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Ageing Better: Using the 'age-friendly' concept to drive system change in communities and places

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Contents

Executive summary 5

About this report 12

About Ageing Better and the 'age-friendly' concept 14

Achieving change 18

How did the partnerships implement age-friendly approaches? 32

Informing local policy and practice to make communities more age-friendly ... 42

Conclusions and recommendations 51

This paper has been written by Ecorys, the lead independent national evaluator of the Ageing Better programme. Details on the evaluation **methodology** can be found in a separate note. Evidence is drawn from online interviews and focus groups with Ageing Better programme stakeholders, which took place during Autumn 2021.

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Executive summary

The Ageing Better programme

Ageing Better was a £87 million programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund). It started in 2015 and ran until March 2022. The programme funded voluntary sector-led partnerships in 14 areas across England[1].

The aim of Ageing Better was to improve the lives of people aged over 50 by addressing **social isolation** and **loneliness**, improving social connections, and enabling people over 50 to be more engaged in the design of services for their communities. The programme also aimed to challenge negative narratives around ageing and promote a positive image of later life.

What does it mean to be 'age-friendly'?

The term 'age-friendly' relates to approaches which are inclusive of people across the life-course. Although the term is not specifically related to older age groups, it is now usually understood in the context of the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition for Age-friendly Cities and Communities[2].

Ageing Better partnerships used the term 'age-friendly' in the sense set out by the WHO Framework – to refer to approaches that enable the inclusion of people of all ages, *including older adults*. These approaches are rooted in positive framing of ageing, and emphasise the value and contribution of people in later life, encouraging their active involvement in communities. This understanding of age-friendliness overlaps significantly with the core principles of the Ageing Better programme. Many partnerships chose to undertake work to make their communities more age-friendly as part of their approach to delivering the programme's core outcomes.

The WHO Framework also sets out a process for becoming an Age-friendly community, describing eight domains for action. The WHO supports a network of Age-friendly cities and communities across the globe, members of which sign up to a range of actions to make their communities more age inclusive. A UK network of Age-friendly communities is facilitated by the Centre for Ageing Better[3].

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1 The partnerships are listed in the accompanying Methods note.

2 The WHO Age-friendly Cities Framework, available at: extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/

3 More information available at: ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities

While most Ageing Better partnerships were involved in making their areas more age-friendly, not all decided to engage with the WHO Framework and processes explicitly.

Across the programme, partnerships worked in three main ways:

- Where Ageing Better partnerships worked in areas that were already part of the WHO and/or UK networks, they aligned their work to existing community-wide commitments and aspirations. Ageing Better programme funding was used to bolster work linked to the core priorities of reducing loneliness and isolation.
- In some Ageing Better partnership areas, Ageing Better programme activity was framed around a push to become an Age-friendly Community.
- Other Ageing Better partnership areas worked to make aspects of their communities age-friendly – adopting core age-friendly approaches and principles, such as a positive approach to ageing, co-production[4], and involving older adults – but outside the structures of the UK/global networks of Age-friendly communities.

How did age-friendly approaches support Ageing Better activity?

We found that working with communities to be more age-friendly supported the partnerships' work in three main ways:

- Talking about becoming age-friendly was a good way of motivating action across sectors, and some partners perceived it was easier to engage partners with this positive agenda than with addressing negative issues, such as loneliness and isolation.
- The breadth of the age-friendly agenda enabled a wide range of partners to get involved in Ageing Better's work, driving support for partnership working and co-production.
- A local commitment to becoming an Age-friendly community can create a space for the Ageing Better programme to continue beyond the lifetime of the funding.

[4] Co-production is an approach that can be applied to a wide range of different contexts. It involves professionals, citizens and other stakeholders sharing power to achieve something together, recognising that both have valuable contributions to make.

What changed?

Projects that aimed to make communities more age-friendly were effective in achieving change in a range of areas. While this change was led by older adults, many of the adjustments made benefit the wider community by improving the accessibility of services, particularly for those with mobility impairments and/or sensory loss, and those affected by loneliness or isolation. These included:

- **Age-friendly environments**: Several partnerships made local environments more welcoming and inclusive of older people by developing age-friendly guidance, which covered issues such as the availability of seating and public toilets, so people felt more confident out and about.
- **Age-friendly transport**: Several partnerships worked with transport providers and authorities to encourage age-friendly adjustments, such as easier to read signage and seating, to transport services and infrastructure. They also worked to provide staff training, so that they could better support older travellers, for example giving people more time to sit down before moving off from bus stops.
- **Age-friendly business**: A number of partnerships worked with local businesses, providing guidance and developing local schemes to encourage and support them to adapt their services to be more inclusive of older people, for example by paying attention to lighting, signage and music levels.
- **Age-friendly social activities**: Some partnerships used the framing of creating an 'age-friendly' community to encourage the development of a broader and more inclusive offer of social opportunities for older adults across their local areas. Several partnerships worked with activity providers to encourage a 'warm welcome' (as set out in the toolkit from Ageing Better in Camden[5]), which many stakeholders saw as linked to age-friendliness in its emphasis on inclusion and involvement.
- **Enabling older people to have a voice**: Supporting older people to become actively involved in shaping their communities is at the heart of the 'age-friendly' concept. Partnerships were successful in creating mechanisms for older people to have their voices heard in shaping their local communities, from informing changes to transport infrastructure, to taking roles on key advisory boards.

[5] www.ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/warm-welcome-approach

What did Ageing Better partnerships do?

There were a number of approaches to achieving change that were adopted by partnerships in their age-friendly work:

- **Identifying opportunities for improvements**: Several partnerships found it helpful to assess the age-friendliness of their communities to establish a starting point for activities and help prioritise actions. Some did this as part of a formal baselining process to become an Age-friendly community, while others undertook less formal 'audits' and research projects.
- **Building cross-sector partnerships**: Partnership working was a core principle of the Ageing Better programme. Some local partnerships found it helpful to build new partnerships around becoming age-friendly, while others continued to support partnerships initially established for the Ageing Better programme. In this way, the age-friendly agenda acts as a vehicle to secure a legacy for the programme.
- **Supporting involvement**: Several partnerships funded forums and groups of older people so that they could engage in co-production activities. Framing this as part of an age-friendly approach encouraged support among stakeholders. These forums and groups helped commissioners and service providers to better understand what older people wanted and to improve their services.

Across all of the work, a critical contribution of the Ageing Better programme was in creating capacity to lead work in order to become age-friendly. Older people, volunteers and staff within Ageing Better partnerships played key roles in driving action on the age-friendly agenda in their areas. We also found that pragmatism and adapting to changes in the wider local context was a critical success factor.

