

Health & Wellbeing Board

24 September 2025

Age Friendly Communities; part of the Communities for All Council priority

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Price, Executive Director of People - Adults

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 This report sets out Dorset Council's ambition to become an Age Friendly County and invites the Health and Wellbeing Board to support a system-wide approach to ageing well. It outlines opportunities for collaboration across health, care, Voluntary & Community Sector Enterprise, and community partners to embed age-friendly principles into planning, commissioning, and delivery. This approach underpins and supports the council plan priority of Communities for All, forming an important strand of how through systems working we can enhance the way we work in our neighbourhoods.
- 1.2 Dorset has one of the oldest demographics of any county in the UK, with 30% of residents aged over 65. The Council is committed to ensuring Dorset remains a place where people can age well, live independently, and stay connected to their communities. This report outlines the progress made to date and sets out a commitment to embedding age-friendly principles across services, infrastructure, and community partnerships throughout the Dorset Council area. This work is central to the wider systems prevention agenda and complements existing programmes such as the Thriving Communities initiative, which laid the groundwork for community-led transformation. By enabling older residents to stay active, socially engaged, and well-supported

within their local areas, the programme aims to reduce future demand on health and care services while enhancing quality of life.

1.3 Becoming an Age Friendly County means creating inclusive, supportive environments where people of all ages, especially older adults, can live healthy, active, and connected lives. It involves adapting public spaces, transport, housing, and services to meet the needs of an ageing population, whilst promoting independence, wellbeing, and social participation. Age Friendly Communities value older people's contributions, reduces isolation, and ensures access to opportunities and support. For Dorset this means aligning local planning, commissioning, and community development with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Age Friendly framework, enabling residents to age well in place and strengthening resilience across generations.

1.4 The eight domains defined by the World Health Organisation are:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings.
2. Transportation.
3. Housing.
4. Social participation.
5. Respect and social inclusion.
6. Civic participation and employment.
7. Communication and information.
8. Community support and health services.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 This report seeks support from the Health & Wellbeing Board to:

i) Endorse Dorset's application for Age Friendly accreditation by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

ii) Support the integration of Age-Friendly principles into health, care & community wide planning.

iii) Promote collaborative delivery through place-based partnerships and VCSE engagement.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 According to recent research, nearly one-third of Dorset's population is aged 65 or over, significantly higher than the national average of 19%, with a median age of 52 compared to 40.5 nationally. Dorset also has the highest proportion of residents aged 85+ in the UK, and an old age dependency ratio of 537 (vs. 297 nationally), meaning there are 537 people aged 65+ for every 1,000 working-age adults.

- 3.2 Dorset Council and system partners face financial and operational pressures due to an ageing population, increasing complexity of need, and limited national funding, reflected in adult social care accounting for over 38% of the Council's 2025/26 net budget and rising demand across NHS services. This context underscores the urgent need for preventative, community-led approaches like Age Friendly Communities, which offer a strategic, system-wide solution to support older adults to live independently, reduce avoidable hospital admissions, and improve wellbeing. By embedding age-friendly principles across infrastructure and service design, and fostering collaboration across council services, NHS, ICBs, and the VCSE sector, Dorset can deliver locally tailored interventions that build resilience, reduce demand, and create long-term value across the whole system.

4. The report

- 4.1 Dorset has a unique opportunity to lead the development of Age Friendly Communities, responding to its ageing demographic through the strategic ambition set out in the Dorset Council Plan 2024–2029 under the 'Communities for All' priority.
- 4.2 In July 2025, the Council formally registered its intent to become an Age Friendly County with the nationally recognised Centre for Ageing Better, aligning its local framework with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) eight domains. The first step toward accreditation is planned for September 2025, demonstrating Dorset's commitment to inclusive, resilient environments that support healthy ageing.
- 4.3 The WHO domains provide a robust framework for an all-age, system-wide approach, building on Adult Social Care commissioning strategies and aligning with the 'Communities for All' priority, Dorset's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the NHS Long Term Plan. The Age Friendly Communities Framework supports joined-up delivery across council services, health, care, and community sectors. It is embedded within place-based partnerships, enabling tailored interventions that reflect local population needs and shared outcomes, while promoting integrated planning, prevention, and inclusive design across the wider system.
- 4.4 The next phase will focus on embedding age-friendly principles into planning, infrastructure, and service design across Dorset's towns and parishes, rural and urban, supported by initiatives in mobility, public space, and lived experience through 'People Panels'. This locally led model draws on the lived experience of older residents and recognises the distinct needs of Dorset's diverse communities. It also acknowledges the economic contribution of older people, from volunteering and caregiving to entrepreneurship and local spending, and will engage employers, Chambers of Commerce, and business

networks to promote age-inclusive development. Community engagement is central to this approach, ensuring that local voices shape priorities, design solutions, and lead implementation. By integrating age-friendly principles from strategic planning to neighbourhood design, Dorset is positioned as a national leader in place-based ageing well, capable of attracting external funding and influencing policy.

