Key issues for Older People

Briefing

Introduction

Box 1. Profile of Older People in Islington

- It is estimated that there are around 17,600 people over the age of 65 living in Islington. This is 9% of the population.

- There are more women than men in the over 65 group - aged 65 there are around 5 women for every 4 men; aged 80 there are around 3 women for every 2 men.

- Most older people live independently (86%) without social services support.

- It is estimated that there are 4,900 people over the age of 80 living in Islington this population of older people is expected to grow over the next few years.

- 16% of older people are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

- A typical older person in Islington will have lived through 18 general elections and seen at least 11 different administrations in Islington.

1. This paper provides an overview of the key fairness and equality issues for older people in Islington, which for the purposes of this paper refers to people aged over 65. Together with other sources of evidence, the paper is intended to assist the Islington Fairness Commission in its deliberations and inquiry into how disadvantage and inequality for older people can be reduced.

2. The paper identifies two main ways in which to approach fairness and equality for older people:

   i. There are some needs and experiences unique to older residents which will not apply to residents in the borough more generally. These include, for example,
tendencies towards certain age related illnesses. From this perspective the hallmark for fairness is the extent to which older people are enabled to live fulfilling lives and play an active role within the community, irrespective of age specific considerations.

ii. There are also certain characteristics of older people themselves, which will directly link to their outcomes. For example, childhood deprivation, lifestyle choices, (such as smoking, diet and exercise) levels of education and poverty over a lifetime correlate directly to deprivation and ill health in old age. Other factors linked to things such as ethnicity and gender can also create specific barriers for older people to meet their needs and enjoy positive experiences in old age. From this perspective the hallmark of fairness is the extent to which all older people are able to live fulfilling lives and play an active role within the community, irrespective of their particular circumstances.

3. Of course, the two approaches to fairness are not mutually exclusive and in the real world many older people face multiple barriers to fairness and equality at the same time. More importantly, the causes and effects of fairness and inequality are intertwined and reinforce each other. For example, the feeling of loneliness and isolation experienced by many older people can be exacerbated where an older person does not speak English as a first language; and a person who does not speak English as a first language may encounter difficulties in finding out about services available to help them; which in turn intensifies the experience of loneliness and isolation.

4. The rest of this paper provides a of the picture of some of the key issues for older people in Islington and sets out how service providers and others are seeking to tackle fairness and equality for these residents. The paper also includes some key questions for the Commission to consider in shaping possible solutions and further analysis.

**Key Issues for Older People in Islington**

5. Help the Aged Islington have identified some of the key concerns for older people as: engagement and empowerment when dealing with statutory authorities; financial worries; housing problems; health concerns; crime; isolation and lack of social contact. These concerns are identified in the data from the London Poverty Profile and the emerging experiences from the Islington charity Help on Your Doorstep who have been working with local residents to help identify support that might be required, as well as signposting residents to sources of support and available services. Some of the key issues are examined and summarised below.

**Engagement and Empowerment in dealing with Statutory Authorities**

6. Local authorities have a statutory duty under Section 21 of the National Assistance Act to provide services to adults who are deemed to be in need of care and attention and this includes older and/or disabled adults. In terms of fairness and equality this means:

i. Ensuring that there are services in place to address the specific needs and experiences of older people, so that they are not disadvantaged simply by reason
of their age. For example, the council has a duty to provide services to older people who are not able to live independently. Statutory authorities also need to ensure that their core mainstream services are available to older residents in the same way they are for other residents. An example of this could be the tailoring of certain leisure services that allow older people to participate in the life of the borough, or ensuring that older people can use crossings.

ii. Services for older people also need to be designed so that they take account of the particular needs of old people who may have particular barriers to accessing a service whether these occur as a consequence of age related characteristics (for example age related health complaints) or the characteristics of specific older people, such as their ability to speak English.

