

Link-Age Consultation Summary

Introduction

In August 2004, the Department for Work and Pensions, in collaboration with the Department of Health, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Local Government Association published the *Link-Age* document. This document set out a vision for joined up, holistic services for older people, described progress to date and consulted on next steps. We received over 100 written comments and ran 20 regional events attended by over 400 mainly older people. **We would like to thank all those who contributed to the consultation.**

We are now ready to respond to the consultation and to set out our programme for developing *Link-Age*, to develop modern public services which meet the needs and aspirations of older people. The programme is described in detail in the main body of a strategy document we are publishing today (23 March 2005) called *Opportunity Age* which can be accessed via the DWP website.

The following section summarises the responses to the ten questions posed by the *Link-Age* document and the wider comments; our summary response are in italics.

The questions set out in the *Link-Age* document

Q1. What are your views on the vision for joined-up services?

The response to this question was very positive. Respondents were supportive of the joined up approach to older people's services and the idea of a person-centred approach to services. The recognition that older people were active citizens was welcomed and it was felt that the document challenged many preconceptions about ageing; this was seen as an important step forward.

However, there were comments that the vision did not show how *Link-Age* was going to join up with other Central Government initiatives, such as the Single Assessment Process, ODPM's e-government initiative, and the changes in Adult Social Care. *We have sought to tackle these criticisms in the Strategy document, showing how we intend to bring these the various initiatives together.*

Some also felt that *Link-Age* contained good rhetoric, but was not as clear as it should be on how it was going to achieve the aim of improving independence well-being among older people. *In Chapter 3 of the Strategy document, we set out a programme of action for encouraging active ageing, and in Chapter 4 we set out our approach to developing services that promote well-being and independence. In Chapter 5 we ask for views on how we assess and track progress towards the objectives of the Strategy.*

Q2. Are we getting the right balance between promoting well-being and independence, and tackling need when it arises?

77 per cent of those who responded to this question said that we are generally getting the right balance although some were concerned that, in practice, there was a risk of us continuing to focus on crisis intervention rather than supporting well-being. Others expressed concern that adequate funding and resources must be available to support those with high needs and those with lower level needs. *In the Adult Social Care Green Paper, we set out our approach to shifting the focus of delivery to a more proactive, preventative model of care.*

Q3. Do you agree with our proposed early priorities for action?

74 per cent who responded said yes. Where there was concern it was mainly about central government being over-prescriptive and not leaving local authorities the flexibilities they need to deliver their local priorities. *We acknowledge that this is a difficult balance to get right. In Chapter 5 of the Strategy we set out our proposals for how central and local government can work more effectively together, getting this balance right.*

Q4. Do you agree that the steps described in Chapter Two are taking us in the right direction?

77 per cent who responded said that they broadly agreed, but most said that we need to go further. Two notable examples were:

- The Partnership Fund: this was universally welcomed but some argued it's scope should have been broader (going beyond benefit take-up) and that the funding should be on-going, rather than one-off. *There are no plans at present to extend the scope of the Fund as contracts have already been made, nor to extend it as there is no current budget to do so.*
- Joint Teams: they were welcomed but it was felt that the model is not suitable for all local authorities, and there must be enough flexibility to allow for local variations. *We fully accept that there is no one-size-fits-all model for joint teams – for example, some joint teams include the voluntary sector, while others do not. The nature of the joint team is negotiated locally.*

Q5. Do you have views on the aspects of services for older people that it should be a priority to bring together?

There was general agreement that health, housing, social care, financial information (including benefits) and transport were the service areas that should be made the highest priorities. There were issues raised about the quality and quantity of provision in these areas, but also about access to information about what is available. *We accept that there are always issues around resources, although we have been investing record amounts in the*

NHS for example. However, we fully accept the issue raised around access to information and we set out proposals in the Strategy document.

Q6. Do you think that our plans to give partner organisations incentives to join up with others to deliver joined-up services for older people will work?

80 per cent who responded said yes in relation to local authorities although it was generally qualified support. A number of respondents commented that incentives to local authorities were almost exclusively built around Local Public Service Agreements and Comprehensive Performance Assessments. These were useful but were not a complete solution. *Chapter 5 of the Strategy document sets out how we intend to develop and improve the ways in which central and local government work together to deliver positive outcomes for older people, and on how we can older people themselves in the design, delivery and evaluation of services which affect them.*

Views were expressed that there are practically no incentives for the voluntary sector which is a weakness to be addressed; and no provision is made for independent advice. 21 per cent of respondents argued that lack of resources would hinder partnership working. Joining up services may save money long term but had start-up costs associated. *Local authorities are the main providers of funding to the voluntary sector and it is they who need to prioritise local budgets. However, Central Government does need to work effectively with the voluntary sector and we are seeking to do so in efficient ways which don't necessarily imply additional costs.*

Q7. Should we be taking further steps to ensure the involvement of older people in policy design, implementation and evaluation and in wider community issues? If so, what might they be?

