Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon age-friendly strategy and action plan

2022 - 2025

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Why an age-friendly strategy and action plan?

An age-friendly community is one in which people of all ages can live healthy and active lives and where everyone is treated with respect, regardless of their age.

As we all live longer, there are huge opportunities to create vibrant communities, develop life-long interests and aspirations and support diversity. After all, streets that are good for walking aids are good for prams and buggies.

But we need to be prepared to manage the challenges and unlock the potential of our ageing population. We need to help people stay connected, healthy and independent and provide choice, dignity and support for those who can no longer look after themselves.

Being age friendly is not a defined state, and it doesn't have an end point. Rather, it is a journey along which we will continue to adapt to support the health and wellbeing of older people.[i] However, there is a process and structure to becoming age friendly. According to the World Health Organisation, an age-friendly place must:

- Establish mechanisms to involve older people throughout the age-friendly process
- Develop a baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the area under eight domains or areas
- Develop a three-year action plan
- Identify measurements to monitor progress against the plan

The eight age-friendly themes are:

- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services
- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing

The following strategy and action plan has been developed by the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Age-friendly Alliance, following extensive consultation with people aged 50 and over living in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon borough, and aims to benefit everyone living, working and visiting the area as they grow older.

Who we are: The Age-friendly Alliance

Creating age-friendly communities involves older residents, local groups, councils, and businesses working together.

In the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon borough, there is an Age-friendly Alliance of partners from different sectors with different expertise including older people's representatives, charities and community groups and statutory agencies. It is likely the Alliance will continue to grow as more organisations see the value of working together to make life better for older people.

The work of the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Age-friendly Alliance is funded through the Public Health Agency, along with an Age-friendly Officer who is based in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

How we worked together to develop this strategy and action plan

During mid –late 2021 we carried out research into all eight age-friendly themes. This included:

- a detailed survey of 593 people
- one-to-one guided conversations
- focus groups

People we spoke to included a good range of people living in the city, towns, villages and countryside; people living alone, with family or in residential care; and people of different ages, from their early fifties to their late nineties.

We also carried out desktop research into what has worked well in age-friendly communities and asked our Age-friendly Alliance partners to share good examples of their work and of work they have come across elsewhere.

The Age-friendly Alliance came together during four workshops to reflect on this evidence. As we learned what matters most to local people or where they would like to see greatest improvement, we drafted, tested and refined the vision, cross-cutting themes, outcomes and actions.

What it's like to grow older around here

More people are living longer. The average man living in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area is now expected to live to 79 and a half years and the average women, 83.1 years.[ii]

Two in every 10 people here are aged 60 and over. Two in every 100 are aged 85 and over. [iii] And the number of people aged 60 and over is expected to rise threefold by 2043 – from 44,971 to 70,257 by 2043.[iv]

Why it is a good place to grow older

We surveyed 593 people aged 50 and over living in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area.[v] People told us that the best thing about where they live is the support they receive from their community. This strong sense of community spirit became even more important and even stronger during the pandemic as people pulled together to look after each other.

Older people also give back generously. Nearly half of the people we surveyed told us that they volunteered,[vi] and 4 in 10 have cared for a loved one, friend or neighbour.

There are relatively few crimes against older people in the borough,[vii] and more than three quarters of people we surveyed feel safe in their local area.

Nearly two-thirds of the people we surveyed agreed that they have good quality, affordable internet, and there has been a big increase in use of the internet among older people.[viii]

What matters most to people here as they grow older

Social participation

Participation in culture, arts and sport tends to decrease with age: 73 per cent of people aged 65 and over took part in 2020/21 compared to 96 per cent of those aged 25 to 34.[ix] But people we surveyed told us they wanted more and a greater variety of things to do. They also felt that activity that is already happening could be promoted better.

Health

In the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area, people aged 50 and over may be less likely to rate their health as good or very good than the population in general.[x] They also ranked their life satisfaction now as 7.1 out of 10 compared to 7.9 for the whole Northern Ireland population in 2019/20.[xi] This is likely to be at least in part because of Covid-19.

Loneliness and isolation were already issues, but they were made worse by the pandemic. Nearly a third of people we surveyed told us that they often felt lonely, and half told us they sometimes felt lonely.

Housing

Most people we spoke to could afford to keep their home warm and pay their household bills.[xii] But housing was a major concern, particularly among those planning for or recently retired. Homes may be too large, have stairs or not be easily adaptable for future needs. Others wanted to understand their long-term care options so they could plan for later life.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

Many people we spoke to felt that the public realm was not accessible as they grew older. They would like to see pavements better maintained to prevent slips, trips and falls; more road crossings; and more seating and public toilets.

Transport

Most older people still drive, and they worry that they will lose their independence if they have to stop. 43 per cent had never used public transport, although others recognised it as a lifeline to help them stay connected.[xiii]

Information and inclusion

Just over half the people we surveyed don't know or aren't sure where to go to get advice about their rights. Just over a third don't find that information they get from the council and other government organisations is easy to understand. And only 16 per cent of respondents felt that their opinion is valued by government.

Older people have a wealth of experience and expertise to offer, and they want to be engaged more in decision making – by government, the health service and others – so that policies and services make a real difference in their lives.