Next steps

The findings from this study can be used to inform the approaches commissioners, policy developers and service providers take to becoming age-friendly. The next steps required will differ depending on local interest in and commitment to the 'age-friendly' agenda – i.e. whether local leaders are already committed to working within the WHO Global Framework for Age-friendly Cities and Communities; whether local leaders want to work towards becoming an Age-friendly community; or whether interest in being age-friendly is still developing.

In Ageing Better areas, partnerships should:

- Enhance their age-friendly activities by drawing on practice from other partnerships, as appropriate
- Explore whether their partner organisations would be willing to continue Ageing Better programme work as part of an effort to become age-friendly
- Continue to document, evaluate and share learning on their age-friendly activities
- Reach out to relevant organisations and neighbouring local authorities through strategic networks and forums
- Support older people who have been involved in co-production activities to move into co-production roles within mainstream structures as 'agents of change' to continue informing service design and development

Age-friendly partnerships working in areas that are committed to becoming Age-friendly communities should:

- Explore lessons learnt from the Ageing Better programme to inform work to deliver their age-friendly action plans. Potential areas for action could include:
  - Replicating approaches to age-friendly audits undertaken by Ageing Better partnerships
  - Adopting co-production approaches used by Ageing Better partnerships to ensure the voices of local people over 50 are heard in shaping local communities[6]
  - Supporting secondments across local authorities and VCSE sector bodies with expertise in involving older adults
  - Using age-friendly training resources developed by Ageing Better partnerships[7]

6 Ageing Better Programme partners (2021), Stronger Together: A co-production toolkit from Ageing Better. Available at: agefriendlysheffield.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Stronger-Together-%E2%80%93-a-co-production-toolkit-Final.pdf

7 For example:
Ageless Thanet (n.d.), Age Friendly Toolkit. Available at: www.agelessthanet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Age-Friendly-Toolkit-2.pdf
Cheshire West and Chester Council (n.d.), Age-friendly Cheshire West. Available at: www.agefriendlycheshirewest.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Age-Friendly-checklist.pdf

In other areas:

- Local authorities should use their convening powers to bring together partners to consider what action can be taken to make their communities more age-friendly. This could include:
  - Joining the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities and working towards being an Age-friendly Community
  - Working with local older people to understand how age-friendly the community already is and identify priorities for action
  - Encouraging staff to undertake age-friendly training
  - Ensuring that new and existing services and strategies are assessed for their age-friendliness
  - Facilitating opportunities for older adults to be directly involved in planning and delivering changes in their local communities
  - Providing funding and support for forums and advisory groups to support older adults' active involvement in their local communities. This might include in-kind support, such as providing meeting rooms and help with administration, or funding support to enable more marginalised groups to take part
- Organisations interested in addressing loneliness/supporting the inclusion of older adults within communities (including older people's groups) should:
  - Consider whether working to make the community more age-friendly would be an effective way of supporting inclusion and involvement of older adults and therefore helping to improve the activities and services they offer
  - Consider taking forward actions to support the community to become more age-friendly, including:
    - Exploring opportunities to work with local businesses and providers of key local services (e.g. transport, health and social care) around becoming age-friendly
    - Ensure that older adults are supported to be actively involved in work to improve communities, utilising their lived experience

To support this work, we recommend that:

- The government works with the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities to support local authorities working towards Age-friendly community status. This could include funding to support co-production with local communities

About this report

This report presents independent evaluation evidence and insights from Ageing Better partnerships. It explores how the Ageing Better partnerships took forward work to develop more 'age-friendly' services, support, places and communities. The report explores the projects Ageing Better partnerships undertook to make their communities more age-friendly, shares reflections on the process of implementing these projects, and sets out how these projects led to changes in practice and whether these are sustainable. Our recommendations for using these approaches are set out at the end of the report.

About Ageing Better and the ‘age-friendly’ concept

About the Ageing Better programme

Ageing Better was a £87 million programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund). It started in 2015 and ran until March 2022.

The aim of Ageing Better is to improve the lives of people over 50 by addressing social isolation and loneliness, improving social connections, and enabling people over 50 to be more engaged in the design of services for their communities.

The programme outcomes are that:

- People over 50 are less isolated and lonely
- People over 50 are actively involved in their communities, with their views and participation valued more highly
- People over 50 are more engaged in the design and delivery of services that help reduce their isolation and improve their social connections
- Services that help to reduce isolation are better planned, co-ordinated and delivered
- Better evidence is available to influence the services that help reduce isolation for people over 50 in the future

The 'age-friendly' concept

The term 'age-friendly' is a general one, which implies the inclusion of people of all ages. Although the term is not specifically related to older age groups it is now usually understood by the definition established by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its Framework for Age-friendly Cities and Communities[8].

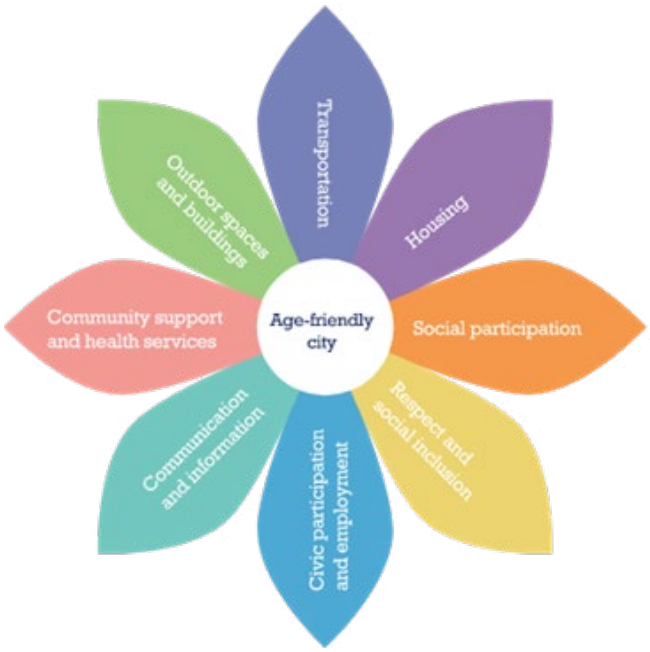
The Framework was developed by the WHO to support cities initially, and then communities more generally, to adapt to the context of population ageing, addressing concerns about the inclusion of older adults and reframing the ageing of their populations as an opportunity. It was developed as part of the WHO's response to population ageing across the globe. For example, by 2050, it is projected that one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 years and over – an increase from approximately one

[8] The WHO Age-friendly Cities Framework, available at: extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/

in five in 2019[9]. This is a significant shift, which requires societies to adapt so that older adults are able to age well. Societies that are age-friendly are those that support the inclusion of people of all ages, including older adults.

