

People & Health Overview

15 September 2025

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

For Recommendation to Cabinet

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: Dorset Council

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

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the People & Health Overview Committee on progress made towards developing Age Friendly Communities across Dorset as part of the 'Communities for All' priority in the Council Plan 2024-29.
- 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 Council's 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 asks the People & Health Overview to review the report and make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

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

ii) Endorse the integration of Age-Friendly principles into whole council strategy and planning considerations including Adult Social Care locality practice, commissioning and strategic planning.

iii) Through the Council's OFC programme (Commissioning & Procurement & Community Partnerships Programmes), integrate age friendly principles into design of infrastructure, transport, housing, and public spaces.

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 As a result, Dorset Council faces growing financial pressures, with adult social care accounting for £159.6 million, over 38% of the 2025/26 net budget. Rising demand, particularly for complex care, combined with limited national

funding, highlights the urgent need for preventative approaches. Delivering community programmes, such as Age Friendly Communities offers a strategic solution to reduce future demand, delay formal care, and improve outcomes, whilst delivering long-term sustainability and value.

4. The report

- 4.1 Dorset Council 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 are effective in framing an all-age approach, building from the Adult Social Care commissioning strategies and align with the ‘Communities for All’ priority delivered through the Community Partnerships Programme. The Age Friendly Communities Framework will ensure joined-up delivery across Council services and localities. This ambition is also embedded within Dorset’s Health & Wellbeing Strategy, which recognises Age-Friendly Communities as a key enabler for creating communities for all ages. Delivery will be driven through place-based partnerships, enabling local areas to tailor interventions to their population needs and measure progress through shared outcomes. This ensures alignment across health, care, and community sectors, and supports integrated planning and delivery.
- 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. This also aligns with NHS and ICB priorities around prevention, integrated care, and population health, offering a community-based approach to reducing demand and improving outcomes.

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 the Age Friendly principles as a frame to the Communities for all programme is a strategic, evidence-led response to Dorset Council's ageing population. Through national partnership, WHO alignment, and local investment, the Council is building a future where older people are valued, supported, and connected. Cabinet's endorsement will support Dorset to secure WHO accreditation, expand community engagement, and deliver measurable improvements in wellbeing, inclusion, and system efficiency.

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

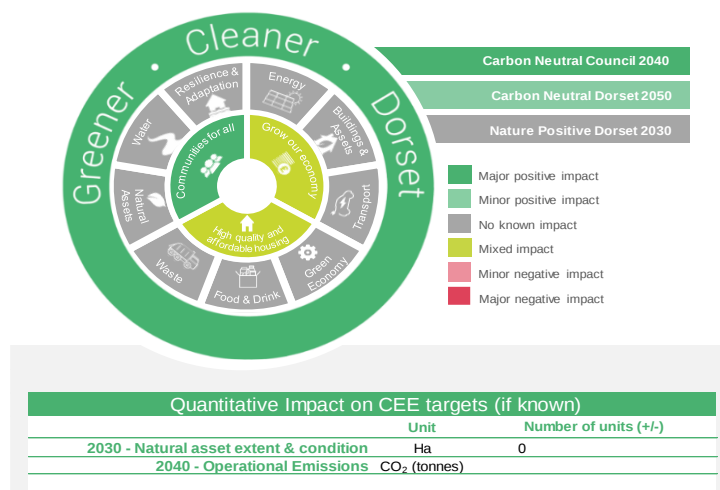
- 6.1 The Age Friendly Communities programme supports Dorset Council's statutory duties under the Care Act 2014 by promoting wellbeing, preventing care needs, and fostering integration across health and social care. It also aligns with the Equality Act 2010 by advancing inclusion for older adults, disabled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

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Dorset Council faces significant financial pressures due to its ageing population, which is one of the oldest of any county in the UK. In 2025–26, adult social care accounts for £159.6 million, representing over 38% of the council's total net budget. This proportion continues to rise as demand increases, particularly for complex care and support services. The financial strain is compounded by limited national funding and a growing need for preventative approaches. Delivering Age Friendly Communities offers a

strategic opportunity to reduce future demand, delay entry into formal care, and improve outcomes, delivering long-term sustainability.

- 7.2 Cabinet is asked to consider support, through the 'Communities for All' programme to deliver Dorset's Age Friendly County Framework. A detailed funding assessment will be developed, identifying internal and external sources including national grants, VCSE contributions, and potential co-investment. This approach will enable town-level implementation of WHO-aligned initiatives that measurably improve older people's 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 fall-related hospital admissions
 - Addressing loneliness and isolation
 - Delaying or preventing entry into formal adult social care
- 7.4 We know the connection between isolation and loneliness and in the UK that this can result in many people requiring health and social care services. The Centre for Social Justice research estimates that for older people alone severe loneliness costs the UK over £6,000 per person in Health and social care services.
- 7.5 This is based on robust national evidence and align with Dorset Council's prevention agenda, NHS priorities, and adult social care reform. The programme will also position 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 would enable the council 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. Success will be monitored through indicators such as reduced falls, increased social participation, and feedback from Older People's Panels. By embedding these metrics, the council can transparently report progress, deliver long-term benefits for residents, and reduce 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).