"Businesses can do more to support older people's social participation…"

AGEING SOCIABLY

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DEM☺S

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Acknowledgements

Josephine Brady for their expert coordination of the publication and launch of this report.

As ever, any errors or omissions are our own.

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July 2012

Foreword

'Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.' These words spoken by Mother Teresa resonate, not only because she places loneliness above the other forms of abject poverty she encountered through her work, but because we have all at one time or another felt the sting of loneliness in our own lives. This sense of disconnect, irrelevance and cold isolation brings significant unhappiness for those in its throes. Sadly, this problem is particularly prevalent in older age and shows no immediate signs of abating. Evidence suggests that a fairly constant proportion of older people (6–13 per cent) feel lonely often or always. We know that there are effective measures we can take to reach out to people to build social connections and reduce levels of loneliness among those in later life.

Since 2008, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has supported a range of initiatives to tackle loneliness in older age as part of a wider ageing and social cohesion programme. We have supported research and practical projects working with a broad range of stakeholders including voluntary sector leaders, designers and social entrepreneurs. Continuing our interest in stimulating cross-cutting approaches and convening people from across sectors and fields of interest, we were delighted to have the opportunity to support this in-depth piece considering the special role for the private sector in building connections within our ageing societies. The report also complements the work of the Campaign to End Loneliness, of which we are founder funder, and which applies a collaborative approach to tackling loneliness in later life through engaging its many supporters and action group members, including from within the business community. The research presented within this report represents

the first attempt, however, to form a coherent picture of the current activities of the business sector and opportunities for building further on the assets, skills and interests they might offer to solve this pernicious social problem.

The picture that emerges is one of creativity and enthusiasm from no small number of businesses in employing a range of methods and resources to assist their older customers to stay connected. From those companies providing space for get-togethers, to pharmacies organising health walks in return for discounts, instances of good practice are not hard to find. Nonetheless, such initiatives are ad hoc, often the inspiration of one passionate employee bringing an idea to fruition rather than part of a wider strategy. More remains to be done to encourage increasing numbers of private sector companies to join in and coordinate their actions, both within their companies and with others in their community. Gathering clearer evidence, sharing learning and strengthening networks across the private sector are all steps that can help to build a stronger presence from the business community in the movement to end loneliness in later life. And as the research points out, there are a number of motivations for businesses to do so, not least the economic argument: people over the age of 50 are responsible for nearly 40 per cent of consumer spending each year and own some 80 per cent of the wealth in the UK.

What is abundantly clear is that there is a role for everyone to play in helping older adults in their community maintain social connections and keep loneliness at bay – this is not simply an issue for central government. A community comprises a wide range of actors; the local authority, voluntary sector providers, other local associations, local businesses and citizens need to collaborate more if they are to find solutions that work for the whole community. There are a number of policy frameworks which are paving the way for greater local collaboration and autonomy, such as the localism agenda and the related open public services white paper. It is our hope that the findings in this report, along with such policy guidance, will encourage new commitments from local voluntary sector players and local

businesses to challenge their preconceptions of the other, and look to the assets and energy each can bring to this agenda. As the influential social activist Dorothy Day once said, 'We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community.'

Andrew Barnett
Director
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK

Executive summary

Introduction

This research responds to an important social trend in our ageing society in the UK: as our population ages, we are seeing greater numbers of older people living alone, increasing the risk that they will experience loneliness and social isolation in later life. This situation is exacerbated by long- and short-term trends that are affecting opportunities for older people to socialise and build their social networks in their local area. First, the local composition of many communities is changing as a result of long-term trends such as the closure of post offices, libraries and pubs, with fewer opportunities for informal social contact on offer. Second, in the short-term recent austerity measures have reduced the funding available for statutory and voluntary sector organisations that support older people in some local areas, increasing pressures on services such as lunch clubs and day centres, and in some cases threatening them with closure.

In response to these various challenges, the central research aim of this project is to explore how we can unlock existing resources in the community to increase the opportunities for older people to make social connections within their local area. In the light of current pressures on statutory and voluntary sector services, we particularly explore the opportunity for businesses to play a greater role in supporting older people's social participation in the communities where they are based. This research has included identifying examples of current good practice that other businesses might wish to replicate, considering the business case for supporting older people's social participation, and exploring some of the challenges for businesses in adopting more 'age friendly' ways of working.

The research

In this research, we have set out to explore this central research question: How might businesses work most effectively with their local communities to support older people's social participation and reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation in old age?

We have focused particularly on exploring three dimensions of this question:

· identifying existing good practice that other businesses can learn from
· identifying the key motivating factors for businesses to get involved in tackling social isolation and loneliness in old age
· identifying the challenges and barriers that businesses might need to overcome if they are to become involved in this way

The research methodology for this project included three main elements, which we will briefly describe:

· *Landscape mapping*: Mapping the current activities of UK businesses that support older people's social participation. Our methods for the landscape mapping included desk-based research and interviews with experts from businesses, charities and local authorities. On the basis of this research we created a typology of varieties of business involvement and identified a series of good practice case studies.
· *Developing case studies*: We developed seven detailed case studies that demonstrate different ways in which businesses can work directly with older people in the community, or in partnership with community groups or charities, to reduce loneliness and social isolation in old age.
· *Holding an 'idea-swapping' workshop:* In the second phase of the research we held an 'idea-swapping' workshop to bring together charities and social enterprises, businesses and older people to share ideas about how businesses can generate new social opportunities for older people.

The findings
Business involvement typology

In the 'landscape mapping' exercise, we identified a variety of examples of ways that businesses are currently supporting older people's social participation. These examples fall roughly into six thematic categories or types:

- *Traditional sponsorship and in-kind donations*: The business provides sponsorship to fund a service or donates refreshments or products to support social events for older people.
- *Products, services or discounts targeted at older customers*: The business offers commercially driven products, services, social activities, entertainment or discounts that support older people's social participation.
- *Providing social spaces for older people*: The business provides a social space where older people can meet, socialise or learn new skills.
- *Supporting regular social activities for older people*: The business either arranges regular social activities for older people or provides support in kind to enable such activities to take place.
- *Employee volunteering to support older people's social participation*: The business provides employee volunteers to support activities that enable older people to participate socially.
- *Organising regular social activities for retired former employees*: The business provides a dedicated programme to support its retired former employees to stay socially connected in retirement.

Table 1 summarises the main examples that we identified of business activities that support older people's social participation.

What's in it for business?

We used the interviews, case studies and 'idea-swapping' workshop to explore why it is worthwhile for businesses to invest

Table 1 **Summary of business involvement models and case study examples**

Business involvement model	Description	Examples of current activities
Traditional sponsorship and in-kind donations	Providing sponsorship to fund a service or donating refreshments or products to support social events for older people	• Japanese Tobacco International (JTI) sponsoring Age NI's 'First Connect' home visiting support service • Waitrose's partnership with Age UK Norfolk, including fundraising, volunteering, and providing tea and cakes to support a festive tea dance • Donations of free gifts and support for events (eg vitamins, raffle prizes and energy saving light bulbs) by Boots, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer and Power NI
Paid-for products, activities or discounts targeted at older customers	Offering commercially driven products and services, social activities and entertainment or discounts targeted at older people	• Telecare products and services • Saga holidays and dating services for people aged 50+ • Discounted 'silver screenings' and 'reminiscence screenings' put on by cinemas including the Odeon and Picturehouse cinemas • B&Q free Diamond Card membership for over 60s (10 per cent discount on Wednesdays) • Boots Over-60s Club (this includes ten advantage points for every pound spent, discounts at Boots opticians and special promotions)

Table 1   **Summary of business involvement models and case study examples –** *continued*

Business involvement model	Description	Examples of current activities
Providing social spaces for older people	Providing social spaces where older people can meet, socialise or learn new skills	• McDonald's free tea and coffee mornings for people aged above state pension age • Sainsbury's 'More than a Store' scheme, which gives community groups access to meeting rooms • Titanic Brewery pubs hosting Stoke Stone & Stafford social media surgeries and knitting circles
Supporting regular social activities for older people	Arranging regular (low-cost or free) social activities for older people, sometimes in partnership with a voluntary or community sector organisation	• Green Light Pharmacy women's and men's ' health walks' • SLM leisure centre offers free afternoon badminton for people aged 50+ • Dementia Café Market Harborough, supported by Sainsbury's • 'Extra Time' programme in care homes and football stadiums (Football Foundation, supported by football clubs and other partners)
Employee volunteering to support older people's social participation	Employee volunteering in activities that are specifically intended to support older people to participate socially	• 02 mobile phone training, supported by WRVS • Zurich Community Trust and Age UK's Call in Time programme
Organising regular social activities for retired former employees	Organising regular social activities to support retired former employees to stay socially connected in retirement	• John Lewis Partnership Retired Partners Programme • Morrisons Plus Retirement Club

effort and resources in providing opportunities for older people to socialise. We identified six key motivating factors:

· the value of the 'golden market'
· building a positive local identity
· knowing your customer
· attracting new customers and building customer loyalty
· increasing employees' motivation and skills
· reciprocal relationships with former employees

The value of the 'golden market'

It was estimated in 2008 that people aged over 50 own 80 per cent of wealth in the UK and are responsible for almost 40 per cent of consumer spending each year.[1] The older market is forecast to grow by 81 per cent from 2005 to 2030, but the 18–59-year-old market only by 7 per cent.[2] Therefore older people are hugely valuable to businesses as a consumer market that is currently under-catered to.

Building a positive local identity

Business is all about trust. Businesses tend to do well if they build a strong relationship with the community they serve and demonstrate positive values. As one interviewee commented, 'Good feedback spreads.'

Knowing your customer

Businesses that are connected to their local community are better able to understand that community's needs and respond to those needs. Businesses that work closely with their older customers (a growing client-base), and regularly consult older people, will have the knowledge they need to meet older people's consumer needs more effectively.

Attracting new customers and building customer loyalty

'It's all about brand awareness.' Businesses that provide social activities for older people are raising their profile among older customers, encouraging consumer loyalty and also attracting loyalty from the wider community (eg friends and relations of older people benefiting from the business's activities). Research

also suggests that older people are loyal to businesses that satisfy their needs for regular social contact, therefore businesses that prioritise friendly customer service could benefit from increased demand among older customers.

Increasing employees' motivation and skills

Businesses' employees enjoy feeling that they are doing something good for the community through their work. Evidence demonstrates that meaningful community engagement, for example through volunteering programmes, increases employees' satisfaction with their jobs. There is also a substantial evidence base that employee volunteering increases employees' skills and can make an important contribution toward their ongoing professional development.

Reciprocal relationships with former employees

Businesses that provide ongoing social support for their retired former employees benefit from these reciprocal relationships and the continuing sense of loyalty that they encourage. In some cases this might mean that former employees support the business's charitable objectives in the community (for example, volunteering to visit and befriend socially isolated older people in the community). In other cases, former employees volunteer to support customer service at busy times (eg in the run-up to Christmas) or support the business to consult older people about the products and services they would like to see on offer.

Challenges involved in achieving broader business engagement

Our research also identified a number of challenges to broader business engagement in reducing social isolation in later life.

These mostly fell into five themes:
· attitudinal challenges
· practical challenges
· the need to identify your business's role
· central and local leadership
· inexperience in working across sectors

Attitudinal challenges

The main attitudinal challenges we identified fell into three categories. Research participants were concerned about:

- discriminatory attitudes towards older people, so businesses are unwilling or uninterested in catering to older people as consumers
- a lack of interest in meeting older people's needs, which has led to market failure for older people, with under-provision of products and services that meet older people's needs and inaccessible retail environments
- some businesses being concerned about social isolation in old age, but feeling it was not the role of businesses (or their own business) to tackle it

Practical challenges

Practical challenges that were cited mainly included space constraints that might prevent a business from hosting social activities, and financial challenges associated with providing new services or adopting new ways of working. However, participants were clear that these challenges were rarely insurmountable. They also argued that some businesses might cite 'health and safety' considerations as a barrier to getting involved, but this was usually just an excuse for not wishing to undertake something that may involve time or cost.

The need to identify your business's role

This challenge reflects the fact that community engagement is not an obvious part of the business model of many businesses. Staff may not feel they have the skill-set or experience needed. There may also be 'a lack of knowledge of what is possible'. Research participants pointed out that corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are most effective and sustainable when they are mainstreamed within core business goals and operating models. They also highlighted the role that voluntary sector organisations can play in helping businesses to identify how they might complement existing provision, and in helping businesses to consult their older customers.

Central and local leadership

A number of people pointed out that concerted efforts from both senior leaders and staff are needed to get new projects started and to sustain them. This presents challenges, as if either of these facilitating factors is lacking, this can lead to inertia. Business leaders need to champion effective engagement with older people as a business priority, while local staff also need to be motivated to broker relationships with older people in the community and to translate policies into action.

Inexperience in working across sectors

A number of research participants highlighted the perception that businesses and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations operate in 'two different worlds', and therefore there may be attitudinal barriers to joint working from both sides, which will need to be overcome. They also pointed out that some kind of coordination role is needed locally to broker relationships and match supply and demand between businesses and community groups.

Policy directions

On the basis of these findings, we set out in this report a series of detailed policy recommendations for central and local government, businesses and the VCS, to suggest how each sector can do more to build collaborative partnerships to help reduce loneliness in old age. Running throughout these individual

policy recommendations are three core principles – the desire:
· to create an inclusive society
· to share responsibility across sectors
· to make sure that interventions are evidence based

Creating an inclusive society

The emphasis of this research is on older people because they are at greater risk of social isolation than other age groups for a variety of life-course transitions associated with old age. However, this does not mean that other age groups are not important or that social activities should be age-specific. The

most important thing is that the social activities businesses support should be led by community needs. In many cases, it will be appropriate that social spaces and activities for older people are inclusive of other age groups, to facilitate cross-generational relationships.

Sharing responsibility across sectors

First and foremost, this report recognises that tackling loneliness in old age is a role for government, and should be recognised as an important policy issue relating to public health *and* social justice. However, we also contend that this is not solely the responsibility of government – all citizens have a role to play in building a cohesive, inclusive society in which people of all ages feel valued. Therefore, while it is clear that government must take first responsibility for preventing and reducing loneliness in old age, these recommendations will focus primarily on how we can build on what is already available to older people by increasing the capacity of businesses to support older people's social inclusion.

Evidence-based practice

There is currently a less strong tradition of measuring social value in the private sector than in the public and community sectors.[3] This is something that needs to change if we are to ensure that businesses' resources are invested wisely, in ways that will generate the greatest possible social return. Making sure that interventions aimed at reducing loneliness are evidence based presents challenges for all sectors. Government agencies, businesses and VCS organisations all have an important role to play in growing the evidence base around effective approaches to tackling loneliness and sharing good practice.

The more detailed policy recommendations that we make in this report are divided into those for central government, local government, the business community and the VCS.

Recommendations for central government

This report makes three main recommendations to central government. First, we recommend that *central government should raise awareness of businesses' role in tackling loneliness*. To help achieve this, we suggest that the Office for Civil Society or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) should seek private sector sponsorship for an annual award for business-led projects aimed at tackling social isolation in old age.

Second, central government should help to *build the evidence base and help businesses to share good practice*. The Government has a valuable role to play in drawing together existing knowledge of good evidence-based practice in one place, and supporting businesses to evaluate their corporate responsibility work to generate new evidence to inform future policy development.

Third, the government should *embed expectations of cross-sector working to reduce social isolation in old age in all relevant policy development*. Examples of relevant policy areas include public health, social care and later life working.

Recommendations for local government

The report makes three main recommendations to local authorities. First, local authorities should work with their local partners to *create age-friendly communities*. This includes making improvements to public spaces to ensure they do not 'design out' older people through an inaccessible built environment. Regeneration money that is invested in city centres should be linked to the council's strategy for meeting the needs of an ageing population.

Second, local authorities should *engage with the local business community through health and wellbeing boards*. Health and wellbeing boards should develop shared cross-sector strategies for supporting 'healthy ageing' locally. Part of this strategy should include a focus on taking action to tackle loneliness and social isolation in old age.

Third, local authorities should *remove disincentives to community engagement and reward businesses for being community-focused*. Following the recent Localism Act, local authorities now

have more power to set business rates locally. Councils should take this opportunity to explore how they might recognise a business's social value to the community in how they set their local rates.

Recommendations for businesses

These are the main recommendations that this report makes to the business community:

- *Businesses should identify what resources they can contribute* to support older people's social inclusion in the local community (for example, providing a venue to host meetings or events, providing refreshments or transport to support a regular event, or offering the support of employee volunteers).
- *Providing a brokerage role*: Businesses should consider seconding one of their employees or contributing a portion of an employee's time to act as a broker between local businesses that have resources to offer and charities and community groups that work with older people. Such an initiative could build on the example of Business in the Community's (BITC's) programme Business Connectors. These brokers could work closely with local partnership organisations, such as chambers of commerce and Councils for Voluntary Service, to help publicise their work in the local area.
- *Businesses should perform an 'age friendly' audit* of their business to identify how well they are meeting older customers' needs.
- Businesses should *build regular consultation with older people into their business model*. This will help them to respond to older customers' social and consumer needs and to develop new products and services that support older people's social participation.
- *Businesses should identify clear employee responsibilities for community engagement.* Large businesses should ensure they have an identified person in each store (or branch) who has designated responsibility for community engagement as part of their core role.
- *Businesses should build a budget for measuring social impact into community engagement budgets*. Like the public sector and

voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, businesses need to measure the social value of their community engagement activities – this is the only way to identify effective approaches and share good practice within and between businesses.

Recommendations for the voluntary and community sector

The report also makes three core recommendations to the VCS. First, VCS organisations should *engage with the local business community*. This may lead them to go out of their comfort zone rather than collaborate with statutory services as the default position. Important brokers to facilitate this may include the local chambers of commerce, the local business partnership and the relevant Councils for Voluntary Service.

Second, VCS organisations need to *think beyond funding*: VCS organisations should develop a 'menu of options' for collaboration to offer to potential business partners, detailing the various opportunities for businesses to support their activities. These options might include providing them with access to free meeting spaces or providing back-office support or skills-based mentoring. This would help businesses that do not have budgets for community engagement to identify other resources they can offer.

Third, VCS organisations should *highlight the benefits of community engagement for businesses and encourage them to consult older customers* (as summarised above). VCS organisations can also help businesses to consult older people by providing a brokerage role.

From research to action

We hope that the new findings and recommendations set out in this report will inspire more people to consider what their organisation can do to support older people's social participation and tackle loneliness. Only by recognising that loneliness in old age is a shared social problem, which we are all responsible for addressing, can we develop genuinely inclusive and collaborative

approaches to ensuring that older people remain valued members of their communities, and continue to have opportunities to participate, contribute and build new social relationships as they age.

Section 1
Later life and loneliness in the UK

1 Social trends shaping our experiences of ageing

Today's 85-year-olds are likely to have witnessed a dramatic improvement in income and living standards, with the slum housing that was common in the 1920s and 1930s replaced by entire new towns stretching out from the suburbs of cities. Perhaps most importantly, they will also have witnessed enormous change in the structure and distribution of social and family relationships. Half a decade ago research by Michael Young in the East End of London reported that it was common to find three generations of families living together in the same house or street.[4] For many this way of life has vanished: less than 5 per cent of white British grandparents now live in multi-generational households, although the proportion differs between ethnic groups.

In this chapter we will briefly set out some of the social and demographic trends that are influencing people's experiences of ageing in twenty-first century Britain, particularly focusing on how these trends are affecting older people's social relationships, and in some cases increasing the risk that older people will experience loneliness and social isolation.

Demographic ageing and living alone

It now well known that the UK population is ageing. In 2010, UK residents aged 65 and over made up 17 per cent of the population, up from 15 per cent in 1985, and this number will increase to 23 per cent by 2035.[5] The proportion of the UK population to have seen the greatest increase in size over the past 15 years – and the age group that is set to increase the most dramatically in the future – is the age group known as the 'oldest old'. These are individuals aged 85 plus who were born in or before 1927. In 2010 there were more than 1.4 million people

aged 85 or older living in the UK, and this number is set to reach 3.5 million by 2035. Since 1985 the proportion of the UK population aged 85 and over has increased from 1 to 2 per cent.[6] By 2035, it is predicted that a startling 5 per cent of the population will be 85 or older.[7] The numbers of centenarians is also on the increase: figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for 2010 estimate the number of people aged 100 or more at 12,640, a threefold increase on the 1985 estimate of 3,420, and a fivefold increase on the 1980 estimate of 2,500.[8]

As the population ages, an increasing proportion of older people are living alone. Research by the ONS observed: 'In Great Britain 34 per cent of non-institutionalised women aged 65 and over were living alone in 1971 compared with 46 in 2001.'[9] There are also clear gender differences in rates of older people living alone. In 2009 32 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men aged 65–74 lived alone. This proportion increases for people aged 75 plus, with 60 per cent of women aged over 75 living alone compared with 36 per cent of men.[10] This gender difference, with more women living alone, reflects women's higher life expectancy and is likely to result in women outliving their partners.

Increasing rates of solo living for both genders are likely to be attributable to a number of long-term social trends, including higher rates of divorce and separation. Predictions suggest that rates of solo living in old age will continue to rise, as people born in the 1960s were far more likely than previous generations to remain unmarried and were also more likely to divorce or separate. People from these generations were also more likely to remain childless; projections showed that more than a fifth (21 per cent) of women born in 1964 would have no children, in comparison with only 14 per cent of women in the previous generation born in 1931.[11]

Shifting gender ratios

In the past, lower male life expectancy led to there being an average of 50 per cent more women than men in the 65 plus cohort, but since the early 1980s the gap in female to male life

expectancy has shrunk from 6 years to 4.1 years.[12] While in 1980 there were 154 women aged over 65 to every 100 men, the current ratio stands at 127 women to every 100 men, and is set to fall to 118 women to every 100 men by 2035. The ratio at older ages has also seen a significant decrease, falling from nine female centenarians to every male centenarian in 2000, to a ratio of five to one in 2010.[13] These demographic shifts have important implications for policymakers seeking to predict trends in housing, health and social care. For example, as there are more men living into their 70s and 80s, we may see an increase in the number of couples entering old age together.

On the other hand, the ageing of the baby boomer population, with their higher incidence of divorce and separation, may lead to an increase in the number of older men living alone. In addition to the narrowing of the gap between the life expectancy of the sexes, men can currently expect to spend a greater proportion of their lives in good health and free from disability than women. Women have both a higher healthy life expectancy and a higher disability free life expectancy than men, but the gender gap between male and female life expectancy is larger than the gender gap between healthy life expectancy and disability free life expectancy. Therefore while females may live for longer, they will also spend a larger proportion of their lives negotiating ill health and mobility issues.[14] We will explore the interaction between poor health, social relationships and the risk of loneliness in the next chapter.

A more diverse older population

While we can observe a number of broad social trends, it is important to note that these will not affect all groups of older people in the same way. As our population ages, it is also becoming increasingly diverse in its lifestyle, religion and sexual orientation. Already a deeply heterogeneous group, the current cohort of older people are soon to be joined by a wave of people from the – famously individualist – 'baby boomer' generation. Because it has grown up in the era of consumer rights, it is often suggested that members of this group are likely to be far more

vocal about their individual and collective needs than previous generations and, as a result of increasing good health, are more likely to take action to demand that these needs are met. However, other voices have been more sceptical about this proposition. This cohort will include increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities and life limiting illnesses, who would previously have had much shorter life expectancies, but whose survival rates have dramatically improved over the past few decades.[15]

Looking specifically at the present cohort of older people, research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has estimated that people from ethnic minority backgrounds currently make up around 5 per cent of people aged over 85.[16] The number of older black and minority ethnic (BME) people is set to increase in the future, as people who migrated from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s age. Research by the JRF also points out that around 5–7 per cent of the population is estimated to be lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB); there are therefore currently around 80,000 LGB people over the age of 85 in the UK. However, as a result of shifting generational attitudes to sexual identity the proportion of people who are openly LGB is likely to be somewhat lower for older cohorts. Similarly, while just 7 per cent of the transgender population is currently aged over 61, the number of older transgender people living in the UK looks set to increase in the coming years.[17] Services for older people will need to ensure they are inclusive and can respond effectively to the needs of a more diverse cohort. Failure to develop inclusive services could increase the risk of social isolation for LGB and transgender older people.

Research by the ONS into inequalities and poverty in retirement has also highlighted the interaction between ethnicity and income in later life, with implications for policy responses to an increasingly ethnically diverse older population. This research shows that Pakistani and Bangladeshi pensioners are the most likely of all ethnic groups to be found in the bottom two income quintile groups (40 per cent), largely because of the high poverty rates within the non-retired Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. White pensioners are the least likely to be in the

bottom quintile, and the most likely to be in the top two income quintiles (34 per cent), followed by Chinese pensioners (31 per cent) and Indian pensioners (30 per cent).[18] As we will see in the next chapter, research suggests that older people who are living on a low income may be at greater risk of experiencing loneliness and poor wellbeing. However, this risk may be mitigated by other factors for older people from BME groups, such as being part of a tight-knit community or living with family members.

The changing local environment

In addition to the various changes in family and relationship structures described above, in recent years there has also been a shift in the function and distribution of local amenities and public space. For example, in London, the high value of land, coupled with cuts to local council's budgets, has led to many local assets being closed down or sold off to private developers. In many other local areas, urban and rural, local shops and services have been forced to close as commerce has shifted either online or into out-of-town shopping centres.

Changes in the local environment have more serious implications for older people who are more dependent on the amenities available in their local area, and may be at greater risk of being left behind as communities become increasingly diffuse and unfocused, no longer centred around a central shopping street, place of worship or town hall. The decline of the British high street was thrown into stark relief by the findings of Mary Portas's 2011 independent review into the future of British high streets.[19] Looking at the changes in the make-up of the British high street since the 1950s, the review found that the number of butchers and greengrocers had fallen from 40,000–45,000 in the 1950s to less than 10,000 of each in 2000. Bakeries had undergone a similar decline, falling in number from 25,000 to around 8,000, while the number of fishmongers had fallen from around 10,000 to 2,000.[20] In the nine years following 2000, the number of town centre stores fell by 15,000, with 10,000 further closures since 2009.[21]

The number of people actually visiting the high street has also dropped; excluding central London, high street footfall has gone down by around 10 per cent in the past three years. While the high street has contracted, things are looking good for large scale retailers and online trade: in 2011, the 8,000 plus supermarkets in the UK accounted for over 97 per cent of total grocery sales. Indeed, recent – and troubling – research by the Competition Commission found that 99.5 per cent of all of the large grocery stores that opened between 2001 and 2006 were owned by existing large retailers. In addition to moving out of town, a significant proportion of trade has moved online. While online retail makes up just 10 per cent of total UK sales, online trading made up nearly 50 per cent of all sales growth between 2003 and 2010. Similarly, in the last two years, sales via mobile phones have increased by 500 per cent.[22]

Retail is not the only area where people are drawing away from community hubs. In February 2010 the British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA) announced that a total of 2,365 pubs closed in 2009, at a rate of on 52 pubs a week in the first half of 2009, and 39 a week in the second half.[23] Indeed, further statistics released by the BBPA show that the number of pubs in the UK has dropped by almost 10,000 in a decade, from 60,800 in 2000 to 51,178 in 2010.[24] While much has been made of government proposals designed to empower local parishes to run struggling village shops and pubs, hard cash is hard to come by, with councils being encouraged to borrow, rather than being given government grants.[25] One former source of support – the Labour Government's 'Community-owned Pub Support Programme', which provided £3.3 million for communities to buy their local pubs – was axed by the Coalition in August 2010.[26]

Local banks and post offices are also on the decline. A report by BIS reported that 1,220 traditional bank branches had closed over the last ten years, including 183 branches of the 'big four' banks in 2010.[27] Post offices are suffering from a similar problem, with figures released to Parliament by Post Office Ltd showing that 424 post offices are currently 'temporarily closed'. Of these, 417 have been shut long-term, and some for as long as four years.[28]

Public libraries have been a particularly high-profile victim of local council budget cuts, with campaigners claiming that as many as 800 are at risk of closure, out of a total of 4,612. According to current estimates by the campaigning site 'Public Libraries News,' 263 libraries were closed or under threat on 1 April 2012.[29] Before the budget cuts, the number of libraries had stayed constant at around 4,500 for the past decade, but use has been declining for some time.[30] Troublingly for older people, the trend seems to be for rural and local branches to close, while larger urban libraries remain open – often with restricted opening hours. The importance of public libraries to older people was highlighted in a survey conducted by Gloucestershire Older Person's Association in January 2011.[31] Despite libraries not being mentioned as an option on the survey, a significant proportion of respondents cited the local library as one of the top three things that affected their quality of life, health, choice and control over their own lives, and participation in society. Comments included: 'Use of a library is important in maintaining choice and control in my life'; 'My one outside activity is the library club'; 'I love the housebound library club that meets at my local library. I can choose audio books (I am blind) and talk to staff and friends.'[32]

Rates of social isolation and loneliness in old age

Some researchers have suggested that the amount of social interaction that older people have outside the home is decreasing. One 2005 study found that a third of respondents aged 65 or older were in contact with their families less than once a week, while a quarter saw friends less than once a week.[33] More broadly, research by the social neuroscientist and expert in 'isolation and connection' Professor John Cacioppo has found that 'one-fifth of the population is beset by feelings of social isolation even when in the company of others.'[34] In addition, a recent meta-analysis of studies into the link between social relationships and mortality found that 'current evidence… indicat[ing] that the quantity and/or quality of social relationships in industrialized societies [is] decreasing.' The

study highlighted a reduction in the number of inter-generational households, increases in the number of single residence households, and of movement-limiting age-related disabilities.[35]

Various sources of survey evidence suggest that levels of 'severe' loneliness have remained largely constant over the years, with between 6 per cent and 13 per cent of older people reporting that they feel lonely often or always.[36] However, while the prevalence of 'severe' loneliness appears to have remained stable, some research has suggested that the incidence of 'intermediate loneliness' – people who say they are 'sometimes lonely' – has increased, with a concomitant decrease in the proportion of people reporting themselves as 'never lonely'.[37] This is a relatively recent change: while rates of intermediate loneliness hovered at between 11 per cent and 22 per cent between 1948 and 1994, an omnibus survey carried out in 2005 placed them at 31 per cent, making up almost a third of the older population. In addition, a study by Thomas Scharf and colleagues in 2002 found that 15 per cent of the older population were experiencing 'severe loneliness', a rate that can perhaps be explained by the location of the study in a deprived neighbourhood where the level of widowhood was twice the national average.[38]

There is a range of indicators that can be used as predictors of feelings of loneliness among older people. In 2005 Victor et al identified strong relationships between loneliness and socio-demographic factors such as living alone; having few social contacts; suffering from a life limiting illness or disability; and being a woman (women live for longer than men, and are more likely to live alone and on a small income). They also made links between health factors such as being disabled or chronically ill; the availability of social resources such as confiding relationships; and material factors around housing and income.[39] Other research particularly identifies social isolation as a predictor of loneliness, reporting that 12 per cent of older people feel trapped in their homes, and 6 per cent of older people leave their house only once a week or less frequently. As the

population ages, there is a risk that the numbers of older people who are subject to these risk factors will increase.[40] We will explore the various predictors for loneliness, as well as the consequences of loneliness, in more detail in the next chapter.