7. In terms of services provided specifically to older people, the bulk of the social services budget is spent on nursing or residential care. The vast majority of older people live in their own homes without support from social services and a key challenge is to help people to sustain their independence. Traditionally this kind of support comes through accessing day centres, receiving home care support and meals on wheels (currently used by 245 residents) or accessing lunch clubs. Recognising this independence the ‘Choice and Control’ programme provides service users and carers with a lot more choice about their support and provides them with control over how their allocation of funding is spent to help them remain healthy and active. In future, services may need to refocus to ensure that older people (including a population of “older old” people) have the information and support they need to exercise their choices effectively.

8. Ensuring that services are well designed is key to ensuring that old people are not disadvantaged simply by reason of their age, or the particular circumstances of the older person. One of the advocates for older black and ethnic minority (BME) people articulated the circumstances of many older people in his evidence to a focus group led by Help the Aged Islington:

“[W]e have Seniors who cannot hear, I call them on the phone but they cannot hear me, sometimes they cannot see, sometimes they have problems to go where they need … and we have seniors who cannot read, they cannot use a computer, they cannot use a library, now we have seniors who can do all these things but they have some ill health circumstances they cannot get out. These are issues that we need to design around to cater for them”

9. In addition to the ongoing programme of consultations on specific services, the council and its partners have set up a variety of forums to engage with older people and to ensure that services are being designed to be more responsive to older peoples needs. Older people (groups and individuals) are involved/ represented in a wide range of forums and boards including, the mobility forum (transport); LINk (scrutiny of health services); social services forum; Choice and Control Programme Board; Older Persons taskforce (residents, service users, council officers and members); and the Citizens’ Panel to name but a few.
Poverty

10. Poverty is endemic for a number of Islington older people. Examining the prevalence of pension credit in the Borough is illuminating as it is a means tested guaranteed credit for people over 60 below a minimum income level and therefore a good way of assessing the extent of poverty for older people. 42% of over 60s in Islington around 9,700 Islington residents receive pension credit. By comparison only a quarter of all London over 60s are in receipt of the benefit and just over a fifth of the over 60s nationally. As with other age groups in the borough the income of old people is not spread evenly across Islington. Within the borough the highest proportion of people in receipt of pension credit are in Finsbury Park and Tollington wards. Finsbury Park had the 21st highest proportion of people on pension credit nationally. And Tollington ranked 65th out of over 10,000 wards in Great Britain. Holloway ranked 102nd (in the top 1% nationally). The lowest proportion in Islington were in Clerkenwell, Highbury East and St Mary’s.

Figure 1: Pension Credit recipients as proportion of all over 60s by ward

11. The impact of poverty can be pernicious and affect the way that people lead their lives in ways that might not be obvious to others in the borough. The Invisible Islington report published by Cripplegate places a spotlight to the effects of poverty and gives voice to some older peoples concerns. One older person cited in the report said:

“I’ve known the pub for years and the Guv, now, there is nothing like him in the world. He caters to his customers. On a regular basis at 10 o’clock he puts out a great big platter of sandwiches so no-one goes home hungry. It is very difficult to live on the money I get so you’ve really got to look at your pennies, so all the little extras like the pub all help because it papers over the cracks”

12. While poverty is a key issue for many older people it is clear that many do not take full advantage of their entitlement to benefits even though small amounts of additional money can make a significant impact to overall income and quality of life. Research from Help the Aged Islington cites a number of barriers for older people missing out including
the complexity of the process to access benefit, older peoples low expectations of the statutory sector based on previous negative experiences and a lack of information or support to negotiate the different services available.

13. The problems of claiming entitlements are compounded for many BME older people. In a recent survey by Age Concern Islington, 42% of White British people encountered no problems when claiming benefits compared to only 11% of BME groups; and 50% of White British people said they had not experienced any problems with their benefits once they had started, compared to 25% of people from BME groups. There are lots of reasons why BME people may face additional barriers to claiming money they are entitled to including language barriers and negative perceptions of welfare itself and service providers.

