LONELY NATION

Part 2: Ending loneliness among older people

August 2024

CSJ — The Centre for Social Justice

Contents

About the CSJ

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the government passed the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2024 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Acknowledgements

Foreword

Loneliness is a modern-day tragedy and the reality of 5.8 million older people in Britain.[1] For the individual, loneliness is associated with acute stress responses, heart disease and stroke.[2] 60 per cent of people experiencing chronic loneliness experience mental distress.[3] For society, loneliness is a symptom of a broken social fabric, where people lack the relationships intrinsic for human flourishing. Loneliness is not just an individual phenomenon, but the result of an increasing atrophied and individualistic society.

This report by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) lays out the acute and complex causes of loneliness in older people. It shows the stark reality of the 5.8 million people over the age of 65 who are lonely.[4] It illustrates the challenges faced by older people and shows how society too often fails them.

The CSJ show how challenges regarding public transport, digital exclusion, housing, changes to family life, intergenerational contact, and retirement have contributed to loneliness in older people. This report outlines 20 recommendations that would put the government on track to significantly reduce loneliness within the decade.

Lonely Nation is filled with the lived experience of older people who have suffered loneliness, as well as the stories of the charities who have so selflessly supported them. Many of the 700 strong CSJ Alliance of grassroots charities have fed into this report and testify to the stories behind the numbers. Their service to older people is an example to society of how to treat individuals with the dignity, respect and value that they deserve.

The government must remember that it is these small charities that most effectively fight loneliness. Ending loneliness requires the government to work hand in glove with the small and medium sized charities, voluntary associations and social enterprises that make up what is most valuable about our communities.

There is also a positive story to tell and much to learn from older people. In this report, the CSJ also show that despite the unique challenges older people face, on average they are less lonely than younger people. Older people are more likely to have conversations with their neighbours, see members of their extended family, attend a community event, volunteer and have meaningful conversations with a friend or family member than the rest of the adult population. But despite these positives, challenges still remain.

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1   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, 15 July 2024.
2   Campaign to End Loneliness, Health impact, n.d. Accessed: https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/health-impact/.
3   Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England, June 2022.
4   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, 15 July 2024.

Lonely Nation is an important contribution to the government's mission for a decade of national renewal. It asks the government to measure participation in social infrastructure as an indicator of the strength of the social fabric. It challenges the view that national renewal is just an economic mission and calls on the government to also consider the nature of our society.

To end loneliness among older people, the government should take up the recommendations in this report, including an older person volunteer passport, promoting intergenerational practice, supporting family carers, making the housing stock accessible for older people, bringing forward a new Digital Inclusion Strategy and placing a duty on government to boost purposeful participation in society.

This report sets out an ambitious set of practical recommendations that should be at the heart of a refreshed strategy to tackle loneliness. Only by building a less lonely society can the government hope to truly renew our country and get Britain's future back.

Andy Cook
Chief Executive of the Centre for Social Justice

Executive Summary

Britain is a lonely nation. This report shows that nearly six in 10 adults feel lonely at least some of the time.[5] This equates to 31.4 million people.[6] But older people buck the trend. Just over four in 10 adults over the age of 65 say they feel lonely at least some of the time, falling to over three in 10 of over 75s.[7] This contrasts sharply with the 18-24 cohort, where 70 per cent say they feel lonely at least some of the time.[8] Older people are the least lonely age cohort in Britain.

Accordingly, there is much to be learned from older people. Older people are more likely to have conversations with their neighbours, see members of their extended family, attend a community event, volunteer and have a meaningful conversation with a friend or family member than the rest of the adult population.[9] All these activities help to protect against loneliness.

Despite being less lonely than the population average, there are acute and complex challenges that can cause and perpetuate loneliness in later life. The CSJ predict that 5.8 million people over the age of 65 feel lonely at least some of the time.[10] Britain is also ageing rapidly. The total number of adults aged 65 plus in the UK is predicted to increase from 13.2 million in 2023 to 17.4 million in 2043.[11] Respectively this represents a rise in the 65 plus population from 19.4 per cent to 24 per cent of the total population over two decades.[12]

The ageing population presents multiple challenges to the nation across all areas of society. Less considered is the impact on loneliness. Removing obstacles to social connection in later life will be critical for ensuring a healthy and prosperous older population in the decades to come.

Loneliness in old age is also an issue of social justice. Analysis by Brunel University has shown that people aged 50 plus who live in the poorest areas are significantly more likely to suffer from loneliness than those who live in the wealthiest. This association is independent of other factors.[13]

The CSJ has identified six challenges that cause and perpetuate loneliness amongst older people. The first three challenges, regarding public transport, digital exclusion and housing, present immediate problems for the government and can begin to be solved within the current parliament.

The following three challenges, regarding family, intergenerational engagement and retirement, are decades in the making and will require cultural shifts, in addition to policy changes. These challenges

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5   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.
6   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, 15 July 2024.
7   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.
8   Ibid.
9   Ibid.
10   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, 15 July 2024.
11   CSJ analysis of National Population projections by single year of age via Nomis, 20th June 2024.
12   Ibid.
13   Victor, Christina R., Pikhartova, J., "Lonely places or lonely people? Investigating the relationship between loneliness and place", *BMC Public Health,* 20 (May, 2020), 778.

will be more complex for government to solve and should be considered as part of its long-term strategy for national renewal.

The CSJ recommends 20 policy solutions for government to adopt that span the six challenges outlined in this report. Adopting these recommendations would help to end loneliness among older people and prepare the nation for the oncoming demographic change.

Recommendations

A Refreshed Strategy

1. **The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should launch a refreshed loneliness strategy that builds upon *A Connected Society* and the progress made in raising awareness, reducing stigma and expanding the evidence base.** A refreshed loneliness strategy must be centred on tackling the root causes of loneliness. It must recognise the importance of addressing the acute and complex causes of loneliness in older people. It should include measurable commitments to address the six challenges outlined in this report that cause and perpetuate loneliness in older people.

2. **Government must measure what matters.** Government should be placed under a statutory duty to improve the wellbeing of the nation through boosting purposeful participation at a local level. This should begin with measuring what matters. Local authorities should be made responsible for capturing data on levels of participation in social infrastructure – which may differ in kind depending on the place – allowing central government to monitor the social fabric across the nation.

Public Transport

3. **The Department for Transport should continue its commitment to create a transport network that supports people's social connections by:**

   a. Ensuring the Connectivity Tool, currently funded by the *Shared Outcomes Fund*, will measure the nature of social isolation and places' connectedness to community assets, not just homes, jobs and services.

   b. Publishing the evaluation of the *Tackling Loneliness With Transport Fund* with a commitment to continuing the scheme if shown to effectively tackle loneliness. The Department for Transport should ringfence a percentage of funding for small and medium sized charities with an income under £2 million per year.

4. **The Department for Transport should work with local authorities to produce guidance for the design of bus shelters** to ensure they are accessible for older people.

5. **The Department for Transport's proposed long-term strategy for transport should include a loneliness test for how future transport improvements will help to tackle loneliness and connect socially isolated communities.** The strategy should outline the importance of public transport for tackling social isolation and protecting against loneliness. Government should also work with the Community Transport Association to ensure that necessary reforms, outlined in *A Better Future for Transport*, are made to guarantee the future of the sector.

Digital Exclusion

6. **The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should set out a new Digital Inclusion Strategy.** A new strategy should recognise the importance of digital inclusion for protecting against loneliness and include measurable commitments for supporting older people to learn the necessary digital skills for engaging in society.

7. **The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should submit a joint bid to the *Shared Outcomes Fund* held by HM Treasury for a £10 million *Digital Champions Fund*** to support new and ongoing work of small and medium sized charities who tackle digital exclusion amongst older people. Government should ringfence a percentage of funding for small and medium sized charities with an income under £2 million per year.

8. **HM Treasury should reduce VAT on social tariffs to five per cent.** At 50 per cent take up this would cost the Treasury circa £58 million per year.

9. **The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should mandate providers to improve their social tariff speeds to match average speeds.**

Housing

10. **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should ensure the ten HAPPI design principles are included within proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework.**

11. **The CSJ echoes the Centre for Ageing Better in calling for accessible and adaptable homes, known as M4 (2) in building regulations, category two housing to become the new minimum standard** for new-build homes.

12. **Within proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should explicitly require all local plans to include a specific policy and target for new wheelchair accessible homes** (known as M4(3) in building regulations), and where no local target is set, to require at least 10 per cent of new homes to meet the standard, subject to future population projections. Government should work with local authorities to determine the percentage of homes that will need to be accessible in certain areas to meet the needs of an ageing population.

13. **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care should work together to produce new design guidance, in partnership with best practice stakeholders, for older people's housing and social care settings** which are focused on creating community and social connection.

Family

14. **The Department of Health and Social Care should fund a social prescribing pilot of £3.6 million which reaches individuals after the death of a partner.** This could be led by the National Academy for Social Prescribing. The pilot should establish different referral pathways to social prescribing from the point of contact where an individual who has lost a partner has been connected with public services. These could include hospitals, care homes, palliative care settings and coroners.

15. **Local authorities should identify family carers and others seeking to care for family members who are on social housing waiting lists** and take the needs of the family member in need of care into consideration when making priority decisions.

16. **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should publish the findings of its consultation to changes to permitted development rights.** Government should aspire to strengthen rights to construct outbuildings and extensions to meet the needs of families who seek to care for older relatives.

Intergenerational Engagement

17. **The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Education should submit a joint bid to the *Shared Outcomes Fund* held by HM Treasury for an *Intergenerational Engagement Fund* to support new and ongoing intergenerational projects, particularly within schools.** This would include supporting third sector organisations to partner with schools and producing resources to teach children about how to show dignity, respect and empathy to older people, as well as raising awareness about the challenges of old age. Charities would also provide opportunities to school-age children to volunteer to support older people at risk of loneliness in health and social care settings. This could be funded through the *Shared Outcomes Fund* of which £100 million has been earmarked for projects to run between 2024-25.

18. **The Department of Health and Social Care should promote intergenerational practice** within its plans for a National Care Service by:

    a. Producing a framework of guidance for how specialist housing for the elderly such as care homes and sheltered accommodation can develop partnerships with childcare providers to build upon the successes of intergenerational nursery settings.

    b. Integrating social prescribing within care homes and retirement villages to link older adults to community groups and volunteering opportunities.

Retirement

19. **The Department for Work and Pensions should evaluate the impact of the expansion of the mid-life MOT** in the 2023 Spring Budget with an ambition that businesses employing more than 50 staff should provide a mid-life MOT, while smaller businesses would access this through the continued roll out of the mid-life MOT through Job Centre Plus.

20. **The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should launch an Older Person National Volunteer Passport.** The passport would ease the transition from work into retirement and open up new volunteering opportunities for those of state pension age. Relevant certifications, ID, and qualifications could be ported onto the volunteer passport, including a DBS check. This would remove unnecessary duplication and increase flexibility for volunteers.

Introduction

In 2018 the UK led the way in publishing the world's first ever cross-government loneliness strategy, *A Connected Society.* The UK was a world leader in recognising loneliness and social isolation as one of the most pressing public health issues in the 21st century. The strategy was designed to lay the foundation for a generation of future work, "*a vital first step in a national mission to end loneliness in our lifetimes*", were the words of the then Prime Minister, Theresa May.[14]

Sadly, the UK is not making progress to end loneliness in our lifetimes. Indeed, loneliness is growing and intensifying as a problem. In its *The State of Loneliness 2023,* the Campaign to End Loneliness found that over half a million more people were chronically lonely when compared to the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the pandemic having a serious long-term impact on loneliness trends.[15]

The government's strategy to tackle loneliness has been focused on three overarching goals.[16]

1. Reduce stigma by building the national conversation on loneliness, so that people feel able to talk about loneliness and reach out for help.

2. Drive a lasting shift so that relationships and loneliness are considered in policymaking and delivery by organisations across society, supporting and amplifying the impact of organisations that are connecting people.

3. Play our part in improving the evidence base on loneliness, making a compelling case for action, and ensuring everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions through challenging times.

It was the right decision in 2018 for government to pursue these aims. The 2018 strategy followed on from the work conducted by the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission, published in 2017, which identified a lack of national leadership on loneliness and a limited evidence base.[17] Since then, in 2023, government said they made good progress delivering against all departmental commitments and would continue to work towards the three objectives outlined above. One example of learning over time has been the launch of the *Know Your Neighbourhood Fund*, launched in January 2023, which invests in volunteering opportunities in disadvantaged areas, after evidence showed the positive impact that volunteering can have to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

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14   Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, A Connected Society, October 2018, p. 2.
15   Campaign to End Loneliness, The State of Loneliness 2023, June 2023, p. 3.
16   Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Government's work on tackling loneliness, June 2023.
17   Jo Cox Loneliness Commission, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time, December 2017.

Definitions

Loneliness – The Campaign to End Loneliness defined loneliness as 'a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those that we want.'[18]

Social Isolation – The Campaign to End Loneliness defined social isolation as 'the level and frequency of one's social interactions'. It is defined as 'having few social relationships or infrequent social contact with others'.[19]

The loneliness strategy has successfully worked towards the objectives it outlined in 2018. The evidence base has grown significantly through the work of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and organisations such as What Works Wellbeing and the Campaign to End Loneliness. Public messaging on loneliness has reached the ears of millions of people, with an aim of reducing stigma, perhaps most emphatically seen in The Prince and Princess of Wales broadcasting a message on loneliness and mental health over radio to nine per cent of the population in May 2022.[20]

However, given that loneliness continues to increase, there is a limit to how much the current strategy will tackle the root causes of the loneliness problem. The strategy helps illuminate the problem of loneliness in society but can do very little in its current format to reduce it and tackle the root causes.

For example, in February 2024, the government launched a new campaign to address the stigma around loneliness in young people, bringing together celebrities from Made in Chelsea and Love Island among others to talk about their experiences of loneliness and encourage others to do the same.[21] The good intentions are undeniable of those involved working on this initiative, and in all likelihood, it will help some people who watch the videos; although at the time of writing several videos published on the DCMS YouTube had as few as 111 views.[22] Addressing stigma does not help to tackle the root cause of loneliness. Reducing stigma cannot be the end goal of the government's loneliness strategy, it must instead be a means to an end with a concerted campaign of solutions that aim to build connection and community across the UK to reduce the prevalence of loneliness, not just its stigma.

Over 2024, the CSJ will be publishing four reports outlining what government can do to foster connection and community across the UK. This report marks the second in this series. To reverse the concerning trends in loneliness and social isolation, government must act on its root causes. This starts with recognising the acute causes of loneliness in older people.

There is a financial incentive to tackling loneliness in older people. A study by the London School of Economics found that the cost to health and social care services of severe loneliness in older people is in excess of £6,000 per person.[23] Measures to tackle loneliness in older people could provide a return

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18   Campaign to End Loneliness, Facts and statistics about loneliness, n.d. Accessed: https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/facts-and-statistics/.

19   Ibid.

20   Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Tackling loneliness annual report March 2023: the fourth year, March 2023.

21   Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Celebrities and influencers join forces to tackle loneliness, February 2024. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/celebrities-and-influencers-join-forces-to-tackle-loneliness.

22   https://www.youtube.com/shorts/6RsTz7Qmnoc as of 10 July 2024.

23   London School of Economics and Political Science, Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review, September 2017, p. 6.

on investment of up to £3 for every £1 invested.[24] Researchers found that over five years preventing loneliness could see a saving of £3.6 million.[25]

It is time for a refreshed loneliness and social isolation strategy that builds on the successes of the 2018 strategy, but pivots towards meaningful action to address the root causes of loneliness in society.

There is a consensus across the third sector that the government needs to launch a new refreshed strategy on loneliness. In 2023, over one hundred organisations including Age UK, Campaign to End Loneliness, British Red Cross, The Cares Family and The Jo Cox Foundation joined together to call for a new strategy and a dedicated Minister for Loneliness.[26] In January 2024, Lilian Greenwood MP, the then shadow minister responsible for loneliness, asked in the House of Commons what the government had done to prepare for a refreshed national strategy, paving the way for a wider review under the new government.[27]

The CSJ supports calls for a refreshed strategy that recognises the importance of tackling the acute and complex causes of loneliness in older people. It should include measurable commitments to address the six major challenges outlined in this report that cause and perpetuate loneliness in older people. This strategy must be cross-departmental as tackling the root causes of loneliness will require action by every part of government, as well as in local and devolved authorities.

Recommendation 1

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should launch a refreshed loneliness strategy that builds upon *A Connected Society* and the progress made in raising awareness, reducing stigma and expanding the evidence base. A refreshed loneliness strategy must be centred on tackling the root causes of loneliness. It must recognise the importance of addressing the acute and complex causes of loneliness in older people. It should include measurable commitments to address the six challenges outlined in this report that cause and perpetuate loneliness in older people.

This report is structured in two parts. Part One examines the immediate challenges causing and perpetuating loneliness in older people. Part Two outlines what the government can do to tackle long-term and cultural causes of loneliness in older people. Findings from our bespoke polling are threaded throughout this report.

This report is informed by visits and interviews with 16 CSJ Alliance grassroots charity and social enterprise leaders across the UK and five lived experience focus groups held across the West Midlands. Polling was conducted by Whitestone Insight in April 2024 using a nationally representative sample of 2,066 adults from across the UK.

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24 Ibid, p. 4.
25 BBC, Loneliness: The cost of the 'last taboo', September 2017. Accessed: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-41349219#:~:text=For%20 a%20decade%20of%20an,and%20higher%20risks%20of%20dementia.
26 British Red Cross, A new call to action: Tackling loneliness and building community, 2023.
27 Lilian Greenwood, Lilian challenges Government on Loneliness Strategy, January 2024. Accessed: https://www.liliangreenwood.co.uk/ news/2024/01/18/lilian-challenges-government-on-loneliness-strategy/.

Are Older People Lonely?

The UK is lonelier than ever before. 58 per cent of adults say that they feel lonely often, most or some of the time. This equates to 31.4 million people.[28] The proportion saying they are lonely rises to 70 per cent of 18–24-year-olds. Polling results can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1: How often do you feel lonely?