2 What is loneliness and why does it matter?

In this chapter we will explore exactly what we mean by 'loneliness', identify the various risk factors for loneliness, and draw out some of the implications that this may have for the health and wellbeing of the UK's growing population of older people.

Defining loneliness

A 2011 report by the Campaign to End Loneliness defined loneliness as 'an emotional response to a perceived gap between the amount of personal contact an individual wants and the amount they have'.[41] Therefore, it is important to note that loneliness and social isolation are not the same thing – although politicians and policymakers often conflate the two – and it is possible to experience one without experiencing the other. Social isolation is a quantifiable state caused by a paucity of social relationships, which leaves an individual reliant on their own resources and unable to access larger social goods. Loneliness, on the other hand, relates to the level of subjective fulfilment that an individual derives from the social relationships in their life. The two are linked, but separate, and it is entirely possible to experience one without the other. Just as it is entirely possible for an individual to feel lonely despite their life being full of social interaction –the most common example is that of a first-year university student who feels lonely despite being surrounded by their contemporaries – an individual who is objectively socially isolated may not necessarily feel lonely.

While social isolation and loneliness affect people at all stages of life, recent research has shown that older people experience higher levels of loneliness than younger cohorts, and that loneliness increases as people become less physically able to carry out the activities with which they have filled their lives.[42]

There is also mounting evidence that both social isolation and loneliness have negative implications for health and wellbeing. While social isolation can be diagnosed through a relatively simple set of questions regarding frequency of social interaction, the social stigma surrounding loneliness makes it harder to measure, as people are often unwilling to define themselves as lonely. The most common tool used to measure loneliness is the UCLA Loneliness Scale, which asks people to respond to a set of indirect statements such as 'I feel isolated', 'There are people I can talk to' and 'I feel part of a group of friends'.[43] To add to the complexity, loneliness can be divided into two groups: social loneliness, a subjective state caused by the feeling that one has a lower quantity of social interactions than one would like, and emotional loneliness, a subjective state caused by feeling that one has a lower quality of social interaction than one would like (see below).

While it is almost impossible to determine whether someone will be lonely merely by looking at their level of social interaction, there are certain factors that Victor et al have defined as likely to predict loneliness:

· socio-demographic attributes such as living alone or not having any surviving children
· material circumstances such as poverty or having a limited education
· health resources, such as having a disability or suffering from anxiety and depression
· social resources, such as the size of one's social network[44]

The study also found that several life events increased the likelihood of loneliness, including bereavement, divorce, admission of a spouse into care and redundancy. The same study found that there were two factors that protect people against loneliness. These are advanced age (the very old are statistically less likely to be lonely than those just entering old age), and having a basic level of education.[45]

Why do we feel lonely?

In recent years a significant body of research has sought to determine the psychological and physiological reasons why human beings experience loneliness. One argument that has gained increasing currency in past years is that made by the psychologist John Cacioppo. Professor Cacioppo's thesis, developed following extensive research into the relationship between loneliness, social isolation and ill health, is that the sensation of loneliness is a warning sign similar to hunger. Loneliness signifies 'that one's connections to others are weakening', and is designed 'to motivate the repair and maintenance of the connections to others that are needed for our health and wellbeing and for the survival of our genes'.[46] Indeed, research by Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams cited in a study by Cacioppo et al has found that the experience of loneliness is processed in the brain in a similar way to pain.[47] For the study the researchers monitored the brain activity of participants who were excluded from a ball game. Using brain-imaging technology, they found that neural activation among those that had been excluded took place in the area of the brain that deals with physical pain.

Distinguishing between 'social' and 'emotional' loneliness

Social loneliness

Social loneliness relates to the number of an individual's social relationships and the frequency of their social contact. According to analysis of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), this 'structural dimension of social relationships' – for example the frequency of social contact – is as important for wellbeing as more subjective factors such as the content of social relationships. There is a particularly strong correlation between wellbeing and social contact, particularly at the extreme ends of the scale – for people with just one or no social relationships, and those with ten or more.[48]

The 2008/09 wave of the study found that people who reported themselves as having infrequent social contact had lower mean life satisfaction and quality of life scores than those

with frequent social contact. The study also found a slight correlation between the frequency of social contact and the prevalence of depressive symptoms in the younger age group (those aged 50–64) with those who had frequent contact with friends and relatives manifesting a 13.1 per cent likelihood of depressive symptoms, compared with 17.9 per cent of those who had infrequent contact.[49]

Social loneliness has also been shown to affect men and women differently: research by the Campaign to End Loneliness has found that men are less likely than women to experience social loneliness following a decrease in their level of social interaction. This, they suggest, is because men tend to have less developed social networks throughout their lives – relying instead on one relationship with a spouse or partner – and are therefore less strongly affected when they break down.[50]

The 'oldest old' – people aged 80 or older – have been shown to experience greater physical barriers to social engagement than those in younger age brackets, and are more likely to suffer from unwanted social isolation and therefore from loneliness. The ELSA study found that almost 50 per cent of people aged 80–84 reported severe limitations in their activities, with the figures rising to 55 per cent and 72 per cent respectively among men and women aged 85 or older. Of those surveyed, 20 per cent of men and women aged over 80 report that they often use public transport, rising to 24 per cent of those aged 85 or older who do not own a car. Membership of political, environmental, religious or charitable groups makes up an important element of social interactions among the oldest old. At the time of the survey over 50 per cent of those questioned were members of at least one membership organisation, and while around 15 per cent stopped being a member of any organisation between 2002/03 and 2008/09, just under 10 per cent took up membership of a new organisation. Giving up membership of an organisation over this time period was associated with a decrease in quality of life over the same period.[51]

Emotional loneliness

Emotional loneliness relates to the quality as opposed to the quantity of social relationships. It can be triggered by factors such as bereavement or relationship breakdown, and also by disparities between the expected and actual content of a relationship. For example, research shows that having children, but not feeling close to them, can bring greater loneliness than not having any children in the first place.[52] In addition, data from wave 4 of the ELSA reveals that being married but not receiving the highest level of emotional support from one's partner 'leads to impaired levels of non-affective wellbeing that are comparable to those people without a spouse or partner'.'[53]

The importance of differentiating between social isolation, and social and emotional loneliness when designing effective interventions was emphasised by the authors of a recent study into the relationship between loneliness and increased blood pressure.[54] Completing a meta-analysis of interventions to reduce loneliness published between 1970 and 2009, the researchers found no intervention effect for group projects that provided opportunities for people to interact and forge new social relationships. This, the authors suggested, was because the people designing the interventions had failed to account for the differences in the two types of loneliness. An effective intervention – which tackled both the social and emotional facets of loneliness – would therefore combine structural and content-based elements. While this model has not as yet been piloted, the type of intervention advocated by the researchers would include:

Cognitive-behavioural training and practice in (a) extending oneself socially, (b) increasing one's awareness of qualities of good relationships, (c) selecting relationship partners carefully to optimize synergies, (d) being more optimistic and expecting the best from relationship partners, and (e) synchronizing affect and behaviour with a relationship partner.[55]

Predictors of loneliness

Age

It is clear from previous research that 'it is not "old age" itself that puts people at greater risk of loneliness but individual social and health-related factors that may be preventable to varying degrees'.[56] The growing population of people aged 85 plus are at greater risk of loneliness than younger age groups because they are more likely to manifest some or all of the common predictors of loneliness. Of this group 77.3 per cent of women live alone, compared with 43.8 per cent of men.[57] They are also more likely to have mobility issues that impede social interaction. While around 47 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women in the 80–84 age group report difficulty in completing daily activities, beyond the age of 85 this increases to 55 per cent of men and 72 per cent of women.[58] This age group are less likely than the age group below them to own their homes, with 36.6 per cent of women and 21.1 per cent of men aged 85 or older renting in the private or social sector.

Life course transitions

Evidence shows people to be at an increased risk of loneliness following life events such as retirement, bereavement or the onset of poor health. Because the experience of loneliness is so bound up with perception, transitioning between two states – for example moving from marriage to widowhood, or work to retirement – can trigger the feeling that a social or emotional need is no longer being met. As the Campaign to End Loneliness comments:

Too often older people find that their age comes to define them. Their various identities, as parents, grandparents, carers, workers, volunteers, community leaders, start to fall away, or be taken away. Apparently benevolent attempts to limit the burdens on older people leave them feeling they no longer have a role, limit their social connections and push them into isolation and loneliness.[59]

The way that life course transitions such as retirement lead to individuals feeling increased emotional loneliness – as opposed to feeling merely socially isolated or socially lonely – is

in part due to the way that an individual's social or professional role affects their sense of self. Hawkley and Cacioppo comment: 'These data suggest that a perceived sense of social connectedness serves as a scaffold for the self – damage the scaffold and the rest of the self begins to crumble.'[60]

Ethnic background

There is some research to show that levels of social isolation and loneliness vary across ethnic groups. Victor et al's 2009 study into levels of loneliness among older people reports that of the six main minority groups – African, Chinese, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi – only the Indian group (8 per cent) displayed similar levels of loneliness to the majority of the British population. Of the others, 23 per cent of the Caribbean population and 40 per cent or more of older people in each of the other ethnic groups responded that they were always or often lonely.[61]

These findings are particularly interesting in the light of research into the prevalence of multi-generational households among different ethnic groups. Despite being the group with the lowest levels of loneliness, less than 5 per cent of white grandparents live in multi-generational households. On the other hand South Asian families – the only other group with loneliness levels of under 10 per cent – are much more likely (25 per cent) to live in multi-generational families.[62] African and Caribbean grandparents have relatively low levels of inter-generational living (7.5 per cent), and levels of loneliness that range between 20 per cent and 40 per cent.[63] While there does not appear to be a strong correlation between multi-generational households and levels of loneliness, research analysis of the 2008 wave of the ELSA has found that regularly caring for a grandchild does lead to increased quality of life. This is not the case for caring responsibilities across the board: the report found that those who provide care for a partner have a lower quality of life, caused by the high numbers of hours that partner carers have to spend in the caring role.[64]

Local environment

Unpicking the complex relationship between social isolation and loneliness becomes particularly pertinent in light of two facts. First: a significant proportion of British people aged 65 and older live in coastal areas in the east and south of the country.[65] Second, while Europe's rural population will decrease from 100 million in 2000 from 75 million in 2030, the ageing of Europe's population will be greater in rural areas than in urban areas.[66] While there is a widespread preconception that rural communities are more socially connected and less isolated than urban communities, the available evidence is inconclusive. A reanalysis of six international studies found that while older people living in rural Europe experience lower levels of loneliness overall, at country level there is no significant difference. People living in rural Austria, the UK and Sweden demonstrate lower levels of loneliness, but there is no significant difference in levels of loneliness in the Netherlands, Luxemburg and Italy. Further research into the experience of older people living in rural areas also points to interesting differences in the way that the genders respond to population density. While increased population density correlates to a drop in loneliness among women, it has no impact on the loneliness level of men.[67]

Rather than being determined simply by the proximity of friends and relations, the relationship between population density and loneliness among older people is driven by a complex set of interlinked factors relating to access to shops and services, changing service infrastructure, and high levels of crime – or a perception that there is a high level of crime – in the local area. There is some evidence that older people living in deprived urban areas are disproportionately lonely: a 1991 study in a deprived area of Hackney revealed a loneliness rate of 16 per cent – compared with 7 per cent nationally – as did a study completed by Scharf and De Jong Gierveld of three English cities in 2002.[68]

In their research Scharf and De Jong Gierveld argue that contemporary urban design fails to take into account the needs of older people, creating cities that are only accessible to the affluent and highly mobile. Certainly, ease of access to services and amenities is an important factor in driving older people's wellbeing. While the data available is not sufficient to unpick

causal relationships, findings from the ELSA suggest there is a strong correlation between access to shops and healthcare services, and levels of depression and loneliness, poorer quality of life and lower life satisfaction.[69] Scharf and De Jong Gierveld also argue that because of the high population turnover in cities, coupled with the high in-migration of younger people and high out-migration of older people and families, it can be difficult for older people to maintain long-standing social connections. A similar point is made in the *The New East End*, in which the authors describe the social isolation experienced by ex-residents of the East End whose close knit social bonds were ruptured when they were relocated to more spacious but badly connected estates on the fringes of the city.[70]

Wealth and income

The ELSA shows a strong correlation between wealth and all measures of wellbeing. Overall the study reports that wealthier participants suffer less from depression and reported greater life satisfaction, a higher quality of life, and lower levels of loneliness. In 2008/09, 27.5 per cent of older people in the poorest quintile in wave 4 had depression scores of above the clinical threshold, and just 7.2 per cent of the wealthiest group. In addition, analysis of questions on 'satisfaction with life, sense of autonomy, control and self-realisation, and the absence of negative feelings of depression and loneliness' reveals there is a strong correlation between wealth and wellbeing. More affluent individuals were more satisfied with their lives, and experienced lower levels of loneliness. In fact, CASP-19 quality of life scores (CASP-19 is a study based on 19 questions on quality of life in old age) were 22 per cent higher in the wealthiest than in the poorest category. Interestingly, the relationship between wealth and wellbeing is gradual, rather than dichotomous: rather than there being a distinct gap between the wellbeing of the poor and 'everyone else', instead wellbeing increases gradually alongside income.[71] The link between income and social participation is thrown into worrying relief by the findings of the 2010 Aviva Real Retirement Report, which revealed the low levels of saving

among people nearing or at retirement age. The study found that 43 per cent of UK residents aged 55–64 were currently saving nothing each month,[72] and in 2010 35 per cent of 55–64-year-olds and 25 per cent of those aged 65–74 have savings of just £2,000 or less.[73]

The impact of loneliness on health and wellbeing

In February 2012 the director of the Government's Behavioural Insight Team David Halpern told the second UK–Nordic Baltic Summit that loneliness is 'a more powerful predictor of whether you will be alive in ten years time, more than almost any other factor, certainly more than smoking'.[74] While Halpern's assertion errs on the side of bombast – the study that he refers to finds that social isolation poses an equal, rather than a greater risk to health than smoking – it does reveal the growing awareness in policy circles of the relationship between measures of wellbeing that are seen as being largely subjective (in this instance, loneliness) and wider health outcomes.

The 2009 study cited by Halpern has interesting implications for policymakers seeking to understand the relationship between social isolation and ill-health. In this study, Julianne Holt-Lunstad et al set out to question the assertion, published in a 1988 edition of the journal *Science*, that 'social relationships, or the relative lack thereof, constitute a major risk factor for health – rivaling the effect of well established health risk factors such as cigarette smoking, blood pressure, blood lipids, obesity and physical activity'.[75] In order to do this the researchers conducted a meta-analytic review of 148 studies that looked at the relationship between mortality and social isolation, drawing on data from 308,849 participants with an average age of 63.9 years. Overall the researchers found that there was a 50 per cent increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships. It also reported a greater positive correlation in studies that looked at complex measurements of social interaction than in those that just looked at simple measurements such as marital status.

The study explains the relationship between social interaction and positive health outcomes through two theoretical models: the 'stress buffering' model and the 'main effects' model. Under the 'stress buffering' model, social relationships are seen as providing resources that individuals are able to call on in order to cushion against the impact of acute stressors such as illness, life events or life course transitions. These resources can be 'informational, emotional or tangible' and they 'promote adaptive behavioural or neuroendocrine responses to acute or chronic stressors'. The 'main effects' model posits a more direct relationship between social relationships and healthy behaviours, and highlights the intentional or non-intentional impacts of social networks in encouraging people to conform to positive social norms around health (eg lifestyle factors of smoking, drinking, diet and exercise).

One important element of the report's findings is around the difference between support provided by strangers and the support from existing social relationships. As the authors point out, while the majority of modern interventions involve helping individuals to develop new relationship with strangers, the studies covered in the meta-analysis are almost exclusively concerned with the positive impact of existing social supports. In fact, analysis of the data suggests that the level of naturally occurring social integration is a much greater predictor of mortality than the level of support received from strangers. With this in mind, the authors comment: 'Multifaceted community-based interventions may have a number of advantages because such interventions are socially grounded and include a broad cross-section of the public.'[76]

A 2008 longitudinal study by Netuveli et al sought to investigate 'the characteristics of resilient individuals and the predictors of their resilience'.[77] The report drew on data from 3581 participants in the British Household Panel Survey who were over the age of 50 and had experienced adversity – defined as impaired mobility, bereavement and marital breakdown, or poverty – in their recent lives. The study found that the most important factor in predicting resilience was the level of social

support received before and during the experience of adversity, with high levels of social support increasing the likelihood of resilience by 40–60 per cent. The study also reported that older women were the most resilient of those surveyed, and that gender differences were stronger among the older cohort.

While much has been made of the causal relationship between loneliness and physical health, it is important to note that the vast majority of studies focus on the way that illness and disability can increase the likelihood of loneliness, rather than vice versa. Although the section of the ELSA dealing with health and wellbeing acknowledges the potentially positive causal relationship between measures of wellbeing such as loneliness and health, the main focus of this section is on the negative impact that ill health and limiting disabilities have on people's overall wellbeing. According to analysis of the findings, the group of participants with the lowest wellbeing levels overall were people aged 50–64 who had two or more limitations in activities of daily living. Indeed, irrespective of age, the differences in indicators of wellbeing – depressive symptoms, quality of life and loneliness – were greatest for those with limitations in activities of daily living: 45.2 per cent those with two or more limitations in activities of daily living reported elevated depressive symptoms, compared with just 11.1 per cent of those with no limitations. In addition, people with no problems performing activities of daily living had much lower loneliness scores (5.8 points) than those with two or more activities of daily living problems (7 points).

The most well-known example of research that looks directly at the way that loneliness affects health is Professor Cacioppo and his colleagues' work at the University of Chicago, which has found a sustained correlation between loneliness and a series of cardiovascular and cognitive problems.[78] According to the research findings, loneliness can lead to increases in blood pressure, HDL cholesterol levels and glycated haemoglobin concentration.[79] In addition, in 'Loneliness matters', Hawkley and Cacioppo report that loneliness can also increase the likelihood of developing a range of emotional and cognitive issues. These include 'personality disorders and psychoses,

suicide, impaired cognitive performance and cognitive decline over time, increased risk of Alzheimer's Disease, diminished executive control, and increases in depressive symptoms'.[80] The finding that there is a relationship between loneliness and Alzheimer's is supported by a range of other studies. For example, Wilson et al found that individuals who were in the top decile of loneliness scores were 2.1 times more likely to develop Alzheimer's than those in the bottom decile.[81]

3 What works in preventing and tackling loneliness?

In previous chapters we have seen that loneliness for older people is a complex problem, with a variety of predictors. Some are caused by demographic, economic and social trends; others are not. According to the research, the number of people saying they are extremely lonely has not changed for several decades, whereas the number of people saying they feel occasionally lonely has increased.[82] We do not know why there has been a marked increase in occasional loneliness among older people but we can make an educated guess that living longer in greater social isolation may be the main culprit.

Social isolation, as we have seen, is not the same as loneliness: some people can be socially isolated and not feel lonely at all. Yet social isolation is undoubtedly one of the major predictors of loneliness. In this chapter we will first explore the protective role of social capital in reducing the risk of social isolation and loneliness in later life, before reviewing evidence on the interventions and activities that are effective in counteracting social and emotional loneliness in older people.

The protective role of social capital in later life

As well as assessing interventions through the research literature, it is also useful to look at the literature on social capital and older people. Social capital can be defined as the value of the social relations of an individual or organisation. Social capital has value because it can facilitate older people to obtain care and help, make friends, and access amenities and services; all these activities help counteract loneliness and social isolation.

There are two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging. The former is the value of close family and other in-group ties, the latter the value of social relations that connect a

person to other groups. Intuitively, both bonding and bridging social capital help older people ward off loneliness and social isolation, but – as we shall see – different kinds of social capital have different values for different groups.

Canadian sociologists Norah Keating and Donna Dosman found that although in many cases the elderly have well-established family networks, this should not lead to the inference that they have plenty of social capital. They note that the 'mere presence of a tie between two people does not equate with the provision of support' and that 'cashing in social capital requires actualizing this support potential'.[83] Moreover, and somewhat unexpectedly, a supportive family, although often committed to providing care, may impede an elderly person's accumulation of social capital with other groups:

Family solidarity, which is essential to the provision of intense levels of care over time, may… [leave] families without adequate resources with which to broker connections to formal community services to assist their frail older members.[84]

Such lack of resources can even lead to institutional neglect: 'In intense caregiving situations, bonding has its costs. Close-family networks are least likely to receive formal help, especially if network members live with the cared-for person.'[85] In other words, in some cases, close, strong bonding social capital can 'crowd out' the development of bridging capital, to the detriment of both carer and cared for.

A lack of bridging social capital (especially connections to wider services and support groups) can lead to increased stress on family carers through loneliness and social isolation, as the older people cared for are already removed from non-kin networks. According to Keating and Dosman, in Japan, such stress has led to violence in extreme cases, with 43 old-aged pensioners murdered by family caregivers in one year. This is termed *Kaigo-jigoku* or 'care-giving hell'.[86]

Thus the 'solidarity of care' provided by kin is both important and potentially harmful. Undoubtedly having loved ones in frequent contact is the best way to ensure good care is

provided. But on the downside, solidarity of care that is too binding and closed can leave carers and cared for prone to social isolation and loneliness.

Anne Gray finds that older people in the UK have found it harder to maintain solidarity of care (because they have been bereaved by kin) and to extend beyond the bonding social capital they have to wider friendship networks (since friends are of the same age group, they die leaving the bereaved alone).[87] Both of these trends can reinforce loneliness and social isolation.

Older people often need contact with younger people who will outlive them, as well as contact with people of the same age as them. However, Gray notes that with more dispersed families, children of older people are often not in regular contact with their parents.[88] Moreover, with more daughters and daughters-in-law in employment, less inter-generational care is available from within families, and older people have become more dependent on their spouses (whom they may well outlive). The author also notes that the United Kingdom Retirement Survey from 1988 showed that 16 per cent of people aged 55–69 years 'regularly or frequently' helped their parents. Whereas the Time Use Survey 2000,

suggests that there was a decline in help to parents. In 2000, only 6.4 per cent of men aged 55–69 years had helped their parents in the last four weeks, and 8.6 per cent of women (but the methodologies of the two surveys were not fully comparable).[89]

Older people also seem to be less able to access inter-generational family care, as well as being more likely to significantly outlive spouses they have become reliant on for care (although some academics are doubtful that the decline in intergenerational contact and multi-generational households has led to a large increase in loneliness).[90] These trends put in train another – the importance of what is termed 'personal community' – a community that one chooses and which is not family dependent.

Academics at Bangor University found that the kind of social network that is most effective in mitigating loneliness and

social isolation is the 'locally integrated support network', which is characterised by 'close relationships with local family, friends and neighbours' and is 'usually based on long-term residence and active community involvement in church and voluntary organisations in the present or recent past'.[91]

In another paper some of the same academics noted that people with locally integrated or family-dependent support networks were less likely to draw on statutory services to help with personal care.[92] Both kinds of networks were more common in stable communities. According to the same authors, the least effective type of network for reducing loneliness and isolation was the 'private restricted support network', which is centred around the household (usually of a married couple) and characterised by little external contact even with kin.

Socio-economic class seems to affect the quantity and quality of social capital that older people possess, with knock-on effects for loneliness and social isolation. Wenger et al found that working-class elders were less likely than their middle-class counterparts to participate in organisations (such as social clubs, sports clubs, hobby groups). Citing the closure of working men's clubs, they warn that working-class elders are at particular risk of social isolation and loneliness.[93]

Another study supported this view, finding that membership organisations have become dominated by 'middle-class joiners', who tend to join several organisations, whereas working-class elders tend to join few or none. The authors suggest that this concentration of middle-class activity decreases the ability of membership organisations to generate bridging social capital as they become islands of middle-class interaction.[94]

Health and mobility are also important in helping elders to build social capital, with several studies noting a positive correlation between good health and social support. This correlation is hard to determine causally: does good health enable social support (through the ability to get out and about) or does social support garner good health?[95]

Closely connected to health and mobility is the idea of 'reciprocity' – that older people receive social support on the basis of giving it, which requires being well enough to be

reasonably active. In his ground-breaking 1957 study of older people in Bethnal Green, Townsend[96] found that even frail older people reciprocated help and support by cooking meals and childminding. But he found that those with the worst health were least able to reciprocate support, and so least able to receive it. However, recent research with older women in a deprived inner-city setting found that even the housebound still had the potential to give help – through phone calls and chats, largely around the issue of health (which the authors dubbed 'health talk').[97]

Looking at the relationship between poor health and social support in 1991 and 2003, Gray contradicted this optimism about the social support available to those in bad health, finding:

men and women with health problems had, if anything, lower support than others at both dates. Worse still, having poor health in 1991 was one of only two factors that were associated with a fall in the individual's support score over the following 12 years.[98]

The same study also found that persistent participation in religious and sports organisations increased social support. For membership of religious organisations this effect appears to be concomitant with meeting regularly with friends, but for sporting organisations higher social support accrues independently of meeting with friends. This latter finding suggests that membership of sporting organisations enhances social support not just through regularly meeting people, but also through the health benefits brought about through activity.

Summing up the research on social capital in later life

Research into the value of social capital for older people, particularly with reference to social isolation and loneliness, demonstrates the following:

· The 'solidarity of care' provided by family and kin is important in guaranteeing good care and companionship, but too much bonding social capital concentrated in the home, without

bridging social capital, can lead to loneliness and social isolation for both carers and people who are cared for.
· Trends in family structure, particularly greater mobility and greater employment among daughters and daughters-in-law, have made social isolation and loneliness more likely in older people.
· 'Locally integrated' and family dependent support networks yield the most social capital.
· Chosen 'personal communities' (eg membership organisations) have become more important in providing social capital, but working-class older people have less access to, and are less likely to join, membership organisations, while middle-class older people are more likely to join membership groups and more likely to gain social support from doing so.
· Persistent and active membership in sports clubs is a good way of retaining social capital and support networks.

Given this research on social capital, it seems that the following areas present particular opportunities for policy interventions to reduce loneliness in later life:

· supporting group activities among working-class older people
· providing group activities and forms of support to older people (either alone or in couples) who do not mix socially much outside their immediate family
· providing shared activities for groups that older people 'naturally' feel part of (eg either through cultural identity, familiarity or shared interests)
· supporting the development of integrated neighbourhoods that older people feel part of (through kinship and neighbourhood attachment) to provide protection against social isolation and loneliness
· providing group activities involving sports, as these have demonstrated particular value in building social capital

The evidence base for interventions aimed at reducing loneliness

There have been a number of interventions aimed at reducing loneliness in older people, and in some cases aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of older people more generally. In the remainder of this chapter we will examine the evidence base on the effectiveness of these interventions. Unfortunately for policy makers, the evidence base is currently under-developed; many interventions have not received a robust evaluation to measure their impact in reducing loneliness, and among those that have been evaluated, many interventions have failed to demonstrate a quantifiable impact. In some cases it is not clear whether this is the fault of the intervention itself, or an unreliable evaluation methodology. Therefore, an important strand of future policy work in this area will be to develop this evidence base by ensuring that current interventions believed to demonstrate good practice receive a robust evaluation. The knowledge developed through this process will then enable practitioners to adopt proven effective practice more widely, while moving away from ineffective approaches.

Interventions to combat loneliness and social isolation have tended to fall into three categories:

· home visiting and one-to-one interventions
· group-based interventions
· interventions that support older people's participation in the community

We will briefly examine the existing evidence base for each category of intervention in turn.

Home visiting and one-to-one interventions

A study by academics at the School of Population and Health Sciences at Newcastle University reviewed 'quantitative outcome' studies of interventions to reduce loneliness and social isolation among older people conducted between 1970 and 2002 (hereafter referred to as the 'Newcastle Review').[99]

The authors of the Newcastle Review note that it is commonly believed that home visiting for older people who are housebound and living alone is effective,[100] but that in general 'the effectiveness of home visiting and befriending schemes remains unclear' and some of the most ineffective interventions are one-to-one schemes, conducted in people's homes. It also notes that two other systematic reviews which looked at the preventative benefits of home visiting came to conflicting conclusions. One review cited by the Newcastle Review claimed to find that there was no evidence that such visits were effective,[101] another that they were effective in reducing mortality rates and admission to institutional care.[102]

The authors of the Newcastle Review also noted that one-to-one home interventions designed to offer information about, or connect people to, services (often through assessment) were largely ineffective in reducing loneliness and social isolation. Although they found that one intervention, comprising a 'one-off home visit by a nurse to patients aged 75 or more years of a GP practice', did result in a significant reduction in social isolation and loneliness. The visit included a health assessment, advice, written health information and referrals to further services if required. Yet the authors raised concerns that the intervention might become less effective once scaled up more widely. Follow-up observations confirmed that the effect wore off soon after the task force had left (because the practice-nurse team did not continue the intervention). The review team also noted that three other large-scale randomised controlled trials 'concerned with health assessment, information and service provision were unable to demonstrate that home visits were effective in reducing social isolation and/or loneliness'.[103]

Another review of four randomised control group evaluations of interventions by health professionals with individuals found conflicting evidence.[104] Researchers found that a monthly visit from a trained health professional offering advice and information on exercise and other health-related issues improved mental health and reduced the costs of prescription drugs, but other trials were inconclusive or even showed

decreased mental wellbeing in older people after visits from health professionals.

