

# *VotingAge*

an older  
people's  
manifesto



By Caroline Bernard  
Funded by Comic Relief

counsel + care   
for older people, their families and carers



# An older people's manifesto

*VotingAge* has produced this older people's Manifesto to present to the three main political parties in the lead up to the next general election. By talking with older people, their families and carers in different parts of the country, we have gathered the knowledge, ideas and aspirations of older people, and found out from them at first hand what they need and want to live better lives.

Research has suggested that politicians should not make any assumptions about how older people will vote (*Age Concern, Looking beyond the grey, 2004*). *VotingAge: an older people's manifesto* will highlight the need for clear pledges in election manifestos that all parties will, should they be elected, enable older voters to have real choice and control over their lives.

Counsel and Care is the national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. We provide personalised, in-depth advice and information, which informs our research and campaigning work.

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Counsel and Care, May 2009

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# Forewords

**We are grateful to the three leaders of the main political parties, who have contributed to the foreword of this older people's manifesto.**

Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP  
Prime Minister



“Over the next 50 years, the UK will make an extraordinary demographic transition. There are now more people in the UK aged over 65 than children under the age of 16. Older people are already living healthier, more active and longer lives than their parents or grandparents.

We need to do more across society so that everybody can make the most of the opportunities created by demographic change. Significant public service reforms are being introduced, including pensions reform, the extension of age discrimination legislation and increased provision of healthcare services that help people to maintain independence and well-being as they age. We are currently looking at how we can develop our policies further and will publish a renewed strategy for our ageing society later this year.

We have taken many actions to support pensioners. From a situation when one in four pensioners was living in relative low income in 1997, the number has fallen by 900,000 since 1998. The Pension Credit now helps over three million pensioners alongside a winter fuel payment and a £60 supplement payment in early 2009, and help with central heating and insulation.

To build a society for all ages, we all need to take our part. I commend this manifesto for helping to raise awareness of the issues we collectively face and for stimulating public debate.”

Rt Hon David Cameron MP  
Leader of the Opposition



“Our aim is that people have dignity and security in old age. That means three things. First, we would increase the basic state pension in line with earnings, not prices, in order to stop the spread of the means test – an insult to dignity. Second, we want to see more older

people allowed to realise their potential in the workplace. And third, we need to change completely the way we think about the services people receive – with more personalisation in healthcare; health and social services working more closely together; and a better partnership between government and individuals on social care, including giving people more control over their care”.

Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP  
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party



“In Britain today, more and more elderly people are left struggling to make ends meet. Too many are expected to get by without the help they need, like guaranteed health care or local services. Scandalously, millions of older people can only afford to heat a single

room in their homes. This has to stop. The Liberal Democrats would link the basic state pension to average earnings immediately, and our proposals for a much higher Citizen’s Pension would end Labour’s demeaning mass means testing. We also believe that older people must have a much greater say over decisions which affect them. If Government wants to improve older people’s lives, it needs to listen to what they have to say – which is exactly why the VotingAge campaign is so important.”

# Chapter 1

## Introduction and recommendations

Idealism is not restricted to the young. Older people, like anyone, have things they would like to see change in society in order to make their lives, and the lives of those around them, better.

The *VotingAge* campaign was conceived by Counsel and Care, the national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support, in response to a call for project ideas by Comic Relief for work that enabled older people themselves to campaign and influence policy and practice. Projects needed to demonstrate that it would not be a case of the 'usual suspects' participating but a range of ordinary members of the public who have not had the opportunity to engage in this way before.

To make the project accessible to a wide range of older people, we sought to gather their dreams, opinions, and aspirations. We consulted with older people across the country in a number of ways. We held consultation events, spoke at older people's tenant and community forums, and engaged with relevant stakeholders. We received responses to our 'Green Paper' by post and by email. And we have received many handwritten notes and letters from older people sharing their ideas.

**Chapter 2** explains what *VotingAge* is and sets out its original aims and objectives.

**Chapter 3** gives the background to the project and illustrates how Counsel and Care's past work equipped us to deliver it. **Chapter 4** outlines the consultation process through a short account of the regional events and the Green Paper consultation.

**Chapter 5** is the manifesto proper. In this section we discuss the themes that arose from our conversations with older people and set out what older people want to see from current and future governments to address their needs and aspirations. These themes expand the recommendations in Chapter 1, and then **Chapter 6** draws the manifesto to its conclusion.

