

Press release

Embargoed until 00.01, Monday 12 October 2009

Report calls for comprehensive action – and leadership - to prepare Britain for the demographic crunch

Every political party's election manifesto should include an outline of long term entitlements under a National Care Service to highlight a commitment to treating older people fairly, a wide-ranging analysis of Britain's ageing society demands today.

The call is one of the key recommendations in a report by housing and care provider Housing 21, *Fair ageing: the challenge of our lifetime*. The report brings together key messages and themes to emerge from a series of events organised by the Fabian Society for Housing 21 in partnership with Counsel and Care - the Fairness in an Ageing Society programme.

It underlines that Britain has 'barely begun to adapt' to a new demographic structure which will require fundamental changes in how society functions. During the programme, speakers invoked the credit crunch and the resulting fallout to highlight the stark challenges – and opportunities – posed by demographic change.

In making the call for leadership on these and other key issues, Housing 21 chief executive Melinda Phillips said that creating a society which delivered fairness across and between all generations would benefit us all – as well as today's older people.

"There is no appetite amongst the British people for an 'us versus them' approach to ageing issues such as pensions and the funding of long term care. That reflects a willingness to accept that fairness across the generations is in all our interests because most of us are going to be old one day.

"Ensuring that older people are listened to, are able to play a full part in society and have a guaranteed reasonable standard of living is something all of us should willingly sign up to - and we need politicians and other key decision makers to champion these principles."

With the run-up to next year's election already dominated by debates around public spending cuts, the report calls for a review of the present balance between universal and targeted entitlements in later life and also calls for

investment to meet the needs of the ‘forgotten generation’ – those over 80 in poverty.

It says: “This would need to look at which non-means-tested entitlements are really considered essential, how willing taxpayers are to fund them, where they might be extended and where, potentially, reduced.”

As well as major policy and funding issues across both central and local government, the report echoes calls made during the Fairness in an Ageing Society programme for greater recognition of the role older people play in society – and how that can be increased further if barriers to participation are removed. It notes that healthy and articulate older people feel ‘invisible’ in the media.

The report says that as well as damaging older people, this attitude could be harming business and the economy. It says companies should examine how they can better meet the needs and aspirations of older people and promote their products and services in an advertising industry fixated with youth.

The report’s other recommendations, which have been sent to the Department for Work and Pensions in response to the Government’s ageing strategy consultation include:

- An equivalent to the *Every Child Matters* initiative which would bring together services and policies at a local and national level with an emphasis on prevention.
- A commitment to ‘age-proofing’ policies and proposals at both national and local government level – backed by genuine consultation, with a clear link to a UK Advisory Forum with real teeth to challenge decisions.
- The scrapping of compulsory retirement ages and age discrimination in employment.
- Measures to tackle the poverty experienced by many in ‘the forgotten generation’ of today’s over 80s – including immediate help for older people to pay for care ahead of the establishment of a National Care Service.
- A commission to recommend improved links across generations, building on the work of existing intergenerational projects.
- A high-profile initiative to counter the negative portrayal and low visibility of older people in the media.

The report includes brief ‘think pieces’ from six leading commentators and people whose role gives them a unique perspective into specific aspects of the debate. They include Ms Phillips, Fabian Society general secretary Sunder Katwala and Dame Denise Platt, the former Chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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Notes to Editors

- 1) For further information or to arrange an interview with Ms Phillips contact Ben Furner on ben@furnercommunications.co.uk, 01273 463461 or 07946 355795.
- 2) The 'Fairness in an Ageing Society' Programme ran throughout 2009 and brought together key figures to discuss and explore ageing issues in a series of forums.
- 3) Visit the Housing 21 website www.housing21.co.uk for copies of the report and copies of the think pieces by Ms Phillips, Mr Katwala, Dame Denise, David Brindle (The Guardian's Public Services Editor), Evelyn Pellow (Counsel and Care's voting age project and Enabling Concepts) and Claire Tickell (chief executive of Action for Children).
- 4) Housing 21's mission is to promote independence and choice for older people through quality housing, care and support services. It currently manages over 16,000 sheltered and extra care apartments and bungalows, and provides more than 100,000 hours of home care per week including the work of the newly acquired Claimar plc.