- 4.5 The programme aims to create a sustainable model of community-led transformation, investing in VCSE-led co-design grants, falls prevention, transport pilots, and creative health initiatives that directly address the needs of older residents and those who will age in the years to come. The impact is both social and economic. Research¹ has shown that Age Friendly Communities improve health outcomes, reduce demand on statutory services, and enhance civic participation. They also address wider determinants of health, such as housing, transport, and social connection, aligning with Dorset's broader prevention agenda and promoting a shift from reactive care to proactive support. The programme aligns with NHS and ICB priorities around prevention, integrated care, and population health. It offers a community-based approach to reducing demand and improving outcomes, particularly for older adults and those with long-term conditions.

¹ Centre for Ageing Better. (2025). Age-friendly Communities Impact Report. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/age-friendly-communities-impact-report>

- 4.6 International case studies from both rural and urban areas, such as Ireland's Louth and Dublin, and Canada's Nova Scotia and Toronto, demonstrate the effectiveness of age-friendly development in improving access, reducing isolation, and supporting active ageing. These examples reinforce the value of empowering local communities to lead change using the WHO framework.
- 4.7 In the UK, Manchester stands out as a leading example. It was the first UK city to join the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in 2010. This commitment is further evidenced by Manchester's £1.5bn investment in later-life housing, as highlighted in a recent article by Positive News, which aims to redefine ageing through inclusive design and community integration, directly supporting the city's Age Friendly strategy. Through its programme, the city and its more rural surrounding areas have embedded age-friendly principles into neighbourhood planning, service design, and cultural engagement which has had tangible improvements in reducing isolation, promoting dignity, and ensuring older residents have a voice in shaping their communities. For Dorset, these lessons reinforce the value of empowering both towns and parishes to lead local change, using the WHO framework to create environments where ageing is supported with dignity, accessibility, and opportunity.

- 4.8 The emerging Health Science University (HSU) partnership offers a unique opportunity to build a future-ready workforce to drive innovation in ageing well. Through co-designed training, research, and placements, Dorset can lead new models of care and embed age-friendly principles into education and practice.
- 4.9 Dorset Council is committed to being an Age-Friendly Employer, recognising the value and contribution of older workers across its workforce. This pledge, coordinated by the Centre for Ageing Better, promotes inclusive recruitment, flexible working, and lifelong learning opportunities for employees of all ages. It aligns with the Council's wider ambition to embed age-friendly principles not only in communities and services, but also within its organisational culture, ensuring that older adults are valued, supported, and empowered both as residents and as members of the workforce.
- 4.10 In summary, using Age Friendly principles as the foundation for the Communities for All programme offers a strategic, evidence-led response to Dorset's ageing population and wider system pressures. Through national partnership, WHO alignment, and local investment, the programme supports a whole-system shift toward prevention, inclusion, and population health. Endorsement by the Health and Wellbeing Board will strengthen cross-sector leadership, enable integrated delivery, and help secure WHO accreditation, driving measurable improvements in wellbeing, equity, and system sustainability.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Standalone investments in health, housing, and transport have been explored, but often lack the integration and community engagement needed for lasting impact. The Age Friendly Communities programme provides a cohesive framework that unites existing workstreams and aligns with wider place-based strategies, supporting delivery of Dorset Council's 'Communities for All' priority through locally led, joined-up action.
- 5.2 Acting as a catalyst for collaboration across council services, VCSEs, businesses, and residents, the programme embeds age-friendly principles into everyday planning and decision-making.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 The Age Friendly Communities programme supports Dorset Council's statutory duties under the Care Act 2014 by promoting wellbeing, preventing care needs, and fostering integration across health and social care. It also aligns with the Equality Act 2010 by advancing inclusion for older adults, disabled residents, and carers, with co-production and inclusive design

