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REVIEW OF THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE IN DAREBIN

Prepared by

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Contents

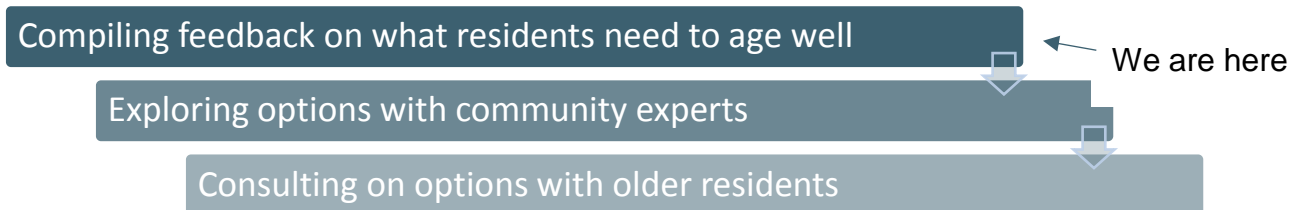
A review of the needs of older people in Darebin	4
The principles of our review.....	4
The changing way we age.....	5
Box 1. What Council does to support ageing well	5
Box 2. How the aged care system is changing.....	6
Our findings	8
1. Helping older people stay connected should be at the heart of everything we do	9
2. New approaches could provide more assistance to help older people live independently at home	10
3. “Brokers” could help older people get the information they need as their circumstances change.....	12
4. We have an important role in helping older residents be healthy and active safely	13
5. We should support initiatives that allow older people to have a sense of purpose, and feel valued in the community	14
6. Some residents are vulnerable and need additional support.....	14
Next steps	15
References	16

A review of the needs of older people in Darebin

This report looks at what our older residents have told us they need to age well in Darebin. It has been compiled of the results from 720 surveys¹, two public information sessions, and six in depth focus groups with English, Greek, Italian and Chinese speakers, and carers, and clients of Council services. The results were then reviewed by a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers.

Aged care specialists have argued our aged care system is increasingly mismatched, inflexible and out-of-step with the new reality of expanding lifespans and the changing needs of our older populations (Edgar et al 2017, NESTA 2013). In addition, the Commonwealth Government is making sweeping changes to the aged care system that will have implications for some services Darebin City Council currently provides (Box 2).

This report is using the opportunity of change to review the way we support our older community to ensure we are best meeting their needs. This report, the first part of our review, describes older resident's needs and ideas about what would help them age well in Darebin. It will be used to inform discussions about solutions with stakeholders and community experts. The stages of our review are:



The principles of our review

Our review is framed by the following principles. We aim to:

- » **improve outcomes for older residents**, ensuring more, and changing, needs are met
- » **talk to residents to establish their needs** before seeking other input
- » **consider needs holistically** rather than focusing on areas in isolation
- » **ensure equitable access to services**, reducing barriers created by affordability or language, or for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with disabilities
- » **think about community building in everything we do**, by encouraging activities that foster community engagement and intergenerational and other forms of cooperation, and
- » **examine modern ways of delivering public services.**

Any options we consider in the future will be tested against these principles.

¹ Overrepresented in the surveys were women (75%), older ages (68% aged over 70, 26% aged 50 – 69), areas with the largest number of older residents (39% Reservoir and 21% Preston), English speakers at home (62%), Council clients (57%), and carers (27%). 38% of respondents spoke one of 33 different languages other than English at home (including Auslan), with the main ones being Italian (114), Greek (35), Chinese/Mandarin/Cantonese (29) and Macedonian (9).

The changing way we age

The way people live in older age is changing. We live thirty years longer than people did a century ago and older age in Australia is now characterised by an active life, continued education or work, the pursuit of hobbies, and lively social networks (Edgar et al 2017).

Older people are now also living independently, outside of extended families, with fewer in institutional care (Edgar et al 2017). In Darebin in 2016, of the 20 291 residents aged over 65:

- » 35% were in a couple living alone
- » 26% were living in a single person household
- » 21% were couples or singles with children still at home
- » 4% were living with other family members or other families
- » >1% were living in institutional care (ABS 2017).

Our older population over the age of 65 is diverse and their diversity is changing over time. In 2016:

- » 61% were born overseas in 48 different countries, the most common being Italy, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, England and Lebanon. But new ethnic cohorts are emerging, notably Asian, reflecting waves of migration to Australia
- » 0.3 % were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- » 35% did not own their house outright and 12% were renting
- » 8% were employed or looking for paid work (ABS 2017).