The WHO supports a Global Network of Cities and Communities that have committed to becoming Age-friendly in line with its Framework. In the UK, the Centre for Ageing Better facilitates the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities[10] which follow the WHO Framework. The Centre for Ageing Better defines an Age-friendly Community as *'a place where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives. These places make it possible for people to continue to stay in their homes, participate in the activities they value and contribute to their communities for as long as possible'.*

Age-friendly Communities actively involve older people and bring together the voluntary, public and private sector to work alongside people to help make changes to the physical and social environment. The WHO Framework identifies eight domains of action for Age-friendly Communities:[11]



9 ONS (2021), Overview of the UK population: January 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/january2021#toc

10 www.ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities

11 The WHO Age-friendly Communities framework. Available at: https://agefriendlysheffield.org.uk/about-age-friendly-sheffield/who-age-friendly-cities-and-communities/

Communities wishing to join the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities commit to working across all eight domains. Precise actions are tailored to local needs and priorities.

Core principles for all actions under the WHO Framework include a positive framing of ageing, working towards making communities more inclusive and accessible for older people *and* the wider population, partnership working, and the active involvement of older adults. This is what Ageing Better partnerships mean when they use the term 'age-friendly'.

There is significant overlap between the WHO approach to Age-friendly Cities and Communities and the core objectives of the Ageing Better programme to influence and inform local age-friendly policies and strategies, promote local action, and develop the skills, confidence and empowerment of people over 50.

While not all of the partnerships within the Ageing Better programme engaged with the WHO Framework or worked to become an official Age-friendly Community, they all undertook work to support their communities to become more age-friendly (as defined by the WHO).

Some Ageing Better partnerships found that the WHO Framework proved to be a helpful strategic tool. It supported work to reframe understanding of ageing as an opportunity, rather than a problem, enabling older people to be included in decision making and in developing fit for purpose solutions as active agents of change:

> "One of the key things that the WHO Age-friendly Communities initiative does is it reframes ageing from [being] a problem and 'How are we going to look after older people?' It shifts that narrative to get people to think about 'How are we ageing well?'"
>
> (External stakeholder)

However, other partnerships undertook work to make their communities more age-friendly without engaging explicitly with the WHO Framework or processes.

Achieving change

Ageing Better partnerships have been successful in making a range of activities, services and places more age-friendly in their areas. All of this work was developed to meet the overall Ageing Better aim of reducing social isolation and loneliness, first and foremost. However, to achieve these objectives, partnerships developed programmes across several of the domains within the WHO Framework. In this section, we explore examples of the changes Ageing Better partnerships' were able to make. While this change was led by older adults, many of the adjustments made benefit the wider community by improving the accessibility of services, particularly for those with mobility impairments and/or sensory loss, and those affected by loneliness or isolation.

We found work to make communities more age-friendly had been effective in the following key areas:

- Encouraging changes in the local built environment and local infrastructure
- Driving improvements in local transport and travel infrastructure
- Helping businesses to become more inclusive and accessible to older people
- Improving indoor environments to make them more accessible and welcoming
- Supporting the provision of a diverse and welcoming range of opportunities for social participation
- Enabling older people to have a voice in their local communities

Age-friendly local environments

A number of Ageing Better partnerships produced Age-friendly charters or checklists to inform work to improve the local area or environment and make the physical environment work better for older people. These have been designed to support local organisations to make services, facilities and activities more inclusive, and have been developed through processes aligned with the core age-friendly principles of partnership and involving older people. For example, the Leeds Age-friendly Charter[12] includes a specific pledge for the local council to make timely repairs to streets and pavements.

[12] Time to Shine (2016), The Age Friendly Charter. Available at: s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media.timetoshine.co.uk/Age-Friendly-Charter-BW-2.pdf

Several other partnerships have been successful in getting changes made to their local walking environment following mapping exercises and influencing work by residents. In Birmingham, for example, an Age Friendly Tyburn project where residents developed walking maps ultimately led to successful lobbying for a significant speed restriction on a main arterial route. This has helped both older adults and the wider community to feel safer when walking[13].

> "We invited the community to collaborate with us, to give us their insights and their practical lived experience of that area, which you don't get as a stranger walking around in an area."
>
> (Project Lead)

[13] Quinn, L. and Hraboweckyj, A. (2019), Independent Evaluation of Age Friendly Tyburn – Creating an Age Friendly Neighbourhood. Available at: https://www.ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk/media/attachments/2019/05/15/age-friendly-tyburn-built-environment-project---stage-1-evaluation-report.pdf

> "I'm a community organiser. We started having meetings and looking at maps, looking at safety. We use the maps to find a destination and see if other people in the groups could find where we needed to go. It's our job as community organisers to check them. Once we found the safer route we decided to put it on the map so that people can go that way. We also looked at the [traffic] lights to see if there was something that could be done to make it feel safer, to make people feel comfortable to be able to walk over to the other side of the street, where you have to catch the bus."
>
> (Volunteer)

Similarly, older residents in Bolton worked with Ambition for Ageing in Greater Manchester to influence Transport for Greater Manchester to add extra time to three traffic crossings around a health centre so that all local residents could cross the road in safety. On the Isle of Wight, local residents have raised awareness of accessibility issues in the local environment and worked with local providers, such as the road maintenance team, to improve pavement surfaces and street lighting[14].

In several areas, including Bristol and Middlesbrough, partnerships worked on local toilet maps highlighting public spaces like cafes, museums and shopping centres where people can use the bathroom free of charge. These were developed in response to insight that when people know what facilities are available, they feel more confident out and about.

[14] The Isle of Wight partnership has provided a new resource, 'Pavements for People', which was initiated by the Older Person's Steering Group and co-produced by Group members, the Age Friendly Island team and Island Roads. Available at: www.ageuk.org.uk/isleofwight/our-services/information-and-advice2/pavements-for-people

In other areas, the focus was on enhancing buildings and indoor environments. Brightlife Cheshire collaborated with Cheshire West Council to develop an age-friendly checklist[15] that includes a series of 'place' suggestions for organisations to consider, to help make their indoor environments more age-friendly.