How often do you feel lonely	All adults (%)	18-24 (%)	65+ (%)	70+ (%)	75+ (%)
Never or hardly ever	40	27	57	60	68
Some of the time	38	36	31	29	19
Often	11	20	7	7	7
Most of the time	9	14	5	4	6
Don't know	1	2	n.d	1	n.d
Prefer not to say	1	1	n.d	n.d	n.d
Lonely at least some of the time	**58**	**70**	**43**	**40**	**32**

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Our polling finds that older people are the least lonely in Britain. Just 32 per cent of those aged 75 or over said they felt lonely at least some of the time. There is a rising trend in loneliness as age cohorts progress, with younger people saying they are the loneliest, and older people being the least likely to admit to any feelings of loneliness. This pattern can be seen below in Figure 1 which shows the percentage of adults by age cohort who said they feel lonely most of the time or often.

Figure 1: Age of adults who said they feel lonely most of the time or often.
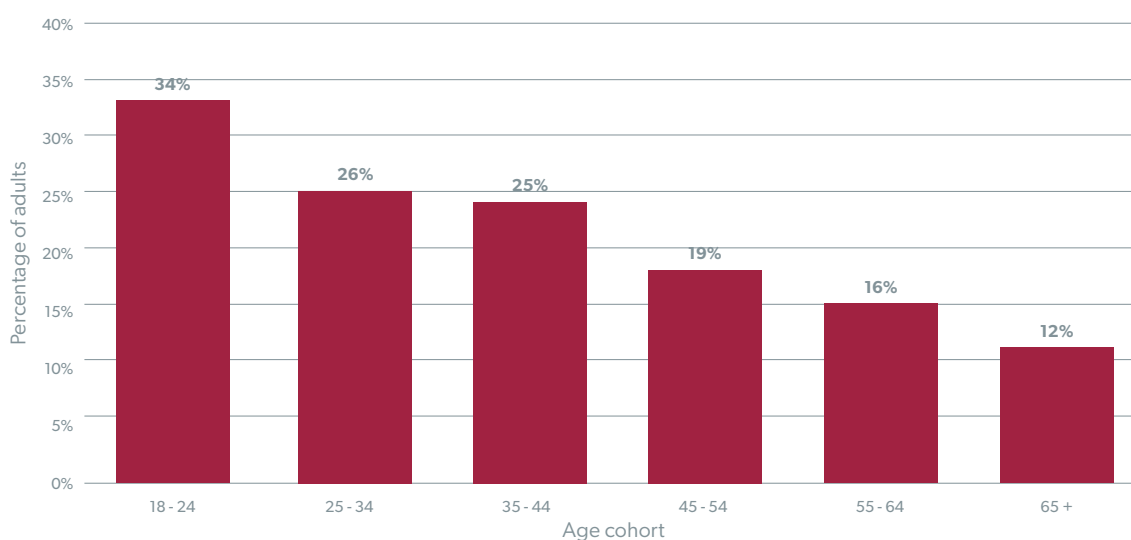
Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

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28   Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, July 2024.

CSJ polling findings that show older people as being the least lonely age cohort in society are also reflected in other national surveys. For example, the Community Life Survey shows that for 2021/22, older people were less likely than younger people to say they felt lonely. 10 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds said they felt lonely often or always, compared to five per cent of those aged 75 and over. [29]

Our polling also asked people what their experiences of loneliness felt like to obtain a snapshot of the manifestation and intensity of loneliness across the UK. This allowed us to understand the nature of loneliness in the country, not just how often people experience it.

Table 2: How loneliness presents across the population and age groups.

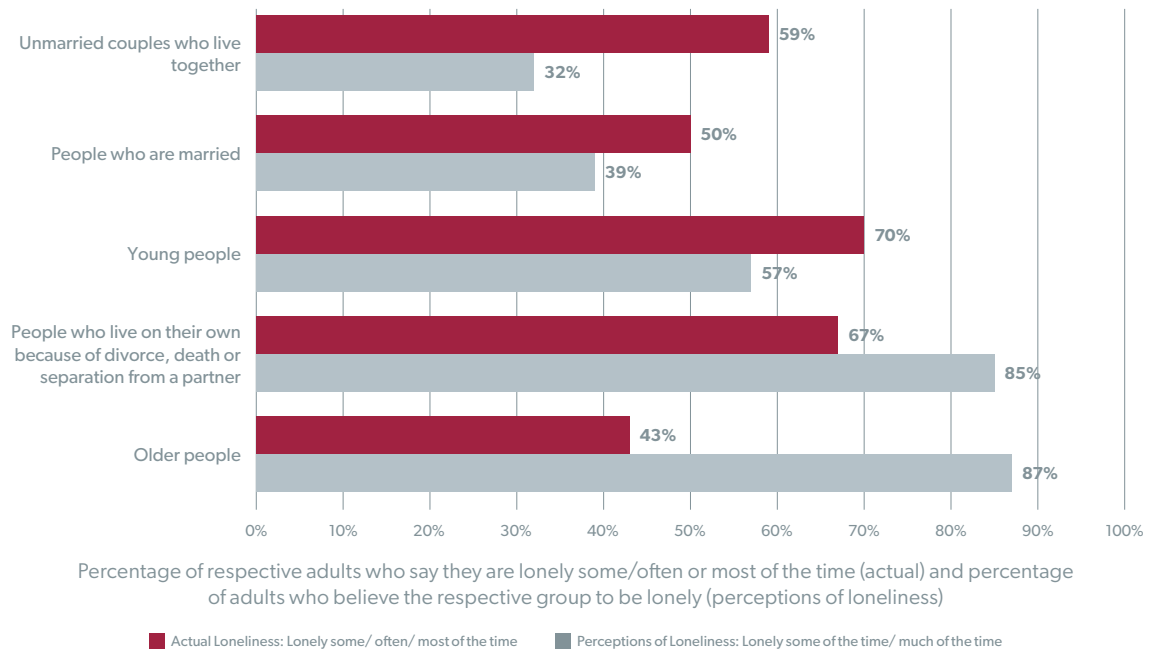| Which statements best describe your personal experience of loneliness	All adults (%)	65+ (%)	70+ (%)	75+ (%)
I would like to have more meaningful relationships in my life	30	16	16	14
I feel I don't have enough high-quality social connections	26	14	10	8
I often feel a fundamental separateness from other people and the wider world	22	13	13	12
I have a general feeling of loneliness that often comes and goes	35	24	23	20
I feel particularly lonely at certain times or occasions, like birthdays, or Christmas	18	13	13	9
None of these/Other	31	51	56	61
Prefer not to say	2	1	2	2

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Table 2 shows that the most common experience of loneliness was a transient feeling that comes and goes, with 35 per cent of the population saying they experience this. Older people are the least likely to say they have any feelings of loneliness. Indeed, well over half of older people aged 75 plus said they do not feel any of the descriptions of loneliness listed. For the adult population as a whole, just 31 per cent said the same. These results show a significant divergence in reported loneliness between the adult population as a whole and older people.

These findings clearly refute the stereotype that older people are the loneliest group in society. The adult population vastly overestimates the loneliness of older people. When the CSJ asked adults who they thought were lonely groups in society, 87 per cent of adults thought most older people were lonely at least some of the time. In reality, just 43 per cent of older adults aged 65 plus said this. These results can be seen below in Figure 2.

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29   Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2021/22: Reference tables, February 2023.

Figure 2: Perceptions of loneliness crossed with actual loneliness.

Percentage of respective adults who say they are lonely some/often or most of the time (actual) and percentage of adults who believe the respective group to be lonely (perceptions of loneliness)

■ Actual Loneliness: Lonely some/ often/ most of the time   ■ Perceptions of Loneliness: Lonely some of the time/ much of the time

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

As well as associating older people with loneliness, most adults surveyed hold negative views about what it will be like to grow old. The CSJ asked adults 'what words come to mind when you think about old age?' The majority of answers were negative, with loneliness and lonely two of the most prominent associations, alongside, health, death, illness and retirement.

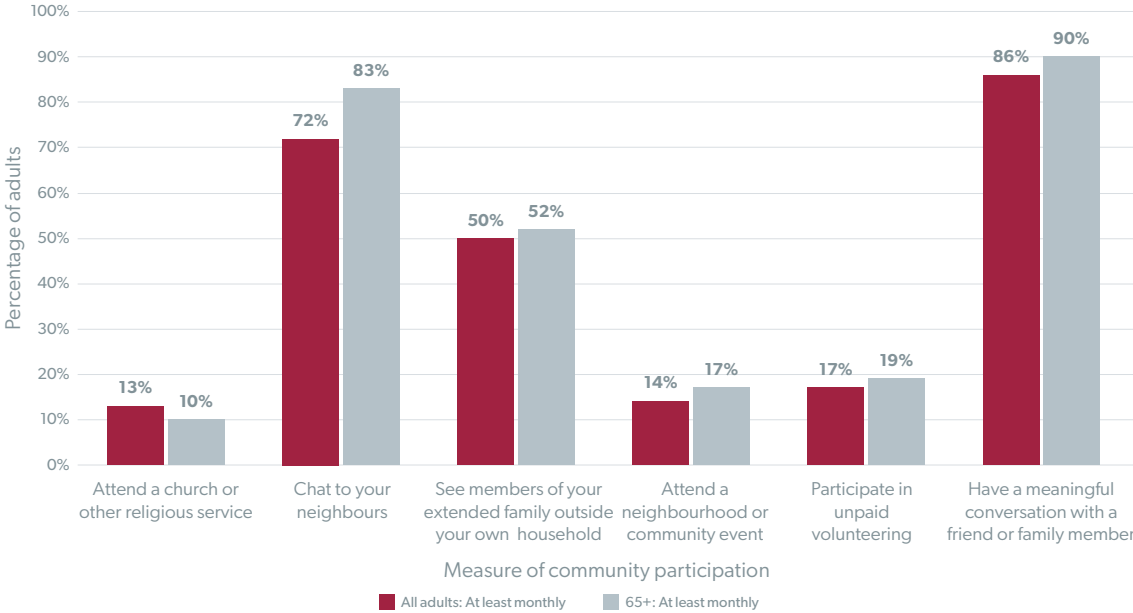*Figure 3: What words come to mind when you think about old age?*

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

The reality and perceptions of loneliness in old age do not match. However, negative perceptions demonstrate the need for a positive view of later life, as well as for policies which prevent the risk of loneliness and social isolation that so many adults associate with growing old.

Why do older people say they are less lonely? Firstly, there may be an underreporting of loneliness in older age cohorts due to a cultural hesitation to share emotions and feelings. Frontline charity leaders told the CSJ that older people are less likely to admit feelings of loneliness than younger generations due to a more reserved outlook on life. The NHS are to the point when they openly state on their website that *"older people tend not to ask for help because they have too much pride."*[30]

Secondly, it is worth asking the question: what can we learn from older people? Older people are more likely to be engaged in community life and purposeful participation that protects against loneliness. CSJ polling found that older people are more likely to chat to their neighbours (83 per cent), see members of their extended family (52 per cent), attend a neighbourhood or community event (17 per cent), participate in unpaid volunteering (19 per cent) and have a meaningful conversation with a friend or family member (90 per cent) than the rest of the adult population.

Figure 4: How often do you do the following activities?

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Our results build on analysis conducted by the Centre for Ageing Better that shows older people aged 65-74 have the highest monthly volunteering rates and a greater sense of satisfaction and belonging to their local area than younger people.[31]

The CSJ has previously shown that purposeful participation in community life leads to a sense of responsibility and belonging to people and places.[32] Purposeful participation reduces feelings of

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30 NHS, Loneliness in older people, August 2022. Accessed: https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symp-toms/loneliness-in-older-people/.
31 Centre for Ageing Better, State of Ageing 2023-24, March 2024. Accessed: https://ageing-better.org.uk/society-state-ageing-2023-4.
32 Centre for Social Justice, Community Capital, 2019, p. 34.

loneliness, contributes to human flourishing and wellbeing. The idea that purposeful participation in communities enables human flourishing is not new. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) asks people if they have someone to rely on; their belonging to a neighbourhood; volunteering; and their participation in arts, culture and sports, to measure wellbeing.[33]

Older people are engaged in purposeful participation, on average, more than the adult population. Government measures GDP as an indicator of economic growth. It is right that government also measures participation in community as an indicator of wellbeing and belonging, as what gets measured gets done.

The ONS measures volunteering and participation in sports, arts and culture through the Understanding Society Survey of 40,000 households. This survey gives helpful national insights into broad categories of participation. However, there are many more expressions of purposeful participation that differ across regions of the country, that cannot be fully captured by a national survey. Given that participation in community is place based, local authorities are a key enabler of this agenda and should be empowered to invest in their local social infrastructure. To enable local authorities to better understand the local social fabric and make investments that promote purposeful participation, they should be made responsible for capturing data on levels of participation in social infrastructure to submit to central government.

Recommendation 2

Government must measure what matters. Government should be placed under a statutory duty to improve the wellbeing of the nation through boosting purposeful participation at a local level. This should begin with measuring what matters. Local authorities should be made responsible for capturing data on levels of participation in social infrastructure – which may differ in kind depending on the place – allowing central government to monitor the social fabric across the nation.

The data submitted by local authorities will indicate progress towards improving purposeful participation. Gauging national policy against the data provided will drive government activity across every department to incentivise the strengthening of local relationships, as well as investment in local authorities for the purposes of improving levels of participation to deliver on this new national outcome.

Whilst this recommendation would place government under a statutory duty to boost purposeful participation, to be successful, it requires each and every individual and family to reflect on the responsibilities and duties they owe their local community. In his inaugural address, the then President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, proclaimed: "*Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.*"[34] It is difficult to imagine any politician today making a similar point about the duties that individuals owe to the common good. But at a time when the government lacks money to spend on public goods, in part due to the expansive role that the state is expected to

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33   Office for National Statistics, UK Measures of National Well-being user guide, May 2024. Accessed: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulation-andcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/ukmeasuresofnationalwellbeinguserguide.

34   National Archives, President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (1961), n.d. Accessed: https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/presi-dent-john-f-kennedys-inaugural-address.

play in the lives of its people in the 21st century, it is right that politicians again begin to speak about the moral duty that each individual and family has to their community and nation.

Purposeful participation helps to protect against loneliness, and older people are more likely than other generations to be engaged in their communities. However, the remainder of this report is concerned with addressing the reasons behind the loneliness reported by 43 per cent of older adults and providing practical solutions to government on how they can continue the mission outlined in *A Connected Society.*

The challenges that face older people are acute and worthy of analysis. There are six key challenges for government to address to tackle loneliness in older people. The first three challenges: regarding public transport, digital exclusion and housing can begin to be solved within the government's first term. The following three challenges: regarding family, intergenerational engagement and retirement are decades in the making and will also require a cultural change. These challenges will be more complex for government to solve and should be considered part of its strategy for a decade of national renewal.

Part One:
Immediate Challenges

There are three immediate challenges for government that are causing and perpetuating loneliness amongst older people. Public transport, digital exclusion and housing. At present, policy failures within each area are contributing to and exacerbating loneliness in later life.

A decade long decline in bus routes has left many older people at risk of social isolation. Older people are the most likely to be digitally excluded and cut off from the social opportunities of the internet. The housing crisis is a result of a broken planning system that cannot deliver the right number of good quality homes for older people. These challenges are urgent and must be dealt with quickly. This chapter outlines recommendations for government to adopt that would begin to turn the tide and deliver a brighter future for older people in Britain.

Public Transport

Public transport is used by people of all ages. In the year ending March 2023, there were 3.4 billion passenger journeys made by travelling on local buses in England, a 19.3 per cent increase from the year ending March 2022.[35] 17–20-year-olds use buses the most, followed by 21–29-year-olds. Older people aged 70 plus are the third most likely to use buses in England.[36]

Many older people are dependent on public transport for daily tasks and social opportunities. In 2022, Age UK outlined how 30 per cent of over 65s take a bus at least once a week.[37] They also highlighted challenges within the current public transport system. For example, Age UK found that 66 per cent of older people cannot reach a hospital within 30 minutes by public transport.[38]

There are several national public transport concessions available to older and disabled people. For those of retirement age, an older person's bus pass grants free travel across England and Wales. In London and Wales, adults over the age of 60 have access to a bus pass.[39] National Rail also offers a Senior Railcard which discounts ticket prices by one third.[40] The London Freedom Pass gives residents over 66 free travel in the capital.[41]

Despite the cost to the state of providing concessionary travel for older people, it has been shown to save the government money in the long-term. In 2017, KPMG found that for every £1 spent

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35   Department for Transport, Annual bus statistics: year ending March 2023 (revised), 19 March 2024.
36   Ibid.
37   Age UK, Policy Position Paper: Public transport (England), December 2022.
38   Ibid.
39   Gov.UK, Apply for an older person's bus pass, n.d. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass.
40   Senior Railcard, n.d. Accessed: https://www.senior-railcard.co.uk/.
41   London Councils, Freedom Pass, n.d. Accessed: https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/freedom-pass.

on concessionary travel for older and disabled people, £3.80 was returned in economic, social and environmental benefits.[42]

University College London (UCL) found that older adults who own a concessionary bus pass are more likely to report better quality of life, greater life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms than peers who do not have the benefits of free bus travel.[43]

CSJ polling found that older people were more likely to value accessible transport than the adult average. Older people aged over 65, 70 and 75 said that accessible transport was more important to them than safety or going on holiday, rising with age. This is different to what the general adult population imagined would be most important to them in later life, going on holiday more and safety. Accessible transport rises as a concern as the age cohorts progress, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Thinking about what life might be like in later life (70 plus), what do you expect will matter most to you?
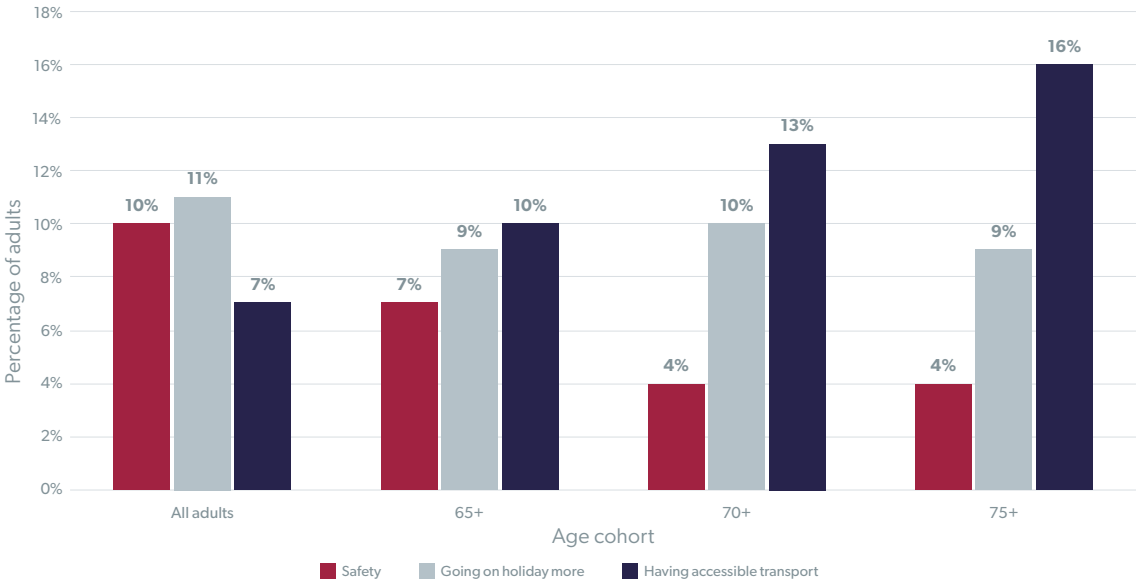
Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Note: Respondents were given a maximum of three choices out of 13 possible answers.

