Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Senedd Finance Committee:

Call for information on the Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2023-24

November 2022

Introduction

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales (OPCW) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senedd Finance Committee's call for information on the Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2023-24.

The Commissioner would like to see the following areas taken into account when making decisions about the Welsh Government budget for 2023-24.

Continuing investment in health and social care

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic back in 2020, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales has been talking and listening to older people, carers, community organisations, volunteers, and many more about the impact of the pandemic on their lives, their health and wellbeing and their access to and experience of health and social care. Older people and their families have told the Commissioner about the impact of having their treatment and care paused because of the pandemic, and about avoiding accessing services.

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Although treatment and support are no longer on pause due to Covid-19, there remains a considerable backlog of demand. It is also likely that older people whose physical and mental health have been impacted by the pandemic have not yet all come forward for health or social care. At the same time, NHS waiting lists in Wales have reached record levels.[1] The effect on older people as vital services are delayed or unavailable is dramatic.

When services were paused during the pandemic, a disabled older person unable to access physiotherapy told the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Team about "closures of the facilities that … enabled myself and many other disabled people [to be] independent [we] became immobilised physically as well as our mental well-being [we were] robbed of everything we has all worked [for we] had to fight becoming Second Class Citizens. Possibly many of us had thoughts of bring our lifeless lives to an end to stop the pain in so many ways".[2] As Wales looks to a managed exit from the pandemic, it is vital to remember that not being able to access healthcare services in a timely way still has a severe impact on the quality of life of older people.

For this reason, the Welsh Government's budget must continue to take action to reduce waiting times and increase timely access to health care services, ensuring that older people are not disadvantaged when prioritising treatment. Alongside this, investment is needed to maintain access to more routine healthcare such as GP appointments and screening services.

Investing in social care is equally as important as investing in health services. The services provided by social care are essential to supporting older people's independence and being able to do the things that matter as we grow older. Social care must be appropriate, timely and easily accessible, and consistent in both the services provided and the criteria for accessing them. Older people should be at the centre of all decisions about the social care that they receive. However, we know that access to different types of social care is increasingly difficult and that staffing pressures in social care are adding to the demands on unpaid carers as well as leading to unacceptable waits for care assessments and services. Good quality data on these issues is important for understanding how best to improve the situation.

The future Welsh Government budget needs to allocate sufficient resources to tackle the severe pressures in social care, whether this is capacity in care homes, provision of domiciliary care and reablement services, the issue of delayed discharge from hospital or other challenges. It is essential that the Welsh Government's draft budget enables social

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[1] See BBC News (20 October 2022): NHS Wales waiting times: What the figures show - BBC News

[2] Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2022), The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and its management, on health and social care in Wales, available at: Health-and-Social-Care-Committee-Covid-19-Response-ENG.pdf (olderpeople.wales)

care services to meet the needs of older people, ensuring rights are upheld and that everyone can age well. This needs to include action on prevention and making much more progress towards a preventative rather than crisis management approach. The narrative on the previous Welsh Government draft budget emphasised that it "prioritises funding for our NHS, social care and local authorities".[3] This also needs to be the case for the year ahead where the future budget needs to provide sufficient investment in health and social care, including funding for prevention and community-based support.

Action to alleviate poverty among older people

Almost one in five older people in Wales are living in poverty, and incomes are shrinking in real terms week by week as the effects of inflation continue.[4] One of the ways for the Welsh Government to help reduce the impact of poverty without spending a significant amount of its own resources is to increase the take up of financial entitlements from the UK Government.

In terms of Pension Credit alone, around 80,000 people in Wales are eligible but do not receive their entitlement. This means that over £200M is lost to Wales that could increase the incomes of older people, unlocking a range of associated support, while also boosting spending power in communities across Wales.[5]

In order to ensure that more of these currently unclaimed funds reach older people, the Welsh Government should allocate sufficient resources in the draft budget to support local authorities and the third sector to effectively target older people who are currently missing out. Advice services are a key element of this support. This is an investment in offsetting some of the harmful effects of poverty, including the negative impact on physical and mental health that would otherwise be dealt with through the Welsh Government's funding of NHS services.

However, advice services across Wales are seeing increased pressure as demand for help on the cost of living crisis grows. Agencies who provide support to individuals to claim their entitlements anecdotally report backlogs of 12-14 weeks. In relation to support services around benefits advice and tackling poverty, a recent report from Audit Wales noted "the difficulty in attracting sufficient talent to deliver what are often very demanding and challenging services. A significant proportion of council officers…noted a growing problem

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[3] Welsh Government (2021), Draft Budget 2022-23, available at: Draft Budget 2022 to 2023 | GOV.WALES, p. 16.
[4] Stats Wales (2021). Available from: Percentage of all individuals, children, working-age adults and pensioners living in relative income poverty for the UK, UK countries and regions of England between 1994-95 to 1996-97 and 2017-18 to 2019-20 (3 year averages of financial years) (gov.wales)
[5] Independent Age (2019), *Credit where it's due: Ending the £3.5 billion Pension Credit scandal*, p.13. Available from: Credit where its due report_0.pdf (independentage.org)

of recruiting and retaining essential staff, both within their organisation but also key third-sector partners. Issues of growing workloads, reductions in capacity, increasing burn-out from frontline work during the pandemic, less competitive salaries and the impact of inflation on wages were all flagged as major risks".[6] The Welsh Government needs to consider what help it can provide to local authorities and the third sector around this issue of recruitment and retention in such crucial services and adequately reflect that in the draft budget for the year ahead.