A range of stakeholders also drew links between the work to make buildings more age-friendly and the 'Warm Welcome' approach (see toolkit from Ageing Better in Camden)[16], which has been a common area of focus across a number of partnerships. Stakeholders felt that the 'Warm Welcome' approach was well aligned to the core principles of inclusion at the heart of age-friendly approaches. With older people more likely to be isolated and needing more opportunity for regular social interactions, ensuring they receive a warm welcome is vital. Research conducted by Ageing Better in Camden[17] found that offering a warm welcome has the following benefits:

- The level of welcome in community groups or businesses impacts on older people's wellbeing, both short and long term
- Older people are more likely to attend groups they perceive as welcoming

These benefits were recognised and confirmed by other Ageing Better partnerships:

> "Welcoming people into communities and groups and businesses with a warm welcome and just being able to interact with people and other similar people will help combat loneliness."
>
> (Project Lead)

[15] Cheshire West and Chester Council (n.d.), Age-friendly Cheshire West. Available at: www.agefriendlycheshirewest.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Age-Friendly-checklist.pdf

[16] Ageing Better in Camden (Warm Welcome Toolkit). Available at: www.ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/s/The-Warm-Welcome-Toolkit-Ageing-Better-in-Camden.pdf

[17] Ageing Better in Camden (2019), What makes groups welcoming for older people and why does it matter? https://static1.squarespace.com/static/568a6b7425981d3d913a52c1/t/5dc93611af9d520b7a7478ee/1573467667143/Warm+Welcome+Key+Messages.pdf

Other partnerships have been successful in improving access to spaces for people to rest while out and about. Ageing Better Middlesbrough's 'Please have a seat' campaign allows participating venues to designate a space for older people and those with mobility issues to sit down and rest if they need a break while out and about.

In Sheffield, the Ageing Better partnership helped to support the creation of a 'talking bench' facility, a designated place where people can sit and chat to others if they are feeling lonely.

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new dimensions to what it means for areas to be age-friendly, as many older people have needed additional support to feel confident getting out and about. Several partnerships have undertaken work to support inclusion during the pandemic. For example, in the Isle of Wight, 'Out and About' cards[18] were developed by Age Friendly Island, following a suggestion by a member of the Age Friendly Island's Older Persons' Steering Group. These were visible cards, which could be worn as a badge, that enabled older people to silently communicate potential challenges linked to COVID-19 safety measures. Messages included 'Please be patient: Social distancing is challenging for me' and 'Please be patient: I am exempt from wearing a face covering'.

[18] Out and About Cards: ageing-better.org.uk/stories/out-and-about-cards

Age-friendly transport

Ageing Better partnerships were also able to influence changes to make local travel and transport options more age-friendly as a means of enabling more older people to access opportunities for social connection, and to feel confident getting out and about. This included a range of activities explicitly centred around the idea of being more age-friendly, such as training programmes for transport drivers and staff, and guides for transport providers. It also included broader activities to support the inclusion of older adults in planning local transport services and travel environments, drawing on age-friendly principles including:

- Adjusting travel information to ensure it is accessible to all
- Improving access to seating and public toilets across transport hubs

Ageing Better partnerships' work on transport is explored in more detail in a separate report.

Age-friendly businesses

Many Ageing Better partnerships got involved in work with local businesses to support them to become more age-friendly. This often involved raising awareness among local businesses of the difference being age-friendly could make to local people over 50, and to them in attracting new customers. Partnerships also supported businesses to become more age-friendly, for example by offering training and guidance on how to take small steps to improve their offer.

> "You can really make a difference to someone's life if you're a business owner or an employee. Small encounters make a big difference to people's quality of life, but particularly for older people."
>
> (Project Lead)

Several Ageing Better partnerships designed training and guidance in conjunction with local people over 50. For example, Ambition for Ageing in Greater Manchester consulted local people about their experiences of accessing shops and how this could be improved, and used the insights gained to design a training outline with Ambition for Ageing volunteers, some of whom went on to co-deliver the training.

Age-friendly business has been a significant focus of the work of Ageless Thanet over the last seven years. This was so successful that more focus and resource was allocated to this area of work in later years of the programme:

> "We've changed the whole of Ageless Thanet because of the age-friendly business scheme, it's been a huge success for us."
>
> (Partnership management team)

The work included developing an age-friendly toolkit[19] and age-friendly training for local businesses. Businesses could undertake training and advertise in an age-friendly business directory and offer discounts and rewards to holders of an age-friendly Reward Card.

Ageless Thanet found that the incentive of advertising and access to a customer base has been a key factor in engaging businesses. To date, nearly 500 businesses have been engaged and over 9,000 residents over 50 have registered for a Ageless Thanet Reward Card.

Bristol Ageing Better also developed a toolkit[20] to support businesses interested in becoming age-friendly. The partnership produced case studies of local age-friendly businesses to share with other businesses to illustrate the motivations and benefits of becoming more age-friendly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was updated to make businesses aware of the particular needs of older people getting out after an extended period of shielding.

[19] Ageless Thanet (n.d.), Age Friendly Toolkit. Available at: www.agelessthanet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Age-Friendly-Toolkit-2.pdf

[20] Bristol Ageing Better (2019), Make your business more age friendly. Information on the Bristol Ageing Better partnership is available at: https://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/who-we-are/

In the Isle of Wight, the partnership delivered age-friendly training for businesses and staff of other local organisations. An evaluation of the scheme found clear consensus that age-friendly business training had been successful in raising staff awareness and improving the experiences of older customers[21]. In total, 524 people participated in 45 age-friendly training sessions, and in their feedback, 100% of the people that attended said it would make a positive change to their work practices and confidence in working with, understanding and assisting older people. Half of the people who participated said that their organisation had subsequently taken specific action as a result of the age-friendly training. For example, Tesco now operates a 'Time for you' checkout specifically for older people all year round, in recognition that shopping can feel stressful and pressured for them. Meanwhile, the Southern Vectis bus company has incorporated age-friendly training as part of the compulsory training for all of its bus drivers using a 'train the trainer' approach, and has also produced a 'Top Tips' factsheet for drivers that focuses on safer bus travel.

Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) in East Lindsey launched an Age-friendly Business Award, which has proven successful. Over 120 businesses have been awarded the status to date. Businesses are assessed on having taken reasonable steps to enhance accessibility, respect and inclusion, and customer comfort, and to offer clear marketing and communications to achieve the award. The award has been effective in recognising what local businesses already do, as well as in incentivising additional steps.

> "Many businesses already did quite a lot for age-friendliness - the award was being recognised for that, rather than changing to become age-friendly. [Businesses were] recognised for what they do."
>
> (Project lead)

[21] NDTi (2019), Becoming an Age-friendly Island Evaluation Report. Available at: https://www.ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk/media/attachments/2019/10/01/becoming-an-age-friendly-island-afi-june-2019.pdf

Social participation

Providing accessible and affordable activities that promote social connections has been a core element of activity delivered by Ageing Better partnerships. Ageing Well Torbay recognised and formalised this as part of their age-friendly work by producing an age-friendly checklist for social participation activities, which covers the following aspects:

- Range of events and activities: A wide variety of activities is available to appeal to a diverse population of older people.
- Accessibility of events and activities: The location is convenient to older people in their neighbourhoods, with affordable, flexible transportation. Times of events are convenient for older people during the day.
- Affordability: Events, activities and local attractions are affordable for older participants, with no hidden or additional costs.
- Awareness of activities: Activities and events are well communicated to older people.
- Community integration: Community facilities promote shared and multipurpose use by people of different ages and interests, and foster interaction among user groups.