42   KPMG, The 'true value' of local bus services, June 2017, pp. 1-2.
43   UCL, Bus passes linked to increased happiness for older adults, 1 May 2019. Accessed: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/may/bus-passes-linked-increased-happiness-older-adults.

Public Transport Connections Are Important for Protecting Against Loneliness

Public transport connections are important for protecting against loneliness, particularly for older people. In a systematic review of transport and loneliness, which included 188,850 participants, researchers found an association between transport and loneliness in older age groups.[44] This association was more often reported for those living in remote and rural areas. A key transition point in old age which could contribute to loneliness was the point at which a person gave up driving.[45]

Revival North Yorkshire, a charity located in the heart of rural North Yorkshire, that works across a number of small and isolated villages that often lack regular bus and train connections, said that poor public transport connections and giving up driving contributed to feelings of loneliness.

> *"The main reason for beginning the organisation was the loneliness of older people…when people get older, they don't have the transport to get out…there are no buses in most villages, there are some trains that go through once or twice a day. There are no taxis…transport is a massive issue."*
>
> *"The older people in our area are stuck once they stop driving…the villages are on really steep hills, people's mobility decreases."*
>
> Charity Leader, Revival North Yorkshire.

The charity Sustrans has showed how public transport is not just important for getting to a place where social connections can be made, but that the process of travelling on public transport could also facilitate social connection and reduce feelings of loneliness. In the report referenced above, Sustrans quote the following from a study on loneliness and transport: "*Waiting at bus stops and being on the bus were, it was widely agreed, one of the few places in the city where it was acceptable to engage strangers in conversation.*" Particularly for older people who are more willing to engage in conversations with strangers,[46] these points of connection on public transport can be very important for feeling connected to others.

The 2018 loneliness strategy highlighted the importance of transport for enabling social connection. At that time, government pledged to create a transport network that supports people's social connections by investing in transport infrastructure, community transport, and by partnering with local transport services to explore ways in which loneliness could be tackled.[47]

The *Tackling loneliness with transport fund* was a welcome initiative which built on the 2018 strategy. The fund offered grant funding to the public and charity sectors to run pilot transport schemes that aimed to reduce loneliness. The Department for Transport's (DfT) website says that results are currently being evaluated.[48] However, DfT correspondence with the CSJ during the pre-election period revealed that the team working on the project were disbanded shortly after its conclusion in July 2023.[49]

The DfT should publish the evaluation of the *Tackling loneliness with transport fund* and commit to continuing the scheme if shown to effectively tackle loneliness. Furthermore, the Connectivity Tool, a project currently funded by the *Shared Outcomes Fund,* should be strengthened. Currently, the Connectivity Tool aims to combine transport and location data to generate a measure of the transport

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44   Sustrans and University of St Andrews, Final report on loneliness and transport systematic review, 30 June 2021.

45   Ibid, p. 24.

46   Victor, C., Yen, D., "Happy to chat – promoting talking to strangers in public places in the UK", *Innovation in Aging,* 7:1 (December 2023), 1051.

47   Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, A Connected Society, October 2018, pp. 40-41.

48   Department for Transport, Tackling loneliness with transport fund, 23 May 2022. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tack-ling-loneliness-with-transport-fund.

49   Department for Transport, correspondence with the CSJ, 13 June 2024.

connectedness of any location in the country.[50] To demonstrate its commitment to building a transport network that supports people's social connections, the DfT should ensure that this tool can also map the connectivity between people's homes and social infrastructure, such as café's, churches, charities and societies. This would help to measure particular places' access to social infrastructure and alert government to areas where transport connectivity is lacking.

Recommendation 3

The Department for Transport should continue its commitment to create a transport network that supports people's social connections by:

a. Ensuring the Connectivity Tool, currently funded by the *Shared Outcomes Fund*, will measure the nature of social isolation and places' connectedness to community assets, not just homes, jobs and services.

b. Publishing the evaluation of the *Tackling loneliness with transport fund* with a commitment to continuing the scheme if shown to effectively tackle loneliness. The Department for Transport should ringfence a percentage of funding for small and medium sized charities with an income under £2 million per year.

The Decline in Bus Routes Has Contributed to the Loneliness Crisis

Buses are a particularly important form of public transport as they are used by those on lower incomes more than those on higher incomes, who tend to use cars and trains more.[51] A lack of bus routes was named as a key cause of loneliness in older people. The charity B: Friend said the problem was not a lack of social opportunities but being able to travel to them.

> *"The women I'm connected with says we want people from the outer areas of town to come in but the problem is getting them in. The transport is so poor. In one area, the buses don't run after 5pm because of anti-social behaviour because of the young people. So, people can't go home from work and people don't want to go out onto the streets, you know so transport is tricky."*
>
> *"Buses have slowly got worse and worse over the last 20 years".*
>
> Charity Leader, B:Friend, South Yorkshire.

A Connected Society gives government a framework for building a public transport system that tackles loneliness. Despite some positive initiatives, such as the *Tackling loneliness with transport fund*, the broader context of the decline in the quality of public transport, particulary in the bus network, is concerning and has meant that the objectives set out in the loneliness strategy have not been met.

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50   HM Treasury, Shared Outcomes Fund Round 3, November 2023, p. 14.
51   National Centre for Social Research, Transport and inequality: An evidence review for the Department for Transport, 10 July 2019, p. 9.

An analysis by Friends of the Earth and the University of Leeds of bus timetables over 15 years, prior to 2023, found that whilst London managed to maintain a constant level of bus provision, other parts of the country have seen declines of more than two-thirds.[52] Particularly in rural areas, the decline in bus routes has left many unable to access social connections and enjoy the relationships that are essential to human flourishing.

Charities told the CSJ how many older people are using expensive taxis as an alternative to buses or community transport. In the North East of England, Churches Together South Tyneside told the CSJ how they were reliant on accessible taxis in the area to ferry older people to social events. They spoke positively of their relationship with taxi companies, despite there only being very few wheelchair accessible vehicles.

In Leicester, one of the service users at Reaching People told the CSJ how they were dependent on taxis to get them to social engagements, which was costing them £35 for each trip. In the past, this service user was able to access a community transport provider which would take her into the city centre. After the centre closed down, she had no choice but to resort to taxis that were wheelchair accessible.

> *"Most important is a subsidised affordable transport system…they used to provide yellow buses for us, and it was free for us at that time, then the centre [a charity the service user used to attend] closed down and we had to go to other centres but with no transport. I am getting £5 for each journey and am paying £35 pound…"*
>
> Focus Group Participant, Reaching People, Leicester.

Some taxi companies serve older clients with mobility needs extremely well. This should be commended. But increased taxi use is not a long-term solution for older people's travel. It is an expensive substitute for a public transport system that is not serving the needs of older people.

The Labour Party recognised the failing state of bus routes in their manifesto, writing that *"Local communities have lost control over their bus routes. Fares have increased, routes have disappeared, and services are unreliable."*[53] Labour pledged to give local government the ability to franchise local bus services and lift the ban on municipal ownership of bus companies during the election campaign,[54] and the King's Speech announced a Better Buses Bill in July 2024.[55] This is a welcome move to improve bus services in the interest of local people. For example, London was excluded from bus deregulation in the 1980s and is the only region that has maintained service levels over the last 15 years.[56] When implemented, local authorities should put supporting social connection for older people at the heart of new plans for bus infrastructure.

Problems with public transport go beyond the number and frequency of routes. There are issues in how public transport infrastructure is designed that has a negative impact on older people. For example, B: Friend told the CSJ how bus stops without a seat or shelter were blamed by older people for contributing to a lack of confidence in using public transport.

B:Friend told the CSJ the issues in the design of public transport services and infrastructure.

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52   Friends of the Earth, How Britain's bus services have drastically declined, November 2023.
53   Labour Party, Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024, June 2024, p. 34.
54   Ibid, p. 34.
55   Prime Minister's Office: 10 Downing Street, The King's Speech 2024, July 2024. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-kings-speech-2024.
56   Friends of the Earth, How Britain's bus services have drastically declined, November 2023.

> *"The issue with transport is not just the vehicle, it's the bus stop without seats."*
>
> *"It's because of the vandalism that they're not willing to put a bus shelter in."*
>
> *"Older people are forgotten; they are not taken into account with planning."*
>
> *"There are surveys to gather thoughts for older people, but they are all online. They keep being asked to give their views, but nothing happens."*
>
> *"With the wheelchair buses, lots are tied to school runs, school runs get prioritised because school runs make more money."*
>
> **Conversation with Charity Leaders from B:Friend, South Yorkshire.**

Furthermore, when the CSJ sat in on a coffee morning hosted by an older people's charity, Search Newcastle, a man told us that he saw a lady fall over and break her hip on the bus after it pulled away too fast from a stop. He told the CSJ that there is a lack of accessible seats on buses for older people.

It is important that if local authorities or metro mayors choose to re-design bus services, through franchising or municipal companies, that the concerns of older people are considered during the design phase and that public infrastructure gives older people the confidence to access transport.

There has been different design guidance issued over time for bus shelters. Transport for London has led the way in this, publishing its latest design guidance in 2017.[57] However, there is no national guidance, and the CSJ heard how poorly designed bus shelters can contribute to a lack of confidence among older people to use buses. Government should work with local authorities to produce design guidance that can be used across the country, to ensure bus shelters help to promote public transport use.

Recommendation 4

The Department for Transport should work with local authorities to produce guidance for the design of bus shelters to ensure they are accessible for older people.

Community Transport

Whilst the decline in bus routes has contributed to loneliness amongst older people, communities have not remained passive observers of decline. As public transport deteriorated over the last decade, community transport run by small charities and social enterprises has appeared across the country as local people took travel needs into their own hands.

Community transport is transport provided by voluntary and community sector organisations, using a combination of volunteers and paid staff. It can range from formal Dial-A-Ride services, or small-scale schemes where people use their own cars to transport others.

The *Tackling loneliness with transport fund* was used by Leeds Older People's Forum to commission an electric taxi which could be used by members as a bookable community transport vehicle.[58] Despite

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57   Transport for London, Accessible Bus Stop Design Guidance, 2017.
58   Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Tackling Loneliness annual report March 2023: the fourth year, March 2023.

some help from government through this fund, only 12 organisations or local authorities received funding, and some just for delivering training opportunities, not for investing in actual transportation.[59]

Furthermore, the uplift to the *Bus Service Operators Grant* for community transport operators since 2020 has been a welcome commitment to the community transport sector, which provides vital services to socially isolated older people.[60]

Studies have shown an association between community transport and feelings of loneliness, especially when there is inadequate public or community transport options.[61] There is clearly great benefit to community transport schemes operating across the country, and even with a well-functioning public transport system, there will always be gaps that need filling by local people's initiative. However, charity leaders at B:Friend told the CSJ why community transport cannot be relied upon to plug the gaps in public transport provision to the degree it currently is.

> *"Some community transport can be good, when it works it's great, but they are very bound by geographic area and finance."*
>
> *"There are lots of crazy rules with community transport, if you live in front of the hospital you qualify for community transport, if you live at the back, you don't."*
>
> Charity Leader, B:Friend, South Yorkshire.

Arbitrary rules relating to where a person lives and the cost of financing community transport schemes were raised as problems. It is clear, that whilst there is enormous benefit to these schemes, community transport cannot replace public transport provision to the degree it has done.

The Community Transport Association has asked government to include community transport within key government schemes and strategies as well as fair, adequate and multi-year funding.[62] This comes alongside a manifesto of recommendations in their election report *A Better Future for Transport* on how the sector can be supported over the coming years.

In their manifesto, Labour pledged to develop a long-term strategy for transport.[63] Within this strategy should be a commitment to support people's social connections and tackling loneliness, as well as a commitment to work with the Community Transport Association to ensure necessary reforms are made to guarantee the future of the sector.

Recommendation 5

The Department for Transport's proposed long-term strategy for transport should include a loneliness test for how future transport improvements will help to tackle loneliness and connect socially isolated communities. The strategy should outline the importance of public transport for tackling social isolation and protecting against loneliness. Government should also work with the Community Transport Association to ensure that necessary reforms, outlined in *A Better Future for Transport*, are made to guarantee the future of the sector.

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59   CSJ analysis of Department for Transport, Tackling loneliness with transport fund: list of organisations awarded funding, May 2022. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-loneliness-with-transport-fund.

60   Community Transport Association, BSOG – Funding to support CT provision, 12 September 2023. Accessed: https://ctauk.org/bsog-funding-to-support-ct-provision/.

61   Sustrans and University of St Andrews, Final report on loneliness and transport systematic review, 30 June 2021, p. 25.

62   Community Transport Association, A Better Future for Transport, June 2024, p. 8.

63   Labour Party, Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024, June 2024 , p. 34.

Digital Exclusion

Digital exclusion refers to sections of the population not being able to use the internet in ways that are needed to participate fully in modern society.[64] CSJ research has shown that older people are one of two broad groups, alongside people on low incomes, who are the most likely to experience digital exclusion.[65] CSJ research has found that of all consumers, those aged over 65 make up just over 70 per cent of those who say they do not have access to the internet.[66]

Digital exclusion is also associated with loneliness. There is evidence that suggests greater efforts to foster digital inclusion can lead to reductions of loneliness in older people.[67] The British Psychological Society has found that the lower a person's digital skills, the lonelier they are likely to be and the poorer their mental and emotional wellbeing, although this association is stronger in under 65s.[68]

In *Left Out: How To Tackle Digital Exclusion and Reduce the Poverty Premium*, the CSJ recommended that government set out a new Digital Inclusion Strategy.[69] Alongside the recommendations outlined in *Left Out*, government should also recognise the importance of digital inclusion for tackling loneliness and social isolation.

Recommendation 6

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should set out a new Digital Inclusion Strategy. A new strategy should recognise the importance of digital inclusion for protecting against loneliness and include measurable commitments for supporting older people to learn the necessary digital skills for engaging in society.

Encouragingly, the *UK Consumer Digital Index 2023* highlighted that older people are closing the gap with other age groups in digital literacy.[70] 71 per cent of people aged 65 plus had the essential digital skills for life in 2022, which had risen to 80 per cent in 2023.[71]

However, there is still more to do. As per Figure 6, older people over the age of 60 are much more likely (12 per cent) to say that they haven't improved their digital skills in the last 12 months despite feeling like they needed improving.[72] This contrasts to just four per cent of 18–24-year-olds who say the same.

64   House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, Digital exclusion, 29 June 2023. Accessed: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldcomm/219/21905.htm.
65   Centre for Social Justice, Left Out, August 2023, p. 9.
66   Ibid, p. 10.
67   Welch, V., et al, "Digital interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness in older adults: An evidence and gap map", *Campbell Systematic Reviews,* 19:4 (December 2023), e1369.
68   The British Psychological Society, Research finds link between digital skills, isolation and loneliness, 21 February 2024. Accessed: https://www.bps.org.uk/news/research-finds-link-between-digital-skills-isolation-and-loneliness.
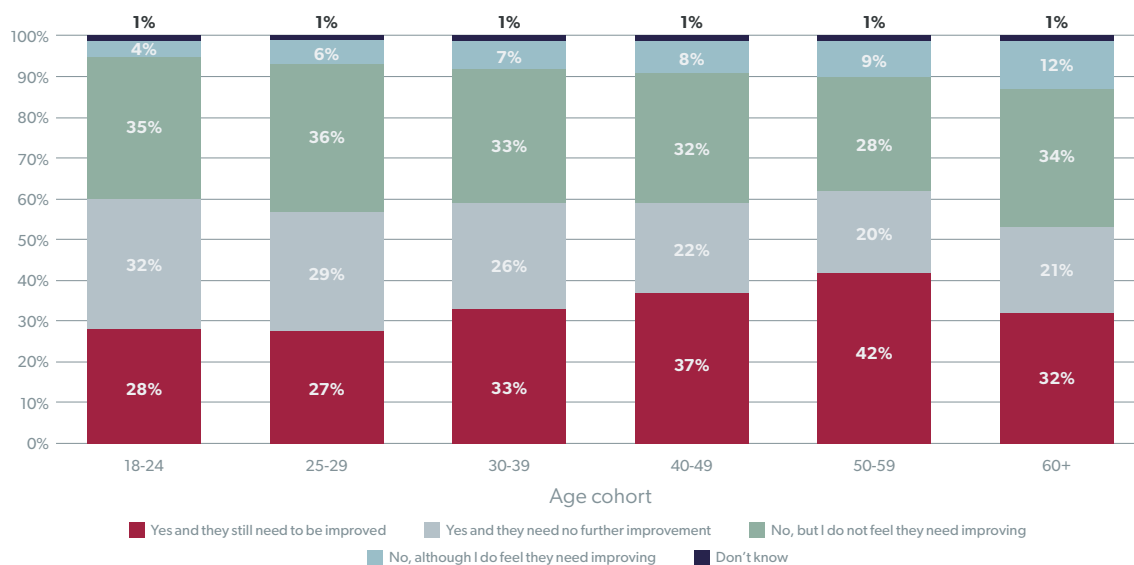69   Centre for Social Justice, Left Out, August 2023, p. 37.
70   Lloyds Bank, 2023 Consumer Digital Index, November 2023, p. 4.
71   Ibid, p. 47.
72   Ibid, p. 33.