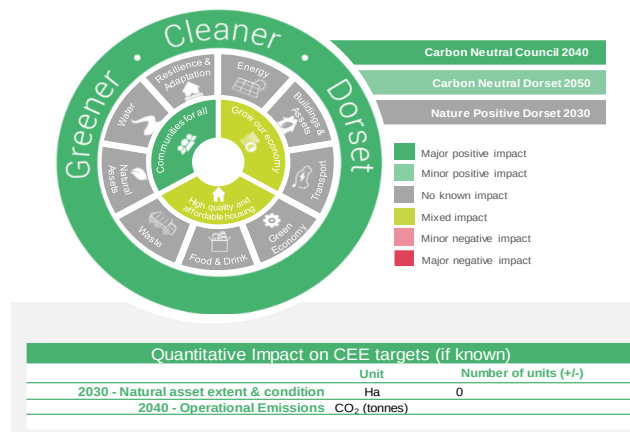
ensuring compliance with consultation, accessibility, and non-discrimination requirements.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Dorset faces significant financial and operational pressures due to its ageing population, one of the oldest in the UK. In 2025–26, adult social care accounts for £159.6 million, over 38% of the Council's net budget, with rising demand for complex care. These pressures are mirrored across NHS services, highlighting the need for system-wide preventative approaches. Age Friendly Communities offer a strategic opportunity to reduce future demand, delay formal care, and improve outcomes through community-led, place-based support.
- 7.2 The programme presents opportunities for joint investment across the system, including national grants, NHS prevention funding, and VCSE contributions. A collaborative funding strategy will be developed to support sustainable delivery and enable town-level implementation of WHO-aligned initiatives that measurably improve wellbeing, reduce system demand, and embed dignity and prevention across public services.
- 7.3 The programme is expected to generate measurable cost avoidance across NHS and adult social care systems by:
- Reducing falls-related hospital admissions
 - Addressing loneliness and isolation
 - Delaying or preventing entry into formal adult social care
- 7.4 According to research by the Centre for Social Justice, severe loneliness among older people is estimated to cost over £6,000 per person in health and social care services, according to the Centre for Social Justice. Tackling isolation through age-friendly design and community engagement is therefore both a moral and economic imperative.
- 7.5 These impacts are supported by robust national evidence and align with Dorset's prevention agenda, NHS priorities, and adult social care reform. The programme positions Dorset to attract external funding and secure international Age Friendly accreditation, reinforcing its leadership in place-based public health and ageing well.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 Age Friendly design principles promote walkable communities, accessible transport, and localised support, contributing to reduced car dependency and more sustainable neighbourhoods. The climate wheel shows the impact:



9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 Age-Friendly Communities have a proven impact on health, wellbeing, and inclusion by creating environments that support mobility, social connection, and access to services, not only for older adults, but also for people with disabilities, long-term conditions, and those aspiring to age well. In the Dorset Council area, implementing the WHO framework enables the system to track measurable improvements across eight domains of ageing well, including reduced hospital admissions, increased healthy life expectancy, improved housing and transport accessibility, and enhanced community health services. By addressing wider determinants of health, such as safe public spaces, inclusive transport, social participation, and access to information, the programme promotes equity and prevention. Success will be monitored through indicators such as reduced falls, increased social participation, and feedback from Older People's Panels, enabling transparent reporting, long-term benefits for residents, and reduced pressure on health and care systems.

9.2 Importantly, age-friendly initiatives also create intergenerational opportunities, fostering stronger relationships between younger and older residents. Shared spaces, community programmes, and volunteering schemes can help bridge generational divides, reduce stereotypes, and build mutual respect, benefiting the wellbeing of all age groups and strengthening community cohesion.

10. Other implications

10.1 Age Friendly Communities span all areas of council activity and require coordinated, cross-directorate working. While Adult Social Care plays a central role, successful implementation also relies on integration across housing, planning, transport, and economic development. A whole-system approach is essential to ensure age-friendly principles are consistently embedded into policy, service design, and delivery across the organisation.

10.2 The programme strengthens the role of the voluntary and community sector by supporting co-production, expanding local delivery capacity, and enabling

VCSE organisations to lead inclusive, preventative initiatives that reflect the needs and aspirations of older residents.

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: HIGH/MEDIUM

Residual Risk: MEDIUM

Failure to invest in age-friendly infrastructure and community support risks increased isolation, higher demand for residential care, and widening health inequalities.

12. Equalities

12.1 The proposal supports inclusion and equity for older adults, carers, disabled residents, and those ageing alone or without family support.

12.2 While age is a key factor in shaping access to communities, it is not the only barrier older people may face. Many individuals experience multiple layers of disadvantage, for example, being an older person of colour, LGBTQ+, disabled, or from a low-income background. These intersecting identities can compound exclusion and reduce access to services, spaces, and opportunities. This means actively considering demographic diversity, listening to underrepresented voices, and designing environments that reflect and respect the full spectrum of lived experiences among older residents.

12.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Age Friendly Communities programme, highlighting clear benefits for older people, carers, and disabled residents, and identifying further opportunities to strengthen inclusion through community-led solutions and enhanced data.

13. Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background papers

14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).