



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Finance Committee](#)

FIN(4)-WG15-07

[Inquiry into Welsh Government Draft](#)

[Budget Proposals 2014-2015](#)

Evidence from the Older People's Commissioner for
Wales

Evidence to inform scrutiny of the Welsh Government's 2014-15 draft budget proposals

Consultation Response by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales

September 2013

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About the Commissioner

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf. She works to ensure that those who are vulnerable and at risk are kept safe and ensures that all older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services they need. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them and their voices are at the heart of all that she does. The Commissioner works to make Wales a good place to grow older - not just for some but for everyone.

The Older People's Commissioner:

- Promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales.
- Challenges discrimination against older people in Wales.
- Encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales.
- Reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales

Re: Call for Written evidence to inform scrutiny of the Welsh Government's 2014-15 draft budget proposals

As Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to inform the scrutiny process of Welsh Government's 2014-15 draft budget proposals.

I understand that not all changes to services are a consequence of budgetary constraints; often change arises to improve accessibility by making services available through different means. Change is also sometimes necessary to maintain safe services through provision by those who have the right skills, equipment and experience. However people will sometimes perceive that saving money is the only driver for change. It is so important therefore that Welsh Government engages effectively with people to explain the drivers behind their proposals.

In 2012-13 I signalled very clearly to those that run public services in Wales, including Welsh Government that I would be looking for assurances that older people in Wales would not suffer disproportionately as a consequence of any changes to services which resulted from managing budgetary pressures at both a national and local level. The evidence I was looking for included:

- Active engagement with older people in the development of service proposals in advance and throughout formal consultation processes.
- Information in accessible formats and, where needed access to independent advocacy services to explain and advise on the impact of any proposed changes to services.
- Robust assessment of the impact on older people of any proposed changes to services as required by public bodies under the Equality Act 2010.

At the same time I made available to public bodies guidance on how they might approach assessing the impact of changes to services on older people.

I am also offering awareness training sessions to public bodies to help them better understand their responsibilities under the Equality Act with regards to age, and to shine a light on the impact of change from an older person's perspective.

Disproportionate impact' is not just a question of counting pound for pound where budgets are protected or not. For example, the closure of day centres is an issue older people feel very strongly about. For many, the time they spend in their day centre is the only thing which keeps them socially included, active and healthy – things many of us take for granted. Without it, there is no doubt many more older people would find themselves in residential care.

Similarly with Community Transport schemes facing an uncertain future, some older people, particularly in rural areas, may find they simply cannot access services where they live.

I recognise that local authorities are in an unenviable position when making a decision to withdraw funding for such facilities. However the impact on those individuals, and the loss of that lifeline, cannot be considered 'proportionate'.

Welsh Government's assessment of the impact of its budget

I have looked at the Welsh Government's own impact assessment of its 2013-14 budget proposals and I acknowledge the journey that the Minister refers to and welcome her commitment to strengthen its approach. I would therefore highlight the following points to be addressed when looking forward to the potential impact of the 2014-15 budgets:

- I have spoken before about the cumulative impact felt by older people as a result of changes across Welsh Government portfolios e.g. housing, transport, health and social care. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to the overall impact on older people as the Welsh Government's assessment is not structured in a way that makes it easy to identify specific conclusions or recommendations against protected characteristics such as age. This would be something I would like to see happen in future years.
- There is limited evidence to indicate how Welsh Government has engaged with and consulted with older people in arriving at its budget proposals. It would be beneficial to other public bodies in Wales to learn what worked well for Welsh Government in how it engaged with older people and how they may be planning to improve their approach in future years.

- In addition to this last point, I have not seen evidence as to how the views provided by older people – their voices - have been taken into account and reflected in the Welsh Government budget. I would be particularly interested to see the evidence of changes or amendments that have been made as a result of feedback provided by older people.
- I would like to see more evidence of the impact the Welsh Government budget is having on charities and third sector providers. These organisations are trusted by older people and provide enormous support to older people, often in their own homes or in a local community setting. Their services are often aimed at preventing admission to hospital, minimising isolation and loneliness, and helping older people who may find themselves in vulnerable situations.

Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending

I can provide the Committee with many examples of good practice that I have seen for myself which are aimed at minimising dependence on public services through early intervention. In my view they shared the following qualities:

- Listened to the voice of older people – delivering what older people want not just what the system thinks they need.
- Strong joint leadership across organisational boundaries with a shared and clear view on outcomes.
- Shared resources.
- Shared attitude to risk and opportunity across professional and organisational boundaries.
- Learnt from the user experience.

The pace of change is still too slow and whilst in some places you can find innovative, excellent services, we are still failing to get the basics right for ALL older people.

My role as Commissioner

In April 2013, I published my Framework for Action which sets out my priorities for the next four years. Older people are very clear that they want to have a strong voice and meaningful control over their lives, particularly in how they are supported and cared for. The extent, to which they do will have a direct impact on their quality of life and, in many cases, both increases the impact of services and reduces the cost of those services to the public purse.

I have structured my priorities in a way that sets the context as to why this is important to older people, given examples of the change I expect to see, evidence I will be looking for and the part that I will play over the next four years.

My five priority areas are:

1. Embedding the wellbeing of older people at the heart of public services.
2. Driving up the quality of – and availability and access to – health and social care.
3. Protecting and improving community services, facilities and infrastructure.
4. Standing up for older people who are at risk of harm and ensuring that they are safeguarded and protected.
5. Tackling prejudice, inequality and discrimination.

Public services within Wales, including Welsh Government must not only be focused on financial balance, efficiency and process measures, but also on the impact that services have on the overall quality of life that older people lead. We must focus more on how they ensure older people feel safe, listened to and respected, can do the things that matter to them, can get the help they need to stay safe and independent and that the places and communities in which they live support the lives they want to lead.

To achieve this, public services will need to improve significantly the extent to which they work together and listen to older people. This includes involving older people in the design, development and delivery of services and ensuring that care and support to individuals is tailored to their specific needs and wishes.

Older people's voices will, and must be, the ultimate test of how effective Welsh Government and all our public services are and whether the change they want and need to see is taking place.

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