Figure 6: Do you think your digital skills have improved in the last 12 months, split by age, 2023.

Source: 2023 Consumer Digital Index, CSJ recreation of Figure 29, p. 33. n = 2,591.

Furthermore, CSJ analysis of Understanding Society (the UK Household Longitudinal Study) has found that one in four people aged 75 plus say they never use the internet, compared to just over 15 per cent of those aged 65 plus. Whether or not older people use the internet frequently depends on how old they are. People aged 65 plus tend to use the internet several times a day (35 per cent of those aged 65 plus), but only 26 per cent of people aged 75 plus use the internet several times a day.

Figure 7: Frequency of internet use.
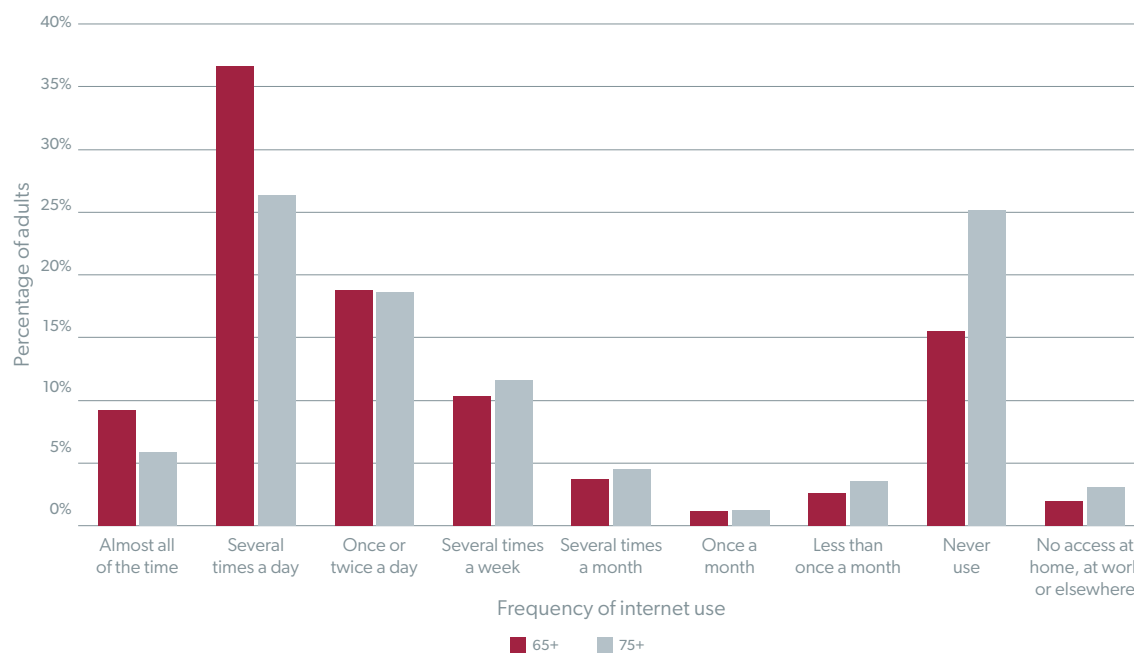
Source: CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.

It is important to recognise that adequate digital skills are not just important for accessing public services and economic opportunities. In the modern world, they are vital for being able to connect with others. Whilst digital connection is no substitute for in-person relationships, a basic proficiency is required to overcome social isolation.

Digital technology is affecting young and old differently. There is evidence to suggest that young people are spending too much time on digital devices and not enough within meaningful in-person communities, which is having a negative impact on their mental health and loneliness. A study from the United States looking at the rollout of Facebook at college campuses found that access to Facebook led to an increase in severe depression by seven per cent and anxiety levels by 20 per cent.[73] UCL researchers analysing the UK Millenium Cohort Study found that adolescents using social media for three hours or more a day were more likely to show signs of depression at age 14, compared to their peers who used it less often.[74] Furthermore, a 2023 study of adults in Norway, the UK, USA and Australia found that more time spent on social media was associated with more loneliness.[75]

For some older people, the opposite is true. Access to digital devices and social media can reduce feelings of loneliness. Lacking the necessary digital skills to engage fully in society means some older people are cut off from the social opportunities that technology and social media affords. For example, CSJ analysis has found that there is a statistically significant relationship between having a smartphone and loneliness in older people.[76] Older people are more likely to be lonely if they do not have a smartphone than if they do. Our analysis shows that 20 per cent of older people aged 65 plus who do not own smartphones say they are lonely, whereas only 15 per cent of older people aged 65 plus who own a smartphone say they are lonely. Results are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Loneliness and smartphone ownership.

	Not Lonely (%)	Lonely (%)
Smartphone	85	15
No smartphone	80	20

Source: CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.

Being proficient in modern technology, like knowing how to use a smartphone, is important for preventing loneliness in older people. There are clear benefits for older people in being able to use digital devices that allow them to connect with others.

In focus groups, older people spoke of the revolutionary impact that digital skills had on their quality of life, whilst young people were much more likely to report negative associations with technology.

The CSJ visited the charity Zink in Buxton who work with people in crisis to deal with problems and plan a future. At a focus group session, younger service users all under the age of 65 told the CSJ the following:

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73   Braghieri, L., Levy, R., Makarin., Social Media and Mental Health, September 2021.
74   CLS RSS, Initial Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study Age 14 Sweep, May 2018.
75   Bonsaksen, T., et al., "Associations between social media use and loneliness in a cross-national population: do motives for social media use matter?", *Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine,* 11:1 (January, 2023).
76   X-squared =8.174, df = 1, p-value = 0.00425.

"My point is that society is built to be anti-social, social media, phones, the internet, they are meant to keep us connected but they do the opposite."

"We live in a lot of fake stuff. People use social media to portray their lives but what's happening behind closed doors isn't what they're portraying."

"The best thing I ever did was completely come off social media if I'm honest, the best thing I did. It's been about two years now. Really great. Don't miss anything. Then when people see me, they're like, excited to see me because they don't know what's going on in my life. Do you know what I mean?"

"I was not allowed my phone in rehab for six months. That was the best time of my life. I was told not to use my phone. You have no choice but to socialise and my mental health was a lot better in there. And you come out, and you're back [on the phone] and it's consuming. I know what I need to do [come off my phone]."

Focus Group Participants, Zink, Buxton.

At Reaching People, a charity working with a variety of clients across Leicester, during a focus group with older people, service users told the CSJ the opposite. Their lives had been transformed by being taught digital skills.

"Because of all this technology nowadays, we have smartphones, we have tablets, and basically, some people are not that educated. There's a language problem as well. So, I think especially for the people, you know who are not educated, who don't know how to speak in English, and they can't use the phones, iPads, anything which they can communicate with. So, it's very difficult for them."

"When I had my operation, I couldn't walk. I then joined the Zoom. She [charity leader] introduced Zoom. So, the people could do all the exercises online because we were not allowed to go out [this was during the lockdown]. And then since I joined the Zoom, you know within a few months I started walking and with that, you know we're still carrying on every day…11 o'clock we have Zoom everyday just in the morning. Just to do exercise. If you don't want to go out, you can just do the Zoom."

"They're not technologically savvy, one good thing about COVID is that it's made people more aware of loneliness and isolation and the community is talking about it. The positive side of it, the Zoom, has given more life, you see the shine on their faces, these were the positive things of COVID."

"The elderly population at home, the worst problem is the technology, you know, like joining the Zoom sessions, if they, or their children supported them and got them a tablet and downloaded Zoom for them and educated them it would be better. So, [name of charity leader] and I did the same thing last year, we had specialist Zoom sessions on how to mute and unmute. We got a 90-year-old and an 85-year-old to join, it was nice to see the smile on their faces."

"Zoom programmes, they gave people so much confidence, I have seen the people who are very hesitant and now they are looking at Google and YouTube, because we teach them and help them, and they are doing everything themselves now…If you can do more online programmes this will help other people too."

Focus Group Participants, Reaching People, Leicester.

Small charities across the UK, like Reaching People, are helping to tackle loneliness in older people by teaching them the skills they need to get online. There is also a role for raising awareness amongst families about the importance of their older relatives being proficient in digital skills. Reaching People told the CSJ that their work of getting older service users to a place of digital proficiency could easily be done by family members if they sat down with an older relative and taught them.

Analysis by Age UK has found that the biggest barrier to using the internet more for over 75s is a lack of IT skills. 79 per cent of over 75s said that the biggest barrier to using the internet more was a lack of IT skills. Age UK highlights that the best way to help older people *"gain confidence and improve their IT skills is usually through ongoing support, tailored to their needs and preferences and delivered one-to-one."*[77] This is the exact approach of CSJ Alliance charity Reaching People and is what the government should be prioritising in their strategy to tackle digital exclusion among older people.

Recommendation 7

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should submit a joint bid to the *Shared Outcomes Fund* held by HM Treasury for a £10 million *Digital Champions Fund* to support new and ongoing work of small and medium sized charities who tackle digital exclusion amongst older people. Government should ringfence a percentage of funding for small and medium sized charities with an income under £2 million per year.

CSJ analysis has also shown that those on low incomes are the second group most likely to experience digital exclusion.[78] However, there is considerable overlap with 58 per cent of those on low incomes with no access to the internet at home aged 65 or over. To tackle digital exclusion amongst low income older people, government should reduce VAT on social tariffs, pending a guarantee from providers that savings will be passed to consumers. At 50 per cent take up, the CSJ estimates this would cost government £58 million per year in VAT loss.[79] Social tariff providers should be mandated to improve their social tariff speeds to match average speeds and take steps to help consumers compare commercial and social speeds to demonstrate their comparability. [80]

Recommendation 8

HM Treasury should reduce VAT on social tariffs to five per cent. At 50 per cent take up this would cost the Treasury circa £58 million per year.

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77   Age UK, Nearly two million over-75s in England are still digitally excluded in a COVID-19 world, 5 March 2021. Accessed: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2021/nearly-two-million-over-75s-in-england-are-still-digitally-excluded--in-a-covid-19-world/#:~:text=Much%20more%20investment%20in%20digital,access%20basic%20goods%20and%20services.

78   Centre for Social Justice, Left Out, August 2023, p. 9.

79   Ibid, p. 30.

80   Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 75.

Recommendation 9

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should mandate providers to improve their social tariff speeds to match average speeds.

Housing

The UK's housing market is under enormous pressure. There is a shortage of all types of homes which has contributed to a crisis in affordability, security of tenure and quality.[81] Housing for older people has not been spared from the housing crisis.

Research from Understanding Society has shown that over four million people (aged 55 plus) are actively seeking to move home, despite only a fraction actually moving.[82] The Centre for Ageing Better argue that the cost of moving home, the time it takes from start to finish and accessibility needs make moving less likely.[83] For example, just nine per cent of homes are considered accessible and suitable for wheelchair users.[84]

The UK's ageing society presents multiple challenges for government in how it manages the housing stock. The total number of adults aged 65 plus in the UK is predicted to increase from 13.2 million in 2023 to 17.4 million in 2043.[85] Respectively this represents a rise in the 65 plus population from 19.4 per cent to 24 per cent of the total population.[86]

The UK's demographic 'pyramid' is not actually a pyramid at all, but a pillar which will soon have a shrinking foundation. The child population aged under 15 is due to shrink as a total percentage of the UK population by 2043, from 18.7 per cent of the total population in 2023 to 17 per cent in 2043.[87] Those aged 85 and over will see the fastest increase over time.[88] In mid-2016, two per cent of the population was aged 85 and over.[89] By mid-2041, this will double to four per cent and by 2066 over treble to seven per cent.[90]

A rapidly ageing population presents challenges for housing. More houses will need to be suitable for an older population, particularly in regions with a higher percentage of older people. Figure 8 shows the projected rise in the population aged 65 and over by local authority.

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81   Centre for Social Justice, Two Nations, December 2023, p. 141.
82   Centre for Ageing Better, Locked Out: A New Perspective on Older People's Housing Choices, August 2023 ,p. 3.
83   Ibid, p. 11.
84   Ibid, p. 11.
85   CSJ analysis of National Population projections by single year of age via Nomis, 20th June 2024.
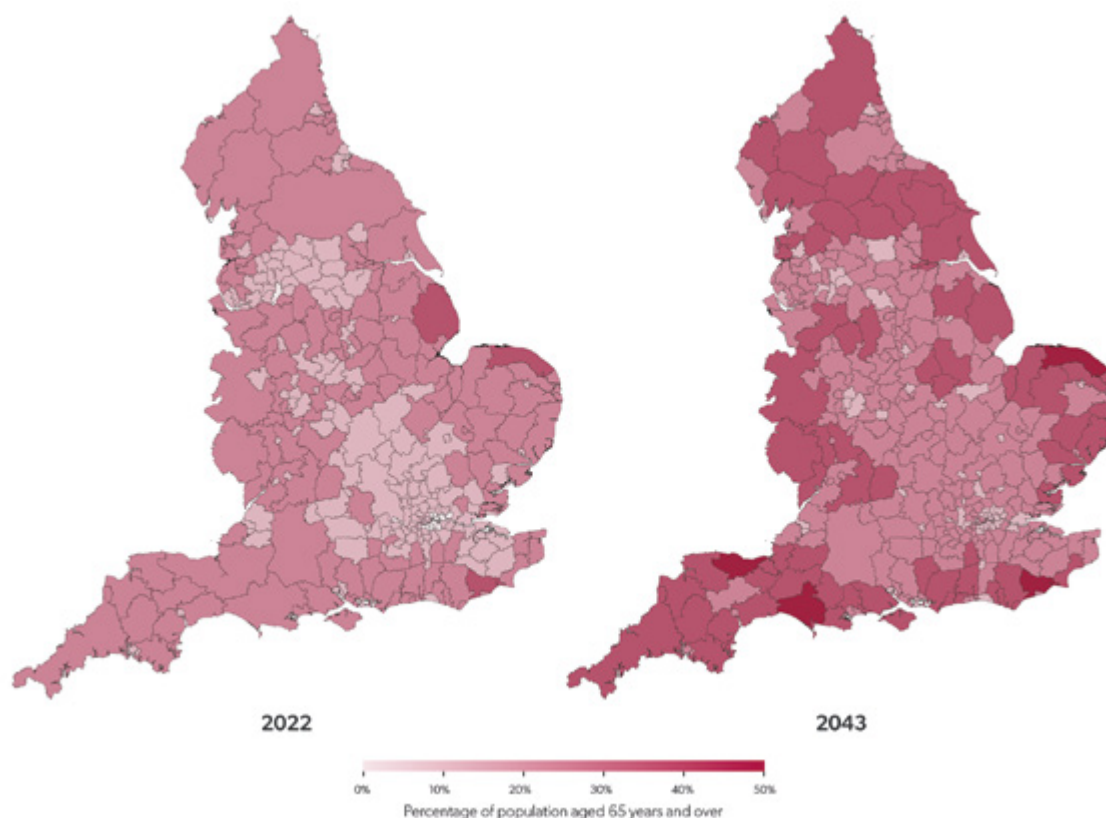86   Ibid.
87   Ibid.
88   Chief Medical Officer for England, Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2023: Health in an Ageing Society, November 2023, p. 23.
89   Ibid, p. 23.
90   Ibid, p. 23.

Figure 8: Map of England showing the projected rise in the percentage of population aged 65 years and over, 2022 to 2043.

Source: CSJ re-creation of Office for National Statistics, Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland: mid 2022, March 2024, Figure 2 and Office for National Statistics, Subnational population projections for England: 2018-based, March 2020, Figure 1.

As per Figure 8, rural and coastal areas are ageing at a faster rate than urban areas. Housing and infrastructure will need to be developed with this in mind over the coming decades. Britain's older population will be heavily concentrated in certain parts of the country. This has significant implications for the new Labour government's ambitions to reform the planning system and build 1.5 million new homes over the current parliament. Housing and communities will need to be designed for an ageing population and with adaptability in mind. This requires intervention to ensure the market is delivering homes for the long-term which are suitable for an older population, not just to satisfy short-term demand. In August 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched an open consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the planning system. Government's proposals for planning reform are almost entirely centred on driving economic growth through fixing long term structural problems within the planning system.[91] However, final proposals for reform to the NPPF should make reference to the UK's ageing population and the need to build and adapt homes that will be suitable for an older population. This will be fundamental to tackling loneliness among older people in the decades to come.

There are already significant problems within the housing market for older people. If these are not dealt with now, the challenges in the coming decades will be significantly difficult. As stated, fewer older people are moving out of homes than those who say they want to move. A significant number

91   Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, August 2024.

of these homes are under-occupied with spare bedrooms, which would be suitable for new families. As the International Longevity Centre has highlighted starkly, if everybody lived in homes appropriate in size, 50,000 fewer homes would need to be built each year.[92] It is important that homes are being built that are suitable for older people to move into in later life.

Good Homes Are Important for Protecting Against Loneliness

> *"Access problems make it difficult for elderly relatives to access homes."*
>
> Charity Leader, Kissing it Better, Midlands.

> *"I think when we look at things that are happening locally, we've recently seen residential homes for the elderly that have been closed because the agenda is to put people back into their own homes and provide community care. We had a home closing in Ibstock [a local town] where there had been residents that'd lived there for a number of years so had found community within that setting. But [since the care home closed down] they have now all had to leave and they're going to suffer increased isolation which is going to cause a decline in wellbeing and a decline in mental health."*
>
> Charity Leader, Coalville Can.

