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The logo for The Centre for Social Justice, featuring the text 'THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE' in white, uppercase letters on a dark red rectangular background.

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
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Iain Duncan Smith draws up blueprint to boost care for the elderly

Radical plans to tackle the challenges posed by Britain's rapidly ageing population are being drawn up by a leading centre-right think-tank.

Proposals to tackle poverty and social isolation, improve often lamentable standards of care for the very old, and find ways of ensuring that older people have the chance to play an active part in society are on the agenda for a review to be conducted by the Centre for Social Justice, which is chaired by Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative Party leader.

In an initial briefing note, the CSJ warns that Britain is facing a demographic timebomb over the next 20 years, which will place further strain on cash-strapped public services.

It reports that the fastest growing age group in the country is the over-80s, which now make up 4.5 per cent of the population or 2.75 million. This has increased from 2.8 per cent or 1.57 million over the past 25 years.

The numbers of pensioners are around 11 million or 19 per cent of the population. This is expected to increase to 15 million in 20 years.

The briefing also highlights alarming levels of poverty among the elderly. Some 2.5 million pensioners are living below the poverty line and nearly a quarter of single female pensioners have no savings at all – compared with one fifth of single male pensioners.

Caring for the very old will place huge extra demands on both individuals and the state. Experts have identified a £6 billion funding gap in elder care opening up over the next 20 years. One in five people will need care in their old age.

Social isolation is another big problem facing the old. One study found that 70 per cent of women over the age of 85 live alone and the majority of them regard television as their primary source of companionship.

Mr Duncan Smith commented: "Our ageing population presents us with huge challenges. We are all familiar with the plight of elderly people forced to sell their homes to pay for long-term residential care. This is one problem that must be addressed.

"But there are deeper issues at stake here. Family breakdown and the growing trend for children to move far from home when they reach adulthood mean that it is often not practicable for them to care for their parents in old age.

"Nor do we respect the elderly as previous generations once did. Old people are seen as a burden these days rather than as a source of accumulated wisdom and skills. Our attitudes towards the elderly need to change as well as our provision of material support."

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain.

Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system and family law. Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.