A review of evidence by Findlay found that telephone support services involving 'at risk' older people being contacted regularly by a trained counsellor or support person were 'ineffective in reducing feelings of social isolation, but… had some success in connecting people "at risk" with support services [and]… reducing rates of suicide'.[105] In addition, the Newcastle Review looked at four studies which investigated 'the effectiveness of directed support and problem-solving in alleviating social isolation and/or loneliness' and found that 'none of the interventions were effective'.

According to Windle et al, a meta-analysis covering a total of 84 studies from across a number of developed countries gave strong evidence for the effectiveness of cognitive training, control-enhancing interventions, psycho-education, relaxation and supportive psychological interventions in improving the subjective wellbeing of older people (but not necessarily in reducing loneliness).[106] The authors note that the findings from this meta-analysis, given that they all derive from developed countries, should transfer well to the UK. The findings of this meta-analysis also suggest that one-to-one interventions are suited to helping older people with health and mental health problems but are not proven to be effective in reducing loneliness.

The Newcastle Review also looked at two one-to-one interventions providing social support (eg 'friendly telephone calls') and found that neither was effective in reducing loneliness. The authors concluded: 'The only majority characteristic among the "ineffective" interventions [across their whole study] was that they were one-to-one interventions conducted in people's own homes.'[107]

Group-based interventions

Structured group activities, often around health and exercise or with an educational element, show some promise in reducing loneliness and social isolation. Five of nine interventions of this

kind reviewed in the Newcastle Review showed significant reductions in loneliness. Reviewers found that structured group activities involving exercise, and with an educational aspect, reduced loneliness and social isolation in older women, and that a structured skills course also did so. However, the review notes that some of the interventions attracted participants who were not necessarily representative of the age group as a whole and who were already active and mobile. Therefore it is important to note that these findings would not necessarily extrapolate to other groups of older people, as the evidence suggests that group activities seem to work best when they are properly targeted at distinct groups with distinct interests, which may require different types of intervention. According to another review, a randomised controlled trial of a weekly group education programme on health issues also proved beneficial, with increases in mental wellbeing scores for the non-control group.[108]

Group activities aimed at boosting social support also appear to be successful in reducing loneliness and social isolation. The Newcastle Review looked at one study where elderly residents in an apartment building were encouraged to undertake social activities together as well as shared chores. The intervention showed significant increases in social activity, as well as reductions in loneliness, especially among those who were initially pessimistic about the value of the changes. Researchers noted that participants came to 'own' the intervention after a while, taking charge of activities themselves.

Other social support group activities that the Newcastle Review notes were successful included bereavement support for recently widowed older people, therapy-type discussion groups for older people with mental health problems, and peer- and professionally-led counselling and discussion groups for adult daughters and daughters-in-law who were primary carers.

Researchers at Bangor University reviewed group-based interventions involving gardening, volunteering and support groups and found no evidence of the effectiveness of any of these kinds of interventions, although they admitted this could have been as much to do with weak and unreliable evaluation methodologies as genuine ineffectiveness. The same researchers

found there was strong evidence across a large number of countries and trials that taking part in 'mixed exercise' sessions caused 'small to moderate' improvements in the mental wellbeing of older people, although not necessary reductions in loneliness. They also found that interventions based on aerobic exercise increased happiness and life satisfaction (but did not necessarily reduce loneliness), and interventions around walking improved mental health and happiness scores.[109]

Interventions that support older people's participation in the community

There are few robust evaluations of interventions that directly set out to improve older people's social capital by enabling them to participate in their wider community. Recent research published by the Campaign to End Loneliness in 2011 cites a variety of such small-scale initiatives such as 'reminiscence projects and intergenerational and family history work, as well as outreach programmes from art galleries and music organisations'.[110] It also cites a qualitative study, which found that a time-banking scheme in Catford had 'given members someone to talk to and also got them out of the house' and improved its members' social networks. However, the report by the Campaign to End Loneliness observes that while 'these schemes look promising, and may both prevent and cure [loneliness]', they are rarely formally evaluated, therefore it is difficult to establish and compare their effectiveness.[111]

A much larger-scale set of initiatives called the Partnership for Older People Projects (POPP), which were funded by the Department of Health (DoH) between May 2006 and March 2009, received a robust evaluation, however.[112] These projects did not explicitly seek to reduce loneliness but the majority of them set out to improve older people's wellbeing and participation in their broader community. The POPP included 29 pilot sites, which developed: 'services for older people, aimed at promoting their health, wellbeing and independence and preventing or delaying their need for higher intensity or institutional care'.[113] The overall budget for POPP was around £60 million. The

projects ran a number of services that were used by 264,637 people and which appear to be reasonably sustainable, since by December 2009 (when the evaluation was published) only 3 per cent of the projects had been closed down.[114]

More than one-third (36 per cent) of the POPP were 'hospital facing' (largely concerned with service improvement by attempting to keep older people out of emergency-care beds in hospital) and 64 per cent were 'community facing' (concerned with providing services for older people in the community to improve their quality of life). The POPP evaluation found that in nine out of eleven types of intervention, the older people who took part in the intervention experienced a measured increase in their 'health-related quality of life'. The health-related quality of life for those who received a 'practical' intervention (eg the installation of a grab-rail) improved by an average of 12 per cent. People who experienced interventions to promote exercise also had an average 12 per cent improvement in health-related quality of life. People who took part in projects providing 'community support, proactive case coordination and specialist falls programmes' had an average 3–4 per cent improvement in health-related quality of life. However, people who took part in hospital discharge interventions (perhaps unsurprisingly) experienced on average a small deterioration in their health-related quality of life.[115] Overall, the projects provided a £1.20 return for every £1 invested through reducing the number of emergency-bed days in hospitals.[116]

The approach of POPP was to engender joint working by agencies and service providers, to involve wherever possible small-scale locally based organisations (especially voluntary and charitable organisations) and older people themselves in the design, governance and running of projects. According to professionals involved and service users, POPP services were felt to be better quality and to span a greater range than other provision. Awareness of POPP services was also said to be more widespread than usual among older people. The evaluation expressed reservations about the success of POPP in reaching BME groups, but where projects were designed especially for such groups their participation was much higher.[117]

The POPPs were judged to have succeeded in their objective of involving older people. However, the way that older people were involved varied and was stronger in the design aspect (77 per cent of projects) and governance (93 per cent had older people on a steering committee) of projects than in service delivery. Less than one-third (29 per cent) involved older people as volunteers. The evaluation found that the older people involved were more often than not the newly retired (the 'young old'), healthy and well educated. This indicates that there may be practical or attitudinal barriers for services to overcome if they to encourage a more diverse range of older people to participate in the delivery of services, as well as their design. However, as the 2011 report by the Campaign to End Loneliness has recently argued, while it may not always be straightforward to support older people's participation in the design and delivery of services to combat loneliness, this should not be considered optional: 'If schemes to target loneliness in older people are to be effective, they must involve older people at every stage, including planning, development, delivery and assessment.'[118]

Summing up the evidence on effective interventions

On the basis of the evidence cited above, we can say the following about the effectiveness of interventions that aim to reduce loneliness and social isolation in older people:

· There is little evidence of the effectiveness of one-to-one home-based interventions.
· Home visits can be effective for house-bound people who live alone.
· Psychological therapies provided one-to-one can be effective, but they tend to work best for 'at-risk' individuals.
· There is good evidence that group-based interventions with an educational element can be effective.
· Group-based interventions aimed at boosting social support appear to be effective, especially when support is targeted to specific needs.
· Group-based interventions work best when targeted at specific groups (eg widows or people with shared interests).

- Interventions that involve some level of participant control or which consult the intended target group before getting under way tend to be more effective.
- Interventions that evaluate an existing service or activity through a demonstration study or are developed and conducted within an existing service are generally more effective than those that carry out no such evaluation.
- There is evidence that interventions that support older people's participation in community-based initiatives and involve older people in the design, governance and running of projects can be effective in improving older people's health and wellbeing.

Summary

We have seen in this chapter that many interventions that aim to combat loneliness and social isolation for older people are either ineffective or we currently lack an evidence base for their effectiveness. However, some interventions do work and these are largely those that are locally tailored to older people's needs, involve group activity and involve older people in their design and delivery. We have also seen that the UK has already put in place projects that possess these qualities and which have been successful in improving older people's wellbeing (eg POPP). In the next chapter we will examine the various political narratives and policy developments that could support a stronger political drive for local authorities, VCS organisations and businesses to work together locally to create more age-friendly communities that support older people's social participation and reduce the risk of loneliness.

4 Political narratives and policy development

Various political narratives have emerged in recent years that are relevant to tackling loneliness and supporting older people's social participation. Few of these narratives deal directly with the issue of loneliness, but each provides a supportive policy framework for policymakers and practitioners interested in tackling loneliness and social isolation to build on. The key policy narratives we will focus on are:

· the Localism Act
· coordinated services – from Total Place to community budgets
· prevention and early intervention
· a local approach to public health through health and wellbeing boards
· campaigns focused on reducing loneliness and social isolation in old age
· businesses as partners in public health and community development

The Localism Act

In opposition the Conservative party produced two green papers on localism, *Control Shift* and *Open Source Planning*.[119] The former set out a broad vision of decentralising power from central to local government and the latter how such a vision would manifest itself in planning reform. Since the Conservative party became part of the Coalition Government, the former green paper became the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, which was passed as the Localism Act in November 2011. The act was designed to:

- lift the burden of bureaucracy
- empower communities to do things their way
- open up government to public scrutiny
- strengthen accountability to local people
- increase local control of public finance
- diversify the supply of public services

What is of most interest for our purposes is the diversification of public services – the use of public money to fund services that are supplied by agencies other than the state, or through cooperation between the state, other agencies and local communities. As we saw in the last chapter, interventions to end loneliness and social isolation which involve older people themselves, and which are tailored to specific groups and interests, are the most likely to be effective. Therefore, the philosophy of localism is apt to provide the framework through which effective initiatives and services can be launched.

However, it would be wrong to think that the localism agenda in public services came into being with the Coalition Government. As we saw in the last chapter, with the POPP the last Labour Government had already trialled this kind of innovation, successfully channelling public money into locally tailored services, often provided by voluntary and charitable organisations. Thus although David Cameron and the Coalition Government have given full voice to the localism agenda, policy on this way of thinking has been developing for some time now.

Coordinated services – from Total Place to community budgets

A second political narrative that has been important to recent policy development is that of coordinated or 'joined up' services. Again, the basic idea was initiated by the last government. Tony Blair called for 'joined up government' as soon as he took power and to help realise this aim, the new Labour Government created the Social Exclusion Unit with expertise from the Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Education. The Total Place pilots were a

particularly interesting manifestation of a policy approach aimed at driving joined-up government. The aims of these pilots, trialled through local authorities with a remit to serve 11 million people, were to make efficiency savings, put citizens at the heart of better service delivery, and encourage collaborative working across the public sector.[120]

The Total Place pilots mapped out £82 billion of public spending that would benefit from a more coordinated approach. Unfortunately, there is no evidence on whether the pilots did indeed lead to improved services and efficiency savings (they may well have done, there simply is no evidence either way). On the downside, Total Place suffered from being somewhat mired in jargon and buzzwords (eg 'co-creation', 'co-design'), as well as from making some heroic assumptions about the abilities of local government. But the evaluation reports for each area have provided useful tools for taking coordinated approaches to tackling social issues – by identifying exactly what problems are salient, what is spent and by whom, and what the focus of ongoing coordinated action should be. For example, the Total Place pilot in Birmingham identified that in employment, 93 per cent of Birmingham's spend is on out-of-work benefits and less than 7 per cent on interventions to help people into work; in health, 96 per cent of spend is on treating illness and less than 4 per cent on keeping people well.[121]

The Coalition Government has continued to build on the ideas behind Total Place by developing community budgets and the health and wellbeing boards. The former sound remarkably like Total Place pilots:

A Community Budget gives local public service partners the freedom to work together to redesign services around the needs of citizens, improving outcomes, reducing duplication and waste and so saving significant sums of public money.[122]

In the 2010 spending review it was announced that

16 areas (28 authorities – 20 per cent of English councils) would develop proposals to turn around the lives of families with multiple problems using

the Community Budget approach. After less than six months, on 1 April 2011, they began implementing plans to deal with at least 10,000 problem families.[123]

It is too early to say whether community budgets have been successful, and they are not yet focused on reducing loneliness in old age. However, if successful, we can assume they might become relevant as vehicles for spending on services focused on this issue.

Prevention and early intervention

Another key narrative in government policy in recent years has been the need to take an 'early intervention' approach to maintaining older people's health, independence and wellbeing, with the aim of preventing the social and financial costs associated with allowing an older person's health and wellbeing to deteriorate.

A succession of policy initiatives has reflected this policy emphasis on early intervention. For example, in 2007, under the Labour Government, the DoH published *Commissioning Framework for Health and Wellbeing* to provide guidelines demonstrating how health and social care services can work more closely together 'to improve the health, wellbeing and independence of everyone living in their local area'.[124] One of the stated key aims of this commissioning framework was to bring about 'a strategic reorientation towards promoting health and wellbeing, investing now to reduce future ill health costs'.[125] As discussed in the previous chapter, the POPP programme, which was initiated by the DoH in May 2006 and ran until March 2009, was also explicitly 'set up to test preventive approaches' and was judged by its evaluators to have successfully 'demonstrated that prevention and early intervention can "work" for older people'.[126]

More recently, under the Coalition Government in 2010, the DoH published the policy document *A Vision for Adult Social Care*, which suggested that councils should take action to improve their emphasis on a preventative approach to service delivery by:

· building community capacity and 'establishing the conditions in which the big society can flourish'
· 'commissioning a full range of appropriate preventative and early intervention services such as re-ablement and telecare'[127]

In the comprehensive spending review in 2010 it was subsequently announced that a portion of the NHS budget would be committed to spending on 'reablement' services to support people who are discharged from hospital to readjust to living at home. These services are considered to be a 'preventative' intervention as they reduce unnecessary readmissions to hospital (the recipients of reablement care are overwhelmingly older people). The funding allocated is to total £150 million in 2011/12 and £300 million in 2012/13.[128]

The impact of public spending cuts

These various policy documents demonstrate a strong government commitment to promoting preventative and 'early intervention' services to support older people's wellbeing. However, because of the inherent challenges associated with releasing limited public funds to pay for dedicated early intervention services, and the increasingly squeezed nature of public resources as a result of austerity measures to reduce the public debt, many local authorities are struggling to deliver these policy commitments.

A 2011 report by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) entitled *The State of Health Care and Adult Social Care in England* was able to measure the immediate impact of public sector budget cuts on social care spending in 2009/10, finding that 'the total number of people receiving publicly-funded community care services fell by nearly 5 per cent against the previous year, despite the rapidly growing proportion of older people with support needs'.[129] The CQC suggested that this reduced access to publicly funded care services may be caused by 'councils applying more stringently their criteria for access'. In the year under consideration, the CQC observed: 'three councils set their eligibility threshold for care-managed services at "critical"

(indicating the most restricted level of access to services), while 107 set their threshold at "substantial"'.[130]

These increasing restrictions on funding for care services increase the risk that older people will be left socially isolated if they are unable to self-fund the support services they need to remain independent.

To highlight this problem of decreasing access to care services, in November 2011 Age UK published research entitled *Don't Cut Care in London*, which used freedom of information requests to all London local authorities to identify the changes they had made to funding, eligibility criteria and charges for a range of older people's services between 2010/11 and 2011/12.[131] They received responses from 29 London boroughs and the City of London, which demonstrated that these local authorities were making savings to their social care budgets in the following ways:

· Two boroughs increased their eligibility threshold for social care services.
· Eighteen boroughs increased prices for customers of Meals on Wheels.
· Six boroughs reduced their domiciliary social care packages or personal budgets.
· Four boroughs reduced the number of day care placements they offered.
· Fifteen boroughs applied new or increased service charges.
· Three boroughs reduced subsidies for places in residential care homes, four boroughs reduced subsidies for a nursing home place and four reduced subsidies for a dementia care home place.
· Thirteen boroughs made savings by cutting voluntary sector grants or contracts.[132]

This final point is corroborated by Demos research published in 2011, which found that around half of local authorities in England and Wales intended to close services for older people and disabled people.[133] According to this research, the community services that were most badly affected by these cuts included day centres, lunch clubs and respite services –

exactly the kinds of low-level support services that are intended to support older people's social participation and reduce the risk of isolation and loneliness. Therefore these studies by Age UK and Demos indicate a growing gap – exacerbated by the public spending cuts – between policy rhetoric and the reality of what services are available to older people in practice.

A local approach to public health through health and wellbeing boards

While public funds to invest in preventative interventions to reduce the risk of loneliness, social isolation and poor wellbeing in old age are clearly in very short supply, the new health and wellbeing boards, which are in the process of being set up in all local authorities, present a new and welcome opportunity for collaborative working at a local level to address these issues. They are currently being trialled by 'early implementing' local authorities as part of the refinement of the Health and Social Care Bill, which became the Health and Social Care Act in March 2012.[134] According to the DoH:

Health and wellbeing boards will be a forum for local commissioners across the NHS, public health and social care, elected representatives, and representatives of HealthWatch to discuss how to work together to better the health and wellbeing outcomes of the people in their area.[135]

Health and wellbeing boards are intended to have two main functions:

· to bring together public health, social care and the NHS agencies in order to bring about coordinated commissioning of services – eg coordinating home-help for independent living with hospital discharge services
· to provide more democratic accountability with the inclusion of patient group and locally elected representatives

Encouragingly, the boards seem to have been among the most popular reforms included in the Health and Social Care

Bill, with 138 of 152 'top-tier' local authorities in England and Wales opting to act as 'early implementers'. The health and wellbeing boards present new opportunities to commission early intervention support services for older people, including services aimed at reducing loneliness and social isolation. As the boards bring together social care, public health and NHS commissioners and community representatives, this is an exciting opportunity to think holistically about developing new policy approaches to improving older people's lives at a local level.

Campaigns focused on reducing loneliness and social isolation in old age

A number of VCS organisations and their partners have recently responded to these various challenges and opportunities by launching public awareness campaigns to highlight the issue of loneliness in old age. These campaigns aim to drive forward thinking on how we can act constructively to tackle loneliness and social isolation in old age, and they have been successful in building considerable political momentum behind these issues. However, as the examples below will demonstrate, while these campaigns have been mainly driven by the third sector, they often emphasise the need for an inclusive and cross-sector partnership approach to addressing this issue, and some of the campaigns that we highlight have had strong backing from private and public sector partners.

Friends of the Elderly Isolation Week

Friends of the Elderly have coordinated a number of campaigns to raise awareness of loneliness experienced by elderly people. In a campaign to highlight the issue in June 2011, ten volunteers spent a week confined to their homes and shared their experience of isolation through daily blogs and Twitter updates.[136]

In December 2011, Friends of the Elderly also teamed up with the *Sun* newspaper to highlight the loneliness of the elderly at Christmas; an estimated 500,000 elderly people spend Christmas Day alone. The campaign was publicised using a two-

page spread in the *Sun*, an online video and celebrity endorsements. The campaign encouraged financial donations and individual action, encouraging readers to call in on their elderly neighbours during the festive period or to buy them a Christmas card.

The Big Lunch

The Big Lunch is a charitable initiative that the Eden Project started in 2009 'in the belief that we, as a society, are better equipped to tackle the challenges that we face when we face them together'. It seeks to tackle social isolation and loneliness among people of all age groups and backgrounds by encouraging 'as many people as possible across the whole of the UK to have lunch with their neighbours in a simple act of community, friendship and fun'.[137]

The Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness was started in 2010 by four founding partners: Age UK Oxfordshire, Counsel and Care, Independent Age and WRVS, with the aim of creating and strengthening connections in older age.[138] The Campaign uses a number of approaches including research, policy and campaigning.

The first report by the Campaign to End Loneliness, *Safeguarding the Convoy*, was launched in 2011. The Campaign is supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and is based at their office in London. The Campaign also recently launched an 18-month project called 'Get on Board – loneliness reduces *our* Health and Wellbeing'. The aim of this project is to encourage health and wellbeing boards to include targets for reducing loneliness in their commissioning plans. Pilots began in April 2012 in six local areas. This project is based on research that loneliness has an effect on mortality akin to cigarette smoking and is associated with other mental and physical health conditions, including increased rates of cardiovascular disease, dementia and disability.

The Campaign produces literature and practical resources such as its recent document *Combating Loneliness*, which was launched in March 2012.[139] The Campaign has its own research hub and has plans for a research conference to be held in July 2012. It co-hosted a conference on loneliness with the Centre for Social Justice in November 2011. The Campaign has fed into policy by providing consultation responses to:

· the ONS's 'Measuring National Wellbeing' discussion
· the DoH's consultation 'Caring for our Future'
· the DoH's health and social care white paper
· the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework

The Age Action Alliance

The Age Action Alliance, launched in October 2011, is a cross-sector 'partnership of organisations from civil society and the public and private sectors, which celebrates the lives of older people and their contribution to society'. Its particular aim is to 'improve the lives of the most disadvantaged older people and prevent deprivation in later life'.[140]

The Alliance's vision includes six broad areas, ensuring that older people:

· are visible, valued and heard
· can make informed choices about health and wellbeing
· live in safe, warm homes
· have a strong network of friends, family or support in their communities
· are able to access information and services they need – including those on the internet
· live in places where their needs are met[141]

These campaigns demonstrate the growing awareness that organisations must work in partnership if they wish to achieve real social impact.

Businesses as partners in community development and public health

The pressures on public spending budgets mean that it is of the utmost importance that these trends in policy development discussed above – localism, coordinated services and early intervention – are brought together in public sector institutions to provide the kind of effective interventions against loneliness and social isolation that we reviewed in the previous chapter. For example, health and wellbeing boards offer the opportunity for services to be commissioned that are locally based, coordinated and strategically targeted so they intervene early to prevent problems rather than waiting until after problems have arisen. Using the kind of data produced by the Total Place pilots, the boards can identify entrenched, harmful and expensive social problems and decide how best to allocate resources across public, third sector and private agencies in order tackle them. This framework offers a promising platform for marshalling resources well.

However, as we saw in the last chapter, although there are interventions that work in reducing loneliness, there are many that don't. There are also many where we simply don't know whether they work or not. While we certainly need to fund interventions to prevent or reduce loneliness through health and wellbeing boards, and join up these interventions with third-sector initiatives such as the Campaign to End Loneliness, as a country we also need to consider how we can use existing infrastructure and resources in a way that enables older people to participate in their communities, reducing the risk of social isolation. One area with great untapped potential is the scope for businesses to do more to combat loneliness and social isolation for older people – whether by adapting retail environments and customer services, allowing business space to be used by community groups, or taking a role as employers in preparing people for the adjustments they will face when they retire.

Here we examine the political momentum behind the idea that businesses should take on more responsibility for social issues. In light of the increasing evidence of the negative impact that loneliness has on older people's health and wellbeing, it is right that government agencies – including health and wellbeing

boards – should lead on reducing the risk of loneliness in old age. However, in the context of public sector spending cuts and increasing pressure on public resources driven by an ageing population, it will clearly be important in coming years that we supplement limited public sector resources where we can by engaging partners from all sectors of the community on this issue.

Political narratives promoting responsible business

The Labour leader Ed Miliband made a speech in January 2012 about businesses and their responsibilities. He stated that 'values and fairness are not being reflected in the way our economy works' and 'the system is not working for the 99 per cent'.[142] He concluded that we have 'an economy and a society too often rewarding not the right people with the right values, but the wrong people with the wrong values'. Mr Miliband also famously called for 'producers' – companies that create wealth and employment – to be supported, and 'predators' – companies that destroy wealth and employment – to be sanctioned. He did not make clear how this was to be done, but the general sentiment of Miliband's speech was that Labour in the past had been too sanguine about the kinds of businesses government supports (whether through active policies or a lack of policies).

Prime Minister David Cameron, in a speech also made in January 2012, said:

We know there is every difference in the world between a market that works and one that does not. Markets can fail. Uncontrolled globalisation can slide into monopolisation, sweeping aside the small, the personal and the local… We are the party that understands how to make capitalism work; the party that has constantly defended our open economy against the economics of socialism. I see problems with markets as an opportunity to improve them.[143]

Cameron's conception of how to improve markets has two main strands:

The first is a vision of social responsibility, which recognises that people are not just individuals and that companies have obligations too… And the second is a genuinely popular capitalism, which allows everyone to share in the success of the market. Corporate social responsibility and environmental responsibility have been constant themes in the arguments I've made and the policies we've developed.[144]

Again, how such responsibilities are to be realised is unclear, but in a speech in February 2012, David Cameron 'described corporate responsibility as 'an absolutely vital part of my mission for this government – to build a bigger, stronger society'.[145]

How will this commitment to CSR be realised? The Government is setting up an informal working group called the Open Business Forum. This forum will consist of 'an online directory called "Trading For Good", showing where small businesses are doing good things, so consumers can know about it and reward them for it'. The Prime Minister describes this as 'the next frontier for corporate responsibility… giving more power to consumers' and 'changing our culture'.[146] Cameron goes on to state that he wants to combat 'the snobbery that says business has no inherent moral worth like the state does; that it isn't really to be trusted, that it should stay out of social concerns and stick to making the money that pays the taxes'.[147]

Every Business Commits

In December 2010, the Coalition Government launched its CSR strategy entitled Every Business Commits. This identified a series of broad areas 'in which Government and business can work together [as] part of the Prime Minister's vision to build a Big Society where businesses, communities, voluntary bodies and charities help solve problems'.[148] Every Business Commits asks businesses to focus on five key priorities:

· creating jobs and developing the skills of their workforce
· supporting local communities

- larger businesses supporting small and medium sized enterprises to grow
- improving the quality of life and wellbeing of their employees
- reducing carbon and protecting the environment[149]

The point about supporting local communities is of most relevance to combating loneliness and social isolation in old age. As we shall see in the following chapters, there is not only an altruistic case for providing such support, but also a clear business case for companies to get involved.

Recently other political figures have also joined this call for more responsible business practices. For example, Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), argued in his 2011 annual lecture that businesses could combine a strategy for competitive success with a commitment to social good.[150] Similarly, John Denham MP, former Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has called for 'the spread of the "good company" – profitable businesses and corporations which add value both to the economy and to society'.[151] Moreover, business thinkers have been making these arguments for some time. In 'Creating shared value' Porter and Kramer argue that the competitiveness of a company and the health of the communities around it are mutually dependent. They conclude that the focus for business should be on identifying and utilising the ways in which business advantage and societal progress overlap.[152]

Working with businesses to improve public health

One of the most significant manifestations of the Coalition Government's new expectations for corporate responsibility is embodied in the DoH's March 2011 strategy *The Public Health Responsibility Deal*. Secretary of State for Health Andrew Lansley's foreword to this document explains:

Business is a powerful influence on the lives of all of us, whether as employers, through commercial actions, or through community action…

Businesses have both the technical expertise to make healthier products and the marketing expertise to influence purchasing habits… In a context like this, we shouldn't be scared to use the reach of businesses to achieve mutually beneficial aims. Put simply, commercial organisations can reach individuals in ways that other organisations, Government included, cannot.[153]

The Public Health Responsibility Deal invites businesses (referred to as 'Responsibility Deal partners') to sign up to a series of five core commitments focused on improving public health:

· recognising the business's role in improving people's health
· agreeing to 'encourage and enable people' to eat more healthily
· agreeing to 'foster a culture of responsible drinking'
· agreeing to 'encourage and assist people to become more physically active'
· agreeing to support their employees to live more healthily[154]

Businesses are then invited to make pledges explaining how they will deliver on these commitments. To monitor this process, the DoH has set up an online registry to 'provide transparency on who the Deal's partners are and the pledges on which they have committed to take action'.[155] By May 2012, more than 350 organisations had signed up to be Public Health Responsibility Deal partners.[156] Thus there is now considerable momentum behind the expectation that businesses should seek to work in partnership with the Government and other community partners for public benefit, as opposed to private profit.

Summary
In addition to an emphasis on developing a more localised, co-ordinated early intervention approach to public services for older people, there is currently political momentum behind two ideas:

· community-focused campaigns to reduce loneliness and social isolation in old age and improve older people's independence and wellbeing

· responsible businesses putting more effort into supporting strong, healthy communities

In light of the spending cuts detailed earlier in this chapter, which appear to threaten the capacity of local authorities to deliver the preventative services that government policymakers expect, it becomes all the more important that we bring these two trends together. We will need to get much more out of existing infrastructure and human and social capital that exists in local communities if we are to stage a fight back against the spread of loneliness and social isolation. In the next three chapters we will examine the various roles that businesses might take and the opportunities and challenges for businesses in engaging with their local communities to support older people's social participation.

Section 2
Exploring the role of business in tackling loneliness

5 Mapping business involvement

Research methodology

The purpose of the qualitative research we conducted for this report was to explore this central research question (identified in the previous chapter): How might businesses work most effectively with their local communities to support older people's social participation and reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation in old age?

We have focused particularly on exploring three dimensions of this question:

· identifying existing good practice that other businesses can learn from
· identifying the key motivating factors for businesses to get involved in tackling social isolation and loneliness in old age
· identifying the challenges and barriers that businesses might need to overcome

The qualitative research methodology for this project included three main elements, which we will briefly describe:

· landscape mapping
· developing case studies
· holding an 'idea-swapping' workshop

Landscape mapping

In the first portion of the research we set out to map current activities of UK businesses that support older people's social participation. We aimed not to identify an exhaustive list, but to explore the various ways in which businesses of all sizes, from large corporations to small and medium-sized enterprises, are currently supporting older people to build social networks and

participate in the community. Our methods for the landscape mapping included desk-based research and interviews with experts from businesses, charities and local authorities. On the basis of this research we created a typology of varieties of business involvement and identified a series of good practice case studies.