14. Islington’s Benefits Team, a partnership between the Department of Work and Pensions, the council and Age Concern Islington, is specifically set up to support older people access all benefits they are entitled to. A report by Age Concern ‘I never beg me bread yet’ aimed to help the benefits team ensure they as a team, are easily accessible to all older people in the borough, including the ‘hard to reach’ who do not normally engage. Whilst the team’s presence addresses some barriers there are accessibility issues relating to both processes; procedures; buildings and communication routes.

Housing

15. 21% of older people live in owner-occupied accommodation with no mortgage. However, home ownership isn’t a measure for wealth in old age and there are different issues that arise for many older people including affordability of care; fuel poverty; and costs of maintaining the property. Islington is a pilot site for an equity release scheme developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with the private sector that recognises some older people are asset rich but income poor so could release small amounts of equity to improve their wellbeing.

16. Housing needs are closely linked to an individual’s ability to remain living independently. National research shows that while some older people need to move, a significant number are unlikely to, because of a lack of information about housing options and because there is no one to help them with processes of finding and moving into a new home. Islington’s Housing department has developed a Housing Options toolkit to assist both staff and older people to consider their options. Through the Supporting People programme the council funds over 700 units of sheltered housing for older people plus extra care that helps frail older people stay living in the community.

17. It is estimated that 53% of single pensioners in the borough live in fuel poverty, i.e. they spend more than 10% of their income on heating their homes. A number of other programmes are also in place which, predominantly benefit older people in fuel poverty such as the standard Insulation, the Council Housing Energy Efficiency Programme and Energy Doctor in the Home for instance.

18. Older men in Islington have the lowest life expectancy in London (75 years) whilst women have the fourth lowest life expectancy in London (81 years). Overall life expectancy is increasing in Islington however the gap between Islington and other authorities is widening as life expectancy elsewhere is increasing at a faster rate.
19. There are a number of health issues prevalent in old age, which are directly linked to life expectancy and quality of life. For example:

i. Dementia usually occurs in people who are 65 or older and the older you get the more likely you are to develop it. Alongside the mainstream health services to tackle dementia and its affects, the council has also recently launched a dementia café that provides a place where people with dementia and their carers can meet others.

ii. Older people are also particularly vulnerable to winter conditions. In Islington the winter death rate amongst over 75s is 23% greater than in the summer, and this age group is also 18% more likely to have an emergency hospital admission in winter. The forthcoming Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy aims to prevent these by bringing together a wide range of partners from the council, NHS Islington and the voluntary sector to create a unified referral system applied systematically to all vulnerable older people.

20. On the whole the health service is well geared up to address the needs of older people as a group however some specific characteristics of the Islington population of older people may require more tailored support. For example, often linked to feelings of loneliness and isolation, the rate of depression in older residents stands at around 18% with women more likely than men to have depression. The highest prevalence is among Greek, Cypriot and Turkish born older people who were 1.5 times more likely to report depression than UK born peers.

21. One approach that has been taken to tackle this issue is to develop the Mental Wellbeing Champions Project to address the stigma and discrimination of mental health and especially with older people to help address issues such as isolation and loneliness. The project aims to train staff working across the council to identify early signs of anxiety or depression.

22. The Islington Health Inequality Strategy identifies that deprivation and poverty have a direct correlation with unhealthy lifestyle behaviours and stands out as the main risk factor for early death and poor health in Islington. This is typically manifested through smoking, poor diet, low levels of physical activity, poor mental health and alcohol and substance misuse. Islington Council and the NHS Islington have developed a number of support services to help older people manage their health conditions including a stroke club run by Manor Gardens.