This older people's manifesto will be widely distributed to influence politicians as the country moves towards the next general election and the parties develop their manifestos.



## VotingAge recommendations

Our respondents have provided a range of recommendations of the things they want all political parties to include in their general election manifestos:

- Address pensioner poverty
- Allow older people to feel included by addressing age discrimination and encouraging respect
- Encourage better relationships between the generations by supporting the development of more intergenerational centres across the country
- Recognise the role of older people as carers – increase Carer’s Allowance and review the overlapping benefits rule
- Provide better joined up health and social care services
- Better home care with more support and training for care workers
- Provide more access to NHS funded physiotherapy, chiropody, and podiatry
- Better access to buildings, facilities and transport
- Increase winter fuel payment to £500
- Address the needs of a growing black and minority ethnic older population
- Influence the negative portrayal of older people in the media
- Support lifelong learning
- Commit to improving the lives of older people



“Don’t let the writing of the manifesto be the ‘end’ in itself. Let this be the start and continue to work for implementation at the very top of power”

# Chapter 2

## What is *VotingAge*?

*VotingAge: an older people's manifesto* is a campaign by older people to address their needs, leading up to the next general election. Whilst the issues around care and support are being addressed by Government in the green paper on care funding, there are concerns that the broader needs of older people aged 60 and over – beyond health and social care – are not being taken into consideration. Older people are being characterised as dependent users of services, as opposed to the adult participants in every aspect of society that they actually are.

The *VotingAge* project was funded by Comic Relief, which sought projects that enabled older people themselves to campaign, supported by organisations. At the start of the process, the aim of the project was to focus on care, but as it unfolded it became clear that it had to be about much more. As we developed a funding bid, there were a range of outcomes that Counsel and Care wished to see as a result of this work (see opposite page). One of the ways that we agreed that we would know if we have achieved these outcomes was if we saw tangible aims in the 2007 comprehensive spending review. The spending review heralded the beginning of the government's 'radical rethink' of social care. However, as alluded to above, older people have ideas, and they have concerns, about every aspect of their lives. This manifesto shares those ideas and sets out what we expect each of the political parties to think about when developing their own manifestos.

This manifesto takes the findings from our regional *VotingAge* consultation events, with the written responses to the discussion paper, and sets out the key areas of concern for older people, their aspirations for the things that would improve their lives, and what needs to happen at a political level in order to make life better for all older people.

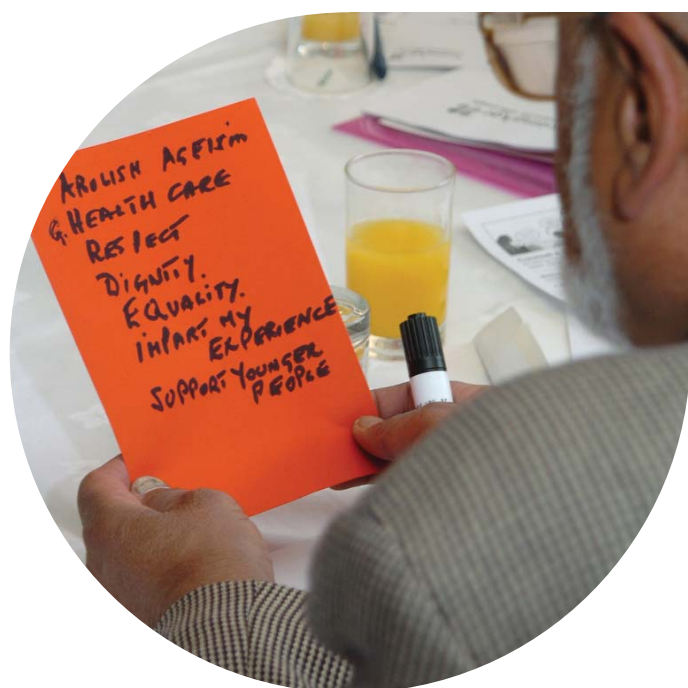


“MPs should activate their promise and not wait until elections to make false promises”



## Original desired outcomes of VotingAge

- Older people having influence over how policy about their care is developed
- Older people who are usually isolated from decision-makers empowered to act and campaign
- Older people who are ‘not the usual suspects’ providing leadership to deliver this project
- Changes to the way in which care is delivered and funded
- Older people getting access to decision-makers to make their views known
- The manifestos from the main political parties prior to the general Election including pledges to address older people’s care and support.