Having a suitable home is important for protecting against loneliness. In the *Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2023 – Health in an Ageing Society,* Professor Chris Whitty writes that many homes are unsuitable for older adults in areas where older people will constitute a higher percentage of the total population.[93] Whitty writes that: *"Where a person lives is fundamental to ensuring that they can remain healthy, active and independent in later life. Older people often spend a higher proportion of their time in homes than at other times in life. Unfortunately, millions of older people are living in homes that are cold, damp, prone to overheating, unsafe, or unsuitable for their needs, putting their health at risk."*[94]

The suitability of an older person's home will have an impact on their ability to remain independent and healthy in later life. The location of a home also matters for access to public transport and opportunities for social connection. Being able to maintain one's home is important for feeling confident to host friends and family. The Centre for Ageing Better make clear that the suitability of housing helps to maintain or improve physical and mental wellbeing, as well as social connections.[95]

Among older people aged 65 and over, maintaining independence was the third most popular response to the CSJ's polling question: 'Thinking about what life might be like in later life, what do you expect will matter most to you?' If respondents were this age, they selected what mattered most to them now. Maintaining good health and having sufficient income were the two most popular responses respectively, as shown below in Figure 9.

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92   International Longevity Centre, The Mayhew Review: Future-proofing retirement living, November 2022, p. 5.

93   Ibid, p. 204.

94   Ibid, p. 204.

95   Centre for Ageing Better, What's an Age-friendly Community?, n.d. Accessed: https://ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities/eight-do-mains#housing.

Figure 10: Thinking about what life might be like in later life (70 plus), what do you expect will matter most to you? If you are this age, please select what matters most to you now.
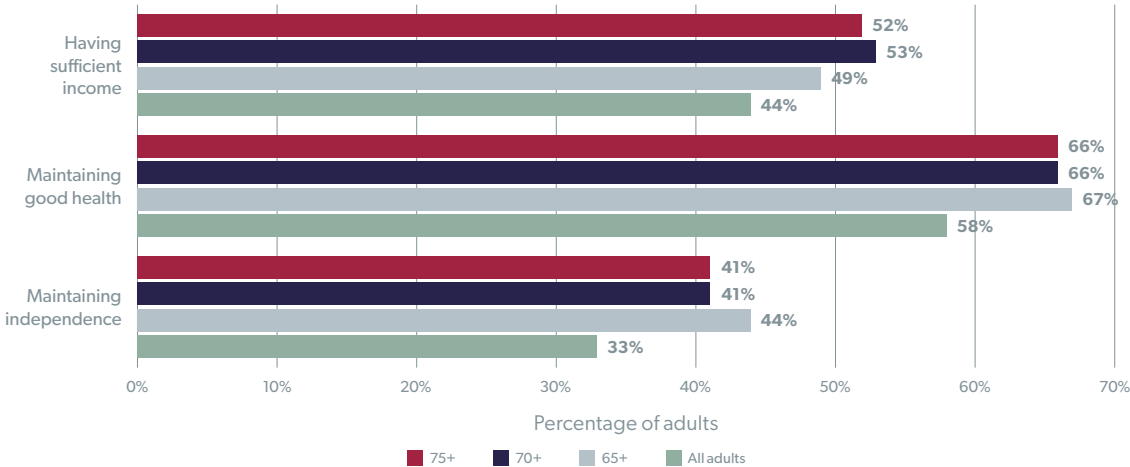
Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Notes: Respondents were given a maximum of three choices out of 13 possible answers.

Maintaining independence is an important priority for older people. Having suitable, good quality housing is an important element in guaranteeing the independence in later life that older people value.

There are different forms of housing for older people, and there will be different types of tenure which will be suitable for people dependent on their needs and choices. Age UK list several types of housing options for older people on their website. For example, older people could choose to adapt their current home or move into housing types such as sheltered accommodation, assisted living and extra-care housing, moving in with family and residential care, specialist housing options such as shared ownership, retirement villages and alms-houses, park homes and privately rented accommodation.[96]

Any option above could be the right choice for an older person, but there are issues within the housing system that means older people's needs are not always met. Poor planning policies at a local level and a failure to reach development targets at a national level are at the root cause of the housing crisis for older people. In *Creating a Britain That Works and Cares*, the CSJ outlined how local plans too often fail to understand the special needs of older and disabled residents.[97]

96   Age UK, Housing options in later life, n.d. Accessed: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/housing-options/.
97   Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 41.

Case Study: Cohousing

An increasingly popular type of housing for older people is cohousing. Cohousing is a form of community housing and an approach to creating an intentional community. Community Led Homes define cohousing as *"people coming together to build a neighbourhood that embodies particular values."* A report for government by the London School of Economics found that community led housing has a positive impact on loneliness, as well as other benefits.[98] Results showed that people involved in community housing schemes were significantly less likely to feel lonely than comparable members of the population.[99] There are also benefits for older people of living in community housing. The report found that "*living in community led housing may afford older people more opportunities to contribute and garner respect than many 'ordinary' communities."*

Funding for community housing was provided through the *Community Housing Fund* which has now closed. The CSJ has long held concerns about the closure of the Fund which provided community housing the risk capital to be able to do the difficult early work of securing a site and obtaining planning permission before bidding into the Affordable Homes Programme.[100] Government guidance now directs community organisations to apply for Affordable Homes Programme funding, but this is very difficult for small, local community organisations who do not have sufficient capital.[101]

CSJ analysis of Understanding Society shows that the vast majority (98 per cent) of older people aged 65 plus are able to get around the house on their own.[102] However, when asked about the ease of getting around the house, older people's answers varied. Just over half (58.5 per cent) of older people aged over 75 found it very easy to get around the house. 7.6 per cent of the same age cohort found it fairly difficult to get around the house, whereas only 5.7 per cent of over 65s said the same. Less than one per cent of older people (65 plus and 75 plus) found it very difficult to get around the house. Results are shown below in Figure 10.

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98   The London School of Economics and Political Science, 'Those little connections': Community-led housing and loneliness, November 2021, p. 69.
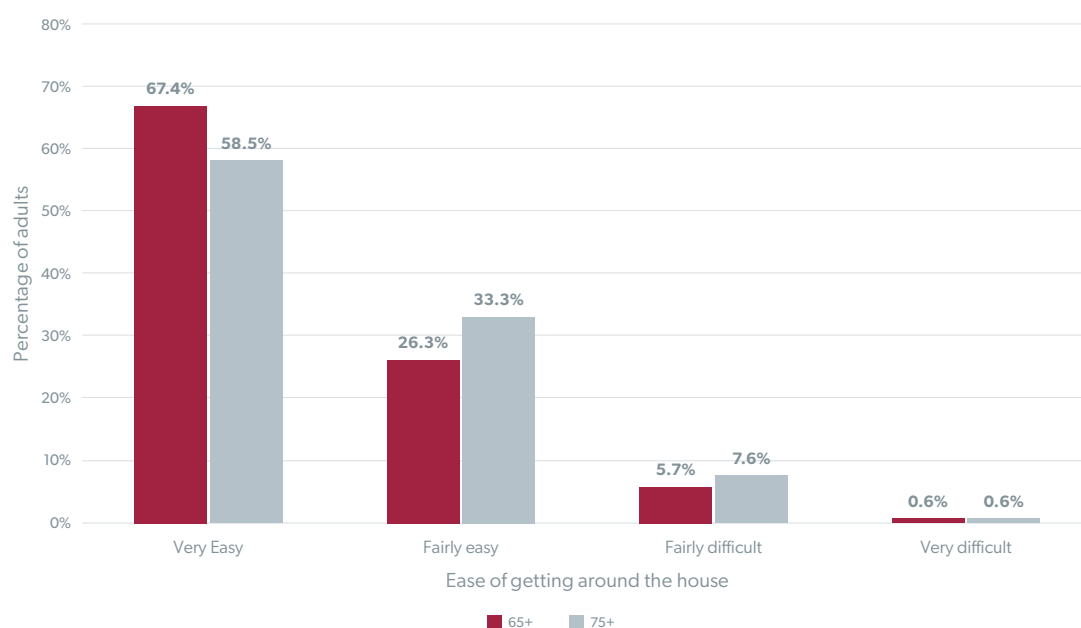99   Ibid, p. 69.
100 Centre for Social Justice, Levying Up, December 2022, p. 54.
101 Ibid, p. 54.
102 CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.

Figure 10: Ease of getting around the house.

Source: CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.

The ease at which people can get around their house has a statistically significant relationship with loneliness. Older people aged 65 plus who are not able to get around the house are four times as likely to be lonely as older people who are able to get around the house on their own. However, this relationship is not particularly strong. Older people aged 65 plus who have difficulty getting around the house are progressively lonelier. Those who find it very difficult to get around the house are nearly eight times as likely to be lonely, whereas those who find it fairly easy are only 1.9 times more likely to be lonely as older people who find it very easy to get around the house. The results are shown below in Table 4.

Table 4: Ability and ease of getting around the house and loneliness.

Ability and ease of getting around the house and loneliness			
	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval	P value
On your own		Reference	
Only with help from someone else	1.77	(0.88, 3.56)	0.106
Not at all	4.01	(1.48, 10.86)	0.006
Very easy		Reference	
Fairly easy	1.91	(1.46, 2.5)	<0.001
Fairly difficult	3.08	(2.13, 4.45)	<0.001
Very difficult	7.82	(2.88, 21.21)	<0.001

Source: CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.

Home Adaptation

More than 80 per cent of the housing stock people will be living in by 2050 is already built.[103] Ensuring the current housing stock can be adapted should be one of the most important priorities for government in preparing for an ageing population.

Creating a Britain That Works and Cares highlighted the slow and patchy provision that currently exists across local authorities for home adaptations and delivering the *Disabled Facilities Grant*.[104] There is currently a postcode lottery for adaptation services.

The CSJ recommends a range of solutions which would end the postcode lottery of home adaptation provision and ensure British housing stock is able to adapt quickly to an ageing population. These adaptations are not optional additions to an older person's life, they are vital to ensuring older people can thrive, remain healthy and socially connected in later life.

Recommendation 10

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should ensure the ten HAPPI design principles are included within proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Government should strengthen the NPPF and National Model Design Code guidance for local authorities by including specific reference to the *Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation* (HAPPI) design principles. These ten principles include: space and flexibility; daylight in the home and in shared spaces; balconies and outdoor space; adaptability and 'care ready' design; positive use of circulation space; shared facilities and 'hubs'; plants, trees, and the natural environment; energy efficiency and sustainable design; storage for belongings and bicycles; external shared surfaces and 'home zones'.[105] In *Creating a Britain That Works and Cares*, the CSJ was told by Professor Alison Bowes, professor in Dementia and Ageing at Stirling University that the HAPPI criteria are critical for retirement homes and homes for those affected by blindness or dementia, as *"they recognise that healthy ageing calls for specific housing elements."*[106]

Recommendation 11

The CSJ echoes the Centre for Ageing Better in calling for accessible and adaptable homes, known as M4 (2) in building regulations, category two housing to become the new minimum standard for new-build homes.

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97 per cent of local authorities told the Centre for Ageing Better that their need for accessible homes will increase in the next 10 years, with a quarter of local authorities surveyed describing their need

103 House of Lords, Ageing: Science, Technology and Healthy Living, January 2021. Accessed: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldse-lect/ldsctech/183/18302.htm.
104 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 47.
105 Ibid, p. 45.
106 Interview with Prof Alison Bowes, 13 July, 2023 in Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 45.

for accessible homes as severe.[107] Current building regulations include three levels of accessible housing.[108]

- Category 1 M4 (1) the minimum standard, with flush threshold, space to circulate, toilet at entrance level – but no concern about adaptability.

- Category 2 M4 (2) "age-friendly" housing, featuring adaptable walls (for hand rails), and wide staircase for installing stairlifts.

- Category 3 M4 (3) wheelchair-friendly home.

The Centre for Ageing Better have shown how just nine per cent of homes are currently accessible and suitable for someone who needs a step-free entrance or uses a wheelchair.[109] In light of the UK's ageing population, there is broad consensus across the sector that work is needed to increase the number of homes that are accessible and adaptable for wheelchair users.

In 2022, government committed to making Category 2 M4 (2) the minimum standard for all new homes.[110] However, in a report published in May 2024, the House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee found that the previous government had made little progress towards implementing its commitment.[111]

Government should now make changes in planning regulations, so that the new minimum standard for accessible housing becomes Category 2 M4(2), which features easily adaptable lay-out and structural elements.

Recommendation 12

Within its proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should explicitly require all local plans to include a specific policy and target for new wheelchair accessible homes (known as M4(3) in building regulations), and where no local target is set, to require at least 10 per cent of new homes to meet the standard, subject to future population projections. Government should work with local authorities to determine the percentage of homes that will need to be accessible in certain areas to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Specialist Housing

When an older person chooses to move into housing that can deliver specialist care they should be assured that the housing will be of good quality and facilitate social connection. However, many specialist housing schemes are characterised by low levels of supply, are poor quality and lack the opportunities for social connection and building relationships that are vital to living a good life in old age.

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107 Centre for Ageing Better, Homes for Life, 2022, p. 7.
108 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 46.
109 Centre for Ageing Better, Locked Out: A New Perspective on Older People's Housing Choices, August 2023, p. 11.
110 Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Raising accessibility standards for new homes: summary of consultation responses and government response, July 2022.
111 House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, Disabled people in the housing sector, May 2024, p. 13.

The three most common specialist housing schemes for older people are extra care housing, sheltered housing and supported living.

Extra care model: purpose-built retirement villages – council-funded and privately-funded. Full professional care staff looking after residents, but outside care can be bought in. A recent evaluation by the Housing Learning and Improvement Network found evidence that housing for older people delivered significant cost-benefits to the NHS and local authority adult social care.[112]

Sheltered housing: usually bungalows, flats, maybe six to eight, with a warden on site. Residents organise for the care themselves. 0.6 per cent of people living with a disability live in sheltered housing, following council assessment. Rental is most likely from housing associations and councils; buying is from private providers. Service charges can be high.[113]

Supported living: three to four people with disabilities share a flat and organise care for the group. Central government pays for this out of housing benefit or Universal Credit, so local authorities are very keen on this alternative. Claire Bolderson led a BBC investigation into Supported Living in 2023. It found that *"Too often the care is low quality, yet the tax payer is stuck with a massive bill."*[114]

Further analysis of the state of these tenures and recommendations to improve them can be found within *Creating a Britain That Works and Cares*.[115]

Specialist Housing Designed for Connection

There are opportunities for specialist housing providers to design their housing provision in such a way that reduces social isolation and provides opportunity for connection. The CSJ spoke to trailblazers in this space, such as Belong Villages, but also heard from our alliance charities about how specialist housing can best deliver social connection and protect against loneliness.

The CSJ was told that when budget pressures exist in specialist housing, opportunities for social engagement suffer. Churches Together South Tyneside told the CSJ about the importance of having staff on site who are given the time and funding to put on activities and help build community within specialist housing sites. Budget pressures mean these members of staff are the first to get cut.

When the CSJ attended a coffee morning for older people at Search Newcastle, we were told how care homes were not designed for social interaction. Older people told us how common areas were neglected and the design of the buildings meant they were at the side of the care home, rather than at the centre.

Care homes, otherwise known as residential homes, are different to extra care housing, sheltered accommodation and supported living. They offer intensive 24/7 care to older people. The care is long-term and designed for people who need substantial help. The crisis of loneliness and social isolation within care homes came into full public view during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, care homes locked down for much longer than the rest of society. Two years after the pandemic there were still care homes which were implementing a full lockdown.[116] There are multiple and well studied

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112 Housing Learning and Improvement Network, The health and social care cost benefits of housing for older people, June 2019.

113 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024

114 BBC Radio 4, File on Four, No Place Like Home: the inside story of supported living, 12 February, 2019.

115 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2022, pp. 50-53.

116 National Institute for Health and Care Research, Social isolation, loneliness and the mental health of care home residents – lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, 6 May 2022. Accessed: https://arc-sl.nihr.ac.uk/news-insights/blog-and-commentary/social-isolation-loneliness-and-mental-health-care-home-residents.

reasons as to why care homes were so badly affected by the COVID-19 virus. These include the vulnerability of the residents who lived there as well as the close contact environment.[117]

There is also evidence that suggests that the loneliness caused by such restrictions made dying from COVID-19 more likely. An Irish study of older people found that those who were lonely had an increased mortality risk and a higher risk of dying from disease.[118] A systematic review and analysis of literature on the prevalence of loneliness amongst older people in care homes found that around 61 per cent of older people living in care homes may be moderately lonely and around 35 per cent severely lonely.[119] These levels of loneliness are significantly higher than what is reported in the community. The authors conclude that *"a key challenge for care homes is therefore to determine ways of developing and nurturing social relationships in the care home setting and to engage residents in activities which can help alleviate loneliness."*[120]

At the Loughborough Wellbeing Centre, a former care home employee raised the issue of loneliness in care homes.

> *"People say to me I prefer my own company, I kind of believe that but I'm also like do you actually prefer your own company. I worked in a care home, the elderly suffer from mental health problems, they get lonely. I think people say that to make people not worry about them."*

One trailblazer in this space is Belong Villages. Belong Villages was set up to offer a new and revolutionary setting designed around the needs of people with dementia. Belong uses building design, award winning facilities and pioneer a household model of care to create the feel of a home.[121] Instead of 40 people being housed within a 24/7 care setting, Belong provide care within households of up to 12 people to *"create a community within a community, with an extended family feel."*[122]

The CSJ spoke to Belong in June 2024.

> *"We were impressed by the de Hogewyk village concept which worked in Holland and wanted to explore how we could take this forward in the UK. There is a risk in traditional care settings that you are cut off from the rest of society. This adds to the stress of moving into a care home, that you might be cut off."*
>
> *"Belong also has residential care and apartment living in the same place. [The two housing options are] arranged around a village centre that has a central space with facilities, which are also open to the public. What's on at Belong is also advertised to the wider community so local people come and join in."*

When asked about the strength of their model, Belong spoke about how they combined apartment living (housing with care) and more intensive 24-hour care households under the same roof. Other CSJ Alliance charities raised the lack of a full-time worker within sheltered accommodation settings as why the community wasn't as strong as it could be.

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117 Alzheimer's Society, Why were care homes so badly affected by coronavirus, 21 May 2021. Accessed: https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/coronavirus/dementia-care-homes-impact.

118 Ward, M., et al., "Mortality risk associated with combinations of loneliness and social isolation. Findings from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDAY)", *Age and Ageing,* 50:4 (July, 2021), pp. 1329-1335.