Box 1. What Council does to support ageing well

Darebin City Council provides a range of services for older residents – and our survey showed they are all important to them. Our work includes:

- » **Home support** including home cleaning, personal care, meals, home maintenance, and respite care. Council is one provider, alongside not-for-profit organisations and private agencies
- » **Community transport**
- » **Facilities and programs** to help older people age well including community houses, senior citizen's clubs, subsidized exercise programs and social activities
- » **Maintaining age friendly built environments**
- » **Information to help people make decisions**
- » **Subsidized rates and solar power** to reduce older people's cost of living
- » **Advocating for older people** to other levels of government on issues from inclusion (age/gender/ethnicity/sexuality), to transport access, to concessions, to the aged care system.

Note: Council does not provide services to residents with complex or high support needs.

Box 2. How the aged care system is changing

The MyAgedCare system was introduced in 2013

Aged care changed in 2013 when the Commonwealth Government introduced the MyAgedCare system. It provides three types of individually tailored care packages: basic home support services for people with low level needs; home care for those with higher needs; and institutional residential care. Council is one of many providers that deliver basic home support services for people with low level needs.

People who want support contact MyAgedCare (by phone or website) to book an assessment to discuss services including transport, domestic help, personal care, home maintenance, home modifications, aids and equipment, meals, nursing and allied health, social support and respite.

A support plan is established and the consumer can choose their providers through the MyAgedCare website, which lists all service providers in an area. The provider charges the Commonwealth Government for the service and also charges the client a small top up contribution.



The way services are funded will change in 2020

In 2020 the second wave of reform will see the funding of services change. Currently the Commonwealth Government funds services directly including \$5.8M to Council for basic home support services. Other income includes \$2.2M from State government, and small client fees payments (all figures at 2016-17). Council has historically contributed significantly to the Aged and Disability budget to subsidise costs.

The Commonwealth Government may change this arrangement to instead hold the funds on behalf of individuals to pay for a service only after it has been delivered.

This change will mean Councils will compete for clients in a rapidly expanding open market – home support work was one of the largest growing types of work in the 2016 Census (ABS 2017).

Challenges for Council

Council will face a number of challenges providing price competitive home support services in the new funding environment due to:

- » **the higher costs of Council services from other agencies** (from higher salaries and larger overheads), which will increase Council's subsidy expenditure. State government rate-capping means Councils cannot increase revenue to cover this and would have to reduce other services.
- » **the greater ability of other, particularly smaller, services to be flexible and tailor supports** to meet the diverse needs of clients, families and carers. Novel tasks can be done more easily by others unless Council EBA agreements are changed.
- » **the requirement for Councils to maintain "competitive neutrality"** – i.e. not use its status or assets (including subsidies) to obtain a competitive advantage, or distort a market, in an open market situation – under the *Local Government Act*.

Use of Council aged care services is already in decline. As will be seen in this report, for some of those services, like transport and home maintenance, it may be because of growing expectations to find these services from private providers, like taxis or local tradespeople.

Residents have concerns about the MyAgedCare system

Some of our residents have reported very positive experiences with MyAgedCare but focus groups revealed concerns:

- » **Many older people are not aware of how MyAgedCare works**, despite it being introduced in 2013. They do not feel they are being given "the nitty gritty" on the system and some of our non-English speaking populations are not informed at all.
- » **Some clients feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the changes** and feel being given a choice is disingenuous when they do not have information.
- » **Some clients report "significant paperwork"** because the system is not joined up across different parts of government (MyAgedCare, Centrelink, concessions, etc).
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers reported **there is an issue getting some older people to make the first contact** by phone or website.
- » **There are gaps in the system that concern older people** particularly around smaller emergencies or short-term changes in circumstances. Clients reported ten week waits for MyAgedCare assessment and were concerned assessment teams/website would not have the knowledge to help them find local services they could trust.
- » **There is a fear the new system will ultimately decrease services or the quality of services.**