Isolation and Loneliness

23. Social isolation and loneliness tend to increase as people age and as family and friendship networks become smaller. Social contacts also usually decrease after retirement and may continue to decline with the deaths of family members and friends as well as changes in residence following widowhood, mobility difficulties and ill health. It is estimated that quarter of a million people in London over the age of 65 do not see a friend, neighbour or family member at least once a week and 150,000 have no contact with friends, family or neighbours at least once a week. Living alone is also a high risk factor for dying during cold periods or heat waves and in developing mental health and other health problems.
24. In Islington, a lack of affordable housing, especially in the south of the borough, is the direct consequence of many older people living without friends or family near by. There are some programs aimed at support for older people, for example the Finsbury & Clerkenwell Volunteers program helps isolated older people in south Islington with befriending visits, lunch clubs, telephone counselling, assisted shopping and assistance with practical tasks. There are also factors in loneliness and depression that are less well understood. For example, the Revealing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Trans Islington report implies that there is a sharp drop in the numbers of LGBT with a partner after the age of 65 and other research implies that they are 4.5 times as likely to have no children to call on in time of need in comparison to straight older people. There is no accurate data on the numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender older people in Islington, however we do know that Islington has the third largest LGBT community in London.

25. The council is currently retendering its volunteering and befriending services, working with current providers in the voluntary sector, to improve the range of services available as well as increasing coverage across the whole borough. This looks at best practice elsewhere to support older people to become more active within their communities in order to reduce social isolation.

26. Older people can also experience age related disabilities. These are not included in this brief as the Islington Fairness Commission will consider separate evidence on disability on future occasions.

Safety

27. Older people feel less safe in their communities after dark in Islington with responses to the Place Survey 2009 suggesting that 38% of older residents feel safe compared to 48% of the general population. The experience of crime and the fear of becoming a victim of crime can act as a barrier to the maintenance of a 'normal' daily life for many older people. As a result, older people may be less likely to leave their homes after dark. This has an impact on both older people feeling a part of their community and also further perpetuates feelings of isolation and loneliness. The council has taken steps to address issues of perception through a variety of projects ranging from increasing the visibility of Police Community Support Officers and improving street lighting on estates to encouraging younger people to volunteer during the school holidays at older person’s day centres.

28. There has also been a lot of work undertaken by the MAGPI (Multi-Agency Geographical Panels in Islington) teams to consult with older people and ensure greater representation at Safer Neighbourhood Panels. Specific projects have been established between young people and older people on estates to ensure all residents are able to voice their concerns and suggestions in creating a better local environment. The council run “linkline” service provides community alarm services to over 1000 people many of whom are elderly. These help people feel safer in their homes and less at risk from harm.
### Box 2. Approaches to tackling loneliness in other London Boroughs

- Westminster Council is developing ‘Get Together’ in partnership with the social enterprise Participle to address the severe issues of social isolation and loneliness amongst older people, by matching older people to develop friendships and support based on common interests.

- Southwark Circle was co-designed by Participle in partnership with older people and their families and the service employs local people called ‘Neighbourhood Helpers’. Along with harnessing the skills, resources and knowledge of older people to help other older people (e.g. DIY; teaching basic IT skills, gardening), the service also helps to reduce loneliness by developing social networks and helping other older people to find new directions in life.

- Opening Doors is a partnership project across 5 inner London authorities including Islington providing support and social activities for older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gender (LGBT) support that they might need.

- Community Service Volunteers (CSV) has established a ‘Retired and Senior Volunteering Programme’ (RSVP) to share the skills, knowledge and life experience of people over 50 with their local community. ‘Grand-mentors’ is a programme within RSVP and builds on inter-generational work in schools.

29. The following questions may help the Commission in its deliberations about how inquiry into how to drive out disadvantage and inequality for older people in Islington and help them to shape possible solutions and further analysis:

- The causes and effects of disadvantage and inequality for old people are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Do the commissioners have views on the most effective interventions to tackle these issues? Can the commissioners suggest solutions which would drive down inequality from more than one perspective?

- How can all older people live fulfilling lives and play an active role in the community irrespective of age or the specific characteristics of and individual older person’s needs? What can statutory sector groups to access hard to reach groups and how can they use data better to ensure that services are well targeted and well matched to the needs of all older people.

- Sources used to compile this brief suggest that isolation and loneliness are key areas that would benefit from a fairness lens. Bringing different communities in the borough together was also a strong theme coming through in public evidence to the Commission. Some examples of work in other London boroughs is summarised in the table above. What solutions can the Commission identify to tackle the isolation and loneliness experienced by many older people?