

The London Assembly Older People's Strategy Review Committee's Response to the Consultation on the Mayor of London's Draft Older People's Strategy.

This report is the London Assembly's response to the consultation draft of the Mayor of London's Older People's Strategy entitled: "*Towards an older people's strategy for London, a draft Mayoral strategy for consultation*", published in November 2005. The draft strategy is intended to provide a basis for the Mayor to influence government and other sectors, to challenge negative perceptions of older people, promote the contribution they make to London, and to ensure they are adequately supported.

At its meeting on 14th December 2005 the Assembly agreed to set up the Older People's Strategy Review Committee to respond to this consultation on behalf of the Assembly. The Older People's Strategy Review Committee is represented by the following Assembly Members: Joanne McCartney (Chair), Geoff Pope (Deputy Chair), Peter Hulme Cross, Elizabeth Howlett and Jenny Jones.

The Committee met on 18th January 2006 with representatives of the GLA, LDA, MPA, LFEPA and London Older People's Strategies Group to examine and discuss the draft strategy. This report summarises Committee Members' views on the consultation, which are submitted on behalf of the London Assembly, following the January meeting and also after consideration of written submissions that were received from a number of organisations.

The Committee's comments are outlined in the bullet points below. General comments on the strategy are given first, followed by comments on various priorities/sections of the strategy.

General comments

- The strategy is set out in thirteen sections each addressing a different strategic theme/priority. Although this thematic layout is helpful, the Committee agreed that the various sections of the strategy should be better integrated throughout the document and linked to each other and to other relevant strategies. For example: health and well-being - the section on transport should also consider older people's access to health services using public transport, and the health section should highlight references to the Mayor's Food Strategy. The section on advice and advocacy should similarly be better integrated with other themes of the strategy, notably the pensions and income section.
- The Committee welcomes the objective of co-ordinating existing and proposed plans to make London a better place for older people. There is a clear need for an action plan to give the details of how the policies and proposals will be implemented and achieved, and the Committee looks forward to receiving this after the Strategy has been further refined. The Committee's specific views on where more detail is needed are outlined in the bullet points below.

Priority 2 Engaging with Older Londoners

This section of the strategy outlines how the Mayor will encourage key service providers across London to engage older people in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services they use.

- In considering this priority, the Committee believes that more clarity is needed about how the Mayor will persuade service providers, including London local authorities, to take account of the views of the London Older People's Assembly. The section should also explain how the GLA will continue to work with local authorities on strategic issues for older people in order to share good practice and experiences.

Priority 3 Age Equality – Leading by Example

This section outlines how the GLA will promote equality for older people through its own policies and practices.

- Committee Members consider that more detail is needed in the final strategy about the actual policies and practices that will be used to promote age equality and monitor the employment of older people at the GLA, and its functional bodies. The Committee understands that the new GLA Age Equality Scheme should be published in March 2006. Firm proposals to promote age equality across the GLA family should be put in place as soon as possible and to be regularly monitored.

Priority 4 Pensions and Income

Details of this priority explains the Mayor's commitment to reduce pensioner poverty in London, including the Mayor's view that there should be a more generous and comprehensive state pension system that is based on earnings as well as contributions.

- The draft strategy lacks important information about how the Mayor will make the case for a pensions system based on earnings as well as contributions and what other actions would be pursued should lobbying of Government be unsuccessful.
- There should be clear references in this section to the Mayor's relevant lobbying on Council Tax – i.e. the Mayor's view that tax levels should be based on people's ability to pay rather than on property values, which would benefit a large number of London's older residents. Consideration should also be given in the strategy to the GLA precept that disproportionately affects those on fixed incomes including a significant percentage of older people.
- The high cost of living in London led to the Mayor lobbying for a fair wage for Londoners. Therefore, consideration should also be given in this strategy to lobbying for a pension system that includes an additional "London weighting" element.

Priority 5 Access to Employment

This section outlines how the Mayor and the LDA will seek to tackle the barriers to employment for older people. The proposals include the LDA using its influence on employers to promote the employment of older people, and gathering baseline evidence

on older people's participation and barriers to this participation in order to structure its work programme.

