Whilst there are continuing strains in the delivery of services for older people, and a very uncertain future in the coming months ahead, this issue nevertheless provides cautious optimism in some areas whilst highlighting the need for change in others.

There is a very practical focus to the two papers looking at how to make environments “dementia friendly”. Both illustrate practical approaches to addressing the social barriers to the inclusion of people with dementia within communities.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation was at the forefront of the “dementia friendly” movement. Hare analyses their major programme of work (“Dementia without Walls”). She reviews a wide range of activity, from research, think pieces, case studies and evaluation through to good practice guides and examples of how communities have tried to overcome social barriers through attitudinal and environmental change.

Whilst dementia has a high profile in health and social care, is the same true for housing? Bligh reports on a very interesting project that a major housing provider undertook to examine its offer to people living with dementia in their housing. The project explored the practical steps that could be taken to move towards more dementia friendly housing provision.

The implementation of two important pieces of social care legislation, the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and the Care Act, come under scrutiny and analysis in two papers. Both highlight areas of concern and the need for change in implementation practice.

Graham explores the consequences for older people’s well-being of the implementation of the MCA. Through an analysis of court of protection judgements and other research the paper concludes that, despite the intention of the legislation to promote choice and control and service user rights, there is paradoxical evidence that the MCA is increasingly being used instead as a safeguarding tool, constraining older people’s rights and encouraging risk averse practice. Mangano looks at the implementation of an aspect of the Care Act and reviews family carers’ experiences of self-funded care. The paper highlights some of the implementation issues that local authorities encounter in their offer to those purchasing their own social care.

Incorporating the views of older people is vital to securing the sort of policies and practices that are appropriate for our ageing society. Manthorpe looks at the involvement of older people in policy development through a review of the literature on older people’s forums in the UK. Three key features are investigated – membership, structures and effectiveness. The paper sheds important light on the operation of these fora and raises queries about the need to widen participation and to look at the resources required to enable them to be effective in influencing policy and practice.

Brookes looks at the views of users in a more discrete area of service delivery, the Shared Lives model. The paper reports on an interesting piece of survey research of the views of actual service users and provides a useful contribution to the literature regarding older adults’ views of family based support in the community.