119 Gardiner, C., et al., "What is the prevalence of loneliness amongst older people living in residential and nursing care homes? A systematic review and meta-analysis", *Age and Ageing,* 49:5 (September, 2020), pp. 748-757.

120 Ibid.

121 Belong Villages, Pioneering Approach, n.d. Accessed: https://www.belong.org.uk/about/why-belong/pioneering-approach.

122 Belong Villages, Households, n.d. Accessed: https://www.belong.org.uk/what-we-offer/our-villages/households.

"The apartments contribute hugely to tackling loneliness. A sheltered housing scheme would typically have a nine to five coordinator. But because the village is a 24/7 care setting there are always people on site."

The CSJ asked Belong about the barriers to other care settings being able to offer the same sort of provision which is centred on wellbeing and fostering community and relationships.

"There are a few barriers, lots of organisations want to be able to do what we do. We are a not-for-profit organisation. We can invest back into our service."

Being more profit oriented means some people wouldn't choose to invest in the services that we offer. Funding to the sector more broadly is of course an issue. On the typical council rates for care you wouldn't be able to do what we do. Local authority rates don't cover our operational costs. However, there are scenarios where they will pay for people to come to Belong, normally if they have higher needs, such as more advanced dementia, and require the smaller, more homely setting that our households offer."

Belong spoke to us about how traditional care home design means that what they do can't always be pioneered within existing care settings. However, there is still more traditional specialist housing settings can do to foster connection and tackle loneliness.

"Our villages are new build villages. We raise funding to develop new schemes. [Belong Villages] need a certain amount of a space. For earlier villages we knocked down previous care homes."

"In more traditional care homes, there is still a lot you can do to make settings more homely. We developed the blueprint for our households by adapting existing spaces in our older homes. More broadly, partnerships in the community are key to tackling loneliness. We partnered with Liverpool's Bluecoat centre for contemporary arts and secured funding for a three-year project introducing artists to our settings to promote better wellbeing for people with dementia."

Belong told the CSJ how they are part of the wider community where the villages are located. In all locations, there is a central bistro which is open to the public at the heart of the facility, along with a hair salon, gym, library and function rooms.

"Being a hub for the community is one of our objectives. Some of our villages are part of formal 'connected community' initiatives, working with the local council."

"It is really fabulous; it gives the older people a sense of purpose. One of the biggest challenges we see, when people have lived their whole life contributing to society through work and their family, one of the hardest things when you move into a care home can be that sense that you are not able to contribute, as well as the sense of boredom. These are the things we address by creating meaningful opportunities through our engagement and event programmes."

Housing for older people is a crucial element of creating the necessary conditions for social connection. Some providers of housing for older people are trailblazing, but sadly this is not the norm. With government planning to build 1.5 million homes over the next parliament, as well as reforming social care to bring about a National Care Service, there are significant opportunities to deliver the suitable homes and opportunities for social connection within social care settings.

Within government's proposed reforms to the NPPF, one of its golden rules for development includes delivering new local infrastructure, including new care homes.[123] Priorities for the delivery of new care homes should not just be reduced to increasing their number as quickly as possible, but on the commissioning of high-quality and well-designed care settings that foster social connection in old age. To ensure that the government meets it's ambition to deliver new care homes to create well-designed and connected places, it should produce design guidance to be used by local authorities in the planning process. This should be produced in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure planning reform supports the creation of healthy communities.

Recommendation 13

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care should work together to produce new design guidance, in partnership with best practice stakeholders, for older people's housing and social care settings which are focused on creating community and social connection.

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123 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, August 2024.

Part Two:
Long Term Challenges

The three challenges outlined in this chapter, regarding family, intergenerational engagement and retirement are decades in the making. They present cultural, as well as policy challenges that will take longer than one parliament to solve. However, this should not prevent government from taking immediate action that would deliver positive outcomes for older people.

Changes to family life have left many older people isolated from traditional support structures. This presents new challenges and raises questions about what obligations individuals owe to older relatives. Britain is more intergenerationally segregated than ever before, with young and old less likely to live in the same communities. Retirement is increasingly presented as a time to escape work and obligations, but the evidence suggests that work and volunteering protect against loneliness.

Family

Lonely Nation Part 1 showed that the high levels of loneliness cannot be understood apart from the nature of family life in Britain.[124] One of the underlying causes of loneliness in Britain is high levels of family breakdown and lack of stable family formation. Britain's families are also more fragile than those in other Western European countries.[125]

Older people are not exempt from the loneliness caused by family breakdown. In addition to family breakdown, one of the acute issues facing older people is when family no longer live nearby. One of the most significant social changes to affect the UK over the last century is family dispersal. Many people no longer live within the same communities as their family and older relatives.

Out of those that had an older relative and answered the question, CSJ polling found that 55 per cent of adults live within 30 minutes of their closest older relative. Nine per cent of adults say they live within two hours of their closest older relative. More than one in five adults live over two hours away.

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124 Centre for Social Justice, Lonely Nation Part 1, May 2024, p. 5.
125 Institute for Fiscal Studies, Families and Inequalities IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities, June 2022, p. 1.

Table 5: How long approximately would it take you to travel to your closest elderly relative?

Distance to closest elderly relative	Total (%)
15 minutes	35
Within 30 minutes	20
Within an hour	16
Within 2 hours	9
Over 2 hours	21

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Note: The percentages above exclude those who answered the question: 'I do not have an elderly relative', 'Don't know/prefer not to say', and 'Not applicable'. N = 1,535.

Despite the majority of adults saying they live within half an hour of an older relative, and a significant portion saying they live just 15 minutes away, many families are now spread far and wide. This comes with unique challenges for older people and the services which support them. Charities told the CSJ how they effectively performed the functions of a traditional extended family.

> *"We were contacted last week by a lady in town, an elderly lady, she didn't know her name, she doesn't have a carer, has no family, it took us two days of phone calls to get this lady a welfare check. We didn't know her, she's wondering around, nothing to do, we spoke to the neighbours, and she has no family…Sometimes the family has moved away…"*
>
> Charity Leader, Focus4Hope, Brighouse.

> *"For older people, we hold the answer on how to navigate the health system, booking GP appointments, medication, teaching people to do online shopping…We are often like the extended family."*
>
> Charity Leader, OPAL Leeds.

A different charity leader, who wished to remain anonymous, was vocal in their shock at how some people left older relatives behind, often alone, to live in other countries.

> *"I have a lady this week who comes in so I can help do her forms, that is because she has one son who lives in Australia and the other is going to America with all the grandkids…she is going to be totally on her own…*
>
> *A part of me gets goosebumps because how could you do that? I don't think I could do that. I mean I don't live near my mum. But I don't think I could actually go, ' right you're 80, I'm going to go off now'. I would think oh my god what if something happens. I mean she will have no one. I mean she has started coming to the [charity] groups. She's found some little friends. She's booked on some trips. I think this has been what's happened. I think people move away and the family, in the old school days, you all looked after each other, grandparents, great-grandparents, your mum would look after their mum down the road. I don't think that's like that anymore, we've lost that community."*

Older people who had experienced loneliness, told the CSJ of how absent family left a gap in their lives.

> *"You know, the children are living far away as well, and they haven't got time for the elderly. So that's where the main issue is. Especially for the elderly."*
>
> Focus Group Participant, Reaching People, Leicester.

There are clearly justifiable reasons for moving away from older relatives. However, the question of how this impacts older people's loneliness and ability to live a good life is rarely considered in loneliness research and public policy.

Older people who regularly see their children are significantly less likely to be lonely than those who never see their children. The CSJ tested the statistical relationship between how often older people over 65 see their children and loneliness using an analysis of Understanding Society. Our results show a significant relationship. Older people (65 plus) who see their children daily, at least once per week, or at least once per month, are about half as likely to be lonely than older people who never see their children. The results are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6: Loneliness and how often people see their children.

Loneliness and how often people see their children			
	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval	P value
Never	Reference		
Less often	0.93	(0.45, 1.92)	0.849
Several times a year*	0.37	(0.18, 0.77)	0.008
At least once per month*	0.48	(0.24, 0.97)	0.041
At least once per week*	0.48	(0.25, 0.92)	0.026
Daily*	0.47	(0.24, 0.96)	0.037

Source: CSJ analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13.
Note: Significant at $p < 0.05$.

To state that people have obligations to older relatives, including living nearby and visiting regularly, could be seen to infringe on the free choices of people to make decisions regarding their own life. Public policy is often limited to dealing with the outcomes of people's free choices, even if those choices lead to negative outcomes for society as a whole and increases the cost to the state. To tackle the root cause of loneliness in older people, government must engage with difficult moral questions of what responsibility and duty individuals owe to older relatives.

It is also true that there are structural disincentives that discourage caring for older relatives. For example, for family carers who take on a more substantial burden of care, the experience is often marred by real difficulty. The CSJ has shown that the average family carer is more likely to be poor, lonely and develop health issues.[126] This is why it is important that government make it easier to care

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126 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024,p. 18.

and take responsibility for older family members. This is what one Senior Social Prescriber told the CSJ about life as a family carer.

> "There are huge amounts of carers who are very isolated and lonely. They haven't got ability to get out and do things for themselves. You know, there's not enough support for them to actually manage that as well. And we see a lot of difficulties around that."
>
> Senior Social Prescriber at a focus group hosted by Loughborough Wellbeing Centre.

Case Study: Timebanking

Older people that live alone and do not have family or friends nearby will often have unmet needs. Family who live far away will often want to contribute to older people's care, but are limited by geography. This is where timebanking as a method of encouraging volunteering could be beneficial. Timebanking is a way of connecting people in communities. For every hour of help one gives, an hour credit is earned to be used at the timebank. For example, a person could spend an hour painting someone's wall, receive a timebank credit, and then spend their credit learning how to cook an apple pie. The CSJ spoke to Timebanking UK who told us timebanking has been shown to increase volunteering and tackle loneliness, especially amongst older people.

More timebanking schemes could be beneficial for families who live far from older relatives. A family member participating in a timebank could earn credits and then transfer those to be used by an older relative who is unable to volunteer. The older person could then cash in their family member's credit and receive help and support around the house via a local timebank.

The Decisions of Older People in Later Life

In his 2023 Annual Report, Professor Chris Whitty, uses the example of the New Forest as a place where many older people move to retire.[127] He writes that as people age in new places, without an established support network, new challenges can be presented which cause individuals to become isolated.[128] If a couple has moved somewhere new together, this risk can increase when a partner dies. When a partner dies, the other person can find themselves socially isolated and without family or friends nearby.

Among the top three most lonely demographic segments identified by the ONS, the first includes widowed older homeowners with long-term physical and mental health conditions.[129] Age UK report that older age groups are more vulnerable to loneliness due to increased risks of being widowed and suffering from health conditions.[130]

This is consistent with frontline evidence heard from CSJ Alliance charities. Crest Cooperative in North Wales, a social enterprise selling pre-loved furniture, clothing and refurbished electricals, reported that

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127 Chief Medical Officer of England, Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2023: Health in an Ageing Society, November 2023, p.56.

128 Ibid, p. 56.

129 Office for National Statistics, Loneliness – What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?, April 2018. Accessed: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwith-feelinglonely/2018-04-10.

130 Age UK, All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, September 2018.

older couples often retire to rural parts of their area to enjoy the scenery. However, as they age this can lead to acute forms of isolation - especially when one spouse passes away. This is because physical mobility is limited, making it hard to move around the area (especially if driving is no longer possible) and because support networks (such as children) normally remain far away after people retire to remote rural areas.

It is clear that individuals who have been widowed or have lost a partner are vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. Some fall through the cracks of public services and many who have moved in later life lack friends and family nearby. Social prescribing could be utilised here to reach out to individuals at an appropriate time after the death of a partner. This would help to ensure individuals at risk of social isolation are picked up and given the opportunity to engage in the community.

Social prescribing is an approach to health care which connects people to activities, groups and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing.[131]

Recommendation 14

The Department of Health and Social Care should fund a social prescribing pilot of £3.6 million which reaches individuals after the death of a partner. This could be led by the National Academy for Social Prescribing. The pilot should establish different referral pathways to social prescribing from the point of contact where an individual who has lost a partner has been connected with public services. These could include hospitals, care homes, palliative care settings and coroners.

Creating a Britain that Works and Cares has shown that family is needed more than ever to care for older relatives. Yet today family breakdown and dispersal mean the pool of local family relationships is shrinking for many older people.[132]

Family relationships are not just important for caring responsibilities, but for the companionship, company and relationships they provide. *Lonely Nation Part 1* showed the association between strong family connections and low levels of loneliness.[133] Given this association, government should recognise the role that family plays in protecting against loneliness for older people throughout relevant policy areas.

Older people value their family relationships. When asked to choose three statements which represented what mattered most to them in later life, more older people over the age of 65 selected living close to family (22 per cent) than safety, better access to public services or going on holiday, as shown in Figure 11.

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131 NHS England, Social prescribing, n.d. Accessed: https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/.
132 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain that Works and Cares, February 2024 , p. 9.
133 Centre for Social Justice, Lonely Nation Part 1, May 2024 , p. 29.

Figure 11: Thinking about what life might be like in later life (70+), what do you expect will matter most to you? If you are this age, please select what matters most to you now.
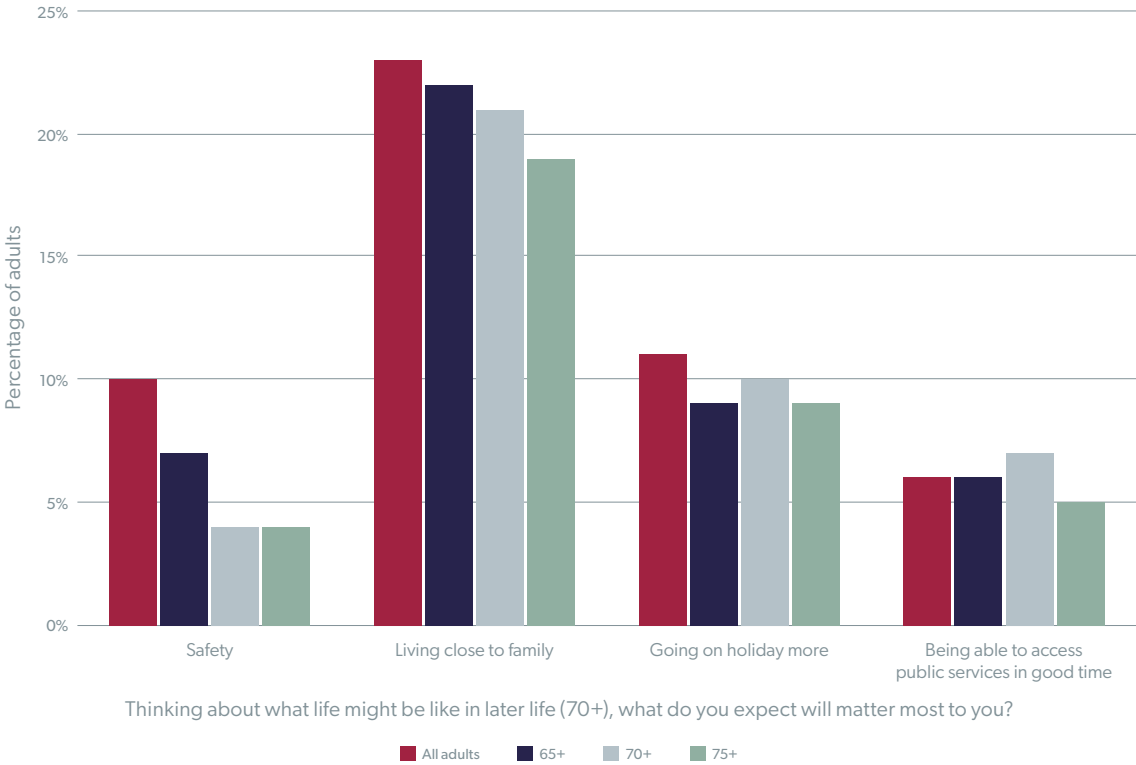
Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

Notes: Respondents were given a maximum of three choices out of 13 possible answers.

Extended family relationships are important for combatting loneliness. Studies have shown that stronger extended family relationships counteract feelings of loneliness.[134] Furthermore, CSJ analysis has shown that people who feel lonely often are less likely to see members of their extended family. 50 per cent of adults say they see a member of their extended family at least once a month. This falls to 40 per cent of adults who say they are lonely often.[135]

Adults Would Consider Moving Closer to Older Relatives

CSJ polling shows that more adults would consider moving closer to an older relative than those who would choose not to. Knowing the importance of family relationships for protecting against loneliness, government should consider how it can provide the most favourable conditions for people who wish to move closer to their family. This will become increasingly important as the UK population ages and family carers are required in greater numbers. Just 32 per cent of adults say they have always lived close or have moved to be closer to an older relative to support them, as shown below in Table 7.

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134 Mauro Silva Júnior, Et al., "Emotional Closeness to Maternal Versus Paternal Lineages", Evolutionary Behavioural Sciences, 8:1, (January 2014), pp. 2330-2925, in Robin Dunbar, Friends: Understanding the Power of our Most Important Relationships, (Little Brown Book Group Limited, 2021), p. 23.

135 Centre for Social Justice, Lonely Nation Part 1, May 2024, p. 39.

Table 7: Have you ever moved to be closer to an older relative to support them in old age?

Have you ever moved to be closer to an older relative to support them in older age?	All adults (%)
Yes, I've moved closer to an older relative	9
No, I've always lived close by	23
No, but I plan to when the time comes	6
No, because I couldn't afford to move	4
No, but I would consider it if needs be	14
No, and I don't have plans to	15
No, I don't have older relatives	17
Other	1
Don't know/prefer not to say	3
Not applicable	8

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

As per Table 7, just 15 per cent of adults said they had no plans to move closer to an older relative to support them. One in five adults said they either had plans or would consider moving closer to an older relative. More adults surveyed said they would consider moving or had plans to move to support an older relative (20 per cent) than those who were not considering it at all (19 per cent).

The British public also believe that family has obligations to older relatives. 94 per cent of adults agree that family has responsibilities to older people when they require care. When selecting who has the highest responsibility, more adults said that it was the older person's own responsibility with 39 per cent of adults selecting this, closely followed by their families responsibility on 38 per cent. This was followed by the government on 21 per cent. Just two per cent of adults said that the local community held the primary responsibility for looking after older people when they require care.

