

Summary: Evaluation of Welsh Government Age-friendly Funding to Local Authorities

Since 2021, Welsh Government has provided dedicated funding to local authorities to support the development of age-friendly communities, in line with the vision set out in [Age Friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society](#). This funding has enabled local authorities to appoint dedicated age-friendly officers (AFCOs), strengthen local partnerships and engage older people in shaping services and local communities.

This report evaluates the impact of this investment of £3.850,000 over 4 years, drawing on end-of-year reports from 2024 – 25, questionnaire responses from local authorities and insights from focus groups with older people facilitated by Age Cymru. By bringing together strategic and community perspectives, the report aims to identify good practice and next steps on our shared journey to become an age-friendly Wales.

This evaluation has identified the following six outcomes that local authorities are aiming to achieve (listed below).

1. Membership of the WHO Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities

A key aim of the funding is to support local authorities to gain membership of the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. 11 local authorities have successfully gained membership, while others are actively progressing through the application process. Engagement with the WHO Network has provided a structured framework for assessing local provision, identifying areas for improvement and embedding age-friendly principles across services.

Local authorities state membership of the WHO Network has brought credibility, enhanced their visibility and facilitated access to global resources and peer learning. Even for those not yet members, the application process itself has been transformative by encouraging collaboration, critical reflection and early improvements in policy and practice. The WHO framework has also helped local authorities to align their work with international standards and reinforced a rights-based, preventative approach to ageing.

2. Establishing age-friendly structures and strengthening partnerships

The funding has enabled local authorities to embed age-friendly principles into their organisational structures and service delivery. AFCOs are now in place across Wales, often situated within departments such as social care, prevention, or corporate policy, which has facilitated cross-departmental collaboration and strategic alignment. Many local authorities have established internal steering groups and external partnerships with health boards, voluntary organisations, and community groups. These partnerships have led to more coordinated planning and delivery of services, with age-friendly considerations increasingly reflected in local policies and frameworks.

3. Amplifying Older People's Voices

Local authorities have made significant efforts to ensure that older people's voices are heard and influence local decision-making. Forums, advisory groups and networks have been established or revitalised, providing regular opportunities for

older people to share their views. Local authorities have employed a range of engagement methods, including in-person events, surveys, newsletters, and digital outreach, with a strong emphasis on face-to-face interaction. Feedback from older people is increasingly being used to inform policy, shape services and guide funding decisions. While engagement is generally strong, challenges remain in reaching digitally excluded individuals and ensuring consistent communication across all areas. Older people have expressed a desire for more inclusive and accessible engagement, particularly in rural communities.

4. Coproduction and Community Empowerment

The age-friendly funding has fostered a culture of coproduction, with older people actively involved in designing and leading community activities. Local authorities have shifted towards enabling roles, supporting older people's groups with funding applications, governance advice and capacity building. Volunteering has emerged as a key feature of the programme, offering older people opportunities for social connection, purpose, and contribution. Local authorities have facilitated the development of new community-led initiatives and helped existing groups to grow and sustain their work. While volunteering is highly valued, older people highlighted that barriers such as health limitations, transport difficulties and limited awareness of opportunities continue to affect participation. Addressing these challenges will be essential to maintaining the momentum and sustainability of community-led initiatives.

5. Inclusion, accessibility and well-being

Local authorities have demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusion and accessibility, recognising the diverse needs of older people. Services and activities have been adapted to reflect differences in age, health, language, culture, and socio-economic status. Councils have taken steps to ensure physical accessibility, provide information in multiple languages, and offer both digital and non-digital communication channels.

Targeted outreach has improved engagement with underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and disabled older people. Despite these efforts, persistent challenges such as rural isolation, transport barriers, and digital exclusion continue to limit participation for some. Local authorities are responding with innovative approaches, including community-based meet-ups, intergenerational projects, and blended communication strategies, but further work is needed to ensure equitable access for all.

