captured in the Commission for Rural Communities "Tackling Rural Disadvantage" pilot report which focused on the needs of older people in rural areas.

We have also highlighted examples of where the voluntary sector currently or could deliver support, but the planned 'round-table' discussion with key stakeholders will both analyse the issues further and identify key areas where voluntary organisations can make a significant difference.

Older People – some facts

UK wide

- The proportion of people aged **65 and over** in the UK is projected to increase from 16% in 2008 to 23% by 2033 (Source: ONS). This is an inevitable consequence of the age structure of the population alive today, in particular the ageing of the large numbers of people born after the 2nd World War and during the 1960s baby boom.
- There are over 19 million people **over 50** in the UK – 42% of the adult population. By 2033 those aged 50 or over will make up almost 50% of the adult population.
- At the time of the last census, 1 in 7 households were occupied by lone pensioners

Somerset

- Currently about 1 in 5 Somerset residents are estimated to be aged 65+ compared to about one in six of the England population.
- In particular, West Somerset has the highest median age of any district in the UK, at 52.1 years, well above the national average of 39.3 (Source: ONS)
- With net inward migration amongst all ages apart from the 16 – 29 yr olds, and people generally living longer, Somerset's population is set to become even older, ageing at a faster rate than that of the country as a whole. The 85+ population is expected to rise by over 15,000 people by 2028 with a particularly strong increase in the number of very aged men.
- 86% of very aged men, and 75% of very aged women, live in their own home.

Results/Findings

Our research has discovered wide variations in the needs of older people and what is important to them, as might be expected from such a diverse group. Services required by a fit person in their fifties in paid work will be very different from the needs of a frail 90 year old living on income-related benefits. However, strong themes have emerged around:

- Access to information
- Isolation
- Independence
- Vulnerability
- Healthy Living
- Fulfilment

This report will expand on each of these, highlighting the key issues raised by stakeholders.

Access to information

“When my husband died I asked my daughter to help with all my forms as there was nowhere else to go. She helped me get the Income Support added to my pension and Council Tax Benefit. When he died I said to my daughter that I wanted to claim everything I was entitled to as Dad and I had paid our stamp for so long and never had any help for the nine years he was seriously ill. I have never heard of Attendance Allowance and I’m sure she hasn’t either. There must be crowds of people on their own who don’t know what they are entitled to.”

Widow over 90 years of age receiving Minimum Income Guarantee, almost certainly entitled to Attendance Allowance.

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Lack of awareness of entitlements/services. People need to be aware of their rights and if they simply don’t know that a relevant service, entitlement or benefit exists, they are in no position to take steps to find out about it.
- Pride prevents people asking about entitlements, particularly where benefits are ‘discretionary’ or ‘means tested’. Perceived stigma around claiming benefits. Process can be demanding and intrusive.
- Information needs to be in appropriate format. Older people generally prefer to find things out through personal (and ideally face to face) contact rather than consulting written or impersonal sources. As some put it, they like to talk to a ‘human being’ who can explain things in a friendly and simple way and can tell them what it means for them.
- Help with filling out forms
- Debt counselling

Other information

- There were 22,525 claimants of pension credit in Somerset in Feb 2007 (DWP). This is a benefit which is widely recognised as being under claimed.

‘Tacking Rural Disadvantage’

A strong culture of self sufficiency amongst older people in rural areas meant that some older people opted to manage without seeking to claim additional state benefit entitlements. However, older people who had successfully claimed additional benefits – usually through the support of other people, rather than on their own initiative – tended to comment that this had improved the quality of their lives.

The report recommends that it is important to consider ways of improving benefit take up amongst older people in rural areas. This might require government departments to develop outreach programmes which specifically target the needs of older people. Consideration might also be given to innovative schemes aimed at providing information to potentially disadvantaged older people in rural areas through existing networks or the voluntary sector.

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- CAB and other independent advice agencies can help older people secure their entitlements to benefits and give them information and advice to enable them to make informed choices.
- Recruit and train local ‘contact points’ within hard to reach and isolated communities or provide telephone-based advisory services.

Isolation (both physical and social)

“It is so important to have one [Post Office] in the village, it’s the main source of a lot of people’s social life. They go there every week and meet friends, gossip about what is going on and arrange outings and meetings otherwise sometimes they wouldn’t go out at all. One old chap who sadly died last year on this site it was the one day a week he really looked forward to. He had something to get up for he used to put on his suit and go down and collect his pension. I am sure it is the same for many living in villages.”

Grandmother living on mobile home site.

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Isolation, as friends and families die or move away
- Bereavement, when spouses die
- Loneliness can lead to depression, especially in the winter months
- Sense of belonging is lacking in many communities
- Lack of opportunities to meet and make new friends
- Lack of services in rural areas – closure of village shops, post offices

- Lack of transport to access both vital services and social activities (particularly in rural areas, where they is a significant additional cost)
- Closure of village pubs – further loss of opportunities for socialising
- Respite for carers

Other information

Farm Crisis Network highlights that the ageing farming population is a group that is particularly prone to isolation and the attendant socio-economic problems with health, retirement and succession issues.