One clear message emerging from the varied social participation activity delivered across Ageing Better partnerships is that where activities are designed with people over 50, they are more likely to participate. By taking this approach, partnerships have been able to apply the 'age-friendly' concept and deliver activities for groups which typically did not participate. For example:

- TED in East Lindsey delivered a number of groups specifically for men, for example through their Men Do project. The project was flexible and person-centred, with attendees co-producing activities and adjusting these based on formal and informal feedback. The project was well attended, and focused around common interests.
- In Greater Manchester, Out & About in Oldham was an informal social support group for older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people in Oldham. The group was set up to respond to a reported need for a specific support and friendship group for those who identified as LGBT+. Now, as well as attending sessions facilitated by Age UK Oldham, the group also arrange their own events

Enabling older people's voices to be heard

Co-production is a critical aspect of becoming more age-friendly. Co-production has a central role in the WHO Framework process, and Ageing Better areas have demonstrated the influence meaningful co-production can have on age-friendly strategies and plans developed by delivery partners. The Age of Experience group, set up by Ageing Better in Birmingham, have been co-producing actions over time.

> "Co-production is really good. A lot of professionals sit on the group, but there's also lots of service users like me. It's very much a bottom-up approach. The professionals say, 'What do you think of this? Give us your feedback, give us your thoughts'. It's a very service-user led approach. We give our thoughts on initiatives. We debate with professionals from the NHS and charities. We discuss all sorts of things they want to do and they ask our opinion, and we're able to contribute to the discussion. The feedback from service users means they can fit in with what individuals are likely to need."
>
> (Volunteer)

The Age of Experience Group works closely with Birmingham City Council's Health and Social Care group, which brings together statutory services and providers from the private and voluntary sectors. This led to plans for the Age of Experience group to conduct age-friendly awareness training for care home staff and carers working in local communities. The group developed a charter to promote age-friendly principles and increase LGBTQ+ awareness among staff and residents in care settings.

When I ask them, [volunteers say] it makes them feel valued. They feel they can make a difference by being involved and they do see a difference – they like to see action and results from being in the Age of Experience group."

(Project lead)

We have raised awareness amongst people who work in care homes as professionals that we are all different. We met with senior managers and a lot of care staff. We sat down and told them about our life stories. We explained they needed to accept that everyone is different and not just make assumptions about people, everyone is equal. Staff said: 'I've learnt such a lot, I didn't realise'. They were learning, and going to use it for staff training."

(Volunteer)

How did the partnerships implement age-friendly approaches?

While most Ageing Better partnerships were involved in making their areas more age-friendly, not all decided to engage with the WHO Framework and processes explicitly.

Across the programme, partnerships worked in three main ways:

- Where Ageing Better partnerships worked in areas that were already part of the WHO and/or UK networks, the partnerships aligned their work to existing community-wide commitments and aspirations. Ageing Better programme funding was used to bolster work linked to the core priorities of reducing loneliness and isolation.
- In some Ageing Better partnership areas, Ageing Better programme activity was framed around a push to become an Age-friendly Community.
- Other Ageing Better partnership areas worked to make aspects of their communities age-friendly – adopting core age-friendly approaches and principles such as a positive approach to ageing, co-production[22], and involving older adults, but outside the structures of the UK/global networks of Age-friendly communities.

We found that working with communities to be more age-friendly supported the partnerships' work in three main ways:

- Talking about becoming age-friendly was a good way of motivating action across sectors, and some partners perceived it was easier to engage partners with this positive agenda, than with addressing negative issues such as loneliness and isolation.
- The breadth of the age-friendly agenda encouraged a wide range of partners to get involved in Ageing Better's work, driving support for partnership working and co-production.
- A local commitment to becoming an Age-friendly Community can create a space for the legacy of the Ageing Better programme to continue beyond the lifetime of the funding.

[22] Co-production is an approach that can be applied to a wide range of different contexts. It involves professionals, citizens and other stakeholders sharing power to achieve something together, recognising that they all have valuable contributions to make.

Working within the WHO Framework for Age-friendly Cities and Communities

For some Ageing Better partnerships, working within the WHO Framework for Age-friendly Cities and Communities[23] has enabled a more coordinated approach to reducing isolation and loneliness and promoting wellbeing in people over 50. It has supported partnerships to achieve system-wide changes, and helped to improve the sustainability of activities and outcomes.

Some partnerships found that the WHO Framework helped provide focus and structure for the work on Ageing Better, and this helped drive progress:

> "In a really basic way, [the WHO Framework] makes the conversations happen. Without the wording, the structure, without saying 'age-friendly', yes all those conversations would still be happening, but it enables the conversation to be concrete and structured – you go in with a purpose to the meetings."
>
> (Partnership management team)

Several Ageing Better partnerships played a leadership role in advocating for and supporting the adoption of the WHO Framework locally and in supporting subsequent steps, such as joining the Global and UK Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. East Lindsey, for example, was the first District Council in the country to join the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities, with TED (the East Lindsey Ageing Better partnership) playing a central role. Similarly in Sheffield, the City Council signed off a City for All Ages Framework in 2012 championed by a city level partnership board, so there was already a commitment in place when the Age Better in Sheffield partnership was established in 2014. However, the Age Better in Sheffield team have been able to work in partnership with the City Council to maintain the momentum for healthy ageing and achieve a lasting city-wide commitment to becoming age-friendly.

[23] The WHO Age-friendly Cities Framework, available at: extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/

"We have layered the age-friendly domains on Sheffield's draft plan because they just match. They talk about things in a different way, but you've got transport, economy, health, the green agenda, it all fits. We mapped the WHO Age-friendly Framework against Sheffield's objectives in their plan. What's been helpful to us is the age-friendly focus on connection – we've been able to layer it really nicely and say to Sheffield City Council, 'It isn't about doing something else, this isn't different, it isn't a whole new piece of work. This is doing what you are setting out to do but looking at it through a lens of Age-friendly Cities'."

(Partnership management team)

This resulted in Sheffield becoming a member of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities in 2019. Being part of the Network has helped the Ageing Better partnership inform work in other areas.

"Being part of the global network immediately puts you in a bigger club. It acts as a really good way of developing a partnership quite quickly with other areas. For example, in Sheffield we've been partnering with other towns and cities in South Yorkshire – Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham. It's a known framework, its well-developed globally, and other areas in the country are doing it, so it's fast tracked our conversation around all of those things we would have wanted to talk about anyway, and pulled them all together."