Developing case studies

We developed eight detailed case studies that demonstrate different ways in which businesses can work directly with older people in the community, or in partnership with community groups or charities, to reduce loneliness and social isolation in old age.

Three of these case studies involved site visits, where we were able to interview the participants (business representatives, VCS partners and older people). These were McDonald's in Barkingside, the Green Light Pharmacy in Euston and the Dementia Café in Market Harborough. We researched the remaining four case studies through face-to-face or telephone interviews. During the course of the landscape mapping and case study elements of this research we interviewed 35 people, whose names are listed in appendix 1.

Holding an 'idea-swapping' workshop

In the second phase of the research we held an 'idea-swapping' workshop to bring together charities and social enterprises, businesses and older people to share ideas about how businesses could generate new social opportunities for older people. This took place in February 2012.

At the workshop we presented the findings from our initial research phase, including the 'landscape map' of businesses' current activities, a selection of case studies and our initial thoughts on:

· the 'business case' or motivating factors for businesses to get involved in tackling social isolation in old age

· the barriers or challenges that businesses might face

We then facilitated a series of round table discussions to give participants the opportunity to question, build on and consolidate these findings. There is a list of attendees at this workshop in appendix 2.

In the remainder of this chapter, we set out our research findings from the 'landscape mapping' exercise, including seven case studies that demonstrate current good practice and models that other businesses could replicate. Chapter 6 explores the key motivating factors for businesses that we identified through the case studies, interviews and the workshop, and chapter 7 sets out the main challenges and barriers that need to be overcome before the business community can increase the scale of the support that it currently offers.

'Ageing sociably' business involvement typology and case studies

We found during the landscape mapping exercise that many of the charity and business representatives struggled to identify examples of businesses that were involved in activities that supported older people's social participation. For some people, the idea of businesses getting involved in this work was counterintuitive as the assumption was that it is the role of charities, social enterprises, housing providers and government agencies to prevent and reduce social isolation in old age. We will discuss these assumptions in more detail in chapter 7. However, we were able to collect a variety of examples of businesses that were working with older people or other community partners in various ways.

The examples that we identified fall roughly into six thematic categories or types:

· traditional sponsorship and in-kind donations
· products, services or discounts targeted at older customers
· providing social spaces for older people
· supporting regular social activities for older people

- employees volunteering to support older people's
  social participation
- organising regular social activities for retired former employees

These are not hard and fast criteria and there is plenty of cross-over between the various categories (for example, any one project might involve a business providing a social space, supporting regular social activities and providing staff volunteers). The aim of this typology is to demonstrate the range of activity that is already taking place and the various existing models that other businesses could potentially adopt and adapt to fit their business model. Table 2 summarises the various examples and case studies we identified during this 'landscape mapping' exercise.

Under the following headings we discuss the six business involvement models in more detail and describe the various projects and activities that we identified through our landscape mapping exercise.

Traditional sponsorship and in-kind donations

Sponsorship and in-kind donations were perhaps the most frequently mentioned examples of ways in which businesses have supported social activities for older people. Some companies, such as Marks & Spencer, Waitrose and Sainsbury's, have policies that allow a local store or branch to choose a charity they wish to support locally. The store or branch will then fundraise for this charity and often combine financial support with donations of refreshments or products to support social events. This may also be combined with employee volunteering and/or providing a venue for events.

When Demos interviewed Maeve Egerton, Trusts & Corporate Relations Manager for Age Northern Ireland (Age NI), in December 2011, she mentioned that Japanese Tobacco International (JTI) sponsored Age NI's 'First Connect' service. This service supports older people to access health and social care services and to live independently in their own home. It also offers older people emotional and practical support at difficult

Table 2   **Summary of business involvement models and case study examples**

Business involvement model	Description	Examples of current activities
Traditional sponsorship and in-kind donations	Providing sponsorship to fund a service or donating refreshments or products to support social events for older people	• JTI sponsors Age NI's 'First Connect' home visiting support service • Waitrose's partnership with Age UK Norfolk, including fundraising, volunteering, and providing tea and cakes to support a Festive Tea Dance • Donations of free gifts and support for events (eg vitamins, raffle prizes and energy saving light bulbs) by Boots, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer and Power NI
Paid-for products, activities or discounts targeted at older customers	Offering commercially-driven products, services, social activities, entertainment or discounts that support older people's social participation	• Telecare products and services • Saga holidays and dating services for people aged 50+ • Discounted 'silver screenings' and 'reminiscence screenings' put on by cinemas including the Odeon and Picturehouse cinemas • B&Q free Diamond Card membership for over 60s (10 per cent discount on Wednesdays) • Boots Over-60s Club (includes ten advantage points for every pound spent, discounts at Boots opticians and special promotions)

Table 2   **Summary of business involvement models and case study examples – *continued***

Business involve-ment model	Description	Examples of current activities
Providing social spaces for older people	Providing social spaces where older people can meet, socialise or learn new skills	• McDonald's free tea and coffee mornings for people aged above state pension age • Sainsbury's 'More than a Store' scheme, which gives community groups access to meeting rooms • Titanic Brewery pubs hosting Stoke Stone & Stafford social media surgeries and knitting circles
Supporting regular social activities for older people	Arranging regular (low-cost or free) social activities for older people, sometimes in partnership with a voluntary or community sector organisation.	• Green Light Pharmacy women's and men's 'health walks' • SLM leisure centre offers free afternoon badminton for people aged 50+ • Dementia Café Market Harborough, supported by Sainsbury's • 'Extra Time' programme in care homes and football stadiums (Football Foundation, supported by football clubs and other partners)
Employee volunteering to support older people's social participation	Employee volunteering in activities that are specifically intended to support older people to participate socially	• O2 mobile phone training, supported by WRVS • Zurich Community Trust and Age UK's Call in Time programme
Organising regular social activities for retired former employees	Organising regular social activities to support retired former employees to stay socially connected in retirement	• John Lewis Partnership Retired Partners Programme • Morrisons Plus Retirement Club

times in their lives and aims to ensure older people's ongoing participation in community life. This is a straightforward funding relationship, whereby JTI provides the funding that is needed to manage and deliver the service. Maeve also mentioned partnerships with Boots NI, which has provided free gifts (eg tubes of vitamins and other raffle prizes) to support events, and Power NI, with which Age NI works in partnership to help vulnerable older people, particularly by tackling fuel poverty. Power NI has partnered Age NI in organising events, and donated energy saving light bulbs, which Age NI distributes to older people at these events.

Peter Hulme, Campaigns Officer at Grandparents Plus, mentioned a recent partnership between Age UK Norfolk and Waitrose supporting social activities for residents and service users at Grays Fair Court in Norwich during the Christmas period in 2011. This included a Festive Tea Dance with refreshments provided by Waitrose, and Waitrose Partners also volunteered to support the event.[157]

Products, activities or discounts targeted at older customers

These are commercially driven products and social activities that are specifically targeted at older people. As we will discuss in chapters 6 and 7, this category was mentioned relatively infrequently during our 'landscape mapping' exercise, as many of the people whom we spoke to (including representatives of CVS organisations and businesses) thought that older people are not currently very well served as consumers. There were also more examples of general services for older people (such as Meals on Wheels) than examples of services that specifically reduce social isolation. We have divided this section into products and services, activities and entertainment, and discounts.

Products and services

Members of the Ageing Sociably project's advisory board mentioned Tunstall as an example of a company that sells products that support older people's participation. Tunstall

offers a range of telecare and telehealth products which support older people to live independently. Some of these products also support older people to participate in their community, for example the 'Tunstall Romad Mobile Alarm', which can 'provide assurance for vulnerable people such as the elderly, or other groups who may be at risk when away from their home'. The GPS technology embedded in the device means that when the alarm button is pressed, two-way voice communication is activated between the user and a monitoring centre operator, and the monitoring centre can locate the device user to within 10 metres.[158] Having access to a service like this could potentially increase the confidence of a more vulnerable older person to leave their home.

Andrew Chidgey, Director of External Affairs at the Alzheimer's Society, mentioned the Design Council's recent project 'Living Well With Dementia', delivered in partnership with the DoH, which has supported the development of five products to improve the lives of people with dementia. These include 'dementia dog… a service providing assistance dogs to people with dementia, helping them lead more fulfilled, independent and stress-free lives'; 'Grouple… a secure, private online social network helping people share the responsibilities of caring for someone with dementia'; and 'buddi', a discrete wristband that 'can send alerts from anywhere to buddi's support services'.[159] The impetus for this project did not come from the private sector, but these products provide examples of how businesses could develop more commercial products and services to support more vulnerable older people and people with dementia to continue to participate socially in their community.

Activities and entertainment
In the fourth category (see 'Supporting regular social activities for older people', below) we will set out examples of businesses that support very low-cost or free activities for older people, often in partnership with a VCS organisation, which are mainly driven by CSR motivations. However, there are also a number of examples of businesses that offer activities or entertainment targeted at wealthier older people with disposable income. Some

examples that were frequently mentioned by interviewees during our 'landscape mapping' exercise include Saga holidays, dating services for people aged 50+ and 'reminiscence' screenings or 'silver screenings' provided by cinema chains such as Odeon and Picturehouse cinemas. These film screenings targeted at older people tend to offer cheaper tickets and usually take place in quieter periods such as mid-morning or early afternoon when the cinema would otherwise be relatively quiet. Both Odeon and Picturehouse also offer free refreshments (tea and biscuits) after the screenings, which adds a social dimension by encouraging older people who have watched the film to stay and discuss it afterwards.[160]

Discounts

During this research, the most frequently mentioned example of a company that provides discounts on its products for older people was B&Q, which offers free Diamond Card membership for people aged over 60, providing a 10 per cent discount on Wednesdays. While the discount applies to B&Q products, rather than social activities, Kelly Metcalfe, Community Manager at B&Q plc, told us, 'This encourages sociability amongst our older customers, and Wednesdays are a particularly busy day for us in store. Our Diamond Club members make the most of the discount and the coffee shops!' As we will also see in the next category, if a business provides discounts or free refreshments for older customers on a regular day, this can have the effect of providing a social space in which older people know they are welcome, which can facilitate regular social contact between older people who live in the local area.

We also learnt that Boots runs an Over-60s Club, which provides various offers to customers who are aged 60+, including ten advantage points for every pound spent, and discounts at Boots opticians and special promotions. Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop also mentioned a scheme run by Southwark Circle, a social enterprise that provides a subscription service for older people, which gives them access to services and activities. The Dine Out membership scheme gives its members a discount of 10–25 per cent in a range of participating restaurants in

Southwark.[161] Such discounts can potentially play a valuable role in reducing social isolation by reducing the cost of socialising for older people.

Providing social spaces for older people

From conversations we had in interviews and the 'idea-swapping' workshop, it became clear during the course of this project that one of the main challenges for older people can be identifying low-cost, affordable places to meet. At the 'idea-swapping' workshop, one participant said she was involved with the University of the Third Age (U3A), a self-help user-led organisation for older people who are no longer in full-time work and wish to share learning experiences,[162] and that they often have difficulty finding places to meet as they try to keep costs down for participants: 'Some groups hold events in people's houses, but some people feel that this creates a sense of social exclusivity that can deter new members.' Alternatively, trying to meet in public places, such as church halls, can mean paying hire fees, which are unaffordable for some groups.

Maeve Egerton at Age NI suggested that businesses can play a valuable role in reducing costs for third sector organisations like hers, by providing meeting spaces for training and social events. She gave a number of examples of the partnerships Age NI has developed with businesses, including support with one-off events and longer-term partnerships. Marks & Spencer hosted a Christmas concert for Age NI in 2010 and provided mince pies, mulled wine and a hamper for the raffle. Maeve said that this had been a very popular event: 'It's all about making older people feel special.' She said that some hotels allow charities to book a space for free, if you purchase refreshments. Maeve said that she was also currently exploring the potential for a partnership with ASDA whereby the company would support social events for older people by providing meeting spaces and refreshments. Under this arrangement, Age NI would facilitate partnerships between individual ASDA stores and their local older people's community groups (Age NI has links to 1,200 older people's groups in Northern Ireland).

Demos also interviewed Andy White, Head of Community Affairs at Sainsbury's, in December 2011. He said that Sainsbury's already supports a number of local community groups across the UK through its 'more than a store' scheme, which provides access to their store space, and the company is currently exploring how they can do more: 'It's tough out there for community groups, rents are going up.' Sainsbury's 2011 corporate responsibility report observes,

A wide range of other community activities has arisen as part of 'more than a store'. In many of our stores local community organisations use our space and facilities for anything from Scout group meetings to speed dating for the elderly.[163]

However, this report does not aggregate information on how the Sainsbury's store space is used, so it is unclear from this report how many stores specifically support older people's groups, as opposed to other parts of the community. As we will explore below, Sainsbury's also has a local charity scheme, through which Sainsbury's colleagues and customers choose a local charity to support each year.[164]

We also interviewed Allison Bartlett, Head of Public Affairs at McDonald's Restaurants Ltd. She told us that McDonald's is actually a coalition of SMEs as it is part of a franchise model. About 65 per cent of McDonald's restaurants in the UK are franchises, while the remainder are company-owned. Most franchise owners own around five or six restaurants and these chains tend to be clustered in a defined region.

Allison said that each McDonald's franchise owner 'has a duty to be embedded in their local community', as the McDonald's business plan is all about building trust with customers, particularly in the local communities where McDonald's franchises operate. McDonald's encourages its franchise owners to focus on developing their own local business identity and it is wholly up to the individual franchise owners how they wish to engage with their local community. Some franchise owners provide business mentoring for small businesses and work to improve their local community; others

provide free tea and coffee mornings for older people. Allison said that it was particularly important that McDonald's franchises make sure their activities are 'relevant to the community and consistent'.

Case study 1 describes one McDonald's franchise owner's motivations for providing weekly free tea and coffee mornings for older people in Barkingside, and the benefits of this for older customers.

Case study 1 McDonald's coffee mornings for older customers in Barkingside

Background

Demos visited a McDonald's restaurant in Barkingside in November 2011 to meet the franchise owner John Loizou. John told us that he owns five McDonald's franchises, including two restaurants in high street locations and three drive-thru stores. He has owned the Barkingside restaurant for 12 years and the coffee mornings began under the previous owners, so they have been running for more than 12 years.

The arrangement is that anybody above state pension age can just walk in and get a free tea or coffee on a Tuesday morning (between about 9am and midday). This offer is not advertised anywhere, it is mainly spread by word of mouth. Regulars often bring their friends and John's aim is to provide a relaxing and welcoming environment for older people to come to. The McDonald's staff always talk to the older people who come in for their free drinks and they provide as many top-ups as people want.

John said that the number attending the coffee mornings varies between five and 15 older people each week, with usually at least eight people in attendance. Some people come alone and others come to meet friends. While many of the regular older customers come only on Tuesday mornings to see friends and have a coffee, one older woman comes every day at 7am and stays for several hours. This woman has been coming to the restaurant every morning for the last 12 years.

Older customers' perspective on the coffee mornings

Demos spoke to a group of six older customers who meet each other for a coffee at the Barkingside McDonald's every Tuesday morning. One older woman told us that although she lives locally, her husband has poor health and can't walk very far, therefore she drives him to McDonald's each week in the car. She worked as a dinner lady at the local school for 22 years, but stopped work when she turned 60. She has been coming to the Barkingside McDonald's every Tuesday morning for the last 10 years, sometimes without her husband if he is not well enough to leave the house. She said, 'I come to have a chat with my friends and pass the time.' When asked if there was anywhere else she liked to socialise locally, she said, 'No, there's nowhere else to go.'

She said that the man sitting next to her used to be her next-door neighbour, but that he moved away to a smaller house when his wife died. They both agreed that coming to the coffee mornings helped them to stay in touch as they knew they would see each other at the same time each week. Two other friends, whom they'd met through being regulars at the coffee mornings, drove over from Woodford each Tuesday and would have a coffee with them at McDonald's, before doing their shopping at Tesco. They all agreed they enjoyed being part of a regular social group and that the free drinks made the arrangement affordable.

McDonald's franchise owner's motivation

John Loizou, the franchise owner, told us that there are a number of reasons why has felt motivated to continue offering free teas and coffees for older people each week during the past 12 years. Most importantly, he emphasised that his intention was not to make money (most of the older customers don't purchase food) but about 'showing goodwill and giving something back to the local community'. He said he was conscious of the financial pressures retired people are experiencing: 'Their savings aren't generating much income, their pensions don't go as far and energy prices and the cost of

food are going up.' Therefore, he is pleased to be able to give older people an opportunity to socialise that won't cost them anything.

John also said that doing positive things for the community is an important part of building a positive local business identity: 'A lot of people see McDonald's as a multi-national, but these offers in the local area show that it's not a corporate beast, it's an individual business run by a local person.' The coffee mornings are part of his broader work as a member of the local business community: he is chair of the local business partnership and gets involved in organising local events that bring people together such as bonfire night.

At the time of our conversation, John had not considered partnering with any local charities or voluntary groups to publicise the free coffee mornings or put on social events for older people. He also did not know whether the local authorities (Redbridge and Waltham Forest) were aware that the free coffee mornings were available to their older residents.

Future plans
When John recently purchased a new McDonald's franchise in Chingford in July 2011, he arranged a meeting with the local older people's home, which is right next to the store. At this meeting he discovered that the residents were frequently bothered by excessive noise in the car park late at night, so he put up new barriers to ensure the car park could not be used after midnight. He has now started to offer free coffee mornings in the Chingford franchise and is keen to work with the older people's home to make sure that the residents feel welcome at the restaurant.

The role of pubs as social spaces

When we interviewed Alan Hatton-Yeo, Chief Executive of the Beth Johnson Foundation, for this research in January 2012, he pointed out that different people feel comfortable in different environments, and older women and men won't necessarily want to socialise in the same places: 'If you go to a Wetherspoons in

the afternoon, it tends to be filled with older men.' He suggested that 'most pubs provide discounts to older people on quiet afternoons', which can provide valuable social spaces for older men. Paul Cann, Chief Executive of Age UK Oxfordshire, also highlighted the role of pubs as important community meeting spaces, mentioning the work of the organisation Pub is the Hub (www.pubisthehub.org.uk/), which supports rural pubs to provide community services that meet the needs of their local community, such as fitness classes, Meals on Wheels or cinema screenings.

Case study 2 describes the role that Titanic Brewery is playing in supporting local community activities in Staffordshire. Many of the people who benefit from the social media surgeries held in Titanic Brewery pubs are older people, although their work is not targeted specifically at older people. In addition to the social media surgeries described below, several Titanic Brewery pubs also host local knitting circles. The Royal Exchange in Stone, Staffordshire, hosts a knitting circle called 'Yarn of Ale', which was set up by a group of regulars with a common interest in winter 2011. The pub's landlady Michelle Hughes explained that the group meets fortnightly, with attendance of between two and 15 people. The group is of mixed ages and includes 'teenagers up to pensioners'. Michelle described the meetings: 'They sit in the bar area and have a chat and knit all kinds of things. If you can think of it, they'll knit it!' A local blog called 'A little Bit of Stone' reported that in November 2011 the Yarn of Ale group raised money for Children in Need by knitting 'through the night, from 8pm to 8am on Saturday morning'.[165]

Case study 2 Stoke Stone & Stafford social media surgery in Titanic Brewery pubs

Background

Nick Booth, a former BBC reporter and documentary maker, developed the concept of social media surgeries through his company podnosh and began to run the first surgeries in Birmingham in early 2009.[166] A social media surgery is 'an

informal gathering of people who want to learn how to use the web to communicate, campaign or collaborate'.[167] *They are particularly targeted at local community and voluntary organisations that wish to learn how to use social media tools to support their activities.*

Philip Oakley,[168] *director of a web application training and consultancy company, went to some of the first social media surgeries that podnosh ran in Birmingham for voluntary and community groups in January 2009. Philip then felt inspired to work with four other local technology enthusiasts to set up a social media surgery for community groups in Staffordshire.*[169]

Partnership with Titanic Brewery

One of the people involved with Philip in setting up the Staffordshire social media surgery has his own PR company. In late 2010 he was working with a local micro-brewery called Titanic (www.titanicbrewery.co.uk/), which has a network of seven pubs in Staffordshire, so he mentioned the project to them and asked if they would be interested in supporting it. Titanic Brewery is very keen on working closely with their local community in Staffordshire and responded positively to the idea, agreeing to provide:

· *free use of the function rooms in their pubs (once a month, rotating between the seven pubs)*
· *free access to wi-fi in their pubs*
· *bottles of Titanic Brewery beer and T-shirts to give away as prizes*

The most important thing Titanic Brewery is able to provide is continuity and consistency: local people are able to find out a long time in advance where and when the social media surgeries will take place. Both parties have benefited from this reciprocal relationship as the Titanic pubs promote the social media surgeries; in return, the social media 'surgeons' (the social media experts who set up the surgery)

*promote the Titanic Brewery pubs as local community hubs,
bringing in new customers.*

The Stoke Stone & Stafford social media surgery

*The first Staffordshire social media surgery took place in a
Titanic Brewery pub in late 2010. The surgeries are intended to
be very inclusive and to benefit the whole community. They are
particularly aimed at charities and not-for-profit organisations
that want to make more use of social media to support their
activities. The social media surgeons are also very keen to
support unemployed people to use social media to improve
their job prospects, and retired people who want to stay socially
connected and actively engaged in their community. However,
nobody who comes to a surgery is turned away and the
surgeons have also worked with people from small local
businesses, some of whom have subsequently volunteered to
become surgeons. Local groups that have taken part in the
social media surgeries have included:*

· *the local branch of Age UK*
· *the local rotary club*
· *the Lions Club*
· *groups that work with homeless people*
· *the local job club*
· *the local Cub Scouts, Girl Guides and cricket club*
· *the Stone Food & Drink Festival*

*The surgeries are led by individual people's interests: they
may want to learn how to use Twitter or to set up a new blog.
The surgeons try to ensure they leave with something tangible,
eg setting up a new Twitter account and sending their first
tweet, or setting up a blog or Facebook page. The main aim is
to demystify social media tools such as Twitter, and to remove
barriers that might prevent people from using new technologies.*

Using social media to build intergenerational relationships
Philip told us that the social media surgeries are not aimed specifically at older people but are intended as inclusive sessions for all age groups. However, in many cases retired people have made use of the sessions by bringing along their laptop and asking for help with using the Internet. Local groups such as the Rotary Club and Lions Club, whose members are often mainly retired, have been particularly interested in the potential to use social media (eg Facebook and Twitter) to recruit new members from younger generations who may not currently know about them. Philip commented,

Twitter is a great way to break down age barriers. Nobody knows how old you are on Twitter, your profile can have a logo, a cartoon or a photograph. This puts everyone on a level playing field... Social media isn't going anywhere and everyone can benefit from it. These are tools that can help your community to communicate and collaborate.

Next steps
The Stoke, Stone & Stafford social media surgery now has around 15 'surgeons' who volunteer in different parts of Staffordshire. Philip would like to expand into South Staffordshire but they would need additional partners to host the surgeries as Titanic Brewery does not currently have any pubs there.

The social media surgery plans to remain a volunteer group for the foreseeable future as opposed to a formal charity. There are no financial transactions involved in their activities: it is free to attend the social media surgeries and the 'surgeons' take part in a purely voluntary capacity. With Titanic Brewery hosting the surgeries in their pubs, this is proving to be a reasonably sustainable model.

Supporting regular social activities for older people

In this category we will describe several examples we identified through our landscape mapping of businesses that either arrange

regular social activities for older people or provide support in kind to enable such activities to take place. This goes beyond simply providing a social space; in these cases, the business also provides logistical support, project management and/or volunteers.

Case study 3 describes the financial, practical and volunteer support that Sainsbury's in Market Harborough is giving to a small local charity called Dementia Café Market Harborough, which provides a supportive social network for people who have been diagnosed with dementia and their carers. While dementia does not only affect older people, most people in the dementia café are aged 60+.

Case study 3 Dementia Café Market Harborough, supported by Sainsbury's

Background

Melanie Wisher, PR Ambassador for Sainsbury's Market Harborough, told us that every May the customers and employees of each Sainsbury's store nominate a charity they would like to support through the 'local charity' scheme. In May 2011, some customers of the Market Harborough store nominated the Dementia Café, which was a local community group set up by Steve Kendall, whose father had been recently diagnosed with dementia. The purpose of the café is to provide a monthly social gathering for people recently diagnosed with dementia and their carers, where they can speak freely about the condition, meet other people affected by dementia, and get information and support.

Steve was invited to make a presentation about the Dementia Café to the Market Harborough Sainsbury's Colleague Council (the staff group whose members agree which charity they will support that year). The Sainsbury's colleagues were very impressed with Steve's plans for the Café and the fact that it was such a local initiative, and decided they would like to support it.

Sainsbury's role in supporting the Dementia Café

Both Steve and the colleagues' council wanted the relationship between Sainsbury's and the Dementia Café to be more than a simple sponsorship arrangement and to make use of the considerable skills base at Sainsbury's. As a result, Sainsbury's staff have played a considerable role in supporting Steve to develop the Dementia Café, including:

- *helping with the costs of venue hire*
- *designing an official logo for the Dementia Café*
- *printing a branded banner for the Dementia Café*
- *printing newsletters for the café*
- *providing Sainsbury's staff volunteers to support the Café's monthly meetings (welcoming people and making tea and coffee)*
- *providing biscuits and cakes at the monthly meetings*
- *allocating money from their community grant (funded out of the sale of 'bags for life') to spend on a monthly raffle prize of enough fruit and vegetables to feed two people for a week*
- *business mentoring and support towards registering the Dementia Café as an official charity*

Other local organisations that have also provided valuable support to the Café include the Market Harborough Lions, Market Harborough Round Table, Market Harborough Rotary and Leicestershire Community Mental Health Team, which provides speakers and advice.

The March 2012 meeting of the Dementia Café

The Dementia Café meets on the third Thursday of every month from 1pm to 3pm at St Dionysius Community Centre on Coventry Road in Market Harborough. In January 2011, the Dementia Café opened with 16 people attending. Just over a year later, in March 2012 their active membership was over 80 people, with approximately 50 people coming along to the café each month. Each attendee pays an entry fee of £1 to help cover running costs, such as the hire of the community hall. They

receive at least two cups of tea or coffee during the two hours and as many biscuits and cakes as they like.

When Demos attended the March meeting of the Café, Leicestershire Community Mental Health Team made a presentation to highlight the various forms of support and therapies that were available locally to people with dementia and their carers. Three Sainsbury's staff volunteered during the course of the event, preparing and handing out the refreshments. One staff member was present throughout, while the other two volunteered in shifts during their lunch break, handing over halfway through. Another local person also volunteered her support, explaining that she used to work in a care home and wanted to volunteer to retain her skills in working with adults who have dementia.

Demos spoke to several of the carers attending the Café to gather their impressions. One woman told us that she has been a carer for her husband who has dementia for 12 years. For the first 11 years following his diagnosis he lived with her at home, but for the last year they have been living apart as he had had to be admitted to a care home. Although they no longer live together, she spends six hours per day with him, feeding him and looking after him. The stress of this responsibility has had a considerable impact on her health, contributing to sleeplessness and anxiety. She said that the Dementia Café was an important outlet for her as it was an opportunity 'to do something for myself' each month and spend time with other people who understood what she was going through. Another woman who had come to the Dementia Café with her husband commented that she was delighted to be part of it and that 'Steve and Sainsbury's are doing such a fantastic job'. Another woman, who won the raffle prize of a week's supply of fruit and vegetables, said 'I'm delighted. This is going to make such a difference to my week.'

Next steps
The Dementia Café published its first newsletter in March 2012 and looks forward to developing this to include a variety of

contributions from partner organisations each quarter. The Dementia Café has also recently started providing a lending library of resources, which includes information leaflets, dementia-friendly books, and memory packs that people with dementia and their carers use at home. The memory packs were donated by the Market Harborough Rotary Club, which has also assisted with fundraising for the Café. In the future the trustees of the Dementia Café would like to expand the resources they have on offer at the monthly meetings.

Organised activities that combine fitness with socialising

During our 'landscape mapping' exercise for this project we identified several examples of businesses that organise activities for older people that combine light exercise with an opportunity to socialise and meet new people. Alan Hatton-Yeo mentioned the example of a Co-operative food store that provided weekly community transport so that older people could participate in an organised walk and then do their shopping, before returning home. When we met Andrew Bonser and Lucy Cork from Alliance Boots, they mentioned an independent pharmacy chain in north London called Green Light, which arranges weekly healthy walks for older men and women (see case study 4).

Case study 4 Green Light Pharmacy women's and men's weekly 'health walks'

Background

Demos met Josie Nakos, the West Euston Healthy Community Project coordinator, at the Green Light Pharmacy in January 2012. She said that the purpose of the West Euston Healthy Community Project is to improve health and wellbeing in the community, with a particular geographical focus on the Regents Park Estate, which has large Bengali, Albanian and Somali communities.

The West Euston Healthy Community Project was set up as a partnership project in 2003 and now involves six organisations (West Euston Partnership, Green Light Pharmacy, Third Age Project, West Euston Time Bank,

Bengali Worker's Association and Fitzrovia Youth in Action), of which the Green Light Pharmacy is the only private sector organisation. The project was originally funded by a five-year Lottery grant, which finished in 2008 and was subsequently supported by partners and Camden PCT until a further three-year funding grant in 2009 from the Big Lottery Fund was secured. Green Light Pharmacy employs the healthy community project coordinator with match-funding from the Big Lottery.

Green Light Pharmacy is an employee-owned independent group of four pharmacies; it opened its first branch in Euston in 1999. Their vision is to empower customers to look after their own health, and the pharmacy has adopted a number of measures to promote this, including:

- long-standing diabetes support groups, which promote self-management
- comprehensive health assessments, which direct people to mainstream services such as NHS health checks
- employment of Bengali staff to improve communication with their customers
- promotion of healthy lifestyles, including exercise and healthy eating choices

Green Light Pharmacy has developed a partnership with local third sector organisations to enable them to reach out to all members of the community, including parents, babies, young people and older people. They also partner other agencies, including NHS Camden, to provide health talks to local people on subjects such as diabetes, strokes and Alzheimer's disease.