Overall, across the county 14% of Super Output Areas (SOAs) fall within the country's 10% most deprived areas for "Barriers to Housing and Services", reflecting the impact of rural isolation (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007). It is worth noting that in West Somerset alone a quarter of the District's SOAs fall within the country's 1% most deprived in this regard.

'Tacking Rural Disadvantage'

A loss of services in the rural areas and the difficulty of reaching services further afield were two key themes that emerged from this research.

The changing local population in many villages is having an impact on the social life of these communities, with many people travelling out of the local area to go to work. This reinforces the feeling of isolation amongst the older residents. Also the diminished sense of community in rural areas appears to reinforce the feeling of isolation amongst the older residents.

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- Community transport, dial-a-ride and car share schemes
- Community-run village shops, post offices and pubs can continue to provide access to vital services
- Village halls can be a focal point for the local delivery of services
- Isolation is not simply a matter of distance from centres of population. Town dwellers with poor social links can feel isolated too. Befriending schemes and luncheon clubs are just two examples of initiatives which can assist and support older people.
- Computer training so older people can keep in touch with family and friends

Independence

"Once you leave hospital though, the service leaves much to be desired. We were called for an interview at the nursing home by someone from Social Services who came over from Glastonbury..... The first thing he said was all the things I was entitled to when I returned home. I thought that sounds good. Then he

said the only trouble is I haven't got anybody and I can't offer you anything.... So that was a complete and utter waste of time, the only thing they have actually provided was the steel ramps to get me from the garden into the house in my chair."

Pensioner severely disabled in an accident having to rely on friends to provide for her care needs on a daily basis.

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Lack of transport affects many older people
- Not enough carers – a career in caring is not valued. It is not seen as a 'proper' job and attracts the minimum wage. One consequence of an ageing population is that the numbers of family or friends caring for an older person is also increasing.
- Paying for care in old age - losing family home to care fees. Won't go into a home because they want to be able to have something to pass on to their children
- Younger family members live away or have to work and can't give low level support
- As people become less physically active, their ability to care for their own homes and gardens declines. Even small jobs can be beyond them, yet many older people are fearful that they will be exploited by unscrupulous workmen.
- Security fears restrict independent movement, particularly at night

Other information

- At the time of the last Census, 1 in 7 households were occupied by lone pensioners
- 33% of men over 85, and 51% of women over 85, live alone.
- 33% of all Somerset households contain someone with a life limiting or terminal illness, including 16,000 where that person is aged 75+. There is no resident carer in 85% of these households.

According to the Countryside Agency's 2004 study of the benefits of providing transport to health care in rural areas, 1 in 16 people over the age of 65 received home care services in urban areas whereas in the most rural areas this fell to 1 in 30. This has implications for the transport needs of people living in rural areas who are unable to access the health care they require at home. Rural dwellers also face a number of less tangible problems. Isolation and loneliness, which are felt more keenly in rural rather than in urban areas, can have their own profound health effects.

'Tacking Rural Disadvantage'

Most of the people interviewed in this research identified transport as a key concern for accessing distant services. They noted that public transport cannot always be used by frail older people or those with poor health.

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- Funding for adaptations to homes
- More flexible services supporting people in their own homes
- Support for carers, in particular respite for older people caring for a partner
- Community transport, car sharing schemes

Vulnerability

"In summer they are always having fights [at the pub]Although I don't hear much up here I do get nervous, especially if I hear a noise late at night. A lot of older people say to me that they wouldn't go out at night in the summer."

Elderly Widow

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Distrust of younger people, especially groups of young people
- Vulnerability to abuse/age discrimination, particularly older people suffering from mental ill health
- Distraction burglaries, rogue traders target the elderly
- Anti social behaviour affects older people in particular

Other information

At the **'Time to Talk aboutFalls and Strokes'** consultation event organised by Age Concern Somerset and Taunton Deane PCT (DATE), an audience member related personal experience of treatment of her stroke at a Somerset hospital. Throughout her time in hospital, she had suffered from age discrimination. Nursing staff had treated her like a child, threatening her with a 'smacked bottom' and not allowing her back to bed until she had eaten her food. The whole experience had been degrading and undignified.

The Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership reported in 2005 that by far the most vulnerable age group to burglaries is the over 60s and over 80s.

'Tacking Rural Disadvantage'

The report notes that for some respondents lack of street lighting and footpaths leaves a number of older people unable to walk around their communities. Apart from this, however, the report did not highlight any particular concern around crime or other 'vulnerability' issues not covered elsewhere in this report. This might suggest that this is not a 'rural' issue.