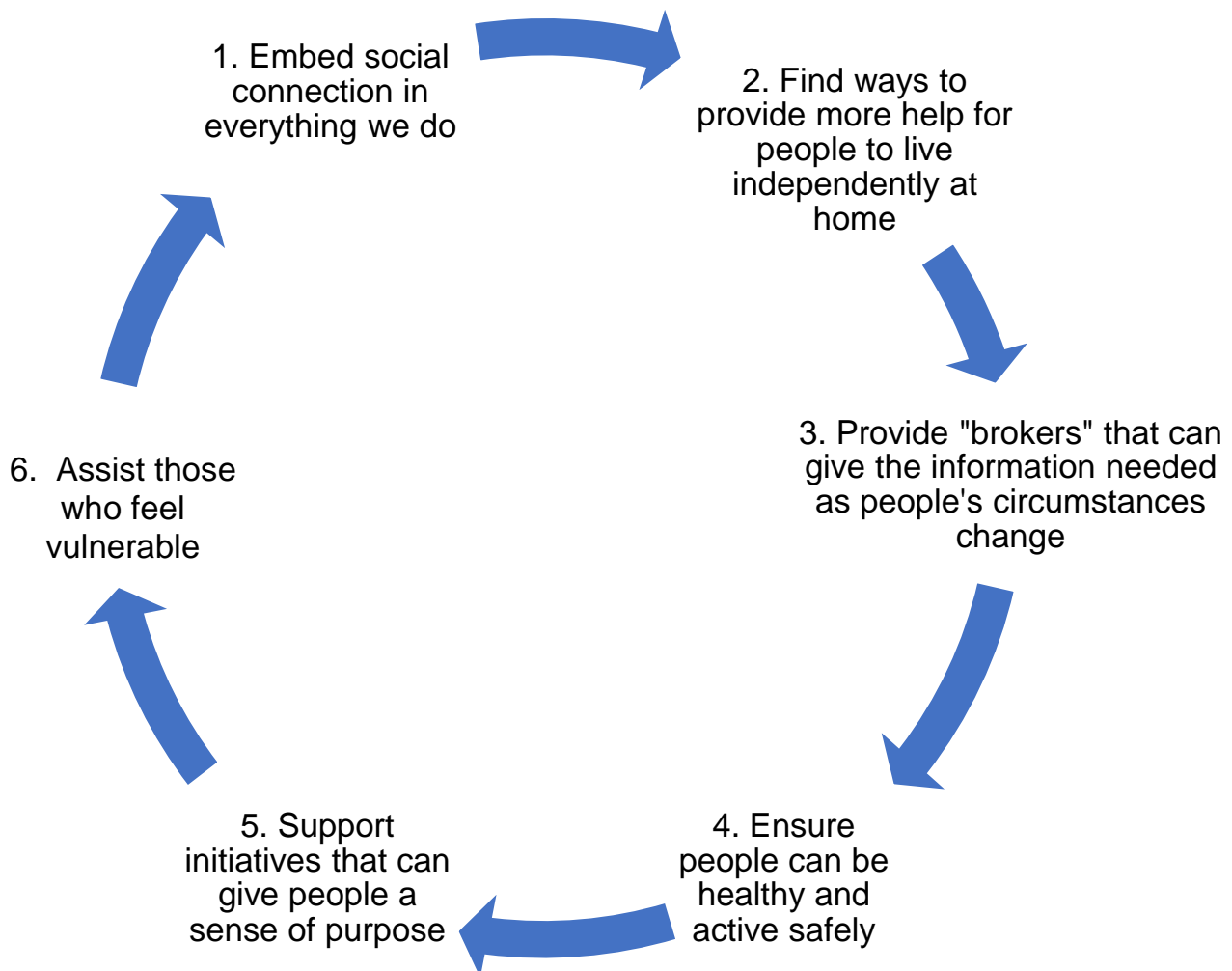
Older people are living through significant technological, economic and social policy change. Things they expected – like being supported through the tax of others – have changed. Change is leaving them feeling isolated and fearful and we need to keep this in mind in considering our work and communication.

Our findings

Our research identified six themes for ageing well in Darebin that Council should consider. These are summarized in the diagram below and detailed in the following sections.

The solutions above are interrelated. Older people have an appetite for new approaches, particularly if they increase social connection, meet certain standards, and if their access to services overall is enhanced and not reduced.

Older residents want us to ...



1. Helping older people **stay connected** should be at the heart of everything we do

The strongest theme to emerge from our consultation was that older people are fearful of becoming socially isolated and lonely. Like everyone, they want to:

- » be able to participate in everyday activities, like shopping
- » have social connections, a fun social calendar, and be part of community activities
- » keep up to date with the digital world to stay connected.

Older people in Darebin worry that if they don't have family around, don't speak English well, or particularly lose their mobility or ability to drive, they will become isolated. They also worry that changing neighbourhoods mean we are all less connected, leaving them with less opportunity to know a range of people that can keep an eye on them and help with small favours when needed.