Strategic context

The Age-friendly strategy and action plan needs to connect with other strategies and policies so that it is supported by a wide range of organisations and that they consider the needs and wants of older people in everything they do.

To develop this Age-friendly strategy and action plan, we reviewed key strategies which relate to the eight age-friendly domains. These are considered in more detail in appendix 2. Of particular importance are the Department for Communities' Active Ageing Strategy 2016–22 and Connected – A Community Plan for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2017–30.

Active Ageing Strategy 2016–22

"Our vision is one of Northern Ireland being an age friendly region in which people, as they grow older, are valued and supported to live actively to their fullest potential; with their rights respected and their dignity protected."

This strategy aims to increase understanding of the issues affecting older people and promote and emphasise their rights, value and contribution.

The outcomes of the strategy are informed by the five themes of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons:

1. Independence
2. Participation
3. Care
4. Self-fulfilment
5. Dignity

Connected – A Community Plan for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2017–30

The community planning partnership is a strategic partnership of statutory organisations which also includes members of the Age-friendly Alliance. It sets the priorities for collaborative working in the borough, one of which is development of an Age-friendly strategy and action plan. The themes and outcomes of the community plan aim to improve the quality of life of all residents.

The vision for 2030 is:

"We have a happy, healthy and connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places for living, working and learning."

Relevant age-friendly priorities

- Community – we live in a caring and safe borough where people lead healthy, fulfilling lives and take pride in shaping, nurturing and enriching community life.

- Confident community – everyone has opportunities to engage in community life and shape decisions – we have a strong sense of community belonging and take pride in our area
- Healthy community – people are making positive lifestyle choices. They are more resilient and better equipped to cope with life's challenges.
- Welcoming community – our borough is a safe, respectful and peaceful environment.
- Place – the borough is a place of discovery, where unique cultural and natural assets are cherished and people are inspired to be creative, to grow and to flourish.
- Creative place – our borough is an inspirational and creative place offering quality, inclusive arts and cultural experiences.

Vision

People in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area are valued regardless of age and are supported to age well and with confidence

Cross-cutting themes

Everything that we do will be underpinned by four cross-cutting themes.

Inclusive and accessible

We are all growing older, but for some people, this will be more challenging. We will consider the different wants, needs and abilities of all our residents as they get older. And we will take practical steps to ensure that those most at risk of missing out can benefit as fully as possible.

Collaborative

Age-friendly is about partnership or working better together. We will pool the collective influence, resources and expertise of the Age-friendly Alliance so that our work has a bigger impact for the people we want to benefit.

Proactive

We will work together to identify new issues – and opportunities – and seek to come up with solutions. We will also seek to influence regional strategy and decision makers.

Meaningful engagement

The Age-friendly strategy and action plan is based on what local people told us matters most in their lives. We are committed to continuing to engage with people in a meaningful way so that what they say helps shape how we deliver the actions in this action plan.

Outcomes - the high level changes which the programme aims to achieve

As people told us what mattered most in their lives or where they would like to see greater improvement, we developed five outcomes and supporting actions.

In the short term, these will support the age-friendly themes of

- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Community support and health services
- Communications and information

In the long term, these will also build foundations to make changes to support

- Transportation
- Housing
- Civic participation and employment

Outcomes	How the Age Friendly Alliance might achieve this
Outcome 1: As we get older, we enjoy good physical and mental health	Scope and collaborate to promote physical activity
	Scope and collaborate to promote good mental health and wellbeing
	Promote opportunities among Alliance members and allied organisations for accessing funds, training and support to deliver projects and activities which meet the needs of older people
Outcome 2: As we get older, we participate meaningfully in community life	Map existing services and activities (by WHO age-friendly domains) and Co-design a mechanism/s to publish and maintain the information, learning from other areas' experiences.
	Identify gaps in activities, services and communication channels and work together to improve
	Establish a sustainable network of providers and community navigators, social prescribers and similar individuals to enable referrals and partnership working in the delivery of a range of services.
	Work to ensure that individuals know where to go to get advice, and information on social activities and training and learning opportunities
	Support and promote the work of the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Loneliness Network, to encourage people to connect with each other
	Support and promote the work of the ABC Intergenerational Network to help increase capacity and raise awareness of the benefits of intergenerational practice
	Promote dementia-awareness training for all front-of-house staff in Alliance partners
	Build understanding and commitment to provide age-friendly environments and services among service providers such as banks, dentists and shops.