(Partnership management team)

In 2021, a new age-friendly website was launched by Age Better in Sheffield[24]. The website collates the timeline of Sheffield's journey and is a single point of access to information about the work to become age-friendly, supporting wider public involvement.

However, in some partnership areas, work around becoming an Age-friendly Community was affected by wider shifts in the local context. Partnerships have needed to be sensitive in their work to support and promote the WHO Framework.

Other areas found that explicit reference to the WHO Framework was less effective with some audiences. Over time, partnerships have found everyday language and tangible examples can work best:

> "We still structure our strategies around those eight domains, and we're talking about them when we're working to our strategy. However, in everyday conversations, we don't talk about the WHO Framework anymore. I think it works better for people to now have real life practical examples of how they personally can support the work."
>
> (Partnership management team)

In areas where there was already work on Age-friendly Communities, local partnerships worked with local leaders to build understanding and bolster commitment. Ageing Better partnerships were able to work alongside other local strategic agencies to drive progress on becoming age-friendly. Ageing Better partnerships were often seen as a specialist partner to support this work, bringing the combined expertise of all of their partners to the table.

For example, as part of a long-term programme of work by agencies across the city region around becoming age-friendly, there is an Ageing Hub within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Ambition for Ageing in Greater Manchester integrated their work with that of the Ageing Hub, focusing on ensuring the voice of local communities and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations influence policy development. Ageing Hub leaders have valued this work:

[24] Website available at: agefriendlysheffield.org.uk

> [The involvement of Ambition for Ageing] has increased capacity and ability, and it's created a layer of people who understand what 'age-friendly' means at a very local level. It's also operated a network of Age-friendly community projects that we want to build on."
>
> (Delivery partner)

Focusing the Ageing Better programme on becoming an Age-friendly Community

Some partnerships found that by relating their programme of work to an overall effort to become an Age-friendly Community, they have been able to secure a legacy for Ageing Better activity beyond the lifetime of the programme funding. The 'age-friendly' concept has provided a helpful way of explaining and bringing together the system-level shifts that the Ageing Better programme has been working to achieve.

> It is important to think of age-friendly not as a project, but more of a means to change and influence a shift in cultural attitudes."
>
> (Partnership management team)

Bristol Ageing Better created an age-friendly partnership with Bristol City Council and Age UK Bristol, and produced an Age-friendly Strategy in 2018. The Age-friendly Strategy formed the main body of Bristol's application to the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Communities. Links were formed to a range of initiatives across the City, to ensure that the strategy remained high profile and that there would be a clear focus on action to becoming more age-friendly.

> "It made sense to have a separate age-friendly strategy and action plan, so that there was a specific focus on this work and so that it wouldn't get lost in all the other initiatives and work streams in the city."

(Project lead)

To support the legacy of their work, the Bristol age-friendly partnership have decided to establish a series of thematic sub-groups, rather than setting up a single overarching age-friendly group or strategy. With concerns over potential changes in political and strategic priorities across the city, it was felt to be more productive to embed work to become more age-friendly into thematic action groups. To support this work, the Bristol partnership have commissioned Bristol Older People's Forum to lead action groups on housing and transport. The Older People's Forum has also been commissioned with Age UK Bristol to run a digital action group. Additionally a Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between the Forum and the local Council, showing a commitment to work to become more age-friendly in these key areas.

> "Age-friendly wasn't a topic of discussion previously. The Ageing Better money enabled us to spend so much time building a strong foundation of age-friendly work across the city, both operationally and strategically. The Ageing Better funding also enabled us to commission partners with things like the task and finish groups, and that's what's propelled [colleagues] on the ground working with age-friendly. Ageing Better really enabled that."

(Partnership management team)

Tailored approaches to make communities more age-friendly

In other Ageing Better partnership areas, different projects and activities were undertaken with the aim of making communities more age-friendly, but without being part of an overarching effort to become an official Age-friendly Community. This was particularly the case where partnerships chose to work in very small communities on specific issues, and did not find it appropriate or have the buy in to pursue the formal WHO process or to work across all eight domains of the WHO Framework.

Several Ageing Better partnerships worked to support businesses to become age-friendly. This typically involved raising awareness among local businesses of the difference being age-friendly could make to local people over 50, and to them in attracting new older customers. Partnerships also offered training and guidance on becoming age-friendly. Partnerships found that talking about being age-friendly was motivating to both businesses and older people. Several felt that this framing was more effective than asking partners to engage around the issue of loneliness and isolation (which is more negatively perceived).

In Middlesbrough, a micro-funding programme to support community groups focused on the theme of becoming age-friendly. The Age Friendly Middlesbrough Fund[25] was launched in 2019 with awards available of up to £1,000, with a second funding round administered in 2020. The Age Friendly Fund was co-produced with the Ageing Better Middlesbrough Action Group (ABMAG), empowering older volunteers to participate in decision-making structures and design and deliver their own actions to make their communities more age-friendly. Similarly, in Greater Manchester, Ambition for Ageing hosted the Age-Friendly Challenge on behalf of the local Mayor in 2019. Fifty-three neighbourhoods were recognised as age-friendly, or as making excellent progress to becoming age-friendly. Over £28,000 was invested into age-friendly neighbourhoods and followed up with the offer to fund 'One Small Thing' in each neighbourhood to help age-friendly communities during and post COVID-19. Older people were involved in developing the idea for the awards, which offered up to £500 to increase social connections and benefit local communities[26].

In other areas, work to make communities more age-friendly has been brought together with other initiatives to make best use of resources and capacity. In Leeds, the 'friendly communities' project has brought together activity being delivered by the Time to Shine Ageing Better partnership and by Leeds Older People's Forum. The project promoted Age-friendly and Dementia Friendly Communities[27], in recognition of the high degree of cross over in the actions and targets of these campaigns. For example, asking businesses to provide seats and encouraging service providers to avoid jargon and have hard copies of materials available are supportive of being both Age-friendly and Dementia-friendly:

[25] Ageing Better Middlesbrough (2020), Age Friendly Middlesbrough Fund. Available at: https://www.ageingbettermiddlesbrough.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Age-Friendly-Fund-Report.pdf

[26] Ambition for Ageing. Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods, https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/age-friendly-neighbourhoods

[27] The Alzheimer's Society promotes the dementia friendly communities programme to encourage everyone to share responsibility for ensuring that people with dementia feel understood, valued and able to contribute to their community: www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities

"

Something that is Age-friendly is probably also going to be Dementia-friendly, so it made sense in terms of capacity and resources, to promote both together."