# Chapter 3

## More power to our elders: the history behind *VotingAge*

*VotingAge* is part of Counsel and Care's influencing programme, where we have, in our own right and with our partners, brought the issue of care and support for older people up the political agenda. There is, however, much in our past activity that has provided the foundation to this piece of work.

Counsel and Care was involved in a project from 1993 to 1994 with the Helen Hamlyn Foundation, the theme of which was empowering older people. The project emerged from the 1993 annual Graham Lecture, which was given by the late David Hobman. The publication that resulted from the work was entitled *More Power to our Elders*, a series of thoughtful papers on ways in which older people can be more involved in the issues that face them such as community care planning, long-term care, and consumer choice – the theme of Hobman's lecture:

*"The notion of choice falls trippingly from the tongue in a Western democracy. It is after all, what differentiates it from a totalitarian regime. We have regularly done battle for it. Many of our relations, our friends and our contemporaries made the ultimate sacrifice for it.*

*Of course it is true that choice is, in theory, available to us all every four or five years through the ballot box, or it would be if the system of winner-takes-all did not disenfranchise the majority of voters. Real influence over the choices which affect our lives, on a day-to-day basis continues to be elusive for*

*those who have little or no influence over the decisions which are taken around them, about them, but less frequently with them as active participants. That is one of the reasons why there are too many old people in the wrong place, at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons."*<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the notion of choice, or perceived choice, has been discussed for some time. Indeed, in his lecture references, Hobman cites a manifesto published by Age Concern England in 1974, which states that "...radicalism is not the prerogative of the young",<sup>2</sup> a sentence which chimes with the pamphlet produced by Counsel and Care at the end of the *VotingAge* consultation exercise which asserts that "*idealism is not restricted to the young.*"<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the challenge of allowing older people to make their own decisions about the things that affect their lives has existed for generations – indeed, this is one of the reasons Counsel and Care came into being in 1954.

Older people have always been organisers. A 1998 Counsel and Care publication sets out examples of projects by and for older people, ranging from advocacy to footcare. This later publication laments



the stereotyping of older people, and challenges the notion that they do not have a contribution to make to the modern world.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, *VotingAge* has a strong foundation to build upon. We hope that the *VotingAge* manifesto can complement more recent work such as *Not Dead Yet: A Manifesto for Old Age* by Julia Neuberger, and the manifesto for change from Dame Joan Bakewell, the government's Voice of the Elderly. In her manifesto, Baroness Neuberger sets out ten points and ends each chapter with a call to arms for older people. Some of the themes chime with those raised by the older people who attended the *VotingAge* events and responded to the consultation, and yet *VotingAge* participants raised yet more issues that need to be addressed:

- 1 Don't make assumptions about my age: end age discrimination
- 2 Don't waste my skills and experience: the right to work
- 3 Don't take my pride away: end begging for entitlements
- 4 Don't trap me at home because there are no loos or seats: reclaim the streets
- 5 Don't make me brain dead, let me grow: open access to learning
- 6 Don't force me into a care home: real choice in housing

- 7 Don't treat those who look after me like rubbish: train and reward care assistants properly
- 8 Don't treat me like I'm not worth repairing: community beds and hospitals
- 9 Don't treat my death as meaningless: the right to die well
- 10 Don't assume I'm not enjoying life, give me a chance: grey rage<sup>5</sup>

Baroness Neuberger's 'call to arms' recognises that older people need to become far more bullish in order to have their issues addressed by government, and that their needs ought to appear much higher up the political agenda than they have in the past. We believe that the more voices we can add to this debate, the stronger it will become.

In her newly appointed role as the Voice of the Elderly, Dame Joan Bakewell has set up a care homes petition on *The Times* website, and has published a 'manifesto for change', seeking action on areas including financial security, housing, information, professionalising the care workforce, accessibility, science and respect.<sup>6</sup>

The next chapter sets out our strategy for engaging with older people and how we gathered the information that makes up this manifesto.

**“More opportunities to vote on more issues i.e. more referendums, more proportional representation.”**





As well as two regional events in Southampton and London, smaller seminars were held with a local pensioners' group in South London, and with the tenant and leaseholder forum members of Housing 21, a national sheltered housing and care provider, from all over the country at their annual conference in Birmingham.