Table 8: When people grow old and require care, whose primary responsibility is it to look after them?

Responsibility	NET: Top 3	1 - highest	2	3	4 - lowest
Their own responsibility	80	39	24	18	20
Their family	94	38	40	16	6
Local community (friends, neighbours, charities)	46	2	10	34	54
The government (local or national)	80	21	26	33	20

Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

These results show us that adults expect older people themselves, and their families, to take significant responsibility for care in older age. *Creating a Britain That Works and Cares* showed that many families wish to care for older relatives but face several barriers and indignities within the current social care framework.[136] To protect against loneliness, as well as to ensure families are able to fulfil their responsibilities to older people, government should consider how it can best create the conditions for families to look after older relatives.

Helping family members to relocate to be closer to older family members should be a priority for government. This is often easier for families with more material resources. To help low-income families support older relatives, government should ensure that local authority housing lists identify family carers, already on the housing list, who are seeking to live close to those they care for. Each local authority draws up its own rules for deciding the order of priority on its record of qualified households – or housing list. These allocation schemes, published on their website, prioritise anyone with a disability or age-related conditions, but not their family carer, unless they live in the same house. This policy should change. Local authorities should be expected to identify family carers and others seeking to care for family members who are on social housing waiting lists and consider giving them greater priority. It is in the interest of older people in need of care to be able to live close to those who care for them. It would be beneficial for a variety of health and care reasons,[137] but it would also reduce the isolation of those who otherwise would struggle alone.

Recommendation 15

Local authorities should identify family carers and others seeking to care for family members who are on social housing waiting lists and take the needs of the family member in need of care into consideration when making priority decisions.

Government should also ensure families who wish to care for an older family member are able to adapt and extend their homes in a less expensive and prolonged way. The previous government launched a consultation on changes to permitted development rights to *"provide householders with further flexibility to meet the needs of growing families and maximise the potential on existing homes"*. [138] This would include making it easier for people to build extensions and granny annexes for older relatives. The MHCLG should publish the results of this consultation and commit to changing planning law to strengthen the rights of homeowners to construct outbuildings and extensions. In its proposed reforms to the NPPF, the government stated its strong support for all upward extensions which builds upon previous changes that gave strong support for Mansard Roof extensions.[139]

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136 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 4.

137 Ibid, p. 46.

138 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Changes to various permitted development rights: consultation, February 2024. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation.

139 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, August 2024.

> **Recommendation 16**
>
> **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should publish the findings of its consultation to changes to permitted development rights.** Government should aspire to strengthen rights to construct outbuildings and extensions to meet the needs of families who seek to care for older relatives.

Intergenerational Engagement

In 2019, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration published *Healing the Generational Divide*, which noted that the divide between generations in the UK went much deeper that political preferences, with different generations divided in their everyday lives, in their neighbourhoods and local communities.[140] The APPG found older and younger people are divided spatially (between urban and rural locations) as well as through a decline in shared community spaces which makes it harder to connect.[141]

In recent years there has been a growing interest in initiatives to bring different generations together through intergenerational practice. Intergenerational practice is defined as: *"bringing people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive building on the positive resources that the younger and older have to offer each other and those around them."*[142]

Our polling shows a lack of intergenerational engagement and activity. Less than half of 18–34-year-olds speak to an older neighbour or friend at least once a month, as per Figure 12. 35–44-year-olds are the youngest age cohort where over half, on average, speak to an older friend or neighbour at least once a month. The percentage of adults who say they speak to an older neighbour or friend rises as the age cohorts progress.

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140 All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, Healing the Generational Divide, n.d, p. 12.
141 Ibid , p. 15.
142 Generations Working Together, Intergenerational Practice, n.d. Accessed: https://generationsworkingtogether.org/about/intergeneration-al-practice/.

Figure 12: How often do you do the following activities? – Speak to an elderly neighbour or elderly friend.
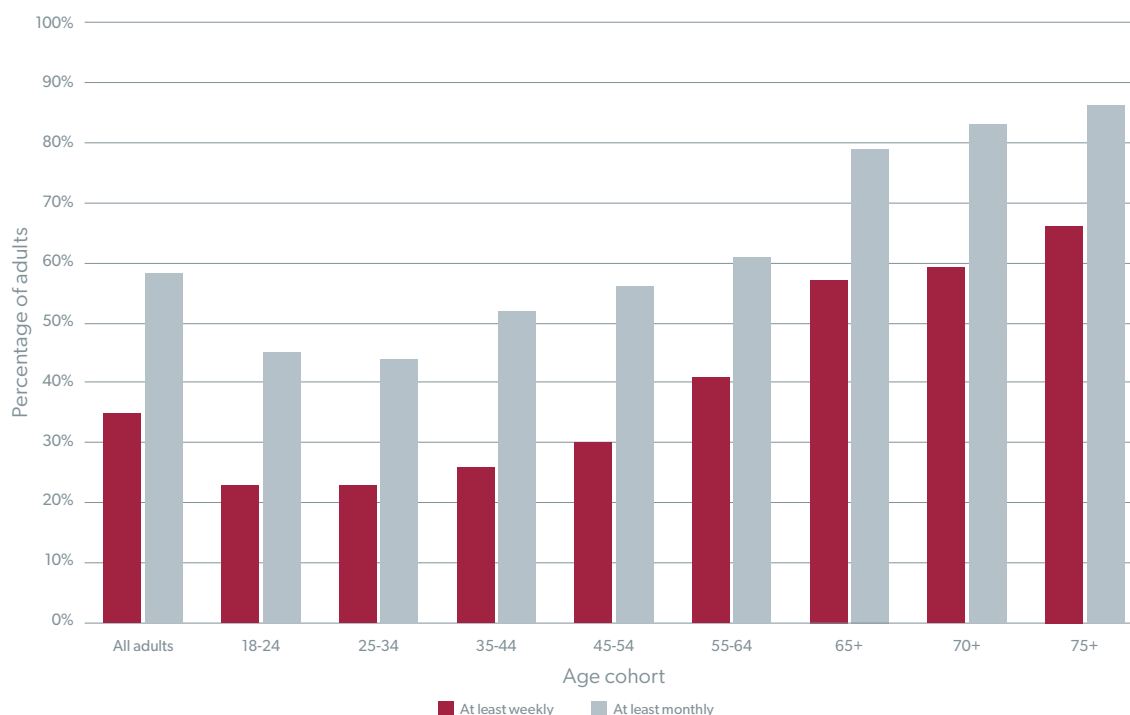
Source: Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th to 16th April 2024.

The lack of engagement across generations has been labelled as age segregation. The Intergenerational Foundation has shown how areas in England and Wales (Middle Layer Super Output Areas) with a median age over 50 have increased by almost 700 per cent between 2001 and 2021 and the share of urban areas with a median age under 25 has increased by almost 33 per cent over the same period.[143] The generations are living more apart than ever before.

Intergenerational Engagement Can Protect Against Loneliness

There is evidence which suggests that intergenerational engagement results in less loneliness. In an analysis on ageism, the World Health Organization found that intergenerational projects resulted in enhanced social connections, improved self-esteem, less depression and loneliness in both older and younger participants.[144]

Whilst the benefits of intergenerational activities are mentioned in *A Connected Society*,[145] the Welsh Government's Loneliness Strategy, *Connected Communities*, develops this principle much further.[146] The Welsh Government identified that intergenerational practice reduces loneliness, particularly social isolation, and offers benefits across ages.[147] Their analysis showed that at the community level, benefits of intergenerational practice included improved connections and a greater sense of belonging.[148]

143 Intergenerational Foundation, No country for young people: The problems of accelerating rural-urban age segregation, August 2023, p. 5.
144 World Health Organization, Connecting generations: planning and implementing interventions for intergenerational contact, October 2023, p. 8.
145 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, A Connected Society, October 2018, p. 50.
146 Welsh Government, Connected Communities, February 2020, p. 45.
147 Welsh Government, Review of key mechanisms in intergenerational practices, and their effectiveness at reducing loneliness/social isolation, May 2019, p. 9.
148 Ibid.

This research is consistent with the frontline experience of CSJ Alliance charities. The CSJ heard from Jill Fraser, Chief Executive of Kissing it Better (KiB), a healthcare charity and training provider which works to end the isolation of old age by bringing the generations together. KiB is passionate about the positive impacts of intergenerational engagement and how it can help to tackle loneliness. Here is what they told the CSJ.

Case Study: Kissing it Better

At KiB, we believe that bringing the generations together could go some way to solving the problem of loneliness. Every day, across the country, our young volunteers meet with older people on Zoom or in real life to have fun, to learn new things and to reminisce about old things. Young and old laugh together, sing together, play board games together and even read funny play scripts aloud. We have emails from hundreds of young people who say they feel more connected to their community because of our work.

These sessions show young people that they can have fulfilling – and fun – friendships with people born in a very different time. When young and old get together, everybody benefits. The older people feel valued and cared for, and the younger ones feel a new sense of purpose. They also learn that real life is not as scary as they thought: there is nothing like a chat with an 85-year-old to put things into a very different perspective.

We are now working with children from as young as five years old, showing them how to make deep and caring connections with the older people in their lives. Our primary school workshop, 'When Great Granny Came to Stay', helps young children understand what it's like to be old in a rapidly changing modern world. These fun and imaginative sessions also teach young children thoughtful ways to show older relatives and family friends that they care.

In the past 12 months, we have taught more than 7,000 children in our 'great granny' workshops. After the sessions, the children can use their learning to make their older relatives feel a bit more special. But we don't stop there: once a school has completed our workshop, we set up KiB clubs to link them to local care homes and day centres, so the children get the chance to light up the day for older people in their community too.

We also run projects in schools and colleges: in the past year, we have connected with more than 6,000 secondary school and university students through our Zoom teaching and volunteering programmes. Our online interactive volunteering programme allows young people to 'visit' older people in care settings or living alone in their own homes.

We also have a range of KiB Calendars, listing events and activities for older people and their carers. We issue them free to carers groups and GPs at various points across the country.

Modern life is hard to negotiate for a hundred different reasons. Just one example: about 20 years ago, the 'stranger danger' idea took hold, and parents started teaching their children never to talk to strangers. Of course, this is a good thing for the safety and security for children, but the message young children hear is that there is danger everywhere and other people are scary. Making friends with older people, through safe secure KiB sessions, offsets the negative associations and brings everyone a bit closer together.

> What we do is challenging work, but it needs to be done. The message is simple: we need to connect with each other, learn from each other, and start having fun together. They say it takes a village to raise a child; it also takes a strong community to keep people feeling happy and connected, from the cradle to the grave.

KiB told the CSJ that loneliness in older people is often rooted in a lack of meaning, purpose and value. The CSJ was told that there is a misunderstanding of what it means to be old, and the dearth of intergenerational contact only perpetuates this. The following quotes are from evidence taking sessions held with KiB over the course of 2024.

> *"What does it mean to be old? We need to get people to understand what it means to be old. For example, understanding issues like dementia and what it can mean to live with poor sight, poor hearing, poor speech, poor mobility, chronic pain or a combination of some or all of those conditions. Some families may sit a much older relative in the corner, but nobody talks to them. At Kissing it Better we're teaching young people from age four to 23 how to connect meaningfully with older people through teaching them what it can mean to be old."*

KiB told the CSJ how modern technology has replaced the traditional function of elder wisdom. Older people are less able to impart knowledge and life experience in the 21st century. This historic role for older people used to provide a sense of purpose and place.

> *"In the older age, we would have referred to parents about bringing up children, now we do so on google."*

KiB also highlighted how it is not just older people who struggle with different forms of technology. They told the CSJ that young people and children are often uncomfortable making phone calls (approx. 90 per cent of their students never use their phones to have a meaningful conversation). Yet it is a means of communication that older people fully understand. In their sessions with school age children, KiB actively teach young people how to make phone calls to older relatives.

> *"We teach young people how to speak on a phone: how to check you are talking to the right person; ensuring there's no background noise; how to start the conversation and also how to end it, sensitively."*

> *"We get feedback from young people whenever they connect with our senior groups. We then send it to older people…This makes the older people feel valued and is hugely significant."*

KiB told the CSJ how there is a lack of understanding from children on how to make older people feel valuable. From analysis of the answers that children in schools tell KiB, they found that the majority of children do not approach an older relative when they come to visit. Most children admit to KiB that they remain on a digital device until summoned by a parent.

> *"From the thousands of students we've taught, approx. 80 per cent of them don't leave their room to come and greet an elderly relative. Instead, they stay on a digital device until a parent comes to get them. We get children to understand that this gesture can make a person feel unwanted, unwelcome or even unloved."*

"How do we show appreciation to elderly relatives? We don't always realise they worry about visiting. For example, things like access issues can make it difficult for elderly relatives to enter homes. Teaching young people thoughtful gestures is important. To clear the pathways, getting a ramp, accessing a side door. And, once inside, checking any tripping hazards, ensuring they get the privacy they need in a bathroom, that the food is manageable, and they have enough light to move around without falling over. Even more important, they get the sense that are wanted and valued throughout their stay."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, KiB's intergenerational Zoom sessions had the following impact on the volunteers who participated.[149]

- 94 per cent of volunteers agreed that KiB Zooms positively changed their attitudes towards older people.

- 73 per cent of volunteers said the Zooms had increased their understanding of what it's like for people living with dementia.

- 90 per cent of volunteers believe that joining the older guests makes them feel like part of a community.

Lived Experience Case Study: Liz Veitch

"If you've been a doer and a fixer and the person to go to all your life if nobody finds you useful, it's awful."

Former deputy head of a school, Liz Veitch, was widowed just before the pandemic. Having recently moved house she found adjusting to lockdown in a new area of the city much harder than she could have ever imagined.

"My family had just moved away. I just didn't know who I was, I didn't know why I was there and where to go with how I was feeling. It was very odd. And yet, at the same time, if I walked outside the door, I'd put a smile on my face, and I'd go for a walk and I'd say hello."

Liz joined the daily intergenerational zooms run by KiB. She loved the opportunity to connect with young people and quickly became a regular guest engaging and educating them about her own life experiences. But just as KiB found with their other senior guests, all of whom felt lonely because they either lived alone or were separated from family and close friends in care homes, the opportunity to share their own life stories didn't just inform and delight the students, many of whom were also intensely lonely, it also made a huge difference to the older people too.

A 2015 evaluation on behalf of NHS England found that KiB was making a "*fantastic difference to the group of organisations it is currently working with.*"[150] Following this evaluation, KiB were awarded the Outstanding Contribution Award at The Patient Experience Network National Awards. Their work has achieved much commendation, with the former CEO of Jaguar Cars and BAA, Sir John Egan, writing to the charity after attending a KiB event focused on reducing loneliness. He said:

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149 Evidence submitted to the CSJ by Kissing it Better, July 2024.
150 The Patient Experience Network, Evaluation of Kissing it Better, January 2015, p. 1.

"Thank you for organising our attendance at the Kissing it Better session at Myton, we both enjoyed this important event! It is all very well learning Maths or French but learning to be a better human being is even more important!"

Other organisations, such as United for All Ages, support the growth of intergenerational centres across the UK to encourage mixing of young and old. Their aim is to support the development of 1,000 centres for all ages by 2030.[151] CSJ Alliance charity, Coalville Can, have piloted an initiative in the community which utilises virtual reality (VR) headsets to give older people in care homes the opportunity to experience new places and experiences that they would not be able to otherwise. It gives school age children in the community the chance to take responsibility and show compassion to older people in their community, as well as older people the chance to engage with new experiences. This was the feedback from one residential home in the community. They said:

> *"The residents loved it and were still talking about it yesterday. We have booked another session, and we can't wait. Our residents were totally amazed by how realistic the images were and those residents who watched a film tailored to them, were so pleased that they had visited somewhere they hadn't been for years. I have worked in care for 15 years and the response we got from our residents to VR was amazing and a great benefit."*

Other countries have also recognised the positive impact of encouraging intergenerational engagement. The German Federal Government have funded a network of 'multi-generational houses' to provide activities for older people, but crucially alongside other age groups.[152]

Government should build upon the success of the third sector in piloting intergenerational projects by founding a new *Intergenerational Engagement Fund* to support new and ongoing projects that aim to tackle loneliness amongst older people as well as help teach school age children about how they can best care for and support older people in their lives.

Recommendation 17

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Education should submit a joint bid to the *Shared Outcomes Fund* held by HM Treasury for an *Intergenerational Engagement Fund* to support new and ongoing intergenerational projects, particularly within schools. This would include supporting third sector organisations to partner with schools and producing resources to teach children about how to show dignity, respect and empathy to older people, as well as raising awareness about the challenges of old age. Charities would also provide opportunities to school-age children to volunteer to support older people at risk of loneliness in health and social care settings. This could be funded through the *Shared Outcomes Fund* of which £100 million has been earmarked for projects to run between 2024-25.

Intergenerational practice which tackles loneliness is also being pioneered within care home settings. Within Belong Villages' Chester site, an intergenerational nursery is located within the care home in partnership with Ready Generations. Belong told the CSJ that a sense of purpose is vital to tackling

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151 United for all ages, 1000 centres for all ages by 2030, n.d. Accessed: https://www.unitedforallages.com/campaign.
152 Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Together For One Another, July 2022.

loneliness, and that the intergenerational nursery helps to create a space where older people can pass on their wisdom and experience.

> *"With the intergenerational relationships it gives the older people a sense of purpose, to pass on their life skills…We have an older person who is a teacher, who struggles to communicate, but she goes back into teacher mode with the children. She reads to them and engages with them…*
>
> *…It gives older people a sense of purpose and younger people the time. One of the children invited the older people to their birthday party, grand friends is what they call them…Verbal skills are much better for children as they are having all these interactions with adults, they are empathetic, and their manners are beyond their years…*
>
> *Purpose and joy are the biggest things, that sense of play, an excuse to be a child again."*
>
> Belong Villages.

An impact report published by Ready Generations and Belong Villages found that the nursery in Belong improved the wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence and reduced the isolation and loneliness of older people involved.[153] To build on the success of intergenerational practice within adult social care settings, government should embed best intergenerational practice within its plans for a National Care Service to tackle loneliness amongst older people.

