

Positive Ageing in London – The Silver Economy – A conference on older workers’ contribution towards economic development and employment

Recommendations from group discussions – 19 March 2018

The silver economy is the biggest growth sector in the UK. More Older People are living longer and more healthily and soon there will be more people aged 65+ than those aged under 15 in the population. Over 70% of people aged 50- 64 are working and there are more people working aged over 65 (1.3 million). We also know that greater numbers of Older People are volunteering and caring (50-64 year olds make up over 50% of carers).

Despite all this economic activity, the needs of the 50+ are often overlooked. We would like the Mayor to recognise the urgency of the problems facing those aged 50+, and which are becoming more urgent each year as 50 moves towards becoming the point of mid-life-expectancy.

Recommendations to the Mayor of London

The aim of this conference was to raise awareness and to look at the specific issues facing, Older People (50+) in the UK but in particular in London.

In the light of the presentations and discussions on the Silver Economy the following key concerns were identified by those attending the conference.

A new strategy forum

There are three major umbrella organisations campaigning for Older People in London f LOPSG (London Older People’s Strategies Group), GLF (The Greater London Forum for Older People) and PAiL (Positive Ageing in London). We request that the Mayor convenes a meeting to discuss the best way for these organisations to work more closely with each other.

We would like to see a new Deputy Mayor with specific responsibilities for Older People and the creation of Older Workers Champions. The Deputy Mayor would promote Older Workers Charter (Age Platform Europe/PEOPLE Charters could be used as they are or as a starting point).

A 50+ forum in all Councils

We would like the Mayor to ensure that every borough has an Older People’s Forum. Although we recognise that some boroughs do have a forum, many have ceased to exist or have become moribund. All of the London boroughs should have a forum linked to the Mayor’s Office and all actions should be accountable and clearly reported in a public arena.

Employment and economic development

We would like the Mayor’s Office to publicly recognise those companies that have actively recruited Older People; companies like McDonald’s and B&Q. We would also like assurance that the mayor’s own department is also actively recruiting Older People.

Employers also need support in recognising that Older People can still add value in professional occupations such as IT and Finance. There are many myths built up around older workers, we would like to see these properly challenged.

We recommend:

- Employers are given more incentives to employ Older People, including those from diverse backgrounds
- Employers are incentivised to support the low skilled into jobs.
- A mechanism is set up to facilitate the engagement between 50+ seeking employment and big companies, local authorities and government departments. Large organizations are reluctant to interact directly with recruitment and tend to outsource to agencies. We need these organisations to have direct contact with those supporting the 50+.
- There is a clear message challenging the myths about Older People being a drain on the economy
- There is action to make it easier for over 50s to work part-time so as to enable them to carry on working well into old age
- There is action to make work more accessible - do not build homes for people unless there are plans to include jobs nearby
- Create a more open and flexible work environment so that those with caring responsibilities or with disabilities of their own can break up the working day to accommodate their needs.

Training and apprenticeships

Older People need more apprenticeships to help them embark on a new career path. The apprenticeship levy is available to Older People but so far it has underperformed and has not been fully implemented. We would like to see the Mayor get fully behind this initiative. We would like the Mayor's office to ensure the reforms of the Apprenticeship Levy fully support those over 50 into work through this route. We support his call for unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds raised in London to be devolved to the capital.

We would like to see the Work and Health programme implemented across London. This programme was launched in the NW and Wales and is to be rolled out over the whole country in 2018.

Skills Strategy

Local Authorities need to provide more training to assist individuals back into to work and to specifically provide training for the over 50s. Training needs to have a clear awareness of the gender difference throughout working life; because of family based commitments, women often acquire fewer transferable skills.

We would like to see the following implemented:

- Intergenerational skills exchanges
- Using the life experiences of Older People to help youngsters - Older People feel they can offer, a work ethic, communication and social skills
- Skills and work training throughout a lifetime
- Support for 'Learning on the go' using buses as mobile centres of learning
- Additional training on the tax system and on what to do about pensions
- Address issue of long-term 50+ unemployed having to "downsize" expectations when applying for jobs – support to manage expectations so that they are not only realistic but also meet peoples aspirations

- Recognise and meet the need for positive counsel and advice on writing effective CVs/job applications
- Recognise and address issues around poor job security, zero-hours contracts etc.
- Support for community engagement e.g. in improving English-language skills
- Tackle social isolation and loneliness, which are a barrier to entering the job market
- Provide confidence-building programmes

Volunteering or unpaid work

We would like to bring to the Mayor's attention the immense economic value of the unpaid work provided by the 50+ in the form of volunteering, social care etc. The economic contribution of people aged 65 plus is £24 billion according to the Age UK Chief Economist's report, which found that £11.4 billion came from informal caring, child care contributed £6.6 billion and nearly £6 billion came from volunteering.

We would like to see more effective use of the many opportunities offered by volunteers. Let's recognise that volunteering is unpaid work.

Older People and digital skills

There is a need for increased training in IT for the 50+, particularly job seekers. This could be partly provided by younger people so as to encourage intergenerational cooperation but also Older People who are IT literate can supply this support.

We recommend:

- Improve digital access for 50+providing IT skills for Older People and for those who have to work with them.
- Provide intergenerational activities such as mentoring, reverse-mentoring, and buddying of older and younger people around employment issues.

Transport Strategy

The Mayor's Office must address the issues of overcrowded trains (e.g. Shenfield Line) which make it difficult or impossible for 50+ and people with health issues to travel to work.

We would like a guarantee of the retention of existing travel support, e.g. Freedom Pass, 60+ Oyster Card.

Older People and housing

We would like to see greater attention given to housing needs of Older People.

Communication

Improve the Mayor's website – in particular, add a general-purpose email address. At present if an issue does not fit neatly into a pre-defined category it cannot be communicated at all. Given the inaccessibility of the Mayor and his deputies, this is a major concern.

In today's world, the amount of information can be overwhelming. We would like special attention given to ensure information from the Mayor's Office and London Councils is organised, streamlined and smart-targeted to relevant audience.