The audiences at the events were diverse, and almost everyone who attended felt able to participate to some extent. The evaluations of the events showed that 63% of those attending the day-long regional events said that they felt able to participate 'fully'. In total, 140 older people attended the events, with the ages of those attending ranging from those in their late 50s to one attendee who was in her late 80s.

The emerging themes from these events form the main part of this manifesto – in the next section we set out what older people are concerned about, what their aspirations are, and what actions they want to see from government in order to improve their lives.

**“People in power should listen to the electorate who put them there. Our opinions should count – listen to us!”**



## Chapter 5

# The voices of older people: the manifesto

Older people want to be included and treated equally in all aspects of their lives. A wide range of issues have emerged from the consultation that has shaped this manifesto. These are not presented here in any particular order of importance, because for older people, they are all equally as vital.





## Poverty and pensions<sup>7</sup>

Financial independence and having an adequate income are important to older people. A lack of money and the related feeling that one cannot afford to purchase services and products only serve to isolate and weaken them.

Older people responding to the *VotingAge* consultation gave **their ideas for solutions to pensioner poverty**:

- Increase the state pension and link it to average national earnings
- Higher taxes for wealthy people to provide funds for an increase in state pension
- Review public spending priorities – reallocate national spending to address poverty
- Increase the minimum wage to allow older people nearing retirement and still working to save for older age
- Better training and education for older adults to enable earning and saving

There is also a challenge for older people who have found themselves **on the 'borderline'** – they do not qualify for support because they fall just outside the threshold – however they are not wealthy either. This group of older people feel they are being penalised for saving and purchasing a modest home and having some savings. **Poverty itself needs to be redefined – so that those on the borderline can access benefits.** And older people **should not have to choose between basic amenities** such as fuel and food because of a lack of funds.



“With the rising age of the population, action must be taken **NOW** to increase state pensions even if this means higher taxes”

“I hope to see better communication between all ages, working together to the mutual benefit of all ages... in dignity and respect for all, old and young people”

**Means testing** is another area of concern for older people. Respondents felt that means testing is an invasion of privacy and that again, it penalises people with modest incomes. Older people want their needs to be prioritised over their means, so that they are better able to access local services such as day centres and luncheon clubs.

## Respect, influence and intergenerational relationships

Older people contribute to society in a variety of ways; these are not always recognised. Our *VotingAge* participants reminded us of the key role that older people play within their communities and their families as activists, carers and advisors. There are attitudes that get in the way of older people feeling valued and included as citizens – these need to be addressed in both policies and practice by future governments:

- Age discrimination in goods and services
- Negative attitudes to older people by society, including the media
- A lack of employment opportunities
- Poor access to health and social care
- The internet becoming a prime source of information
- Poor public transport
- Poorly trained care workforce
- Isolation due to disability that precludes use of public services and transport
- Being patronised by younger people

Older people want to be able to **exert more influence** over the decisions that affect them. The *VotingAge* participants want to find ways to allow more older people to become lobbyists and campaigners. They want to see the appointment of a dedicated **Minister for Older People** in England and an **Age Ombudsman**, to prove that the challenge of the ageing population is being taken seriously by government and wider society.

Another challenge raised at all of the consultation events was that of **improving relationships between generations**. Participants recognised that not all young people are disrespectful towards older people, and not all older people are intolerant of young people. It was recognised that there is often a lack of understanding between the generations that goes in both directions.





Government needs to incentivise work with local groups to bring the generations together – particularly in **schools** where negative attitudes towards older people often take shape. By inviting older people into schools to **provide mentoring, speak to young people about history, teach crafts and other skills**, some of these intergenerational barriers can be broken down. Developing such projects in the communities can help to address misconceptions and build mutual respect.

## Healthcare and caring

Older people provide care across generations. Many parents rely on grandparents for support after the birth of a child, and when they need to return to work, many grandparents provide pre-school care, undertake school runs, and babysit to allow parents to enjoy social activities. Many grandparents take on the full-time care of grandchildren when a parent becomes ill or otherwise incapacitated.