I am 89. I like to get out. I do not want to be isolated.

I wish there was someone who could drop in occasionally and see how I am doing.

There are no friends/neighbours left to rely on, due to development with triple double story buildings. There is no one you can call on for help if required.

Older people told us social connection should be at the heart of everything Council does – every service, strategy, neighbourhood design, and even home support. Ideas included (in order of mentions):

- » Increasing subsidised social groups, clubs, activities, grandparents-with-children play groups, outings, events and cultural festivals, including for different language groups: sometimes for older people but more often mixed ages, and particularly through local facilities such as community centres, neighbourhood houses, libraries.
- » Supporting and promoting community programs that help older people: share their homes, stay digitally connected; find volunteers for outings, take group English classes, or keep pets.
- » Supporting initiatives that create more “neighbourly neighbourhoods” by supporting the administrators of neighbourhood or street groups (including email/facebook groups), street parties, shared platforms, seniors neighborhood watch, etc, and reducing the red tape that prevents them organizing social activities easily.
- » Designing public spaces for connection: lower fences, more meeting places with seats, opportunities for neighbours to bump into each other in new developments.
- » Ensuring every home service leaves a calendar of events with the client.

Council can help by building sharing communities. Neighbours can look after each other rather than rely on Council and other services.

I need help to manage device, social media and NBN challenges so I can keep connected.

2. New approaches could provide more assistance to help older people **live independently at home**

Older people want as much help as possible to stay living independently in their own homes, but they insist they are not all the same, and not everyone wants the same thing. What people want also changes across different population cohorts, including language groups, and as circumstances change (for example, when a spouse dies who managed all the home maintenance or cooking). Additionally, older people pointed out that there is a gap in being able to get services quickly when smaller things go wrong.

The services older people reported would help them stay independent in their homes were (in order of mentions):

- » **Home support** – cleaning, home help, shopping; meals, personal care (feeding, bathing), subsidized home modification and aides
- » **Transport** –public, taxis/Uber, community
- » **Home maintenance and gardening**
- » **Other assistance:** help with digital devices, changing lightbulbs and smoke alarms, putting out the rubbish bins, pets, picking up medicine, finances/banking/paying bills, spring cleaning, supporting carers, someone to check in on them, etc.

Ageing well ... means feeling confident you will get the support to stay in your own home, whatever may be the needs

Any service the community can offer to help people age gracefully is welcome. I don't care who provides assistance, as long as I can stay in my home

I don't want to be at the mercy of private providers whose duty is to shareholders not the community

Who older people would prefer provided services is complicated. They like Council services because they trust Council to vet employees. Some felt government provision was politically important. Some of the language groups felt that because they had paid rates for a long time they were owed service. Others wanted choice and like the services provided by not-for-profits. Some services, like transport and home maintenance, people preferred, or perhaps expected, to get from the private sector but they want these services vetted. Many older people, particularly clients, also like the idea of new approaches if they can deliver more social connection, in particular linking them to local networks they could know and trust.

Their preferences and suggestions for improving service provision included:

Home support

Older people trust the home support from Council but a significant proportion of clients report issues including the lack of continuity of staff, waiting around for services, not enough service, cleaning poorly done, meals not being suitable, or lack of flexibility (like getting something heavy moved).

Clients prefer Council services because they vet employees. Older people fear privatisation will leave them in the hands of unscrupulous operators and drive down the quality of the service and

staff conditions. But with deliberation, older people thought there was little pressure in the current system to improve quality and didn't mind who delivers services provided the following criteria are met:

- » The service must be **trustworthy** – they are concerned about letting strangers into their homes and of being scammed by unscrupulous providers.
- » The organisation providing services must **not be driven solely by profit** and have **values** of integrity, respect, and interest in older people. They should be a registered business or not-for-profit and staff should have good pay and conditions.
- » They wanted the **same person to turn up** each week so they can build a personal relationship with them. Some would prefer a local person, who knew the local area and community. For the Greek and Italian speakers, this included someone who spoke the language.
- » They want **services vetted** by someone they trust.

Chinese speaking residents would prefer Council found a way to encourage their children to assist them.

Transport

Use of the Council transport service is declining and it does not appear to be a particular preference for most older people. They like the control and flexibility of taxi's, and two mentioned how concessions with Uber (or a community version) would allow them to build a relationship with a local (which taxis do not).