Recommendation 18

The Department of Health and Social Care should promote intergenerational practice within its plans for a National Care Service by:

a. Producing a framework of guidance for how specialist housing for the elderly such as care homes and sheltered accommodation can develop partnerships with childcare providers to build upon the successes of intergenerational nursery settings.

b. Integrating social prescribing within care homes and retirement villages to link older adults to community groups and volunteering opportunities.

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153 Ready Generations, Visions of Us, September 2023, p. 11.

Retirement

Retirement is a moment of transition. For many, this moment is one of freedom, with greater opportunities to engage in hobbies, volunteering and family life. For others, retirement is thought about with dread and a sense of loss.

People are increasingly choosing to take early retirement, with a recent House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee report, *Where have all the workers gone?,* highlighting how early retirement (taken under the state pension age of 66) is among the leading causes of labour shortages seen in recent years.[154] The report highlights how for many, in the recent wave of new retirees seen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, lifestyle factors and the preference for increased leisure time played a significant role in incentivising early retirement.[155]

There is evidence to suggest that viewing retirement as a moment to escape obligation, work and responsibilities is not conducive to human flourishing. A Polish study has found that the probability of being lonely increased among males after retirement, and that not working after retirement increased the likelihood of being lonely among men.[156] Engaging in bridge employment (partial retirement) decreased the chances of being lonely.[157]

This is consistent with evidence provided by CSJ Alliance charities. The CSJ held a focus group at Reaching People in Leicester with older people they work with in the community. The older people told us that people hesitate to retire and fear losing the purpose they find in work.

> *"When I talk to older people, one thing that they say is that they are not heard, their voice is not heard. It's like when you're working you have a purpose, but it's like being rejected [after work]."*
>
> *"I see people hesitate to retire, people want to keep working, because they think 'what will I do at home.' Once people do that, they don't have many interests and they go downhill. Some people have plans, 'I'll do this', they'll be fine, but people who don't have plans they go downhill. Their health deteriorates."*
>
> *"…Yeah, like, you know, I'm part of the volunteers at the lunch club. And it's nice, you know, we all work together. And you do have a sense of belonging. And you know, you care for each other and it's quite good. You know, the other volunteers come in to help you know, they feel happier within themselves as well which is good. Doing something for the community, being part of something bigger gives you that connectedness…"*
>
> *"…I think then you feel connected because in the end you know if you have purpose in life, it's about giving, it's not all about taking. If you can give, there's a nice feelgood factor."*

These older people had their lives transformed by being brought into the community at Reaching People. Having the opportunity to volunteer in older age and to make a valuable contribution to their community helped to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation in retirement.

For economically deprived older people, these opportunities are important. Richer retirees will be able to fund holidays and activities which provide opportunity for stimulation and connection. Economically deprived older people are more likely to lack the same material resources and opportunities in later

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154 House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, Where have all the workers gone?, December 2022, p. 26.
155 Ibid, pp. 81-82.
156 Ambramowska-Kmon, A., Łątkowski, Wojciech., "The Impact of Retirement on Happiness and Loneliness in Poland – Evidence from Panel Data", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* 18:18 (September, 2018).
157 Ibid.

life. Analysis by Brunel University has shown that people aged 50 plus who live in the poorest areas are significantly more likely to suffer from loneliness than those who live in the wealthiest. This association is independent of other factors.[158]

Older people told the CSJ that a common feeling experienced after retirement was a lack of worth after work. For older people to feel like they have no contribution to make after work is a waste of human potential. They told the CSJ how loneliness is often linked to a feeling of worthlessness and that being able to engage in society after retirement was extremely important to them.

> *"A sense of purpose is the overriding issue. Everyone needs to feel like they have a sense of purpose."*
>
> Charity Leader, OPAL Leeds.

> *"He's [service user] very lonely because when he was working, he had friends. And now he gets really lonely. Now, after coming here [to Wesley Hall], he has made friends."*
>
> Charity Leader, Wesley Hall, Leicester.

Work Is a Source of Meaning and Belonging

Work is a source of meaning and belonging. Older people who wish to continue working part-time after retirement should be encouraged to do so and given the necessary support and opportunities.

Without a concerted effort to increase opportunities for older workers, individuals, businesses and the economy will suffer. The CSJ has previously outlined the health benefits of working longer, including important social networks, a sense of purpose and self-esteem, mental, social and physical stimulation.[159]

The Centre for Ageing Better has found that ageism and age bias are rife in the labour market, with almost one in three workers aged 50 to 70 who left their job during the COVID-19 pandemic saying they experienced age discrimination when looking for work.[160] Furthermore, existing employment support services are currently underperforming for older age groups, as well as older workers in the labour market receiving significantly less opportunities for training, development and progression.[161]

Older people should be supported to work if it is right for them. In 2023, the government launched an online mid-life MOT to help older workers with financial planning, health guidance, and to assess what their skills mean for their careers and future.[162] The mid-life MOT is flexible but should include discussion about opportunities for flexibility, workplace adjustments and training opportunities. This built upon the success of the scheme that had already been rolled out in Job Centres from 2021. The 2023 Spring Budget expanded support for older workers with £70 million of additional funding,[163] and the trial of a face-to-face mid-life MOT programme through employers in the North East, South

158 Victor, Christina R., Pikhartova, Jitka., "Lonely places or lonely people? Investigating the relationship between loneliness and place of residence", *BMC Public Health,* 20 (2020), 778.

159 Centre for Social Justice, Ageing Confidently, August 2019, p. 23–24.

160 Centre for Ageing Better, The 50+ Employment Commitment, n.d. Accessed: https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/50%2B_Employment_Commitment.pdf.

161 Ibid.

162 Department for Work and Pensions, DWP launches new Midlife MOT website, July 2023. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dwp-launches-new-midlife-mot-website.

163 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Back to work Budget' supporting people to return to the labour market, March 2023. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/back-to-work-budget-supporting-people-to-return-to-the-labour-market.

West and East of England.[164] The Centre for Ageing Better told the CSJ that they were disappointed that these pilots were prematurely terminated at the end of the previous parliament. Although take up had been low, participation had been very positive. The Centre suggested that if proper incentives and support mechanisms were in place for employers, mid-life MOTs could become a regular resource across the private sector.[165]

The government should evaluate the impact of the expansion of the mid-life MOT from the 2023 Spring Budget and maintain an ambition to rollout the scheme further across the private sector for all employers with more than 50 staff and across all Job Centres for smaller businesses to access.

A mid-life MOT, which involves a one-on-one conversation, signposting to upskilling courses, alternative pathways within the workplace, and mental and physical health check-ups, when necessary, would boost all employees' confidence – but in particular the older employees who might be thinking about retirement. The MOT should be employee-led, allowing them to explore options for professional development, pension and retirement.[166]

Recommendation 19

The Department for Work and Pensions should evaluate the impact of the expansion of the mid-life MOT in the 2023 Spring Budget with an ambition that businesses employing more than 50 staff should provide a mid-life MOT, while smaller businesses would access this through the continued roll out of the mid-life MOT through Job Centre Plus.

However, it is important to note that working up to and past state pension age might not be beneficial for everyone. If the only work available to a retiree is bad quality, insecure and low paying, it could contribute to adverse health impacts.[167] Older people should be able to access good work. Older people's employment should be considered as a central pillar of government's plans for a New Deal for Working People.

Volunteering

Volunteering is another outlet for older people to engage in their community and build connections post-retirement. For many people, this begins a pathway into work. Since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a decline in volunteers. A third (32 per cent) of charities surveyed by the Charity Commission in 2021 said they experienced a shortage of volunteers, with other charities reporting to the Commission that volunteering capacity dropped by 40 per cent after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[168] In 2023, DCMS estimated that there were four million fewer people participating in regular formal volunteering than there were in 2019/20.[169] There is great need for committed and regular volunteers in the third sector, and many older people have the necessary qualifications, experience and time to be able to fill the gap.

164 Department for Work and Pensions, Mid-life MOT expansion to help tens of thousands assess work, wellbeing, and finances, July 2023. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mid-life-mot-expansion-to-help-tens-of-thousands-assess-work-wellbeing-and-finances.
165 Centre for Ageing Better, Evidence provided to the CSJ, July 2024.
166 Centre for Social Justice, Creating a Britain That Works and Cares, February 2024, p. 68.
167 Ibid, p. 24.
168 The Charity Commission for England and Wales, What New Research Tells Us About the Impact Of COVID-19 On Charities, 28 October 2021.
169 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2021/22: Volunteering and Charitable Giving, 28 February 2023.

Volunteering also protects against loneliness. Government recognised this with the launch of the *Know Your Neighbourhood Fund* in 2023 which set aside up to £30 million to support charitable projects that help people take part in volunteering.[170]

Older people are already more likely to volunteer than younger generations. According to the latest release of the Community Life Survey, 23 per cent of 65 to 74-year-olds said they formally volunteered at least once in the last month. Older people aged 65 to 74 are over twice as likely to volunteer than those aged between 25 and 34.

Figure 13: Formal volunteering by age cohort, 2021/22.
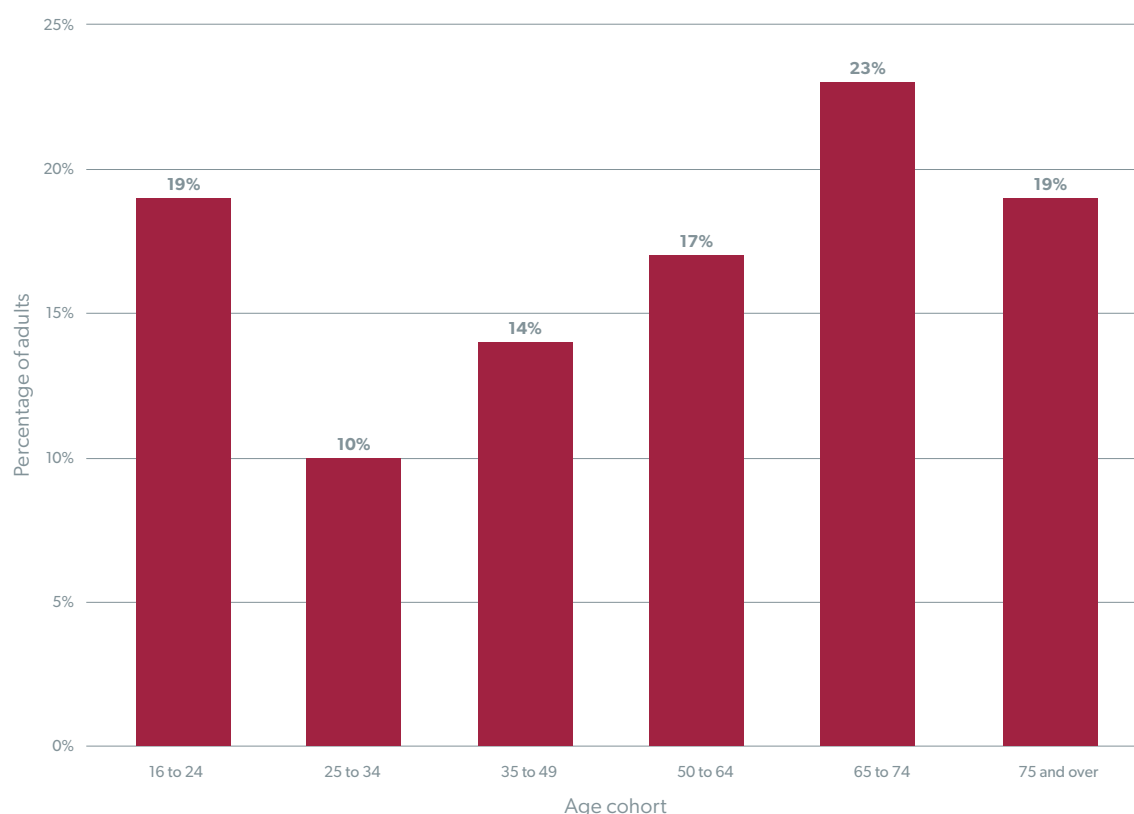
Source: Community Life Survey 2021/22 Reference Tables, worksheet D1.

Despite nearly one in four older people aged 65 to 74, and nearly one in five of those aged 75 plus saying they volunteer formally at least once a month, the CSJ was told that older people face several barriers when accessing volunteering opportunities. There is a large appetite among older age cohorts to volunteer which should be utilised and enabled by government.

KiB told the CSJ that online applications, certifications such as the DBS check and a lack of portability (not being able to transfer certificates such as a DBS or food hygiene certificate between different charities) put unnecessary barriers in the way of older people.

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170 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Major fund to tackle loneliness and boost volunteering in disadvantaged areas launched, March 2023. Accessed: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-fund-to-tackle-loneliness-and-boost-volunteering-in-disadvantaged-are-as-launched.

"Society makes life so difficult for older people…Please make the opportunity for older people to do good in the world when they retire easier."

"The move to the online world has made it much more difficult for people to engage."

"The DBS check and other volunteer application forms are often online, and this can discourage many older people, not because they have anything to hide but because it is not fully explained. For example, some older people we've worked with have actually stopped applying, not simply because they don't have the computer skills to do it, but also because they have had a parking ticket in the past and think they have a criminal record. This would not happen if someone helped them complete that form."

"The online induction for a National Volunteer Certificate [relevant for health and care environments] can take over six hours to complete and is very difficult to do on your own at home as, if you get stuck on a question, you can't move on. This can be immensely frustrating and discouraging. In short, you have got regulatory chaos…The system cannot cope with the regulation."

"The result is that there are many lonely people in the community who could give a really valuable contribution to society if only they had appropriate support. Although it is important for everyone to be safe, an obsession with an increasing number of poorly explained forms, that have to be completed online, is in danger of destroying community and social life. We have lost sight of common sense…bring back common sense."

"We cannot afford to turn away free offers of help in this country. Both the NHS and social care desperately need extra support. By utilising the help of retired older people as volunteers, they are not only getting extra pairs of hands and years of life skills, but they are also doing much to reduce the loneliness and isolation of older people and all the negative health issues that loneliness can create."

These sentiments were also reflected in conversation with B:Friend at Balby Social Club in Doncaster. They told the CSJ that the hoops needed to jump through to engage in volunteering put people off.

There are frustrations with the number of procedures and processes necessary for volunteering. It is also true that those processes are there to safeguard and protect clients of charities and many are important and necessary. It is right that older people should be given the most help possible to navigate those loopholes and gain the certificates they need to volunteer. Government should focus on maximising the portability of DBS checks and other certificates needed to volunteer. For example, many charities are unaware of the DBS update service and existing mechanisms designed to maximise portability.

There is appetite to volunteer if the processes were simplified and opportunities advertised. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations asked people their reasons for not volunteering. They found that:[171]

- 21 per cent have not been asked.
- 14 per cent said they hadn't heard about opportunities to give help.
- 14 per cent would be put off by the associated bureaucracy and administrative processes.

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171 National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Time Well Spent 2023, June 2023. Accessed: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023/volunteering-barriers-enablers/.

Similar feelings were articulated by older people who spoke to the CSJ. Here's what one service user from Reaching People Leicester said.

> "I mean the government should be announcing on television that, you know, once you've retired, try to look after the community around you, people will find something to do you know. I think we need to tell them that after you've retired look after the community, spend some time with the community because they need it."

Tapping into the desire to volunteer amongst older people would provide multiple benefits for local communities and individuals themselves. Encouraging an active retirement where older people have the opportunities to take responsibility and share their knowledge and experience would also help to tackle loneliness in old age.

Government should make it as easy as possible for older people to volunteer and aim to remove the barriers that prevent older people from taking those opportunities. This should be pioneered through a new Older Person National Volunteer Passport which builds upon the previous review on volunteer passports for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in 2021, and its findings on the expectations for government support.

Among other expectations from the third sector, it found that improving portability as a whole was a priority (including the DBS check), as well as legal clarity over certain issues curtailing volunteer portability.[172] The review found that if any volunteer passporting mechanisms were developed on a national level, there would be a strong demand for government to ensure that this would be designed to support and integrate with local volunteer involving organisations and volunteer passports, rather than compete with them.[173] Integrating with ongoing work conducted by the third sector should be a priority for government in launching an Older Person National Volunteer Passport.

Recommendation 20

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should launch an Older Person National Volunteer Passport. The passport would ease the transition from work into retirement and open up new volunteering opportunities for those of state pension age. Relevant certifications, ID, and qualifications could be ported onto the volunteer passport, including a DBS check. This would remove unnecessary duplication and increase flexibility for volunteers.

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172 Research Works, Volunteer Passporting Research, April 2021, p. 64.
173 Ibid, p. 64.

Conclusion

In conclusion, government must commit to tackling the immediate and long-term challenges that cause and perpetuate loneliness in older people. Despite older people reporting less loneliness than other age groups, there are unique and acute challenges that can make loneliness and social isolation particularly difficult to overcome in old age. These challenges must not be overlooked if the country is to end the loneliness epidemic.

The UK's society is rapidly ageing. This presents challenges across all areas of society. The CSJ has shown how challenges regarding public transport, digital exclusion, housing, family, intergenerational engagement and retirement must be tackled now if older people are to thrive in the decades to come.

Tackling loneliness also saves the state money. Severe loneliness in older people costs health and social care services in excess of £6,000 per person.[174] The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has spoken about the need for the NHS to shift its focus from simply treating sickness to preventing it. Adopting the recommendations outlined in this report would save the tax payer money in the long-term by preventing the ill health associated with loneliness.

The CSJ has outlined 20 recommendations that span multiple government departments. However, loneliness cannot just be solved by government action. The loneliness epidemic is also the result of long-term cultural changes. Family breakdown and dispersal, a lack of intergenerational engagement, and confusion over purpose and value after retirement are not a result of government policy so much as they are a reflection of changing cultural trends within the context of an increasingly individualistic society. The challenge for government is to create the conditions for a society in which all older people feel they belong and have value.

Loneliness is a dehumanising phenomenon with multiple causes that emerge out of a society that has lost a shared sense of togetherness and moral purpose. This report has charted six of its causes in later life, as well as practical solutions to solve it.

The CSJ will continue to campaign on these issues until no older person has to worry about being isolated, alone and without the fundamental human relationships that give life its meaning and colour.

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174 London School of Economics and Political Science, Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review, September 2017, p. 6.

The Centre for Social Justice