There are currently more than 1.5 million people aged over 60 providing unpaid care to relatives and friends in the UK. Whilst most are only too pleased to provide this care, it often goes unrecognised, and many carers risk their own health, particularly when they become frail themselves. Eight thousand of the UK's carers are aged 90 and over, and half of these people are providing 50 hours or more a week of unpaid care.<sup>8</sup>

Older carers also have to navigate a complex benefits system. Currently, carers in receipt of State

“Individual care and healthcare budgets to be implemented for people of all ages”

Pension are unable to claim Carer's Allowance due to the 'overlapping benefit rule', however they can apply for a Carer Premium to their Pension Credit. However, in the UK, more than 63,000 carers over 60 are missing out on Carer Premium, because they do not know that it is available.<sup>9</sup> The overlapping benefit rule was one of the issues raised by older people attending our *VotingAge* events – one of the actions they want government to take to improve their lives is for **'those receiving the State Pension to also receive Carer's Allowance'**.

Older people are the largest group of users of health and social care services. Their multiple needs often mean that they need to be seen by a range of professionals from different disciplines. Steps have been taken by the present government towards the 'joining up' of health and social

“Listen to what we are saying”



care, but this is still not universal, despite promises early on from the current Labour government to address the problems faced by those who ‘find themselves in the no man’s land between health and social services’.<sup>10</sup>

**Joint health and social care services need to be provided universally** so that older people are not at the mercy of a postcode lottery. Whilst the government has reviewed its guidance on health and social care joint working through the NHS Act 2006, older people need to see the evidence locally that this guidance is being taken on board and that health and social care partners are taking steps towards fully integrated services across disciplines.

Older people feel that they are **treated unfairly by healthcare professionals**, such as GPs. They believe that these professionals make assumptions about their conditions and attribute them to ageing. And they do not feel that they can speak freely to GPs due to limited time for consultation.

Health services need to take the practical needs of older people into account – for example charging for hospital parking is an area of great concern for older people who drive or are driven to their appointments.

**Older people also want better care at home.** Homecare staff need to receive better training, and be able to spend more time with the person they are caring for, rather than working to strict time constraints which can sometimes result in poor quality care.



**Access to services such as physiotherapy, podiatry and chiropody and alternative therapies** that are not currently available from the NHS, and access to affordable dental care would keep older people healthier and more independent for longer. Older people also need up-to-date information from their local Primary Care Trust, and more information on facilities that enable independent living such as exercise classes, luncheon clubs, and social activities.

## Neighbourhoods and the environment

**Security** is one of the most important things to older people. There are often high levels of fear about crime and security within one's own home. Older people need to know that crime and the fear of crime is taken seriously by government. More schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch would improve the lives of older people concerned about this issue.

**Access to buildings and transport** is another area of concern for older people. The Disability Discrimination Act was amended in 2005 to cover

access to goods, facilities and services. However, older people tell us that they still experience problems accessing buildings, and transport systems are out of date and do not meet the needs of people who cannot walk long distances nor climb stairs. Older people also need more reliable transport services, particularly in rural areas, and more specialised services such as Dial-A-Ride.

For London's older people, there has been a long running campaign to preserve the Freedom Pass, which for many older people is a lifeline and maintains their independence. Older people want to see more free travel outside London for the over 60s.

**Public toilets** have been a bone of contention for some time, with too many facilities closed because they are inadequate, un-modernised, or vandalised. One of the things that would improve older people's lives is more free public facilities. MPs on the Communities and Local Government Committee produced a recent report stating that local authorities should not be closing public facilities unless they have a strong case in favour of doing so.<sup>11</sup> Where these services have to be charged for, older people should be taken into consideration and offered free access or a substantial reduction.

**“Continue to support and improve the NHS, free transport for the elderly and young children, in general improvement in transport, road, rail and flight links, good European and international relations”**

# “Social inclusion for all age groups”

## Older people also need better parking facilities.

The first parking bays for older people in the UK were launched in March 2008. In the London borough of Hillingdon, people over 65 who do not qualify for a blue badge can apply for a ‘brown badge’ to enable them to park in spaces situated close to car park entrance and exit points and local services in the area. This scheme has been welcomed by Hillingdon’s residents, and should be rolled out to more local authorities in future.

Poor housing was one of the issues identified by older people when they looked at what government priorities need to be. The current government has already pledged to improve home and neighbourhood in one of their Public Service Agreements, and older people attending *VotingAge* events and responding to the consultation are concerned about older people living in poor housing that has not been adapted, and are suffering fuel poverty due to rising gas and electricity prices. **Increasing the winter fuel payment to £500 and reviewing Pension Credit thresholds** would begin to address these concerns.