	Build understanding and commitment among care homes and their local communities to enable residents to continue to participate in community life
Outcome 3: As we get older, we are heard, valued and respected	Identify and apply suitable good practice guidelines for engagement of older people to ensure they are enabled to influence decision making and to receive feedback on their contributions.
	Connect older people to influencing structures they can join and the decisions they can influence, eg. Older Peoples Networks, Patient & Client Council, Pensioners Parliament
	Consider use of Participatory Budgeting initiative to support engagement activities
	Carry out an age-friendly survey every 3 years and share results widely including with targeted dissemination for older residents
	Explore options for a process to enable people over 50 to be engaged in dialogue and consulted on plans, policies and strategies that affect them
	Ensure that the needs and aspirations of older people are consistently considered by identifying (and training where appropriate) champions for older people
	Secure commitment of Alliance partners to define methods to assess the age-friendliness of their facilities, public spaces such as parks, town centres and community and leisure centres. Where appropriate, work in partnership to take action to address issues.
	Support and build capacity of ABC Seniors Network to help the group represent the voice of older people in the Borough.
Outcome 4: As we get older, we are independent and involved in decisions that affect us	Connect older people to services that will enable them to live independently for longer in their own homes
	Connect older people to NIHE and Housing Associations to influence the development of appropriate housing options for different ages and needs
	Explore partnership initiatives to expose and support older people to access public and community transport
	Connect older people and prospective volunteers to training and support to improve digital inclusion of older people
Outcome 5: As we get older, we are well informed about things that matter to us	Agree a communications plan for Age-friendly Alliance members and supporters to publicly demonstrate their commitment to age friendly and to enable promotion of actions under outcomes 1 to 4
	Develop a mechanism to access a variety of communications platforms to disseminate agreed health and wellbeing and other relevant messages on behalf of the Age-friendly Alliance
	Develop a communications campaign which challenges the stereotypes of growing older

How we will work together to deliver the action plan

Delivery

The Age-friendly Alliance will provide strategic direction and leadership in the delivery of the action plan.

It will be the role of key partners to lead on and take responsibility for the delivery of specific allocated actions. A number of partners have signed up to help deliver particular actions. They will work together with other Alliance partners to further develop joined-up delivery plans. These will be built on:

- what older people told us are their wants and needs
- their own experience of what works as experts in their field
- knowledge and awareness of what else is happening to avoid duplication
- learning from good practice from elsewhere

The Alliance will meet four times a year to feedback on actions and activities, to discuss progress and review action plans as needs evolve.

It is not in the power of the Alliance to deliver on everything that older people need. For example, during the consultation, we heard access to primary care services, such as GPs, is a big issue. However, the Alliance can share its findings and work together to and lobby other organisations and decision makers.

In many cases within the action plan, implementation will be dependent on the availability of resources. Whilst these are scarce, it is acknowledged that partnership working and pooling resources can bring greater value to existing budgets.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

An Outcomes-based approach is increasingly being used through Community Planning partnerships as a method to monitor and evaluate the results of actions and activities.

We will work as Age Friendly Alliance partners to develop this approach for each outcome using the key statistics as population indicators. All actions in the action plans should contribute to improving these statistics.

While project performance measures will be further developed with delivery partners, some consideration has been given to this and suggested draft performance metrics have been included in the action plans under the "How we will measure success" column.

The Alliance will provide progress reports to the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Community Planning Strategic Partnership within their reporting cycle.

The strategy, action plan and anticipated timescales for the delivery of actions and outcomes will be reviewed and revised annually to consider what has worked well and less well over the previous year and to consider new challenges and opportunities.

The strategy and action plan form part of the Borough's Community Planning framework and will link with reporting to the Strategic Partnership.

Notes:

[i] Creating age-friendly environments in Europe, a tool for local policy makers and planners, WHO Europe 2016

[ii] From the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) Life expectancy at birth (administrative geographies), https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/PivotGrid.aspx?ds=10325&lh=73&yn=2008-2019&sk=134&sn=Health%20and%20Social%20Care&yearfilter=

[iii] NISRA,-friendly profiles (administrative geographies) for 2019 and 2043, www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/PivotGrid.aspx?ds=10315&lh=73&yn=2017,2019,2043&sk=10&sn=People%20and%20Places&yearfilter=

[v] Based on a sample size of 593, we can be sure that 95 per cent of the whole population would have responded to the survey question in the same way with a margin of error of plus or minus 4 per cent.

[vi] 48 per cent prior to the Covid-19 pandemic

[vii] 649 in 2018/19 according to NISRA, Police recorded crime (administrative geographies), https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/AreaProfileReportViewer.aspx?FromAPAddressMulipleRecords=Armagh%20City,%20Banbridge%20And%20Craigavon@Partial%20match%20of%20location%20name:%20@Partial%20Match%20Of%20Location%20Name:%20%20Armagh%20City,%20Banbridge%20And%20Craigavon@22?#545

[viii] In 2019, 58 per cent of people aged 65 and older in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council had never accessed the internet (https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/PivotGrid.aspx?ds=10295&lh=73&yn=2013-2019&sk=10&sn=People%20and%20Places&yearfilter=); in 2021, according to our survey, that figure is now 21 per cent

[ix] From the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) 2020/21, https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/engagement-culture-arts-and-sport-by-adults-northern-ireland-202021

[x] Based on Heath survey Norther Ireland 2019/20, https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-survey-northern-ireland-first-results-201920

[xi] 62 per cent of people we surveyed aged 50 and over rated their health as good or very good compared to 71 per cent of people of all ages across NI in 2019/20 (https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/self-efficacy-locus-control-life-satisfaction-northern-ireland-201920)

[xii] 88 per cent and 92 per cent respectively

[xiii] From the 2021 Age-friendly Alliance survey