Home maintenance and gardening

Older people generally expected to use local businesses for home maintenance, but don't know how to find reliable tradespeople, and would like them vetted by someone they trust. For some an out of the ordinary maintenance request, like the need to trim trees from power lines, can cause anxiety about finding services and assessing cost. For others there are issues with tasks too small for a tradesperson, like changing light bulbs or smoke alarm batteries. They were interested in whether other ideas involving the community, such as established gardening groups or men's sheds, could work.

[We need] ... a Council vetted/endorsed grey army. I don't expect it to be free but honest, reliable and affordable for pensioners. Like the RACV

The fire brigade used to go around and change everyone's smoke alarm batteries once a year. I wonder if Men's Shed or someone could do something like that

We need a "Trip Advisor" type site for local businesses where we can rate them and share information

Other forms of assistance

Older people identified a range of other needs they have for assistance that they would prefer were delivered through the community. The Chinese speaking focus group suggested finding a way for seniors to help each other – gaining credits they could then use for times they needed help. A similar scheme of "time banking" is running in Japan, England and Canada and is discussed at the end of this report.

Could seniors provide services to other seniors? They could get credits for services for when they need them

3. “Brokers” could help older people get the **information** they need as their circumstances change

The third strongest theme through the survey and focus groups was the need for older people to stay up to date with information as their needs change. They do not feel informed. They do not feel the channels for communicating what is on offer are effective, particularly for people with little spoken or written English.

We need a way to find out about the system and what's out there for us

They want to be communicated with, so they can hear about social activities, concessions, services, and other things that might solve challenges as they arise (digital, home share, pets, Centrelink issues, help with paperwork, finding large print books, etc). Time was spent in the client's focus group sharing the details of local transport, plumbers, and events. It was clear information was very valuable.

Older people also talked a great deal about needing a trusted person/advocate who knows them as their needs change, preferably who they could speak to face-to-face, who could:

- » provide reliable information about the aged care system and advocate for them where necessary.
- » link them to (preferably local) services, tradespeople, professional experts (finance, legal), activities, information, available help.
- » vet tradespeople and other help.
- » be a source of advice when something unexpected happened.

Ageing well ... depends on knowing what is on offer, our needs change so QUICKLY

I need help with “service isolation” and someone I could go to when problems arise

Council should be focused on access and social strategies. Other organisations can provide services

Their ideas for a service to bridge this gap included case workers, brokers, one stop shops, a hot line, help cafes in the libraries and community centres, a “concierge” service, a Mr Whippy Van (with travelling information), shop front pop-ups, visits to seniors clubs meetings, small group talks about available services, a debrief service for carers.

For some, this service would be more welcome from Council than direct provision of home support. They felt it could also register systemic issues, advocate for change, and find ways to apply pressure in the aged care system to weed out poor service and promote good providers (for example, the “Trip Advisor” type site mentioned in the last section).

I would have an ENGAGED support worker, who got to know me well, to advocate for me with respect to my wishes and needs

There needs to be advocates to help the elderly look after themselves in the home ... stand up for their rights

4. We have an important role in helping older residents be **healthy and active safely**

Older people want to maintain the best possible physical and mental health. They want activities that can keep them active and healthy. Walking was reported as an important activity for ageing well, and many survey respondents also wanted subsidised exercise classes.

Anything that helps us stay moving is valuable

I keep walking to maintain my independence, and keep my brain active to keep my dignity

If you don't have health and wellness you don't have social engagement and physical activity – a very important combination

A significant theme of both the survey and the focus groups related to the importance of being able to walk, and to a lesser extent cycle, around the community safely. Older people reported they were fearful of tripping and falling, being harried by others, and could be frightened crossing roads. They also reported that many places they need to go (train stations, Preston market, supermarkets) are now surrounded by car parks, which are hard to navigate.

The services they reported they needed to stay safe when mobile included (in order of mentions):

- » Clean, clear footpaths, tripping hazards (such as cracks) minimised.
- » More shaded seating and water fountains along pathways, Darebin Creek, playgrounds and other areas so they can walk further.
- » Bikes separated from traffic, walkers separated from bikes.
- » Age friendly street crossings.
- » More disabled parking spots, longer stay parking at rail stations during the day.
- » Help to assess what their houses need for safety in extreme temperature events.
- » More accessible facilities, including disability access at Edwardes Lake.

We need flat, clean, clear pavements so we can walk easily

I want to safely access buildings, institutions and shopping centres as a pedestrian. They all have 'moats' of cars and buses

5. We should support initiatives that allow older people to have a **sense of purpose**, and feel valued in the community

A significant number of older people in the survey and focus groups mentioned they would like to have a purpose and still feel useful in the community. They felt they were still able to contribute through volunteering, mentoring, particularly young people, or involvement in Council decision-making. Many did not know how to get involved or what was on offer.