## Age discrimination

We asked older people about ‘being included and treated equally in all parts of your life’. We wanted to know what things made older people feel included and valued as citizens. Some of the things that older people said help them **feel equal and valued** are:

- Common courtesy
- Being able to participate
- Being spoken to with respect
- Having their rights respected
- Being financially independent
- Looking after grandchildren
- Not being patronised
- Having their contributions recognised

We also wanted to know **what gets in the way** of older people feeling valued and equal as citizens. Some things that older people find **challenging** are:

- Being stereotyped
- Being isolated
- Other people’s attitudes
- A negative perception of older people
- Double discrimination e.g. age and race
- Problems communicating with younger people
- Lack of job opportunities
- Loss of access to services such as holiday and health insurance

**Research has shown that 73% of older people feel that they experience discrimination on the grounds of their age on an everyday basis.<sup>12</sup>** This has to be addressed on the statute book. The Equalities Bill that has been announced by the



present government needs to take an even closer look at age discrimination and recognise the important contribution made by older people to society in this country. For example, more support is needed with flexible working so that older carers who work can balance their work and care responsibilities.

### **An ageing black and minority ethnic (BME) population**

*VotingAge* participants highlighted another discrimination challenge that faced older people from black and minority ethnic communities, many of whom have been living in Great Britain for 50 years or more.

The consultation raised some concerns about the particular issues faced by this group of older people, and a number of comments were made, these are set out opposite:

- Older people from black and minority ethnic groups are at risk of financial and health inequalities
- A growing number of older carers are from ethnic minorities
- With more families dispersing, more older people from ethnic minorities may not have a family member in close proximity
- There is a potential negative impact of government-aided dispersal and integration of immigrant communities on older people.

Older people, whatever their cultural and ethnic background, have the right to **fair and equal treatment and inclusion**. This manifesto urges all parties to take further steps as we move towards equality legislation to ensure that people do not experience any form of prejudice based on their age, gender, sexuality or ethnic background.

**Older people, whatever their cultural and ethnic background, have the right to fair and equal treatment and inclusion**



“Older people can have more influence by knowing how to get information, who to contact etc to know what is available... and improved access to services”

## The media

Another theme that came out strongly from *VotingAge* participants and respondents was the **negative portrayal of older people** in the media. Older people are often portrayed as out of touch, weak and vulnerable, which only serves to compound poor relationships between generations. Organisations such as the Greater London Forum for Older People,<sup>13</sup> and Age and Opportunity in Ireland have challenged communicators about the language and terminology they use to describe older people. Age and Opportunity refer to research carried out in 1992 in which the term ‘elderly’ was rejected by respondents asked how they wish to be called as older people.<sup>14</sup> Yet, print media continues to use terms such as ‘OAP’, ‘the elderly’, ‘granny’ and so on.

One of our respondents makes the following proposal to politicians:

*“The Government, through its agencies monitoring the media... might be nudged towards insisting on a more positive portrayal of older persons. Serious television documentaries celebrating the past (perhaps the wartime home-front, when the sacrifices and austerity of civilians might put the comfortable lives of our younger contemporaries in context) as well as the present contributions of the older generation should be encouraged.”<sup>15</sup>*

## Lifelong learning

**Supported, affordable lifelong learning** is one of the areas that *VotingAge* respondents agree needs to be improved to tackle age discrimination. Many local authorities are cutting back and today, not all councils provide free or cheaper adult education for over 60s. Older people want training and learning opportunities available to all age groups. Respondents also feel that there is a place for education and training courses aimed specifically at older people.

The government consulted on adult learning this year<sup>16</sup> with a view to setting a new vision for adult education in the 21st century. 5,500 people responded to the consultation, which illustrates the importance of this to stakeholders and the public. Many concerns were raised in the responses to the consultation about the government’s commitment to adult learning, and they have stated that it is a priority. This pledge must carry through to general election manifestos so that adults, and older adults in particular who have suffered the consequences of local authority cutbacks, can be confident that their need for continued learning is being taken seriously, and that the commitments will survive a change of government.

Older people would welcome community based projects such as resource centres with internet access in a protected and safe educational environment. There are already examples of such projects, one of which is set out in the case study on the next page.



### London Older People's Resource Facility

The London Older People's Resource Facility is supported by the Greater London Authority. The resource centre opened in 2004 and moved to its current premises near London Bridge in 2006.

The facility provides free internet access, office space and training sessions, and is supported by two full time Greater London Authority members of staff.