(Project lead)

Informing local policy and practice to make communities more age-friendly

Ageing Better partnerships have learnt valuable lessons about how to influence policy and practice to help make communities more age-friendly.

Their work has shown the value of four key approaches to driving forward action to become more age-friendly. These include:

- Involving local people over 50 in identifying opportunities for improvement
- Developing and refreshing age-friendly strategies for the community
- Building and enhancing cross-sector partnerships
- Raising the profile of and commitment to co-production

Across all of this work, we found that the leadership of the older people, volunteers and staff within Ageing Better partnerships was vital to driving action on this agenda. We also found that pragmatism and adapting to changes in the wider local context was a critical success factor.

Identifying opportunities for improvements

Several partnerships undertook work to assess the age-friendliness of their communities in order to establish a starting point for activities and to help prioritise actions. Some did this as part of a formal baselining process to become an Age-friendly Community, while others undertook less formal 'audits' and research projects.

In East Lindsey, the TED Ageing Better partnership assessed the age-friendliness of the East Lindsey district in Lincolnshire against the WHO Framework. This work was led by the Age-friendly Principal Officer, a role jointly created by TED and East Lindsey District Council (ELDC). Data was collected though desk research, meetings, an 'Age-friendly survey' and focus groups for older people. 'Walking audits[28]' were also undertaken by members of the community, who were asked to consider the age-friendliness of their public spaces by casting a critical eye across their local streets and other public spaces. Findings from the baseline assessment[29] helped shape a delivery action plan, which focuses on issues such as accessibility of outdoor spaces, housing options for older people and communication mechanisms.

[28] On a walking audit, key stakeholders are led around a route on which issues confronting the pedestrians are highlighted by the group. More information on the methodology and materials used by the TED Ageing Better partnership are available at: https://tedineastlindsey.co.uk/

[29] Age-friendly Baseline Assessment Report for East Lindsey, accessed at: https://tedineastlindsey.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/TED_Baseline_Final.pdf

The action allowed the area to provide a springboard for future work:

> "Working in partnership with TED Ageing Better to undertake this comprehensive assessment has provided an excellent foundation on which to build the changes needed to improve the age-friendliness of our district."
>
> (Local Councillor)

Ageing Well Torbay also led work to develop a baseline assessment[30] as part of the process to achieve recognition as part of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. The work ensured that consultation and events to capture older people's thoughts about what would help them to age well in Torbay were at the heart of the assessment. The assessment also brought together data, reports, policies and strategies from Ageing Well partners, the wider VCSE sector, Torbay Council, and the local NHS. The baseline report was the starting point for the Health and Wellbeing Board to co-write a Healthy Ageing Strategy for Torbay[31], which forms part of the Torbay Policy Framework.

Developing and refreshing age-friendly strategies

Several partnerships were involved in developing age-friendly strategies for their local communities (such as Torbay, as described above), while others offered expertise and capacity to further develop and implement existing strategies. Ambition for Ageing joined the work of Greater Manchester's existing Ageing Hub and contributed to the Greater Manchester Age-friendly Strategy, launched in 2018[32]. Developing age-friendly strategies and action plans proved an effective way of encouraging action across local communities, ensuring the views and ideas of communities and local partnerships were acknowledged and used.

30 Torbay Age-friendly Baseline Report 2021, accessed at: ageingwelltorbay.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Torbay-Age-Friendly-Baseline-Report-2021.pdf

31 Torbay Council (n.d.), Active Ageing Strategy. Available at: www.torbay.gov.uk/media/1876/activeageingstrategy.pdf

32 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2018), Greater Manchester Age-friendly Strategy. Available at: www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1166/gm_ageing_strategy.pdf

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, several partnerships were involved in reassessing and refreshing local strategies. For example, Bristol Ageing Better revisited their 2018 Age-friendly Charter, producing an updated strategy and action plan. This reflective exercise allowed them to address some of the weaknesses of the previous strategy, including the need for a separate action plan with clear ownership of each action.

Building and enhancing cross sector partnerships

Our evidence shows that working to make communities more age-friendly supported **commitment to working in partnership across sectors**. Ageing Better partnerships have played an active role in bolstering wider strategic work across their areas around the WHO Framework, and in the adoption of area-wide plans.

The WHO Framework, with its emphasis on action across eight domains[33] spanning all aspects of the community, has been a useful tool to support communications with partners. Ageing Better partnerships report that it helps to show why cross-sector working is necessary, and why action is needed across policy areas beyond those traditionally associated with ageing (such as adult social care):

> "The WHO Framework makes it easy to show that Adult Social Care is just one of the pieces of the puzzle to creating changes across the city. The WHO Framework shows that we can't work in silos, but need to work across boards and sectors to see significant and long-lasting changes. [The Framework] can broaden horizons when you're having conversations with people who are new to age-friendliness but have the power to make a difference."
>
> (Project lead)

[33] The eight domains are: outdoor spaces and buildings, transport, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, community support and health services.

> We think it's important to look at ageing across the life course. For us, the [WHO's] Age-friendly Framework and the domains are all interconnected. This isn't about one bit of your life; you can't reduce isolation and loneliness by just improving transport, if you don't have good housing or financial inclusion or social inclusion. The [WHO] domains represent the interconnectedness and interdependence in our lives."
>
> (Partnership management team)

Ambition for Ageing joined the work of Greater Manchester to practically achieve the required cross sector partnership working. Joint or seconded **roles working on the age-friendly agenda** have been created in several areas. This has proven effective, with embedded staff more able to act as 'agents of change' than when just working as partners:

- In the Isle of Wight, a member of the Ageing Better Programme Team, employed by Age UK, has been seconded to Isle of Wight Council to help embed the 'age-friendly' concept. The secondment builds on the Age Friendly Island project and commitment from local partners to become a member of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities and the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities. The secondment has allowed the team greater access and influence:

> We need to be influencing across the Council at that high level, we're very lucky because we are based within the corporate services team."
>
> (Partnership management team)

- In East Lindsey, the Ageing Better partnership and East Lindsey District Council jointly created an Age-friendly Principal Officer role to help support membership of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

In Leeds, Age-Friendly Ambassadors have been recruited to reach across sectors and promote the need for action to become more age-friendly. Age Friendly Ambassadors are individuals from organisations, businesses or communities who work in a voluntary capacity to promote Age Friendly Leeds within their workplace, sports team, place of worship, with family and friends, or anywhere in their community. To date, over 200 Ambassadors have been recruited. Ambassadors are supported through newsletters, monthly meetings and training and information sessions. This has been an effective way for the age-friendly message to be spread more widely across organisations and sectors than would have been possible within the capacity of the Ageing Better partnership.