More broadly, funding for the Discretionary Assistance Fund needs to be maintained and consideration should be given to other types of support for older people during the cost of living crisis. Work is needed on ensuring that the Discretionary Assistance Fund is reaching older people to ensure that all sections of society are benefitting.

Communication budgets for Welsh Government support funds should also reflect that specific messaging and targeting will be needed to ensure that older people recognise that such sources of support or funding are intended for older people and households. This includes signposting and highlighting of all advice services.

Support for older workers

Older workers are vital to the Welsh economy, making a significant contribution to the economy. Figures for December 2021 to February 2022 show that the level of employment amongst 50–64-year olds is 69.3%. This is the third lowest of all the nations and regions of the UK.[7] For the year ending 30 June 2022, the employment rate of people aged over 65 in Wales was 9.4%.[8]

In terms of the health and social care sector in Wales, older people also make up an increasingly important part of the workforce. The percentage of NHS workforce in the 55+ age group grew from 20% in 2015 to 23% in 2021.[9] In social care, in both local authority run *and* commissioned services, 3-4% of staff are aged over 65. However, in local authority services, around 25% of the social care workforce are aged 56-65, while for commissioned services the figure is 15%.[10] The Welsh Government needs to consider how older workers

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[6] Audit Wales, Time for Change: Poverty in Wales (2022). Report of the Auditor General for Wales. Available at: 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales (audit.wales), p. 33.

[7] Office for National Statistics (2022) X01 Regional labour market: Estimates of employment by age. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/regionalempl oymentbyagex01/current

[8] Stats Wales (2022), available at: Employment of people in Wales aged over 16 by age and measure (gov.wales)

[9] NHS Wales Workforce Trends (as at 31 March 2021) - Final (1).docx (live.com)

[10] Health Education and Improvement Wales (2021), NHS Wales' Workforce Trends (as at 31st March 2021). Available at: Social care workforce report

can be retained in the health and social care sector, working with employers as appropriate. Wales needs to retain such experienced and capable staff.

In terms of support for the economy and business more generally following the pandemic, a key area for the Welsh Government will be to assist older workers to stay in the workplace or in self-employment and enable there to be genuine choice about if and when to retire. Recent Labour Market data has shown an increase in economic inactivity with the rise mainly in adults aged over 50. In May to July 2022 in Great Britain, there were 386,096 more economically inactive adults aged 50 to 64 years than in the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period (December 2019 to February 2020).[11]

However, there are ways to retain and attract older workers with flexible working hours being key. Among adults aged 50 to 65 years who have left their job since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and would consider returning to work (58%), the most important factors when choosing a paid job were: flexible working hours (32%), good pay (23%), and being able to work from home (12%). Flexible working hours was the biggest single factor in choosing a paid job selected by people aged 60-65 – over a third of people in this age group identified this option.[12]

By investing in schemes to enable older workers to continue or return to employment and challenge ageist practices that hinder this, the Welsh Government could provide a significant boost to the economy. The Centre for Ageing Better is undertaking a number of projects on good recruitment. These include considerations of the language used in recruitment materials.[13] Likewise, Age Cymru's partnership with Business in the Community Cymru offers a variety of support to both businesses and older workers via free mid-career review webinars, Age Inclusive Business Reviews and an Age Inclusive Learning Network.[14]

Health is a key issue among older workers. For older people who want to work but are not employed, 33% of 65-74 year olds and 54% of 75+ say their age and 39% of 65-74 year olds say a long-term illness or condition, or a disability is the reason why they are unable to work.[15] Increasing the amount of roles with flexible hours could make a significant difference to the economy, attracting and retaining older people in workplaces across Wales.