Contact: Nabilla Stelter 020 7785 3873 or email [nabilla.stelter@london.gov.uk](mailto:nabilla.stelter@london.gov.uk)

Linked with lifelong learning is a need for **better job opportunities** for older workers including training for a second career. One participant called for one accessible central point for information, advice, and lifelong learning.

There are also opportunities to **link learning with improving intergenerational relationships**. Respondents feel that the experience of older people can be used to facilitate apprenticeship schemes for younger people undertaking both vocational and non-vocational training.

### Information and advice

As a provider of information and advice services, Counsel and Care knows only too well the challenges older people and their carers face when trying to navigate the care system. A lack of **clear and accessible information, advice and advocacy** was another theme from the *VotingAge* consultation process. 'Being informed', getting the 'right information from the right source', 'less automated call centres' and many other things would help the older people who responded to *VotingAge* stay in control of their lives.

There was also concern at the amount of information that is **only available online**, as there are many older people who out of choice do not wish to learn how to navigate the internet. Service commissioners and providers need to respect this choice, and government departments have to ensure that all of their information is available in a **range of hard copy formats** such as large print and easy read.

# “Accountability to voters from local council and MPs”

Older people want to be able to make their own choices, but this is difficult if access to information is restricted. Choice is also curtailed if older people are not sure that the advice they are being given is independent. The present government has recognised the need for a national advice, information and advocacy service and has committed itself to it. Again, these plans must survive a change of government so that older people and others who rely on these services are not left behind – **we need to see clear pledges on information, advice and advocacy in all party manifestos.**



## Political commitment

Counsel and Care took the initial findings from *VotingAge* to all three 2008 party conferences and they were well received. All of the politicians we met understood the potential impact of an ageing population, and more importantly, they understood the potential impact of the older voter on the general election result. No political party can afford to alienate older people - and by the same token, no new government can afford to alienate them. The responses to our consultation illustrate that there are many politically savvy older people across the country. There were also many who were attending their first consultation event by coming to *VotingAge*, and the majority of these people felt able to contribute around the tables and by completing and sending in responses to our ‘Green Paper’.

Our initial findings document consisted of a pamphlet and poster which contained quotes from older people with ‘manifesto messages’. These quotes, given opposite and throughout this document, give a strong message to politicians about the commitment that older people need from them as we move towards the next general election.



“To older people:  
be more assertive:  
dance more, join  
with others to  
influence local and  
central government  
decisions”

“Please devolve power  
(decision making and voting  
rights) from central government  
to local level (more referendums!)  
Too much power in the hands  
of too few!”

“Equal rights for  
[older] women”

“More help  
for very old  
and disabled  
people”

“Always remember us  
and our contribution to  
the past. Reward us!”

“Live and let live  
with body, mind and  
spirit. To progress in life.  
These three core concepts  
of life is important and  
to live happily”

“To deal with poverty  
and inequality”

# Chapter 6

## What needs to happen? conclusions

The recommendations set out in Chapter 1 and the related themes detailed in Chapter 5 are aimed at all political parties, and cover a wide range of issues from our respondents. These recommendations are not only about the care of older people – they are more than simply recipients of care and support services – which is reflected throughout this document.

At the Liberal Democrats conference *VotingAge* fringe meeting the Chief Whip, Paul Burstow, stated that older people's issues need to run throughout manifestos and not simply form a part of them. With an ageing society, such an attitude needs to become part and parcel of everyone's thinking throughout the country.

It was also highlighted at the same fringe meeting that older people bring a high number of votes to political parties, which as some younger people become disillusioned and less likely to vote, will be more important than ever as we enter a possible general election year.

However – no party should take the older vote for granted. The country is in a difficult phase economically, and this will have a major impact on older people, some of whom already struggle to make ends meet. It is only by showing clear, well thought out, deliverable manifesto pledges that include older people and address their wants and aspirations that political parties can gain the trust of this growing section of the electorate, and the future generations that will follow them.

The last word must go to an older person - a respondent to the written consultation who summarises the challenge for politicians perfectly:

“Too often government policy makers seem to think that life stops at retirement for most purposes – that people are happy just not going to work and can sleep and watch TV all the time with an occasional visit from the family.

“This is not true. Older people recognise that their future may be short term but [they] still want to enjoy life, to make choices of how they live (and die) and not be dictated to and treated as ‘old children’ for whom others know best”<sup>17</sup>



“Respect us,  
listen to us, don't  
patronise us”

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## About the author



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