Weekly health walks

Green Light Pharmacy organises weekly men's and women's health walks as an important part of its preventative health strategy. The women's health walk departs from the Euston branch of the Green Light Pharmacy every Thursday morning

at 10.30am. The women meet the walk leader, who is a trained volunteer, at the pharmacy and register their attendance. They then walk to Regent's Park, often picking up additional participants on their route, and complete a circuit of Regent's Park (taking various routes), always stopping for a tea or coffee at the park's café halfway through. Green Light Pharmacy provides an incentive card, which is match-funded by the Big Lottery. The women receive a stamp on the card for each walk they complete. When the card is full, they can receive a discount of £5 on goods bought in the pharmacy or on fruit and vegetables in nearby shops that participate in the scheme.

Participants in the women's health walk
The women who take part in the walks are mostly aged between 60 and 70. Around 100 women are registered to take part in the health walks and approximately 70 women have participated in ten or more walks. The social dimension of the walks provides an important motivation for many of the women who take part: they arrange to meet friends at the same time each week and know they will be able to catch up, while also getting exercise.

The walk Demos joined in January 2012 was attended by 16 women, most of whom were regular attendees and aged 60+. The women were from a wide variety of backgrounds, including white British, Filipina, Portuguese and Bengali. Several of the women told us that they now live in Walthamstow, but return to Euston each week to see their friends and take part in the health walk. Another woman said she worked as a telephonist at the nearby UCL hospital and comes on the health walk directly after her night shift, before going home to sleep. Another woman, who was in her 20s, had recently moved to London from Paris and works in retail. She said she didn't work on Thursdays and liked to start her day off by coming on the health walk because she knew very few people in London and could be sure that she would receive a warm welcome from the other women.

Next steps

Green Light Pharmacy plans to keep the health walks running for the foreseeable future. The three years of funding agreed with the Big Lottery Fund ends in 2012, but the partnership consortium has managed to secure a further year of funding until May 2013. Additionally, there are plans in the next year to conduct further evaluation of the walks to measure their effect in reducing social isolation, to bolster the anecdotal evidence provided by case studies such as this.

Green Light Pharmacy recognises the importance of providing the healthy walks and is planning to launch similar walks at their new pharmacy near the Ocean Estate in Tower Hamlets, east London. Even without specific funding, Green Light is committed to establishing and promoting community health and began this new service shortly after the pharmacy opened at the end of April 2012. Such a service is a key differentiator between Green Light and other more retail-focused pharmacies and enables the local community to see Green Light Pharmacy as an active promoter of healthy lifestyle choices.

Alan Hatton-Yeo pointed out that sports activities, and in particular football clubs, could be an important method of engaging socially isolated older men, who are often more reluctant than women to engage in community activities. He mentioned that the Beth Johnson Foundation is working with Enfield Town football club on a heritage project to engage men and women in the early stages of dementia, and spoke about the Football Foundation's Extra Time programme. Demos subsequently met Femina Makkar the Extra Time Programme Manager, in January 2012 to learn more (case study 5).

Case study 5 The Football Foundation's Extra Time programme

Background

Femina Makkar, Extra Time Programme Manager, told us that the Extra Time programme was initially set up as a two-year pilot through a partnership between Sport Relief and the

Football Foundation, with advice from Age UK. The aim of the programme was to engage people aged 55+ in exercise and social activities, using professional football clubs' brands to engage older people who might not otherwise have got involved (especially men). After a successful pilot phase, the programme received funding for a further two years.

In the first year of the programme, 15 professional football clubs each received £10,000 to run a 30-week Extra Time project with older people in the local community. Each project had a steering group including local older people, representatives of the NHS and other community partners. In the second year of the project, 13 of the original clubs received another year of funding to continue their projects, and seven new clubs also received funding. Each club ran their scheme in a very different way; some were run in care homes (eg Rotherham United and Tottenham Hotspur football clubs), some in local community centres and some in the football stadiums (eg Watford). They provided a wide range of activities including small-sided football, tai chi, yoga and chair-based exercise. By the end of the fourth year, 30 football clubs were involved in the scheme.

Private sector support

While the Football Foundation and Sports Relief provided initial funding to each of the football clubs, the clubs were encouraged also to obtain match-funding from other sources and many have been successful in doing this; for example Watford Football Club received sponsorship from John Lewis Watford. The football clubs have also provided in-kind support for the extra time projects, such as football coaches' time, organisational support and free access to the football stadiums to host the activities.

Outcomes achieved by Extra Time

The initial two-year pilot phase of the Extra Time project received a formal evaluation and social return on investment

analysis, which was overseen by Just Economics LLP.[170]

During the course of the two-year programme, 985 participants registered, 90 per cent of whom were aged 60+ and 23 per cent were aged 80+.[171] *More than a quarter (26 per cent) of those taking part had a long-term illness and 9 per cent were disabled. Entry and exit surveys, completed by 442 participants, provided evidence of the following outcomes achieved by the programme.*

The programme had resulted in improved physical health:

· *70 per cent of participants experienced improvement in their ability to perform a selection of physical activities ('climbing the stairs, lifting and carrying shopping, getting up from the chair without using hands, washing your hair, reaching top cupboards, touching toes without bending knees').*
· *59 per cent of participants thought their flexibility had improved and 56 per cent thought their muscle strength had improved.*
· *21 per cent of participants were using health services less.*[172]

It had helped reduce social isolation:

· *45 per cent of participants said they now had one or two more people they could call on if they needed help or support. 39 per cent of participants said they had three or more additional people they could call on (only 16 per cent experienced no change as a result of being involved in the programme).*
· *89 per cent of participants felt they had more people looking out for them as a result of Extra Time.*
· *75 per cent of participants said they had made new friends and had fun through the programme.*[173]

Learning from the programme

Femina Makkar suggested that the findings from the Extra Time programme potentially have a much wider application than just for football clubs. The Extra Time programme has

> *demonstrated that physical exercise can be a very effective tool for engaging older people, particularly older men (41 per cent of the Extra Time participants were male), in activities that also support them to expand their social networks. Femina suggested that leisure centre providers could potentially take a similar role in engaging older people locally, perhaps using times when the leisure centre is under-used (eg weekday mornings and afternoons) to offer free or discounted sports activities to encourage older people to start using the facilities.*

In May 2012 Demos also interviewed Nick Kingham, Project Manager of 'Activate Havering'. He explained that the purpose of Activate Havering is to coordinate Havering Council's approach to providing low-level prevention and support services for older people in the community. This includes working across sectors to identify community resources that can be used to support older people to participate socially participate and stay healthy and independent. In partnership with Activate Havering, SLM, which runs Havering's leisure centres, has agreed to offer free badminton courts on weekdays and will be linking this offer to existing clubs to promote older people's involvement and socialising among older people.[174] This is a model that many other sports clubs and leisure centres could replicate.

Employees volunteering to support older people's social participation

In this section we describe examples of businesses that provide volunteers to support older people's social participation, usually in partnership with a VCS organisation such as WRVS or Age UK.

Ad hoc or one-off employee volunteering

When we interviewed Alan Hatton-Yeo, CEO of the Beth Johnson Foundation, in January 2012 he mentioned that it can be difficult for older people to access suitable mobile phones, as

mobile phone providers do not always display their adapted or accessible phones in their shops, and older people may not know that they exist. He also pointed out that a lot of older people need training to use their mobile phones, therefore 'it would be useful to have outreach services to train older people to use their mobile phone', as this could help older people to stay in contact with friends and relations.

We subsequently interviewed Sam Ward, Head of WRVS Services, Midlands, in February 2012, who told us that O2 had recently provided mobile phone training to an older people's community group that WRVS supports. We outline the benefits of this event to the older people and the O2 staff volunteers in case study 6.

Case study 6 O2 mobile phone training, supported by WRVS

Background

In April 2012 Demos spoke to Sharon Sinclair, WRVS Service Delivery Manager for Shropshire and the Black Country, about a mobile phone training event the WRVS had recently arranged with O2 in partnership with the Copthorne Companions Club. This is a self-organising group of older people who meet weekly on Thursday afternoons at a scout hut in Shrewsbury, with support from the older people's charity WRVS, which arranges trips and speakers for them.[175] Someone at the Companions Club mentioned to someone at WRVS that a number of their members had been given mobile phones by family members but they were not confident about using them. Some of them did not know how to switch on their phone, or keep it charged, and some of the club's members' families were increasingly frustrated because they couldn't easily keep in touch.

A representative from WRVS spoke to the Shropshire Community Council about this, as the Council has been developing a programme of work on raising local people's awareness of digital technologies called 'Get Shropshire Online'. The Community Council put WRVS in touch with the manager of the local O2 shop in Shrewsbury and WRVS asked

him whether it would be possible to arrange mobile phone training for the Companions Club. The O2 manager responded very enthusiastically and worked closely with WRVS to arrange the event.

The mobile phone training event with O2
O2 arranged for six young men on their staff to attend a meeting of the Copthorne Companions Club in February 2012. Several of them travelled quite a distance from other O2 stores in the region in order to be able to volunteer at the event. Approximately 60 members of the Companions Club attended the event and those who had their own mobile phones brought them along with them so they could practice on their handset.

The manager gave a five-minute introductory talk to break the ice and then the O2 staff volunteers split up into six groups to answer people's general questions and give advice, such as:

- 'It is quite difficult to break a mobile phone, and they can usually survive being dropped quite a few times.'
- 'If you have an emergency, you can ring 999 like you would on any other phone.'
- 'Leave the phone on even when you're not using it, so that people can contact you. If you don't want to be disturbed, you can put it on a silent setting.'

The O2 volunteers then gave people one-to-one support with their particular queries, which included how to switch the phone on, how to charge it, how to lock the keyboard so that you don't ring people from your pocket, and how to add contact numbers.

Feedback from the event
The older people were very pleased with how patient the O2 volunteers were with their queries. Nobody had felt embarrassed as they were in a group setting with other people

who had experienced similar difficulties with using a mobile phone. One woman was excited to be able to send her grandson a text message with help from an O2 volunteer, as her grandson texted her every day, but previously she had never been able to respond. Another woman took the opportunity to get an O2 volunteer's help with programming the satnav in her car, which she'd been having difficulties with.

The feedback from the O2 volunteers was also very positive. The manager thought the event provided valuable face-to-face training for his staff in working with older people and understanding the anxieties they might experience in purchasing a mobile phone and learning how to use it. The event was also good for the O2 volunteers' confidence as they realised that their skills and time were greatly valued by the older people and that their efforts were appreciated. Many of the older people also said they would recommend O2 to their grandchildren, and that if they ever needed to buy a phone they would now want to buy from O2 as they knew they would get good support from the staff.

Next steps
Sharon and her colleagues at WRVS would like to build on this event and provide similar events in partnership with O2 with other older people's groups. There is also scope to arrange events looking at other technologies, such as Skype. Since the mobile phone training event, O2 has become an official partner in the 'Get Shropshire Online' project and plans to collaborate with the Shropshire Community Council on other projects.

Structured employee volunteering programmes
Demos interviewed Steven Hargreaves, WRVS Head of Region for the South West, in January 2012. He told us that Zurich provides employee volunteers to support WRVS's trolley service, which sells small items like biscuits, drinks, newspapers and magazines in the Great Western Hospital in Swindon. The volunteers are trained to identify any patient on the ward who looks like they are feeling unwell or doesn't have a visitor, and to

offer them friendship and emotional support. They help older people feel less dependent on visitors while they are in hospital.

Steven mentioned that Zurich employee volunteers also support the Call in Time telephone befriending service, which the Zurich Community Trust set up in partnership with Age UK. Three other companies have now joined the programme, bringing with them new volunteers and additional funding for Age UK to help sustain and expand it (see case study 7).

Case study 7 Zurich Community Trust and Age UK's Call in Time programme

Background

Demos interviewed Jane Boulton, Programme Manager at Zurich Community Trust (UK), in April 2012. Zurich's Community Investment Programme is delivered through the Zurich Community Trust (UK) Ltd, a registered charity, first established in 1973. The Trust supports disadvantaged people to lead more independent lives through some targeted, long-term social transformation programmes, which are effective, replicable and often tackle unpopular areas of need.

Jane explained that Zurich Community Trust set up the Call in Time programme in partnership with Age UK in 2006. The ideas behind the programme derived from Zurich Community Trust's review of its Older People Programme (conducted between 2003 and 2006). Through this review, the Trust decided that it wished to make tackling social isolation among older people a key objective of its work, and chose telephone befriending as its method.

Zurich Community Trust and Age UK piloted the Call in Time programme between 2006 and 2008, using eight individual pilot project sites, which Leeds Metropolitan University evaluated independently. The evaluation, which involved interviews with 40 older participants, found that they had benefited in the following ways:[176]

· *They had 'a reason to get up in the morning'.*

- *It had helped them 'to re-engage with the community and the external environment'.*
- *Many of them became 'more confident and independent'.*
- *'Their* wellbeing *and mood improved and their activity levels increased' (including older participants who had chronic depression).*

The Call in Time programme as it exists today was developed on the basis of the knowledge gained through this pilot programme and the evaluation findings.

The structure of the Call in Time programme

Through its services Age UK recruits isolated older people who would like to take part in the Call in Time programme, and the programme then matches each older person with an employee volunteer who will then make a regular 10–15-minute friendly phone call to their older friend (usually weekly), in work time and from their desks.

While Zurich Community Trust was the founding partner for this scheme recruiting Zurich employee volunteers, they have worked with Age UK to develop a corporate partnership model to enable additional corporate partners to join the scheme and replicate the model. Prudential, Wilkinsons and Bloomberg are currently taking part and overall around 500 employee volunteers are now involved in the programme. Each corporate partner is committed to support the scheme for a minimum of two years and the partners fund their own volunteer coordinator at Age UK to run the programme for their company.

Age UK recruits the older participants for each of the corporate partners, while the corporate volunteer coordinator recruits employee volunteers from within their business. Someone from Age UK speaks to the older person several times in preparation for joining the scheme to identify their interests, with the aim of then working with the corporate partner to match them with somebody who has shared interests. The volunteer usually commits to the scheme for at least a year.

Training and support

Age UK has developed accredited befriending training and works with the corporate volunteer coordinators to deliver this training to the volunteer befrienders. This includes two training modules, which can be completed face-to-face or through an online learning format. This gives the volunteers information including advice about potential topics of conversation, what to do if the older person doesn't answer the phone, and what to do if there is a problem.

The volunteers use a web-based IT system to post information following the session about how the phone call went, how the older person is and so on. This is then monitored by someone at Age UK, who follows up any queries or problems. If the older person has any additional support needs that the volunteer can't meet, Age UK works with the older person to try to find available local support.

The benefits to corporate partners

Jane Boulton told us that employees throughout Zurich are now involved in the Call in Time programme and Zurich managers strongly promote the programme among company employees and allow them to take part during office hours. The only caveat is that employees need to have their line manager's approval, which has not presented problems so far because of the considerable support for the scheme throughout the company and the awareness of the personal development benefits it brings to staff.

Jane said that Zurich is enthusiastic about the scheme as 'it is a very unique way of using employees' time effectively to achieve real social impact'. Also Zurich has a long history of community involvement and it is seen as a very important part of Zurich's culture.

Next steps

Zurich Community Trust's and Age UK's longer-term aim for the Call in Time programme is to recruit more corporate partners for the programme across the UK so it can achieve a wide reach and remain financially sustainable.

Skills-based employee volunteering and business mentoring

As we have seen from case study 3, the potential for employee volunteering to support older people's social participation is not limited to employee volunteers working directly with older people. In some cases, businesses can work in partnership with VCS organisations to build their capacity to tackle social isolation in old age. Case study 3 described how Sainsbury's provides back-office support to the Dementia Café community group in Market Harborough, which enables those in the group to make contact with more people and sustain this contact in a meaningful way in between meetings. Employees at the Market Harborough Sainsbury's store provided business mentoring to the charity and helped them to design and print their newsletters.

When we interviewed Professor Norma Raynes, Chief Executive at Intergen CIC, in November 2011, she explained that the social enterprise Intergen CIC supports intergenerational relationships between retired volunteers and school children by giving them opportunities to share skills and learn together. Intergen CIC's activities are funded by the schools they partner with, but Norma said there were many ways in which Intergen CIC could benefit from mentoring and support from local businesses:

· through advertising for volunteers in supermarkets and other local businesses
· by gaining support to put on social events (eg coffee mornings for older volunteers)
· by receiving help from people with expertise in website design to improve Intergen CIC's website
· by gaining support in producing a newsletter

Norma said that support with each of these activities is very valuable to small charities and social enterprises, but that it could be hard to know who to approach and which businesses might be willing to offer their help.

Research by BITC in 2010 found that many businesses also want to identify more constructive ways in which to engage with the voluntary sector and share skills:

[Business leaders] felt that this would shift the ad hoc financial asks to business from the voluntary sector, and allow more long-term strategic partnerships to develop. A number of business leaders talked about the need to share skills-based support as well as financial support. Increased awareness would ensure a better understanding among local authorities and voluntary groups of how to maximize engagement, ultimately generating greater change.[177]

Therefore, while many businesses are keen to share their skills and expertise with charities and community groups, and the latter are eager to receive their support, the challenge is to match these organisations' skills and broker these relationships (we will consider this in more detail in chapter 7).

Deloitte uses the term 'skills-based volunteerism' to describe this type of corporate employee volunteering:

Deloitte's skills-based volunteerism model focuses on matching corporate talent with non-profit need to maximize impact on nonprofits, their clients and the community. The idea is to put the unique business knowledge of our personnel to work in the non-profit sector so that we can empower nonprofits to more effectively manage their challenges and in turn, make a more significant impact in the community.[178]

Organising regular social activities for retired former employees

This final category of business involvement in preventing social isolation in old age differs from the previous six categories as it includes schemes that specifically support a business's retired former employees, rather than members of the general public.

Case study 8 describes the retirement schemes that the John Lewis Partnership and Morrisons offer to their former employees. Each of these schemes involves a strong social element (eg regular meetings, lunches and coffee mornings), as well as financial benefits (eg discount cards).

Case study 8 John Lewis Partnership and Morrisons schemes for retired former employees

John Lewis Partnership Retired Partners Programme

Employee benefits

Sarah Gilpin, who manages the John Lewis Partnership's Retirement Service, told us that anyone with 15 or more years of service at the John Lewis Partnership qualifies for a set of benefits in retirement, including keeping the employee benefits that partners have before retirement:

- *discounts in John Lewis and Waitrose*
- *a leisure learning subsidy*
- *access to PartnerChoice benefits and corporate offers*
- *use of John Lewis Partnership holiday centres around the country (including the Lake District and Dorset)*
- *membership of branch clubs and societies (mostly self-organised, although the partnership supports their running costs)*
- *access to branch social events*

Sarah Gilpin told us that the Partnership Retirement Service delivers the brief that is set by the John Lewis Partnership's main democratic body, which is to 'maintain the kind of relationship between the Partnership and its retired partners that exists in a family, with priority for its attention and funds being given to those in need'. Sarah commented, 'It is this whole package of benefits that enables us to promote social inclusion among our retired partners.'

Social activities for retired partners

Following retirement, the area retirement coordinator for each branch maintains contact with all retired employees throughout the course of their retirement, and retired partners and their dependents receive the monthly John Lewis Partnership magazine 'Connections', which features news items and information about forthcoming events. Retired partners are invited to take part in two free social events each year (usually one in summer and one at Christmas). These are

usually organised around the branches where people previously worked. An important aim of these events is to provide a continuing community in retirement, giving retired partners the opportunity to maintain the social networks they made during their working life and reducing the risk of social isolation. In many cases, locally self-funded groups of retired partners also arrange their own regular social events. Their activities range from regular coffee mornings to trips abroad.

The visiting programme
From the age of 80 (or younger where it is required) there is a dedicated visiting programme whereby retired partners receive a visit from a member of the John Lewis Partnership Retirement Service team. These visits take place at least once a year, or more frequently if necessary. The aim of the programme is to ensure that retired partners are making the most of their retirement and to remind them of the support network that is available. This includes a local signposting service and in some cases has included intervening to address financial problems; the John Lewis Partnership's retirement programme sometimes pays off debts of former employees. The retirement programme has also funded aids and adaptations that might be needed, including mobility scooters, wheelchairs and stair lifts.

Retired partner volunteering at peak times
Sarah Gilpin said that many of the retired partners value the opportunity to remain involved in the wider social network they developed through working for the John Lewis Partnership. The strength of this ongoing relationship is evidenced by the fact that many of the retired partners volunteer to support their local branch at busy times such as Christmas.

Morrisons Plus Retirement Club
Background
Demos interviewed Wendy Taylor, Head of Central HR Services for Morrison Supermarkets, in February 2012, who

told us that the idea for the retirement club came about when a group of people who were retiring realised they would lose their staff discount card, and asked whether there was a way in which they could retain this in retirement. Morrisons responded by developing the Morrisons Plus Retirement Club. At its launch in May 2011 the club had 4,047 members. Less than a year later in February 2012 the membership had increased to 5,737.

Every month, newly qualifying colleagues are contacted directly and invited to join. To qualify for the club a retiring staff member must have either:

- *25 years' service or*
- *at least five years of service, which combined with their age makes up a total of 70 years or more*

Club benefits
The benefits that club members receive include:

- *a quarterly newsletter*
- *two discount cards, with priority notice of special discount days at Morrisons*
- *selected company discounts*
- *seasonal work opportunities*
- *regular lunch and event groups*
- *the opportunity to become a trained welfare assessor or befriender with the charity Caravan (the National Grocers' Benevolent Fund; see www.caravan-charity.org.uk)*

Regular social events
Morrisons Plus Retirement Club now has 37 lunch groups, which meet twice a year for lunch or social events. These events are heavily subsidised and support the attendance of the member and their guest. Some groups in Bradford and Birmingham have become so large that they have to split into two. At the Maidstone group, 245 members recently attended one of their lunches.

Supporting Morrisons

The retirement scheme also invites participants to sign up to be 'insight volunteers' (mystery shoppers), who provide anonymous feedback on the customer service Morrisons provides in their stores, to help improve their offer. Hundreds of retired Morrisons staff have signed up to this scheme and they worked very hard during the Christmas period in 2011. Some Morrisons stores asked their volunteers to interview other customers about their shopping experience and how it could improve.

Morrisons Plus members also support Morrisons with their charitable activities. A large number have volunteered to assist with Save the Children events and bucket collection fundraising drives.

Next steps

Wendy told us that Morrisons plans to continue building on the success and popularity of the retirement club. In 2012 they would like to start offering retirement planning courses, which will help people approaching their retirement to plan ahead and prepare for the transition to a different way of life.

In this chapter we reviewed a cross-section of business activities that encourage and support older people's social participation. Chapter 6 will set out the main opportunities or motivating factors for businesses to get involved in this kind of work, and chapter 7 will consider the challenges that may need to be overcome before such activities become more mainstream.

6 What's in it for businesses?

The case studies that we presented in chapter 5 demonstrate that a number of businesses have already identified older people as important customers and are providing specific services for them and/or investing time and resources in supporting older people's social participation. This reflects the fact that older people are an increasingly valuable consumer market, as well as the increasing political and societal expectations that businesses must behave in a socially responsible manner (discussed in chapter 4). However, many participants in our research, across sectors, challenged the distinction between business motivations and CSR, by citing many ways in which supporting older people's social participation is also good for business.

The business people, VCS representatives and local government representatives who took part in interviews and the 'idea-swapping' workshop identified a variety of ways in which businesses can benefit from getting involved in initiatives to support older people's social participation. These fell roughly into the following six areas:

· valuing the 'golden market'
· building a positive local identity
· knowing your older customers
· attracting new customers and building customer loyalty
· increasing employees' motivation and skills
· having reciprocal relationships with former employees

In this chapter we will explore each of these themes in turn. In chapter 7 we will explore the challenges involved in getting this work off the ground.

The value of the 'golden' market'

The first and most obvious motivation for businesses to get involved in supporting older people's social participation is that older people have a huge potential value for businesses as a consumer market.

In 2008 a report by Age Concern England estimated that people aged over 50 owned 80 per cent of wealth in the UK and were responsible for almost 40 per cent of consumer spending each year.[179] More recently, a substantial study conducted by ILC-UK for Age UK in 2010, entitled *The Golden Economy*, observed: 'The older consumer market is large and it is growing. The older market is forecast to grow by 81 per cent from 2005 to 2030, but the 18–59-year-old market only by 7 per cent.'[180] This reflects demographic changes associated with population ageing: while people aged 65+ currently represent 20 per cent of the UK's 'consumer population' (aged 16+), this proportion is projected to increase to 25 per cent of the consumer market by 2030.[181] A 2010 report by WRVS also supported these findings, estimating that between 2010 and 2030, the overall spending power of older people (aged 65+) will increase by 68 per cent.[182]

Age UK's analysis of the report *Family Spending* (published by the Office for National Statistics) calculated that in 2008 people aged over 65 in the UK spent £97 billion, or 15 per cent of total household spending.[183] This relatively low proportion of overall household spending reflects the fact that older people tend to live in smaller households than younger people (an average household size for people aged 75+ is 1.4 people, compared with 2.5 people in the under 30 age group and 2.9 people in the 30–49 age group).[184] However, as figure 1 demonstrates, the average per capita weekly income of an older person aged between 65 and 74 is roughly equal to that of an adult aged under 30.

One of the findings from the 2007 *Family Spending Report* that might be most interesting to supermarkets and other food retailers is that households headed by people aged 75+ spend a larger proportion of their total household expenditure on food than younger age groups. Households headed by people aged 65+ also 'spent more per person on most food items than younger households'.[185]

Figure 1 **Average gross weekly income per person by age of household reference person, 2007**

Age	Income
Less than 30	£242
30-49	£287
50-64	£321
65-74	£241
75 or over	£212

Source: Reproduced from Sinclair, *The Golden Economy*. [186]

On the basis of these figures, we would expect older people to be a key consumer group that businesses would wish to target. In a telephone interview, Paul McGarry, Senior Strategy Manager for the Valuing Older People Team at Manchester City Council, observed that population ageing in the UK presents 'huge opportunities for British business to develop goods and services and expertise'. However, as we will explore in chapter 7, many older people do not feel that businesses value them as customers. Instead, many older people feel that at best they are ignored, and at worst they are actively discriminated against by a range of commercial sectors such as retail, advertising and insurance. In chapter 7 we will consider some of the evidence of this market failure.

Building a positive local identity

The experts, practitioners and business representatives who participated in our qualitative research emphasised that businesses stand to gain a lot from supporting schemes that tackle social isolation in old age through the enhanced profile and positive local identity that such activities generate.

People at the 'idea-swapping' workshop argued that business is all about trust: businesses do well if they build a strong relationship with the community they serve and

demonstrate positive values. If businesses do good things for their community, they get a good reputation and people will be more likely to want to use their services or buy their products. Workshop participants also challenged the distinction between CSR motivations and business motivations. One commented, 'The rewards are the same, regardless of the motivation – businesses all want to increase their market share.' They argued that CSR activities such as volunteering can be an important tool for building a relationship with local customers and encouraging customer loyalty. However, this does not mean that engaging with older people should be viewed as a standalone activity: effective engagement with older customers should be treated as the norm in all departments and business activities.

Steve Kendall, Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Dementia Café in Market Harborough (see case study 3), corroborated these arguments, explaining that by supporting the Café, Sainsbury's is 'seen to be part of the community' and is therefore viewed more positively. Josie Nakos, Healthy Community Project Coordinator for the Green Light Pharmacy (see case study 4), told us that the pharmacy's activities in running the health walks are 'good for business because you build up trust with the community and trust is really important. As a business, you're doing yourself a favour if you build up these relationships. Good feedback spreads!'

This is an important reason why, as Allison Bartlett said, each McDonald's franchisee 'has a duty to be embedded in their local community'. McDonalds's business plan is all about trust, including building trust in the local communities where they operate. As we saw in case study 1, John Loizou, franchise owner of Barkingside McDonald's was well aware of the reputational benefits of offering free tea and coffee mornings to retired people: 'A lot of people see McDonald's as a multinational, but these offers in the local area show that it's not a corporate beast, it's an individual business run by a local person.'

Recent research by BITC demonstrates the business benefits that store and branch managers feel they derive from being involved in their local town centre partnership: a mechanism for working closely with the council and the local

community to tackle local issues: 44 per cent of the surveyed store and branch managers who were involved with their town centre partnership thought the partnership had improved their local reputation and 41 per cent thought they had a better relationship with the council.[187]

Knowing your older customers

One of the most frequent reasons that research participants gave for why businesses could benefit from getting involved in supporting older people was that it would provide an opportunity for the business to get to know their older customers. Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy at Alliance Boots, observed: 'Being connected with your local community is essential for any business.' This is essential for 'delivering real customer need and understanding what the needs are'. Boots puts a huge emphasis on 'understanding customer need and responding to customer need'.

However, research in 2006 by Help the Aged found evidence that companies can inadvertently exclude older people because of 'the type of service they provide, the type of environment they provide it in, or the level of support they offer'.[188] Those in our 'idea-swapping' workshop gave a number of examples of ways in which businesses are not sufficiently age-friendly (eg a lack of chairs in shops, lack of access to toilets and unavailability of staff to offer help). They pointed out that businesses that unintentionally exclude older people will alienate their customer base and lose revenue.