> "Age-friendly is about making everything age-friendly, and that is huge. The Ambassadors' role has helped enormously with getting out in the community and into businesses, by finding individuals who can take that message and spread the word."
>
> (Project lead)

Supporting involvement

Enabling older people to be involved in developing and delivering change in their communities through co-production is core to the Ageing Better programme. Several local partnerships have invested significantly in supporting older adults to engage in developing projects within their local programmes and their wider communities. These approaches are also core to the WHO approach to developing Age-friendly Communities. Supporting co-production has, therefore, been a key means by which Ageing Better partnerships have contributed to helping their communities to become more age-friendly.

> "Doing age-friendly work, representing older people and being heard in that process, that lived experience, is so important."
>
> (Project lead)

In several areas, forums and panels established by Ageing Better to support co-production have engaged in wider work to make their communities more age-friendly:

- The Greater Manchester Older People's Network (first created as part of the Ambition for Ageing Programme) has established a strong link with the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub. They were part of a collaboration led by the Ageing Hub to develop a Keeping Well this Winter campaign.[34] To support older residents in Greater Manchester with practical information to keep safe in winter.
- In Hackney, members of the Ageing Better Older People's Committee (OPC) joined a board tasked with developing an Ageing Well Strategy for the London Borough of Hackney.
- The Torbay Assembly Action Group developed a three year Action Plan for Age-Friendly Torbay which was part of the application to WHO to become an Age-Friendly Community.
- In Leeds, an age-friendly steering group has been established as a consultation body available to input into any developments happening in the city.
- In Bristol, the Council has agreed with the Bristol Older People's Forum, established by Ageing Better, to create an additional advisory group to support work on the age-friendly strategy developed by the Ageing Better partnership.
- On the Isle of Wight, an older people's steering group feeds into a wider steering group for the Age Friendly Island initiative.

> "We've had real success in the way we set up our older people's steering group and that has a very good relationship with our stakeholder steering group. They are taking on board a huge range of issues, the questions that come up, and some of those have led to system changes."
>
> (Partnership management team)

[34] A campaign to support older people who are not online with practical information to keep well in winter. Available at: www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/ageing/keeping-well-this-winter/

Supporting professionals to engage directly with older people in co-production has been effective for some partnerships. For example, in Middlesbrough, engaging a representative of the local public health office in meetings with the older people's Advisory Group is helping to provide information for the application to join the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, and this has been recognised as a key public health priority for 2021/22. A member of the partnership management team explains:

> "I think they have had an impact there in their own voice being heard by public health."
>
> (Partnership management team)

To continue this work, Middlesbrough's Public Health team now lead an age-friendly steering group, bringing together partner organisations and representatives from the older people's Advisory Group.

In Bristol, a refreshed structure for co-production, with Task and Finish groups working on key themes, has been developed after a dormant period during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was inspired by similar structures developed by Age Friendly Island, on the Isle of Wight, and by Connect Hackney:

> "That's a pool that the Council can call upon each time they want older people's voices to come up with a solution to a problem. Most of them will sit within the eight domains, but sometimes it will just be 'we want to speak to people about a particular proposal', such as a clean air zone or low traffic neighbourhood. That's the new structure [the Council are] looking at."
>
> (Partnership management team)

Conclusions and recommendations

Our research showed that by working to make communities more age-friendly, Ageing Better partnerships were able to forge cross-sector partnerships to drive improvements across communities that support older people to get involved and enable social connection.

However, we found that creating Age-friendly Communities requires strong leadership and a commitment to drive real change.

Involving people over 50 in co-designing actions to make their communities more age-friendly led to tangible change in a variety of settings, from transport hubs to local businesses.

The 'age-friendly' concept and the more formal WHO Framework can help drive action in a range of ways. It can:

- Empower people to inform the design and development of approaches and services
- Improve customer experiences and enable service providers to enhance their offer to older audiences
- Support participants and volunteers to experience increased social connections and improved wellbeing
- Provide a tangible and motivating rallying cry that can help engage older people and other stakeholders or partners

The findings from this study can be used to inform the approaches commissioners, policy developers and service providers take to becoming age-friendly. The next steps required will differ depending on local interest in and commitment to the 'age-friendly' agenda – i.e. whether local leaders are already committed to working within the WHO Global Framework for Age-friendly Cities and Communities; whether local leaders want to work towards becoming an Age-friendly community; or whether interest in being age-friendly is still developing.

In Ageing Better areas, partnerships should:

- Continue to pursue their age-friendly activities, drawing on practice from other partnerships as appropriate
- Explore whether partner organisations would be willing to continue Ageing Better programme work as part of an effort to become age-friendly
- Continue to document, evaluate and share learning on their age-friendly activities
- Reach out to relevant organisations and neighbouring local authorities through strategic networks and forums
- Support older people who have been involved in co-production activities to move into co-production roles within mainstream structures, as 'agents of change' to continue informing service design and development

Age-friendly partnerships working in areas that are committed to becoming Age-friendly communities should:

- Explore the learning from the Ageing Better programme to inform work to deliver their age-friendly action plans. Potential areas for action could include:
  - Supporting secondments across local authorities and VCSE sector bodies with expertise in involving older adults
  - Using age-friendly training resources developed by Ageing Better partnerships
  - Replicating approaches to age-friendly audits undertaken by Ageing Better partnerships
  - Adopting co-production approaches utilised by Ageing Better partnerships to ensure the voice of local people over 50 is central to the activity being undertaken

In other areas:

- Local authorities should use their convening powers to bring together partners to consider what action can be taken to make their communities more age-friendly. This could include:
  - Joining the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities and working towards being an Age-friendly Community
  - Working with local older people to understand how age-friendly the community already is and identify priorities for action
  - Encouraging staff to undertake age-friendly training
  - Ensuring that new services and strategies are assessed for their age-friendliness
  - Facilitating opportunities for older adults to be directly involved in planning and delivering changes in their local communities;
  - Providing funding and support for forums and advisory groups to support older adults' active involvement in their local communities. This could include in-kind support, such as providing meeting rooms and help with administration
- **Organisations interested in addressing loneliness/supporting the inclusion of older adults within communities (including older people's groups) should:**
  - Consider whether working to make the community more age-friendly would be an effective way of supporting inclusion and involvement of older adults and helping to improve their service offer
  - Consider taking forward actions to support the community to become more age-friendly. For example, explore opportunities to work with local businesses and providers of key local services (e.g. transport, health and social care) around becoming age-friendly
  - Ensure that older adults are supported to be actively involved in work to improve communities, utilising their lived experience

To support this work, we recommend:

- The government works with the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities to support local authorities working towards Age-friendly Community status. This could include funding to support co-production with local communities

This report is accompanied by a Methods note, available online.

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