



## A LONDON SURVIVAL PLAN FOR OLDER LONDONERS FOR THE WINTER

### ***Older people have suffered greatly from the effects of Covid 19 and lockdown***

With a second wave and lockdown we face the spectre of older people having to live with COVID-19 for a long time. Older people have suffered from COVID-19 not just the terrible death toll but the deep effect on their lives and wellbeing and so urgently require support.

Age UK research in England and Wales and Independent Age vividly shows this and the statistics are dramatic – 37 % of over 70s surveyed in September had over a seven-day period not left home or left only for exercise, basic needs, or health reasons. 45 per cent were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about leaving their house because of COVID-19. For older people who rely on public transport – over two thirds were less confident using public transport and the same lack of confidence applies to shopping and health appointments. Many suffered from reduced physical health being cooped up leading to health problems in the future. London data from Independent Age shows over a half of older Londoners stating their mental health has got worse. Many older people have suffered from a cocktail of problems – poor diet, isolation, a lack of mental stimulation, anxiety and in some cases onset of dementia. These problems will become more acute with a second lockdown and potentially restrictions lasting well into 2021

### ***Recovery needs to be real and now***

The risk is these problems get forgotten in the longer-term aspirations of recovery planning and not seen as priorities. But tackling these problems should now be the first stage on any recovery planning to help tackle the difficulties of people to cope with living with COVID-19.

### ***A Survival Plan to help build the resilience of older Londoners***

Our plan aims is to restore the confidence and resilience of older people to ensure they get out, are active, get necessary health support, feel supported and above all can actively contribute to their communities and to London's future

It outlines priorities targeted at those who are most in need and has actions for London's government – local government and health. It's based on research evidence, reviewing other cities recovery plans, as well as the lived experience of older people who contributed issues for a future London as part of the consultation on the missions.

## **A. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH OLDER PEOPLE AND HELP SUPPORT LIVING WITH COVID.**

### **The challenges**

Many older Londoners have been cautious during COVID-19 creating a lack of confidence about what they can do safely. Older Londoners need accurate assessments of risks and rules and bespoke communications about what they can do safely.

### **Key priorities**

- Better tailored and simple information on risks for older people and how to mitigate these through bespoke public health campaigns geared at older Londoners according to need
- Local information on COVID-19 rates and any breakouts published by area
- Provision of hard copy information for those unable to access online information

## **B. COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT INITIATIVES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

### **The challenges**

As with the first lockdown communities play a massive role in supporting older people and this needs to be maintained. Local initiatives and infrastructure need to continue to help older people particularly those more at risk and vulnerable and provide strong supportive neighbourhoods. Many older Londoners had their access to food severely curtailed - they are less likely to have the equipment and skills for online food shopping and some reported difficulties in getting delivery slots. Financial wellbeing is important at a community level in providing support for those facing hardship and poverty.

### **Key priorities**

- Review and share best practise across London on what worked well in local solutions
- Each London Borough to work to maintain local initiatives through support as part of a community development policy to protect neighbourhoods working with older people
- Provide information for older people about local services available and reopening of services such as community facilities and community centres and health information
- Ensure that access to food, prescriptions and cash is available locally for vulnerable groups including increasing supermarket home delivery by phone by major supermarket chains expanding their home delivery service and to accept orders over the phone
- Programmes of advice on financial benefits available e.g. pension credit

## **C. MAINTAINING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OLDER PEOPLE**

### **The challenges**

Older people have experienced significant challenge to their health from the crisis. For those who suffered from COVID there are problems of recovery and the need for rehabilitation. Months of isolation and inactivity may have had unintended consequences for physical and mental health. Usage of the health service has declined during the crisis by all age groups with a backlog of treatments which will need to be cleared and older people must have confidence in using the NHS again. There has been a move to telephone and online consultations, but it is uncertain how well these serve older patients.

### **Key priorities**

- Convince older people that NHS services are open for non-COVID-19 cases and safe to use
- Clear the backlog of cases e.g. elective surgery and better communicate delays
- Ensure face-to-face health consultations are available to those that prefer them
- Ensure that necessary levels of rehabilitation services are in place to meet the needs of those who have suffered from COVID-19, particularly Long COVID-19
- Develop and extend local initiatives to promote physical activity for older people

## **D. BEING CONNECTED AND REDUCING DIGITAL EXCLUSION**

### **The challenges**

The digital divide was one of the inequalities facing older people highlighted in the first lockdown. Older people who were digitally excluded suffered from loneliness and isolation. The cost of devices and internet access proved to be a barrier for many older people coupled with lack of digital literacy and confidence. With a second lockdown there's a need to ensure older people do not suffer from being unable to engage online and to improve the rates of older people being connected digitally

### **Key priorities**

- Continue to ensure that those who do not have online access received targeted printed information about core information and services
- Ensure shops and public services have efficient phone systems to ensure people can ring with queries or to book services
- Increase programmes of support to get online including provision of free Wi-Fi to those older people in need and of pay as you go handsets and tablets for those who do not have equipment
- Use volunteering opportunities to develop digital befriending services to help older people get online

## **E. THE ABILITY FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO TRAVEL SAFELY**

### **The challenges**

Evidence shows older Londoners are concerned about the safety of travelling on public transport which they are reliant on rather than walking or cycling or traveling by car. Whilst social distancing is in place then there are constraints on the capacity of public transport. The free travel for over 60s pre 9am has been suspended leading to problems. Financial constraints on TfL may lead to routes being cut or longer waiting times which impact on essential travel such as hospital appointments. Covid secure street changes have adversely affected older people's safety.

### **Key priorities**

- Improve public confidence in travelling by public transport in London through communicating safety provision
- Ensure hospital transportation is adequate to meet any increase in demand
- End the suspension of free travel for over 60s before 9am to support those on low incomes travelling to work and health appointments
- Audit of safety for amenities and older people's needs assessment to ensure high streets and public spaces are age friendly including provision of toilets

## **F. PROVIDING SAFE HOMES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

### **The challenges**

The lockdown exacerbated the problems of those living in unsuitable accommodation – leading to physical and mental health problems. There have also been problems of rent issues for some older people with private landlords.

### **Key priorities**

- Local authorities to identify the needs of older people in unsafe accommodation
- Local authorities to address non-decent homes in their communities and action on housing quality as an outcome in all health and care integration, prevention, and improvement initiatives
- Ensuring the availability of, and access to, organisations that support housing maintenance and improvements to help with aids and adaptations
- Ensure older private renters under threat are protected
- Improvement in the availability of impartial housing information and advice

## **G. ENSURING EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCE SUPPORT FOR OLDER WORKERS**

### **The challenges**

Older workers are now at risk of being laid off and face a tougher job market – they are the second most vulnerable age group apart from young people affected by the impact of COVID-19. Many older people have decided to take early retirement or an enforced drop out of the job market. Among older workers, 37% reported that their household income was now lower than in February. With a second lock down older workers who are over 60 and in occupations unable to work from home are worried about their health risk and those with caring responsibilities face difficulties.

### **Key priorities**

- Introduce tailor made job seeker support, skills development and for older workers facing redundancy
- Develop schemes for skills development for older workers together with financial health advice
- Ensure safety protocols in place for older workers over 60s and or in the clinically vulnerable category in workplaces and support for furloughing
- Ensure employers do not discriminate against older workers through better monitoring and publicising how to challenge age discrimination

Compiled by Tim Whitaker, PAiL November 2020