100 per cent who responded to the question said yes. Many respondents made the point that involving older people means older people themselves, not just organisations which represent their interests (although such organisations do have a part to play). Care should be taken to involve all aspects of the older community, which is extremely diverse, not a homogenous group with the needs and aspirations. *We agree. Chapter 5 of the Strategy paper sets out the mechanisms currently in place for involving older people and invites stakeholders to share good practice.*

Q8. Do you think that identifying trigger points, when people might find themselves in need of services, is a useful way of developing priorities for next steps?

100 per cent who responded to the question said yes. However, several respondents made the point that needs can arise gradually, so intervention at crisis trigger points is not the whole answer. *We accept this analysis. Whilst our programme for action, set out in the Strategy document, sets out our plans for pro-active action at some key trigger points (such as reaching State pension age, and when a care need arises) we also discuss how we propose to pick up developing needs which are not necessarily triggered by a specific*

event (eg through developing more effective partnerships between the Pension Service and the utility companies).

Q9. Have we identified the right triggers?

100 per cent who responded said yes but some additional ones that were suggested were:

- Becoming a carer
- Falling into debt
- Entering a care home or hospice
- Divorce
- Loss of mobility eg: no longer being able to drive/use public transport.

We accept that these are important triggers and in developing the next phase of Link-Age, we will be looking for ways building partnerships which will enable us to pick up emerging issues such as these.

Q10. What are your views about our suggested priorities for next steps?

Many respondents felt that the priority for *Link-Age* was to build on existing good practice and government initiatives in older people's services such as the Single Assessment Process, e-government and changes to Adult Social Care. *We agree and the Strategy document sets out how we intend to build on these and other central Government initiatives.*

Additional Comments

Many respondents, particularly at the regional events, made comments which went beyond the specific questions posed in the *Link-Age* document. Key comments included:

Information

- There was widespread support for single telephone number in local areas which older people can use to get information about services available to them. *We are encouraging local authorities to consider this in their areas.*
- Widespread plea for better information on reaching pension age – eg a “welcome to the club” type notification. *We intend to develop a pack which will be sent to everyone approaching 65.*

Data sharing

- There was a mixed response about data sharing. People only want to give information once, but some had concerns about information being shared, especially about personal issues like health. The majority were in favour of the Pension Service and Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit staff sharing data, but on strict “need to know” basis. *We are developing plans*

for more data sharing, where appropriate, but are taking these views into account.

Security

- Safety was raised by a lot of people:
 - Need register of reliable trades people - *some local authorities already have a registered tradespeople system. We will be encouraging other local authorities to consider following suit.*
 - More "bobbies on beat" – As we point out in the Strategy, we now have the highest ever number of police officers patrolling our streets. By 2008, there will be 24,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs), a fourfold increase in the number of CSOs to help create dedicated neighbourhood policing teams and providing up to 36 million patrolling hours a year out in communities.

Miscellaneous

- There was a lot of interest in volunteering which people felt should be supported - *March 2005 is "Year of the Volunteer" Older People month and to mark it the Home Office will be establishing a national co-ordinating body to provide a focal point for older volunteering.*
- There was a widespread view that carers need greater support, particularly those trying to combine caring responsibilities with work - *we set out in our proposals on carers in the Strategy document.*
- Whilst many supported the introduction of Pension Credit, others were critical suggesting it represented an extension of means testing – *Pension Credit is an important plank of our policy to tackle pensioner poverty. However, we are looking afresh at what the pension system should look like in the future and have just published the principles under which we will develop future pension policy. This can be accessed via the Pension Service website.*
- A number of respondents were concerned about payment of benefits into bank accounts and pleas were made for the exception service to be easily accessible – *Direct Payment is a modern, secure and efficient way of paying benefits and pensions which gives people more choice about where and when they collect their money. Nine out of ten people are now paid into an account. And more than nine out of ten paid by Direct Payment are happy to receive payments this way. Customers who are not paid into an account will automatically be sent cheques which they can cash at the Post Office.*

