

Developing Effective Services for Older People



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 518 Session 2002-2003: 26 March 2003

Summary & recommendations

- 1 Older people are major users of public services provided by a diverse range of bodies in central Government, local government and the independent sector (**Figure 1 overleaf**). The Government has committed itself to improving provision. This report examines whether, in line with the Government's stated aims, the development of services relevant to older people is joined up, avoids duplication and takes account of older people's characteristics and needs.
- 2 The population of the United Kingdom is becoming older. More than 10.5 million people are currently over state pension age, a number forecast to rise by 2040 to 16 million, or one-quarter of the population. Within this group there are great disparities of health, wealth and activity. On average, older people are more likely than younger people to report lifestyle-limiting illness, to live alone and to rely on public services. Although the current generation of older people is on average the most affluent ever, in 2000-01 welfare benefits are estimated to have made up the entire income of 13 per cent of them.
- 3 Population ageing has significant implications for many public services such as health, transport, housing and care. People over pension age are expected to receive around £63 billion in state pensions and benefits in 2002-03¹. In the most recent year for which data have been separated (1998-99), National Health Service expenditure on people over 65 was £10 billion and local authority care expenditure was £5 billion². Total expenditure on state pensions and benefits, National Health Service care and local authority care is about 8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

We found that the Government has:

- recognised the varied needs of older people in a wide range of initiatives;
- made progress towards better co-ordination, establishing a Cabinet Committee on Older People, appointing a Cabinet Champion for Older People, designating the Department for Work and Pensions to take the lead on older people's issues and establishing The Pensions Service to provide a dedicated benefits service for pensioners;
- successfully used a variety of methods to consult a wide range of older people; and
- made some progress towards including older people in policy-making.

However, there is scope, by adopting our recommendations, for further improvements in co-ordination, consultation and the use of evidence in formulating policy.



1 Department for Work and Pensions Departmental Report - The Government's expenditure plans 2002-03 to 2003-04, Cm 5424.
 2 Department of Health - Departmental Report 2001 Cm 5103.

1 Services used by older people



Key:

Service

Primary contacts

Relevant Departments

Source: National Audit Office analysis

- 4 Many older people find the divisions between service providers, which are not reflected in their own lives, confusing. Often those in most need have to contact the largest number of agencies. In various surveys and consultations³, older people have called for simplification and co-ordination of information and access to public services, as well as sharing information on older people's views and needs better between Government Departments. Integrating provision from the perspective of users is now a major driving force in service delivery, and the measure of success will be customers' perception of whether the Government appears to be more joined up than in the past. The booklet and website *Are you over 50?* (www.over50.gov.uk), prepared by the Department for Work and Pensions, provide the most recent illustration of work to integrate government information.
- 5 The Government has introduced many policy initiatives relevant to older people. It established the Inter-Ministerial Group for Older People in 1998 "to ensure that government strategy and policy affecting older people is effectively co-ordinated, avoids duplication and takes account of the needs of older people". The Better Government for Older People programme was also launched in 1998 "to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views, and encouraging and recognising their contribution". In 1999, Cabinet Office guidance recommended "that all areas of policy are appraised from older people's perspective from the outset and, where necessary, that special measures are built in to address their needs". Many other initiatives concentrate on more specific issues.

Joining up to develop effective services affecting older people

- 6 The Government has taken a more strategic approach to policy-making on issues affecting older people and has used a range of approaches to produce tangible benefits for them. Joining up has involved outside parties, such as experts and older people, as well as many central Government Departments. It has generated new ideas, helped to ensure a client-group focus and brought together diverse parties. It has also helped to co-ordinate activities across government, to establish more coherence, to focus on specific problems and to raise the profile of older people's issues.
- 7 Our examination focussed on five initiatives, each reflecting a different form of joining up:
 - **The Inter-Ministerial Group for Older People**, now replaced by the Cabinet Committee on Older People, is an example of **cross-government co-ordination**. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is the Government Champion for Older People and the Department for Work and Pensions are the designated lead Department for older people. It is responsible for monitoring progress across Government by means of updates from other Departments and for liaising with them regularly on the development and expansion of a strategic approach to older people. A Partnership Group of professionals and national experts in the field of older people, as well as older people from the Older People's Advisory Group (below), informs the work of the Committee.
 - **Better Government for Older People** was a **government wide programme** designed to improve public services for older people and learn lessons for the future by combining action, research and consultation. It stimulated a diverse range of local improvements and innovations and fed into central Government developments. It has continued as an on-going Network, with an associated Older People's Advisory Group.

