Tackling the Challenges of Ageing –
Fuel Poverty and Services for Older People
Discussion Summary

What are the distinctive challenges facing older people in rural areas?

➢ Access to services, access to social opportunities and barriers of cost, availability and transport. These issues are greater in rural than urban areas.
➢ The importance of community transport amid contraction and removal of subsidised services, including reduced eligibility for patient transport, dial a ride – there's more pressure on community transport providers.
➢ Rural areas are ageing at a higher rate than urban areas.
➢ An over dependence on a small number of volunteers to help deliver services in rural areas.
➢ We now have a reduced model of service delivery in rural areas (e.g. closure of libraries, cottage hospitals).
➢ The impact of these challenges, particularly around social isolation and lack of providers (particularly for personal budgets, carers), can lead older people to lose their independence.
➢ Agencies are working smarter together to help people stay in their own homes for longer.
➢ There are many successful initiatives, including Village Agents and befriending schemes.
➢ The variability of need and the hidden nature of some of it (e.g. hard to reach older people).
➢ Mechanisms for empowering people are out of kilter with the provision that is available.
➢ Digital inclusion and information/forms being put online. Tele-care and tele-health. Rural broadband investment. Helping older people to use Skype via libraries.
➢ Driverless vehicles for people in rural areas.
➢ = How do we manage the challenges around an ageing society?

How will increases to wages and reductions in adult care budgets manifest in rural areas?

➢ Social care has been a low wage economy and this may drive up the value of the sector. This challenges the existing distributed model of care but better wages makes it a more viable sector for some people.
➢ Increase in self-employed care assistants.
➢ Relative affluence of older people in some rural areas, more so than those in employment, and they can self-finance their care and are willing to pay for a higher quality service.
➢ More professionalised care model.
➢ How do you find the finance and resource for care that needs to be provided by the state?
➢ Domiciliary care is become less affordable and less available in rural areas leading to dependency on friends and family and moving into residential care sooner.
➢ The integration of health and care and the need for third sector providers to come together.
➢ Some people are prepared to pay more to retain services.
➢ Improving the quality of care for people in their local community and demonstrating the money saved through reduced hospital admissions and not needing residential care.
➢ The health and care systems are complex and there is no one body overseeing it.
➢ The role of Health and Wellbeing Boards - oversight available through the development of their Strategies?
➢ Lack of affordable housing for carers in rural areas.
➢ Extra care savings up to £9,000 per person - how to bring forward the housing and then recruit staff to work there.

In what ways might we view older people as a resource rather than a challenge?

➢ Health and Care as a priority for some Local Enterprise Partnerships.
➢ At what age do you become an 'older person' – there are different degrees of ageing (e.g. differences between 60 years, 70 years, 80 years etc. and the different processes people go through). We need to recognise older people are not a homogeneous group.
➢ Recently retiring as being community volunteers.
➢ Winter fuel allowance to recognise the need requirement (it is needed by some older people but not others) - how can we extend their ability to help other people in their community? How can we help older people living with life limiting conditions? Better promotion of 'what's in it for me as a volunteer?' Carer and recipient both benefit from volunteering.
➢ Oral history and education across the generations help build community spirit.
➢ How can we encourage older people who are not volunteering to become a volunteer? Could be linked to supporting them when they retire. Some people are under-occupied and need to be able to access volunteering opportunities.
➢ Sandwich generation (people working longer to support their children to build a life).
➢ Increasing expectation on volunteers as an unpaid workforce as services are reduced. Ensuring we are not asking volunteers to do things they are not able to do, this will lead people to stop volunteering.

Points raised during the morning session:
➢ Downsizing and the stock of rural housing - park homes, equity release for home energy improvements.
➢ Smaller number of houses built since 1991, before energy efficiency / building regulations came into effect.
➢ Older people moving into urban areas.
➢ One-third of older people would downsize if there was reasonable choice.
➢ District Councils need to plan housing for an ageing population.
➢ National Planning context doesn't always define rural places as being sustainable communities.
➢ Settlements with populations under 3,000 are deemed not sustainable unless by exception. Rural areas aggregate their functionality (i.e., one village has the school, a neighbouring settlement the shop/post office etc. = cluster of settlements which provide services) yet this is missed in planning settlement hierarchies.
➢ National policy and local communities resistant to change - this is becoming an acute challenge.
➢ NIMBYism around rural affordable housing in some communities.
➢ Neighbourhood Plans with housing components.
➢ House of Lords report 'ready for ageing? - Demonstrated central government was not ready. Pressure needs to continue via Age UK and RSN.
➢ Age UK has recruited 55 MPs in the House of Commons as 'age champions'.
➢ Send these issues and research to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services.
➢ Developers are less interested in building affordable homes but detached family homes in a beautiful setting. Local people want appropriate development for young people and older people. Yet it's open season for developers in rural areas because of localism and lack of 5-year land supply.
➢ Commission for Rural Communities economic well-being case study on Caradon Benefits take-up campaign. This highlighted the scale of unclaimed benefits among older people. With small focused support there can be big returns to local economies because older people tend to spend their money locally.
➢ Age UK benefit entitlement sessions - to find out if they are entitled to benefits and collect them. £5 billion of means tested benefits goes unclaimed every year.
➢ Intergenerational tension between young people (trying to get on the housing and job ladders) versus older people (trying to access more money).
➢ Older people could give attendance allowance to younger people?
➢ How can we get more young people to vote and get involved in decision and policy making?

Points raised during the afternoon session:
➢ How can we prepare for ageing?
➢ Evidence based policy making – but different interpretations, metrics and targets, and how can we tell if interventions to support older people are being targeted in rural areas?
➢ We need to demonstrate the value and cost effectiveness of interventions so as well as being 'nice to have' they benefits to individuals and the outcomes can be quantified.

- Are we listening to older people?
- Successful initiatives include: Tillington Local Care (TLC), luncheon clubs that are open to all ages, Shropshire Care Coordinators, social prescribing in the Cotswolds and bulk oil buying groups (e.g. Malvern Hills bulk LPG buying group).
- GP surgeries in rural areas need a wider remit and to know what support is available locally for older patients.
- Lots of rural homes rely upon more than one heat source (this can be due to choice, preference and lifestyle).
- Low income-high cost indicator to measure the depth of fuel poverty.
- No accurate up-to-date data on fuel poverty and rural off-gas.
- Stigma around fuel poverty.
- Dispersed and hidden nature of fuel poverty – it does not follow social deprivation or aesthetics.
- In private rented accommodation older people are worried if the energy efficiency of the property is improved their rent will increase.
- Can the winter fuel allowance be paid to customers in summer so those off-grid can fill their tanks when prices are cheaper?
- There are distribution issues for energy providers in rural areas – how to bring more customers in to make provision viable.
- Lack of rural thinking around ageing by policy and decision makers – ageing is fragmented across different central government departments and within local authorities.
- The importance of data collection from the outset so you can illustrate the cost savings as a result of early intervention.
- The role of social enterprises and creation of village companies to address some of the challenges and issues discussed.

Further information
- House of Lords 'ready for ageing?' report: http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/public-services-committee/report-ready-for-ageing/
- Village Agents: https://www.villageagents.org.uk/
- Tillington Local Care (TLC): http://www.tillington.net/TLC.html
- Government's current fuel poverty strategy: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cutting-the-cost-of-keeping-warm