Recent research by BITC suggests that the problem of businesses being out of touch with their local customers' needs may be a bigger risk than many companies realise. It found that one consequence of high job turnover was that 'store and branch managers are often unfamiliar with the local community they serve'; 53 per cent of store and branch managers consulted in the research had been running their current store for less than two years.[189]

However, as the examples presented in chapter 5 have demonstrated, there are many opportunities for businesses to

overcome these problems by working more closely with their local community to learn about their older customers' needs. A 2004 study by the Institute for Volunteering Research found that a key benefit of Barclays Bank's employee volunteering scheme was its success in enabling the employee volunteers to develop 'a greater understanding of the needs and problems of their local communities and an increased sense of empathy with local people'. The evaluation of this scheme found that 67 per cent of employee volunteers thought they had increased understanding of social issues and 68 per cent 'were more aware of problems facing people in the community' as a result of being involved.[190]

A 2011 study by the RSA called 'The community footprint', which used B&Q's Sutton store as a case study, pointed out that 'becoming a community hub will provide more space for innovation as businesses are better able to draw on the ideas and understand the needs of the community'.[191] Another study published by Corporate Citizenship in the same year highlighted this potential for closer social contact between employees and customers to 'spark ideas for new services and products'.[192]

Opportunities for consulting older people

It may be simplistic to assume that informal contact between a business's employees and their older customers will automatically generate the level of customer insight that is needed to ensure that the business can meet older people's needs effectively, however. A number of the participants in our 'idea-swapping' workshop highlighted the perceived heterogeneity of older people as a group, arguing that if businesses wish to ensure that they are responding to older people's needs, they will need to consult their older customers.

Steve Kendall, whose Dementia Café in Market Harborough now has a membership of more than 80 people (mainly aged 60+), commented, 'There is a ready-made group here to consult.' However, one of the group members at the Dementia Café told us that she had been unable to return Sainsbury's generosity in sponsoring the Café by shopping in the local Sainsbury's store, as her husband could not stand up for

long periods of time and the store did not currently provide any chairs for customers. This insight suggests that the Sainsbury's store in Market Harborough could benefit from a more formalised process for consulting their older customers, as this message about these older customer's needs had evidently not been communicated through existing channels.

Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop suggested that businesses should make sure these conversations take place at a local level by involving their older customers in consultation activities, such as focus groups, or by encouraging them to volunteer as 'mystery shoppers' to evaluate the quality of services or variety of products on offer. In box 1 we have presented some examples of creative ways which businesses have used to consult their older customers, which we learnt about through the 'landscape mapping' exercise.

Box 1 **Good practice examples of businesses consulting with older people**

John Lewis

Sarah Gilpin, who manages the John Lewis Partnership's Retired Partners Programme, told us that John Lewis recently undertook a consultation exercise with 300 retired partners, the oldest of whom was 91, to feed into a project exploring the growing importance of the over-65s for John Lewis. This project 'identified a limited offer – for instance, John Lewis did not provide a lighting installation or furniture assembly service, and customers could not purchase services online'.[193] As a result of this consultation exercise, John Lewis now offers a range of products online, which they did not previously offer (including the Dyson fan heater, Simple human soap dispensers, the John Lewis two-tog duvet, NYDJ (Not Your Daughter's Jeans) and Lancôme youth activating serum). It now also offers a lighting installation service, a furniture assembly service and a customised upholstery service.[194]

Marks & Spencer

Marks & Spencer has worked with Help the Aged to explore how older people experience their product packaging. Marks & Spencer also has an inclusive design policy for all new stores and store developments to ensure easy access for all.

Morrisons

Wendy Taylor, Head of Central HR Services at Morrison Supermarkets plc, told us that Morrisons had invited members of their Morrisons Plus retirement club to volunteer as 'mystery shoppers' to provide feedback on the customer service they experienced in Morrison's stores.

Andy White, Head of Community Affairs at Sainsbury's, suggested that VCS organisations could play an important role in overcoming communication barriers between businesses and their older customers by facilitating consultation exercises for businesses. He pointed out that such an arrangement could be of mutual benefit to charities and businesses: businesses need to know about charities' client bases (older people), and 'arranging consultations for businesses could be a valuable source of revenue for charities'.

Making your business 'age friendly'

Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop suggested that supporting older people's social participation and consulting with older customers were important steps towards businesses becoming – and being perceived as – 'age friendly'. As well as having social benefits, this would give the business a competitive advantage in an ageing society.

Andrew Chidgey, Director of External Affairs at the Alzheimer's Society, pointed out that there is a lot in common between 'age friendly' and 'dementia friendly' initiatives – in most cases activities to improve awareness will benefit both

groups. The Alzheimer's Society launched its 'Dementia Friendly Communities' Programme in March 2012. The aim of the programme is to support the creation of dementia friendly communities and to 'give public recognition and support to villages, towns, cities and national organisations who are taking steps towards being more inclusive of people with dementia'.[195] Andrew explained that businesses have a very important role in this process:

Social isolation is often a consequence of people feeling embarrassed to be out and about, therefore there are very practical things that businesses can do to educate their workforces and make sure that they are welcoming and patient.

Box 2 describes a project delivered in partnership between WRVS and the Salford District General Hospital to refurbish a WRVS café in accordance with dementia-friendly design principles. These principles could be applied by any business that wished to make sure that its store or branch provided an environment that was inclusive of people with dementia or other visual impairments.

Box 2   **Dementia-friendly design of WRVS Café at Salford District General Hospital**

In 2011 WRVS completed a major refurbishment of the WRVS café at Salford District General Hospital. WRVS took the opportunity of this refurbishment project 'to create an environment that is user friendly to people who suffer with dementia', following guidelines developed in a research project by the University of Stirling and the King's Trust called Enhancing the Healing Environment.[196]

The dementia-friendly design features that have guided the refurbishment of the café include:

· *paying attention to the contrast of adjoining finishes such as flooring and walls 'to ensure distinct visual lines for people who suffer from poor peripheral vision'; this principle was applied*

even to the shape of table tops and other furniture 'to ensure that all edges were clearly defined'[197]
· introducing subtle graphics into the back fittings to the counter and to feature wall areas to create a running visual theme to the area
· using low voltage LED lighting to provide consistent and ambient illumination throughout the café
· purchasing 'strong coloured drinking glasses to support dementia friendly design'[198]

Following the success of this project, WRVS had decided to apply these same dementia friendly principles to their refurbishment at Macclesfield, which is due to complete in early 2012.

Attracting new customers and building customer loyalty

Another key theme emerging from our research into businesses' potential motivations for supporting older people's social participation in the community was the potential for such activities to attract new customers and increase customer loyalty by strengthening the relationship between customers and the business.

Attracting new customers

There was anecdotal evidence from a number of the case studies we developed for this study that older people who take part in social activities supported by a business feel a sense of gratitude and allegiance towards that business and are likely to promote it to friends and family members. Steve Kendall told us,

80 people are signed up to this Dementia Café who are not necessarily Sainsbury's shoppers but when they see the level of support that Sainsbury's is providing, they may be encouraged to shop at Sainsbury's… It's about brand awareness; there are people in Sainsbury's uniforms here serving cake.

The case study of O2 staff volunteers' provision of mobile phone training to an older people's community group (case study 6) had a similar finding. When Demos asked Sharon Sinclair, WRVS Service Delivery Manager for Shropshire and the Black Country, how taking part in this volunteering activity might benefit O2 as a business, she responded that many of the older people said they would recommend O2 to their grandchildren and would also choose to shop at O2 as they knew they would get good support from the staff.

There is an established body of academic research in the advertising and marketing literature supporting this anecdotal evidence that knowledge and experience of a company's CSR activities positively influences consumers' behaviour. One 2004 study verified the simple fact that 'consumers with more positive CSR beliefs about a grocery chain buy more from that chain'.[199] Other studies have found that if a consumer identifies with a company, this 'causes people to become psychologically attached to and care about the company and its products, motivating them to commit to the achievement of its goals and expend more voluntary efforts on its behalf'.[200] These 'efforts' can include trying more of that company's products, promoting the company to other people and demonstrating a higher level of loyalty to the company over time.[201]

Building customer loyalty

Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop also suggested that businesses that supported older people's social participation in the local community would have opportunities to develop particularly strong relationships with their older customers, which was likely to promote customer loyalty. One cited an example she had experienced where employees of a building society had built a very close relationship between that business and their local community through their volunteering. However, another workshop participant commented,

While some businesses do recognise the business case for supporting social interactions amongst older people, they think that older people are less likely to take steps such as changing providers, which can undermine the case for targeting older consumers.

This suggestion that older people often make particularly loyal customers is backed up by various evidence. As Age UK's 2010 report *The Golden Economy* observed, Ofcom's Consumer Experience model, which is published annually, divides customers into four groups (inactive, passive, interested, engaged) according to the likelihood that they will change products or brands according to what is the best value for money. This survey has consistently found that

older consumers were more likely than other ages to be inactive in relation to the fixed-line market, the mobile-phone market, the broadband market, and the multichannel television market [so] older people are less likely than other ages to shop around or be keeping an eye out for better deals.[202]

However, while this research suggests that older customers might be less motivated to change providers out of cost considerations, other research, conducted in Australia, has suggested that the higher degree of customer loyalty that older people demonstrate can be particularly influenced by the valued relationships they develop with service providers. A 2007 study published in the *Journal of Services Marketing* surveyed a representative sample of over 700 customers of dentists, hairdressers and travel agents in the Illawarra region of Australia and found that people aged 35–54 and 55+ demonstrated higher levels of customer loyalty than younger age groups (people aged 18–24 and 25–34 years).[203] It also found that retired people displayed the highest loyalty across all three types of service, while students were the least loyal in each case. When this study explored the reasons for increased loyalty among older customers, it found that older customers attributed a higher importance to the social benefits of attending the same hairdressers and travel agents than younger customers.[204] The author of the study concluded, 'Our results clearly show that

older consumers' major motive in staying a regular patron is to get to know and engage in social interaction with a service provider.'[205]

This knowledge that many older customers particularly value the social dimension of their contact with a company therefore presents opportunities for businesses that wish to attract more older customers. This study recommended that if businesses wished to attract new customers and build customer loyalty, they should train their staff to greet older customers in a friendly way and, where possible, build relationships with older customers. It also suggested that businesses that have a high degree of contact with their customers, such as leisure centres, travel agents and other kinds of retail environments, could benefit from designing their store or branch spaces in a way that would 'facilitate social interactions between customers and staff, but equally important, between customers themselves'. This study's findings suggest that businesses that provide a sociable environment for older people are likely to be rewarded by increased customer loyalty from many older people, who are likely to attribute a high value to positive social interactions with the business.

When Demos interviewed Nick Stanhope, CEO of We Are What We Do (a 'not-for-profit behaviour change company'; http://wearewhatwedo.org/), in May 2012, he told us that there is a huge amount that businesses, and particularly retailers, can do to provide a more age-friendly environment for older people. He pointed out that 'older people really value low turnover in staff and they'll queue for longer at the till where they'll be served by a person they recognise'. He suggested that to respond to this 'staff need time to chat and build relationships with older customers'. Nick argued, 'People can achieve more impact if they build these ideas into their business activities.' He suggested that CSR initiatives that identify older people as a recipient can risk feeling contrived: 'If it feels contrived, the social benefits are much lower. If they feel they are participating as a member of the community, it is much more powerful.' Therefore, he suggested that if businesses wish to support specific activities that engage older people, an 'age neutral' approach that involves 'activities

that really value the role of older people' can sometimes be the most effective approach.

Increasing customer satisfaction through employing older workers

Some of the participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop linked the business case for providing social activities for older consumers with the business case for employing older people (and particularly offering part-time work). One person wrote in their workshop questionnaire: 'Need to encourage businesses to employ older people (good to see friendly faces serving customers) and to help staff volunteer with older people.'

Participants suggested that older people may feel more welcome in an environment that is staffed by people in their age range. One said that in Germany some companies only employ older people in customer-facing roles as they value their life experience and customer service skills.

Research by McDonald's has identified particular benefits of employing older workers in their restaurants as part of mixed-age teams. This research (see box 3) found that staff teams that included older workers (aged 60+) achieved statistically higher levels of customer satisfaction across a range of measures.

Box 3   **Improved customer satisfaction brought by employing older workers: McDonald's**

In 2009 Lancaster University Management School conducted research across 417 of McDonald's UK restaurants (out of a total of 1,200 UK restaurants). The study compared the performance data of two sets of company-owned McDonald's restaurants. The first set comprised 178 restaurants that employed one or more members of staff aged 60+. The second set comprised 239 restaurants where nobody employed was aged 50+.[206]

This study found that overall levels of customer satisfaction based on customer feedback data were 20 per cent higher in restaurants that employed a member of staff aged 60+. These stores had:

- *22.7 per cent higher ratings for quality performance*
- *16.9 per cent higher ratings for service performance*
- *26.1 per cent higher ratings for cleanliness performance*

This research did not consider whether employing older workers particularly improved relationships with older customers, but a subsequent survey that McDonald's commissioned of 148 restaurant managers found:

- *69 per cent of managers thought that older workers empathise with and connect well with customers.*
- *47 per cent referred to older workers' ability to 'go the extra mile' to deliver the best possible customer service.*
- *44 per cent thought older workers brought mentoring skills to the workplace, supporting the development of younger colleagues.*[207]

Therefore, it appears from this research that employing older workers as part of multi-age teams has clear benefits for customers and employees of McDonald's.

Increasing employees' motivation and skills

In addition to the public-facing benefits of community engagement and employee volunteering outlined above (eg improving relationships between staff and the local community), participants in this research also mentioned the internal benefits to businesses of supporting employee volunteering. These perceived benefits included increased motivation and satis-faction among employees and increased opportunities for professional development through gaining work-relevant skills and competencies.

We will briefly review the evidence of the various internal benefits that businesses gain from supporting employee volunteering programmes, first considering the relationship between volunteering and employees' motivation and job satisfaction, and then the role of volunteering in developing employees' skills.

Increased employee motivation and satisfaction

A 2009 study by the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, which surveyed over 200 Fortune 500 companies in the USA about their employee volunteering and giving programmes, found that: 'The most commonly pursued business benefits by Fortune 500 survey respondents are company reputation, employee team building and employee morale'.[208]

There is a range of evidence generated by evaluations of employee volunteering schemes that companies' support for these schemes increases their employees' commitment. A 2004 study by the Institute for Volunteering Research exploring the impacts of employee volunteering at Barclays Bank found that volunteering was positively related to job satisfaction and pride.[209] More volunteers than non-volunteers said they would recommend Barclays as an employer (67 per cent of volunteers compared with 58 per cent of non-volunteers). They also found that the volunteers' pride in their employer increased in relation to the number of times they had volunteered: 78 per cent of those who had volunteered four or more times agreed that they 'talked to family and friends about Barclays' support for the community', compared with 64 per cent of those who had volunteered on only one occasion.[210] Research for Standard Chartered's Sustainability Review 2010 had similar findings: a staff survey on their new volunteering strategy found that '74 per cent of respondents believe that employee volunteering increases their job satisfaction, while 81 per cent preferred working for a company that supports employee volunteering'.[211]

In 2010 another study conducted in the USA used a survey tool to compare various measures of motivation between employees of a not-for-profit organisation called UL, which was involved in volunteering and employees who were not involved in volunteering. Nearly 1,500 (1,427) employees of UL completed the survey and five business-related outcomes were measured: job satisfaction, morale, organisational pride, belief in UL's mission, and engagement (willingness 'to contribute beyond what is required to help UL succeed').[212]

This study found that employees who participated in one of the company's signature volunteering programmes were more likely to believe in the company's mission (100 per cent of

volunteers versus 95 per cent on non-volunteers). Employee volunteers were also more engaged in their work (97 per cent of employee volunteers said they were 'willing to contribute beyond what is required in my job to help UL succeed', versus 89 per cent of non-volunteers). More than two-thirds (70 per cent) of employee volunteers participating in the signature programmes reported that their participation had increased their job satisfaction, and there was a spill-over effect for employees who were not involved in the volunteer programmes, but were aware of them. Those who were aware of at least one signature programme (but did not participate) reported higher morale than those who were unaware (87 per cent vs 81 per cent). Those who were aware of the programmes also reported having higher organisational pride than those who were unaware (94 per cent of respondents vs 88 per cent).

Research commissioned by the City of London and published in 2010, which we will explore in more detail below, surveyed 546 employee volunteers who were involved in education programmes, to explore the learning and development they gained by participating. This research did not ask specifically about 'morale and motivation'. However, when the employee volunteer respondents were asked the open question 'have you benefited in any other way from the volunteering activity?' many respondents mentioned 'how their engagement in volunteering increases their loyalty towards and appreciation of the company they work for'.[213] For example, one participant commented, 'It's given me greater pride in my employer.'[214]

These various sources of evidence suggest that employee volunteering programmes that seek to reduce social isolation in old age, such as Sainsbury's involvement in the Dementia Café, O2's mobile phone training for older people, or the John Lewis Partnership's retired partners programme, are likely to bring additional benefits to the businesses involved by highlighting their values-based ethos and thereby strengthening their employees' commitment to them as an organisation.

The evaluation of the Call in Time programme supported by Zurich Community Trust, in partnership with Help the Aged (now Age UK), did not specifically ask volunteers whether their

commitment to Zurich was influenced by taking part in the project, although it found that the volunteers who were surveyed recommended the scheme to colleagues. When Demos interviewed Jane Boulton, Programme Manager at Zurich Community Trust, we found anecdotal evidence suggesting that Zurich's support for employee volunteering has boosted its status as a desirable employer. Jane pointed out that Zurich recently ranked at 17 in the Sunday Times' 'Top 25 Big Companies to Work For' in 2012.[215] She suggested that 'a key contributor to this was the extensive community involvement programme', with 30 per cent of Zurich employees undertaking some kind of volunteering. Jane also commented that the Zurich Community Trust's research has found that 'employees feel that taking part in volunteering felt increased job satisfaction and pride'.

Employee professional development

The 'landscape mapping' research that we conducted to develop the case studies in chapter 5 also suggested that employee volunteering schemes can benefit companies by giving their employees new opportunities to develop transferable skills. Steve Kendall, who set up the Dementia Café in Market Harborough, pointed out that Sainsbury's staff volunteers who participate in the scheme are gaining experience in working with older people who have dementia. For those with a customer-facing role, this is likely to be very valuable, as growing numbers of older people in Market Harborough are affected by dementia. The O2 manager who arranged mobile phone training for the Copthorne Companions Club in Shrewsbury (see case study 6) also thought that this event provided really valuable face-to-face training for his staff in working with older people and understanding what kind of help and advice they might appreciate when purchasing a mobile phone.

These qualitative research findings are corroborated by larger-scale quantitative research studies conducted in recent years to measure the professional benefits of volunteering. The Institute for Volunteering Research's 2004 study of employee volunteering in Barclays Bank found that 61 per cent of

managers thought that their staff's communication skills had improved as a result of their volunteering experience, and 56 per cent of managers thought that leadership skills had improved. A survey that Deloitte conducted with 250 human resources managers in 2008 found that they also strongly believed in the benefits of volunteering: 91 per cent of respondents thought that volunteering support with business skills to a non-profit organisation can be an effective means of developing leadership and business skills.[216]

A more in-depth study commissioned by the City of London and published in 2010 investigated the benefits of employee volunteering in 16 businesses that operate in the City of London, in sectors including financial services, law and consultancy. This study used interviews and surveys to measure the personal skills that 546 employee volunteers developed through their participation in education-related volunteering activities with young people (from primary to tertiary education).[217] As table 3 demonstrates, the employee volunteers reported 'some' or 'significant' development in a broad range of transferable work-related skills. The skills that were most commonly thought to have improved included communication skills, ability to help others to improve, adaptability, influencing and negotiating skills, and team-working skills.

In this study, the line managers of employees who were involved in volunteering reported that the staff member they managed had 'some' development or 'significant' development of their skills in the following areas:

· adaptability (in 57 per cent of cases)
· team working (52 per cent of cases)
· willingness to continually improve (47 per cent of cases)
· ability to build relationships and networks (37 per cent of cases)
· communication skills (31 per cent of cases)[218]

The authors of the study concluded that volunteering was a cost-effective way for companies to build their employees' skills, as companies typically invest at least £400 per staff member each year to develop useful skills and competencies. However,

Table 3 **City of London research findings on the value of employee volunteering in developing personal skills**[219]

Identified skill	Proportion of employee volunteers reporting 'some' or 'significant' development of this skill (%)	Number of employee volunteers surveyed
Adaptability; being effective in different surroundings	54	526
Team working skills	43	525
Communication skills	66	525
Influencing and negotiation skills	45	525
Problem solving skills	39	526
Leadership skills	41	527
Planning and organisation skills	40	526
Decision making and exercising judgement	39	524
Building relationships and networks	39	527
Willingness to continually improve	41	525
Ability to help others to improve	65	526

supporting a volunteer placement cost the employer an average of £381 per person per year (including administrative costs of partnering with external organizations, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, preparatory training, travel costs and so on). In addition to increasing the employee's skills, the study also found that the employee volunteers experienced additional, 'intrinsic' benefits of increased wellbeing brought by helping others.[220]

It must be noted that this research explored the benefits of employees volunteering in activities supporting young people in education settings. These findings may not, therefore, be directly transferable to employees volunteering with older people, although it is likely that this provides many of the same benefits and enables employees to develop many of the same skills. More

research is needed to identify the specific benefits to employees of volunteering to support older people's social participation as opposed to working with other client groups (eg school children or unemployed people). However, as we have seen above, we obtained anecdotal evidence from our case study research that O2 and Sainsbury's staff were gaining valuable skills in working with older people and people with dementia. There is also some small-scale evidence from the evaluation of the Call in Time programme that employees' involvement in telephone befriending of an older person had 'increased their self-confidence and interpersonal skills' and 'increased their awareness of community and older people's needs'.[221]

Benefits of structured volunteering programmes

Another important point that has emerged from previous research is the observation that structured volunteering programmes are likely to bring greater benefits to businesses than intermittent or one-off events.[222] The Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship's 2009 study found, 'There is evidence that the positive effects volunteering has on personal wellbeing, skill development, teamwork and health do not accrue with short-term episodic volunteering.' The author suggests that if employees are to experience 'meaningful' benefits, they will need to volunteer for at least two days each year.[223] The Institute for Volunteering Research's 2004 study of employee volunteering in Barclays Bank corroborates this finding, suggesting that 'skills tended to increase with the frequency of volunteering'. This study found that 56 per cent of employees who had volunteered four times or more reported that their decision-making skills had increased, while only 37 per cent of employees who had volunteered once or twice thought their decision-making had improved.[224]

This is something that businesses should bear in mind when developing employee volunteering programmes to support older people's social participation. More structured, long-term schemes are not only more likely to be of benefit to the older people participating (as schemes such as Call in Time

demonstrate), but also more likely to benefit the employee volunteers taking part.

Reciprocal relationships with former employees

The sixth category in the 'landscape mapping' study set out in chapter 5 concerned company schemes that continue to provide social support for their retiring employees, illustrated by the examples of the retirement schemes run by John Lewis Partnership and Morrisons in case study 8.

It was clear from these case studies that the relationships that the John Lewis Partnership and Morrisons maintained with their retired former employees were by no means one-sided. The retired employees with whom these companies kept in touch through regular social events clearly had a strong, ongoing sense of loyalty to their former employers and both stores reported that they were eager to return and volunteer to support the stores during busy periods such as the run-up to Christmas. As we have seen above, Morrisons and John Lewis have also made good use of these ongoing relationships for customer insight purposes: Morrisons has trained retired volunteers to act as 'mystery shoppers', while John Lewis has surveyed their retired partners to find out how their stores and delivery services could better respond to older customers' needs.

These examples highlight the fact that older people often do not want to be passive recipients of services and are keen to take an active role. The John Lewis Partnership Retired Partners Programme provides a very comprehensive support service and an infrastructure that enables retired partners to stay in contact with one another and self-organise their learning, leisure activities and social events. The Morrisons retirement scheme promotes opportunities for its participants to volunteer with a charity called Caravan, which supports former grocery industry workers, or in their own fundraising activities.

These examples suggest that businesses that maintain ongoing relationships with their former employees and support their continuing social connections within the community are not only 'doing the right thing', but can also benefit from

increased capacity brought by having access to a large volunteer workforce. These volunteers can provide support with charitable objectives (such as visiting socially isolated older people in the community) and business objectives (such as coping with increases in demand in the run-up to Christmas, or improving knowledge of customers' needs). Sarah Gilpin told us that the existence of the Retired Partners Programme 'highlights our values-based ethos and strengthens the loyalty of retired Partners to the Partnership and also working Partners who take a pride in being part of a business that maintains a caring, "cradle-to-grave" ethos'.

7 Challenges involved in achieving broader business engagement

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are a number of powerful motivating factors for businesses to get involved in supporting older people's social participation and reducing the risk of loneliness and isolation in old age. Many of these concern the opportunities for businesses to demonstrate their values-driven ethos, to build a stronger relationship to their community – creating opportunities to develop new and loyal customer relationships – and to develop their employees' skills and capabilities.[225]

However, we found during the 'landscape mapping' exercise for this research that there are relatively few businesses that are providing social hubs for older people, or taking action to strengthen their relationship with their older customers, in any systematic way. In fact, many of the examples that we uncovered (presented in chapter 5) were ad hoc activities initiated by individual staff members, or external VCS partners, rather than driven by senior business leadership.

In this chapter we will explore the various challenges and barriers we identified through our desk-based and qualitative research, which may explain why more businesses (large and small) are not taking action to support older people's social inclusion in the communities where they operate. They are:

· attitudinal challenges
· practical challenges
· the need to identify your business's role
· lack of central and local leadership
· inexperience in working across sectors

The remainder of this chapter will consider each of these challenges in turn. We also identify four examples of potential

'early adopters' – businesses that are particularly well placed to overcome these challenges. These are businesses that do not currently have any strategy in place for supporting older people's social participation in the communities where they operate, but may be already exploring the potential to do more work in this area, or have strong policies and infrastructures in place that could facilitate this kind of work.

Attitudinal challenges

We have divided the attitudinal challenges identified through our research into three:

- businesses' employees having discriminatory attitudes towards older people
- businesses' lack of interest in older people causing market failure
- businesses thinking it is not their role to tackle loneliness

Businesses' employees having discriminatory attitudes towards older people

At the 'idea-swapping' workshop we held to inform this research, we asked participants to fill out a questionnaire. One of the questions was: 'What are the main barriers to businesses getting involved in providing social opportunities to older people?' Some of the responses to this question included:

- 'no real barriers but lots of *perceived* issues'
- 'reactionary attitudes limit willingness to break free of stereotypes'
- 'values, attitudes, stereotyping, failure to do market research'
- 'location and stereotyping'
- 'knowing what older people want and how they can facilitate it'

During the workshop, some participants commented that business employees may have discriminatory attitudes towards older people, leading to discriminatory or inflexible behaviour. Others suggested that there may simply be a lack of thought about how the business could do more to support older people's

social participation: 'They do not understand the positive impact that the involvement and cooperation with older (and even better together with younger) people can have.' Some suggested that attitudinal barriers are often 'dressed up' and presented as practical barriers. One person wrote on the questionnaire,

Often things such as health and safety, CRBs and insurance are used as an excuse not to get involved. People's perceptions need to change.

However, participants in the workshop did not suggest that ageist attitudes were particularly a feature of the business community. Several emphasised that this was a problem that runs throughout our society. One of the group discussions centred on the role of policymakers in perpetuating myths about older people 'as a passive group waiting to be catered for'. Instead, this group suggested that policymakers and businesses need to recognise older people as active consumers and people who can't necessarily be pigeonholed into one category of interest. They also suggested that older people should be enabled and encouraged to engage in society as active consumers. Central to this is how important it is that older people are not envisaged as a homogeneous and dependent group. Instead, 'It is crucial to differentiate between different types of older people. Young-old age and old-old age are very different groups, with very different needs.'[226]

Participants at the 'idea-swapping' workshop suggested several potential societal causes for these discriminatory attitudes towards older people. Most notably, one discussion group suggested that 'there is a lack of intergenerational contact and not enough interaction between people with diverse backgrounds and interests in the community'. The concerns expressed at this workshop reflect wider concerns held by people in the UK. A Europe-wide survey conducted in 2009 found that only 24 per cent of UK respondents agreed that 'the government is doing a good job in promoting a better understanding between the young and the old'.[227] This is a slightly lower figure than the EU average of 27 per cent of respondents thinking that their government was doing a good job, and considerably lower than in countries such as the Netherlands, where 49 per cent of

respondents thought their government was doing a good job.[228]

Age UK's analysis of the fourth round of the European Social Survey (conducted in 2008 and 2009) also found that 64 per cent of UK survey respondents thought that age discrimination is a 'quite' or 'very' serious problem in the UK, compared with an EU-wide average of only 44 per cent of respondents thinking age discrimination is a serious problem in their country.[229] These survey findings suggest that age discrimination is a more widely recognised problem in the UK than in many other EU countries.

Businesses' lack of interest in older people causing market failure

As noted in the previous chapter, participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop thought that attitudinal issues (including discriminatory attitudes, discomfort in engaging with older people or lack of interest) had led to a general market failure around older consumers, with public spaces, services and products often failing to meet older people's needs. Some of the experts and practitioners whom we interviewed for this research also expressed these concerns. Andrew Chidgey, Director of External Affairs at the Alzheimer's Society, commented,

Lots of businesses are preoccupied with young families and… many businesses haven't taken on board the message about the older population. Lots of people who work in these companies think that ageing is an unattractive issue.

This inattention to older consumers' needs, or even unwillingness to engage with older consumers at all, can result in some older people being blocked from engaging with the market. Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop pointed to various examples of arbitrary upper-age limits placed on products and services: 'People aged over 75 are not able to take out mortgages, insurance, take part in certain activities, travel and join car clubs.' Recent research by Age UK exploring how well the consumer marketplace meets older people's needs identified a variety of areas in which companies need to improve:

- product design
- the retail environment
- payment mechanisms
- the digital divide
- consumer protection
- marketing and the media[230]

This report observed:

When people cannot access the private consumer market it can impact on both the small and big things in life. A lack of access to even the smallest aspects of the consumer market can be frustrating and depressing and have a negative impact on quality of life.[231]

Businesses thinking it is not their role to tackle loneliness

Inattention to meeting older people's consumer needs is also likely to impact on companies' CSR strategies. Stephanie Hagan, Head of Community Investment at BITC, discussed this:

Companies invest in CSR most sustainably when they support an issue that is relevant to their business… Community investment works well where there is a reason for the business to support an issue, a reason to continue supporting it, and when it gives the business something back in return. Does tackling that issue have commercial relevance? For example, [does] the customer base include a high proportion of older people?