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[11] ONS (2022), Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic: wave 2. Available at: Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic - Office for National Statistics

[12] ONS (2022), Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic: wave 2. Available at: Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic - Office for National Statistics

[13] See Centre for Ageing Better (2021): Good Recruitment for Older Workers (GROW) | Centre for Ageing Better (ageing-better.org.uk)

[14] See Age Cymru ¦ Age at Work (ageuk.org.uk)

[15] Welsh Government (2022) National Survey for Wales April 2021 to March 2022 https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-results-viewer

Older workers are also more likely to be made redundant, and often find it more difficult to find work following a job loss or redundancy, particularly as the support available to help find work is often not sufficiently tailored.[16] 90% of older people believe that they have transferable skills to move roles or industry if they were offered training, but only 35% of employers surveyed would be prepared to hire and offer training to someone over 55 in a new industry.[17] Employment is just one area where the negative impact of ageism is apparent. Employers and the economy more broadly are missing out on the skills and contribution of older workers. Too often, this is based on stereotypes and myths that older workers are inflexible, less innovative or do not understand new technology. To help counteract this, the Wales TUC produced a toolkit on Supporting Older Workers.[18] The toolkit sets out a positive case for retaining older workers and challenging ageist myths such as those above. 55/Redefined and Reed Talent Solutions also published research in November 2022 on the impact of ageism in the workplace.[19] As part of this, one-in-five over 50s said they want employers to have a clear strategy to address ageism in the workplace. The culture of organisations also plays an important role in whether older people feel welcome.

The category of 'economic inactivity' hides a considerable amount of activity essential to the economy that would otherwise go undone or would need to be funded. Older people make a significant contribution in Wales as volunteers and unpaid carers.

The contribution of older people in employment, as carers and as volunteers (sometimes taking part in all three) needs to be recognised. The future Welsh Government budget needs to consider how to support older people to maintain these roles.

Evidence and data

The Welsh Government's recently published Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units strategy rightly notes that "Reliable evidence is required throughout policy development in planning, during implementation and in evaluating whether the policy was successful and where improvements are required".[20] In too many cases, good quality and reliable data is not available for the experiences of older people in Wales. Where data is available for

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[16] Wilson, T et al. (2020) Getting back to work: Dealing with the labour market impacts of the Covid-19 recession. Institute for Employment Studies. Available at: https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/541.1.pdf

[17] 55/Redefined (August 2021) Shut out, forced out and overlooked Ageism at work: Attitudes on employment over the age of 55. Available at: https://www.55redefined.com/drafts/shut-out-forced-out-and-overlooked-an-ageism-report

[18] Wales TUC Cymru, Supporting older workers: A toolkit for trade unionists. Available at: olderworkers11_3.pdf (tuc.org.uk)

[19] 55/Redefined (2022), The Unretirement Uprising: The retirement rebellion that could save our workplaces. Available at: 55REDEFINED_Whitepaper_V12 (prismic-io.s3.amazonaws.com)

[20] Welsh Government (2022), Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units strategy. Available at: Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units strategy | GOV.WALES

people over the age of 60 or 65, often anyone over this age is included as part of a seemingly homogenous group. This hides a number of important differences and variety of experiences.

The Welsh Government budget needs to include resources to improve data on the experiences of older people and this needs to be broken down into much smaller age bands to enable scrutiny of whether policy is having its intended effects. The Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units strategy raises the issue of small sample sizes and will seek to address this – an approach that should be applied to data collection and analysis of information about older people in Wales. Without investing in data collection and analysis, there is a risk that resources are not used as effectively as possible as policy impact is difficult to assess. This focus on ensuring good quality data, broken down by appropriate age bands, should apply to areas such as health and social care but also to any planned or commissioned work around areas such as leisure services, for example, adult participation in sport.[21]

Age friendly communities

The Commissioner has been pleased to see Welsh Government support for progressing towards age-friendly communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes Age-Friendly communities as being places in which older people, communities, policies, services, settings, and structures work together in partnership to support and enable us all to age well. The WHO identify eight essential features of Age-Friendly communities, known as the 'eight domains':

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transport
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information

[21] See recommendations from Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee (2022), Levelling the playing field: a report on participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas (senedd.wales)

- Community support and health services.

In April 2022, the Welsh Government announced that £1.1 million was being made available to local authorities to support their work to become age friendly and ensure older people are involved in the design and planning of local services.[22] Investment must be maintained if we are to advance the Welsh Government's "Age friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society" and its vision of an age-friendly Wales. Age-friendly communities are designed for diversity, inclusion, and cohesion, including across all ages and capacities and investment here has positive benefits for communities in general.

Summary: Priorities for the Draft Welsh Government Budget

- Provide sufficient investment in health and social care, including funding for prevention and community-based support
- Increase the investment in information and advice services to help older people experiencing poverty by a focus on uptake of entitlements, especially Pension Credit
- Support older workers to return to or stay in employment, including by promoting flexible working, while recognising the importance of older people as carers and volunteers
- Invest in improving data and research about the experiences of older people in order to produce better policy and enable scrutiny of policy impact
- Maintain investment in Age-Friendly communities and related work.

[22] See Welsh Government press release (April 2022), available at: £1.1 million investment to champion older people as Wales becomes Age Friendly | GOV.WALES

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

The Commissioner is taking action to protect older people's rights, end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner is working for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.

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