The focus groups were warmly received, with people welcoming the chance to have a say, they could be a model for community engagement around decision-making going forward.

Ageing well ... would look like staying connected, knowing that I can be a useful part of my local community

The biggest challenge is being treated as if I have nothing to offer and my life is over because I've arrived at a certain number

I'd like to feel that I have something to offer the community and that the offering is valued

People like to feel needed and when you are past making money, you still want to contribute and interact

6. Some residents are vulnerable and need additional support

Some older people report feeling particularly vulnerable including those who:

- **are isolated** because they speak a language other than English at home, are homebound by disability, or who don't have close friends or family (particularly children), or can no longer drive.
- **lack economic resources and worry they may not be able to afford living in Darebin.** This includes residents on pensions and renters. For these residents, subsidies, concessions, help paying bills and other transfers that allow small budgets to stretch were requested.
- **feel they might be discriminated against** because of sexuality.

Older residents not in these situations were very concerned about welfare of those that were. They were keen to impress on us that no one should fall through the cracks.

Council needs to understand the needs and context of the diverse older community well to be flexible enough to address vulnerability. Older people felt assumptions were made about what different groups need that weren't always correct. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers talked in depth about Council needing ways to better explore issues for different groups – understanding that even in a like population group, people's needs, interests and desires to be involved will be very different – and it will therefore need a way to identify what works well in the community and give those activities a little resource support.

Go to the pokies venues during the day and you'll find a whole lot of lonely older people

Ageing well would mean living without the constant worry of not being able to support myself financially

I worry I will not be able to live in Darebin on a pension

Next steps

Council will now work with stakeholders and experts to consider how to best address the needs of our diverse and changing older population and examine the following questions:

1. How can Council make sure that opportunities for **social connection** are built into its work?

How can we encourage or facilitate neighbourliness?

***Idea: Sustainability Street** is an organised street of neighbours in Northcote, that as a by product of organising into a network, look after older people, keeping an eye on them and cooking meals.*

***Idea: South Australia's Meals with Mates** is a series of gatherings of like-minded older people with a shared interest, hosted in an older person's home, local pub or restaurant. Local convenors (volunteers) find hosts, and connect older people with similar interests to form new gatherings. <http://greatliving.tacsi.org.au> (NESTA 2013)*

How can we support community organisations that can give older people a **sense of purpose**?

***Idea: Repair Cafés** are free meeting places where the community repairs things together. Residents with tools, materials and expertise help repair, or teach others how to repair, clothing, furniture, appliances, bicycles, crockery, toys, etc. If you have nothing to repair, you can enjoy a cup of tea or lend a hand with someone else's repair job.*

2. What can we do to ensure better **help to live independently** in the new funding system?

Should Council continue to provide all its services? And if so, what should we trade off to cover the need for bigger subsidies?

Could we trigger the development of a community type Uber/Shebah (taxi) service for transport?

Should Council divest any of its services to a not-for-profit, social enterprise, employee cooperative or public sector mutual? If so, what should be the conditions of that divestment?

***Idea: Sunderland Home Care Associates** is a cooperative providing social care in the UK. Employees own a share of the business making them strive for high quality client service. Profits are spent on better service or rewarding staff. The company has 450 staff and an annual turnover of £5m and is now diversifying – working with the local council to provide a “café in the park” that hires people with learning difficulties who also have a share in the company (Guardian 2013).*

Are there other ideas for providing the smaller forms of assistance not covered by Council's services?

***Idea: The UK Care4Care** is a time banking scheme which encourages neighbours to care for older people in their community, in exchange for a time credit. A community co-ordinator matches volunteers with older people's requests for support. Each hour of volunteering gives a time credit that can be 'banked' for their own care in the future, or exchanged for care of a family member or relative. www.care4care.org (NESTA 2013)*

3. Should Council provide a “broker” service to provide older people with **information** as their needs change?
4. How could we improve our community so older people can remain **healthy and active** safely?

***Idea: Darebin Council** used to wait for complaints before undertaking action on footpath issues but now it undertake a proactive a six monthly footpath audit. This is a good starting point for considering a broader issues audit.*

5. How do we have to address **those feeling vulnerable** because of isolation, affordability or language or literacy barrier across the areas above?

Can Council reverse my age and make me 25 again!!!

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