Therefore, if the businesses do not view older people as an important consumer group and area of expertise for their business, they may also be unlikely to see older people as an important focus for their CSR initiatives.

Participants at the 'idea-swapping' workshop suggested that CSR initiatives are often tailored to young people and young families because they are seen as a more important consumer group. Alan Hatton-Yeo, Chief Executive of The Beth Johnson Foundation shared this view, commenting in a Demos interview:

Businesses' CSR strategies are too often focused around young people. Older people aren't viewed as being as exciting to work with as young people. There is also a perception that retirement is an 'end' and that as people get older, their value to society decreases.

He also suggested that some commercial organisations may be 'institutionally ageist'.

However, some of the workshop participants thought that there was simply 'a lack of understanding among businesses about what role they might take in tackling loneliness'. One person wrote on the questionnaire that the main barrier was business employees 'not understanding the relevance to themselves – time/space/ finances – resource barriers. Not understanding how they can meet the needs of local people. Not understanding the business case.' Another referred to a 'What is in it for us' mentality.

At an advisory board meeting, James Hulme, Senior Public Affairs Manager at the Co-operative Group, suggested that from a business perspective, many businesses will be thinking:

· How will this work on the ground?
· Why is this something I should prioritise?
· How do you develop those relationships with the local authority and the third sector?
· Is this taking over the role of the local authority?

Therefore, one of the main challenges to overcome is convincing businesses that there is a business case for them to work with older people and community groups to support opportunities for social participation, and that they can do this in a way that will complement, rather than duplicate, existing community resources.

Research by BITC exploring why 44 per cent of local store and branch managers were not involved in their town centre partnership found that the main reason (given by 55 per cent of the respondents who were not involved) was that the business has other priorities.[232] Another frequently stated reason was the distance that store managers travelled to get into work,

suggesting that employees who live near to where they work might be more likely to get involved with local community initiatives. A substantial proportion (43 per cent) of the store and branch managers who were not involved in their local town centre partnership said they would be more motivated to get involved if could see the business benefits for their store, and a further 33 per cent said that 'they would need greater guidance and support to enable them to get involved locally'. These concerns illustrate the attitudinal barriers that may mean business employees are reluctant or unconfident about working with older people or VCS organisations to explore how they could reduce social isolation in old age. We will explore opportunities and mechanisms for overcoming these barriers in the final two chapters of this report.

Practical challenges

In their written answers to the questionnaire handed out at the 'idea-swapping' workshop, participants suggested a range of practical challenges that might restrict businesses' capacity to engage older people in social activities, including:

· 'Cash is limited. Employee availability and time… Appropriate skills. Locality.'
· 'The demise of the high street. Need for better local transport. Insurance and CRB checks are not a significant issue.'
· 'Finance. Making space and facilities available.'
· 'Attitude. Lack of experience. Lack of funds. Lack of space and networks.'

The discussion of practical challenges during the workshop fell mainly into two themes: space constraints and financial constraints. Participants also discussed procedural issues, such as health and safety regulations and CRB checks. However, as we will discuss below, most felt that these procedural issues are straightforward to overcome if there is sufficient commitment from the business concerned. They suggested that if attitudinal barriers are overcome, more practical barriers such as finding

appropriate meeting spaces or taking up employees' time can be tackled more easily.

Space constraints

A number of workshop participants pointed out that while the vision of creating community hubs in businesses premises is a realistic and desirable goal for many businesses, such as large retailers[233] and businesses that can provide a sociable environment (eg cafés, pubs and restaurants), this model will not be appropriate for all businesses.

At an advisory board meeting, James Hulme, Senior Public Affairs Manager at the Co-operative Group, pointed out that 'one size fits all won't work'. Most Co-operative food stores are in town and city centres, therefore in many cases it would be difficult for individual stores to host social activities as there are issues around space. Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy at Alliance Boots, observed that Boots pharmacies do not necessary have sufficient space to host social activities, nor are they necessarily an appropriate social environment. Therefore, James and Andrew suggested that the Co-operative and Boots would need to think creatively about how they could lend their support in this area. More appropriate types of support might include directing older customers to local support services or social activities, supporting initiatives through employee volunteering or providing refreshments to support a local event. As we have seen in chapter 5, there are a variety of ways in which a business can support older people's social inclusion that do not require the business to provide physical premises.

Financial challenges and disincentives

While large businesses may be able to absorb any costs associated with developing new types of social provision for older people (eg creating new policies, training staff, hiring premises or providing refreshments and administrative costs), some of the interviews conducted for this research highlighted

the particular financial challenges that small businesses might face.

Demos interviewed John Longden, Chief Executive of the charity Pub is the Hub, in March 2012. Pub is the Hub works with the licensees of rural pubs to identify how they can better meet the needs of their local community, and support local regeneration, by providing new services. Pub is the Hub mainly works with independent pubs that are run as small businesses, therefore John is familiar with the financial challenges that small businesses might face in changing their business model to provide new community services.

John told us that one of the pubs Pub is the Hub works with in Suffolk had decided to respond to the needs of older people in the local community by providing community fitness classes, as nothing of this kind was currently on offer locally. However, there are various financial costs and administrative issues associated with providing new community services. For example, there may be financial costs associated with converting the premises. The pub will also need to make a 'change of use' planning application to the local authority, which takes time and involves administrative costs. John said that the role of the Pub is the Hub is to support businesses to overcome these hurdles. For example, the Pub is the Hub can help pubs to apply to their local authority for a grant, as some local authorities have a dedicated budget for supporting rural services. He pointed out that without support of this kind it can be financially and practically challenging for small businesses to provide new community services.

When Demos interviewed Brigid Simmonds, Chief Executive of the British Beer & Pub Association, in March 2012 she pointed out some of the structural factors that could create financial disincentives for the pubs to get involved in providing additional community services for older people: 'Pubs' business rates are rated according to turnover. This means that when turnover increases, the pubs' business rates go up. This can act as a disincentive to provide additional services.' John Longden recognised this problem and commented,

People should not be penalised for providing a community service. If a licensee is prepared to work all of the extra hours to provide socially valuable services for their community, they should not be pensalised for this.

Brigid Simmonds pointed out that from April 2012, provisions within the Localism Bill give councils more say in setting local business rates, which could provide opportunities for them to incentivise pubs to provide valuable community services for older people by offering them a discount in their business rates. We will return to this suggestion when we discuss our policy recommendations in chapter 9.

Health and safety is a 'red herring'

Finally, while participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop acknowledged that supporting new social activities for older people may have time and cost implications for businesses, they felt that these were rarely insurmountable. They suggested that some businesses might cite health and safety considerations as a barrier to getting involved, but that 'this is often really just an excuse for not doing something that may be time-consuming or involve cost'. They suggested that if a business was really committed to working with their local community to reduce social isolation and loneliness in old age, they would find a way to overcome these practical challenges.

The need to identify your business's role

We have found during the course of our qualitative research that even where businesses believe they could have a legitimate role to play in tackling loneliness in old age, it can be difficult for them to identify what this role might be. Paul McGarry, Senior Strategy Manager in the Valuing Older People Team at Manchester City Council, commented,

You often get the impression that businesses aren't quite sure what to do. You can find small-scale projects, but there is less evidence of these growing into mainstream programmes… It needs to work at different levels. There are the

big businesses, such as Tesco, banks, right down to your local shops, and it has to make sense at their level.

Stephanie Hagan, Head of Community Investment at BITC, made a similar point:

My instinct is that the reason why there is not currently broad engagement is not due to a lack of will but due to a lack of knowledge of what is possible. There hasn't been any concerted activity to make this happen and this is not necessarily an issue that companies would come up with themselves.

This suggests that businesses may need outside stimulus and support from VCS or statutory partners to help them consider why and how they might support this agenda. As Stephanie put it, 'It can help if businesses have guidance on what to do, where to do it and how to do it.'

Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop observed that businesses are likely to work most effectively with the local community when their CSR goals are aligned with their business goals. They argued that CSR should not be an 'add-on' but something that will fit with the current business model and reinforce what the business already does. One participant said, 'CSR can be cynical or tokenistic, whereas mainstreaming activities as part of the business model and brand is likely to be more transparent.'

John Longden also highlighted the fact that once a business decides to work with the community to tackle local issues, such as social isolation among older people in the local area, they need to consult members of the community about how they can best do this. He commented, with reference to the work of Pub is the Hub:

Local community engagement is essential to ensure that the pub [or other business] provides services that the local community actually wants. If they engage with local people, they will then support the service because it is unique to the local area and reflects their needs.

In box 4 (Potential 'early adopter' 1) we describe how Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy at Alliance Boots, is currently exploring how Boots pharmacies might work with older people and other community partners to help tackle challenges in old age.

Box 4 **Potential 'early adopter' 1: Boots pharmacies**

Background

When Demos interviewed Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy at Alliance Boots, in January 2012 about this project, he told us:

The challenge is to pinpoint what we should be doing. We want our pharmacists to engage with the local community, but of course every pharmacist is different and operates in a different context. It is hard to know what is relevant.

As observed above, he also pointed out that many Boots stores do not have space available to host social activities for older people on site.

Andrew mentioned that Alliance Boots is part of the Age Action Alliance, which is a cross-sector partnership, which 'share[s]the vision of improving older people's lives; creating neighbourhoods where all older people are secure, valued and able to make a contribution to their local communities and wider society'.[234] *He also mentioned that he is currently working with BITC to exploring how local store managers can engage with local community groups to help improve the local environment.*

Potential next steps

Andrew pointed out that if businesses want to work with the local community, they need to consider what partnerships are needed and what is needed locally. In some places local services for older people might already be well organised. Rather than setting up new social activities it might be more helpful to

formalise relationships with local stakeholders and publicise the services that are already available to older people.

Andrew also observed that Boots already works closely with carers, providing them with support, information and advice. The company has a partnership with Macmillan whereby they provide information to people affected by cancer about local services and support groups. There is potential to build on these approaches to identify opportunities for tackling social isolation in old age and referring older people to local support services, which Alliance Boots is exploring; some Boots stores are already working on this with their local partners.[235]

Lack of central and local leadership

A number of the workshop participants, experts and practitioners whom we interviewed for this project argued that new initiatives to tackle loneliness will not take off unless a business can provide a combination of senior leadership and willing people at a local level with the drive to make things happen.

The importance of senior leadership

A number of people at the 'idea-swapping' workshop commented that 'leadership' was a key 'facilitating factor' to get this work started. Subsequently, when we interviewed John Longden, Chief Executive of Pub is the Hub, he said, 'The leadership role is essential – somebody at corporate board level has to take responsibility and champion the initiative if anything is going to happen.' Paul Cann, Chief Executive of Age UK Oxfordshire, observed, 'This role for businesses is not mainstream yet. It is up to individuals and circumstances whether things take off.' He suggested that this leadership need not all come from within businesses:

Public bodies need to take a stronger role in tackling social isolation in old age... local health and wellbeing boards could play an important role here. Loneliness needs to be recognised alongside other public health scourges.

Paul McGarry, Senior Strategy Manager in the Valuing Older People Team at Manchester City Council, also commented on the importance of leadership:

Leadership at a national level and at a local level can't be underestimated. This needs to be presented as an opportunity for businesses... at a regional and local level, businesses should see themselves as partners in developing positive ageing strategies in their area.

He mentioned the work of New York City Council's Age-friendly NYC,[236] which has involved creating good practice guides for 'age friendly' businesses, as an excellent example of cross-sector local leadership on this issue: 'It's flipping around how you see ageing. It's about how people move around and interact. It's about place and communal space and neighbourhood, not about individuals purchasing services.'

Research by BITC exploring how businesses engage with town centre partnerships has also emphasised the essential role of strong leadership in driving community engagement:

All town centre tenants are different and will translate their brand differently at local level. However the common thread running through all the case studies in this publication is strong leadership and vision from the top. Increasingly, business leaders are recognising their responsibilities and are committing themselves to improving their local community impact.[237]

However, as this research observes, senior leadership is often insufficient on its own, it must be complemented by mechanisms to support local store and branch managers to engage with a public agenda: 'The reality... is that some [business leaders] still struggle to translate national commitments into positive impact in local communities.'[238]

The importance of local commitment

At the 'idea-swapping' workshop, participants suggested that a key barrier to the initiation of new work to support older

people's social participation might be 'staff engagement at the level of the shop/ pub/ office'. One person argued:

For community engagement work to really take off, it must be championed locally by the store manager or other member of staff, as well as being championed by the head office. Without enthusiastic people working at a local level, relationships with other local organisations and customers will not be built effectively.

Stephanie Hagan at BITC said, 'It is often about whether you have someone who is willing to make it happen at a local level. It is about those local relationships and the brokerage role is often crucial.'

James Hulme, Public Affairs Manager at the Co-operative suggested:

One of the challenges is to find ways to encourage local store managers to engage with the wider social issues faced by their communities. However, it is important that you avoid central diktat and give people autonomy.

Wendy Taylor, Head of Central HR Services at Morrison Supermarkets, made a similar observation:

The important thing is that store managers feel empowered to meet local needs. If a local store manager is passionate and committed and they feel part of the community, they will really run with it.

John Longden also emphasised the importance of local representatives,

You need local representatives – people based in the local pub or store – who can liaise with the relevant people in the local community – Age UK or other older people's representatives and community groups, and the Local Authority, which will also help to identify local priorities.

He reflected on how this challenge of motivating local staff might play out differently in different types of pub business. Large managed pub chains do not tend to get involved with Pub

is the Hub, partly because they tend not to see the role of providing community services as being part of their business, and for practical reasons based on how they run their business. Rather than having tenanted pubs, the large chains tend to put managers in place, who change fairly regularly. In contrast, in the average pub that is run as a small business, licensees tend to run the pub for three years or more and are more likely to live in the community where they work. Therefore licensees are more likely to see themselves and their pub as being part of the local community than are staff in managed pub chains.

In box 5 (Potential 'early adopter' 2) we consider the facilitating factors that Marks & Spencer already has in place that could enable staff in their local stores to get more involved in tackling social isolation among older people in their local community.

Box 5   **Potential 'early adopter' 2: Marks & Spencer**
Background
Marks & Spencer's ethos is already very focused on including older members of the community. First, the company has had inclusive employment policies toward older workers for many years:

- *It abolished the default retirement age in 2001, so employees can choose to retire at any age after 55.*
- *The company has a flexible retirement policy so employees can take their pension any time after the age of 55 and continue to work.*
- *It offers flexible working, which any employee can request, including older workers and carers.*

    Second (as observed above), Marks & Spencer has worked with Help the Aged to understand how older people experience their product packaging. Third, Marks & Spencer has an inclusive design policy for all our new stores and store developments.
    There are several CSR policies that Marks & Spencer has in place that could potentially facilitate staff members to

develop partnerships with older people's groups, to help support older people's social participation.

Each M&S store can choose a local charity or cause it would like to fundraise for. Fundraising is then arranged locally, with guidelines from central offices about how the store might go about fundraising. Each store also has a small budget they can put towards local community events. Stores have the freedom to put their efforts into whatever they think will have most impact in the local community.

Marks & Spencer has a number of corporate charity partnerships that are managed centrally. Once is Macmillan; each year Marks & Spencer stores host a coffee morning to raise money for Macmillan. This is arranged centrally and all local Marks & Spencer stores that have a café participate.

Facilitating factors

Comments made during the interview with a representative of Marks & Spencer suggested that Marks & Spencer has a number of supportive factors already in place:

· *a strong ethos of promoting inclusive treatment of older people*
· *central policies to support local stores to fundraise and support local charities and causes*
· *staff experience in using Marks & Spencer coffee shops and restaurants to support community events*

Potential next steps

Marks & Spencer is in a good position to explore in a systematic way how their stores could provide local social hubs for older people or (particularly where space is a problem) how Marks & Spencer employees could support local social activities for older people in other ways (eg through staff volunteering, providing refreshments and other types of support).

Inexperience in working across sectors

The final key challenge that we identified at the 'idea-swapping' workshop and in our expert interviews concerned the inexperience of many businesses and charities in working across sectors to tackle complex issues such as social isolation in old age.

BITC research in 2010, 'Transforming business, transforming communities', found that there is considerable appetite among business leaders to increase their engagement in local communities. In a survey of 170 senior UK business leaders, BITC found that 77 per cent of business leaders 'say they could do more to scale up strategic support for communities across their business', and 80 per cent of business leaders 'feel they could do more to engage other businesses to scale up their support'.[239] However, there is very little research exploring specifically how businesses can engage with older people to reduce social isolation.

Stephanie Hagan at BITC suggested that one of the biggest barriers is often that businesses need somebody to be available at a local level who can 'make things happen'. Somebody needs to perform the brokerage role of connecting the business with local community groups and identifying how they can work together: 'From a business perspective, businesses often get many small-scale requests for help and it is difficult to know how to prioritise them.'

To help overcome this problem, BITC established the programme Business Connectors, currently being piloted in partnership with 13 businesses. The role of 'business connectors' is to 'create partnerships, ensuring that the time, skills, money and knowledge being offered from the private sector can match local priorities and community needs most appropriately'.[240] The 'business connectors' are 'employees on secondment, recruited from business, trained by BITC, to build local partnerships between business and community organisations in local areas of need across the country'.[241] During the pilot BITC has 20 'business connectors' in 20 different areas and the individual 'business connector' is often hosted by a local community organisation. The businesses involved include Greggs, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, BT, Fujitsu, Royal Mail and Lloyds TSB.

At the 'idea-swapping' workshop, participants pointed out that CSR programmes that provide access to free meeting rooms, business mentoring, employee volunteers or other useful resources are of little use if VCS organisations do not know that these opportunities are available, and suggested that the role of a broker to provide local coordination would be essential. They made various suggestions of organisations that might take on this coordinating and leadership role, including BITC, the local chambers of commerce, the Councils for Voluntary Service (CSVs) or other local business or voluntary sector partnerships.

Below we set out two further examples of potential 'early adopter' businesses that have developed their own approach to cross-sector working relationships. In box 6 (Potential 'early adopter' 3) we set out the infrastructure and working practices Tesco has put in place to help their stores engage effectively with the local community. In box 7 (Potential 'early adopter' 4) we explore the various factors in place that could facilitate B&Q to take a greater role in engaging with the local community to reduce social isolation in old age. This includes a new working relationship with Activate Havering.

Box 6 **Potential 'early adopter' 3: Tesco supermarkets**
Background
Having already identified the challenge that their local store managers may be inexperienced or unconfident about working across sectors to tackle social issues, Tesco has developed a programme called Community Champions 'to help us communicate effectively with local communities'.[242] *The Tesco 'community champions' are based in Tesco's stores and are paid to spend 18 hours of their working week engaging with the local community.*

Tesco provides examples of the activities of 'community champions' in their 2011 CSR report:

· *giving store tours to local schoolchildren or going into the local primary school to talk about healthy eating*
· *organising collections or bag packing for a local charity*

- *meeting the fire service or local charities to find out how Tesco can help them*
- *encouraging staff and customers to be involved in events such as Race for Life*

　　By 2011, Tesco had more than 300 'community champions' in the UK.[243]

Potential next steps
Tesco's 'community champions' do not currently appear to have any specific remit for supporting older people's social participation. Therefore, there is an opportunity for Tesco to collect and share good practice in how these 'community champions' are already engaging older people in the community, and to encourage more of them to explore how their Tesco stores might do more to reduce social isolation among older people in the local community.

Box 7　**Potential 'early adopter' 4: B&Q working in partnership with Activate Havering**

Background
Demos contacted Kelly Metcalfe, Community Manager at B&Q plc, in April 2012. Kelly told us that B&Q already has a company ethos that supports effective engagement with older people in a number of ways, most notably:

- *B&Q has 'a really good record/history in employing people from older generations. One quarter of our work colleagues are aged 50+'.*
- *As observed in chapter 5, B&Q offers free Diamond Card membership for people aged over 60, which provides a 10 per cent discount on Wednesdays.*

　　B&Q is also very interested in how it can use its store spaces as 'community hubs' for local people. Recently B&Q sponsored the RSA to undertake a piece of research called

'The community footprint' to explore how B&Q stores can do more to have a positive impact on their surrounding communities.[244]

B&Q stores currently run 'You Can Do It' classes, which aim to teach customers do-it-yourself skills to increase their confidence and make them self-sufficient. People of all ages have made use of these classes.

Potential next steps

B&Q already has a number of important facilitating factors in place that make it a promising potential 'early adopter'; the company already recognises older people as valued customers and members of the community, and B&Q managers are interested in promoting their stores as community hubs.

B&Q is also involved in conversations with Activate Havering about how the company can do more to support older people and reduce social isolation in their stores in the London Borough of Havering. Nick Kingham, Activate Havering Project Manager, said B&Q had put on a 'You Can Do It' session during International Women's Day and 'we will be working with them to run similar events involving the older community'. The aim of this work 'will be to get the older community involved and seek support from the local stores on other volunteering initiatives as it will be beneficial to all parties'.

Challenges for the community and voluntary sector in working across sectors

While our research on this project has highlighted the challenges for businesses in working across sectors, these challenges are not confined to the business community. Many of the representatives of charities we spoke to said that the assumption that charities and businesses operate in very different worlds acts as a barrier to collaboration. Some participants at the 'idea-swapping' workshop suggested that charities are not always comfortable working with private sector organisations, and might have to

overcome attitudinal barriers. In particular, one person highlighted the problem that there can be perceived 'reputational risks associated with working with private sector partners'. Therefore charities are often more comfortable working in partnership with the public sector or other charities than with businesses, and opportunities are missed.

The Campaign to End Loneliness recently carried out an important piece of research in partnership with the Local Government Association's programme Ageing Well, which culminated in a report called *Combating Loneliness*. This report provides 'a brief summary of key research on the issue of loneliness, and some practical steps every local authority, working in partnership with other local actors, can take to tackle the problem'.[245] This research will be very valuable in helping councils and their partners consider how they can work together in partnership to tackle loneliness in old age. However, notably, businesses do not feature at all in the vision presented in this research. This omission is indicative of one of the wider assumptions we have discussed above: that it is the role of VCS organisations and government bodies to tackle loneliness, rather the role of businesses.

We also encountered in our research many people who were very aware of the opportunities for businesses to play a greater role in supporting older people to socialise and build their social capital. Participants in the 'idea-swapping' workshop acknowledged that with budget cuts taking place, gaps are opening up in the provision available for older people and businesses could play a very valuable role in supporting and complementing VCS and statutory initiatives. Steven Hargreaves, WRVS Head of Region for the South West in January 2012, told us that he is very keen to identify more opportunities for businesses to get involved in supporting WRVS's activities with older people. He suggested it would be helpful to develop 'a menu of options' to offer businesses, to help them consider the various ways in which they might work in partnership with WRVS, including:

- financial input
- providing volunteers
- providing premises for holding meetings and activities

Steven explained that he is in the process of splitting his South West region into four main community hubs, and exploring how WRVS can offer more flexible volunteering opportunities to make it easier for more people to get involved. He said that WRVS often asks local authorities if they can provide meeting spaces to support their activities, but the private sector could equally do this and there is plenty of scope for WRVS to involve businesses more proactively.

In chapter 9 we will build on these ideas and present recommendations for how charities can show leadership in collaborating more closely with businesses in their local area to develop cross-sector partnerships for working to reduce loneliness and social isolation in old age.

Section 3
The way forward

8 Opportunities for coordinated action

Building on momentum

As we have seen in chapter 4, there is a growing expectation – both from government and from businesses themselves – that businesses must demonstrate their 'responsibility' and social value. Government policies, such as Every Business Commits, expect businesses to develop positive relationships with the communities where they operate, and to work in partnership with these communities to help tackle complex social issues including health inequalities, unemployment and social isolation. Businesses also recognise that consumers' expectations of business have changed, and that they often make spending decisions based on a company's values, rather than just the quality of its products. Therefore it is important for businesses to demonstrate to their customers that their values and working practices are worth buying into, as well as their products and services. CSR ideas are now so mainstream that Sainsbury's responded to the Government's CSR strategy by stating simply in its 2011 corporate responsibility report: 'At Sainsbury's we found that five pledges under "Every Business Commits" mirrored our company values and therefore we are already doing this.'[246]

Therefore, the question is not *whether* businesses should be responsible, but *how* they can most effectively fulfil their responsibilities towards their customers and the communities in which they do business. Chapter 6 demonstrated that there are huge opportunities for businesses to benefit from building closer relationships with the older people who live and work in the surrounding area. Our research suggests that businesses that learn how to cater effectively to the consumer and social needs of older people stand to:

- reap the rewards of a large and growing older consumer market
- build a positive local identity as a business that cares about its customers
- get to know their older customers and thereby better understand how they can provide a positive and accessible environment; learn about the kinds of products and services their older customers want; develop new products and services that respond to older customers' needs
- attract new customers through an enhanced reputation and develop long-lasting relationships with older customers, who appreciate the high quality of service on offer
- develop confident, motivated and skilled staff who are proud of the business they work for and can relate to the customers' perspective
- benefit from reciprocal relationships with customers and retired former employees

Conversely, while the rewards are large, the potential penalties for a business that does not make the effort to engage effectively with its older customers are also significant. The 'landscape mapping' presented in chapter 5 indicates that a variety of businesses are waking up to the opportunities presented by the older consumer market, and to the important role they can play in meeting a key need in many older people's lives: the opportunity to participate socially as a valued member of their community. This report provides an opportunity for more businesses to build on this momentum, and to learn from and replicate the creative models for community engagement that other businesses are developing, such as Tesco's programme Community Champions and BITC's Business Connectors.

Thinking creatively

In chapter 7 we explored some of the challenges that businesses might face in seeking to change their business practices and engage with the community in new ways. Discriminatory attitudes, space constraints and unfamiliarity with new ways of working can all act as barriers that impede progress. However,

throughout this research, the message we received from charities, businesses and older people is that with the right attitudes, willingness to listen to their customers and openness to working in partnership, any of these practical barriers can be overcome. The 'potential early adopter' examples in chapter 7 indicate that many businesses have all the necessary prerequisites (eg an age-friendly ethos and policies that support staff innovation and autonomy) already in place. Therefore, the challenge may be simply for the business to consider how they can use their existing resources in new ways to meet their older customers' needs. The best source of knowledge on this issue is of course the older customers themselves.

Scaling up

The question for businesses that are already showing good practice in some stores or branches, such as those businesses featured in chapter 5 of this report, might be how they can scale up this activity and replicate it more widely. The popular wisdom of CSR is currently that it must devolve autonomy and ownership to the shop floor, to allow staff groups to champion the causes they believe in. There is much to be said for this, but if CSR goals are wholly devolved, businesses can also miss the opportunity to learn about what is working well, and how effective approaches might be replicated in other areas of the business, with the potential to improve the lives of many more older people.

Most businesses' CSR reports detail the policies or programmes that are in place to facilitate community engagement, and the money invested to get projects off the ground, but they do not capture the social value that is created for staff and communities, or the lessons learned about approaches that worked well, or those that failed to deliver the hoped-for benefits. In the next chapter we will discuss the need for businesses to improve their methods of evaluating the impact of their community engagement work.

Working in partnership across sectors

This research has also highlighted the anxiety that many business employees, including store and branch managers, feel about moving into uncharted territory and working in ways they are unaccustomed to. However, the case studies presented in this research demonstrate that there is no need to 'go it alone'. A huge amount of expertise already exists in most communities in local business partnerships, chambers of commerce, voluntary sector bureaux and community groups. Therefore businesses need to encourage their staff to build local partnerships with organisations that have the expertise they lack. In return, they will be able to support these organisations with their business skills and expertise.

Councils have a key role to play here; an important role of councils is to provide the brokerage role that is needed to build cross-sector partnerships to tackle local issues. However, as we will discuss in the next chapter, many of the participants at our 'idea-swapping' workshop were adamant that local leadership to drive businesses to take action to tackle loneliness should come from the business community. By leading on this issue, they can provide the inspiration and support that is needed to get other businesses on board.

Working with, not for, older people

Finally, and most importantly, businesses need to work in partnership with their older customers and other older people in the local community. We heard from many people during the course of this research that most older people do not want things 'done for them'. Research by Age Concern in 2003 highlighted the fact that in rural communities it is often older people who are 'particularly active in community-building processes, often acting as the "glue" which binds rural communities together'.[247] Therefore, it may not always be appropriate for a business to develop new social activities specifically aimed at older people. Instead, they might consult their older customers to find out what it is they could do that would really make a difference and work alongside some of the community groups that are already working with local older people. In some cases an 'age neutral'

activity or community project might present a more attractive opportunity for older people to use their skills and socialise with other people in their community, without feeling patronised or stigmatised, than a service aimed specifically at older people.

In the next chapter, we will make a series of proposals for how central government, local authorities, businesses and VCS organisations can work together at a local level to support older people's social participation and reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

9 Policy directions

General principles

Before we discuss our detailed policy recommendations, we will briefly set out the three core principles that bind these recommendations together: creating an inclusive society, sharing responsibility across sectors, and evidence-based practice.

Creating an inclusive society

This project has focused on the issues of loneliness and social isolation in later life, as research (discussed in chapters 1 and 2) shows that older people are more likely to experience one or more of the known risk factors for loneliness, such as living alone, having few social contacts or having a life limiting illness or disability. However, this does not mean that loneliness is a particular characteristic of older people, or that it is something that young people do not experience. Instead, it suggests that the life transitions that most older people experience at some point, such as retirement, bereavement and deteriorating health, put them at greater risk of experiencing loneliness or social isolation. Thus one of the main messages of this research is that we need to ensure that as a society we include older people and that all older people have opportunities to maintain and develop social contacts as they age. Therefore, local areas need not necessarily offer dedicated services or activities for older people, but we need to ensure that our communities offer services, entertainment, facilities and public spaces for people of all age groups.

Sharing responsibility across sectors

First and foremost, this report recognises that tackling loneliness in old age is a role for government, and should be recognised as

an integral and cross-cutting policy issue that must be addressed as part of key agendas such as public health and social justice. However, we also contend that tackling loneliness is not solely the responsibility of government – all citizens have a role to play in building a cohesive, inclusive society in which people of all ages feel valued.