³ *Attitudes and Aspirations of Older People: A Qualitative Study, Department of Social Security 1999; Building a Better Society for Older People: report on the listening events to the Ministerial Group on Older People, University of Warwick, 2000.*

- **Winning the Generation Game**, a report by the Performance and Innovation Unit, was a **centrally-driven initiative**. It examined the declining economic activity of people aged 50 to 65, successfully taking a view across the whole of Government that would have been difficult for a single Department. A range of experts, including from the voluntary sector, provided input. The Department for Work and Pensions were responsible for reporting to the Prime Minister on progress against recommendations.
 - **The National Service Framework for Older People** is a **client-focused approach** that defines eight areas of standards applicable to health and social care for older people. It demonstrates how the Department of Health raised their effectiveness by recognising the contribution of other organisations and involving them in policy development. Partner organisations include local government, the voluntary sector and older people themselves.
 - **Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing** is a **strategic framework** developed jointly by the Department of Health and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in bilateral co-operation to achieve greater impact through collaboration. Representatives from the voluntary sector contributed to the development of the strategic framework.
- 8 These initiatives have all had major beneficial impacts but there are also important elements of unfinished business. For example:
- The Department for Work and Pensions have been developing an Older People Strategy for the Cabinet Committee on Older People. The Strategy will summarise progress, set out a forward work programme and provide a framework across Government for work relevant to older people.

- The Government published commitments in May 2000 and January 2001 to repeat "Listening to Older People" events and to report progress on matters related to older people. Although there was not necessarily an implication of repeating them annually, it is three years since the listening events were held. Three key reports (*Life begins at 50*, *Building on partnership* and *Winning the Generation Game*) include recommendations on which public reporting might be expected. One report (*The Age Shift*) contains recommendations that cover many Departments and other parties, but for which no organisation has overall monitoring responsibility, in line with policy on the conduct of the Foresight exercise generally. There is a risk that this failure to continue consulting and to report progress could undermine confidence amongst non-governmental parties.
- The National Service Framework for Older People has 29 Milestone Targets, 16 of them due on or before April 2002. The Department of Health intend to report in March 2003 on progress against Milestone Targets. This public reporting will be important in sustaining partners' involvement and commitment.
- The report *Building on partnership*, published in January 2001, included a recommendation for more cross-cutting Public Service Agreement targets affecting older people. Of those targets specifically relevant to older people, the proportion assigned jointly to Departments reduced from just over a third in 2000 to just under a quarter in 2002.



- 9 Some aspects of joined up policy development have been easier than have others. However, Departments can take a number of steps to get past the obstacles. Key elements are:
 - **Strong leadership** is required in joined up initiatives because they tackle complex issues, involve many people and have the potential to cause disillusionment if they do not make progress. High-profile individual leadership, including by Ministers, has been a feature of many initiatives that we examined.
 - Members of staff need **new skills and incentives** for joined up working, although their objectives rarely encourage it and it is not systematically or openly recognised in appraisal. The Cabinet Office reported that, in 2000-01, 56 per cent of the Senior Civil Service had experience outside their own department, against a 2005 target of 75 per cent, but secondments at all levels between Departments are still much less common than those with outside partners, even though they are a valuable means of developing trust and understanding.
 - **Certainty about funding** can help to promote joint working, but some initiatives lacked dedicated funding or experienced difficulties in securing it. Such funding problems have caused service deliverers and third parties to infer negative messages about the importance that Departments attach to initiatives. Members of staff have spent time clarifying funding when they could have been concentrating on service delivery. There have, for example, been particular difficulties in agreeing financial contributions from different Departments to the Better Government for Older People Network and the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing.
 - Mechanisms, such as the designation of older people's champions, need to be in place to **maintain the momentum** of joined up initiatives. The National Service Framework provides for champions in health and social care bodies, but a report in 2002 by Age Concern and the British Geriatrics Society identified confusion about their roles. The Department for Work and Pensions run a network of co-ordinators across Government but have no power to require Departments to co-operate. Such mechanisms can work. In a different context, the Cabinet Office requires every Department, along with other public bodies, to appoint a champion responsible for leading the consumer agenda.

