

# BETTER LATER LIFE: RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE WORK OF THE CENTRE FOR AGEING BETTER

## Consultation response

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### Introduction

The UK is experiencing huge demographic shifts—by 2033 nearly a quarter of the UK population will be aged 65 or over. Longer life expectancy is opening up new possibilities, but the scale and nature of these changes also presents significant challenges for society and the organisations within it.

NPC established the [Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing](#), run in partnership with [ILC-UK](#) and chaired by Lynne Berry OBE, to put ageing on the agenda for the voluntary sector. Part of NPC's work to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions, the Commission brought together experts, conducted research, held events and consulted across the sector and beyond to consider the impact of demographic change on a wide range of issues. The [final report](#) concluded that voluntary organisations are not currently prepared for changes ahead, and made recommendations for a range of organisations including the [Centre for Ageing Better \(CfAB\)](#).

Here, in response to the [Centre for Ageing Better's consultation](#) on its proposed role and programmes, we draw on some of the Commission's conclusions, as well as other NPC research and experience.

### Comments on the Summary

The evidence around improving the lives of older people is mixed, and so we are wary of the bold statement in paragraph 4, page 3 that '*we have a clear understanding of what people want for a better later life*'. We would argue that more research and evidence-gathering is needed here, otherwise there is a risk that CfAB and other organisations end up imposing rather than reflecting the values of older people

### Comments on the Approach

The paper sometimes indicates that older people are the only stakeholders in CfAB's work. See for example paragraph 13 (page 6): '*CfAB is committed to ensuring that the views and voices of older people are embedded in the Centre's work. We want to select topics that reflect the priorities of older people, deliver programmes in ways that promote co-design and co-production with older people, and adopt approaches to behaviour change that reflect what we know will resonate with older people.*'

There is a risk with this approach, which the Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing identified, of reinforcing age divisions and siloed working. People at all stages of life—from children who may need earlier pensions advice at school to the middle-aged who will constitute the next generation of pensioners—have a stake in the way age is considered and catered for in society. We strongly recommend that CfAB takes the broadest possible approach, involving people across society in its plans.

## Comments on the Vision, Aims and Objectives

You rightly identify that independence is critical (paragraph 8, page 4). The CfAB's independence—and the confidence of others in this independence—will add strength to its recommendations, and is especially important for a [What Works centre](#).

CfAB proposes '*harnessing and strengthening the evidence base*' on '*what works to support ageing better*' (paragraph 9, page 5). From the research conducted by the Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing, such an evidence base is largely missing from the charity sector.

Although we found some good work, little was sufficiently forward looking or adequate for the huge demographic shifts that will take place in the next 20 years. We note that one of CfAB's aims is to provide seed funding for projects with proven effectiveness. Given our experience that projects with a proven track record will be hard to find, CfAB may need to develop these projects proactively with charities/providers.

CfAB can maintain a unique position looking at a diverse range of issues in the lives of older people, and should be wary of focusing too heavily on preventative health issues, especially when well-established organisations exist which already do exactly this. From the topics listed in paragraph 14 (page 6), we would recommend CfAB focus on the broader issues of:

- Extending working lives;
- Social connectedness;
- Sustaining independence in the home;
- Ready for ageing locally;
- Ageism; and
- Inequality in ageing outcomes.

CfAB proposes building further '*warm relationships*' to realise its goals (paragraph 33, page 10). We believe that early, proactive engagement of partners is the correct approach. We also support the ambition that CfAB is '*a 'do-tank' rather than merely a writer of reports*' (paragraph 11, page 5). We found with the Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing that engaging the sector throughout our project lent weight to our key finding—that the voluntary sector has a collective lack of imagination in this area—and ensured that its critique was heard by organisations in the sector both large and small. We found our series of topical roundtables and subsequent [discussion papers](#), coupled with an engaged [expert panel](#) of key leaders in the sector, meant that we could test findings, provoke and rally support for better ways of working

## Comments on Appendix 1

We are heartened that the CfAB plans to employ '*a robust theory of change*' in the areas on which it decides to focus (page 16). Theory of change is at the heart of [NPC's Four Pillars approach](#) to impact measurement, because without it you don't know what you want to achieve and therefore what you need to track and measure. We note that the theories of change in the consultation paper are embryonic and require further development. NPC has helped numerous charities and funders to create a [theory of change](#) and from this experience advises CfAB to assemble a selection of its staff, trustees, experts and older people themselves in a workshop to help develop the theory of change. An external facilitator is also highly recommended, as such people have the independence to ask difficult and challenging questions. We would then advise that the theories of change are written up, and used to identify the desired outcomes for the area, and where there is (and is not) evidence.

### Topic 3: Social connectedness

CfAB rightly identifies the ‘*variable results*’ around the scale and impact of loneliness on older people (page 21). We would urge caution on responding to this issue until a more detailed review of both the problem and the costs associated with it have been robustly reviewed—work which CfAB may be well placed to conduct.

In addition, evidence from the Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing indicates that solutions often proposed in the past—older people’s lunch clubs, mentoring and befriending groups for example—are not always what older people want. A new approach to understanding and addressing loneliness is needed instead.

As we urged in our [Decision time](#) report, it’s time for us all to step up to the age of opportunity. We encourage CfAB to take on the mantle of Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing, by acting not just as a ‘hub’ of information but as an advocate for change and a provocative force to help the charity sector take a new approach to questions of ageing.