Important advocacy movements such as the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Age Action Alliance and long-term work by organisations such as WRVS and Age UK already recognise the important role of the VCS in providing grassroots support to older people at risk of social isolation. There has been very little consideration of businesses' role in tackling loneliness, however, although the private sector has the largest presence in most communities (eg small shops, pubs, restaurants, cafés, super-markets) and therefore potentially a great deal of additional capacity to bring to supporting older people's participation.

Therefore, while it is clear that government must take first responsibility for preventing and reducing loneliness in old age, these recommendations will focus primarily on how we can build on what is already available to older people by increasing the capacity of businesses to support older people's social inclusion.

Evidence-based practice

The tradition of measuring social value is less strong in the private sector than in the public and community sectors.[248] This is something that needs to change if we are to ensure that businesses' resources are invested wisely, in ways that will generate the greatest possible social return. As a recent Demos report observed, 'Corporations that fund work that generates a social value should want to understand whether or not they are achieving value for money.'[249] However, making sure that interventions aimed at reducing loneliness are evidence based presents challenges for all sectors; as we have shown in chapter 3, the evidence base in this area is still fairly small. However, there are a number of robustly evaluated models for engaging older people already available in the public domain (such as POPPs[250] and *Extra Time*[251]) and an even greater number of promising

models that could potentially demonstrate positive impact in reducing loneliness if they received a professional evaluation (eg the case studies presented in chapter 5). This report contends that government agencies, businesses and VCS organisations *all* have an important role to play in growing the evidence base around effective approaches to tackling loneliness and sharing good practice.

These three core principles cut across and run throughout the more detailed policy recommendations we present below, which are divided into recommendations for central government, local government, the business community and the VCS.

Recommendations for central government

Central government has an important role in providing policy leadership for local government, businesses and charities and as a facilitator for cross-sector working. These recommendations for central government will focus on what the government can do to encourage more businesses to get involved in preventing social isolation in old age.

1 Raise awareness of businesses' role in tackling loneliness

As we set out in chapter 3 of this report, government strategies such as Every Business Commits are very clear in their expectations that businesses must support their local communities. Political narratives about responsible business should set a clear expectation that CSR is not an add-on, but should be embedded in the way that businesses operate locally.

However, there is as yet very limited awareness of the specific role that businesses can play in supporting older people's social participation. To raise awareness of this issue, the Office for Civil Society or BIS could seek private sector sponsorship for an annual award for business-led projects aimed at tackling social isolation in old age. Central government could also fund BITC to develop a specific programme of work focused on engaging the business community in tackling social isolation in old age.

2 Build the evidence base and help businesses to share good practice

In chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this report we have seen that there are numerous small, isolated examples of good work already happening in this area, but businesses are not currently learning from each other's CSR practices. We have also discovered during the course of this research that CSR policies in large businesses tend to be highly decentralised. The aim of this decentralised policy approach to CSR is to maximise the autonomy of local staff, to empower them to pursue their own interests and to ensure they can respond to local need effectively. However, the unintended consequence of this approach is that CSR practice can be so decentralised that a large business's central office often has very little knowledge of what their frontline staff are doing. This limits the opportunities for businesses to share good practice across their business, and externally with other businesses.

Therefore, the Government has a valuable role to play in drawing together existing knowledge of good evidence-based practice in one place, and supporting businesses to evaluate their corporate responsibility work to generate new evidence to inform future policy development. Government policy promoting CSR should also set the expectation that good CSR involves 'measuring social value' and being able to demonstrate that a business's community engagement initiatives are achieving the impact that they set out to.[252] To facilitate this process central government should fund an organisation such as BITC to support businesses to measure their community impact, and to draw together evidence of effective approaches to supporting older people's social participation in one single repository.

3 Embed expectations of cross-sector working to reduce social isolation in old age in all relevant policy development

Central government should show leadership to local government and businesses by embedding an expectation of cross-sector working in all relevant policy development, for example in the following policy areas: public health, social care and later life working and retirement.

Public health

The DoH should task Public Health England with developing policies to set the expectation that health and wellbeing boards will lead on promoting 'healthy ageing' and social participation in old age in local communities. Approaches to improving public health at a local level should include the expectation that agencies will develop cross-sector partnerships to support healthy behaviours, build older people's resilience against social isolation and support positive experiences of ageing. Box 8 describes recent work by the Campaign to End Loneliness to develop guidance for health and wellbeing boards on how they can work to tackle loneliness in old age at a community level.

Box 8   **The Campaign to End Loneliness: work with health and wellbeing boards**

The Campaign to End Loneliness has recently undertaken a programme of work, funded by the DoH, to create information for health and wellbeing boards about how they might tackle loneliness in older age. This has involved working with a number of health and wellbeing boards from across the country to create information and a practical toolkit for all boards. The toolkit will:

- *give boards practical instructions on how to gather local evidence for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on loneliness in old age, including facilitating participation from older people and local groups*
- *show how loneliness in old age impacts on other priorities in the health and wellbeing strategy*
- *provide examples of what can be done locally to alleviate loneliness*
- *focus on the capabilities and resources within communities and opportunities for partnership working locally*

The toolkit is to be launched in July 2012 and the Campaign to End Loneliness is seeking interested health and wellbeing boards to be the first to pilot the toolkit.[253]

Social care

As we have seen in chapter 4, social care policy increasingly emphasises the need for preventative approaches to supporting older people's health and wellbeing in old age, based on building resilience and supporting older people to participate in developing and delivering local services. Government policy in this area should encourage local service providers to consider community assets in the broadest sense, including the capacities of the local business community, rather than focusing only on the role of statutory and commissioned services.

Later life working and retirement

We have seen in chapter 5 that some businesses are leading the way in preparing their employees for retirement and continuing to support their social participation following retirement. DWP and BIS should encourage businesses to learn from and replicate this good practice by putting in place support to help people plan for their retirement. This may include putting pre-retirees in contact with local voluntary sector organisations that can offer volunteering opportunities and new social networks to replace the regular social contact on offer in the workplace. Research demonstrates that retirement is a very significant life-course transition that we should take seriously. The retirement programmes on offer by the John Lewis Partnership and Morrisons provide excellent examples of good practice that other businesses could emulate. DWP and BIS should set the expectation that employers (including charities and statutory agencies) will respond to the removal of the default retirement age and increases in the state pension age by providing more support for older workers while in work and during the transition to retirement.

Recommendations for local government

As we have argued above, local government has an important role as a broker and facilitator to help businesses make connections with other local organisations that have expertise in supporting older people's social participation. It is important that local government departments develop a strong emphasis on

cross-sector working and making local businesses feel valued as partners.

4 Support the development of age-friendly communities

Considerable work has been invested in recent years by a number of organisations and alliances to share knowledge and develop approaches for creating 'age friendly' communities. Most notably, in 2006 the World Health Organization developed the 'Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities' 'to help determine the key elements of the urban environment that support active and healthy ageing'.[254] Following on from this, in New York in 2007, the Mayor's Office, New York City Council and the New York Academy of Medicine launched an age-friendly New York City programme called Age-Friendly NYC, which has developed a series of good practice tools and resources explaining how local authorities can consult their older populations about what changes are needed to make their neighbourhoods 'age friendly'. This work has included an 'age friendly local retail initiative' to explore how local retailers can play a role in making communities age-friendly by ensuring that their premises are accessible for older people.[255]

Some local authorities in the UK are now leading work to ensure that their communities are prepared to meet the needs of an ageing population. For example, two of the local authorities that we spoke to in this research, Manchester City Council and the London Borough of Havering, have dedicated programmes for exploring how they can work in partnership at a local level to ensure that their older residents are valued and included in their communities. New programmes are also being set up in Plymouth[256] and Stirling[257] to promote 'dementia-friendly' environments.

More local authorities need to make the creation of age-friendly communities a local priority, by:

· consulting older residents to identify any improvements that need to be made to public spaces to ensure they are not 'designing out' older people through a poor built environment

- ensuring that any regeneration money invested in town or city centres is linked to a joined-up strategy for meeting the needs of an ageing population
- creating networks of organisations that can work together to consult older people and promote awareness of the needs of older people locally
- working with local businesses (cinemas, pubs, cafés, restaurants, shops) to create the expectation that they will provide an inclusive, age-friendly environment
- supporting businesses with planning applications to make their premises accessible and help businesses to apply for funds to pay for adaptations (eg ramps, lifts, disabled toilets and so on); this will benefit the whole community including disabled people and young families with prams
- in rural areas, allocating budgets for supporting rural community services, some of which might be made available to support small businesses (such as pubs or independent shops) to support them to offer new services for older people in the community

Some of these proposals will require investment. However, many of them simply require local authorities to show leadership, or to allocate existing resources in a different way to help local people to change their mind-set and prioritise making their community 'age friendly'.

5 Engage with the local business community through health and wellbeing boards

Health and wellbeing boards present an exciting opportunity for local authorities to work in partnership with local organisations to improve the health and wellbeing of their residents. We recommend that these new boards should engage with the local business community to develop a shared strategy for supporting 'healthy ageing' locally. Part of this strategy should include a focus on taking action to tackle loneliness and social isolation in old age.

To support this strategy, health and wellbeing boards could have sub-working groups focused on building effective partnerships with local business, with representation from local business leaders and the local business partnership or chambers of commerce. These working groups should be conceived of as an equal partnership to enable businesses to feel they have ownership and are able to bring their own ideas.

6 Remove disincentives to community engagement and reward businesses for being community-focused

Following the recent Localism Act, local authorities now have more power to set business rates locally:

The Localism Act gives councils more freedom to offer business rate discounts – to help attract firms, investment and jobs. Whilst councils would need to meet the cost of any discount from local resources, they may decide that the immediate cost of the discount is outweighed by the long-term benefit of attracting growth and jobs to their area.[258]

We suggest that councils should take this opportunity to explore how they might recognise a business's value to the community in how they set their local rates. Pubs provide a key example of the poor incentive structure that currently exists, as those that have higher turnover pay higher business rates, which might disincentivise pubs from increasing their customer base by providing new social spaces and community services for older people. To reduce this disincentive, councils should consider how they might offer discounts in their business rates for businesses that can demonstrate that they provide valuable community services and engage effectively with their communities.

Recommendations for the business community

This report recognises that the operational context between large and small businesses and different business models such as managed chains, franchises and independent businesses varies

hugely. However, it demonstrates that there is a wide variety of opportunities for businesses to get involved in supporting older people's social participation. Therefore, while there is no uniform model that businesses can adopt, there are opportunities for every business to get involved in one way or another. One business might make the way it does business more 'age friendly'; another might set up a new partnership with a community group to support learning or social activities for older people.

7 Provide local leadership to build communities' capacity for tackling social isolation

One message we have received throughout this research is that businesses can achieve more impact in supporting older people's participation if their contributions are coordinated effectively at a local level. For example, if an older people's community group was seeking a free venue to host their meetings, it would be far more efficient if they could approach a single point of contact to find out which businesses offered free facilities, than approaching a succession of businesses individually. Inevitably, making this process work well will require leadership and support at a local level – to encourage businesses to offer whichever resources they can have available (meeting space, refreshments, organisation, logistical support, mentoring or employee volunteering) – and broker relationships with community partners to match resources to local needs.

Some of the participants in our 'idea-swapping' workshop believed strongly that this local leadership should come from businesses rather than government, with the concern that 'if it was left to local government, nothing would happen'. Some other participants felt that government agencies can be poor at treating businesses as equal partners, and tend to try to dictate what their involvement should be. These participants thought that it was important that the business community should have ownership of this work as activities were more likely to be sustainable if they were motivated by business interests and were felt to be relevant to business priorities, rather than being viewed

as some kind of self-contained CSR project. They suggested that a business-led approach would be more likely to get buy-in from other businesses, whereas a government-led approach might be perceived by the business community as 'another thing the government is trying to make us do'.

BITC's programme Business Connectors, whereby business employees are seconded to build local partnerships between businesses and the voluntary sector (see chapter 7), could potentially provide an effective model for this brokerage role. Individual business leaders or 'business connectors' would benefit from the support of a local organisation such as the local chamber of commerce or the local voluntary sector bureau, to provide a central hub and point of contact for people (and organisations) who wish to lend their capacity to support older people's social participation and reduce loneliness. Such a scheme would depend on local businesses being willing to second an employee, or contribute a portion of their time to providing this brokerage role, and another local organisation would need to be willing to host and support them in this role by providing a central hub. We recommend that businesses should show leadership by exploring their capacity to second one or more employees to take part in this type of scheme, either on a full-time or part-time basis.

8 Create an 'age-friendly' environment and build regular consultation with older people into business models

Businesses need to show that they value their (current and potential) older customers by taking their needs seriously, by considering to what extent the business's commercial activities are 'age friendly', before thinking about how older people's needs might also be met through CSR objectives. As we have stated in previous chapters, older people are a large and growing consumer market, and there are huge opportunities for businesses to develop new products and services that older people wish to buy. Businesses that are well known for their excellent customer service and positive treatment of older people will also benefit from an enhanced reputation more broadly.

There are three key measures that businesses could take to create a more 'age friendly' environment and improve their understanding of how they might meet older people's needs:

· Train staff to provide a friendly and welcoming environment for older customers. Research discussed in chapter 6 demonstrated that many older customers will favour a particular service provider because they value the quality and regularity of social contact that it provides.
· Carry out an 'age friendly' audit of your business. This might involve working with a local community group, or inviting some of your older customers to assess how well the business is currently responding to older people's needs and how it needs to improve. Are the right products or services currently on offer?
· Consult older people seriously: build regular (perhaps annual) consultation with older customers into your business model. This will be most effective if it is undertaken locally, for example by individual stores consulting the older customers who use them. However, in a large business, the learning from these exercises should be collated and distributed throughout the business to ensure there are opportunities to share learning and good practice. See the good practice examples of businesses consulting older people presented in chapter 6.[259]

These activities need not be time-consuming and they are likely to be paid for many times over by the increased profits available to businesses that meet older customers' needs effectively. In recommendation 14 we highlight the important role that VCS organisations could play in encouraging businesses to consult older people (eg by arranging focus groups or surveying their members).

9 Identify clear employee responsibilities for community engagement

Our research has shown that some businesses have identified clear leads for community engagement in their stores and branches, while others manage this in a more *ad hoc* manner. We

recommend that large businesses should ensure they have an identified lead staff member in each store or branch who has designated responsibility for community engagement as part of their core role. Preparing and supporting staff with this role will need to be built into management structures, appraisals and continuous professional development provisions. However, we have also demonstrated in chapter 6 that employees can develop many of the skills they need to excel at community engagement through volunteering activities. Therefore, it may be most effective if businesses integrate their strategies for training and professional development with their CSR strategies.

Smaller businesses may wish to make 'community engagement' part of an individual employee's job role, and where appropriate to provide training and guidance to support them in this role and introduce them to local networks that can support them, such as the local chambers of commerce or the local bureau for the voluntary sector.

An important role of these community engagement leads will be to engage with older people and relevant community groups to develop an understanding of how they can best meet the needs of older people in the community and support their social participation. It may be helpful for businesses to develop various types of service or support that they are able to offer local community groups (eg a venue, refreshments, volunteers or skills-based support), to make it clear what the advantages of a partnership might be.

10 Develop clear policies to support local action

Large businesses should develop supportive policies and toolkits for employees in their individual stores or branches to guide how they can work in partnership with older people's groups. These might include policies on:

- fundraising
- sharing store space with community groups
- allocating resources to support events or activities (eg budgets for refreshments or hiring a venue)

· supporting employee volunteering (eg an allocation of a certain number of volunteering days that employees can take within work time each year)
· using back-office resources (eg software, printing and audiovisual equipment) to support local VCS organisations

As mentioned in recommendation 9, where possible this could be supported by training and good practice-sharing events to pool knowledge across the business. It should also be noted that the evidence presented in chapter 6 found that structured volunteering programmes that enable employees to volunteer for at least two days each year have a clearer impact on employees' skill development than *ad hoc* or one-off volunteering activities.

11 Build a budget for robust evaluation into community engagement budgets

As we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, businesses need to improve the way they measure the social value of their community responsibility activities. It is only by capturing the social impact of activities that businesses can distinguish between effective and ineffective approaches and share good practice across the business and with other businesses.

The best and most sustainable approaches to community responsibility embed responsible practices within usual business activities, bringing financial benefits to the business (eg by attracting more older customers and increasing the amount that older customers spend), while also bringing social value by supporting older people's social participation and reducing the risk of loneliness. Therefore businesses need tools that enable them to measure the social value, as well as the financial returns, of investing their resources in community engagement. As a recent Demos report argued, 'Without clear and open measurement of social value we cannot develop a more mature and realistic conversation about the role of business in British society.'[260]

National government has a role to play in developing and disseminating these tools, but businesses should not wait for the Government to take action on this. They should work in

partnership with organisations such as BITC, which have expertise in measuring social value, to develop their own tools to measure social impact and business benefits. The data produced by 'early adopting' businesses will convince other businesses that it is worthwhile to engage constructively with older people in the community.

Therefore, collecting and disseminating evidence of the social impact and business benefits brought by supporting older people's social participation should be considered an integral part of businesses' CSR strategies. Businesses should ensure that they build budgets for measuring the impact of their community engagement activities into their CSR budgets.

Recommendations for the voluntary and community sector

12 Engage with the local business community

The 'landscape mapping' exercise we conducted for this project made it clear that the impetus for businesses to support older people's social participation often comes from VCS organisations rather than businesses themselves. Therefore, the VCS has a very important role in initiating relationships with businesses and helping them to understand the benefits of engaging constructively with their older customers, and supporting local groups that reduce social isolation among older people. It was clear from our research that some VCS organisations have very established practices of working in partnership with businesses, while other VCS organisations have little experience of this.

To encourage businesses to engage with this agenda, VCS organisations should ensure they have an active strategy for connecting with the local business community. For example they might encourage and support their employees and volunteers to go out of their comfort zone and make contact with local businesses, rather than always collaborating with other charities or statutory services as the default position.

We suggest that VCS organisations that support older people's social participation should explore how they can benefit from partnerships with businesses by:

- developing an action plan for engaging with local businesses (this might include approaching a new business to explore opportunities for collaboration each week or month, depending on the size of the organisation)
- identifying at least one member of staff to lead on business engagement and provide appropriate training and support
- getting involved with local forums that provide a network for local businesses (eg the local chamber of commerce or local business partnership) to publicise the organisation's work and explain how businesses can help.

13 Think beyond funding

We have demonstrated in this research that there are a variety of ways in which businesses can work constructively with their communities to support older people's social participation and reduce isolation and loneliness. It is important therefore that VCS organisations think laterally about the various types of business support that would benefit them and do not only think about partnerships with businesses as funding relationships.

We recommend that VCS organisations develop 'various options' for collaboration, which they then offer to potential business partners, for example:

- free access to a meeting space
- free refreshments to support events
- access to employee volunteers to support community events
- back-office support to organise activities
- skills-based volunteering and business mentoring (eg learning website design or receiving mentoring in applying for charity status)

This more flexible approach will help businesses that do not have budgets to spend on sponsorship or corporate responsibility initiatives to identify other resources they can offer to support VCS organisations.

14 Highlight the benefits of community engagement for business and support businesses to consult older customers

Finally, we have also demonstrated in this research that there are huge potential business benefits or businesses that engage constructively in supporting older people's social participation (discussed in detail in chapter 6). However, many businesses do not currently understand these benefits or why they should prioritise community engagement.

VCS organisations therefore have an important role in helping businesses understand the benefits to them of working in partnership with VCS organisations that support and represent older people. Five key benefits apply to all businesses:

· realising the value of the 'golden market'
· building a positive local identity
· knowing your older customers
· attracting new customers and building customer loyalty
· improving employees' commitment to the organisation and building employees' skills

However, there are also more direct ways in which VCS organisations can help businesses to realise the benefits of community engagement. Our research suggested that some businesses are unsure of how they can work with older people and there can be a 'fear factor' associated with moving away from familiar business practices. Therefore VCS organisations can play a hugely important role as brokers between businesses and older people's groups, and this could develop into a mutually beneficial arrangement. For example, a VCS organisation could offer to help local businesses to consult older people or provide training for their staff in working effectively with older customers. Businesses could either pay for this service or provide support in kind, such as a free venue for holding activities. Such a reciprocal arrangement would be likely to benefit both the business and the VCS organisation and could be more sustainable than a partnership that benefits only one party.

10 Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that loneliness in old age is a serious social problem that deserves the attention of policymakers. People who have few social relationships or lack social support have an increased risk of mortality, are more likely to have unhealthy lifestyles and are less resilient to cope with experiences of adversity. There is also much evidence that loneliness is associated with lower cognitive functioning, poor mental health and an increased risk of developing dementia. Each of these aspects of poor physical and mental health and increased vulnerability highlights the perils of failing to act – to older people's wellbeing and to the increased costs to the public purse of funding health and social care services to address the consequences of loneliness.

However, although it is clear from this research that loneliness in old age merits policy attention, there is no quick or easy answer to tackling it. As we saw in the opening chapters of this report, people experience loneliness from time to time at all stages of life and for a variety of reasons. Research examining the distinction between 'social' and 'emotional' loneliness also suggests that some types of loneliness may be much harder to address than others. For example, for some people, loneliness brought about by the loss of a much-loved partner or friend through bereavement may not be alleviated through increased social contact with other people. For others, new social experiences and relationships may be exactly what helps them overcome their sense of loneliness, particularly if it is caused by a shrinking social network following retirement, onset of poor health, relationship breakdown or bereavement.

The research discussed in this report demonstrates that the causes of loneliness in old age are often complex and there is certainly no single solution to reducing loneliness. Indeed the

very word 'loneliness' covers a variety of feelings and circumstances including a complete lack of social relationships, dissatisfaction with current social relationships, and loss of a unique relationship that cannot be replaced. We also lack a good evidence base for the effectiveness of interventions to reduce loneliness; in many cases, evaluations have found interventions to be ineffective in reducing loneliness, or have failed to establish evidence that an intervention was effective. Thus there is still a great deal of work to be carried out in building evidence of which approaches are effective in reducing loneliness for different groups of people and in different social, cultural and geographical contexts.

This research set out to explore the specific question of how businesses can help to prevent and reduce loneliness and social isolation in old age. Many of the people we spoke to during the course of this research found this proposal slightly counterintuitive, as businesses do not tend to be seen as having a leading role in addressing social issues, particularly where the beneficiaries are older people. However, our 'landscape mapping' exercise revealed that there are already numerous examples of businesses supporting older people to socialise and participate in their local community. There is also a great deal of appetite from business leaders to explore how they can do more to engage constructively with older people in the communities where their businesses operate, and to support local community and voluntary sector activities that promote older people's social inclusion.

This research suggests that the main barriers to businesses getting involved in supporting older people's social participation are attitudinal rather than practical. It is a case of being aware of what is possible, defining the business's specific role and building the relationships that are needed at a local level, rather than a lack of resources to put ideas into practice. Our case studies demonstrate that often a great deal can be achieved with creative use of existing resources, such as an unused meeting space or the regular contribution of an employee's time, either during working hours or in their lunch break. In other cases, businesses have committed a very small amount of extra

resources, such as a small budget for refreshments, to support a regular social activity. These examples show that it is possible for businesses to achieve a great deal to improve older people's lives at a local level, simply by building new partnerships or adopting new ways of working.

Many businesses already put effective community engagement at the centre of their business model as they recognise that a positive local identity is crucial to develop a strong and trusting relationship with their customers. Therefore, the challenge may be to convince business leaders that older people are a valuable consumer group, whose consumer and social needs are just as important as those of families and young people. In some cases it may be employees' unfamiliarity and discomfort with working with older people that is driving businesses' failure to engage effectively with their older customers' needs at a local level. Staff with client-facing roles may benefit from training in how to provide more 'age-friendly' customer service.

However, these various attitudinal barriers do not only affect businesses. We found in our research that people who work in voluntary sector organisations that work with older people often view the business community as a separate world that does not share the aims and interests of the voluntary sector. Therefore valuable opportunities for collaboration are often lost, and charities do not always make best use of the skills and resources that local businesses can offer.

This policy agenda presents challenges for people working in all sectors, but these challenges can be overcome where there is sufficient commitment. Our case studies and interviews with stakeholders from all sectors demonstrated that there is a great deal of enthusiasm to explore new ways of working collaboratively to prevent and reduce loneliness in old age. We hope the new findings and recommendations set out in this report will inspire more employees to consider what their organisation can do to support older people's social participation. The best starting point for businesses may be to ask their older customers how they can meet their needs more effectively. Charities and community groups could have an important role in helping

businesses to manage these consultation activities locally. Local government must also provide a policy framework that encourages businesses to contribute to developing and delivering local approaches to tackling important social issues that affect people of all age groups.

Only by recognising that loneliness in old age is a shared social problem, which we are all responsible for addressing, can we develop genuinely inclusive and collaborative approaches to ensuring that older people remain valued members of their communities, and continue to have opportunities to participate, contribute and build new social relationships as they age.

Appendix 1 People we interviewed during the project

Demos had contact with the following individuals during the course of the this project (including face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews and email exchanges):

Allison Bartlett, Head of Public Affairs, McDonald's Restaurants Ltd
Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy, Alliance Boots
Jane Boulton, Programme Manager, Zurich Community Trust (UK) Limited
Paul Cann, Chief Executive, Age UK Oxfordshire
Andrew Chidgey, Director of External Affairs, Alzheimer's Society
Sue Collins, Head of WRVS Yorkshire/Humber & North West Region
Lucy Cork, Alliance Boots
Maeve Egerton, Trusts & Corporate Relations Manager, Age NI
Claire Ford, Employee Engagement Manager, Marks & Spencer
Angela Geer, Executive Director for Older People's Services, WRVS
Sarah Gilpin, Manager, Partnership Retirement Service, John Lewis Partnership
Christine Graham, Head of WRVS services, North East England
Stephanie Hagan, Head of Community Investment, Business in the Community
Steven Hargreaves, Head of Service, South West England, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, WRVS
Alan Hatton-Yeo, Chief Executive, Beth Johnson Foundation
Michelle Hughes, Royal Exchange (Titanic Brewery), Stone, Staffordshire
Peter Hulme, Campaigns Officer, Grandparents Plus

Steve Kendall, Chair of the Board of Trustees, the Dementia
    Café, Market Harborough
Nick Kingham, Activate Havering Project Manager, London
    Borough of Havering
John Loizou, franchise owner of Barkingside McDonald's
John Longden, Chief Executive, Pub is the Hub
Femina Makkar, Programme Manager, Extra Time programme,
    The Football Foundation
Paul McGarry, Senior Strategy Manager, Public Health
    Manchester, Manchester City Council
Kelly Metcalfe, Community Manager, B&Q plc
Josie Nakos, Healthy Community Project Coordinator, Green
    Light Pharmacy
Philip Oakley, Director, Outserve Limited (Staffordshire social
    media surgeries)
Paul Rackham, Service Manager, Strategic Commissioning and
    Market Development, Housing, Health and Adult Social
    Care, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Professor Norma Raynes, Chief Executive, Intergen CIC
Brigid Simmonds, Chief Executive, British Beer &
    Pub Association
Sharon Sinclair, WRVS Service Delivery Manager for Shropshire
    and the Black Country
Neil Spring, Senior Communications Manager, John
    Lewis Partnership
Nick Stanhope, CEO, We Are What We Do
Wendy Taylor, Head of Central HR Services, Wm Morrison
    Supermarkets plc
Sam Ward, Head of WRVS Services, Midlands
Andy White, Head of Community Affairs, Sainsbury's
Melanie Wisher, PR ambassador, Sainsbury's
    Market Harborough

Appendix 2 Participants in the February 2012 Ageing Sociably workshop

Dorothy Barnes, U3A member
Allison Bartlett, Head of Public Affairs, McDonald's Restaurants Ltd
Louise Bazalgette, Senior Researcher, Family and Society Programme, Demos
Andrew Bonser, Director of Public Policy, Alliance Boots
Simon Bottery, Head of Policy, Independent Age
Stephen Burke, Director, United for all Ages
Phillida Cheetham, Junior Associate, Demos
Gillian Crosby, Director, Centre for Policy on Ageing
Laura Gonzalez, Senior Support Manager, Metropolitan Housing Partnership and Support Trust
Janet Harris
Jane Hopkins, Lewisham Pensioners Forum
Hasina Khatun, Research Intern, Demos
Annabel Knight, Project Officer, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Greg Lewis, Public Policy Programme Manager, Age UK
Professor Jill Manthorpe, Director of the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London
Professor Stephen McNair, Senior Research Fellow, NIACE
Shirley Meredeen, Older Women's co-housing
Norma Raynes, Chief Executive, Intergen CIC
Sylvia Roberts, U3A member
Matthias Roos, Department of Public Health, Frankfurt Regional Government
Noreen Siba, Managing Director, ILC-UK
Steve Smith, Policy team, WRVS
John Taylor, Midland Heart
Wendy Taylor, Head of Central Services HR and Morrisons Plus Programme, Morrisons

Lynne Wealleans, Positive Ageing Manager, Beth Johnson
    Foundation
Claudia Wood, Deputy Director, Demos

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The population of the UK is rapidly ageing. While 17 per cent of the population were aged 65 and over in 2010, that proportion is expected to increase to 23 per cent by 2035. Long-term social trends also mean that people retiring now are more likely to live alone, increasing the risk that they will experience loneliness and social isolation in later life. These trends have been compounded by the 'hollowing out' of communities, with both private and public sector institutions that traditionally act as social hubs – local pubs, post offices and libraries – facing funding cuts or closing down.

Ageing Sociably explores how we can unlock existing community resources to increase the opportunities for older people to make social connections in their local area. Responding both to the financial pressures facing statutory and charitable bodies, and increasing calls from politicians and the public for a more responsible capitalism, the report focuses on the role that businesses can play.

In this report we identify the business case for companies to develop more 'age friendly' ways of working and to do more to support older people's participation in the local community. We recommend that companies embed community engagement into their business models and thereby benefit commercially, while also increasing their positive social impact.

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