Understanding the needs of older people

- 10 Services developed on a sound understanding of what older people believe, want or need are more likely to deliver intended outcomes effectively. Consultation and research are the main means for understanding these matters and how they might change in the future. The Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health, in particular, have substantial consultation and research programmes on older people's issues. The National Collaboration on Ageing Research aims to raise the profile and relevance of ageing research for which the Research Councils are responsible, including the promotion of multidisciplinary approaches. The Funders' Forum for Research on Ageing and Older People aims to stimulate and facilitate interdisciplinary research and collaborative working. It is chaired by the Department of Health, with representatives from the health departments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the Office of Science and Technology, the Research Councils, the National Collaboration on Ageing Research and the voluntary sector.
- 11 **Consultation** has been at the heart of many of the initiatives for older people we examined. Through a range of innovative consultation methods the Government has achieved much, including better informed policy-making, identifying priorities, placing issues on the agenda, understanding older people's needs better, and sustaining contact with older people.

- 12 Comments from parties consulted by Government show that some aspects of consultation have proved easier to manage than have others. There are some key issues that Departments need to take into account when running consultations. They are:
- The main concern, raised by almost every third party whom we contacted, was lack of **feedback**. Participants want to know what has changed as a result of consultation and why some suggestions have been rejected. They accept that not all their wishes can be met, but dislike the idea that their contributions might have been ignored and their time wasted. Consultation raises expectations that may later be undermined if feedback is inadequate.
 - Consultations need to be **open** enough to enable people to discuss issues that most concern them. They need to be **early** enough to allow people the opportunity to comment before decisions have been made, to have time for considered responses, and to seek the views of any other parties they represent.
 - Active steps are needed to avoid any hint of **tokenism**, for example ensuring that older people are not heavily outnumbered by professionals, that official speakers are able to stay to listen, and that any constraints on consultation are explained.
 - Small outside organisations, in particular, could better **manage the demands** on them if there was greater co-ordination across Government in relation to the timing of consultations and engagements, and the sharing of information when different Departments need to ask the same or similar questions.
 - The Government needs to avoid imposing too great a consultation **burden** on the voluntary sector, and must create mechanisms that respect partners' independence and their right to hold different views.
 - The Government can increase the **effectiveness** of consultation by using existing knowledge, networks and experience in the voluntary sector and elsewhere, by making its own consultations more accessible across different Departments and by maintaining ongoing engagement following consultation.
- 13 The Government has a substantial **research** programme on older people's issues, cutting across many Departments and other public sector bodies. All of the initiatives that we examined incorporated research through mechanisms such as reviewing pre-existing work, commissioning new work and convening meetings of experts. Third parties told us that the application of research had substantially enhanced the quality of the initiatives.
- 14 Some aspects of applying research to older people's issues have been more successful than others, and Departments can take steps to increase their effectiveness. For example:
- There is a need for better **co-ordination** of research requirements and funding agreements, and better dissemination of results, developing the example of the National Collaboration on Ageing Research promoted by the Research Councils.
 - Steps to improve the **communication** of research to policy makers include placing people with research experience in policy teams, designating expert staff to facilitate communication, requiring research projects to bring out policy implications and bringing time scales closer through presenting interim results.
 - There is a **Strategic Futures** Group within the Cabinet Office promoting interest in techniques that aim to prepare policy-makers for a variety of possible future circumstances. Strategic futures work occurs across Government, for example in the report *The Age Shift*, but none of the five main initiatives that we examined referred to it.