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- Intergenerational projects can build more understanding and integration between young people and older people, and reduce older people's fears of anti social behaviour and crime.
- Neighbourhood Watch projects can reduce residents fear of crime.
- Practical assistance with the upkeep of the house and garden will make it harder for burglars and rogue traders to identify and target older person households.

The next two topics have a different emphasis on activities that may go some way towards helping older people live healthier and more fulfilling lives, which may help mitigate or prevent some of the problems highlighted above. Although they are not 'issues' in the same way as the preceding sections of this report, such was the response from interviewees we felt both deserved a section. Arguably the emphasis has arguably come more from providers than beneficiaries. We have not found any corroborating evidence that there is demand for, or concern about the lack of, (preventative) initiatives that support healthier or more fulfilling lifestyles but this may simply reflect the focus of the research we have drawn on for this report on acute problems.

Healthy Living

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Need more activities raising awareness of healthy lifestyles – e.g. exercise programmes, healthy eating etc.
- Leisure centres do not offer enough activities targeted at older people
- Not enough educational opportunities, or opportunities to develop new interests
- Access to leisure opportunities difficult because of lack of public transport and also limited respite for carers
- People affected by dementia and their carers need opportunities to meet others in similar situations.

Other information

Evidence from a national survey on what determines older people's quality of life (***Ageing Well: Quality of Life in Old Age***) has emphasised the importance given by older people to opportunities for social engagement such as leisure and volunteering and to local services such as libraries for personal fulfilment and social activities.

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- Active Living Centres – community, voluntary and statutory groups work in partnership to promote and develop opportunities for people aged 50 and over to access information and activities that keep them active and well.
- Provision of more structured activities for people affected by dementia such as memory cafes and Singing for the Brain sessions where those attending can receive information and support, make contact with others in similar situations and take part in activities which promote wellbeing.
- University of the Third Age groups can offer opportunities for lifelong learning
- Community transport schemes

Fulfilment

Principal points raised by local stakeholders

- Older people want to be able to help others , to feel needed and appreciated – improves feeling of self worth
- Skills and experience of older people should be used to support others through volunteering but the process is complicated and it can put people off.
- CRB checks can be barriers to volunteering – older people see them as a slight on their character.
- Lack of consultation with older people on issues which affect them
- Lack of confidence among older people about speaking out in formal settings

Role of the Voluntary Sector

- Charities and small community groups can offer volunteering opportunities
Increase the capacity of older people to influence decisions that affect their lives
- Older people's forums – older people respond well to consultation undertaken by their peers.
They need to be sure they are listened to and taken seriously.
- Undertaking to learn and to help others learn has been the main thrust of the University of the Third Age which has 4 branches in Somerset.

CONCLUSIONS

As might be expected, the issues raised during our research were very wide ranging, with few surprises. The insights from local organisations are reflected in national research, suggesting that the issues within Somerset are by no means unique. Although some of the formal research and reports we have drawn on

are several years old, their findings are largely reflected in our interviewee responses, suggesting that, at best, there is a long way to go to help all older people enjoy a high and dignified quality of life.

The most widely acknowledged were around the three themes of access to information, isolation and independence and in all three areas the rural nature of Somerset adds an extra dimension to these issues. The county is largely rural in character with over 50% of the population living in communities of less than 3000 people. For many this provides a high quality of life, but for those who live in disadvantaged circumstances, the rurality more often than not compounds their problems.

In many respects all of the issues are interrelated. For example, improved transport to sources of advice and support may help people identify and claim benefits to which they are entitled, which in turns enable them to lead more fulfilling lives.

Our research has highlighted transport as being one of the biggest concerns, particularly in the more rural communities. There is also a need for local initiatives to bring services and care to older people and the voluntary sector groups will be a key part of this service delivery.

An ageing population should be seen as an opportunity, not a burden. Older people have a wealth of skills and experience that can make an enormous contribution and enrich the communities in which they live. For example, they provide vital support across generations – if the unpaid care of grandparents was provided by paid childminders, it would cost around £3.9 billion every year. They deserve to be offered support to prolong their independence and live healthier and more active lives for longer.

Undoubtedly the local voluntary sector has a significant part to play in addressing these needs, particularly given the rurality of the county.

Next Steps

We will use this report as a basis for a round-table discussion with a wide range of stakeholders from the public, not for profit and voluntary sectors with a view to identifying key areas where the a targeted grants programme could make a difference in Somerset. This will lead to the final conclusions from the project. This will give us an opportunity to explore in more detail the specific issues of interest to Hastoe Housing of fuel poverty & equity release.

Annex – Organisations Interviewed

Age Concern Somerset

Alzheimer's Society

Avon and Somerset Constabulary

Citizens Advice Bureau (Mendip)

Flourish Homes

Mendip Community Support

NHS Somerset

South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action

Somerset County Council (Active Living Project)