- The LDA should be working to promote the employment of older Londoners with skills still in demand from London's economy. Examples such as encouraging skilled trades people such as plumbers and electricians to work on Olympic and other major construction projects could be included in this part of the draft Strategy.
- Clarification is also needed as to how the LDA will use information about older people's participation in the labour market, and barriers to participation in the market, to focus its work programme (proposal 5.4). This is an area that should be dealt with in more detail in the subsequent strategy's action plan.

Priority 7 Health and Social Care Services

These proposals outline how the Mayor will use his powers and work with partners to secure improvements in the quality and availability of social care and health services for older Londoners. Included within this section is a proposal to join with the ALG and other partners to work with the private/ independent sector to promote fair wages for care staff and high quality services.

- More information is needed about how the Mayor will work with partners to influence private/independent sector care providers to pay fair wages and ensure good quality care service provision, and what incentive there is for these employers to pay higher wages.
- Access to health services for older people is of vital importance. Therefore, there need to be links made between this section and the transport section in terms of ensuring bus, tube, train and door-to-door services are planned in a way that makes it easy for older people to access health services.

Priority 8 Housing and Homelessness

This section outlines how the Mayor's strategic policies for London will fully incorporate the needs of older Londoners. It includes initiatives such as increasing the take up of the Houseproud Equity Release Scheme which helps homeowners to release some of the equity in their homes.

- More details about how the Houseproud Equity Release Scheme works are needed before the Assembly's support is given to developing the scheme further. The Assembly has seen plenty of evidence that advises people to the contrary when considering releasing equity from their property. Further details are needed which explains how the scheme works in practice, how popular it is among older people, and how its success is being assessed.
- It has been suggested, by some, that there would be benefits in the Mayor taking control of the Supporting People Strategy for London which is currently overseen by the ALG, especially if the Mayor is granted new strategic powers in terms of social housing. Should the Mayor make a proposal to take responsibility for the Supporting People Strategy, the Committee would like to see details of how this proposal would be taken forward and how it will add value.

Priority 10 Culture

These proposals outline the Mayor's plans to ensure older Londoners can participate in and benefit from the capital's cultural and leisure activities and facilities, including volunteering opportunities, the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and cultural festivals.

- The Committee heard from older people's representatives who feel that the culture section covers too narrow a definition of cultural activities, which do not reflect the diversity of culture in London. The Assembly would hope that this section could be widened, after further consultation with relevant organisations, to reflect the reality of older people's participation and experiences in the cultural life of London.
- The strategy needs to recognise that older people want to take part in cultural activities as participants, as well as members of the audience.

Priority 11 Transport

This section outlines measures to improve the accessibility and safety of London's public transport for older people. It includes information about the two main door-to-door transport services – Dial-a-Ride and the Taxicard service which enable people who cannot use other forms of public transport to get around.

- The Assembly believes that the strategy should include commitments for improving door-to-door travel, based on recommendations from the recent review of these services (which was due to report at the end of 2005). The strategy should also clarify how these services will be assessed in the future, how service users' views will feed into this process and how the Mayor can influence changes to the service made by the providers.
- This section should emphasise the need for better provision of public toilets at or near tube, train and bus stations across London. It should include a commitment from Transport for London that it will work to increase the number of public toilets at or near stations by reopening closed facilities or providing new facilities, working with local partners where necessary.
- Transport service planning should take older people's needs into account – such as the fact that many depend on public transport to get to, from and between hospitals, health centres and other local leisure and shopping facilities. This issue should therefore be covered in the strategy.

Priority 12 Crime and Personal Safety

This is an important part of the Strategy that outlines plans to improve older people's safety and reduce their fear of crime. Proposed initiatives include specific monitoring of older people's experiences and perceptions of crime, ensuring issues for older women (in particular) are considered in reviewing the Mayor's domestic violence strategy, and elder abuse.

- The strategy should detail when and how the GLA will monitor older people's perceptions and experiences of crime and disorder.
- The section on domestic violence should refer to older men being potential victims of this type of crime as well as older women.

Priority 13 Environment

This section outlines how the Mayor will ensure that specific needs of older people are addressed in the delivery of all his environmental strategies. This includes work with boroughs and waste authorities to ensure recycling services meet older people's needs

- The Assembly believes that this subsection on recycling should be more explicit about what the specific needs of older people are in relation to the environment and how the GLA will identify and share best practice across London in ensuring recycling services meet these needs.