Recommendations

15 Our recommendations are:

On joining up to develop effective services affecting older people

- i There is an outstanding need to provide an overall framework for work across Government affecting older people because, despite progress in joining up policy-making, there remains a lack of co-ordination in some areas. This could be addressed by the publication of the planned Older People Strategy. The Department for Work and Pensions should work with the Cabinet Committee on Older People to publish the Strategy as soon as possible (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.16).
- ii The Department for Work and Pensions should work with the Cabinet Committee on Older People to consider how to fulfil the Government's commitments of May 2000 to repeat the "Listening to Older People" programme, taking into account what frequency would be appropriate. The original consultation was generally well received and effective, but raised expectations which risk being undermined if there is insufficient follow up (Case Study A, page 22).
- iii The Department for Work and Pensions should work with the Cabinet Committee on Older People to consider how to fulfil the Government's commitments of January 2001 to report progress on matters related to older people. Whilst a new openness in Government has been welcomed, more attention should be given to reporting publicly. The absence of feedback following consultation can lead to disillusionment amongst the older people and voluntary organisations involved. Public commitments to report progress regularly on *Life begins at 50* and *Building on partnership* need to be met and there is a high level of expectation that there would be a report on progress on *Winning the Generation Game* recommendations (paragraphs 2.16 and 3.12).
- iv The Department of Health should clarify publicly the role of older people's champions in the National Health Service in order to help those so designated to discharge their responsibilities, to provide stronger leadership on older people's issues, and to dispel the confusion identified in research by Age Concern and the British Geriatrics Society (paragraph 2.16).
- v The Cabinet Office should consider the merits of requiring every Department to appoint an older people's champion (along the lines of e-champions or consumer champions) to work with the Department for Work and Pensions in co-ordinating work across Government on older people's issues, in raising issues that require resolution among Departments, and in providing progress reports to the Cabinet Committee on Older People. A possible model is the National Director for Older People's Services at the Department of Health (paragraph 2.16).

- vi In order to aid co-ordination in setting strategic priorities across Government, the Treasury should work with other Departments to identify synergies in future Public Service Agreement targets affecting older people and to assign more of them jointly to relevant Departments where this would help to promote more effective service delivery (paragraph 2.9).
- vii In order to enable staff and organisations responsible for joined up programmes to focus on delivering them, sponsoring Departments should ensure that responsibility for funding issues is clarified from the outset, to avoid the uncertainty that has affected, for example, the Better Government for Older People Network and the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing. Approaches that involve seeking individual contributions from all Departments concerned are time consuming and have not always proved effective (paragraph 2.15).

On understanding the needs of older people

- viii In order to minimise burdens on third parties and to avoid duplication by Departments, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health should develop a joined up approach across Government to consultation on older people's issues. This approach should maximise the use of existing structures, such as older people's advisory groups and voluntary organisations, and deploy internet technology to make results easily available across Government (paragraphs 3.10 and 3.13).
- ix The Cabinet Office should include in their guidance on consultation a stronger emphasis on the importance of providing timely and informative feedback in order to maintain the commitment and interest of third parties with whom Departments consult, and to avoid raising expectations that may later be undermined if feedback is inadequate (paragraph 3.12).
- x In order to maximise value for money and avoid duplication in research on older people's issues, Government Departments and the Research Councils should work together to improve co-ordination of requirements, agreements on funding and dissemination of results. The Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health are well placed, as the main research commissioners, to promote improvement. The approach would also involve the National Collaboration on Ageing Research and might build on the Funders' Forum for Research on Ageing and Older People (paragraphs 3.18 to 3.21).
- xi The Department for Work and Pensions, in their role supporting the Cabinet Committee on Older People as the key cross-Government co-ordination mechanism, may wish to encourage the use of strategic futures work routinely in areas relevant to older people in order to ensure that policy-making takes account of the long term nature of population ageing (paragraphs 3.23 and 3.24).