Communication and information sharing

Improved communication has been a notable outcome of the age-friendly funding. Local authorities have adopted a blended approach to information sharing, combining traditional methods such as printed newsletters, leaflets and face-to-face engagement with digital tools including websites, social media, and virtual meetings. These efforts have helped older people stay informed about services, activities and opportunities in their communities. However, feedback from older people indicates that information is still not always easy to find or access, particularly for those who are not online. There is a continued need for clear signposting, consistent messaging and proactive outreach to ensure that all older people, regardless of their circumstances, can remain informed and engaged.

Impact on older people

The age-friendly programme has had a significant positive impact on older people's well-being. Social connections have been strengthened, with many older people reporting reduced loneliness and a greater sense of belonging. Emotional well-being and confidence have improved as older people feel more valued, heard, and involved in their communities. Participation in physical activities has supported healthier lifestyles and improved mobility. Access to services and support has increased, with more older people receiving information about benefits, transport, and local resources. The programme has also empowered older people to take on leadership roles, volunteer and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Improvements to public spaces and community facilities have enhanced safety and accessibility, further supporting older people's independence and participation.

Feedback from older people's focus groups

Older people across Wales shared a wide range of experiences regarding their involvement in age-friendly initiatives. Many participants described the activities supported by the funding as essential to their well-being, offering social connection, purpose, and improved mental and physical health. They valued opportunities to meet others, reduce loneliness and feel part of a community. Volunteering was highlighted as particularly rewarding, helping individuals maintain a sense of identity and contribution after retirement.

However, experiences of engagement varied. While some older people felt empowered through structured forums and regular contact with Age-friendly Communities Officers, others reported feeling excluded or unaware of how to get involved. Digital exclusion was a recurring concern, with many participants lacking the skills, confidence, or access to engage with online consultations or communications. There was a strong preference for face-to-face engagement, printed materials, and local noticeboards.

Participants also expressed frustration with limited transport options, especially in rural areas, which restricted their ability to attend activities or access services. Physical accessibility issues, such as poor pavements and inadequate public toilets, were also raised. Some older people felt that information about services and opportunities was too fragmented or hidden, relying too heavily on digital platforms or word of mouth.

Despite these challenges, there was a clear appetite for more meaningful engagement, better communication, and inclusive consultation methods. Older people called for more visible representation, improved outreach, and sustained support for community-led initiatives. Where Age-friendly Communities Officers were active and visible, they were highly valued and seen as vital connectors and advocates.

Challenges identified

Despite the progress made, several challenges remain. Short-term funding cycles have limited the ability of local authorities to plan strategically and maintain continuity. Capacity constraints, particularly where a single AFCO is responsible for a wide remit, have affected the scale and consistency of delivery. Digital exclusion and transport barriers continue to hinder engagement, especially in rural areas. Improved

coordination across related initiatives and clearer role definitions for AFCOs to ensure consistency and effectiveness may help. Reaching isolated or disengaged older individuals remains a challenge, requiring targeted and sustained outreach efforts.

Conclusion

The age-friendly funding has delivered meaningful outcomes across Wales, improving the lives of older people and transforming how local authorities approach ageing. Local authorities report a cultural shift towards more inclusive, responsive, and collaborative practices. Older people are more engaged, empowered, and supported than before and services are increasingly aligned with their needs and aspirations. The programme has demonstrated the value of dedicated, ring-fenced funding in driving strategic change and fostering community resilience.

While the overall direction of travel is positive, the older people's focus groups also surfaced important challenges that temper this progress. Barriers such as transport, rural isolation, digital exclusion and limited awareness of available services were frequently cited. Notably, these same issues were also acknowledged by local authorities in their reports and questionnaires, demonstrating a shared understanding of the structural and practical obstacles that can limit participation.

The contrast lies not in disagreement over the issues, but in the experience of their impact. While local authorities are working to address these barriers through strategic planning and partnership, older people's day-to-day experiences suggest that more needs to be done to ensure these efforts are reaching everyone, particularly those who are most isolated or digitally excluded.

It is also clear that some local authorities are employing the funding to achieve its specified outcomes better than others. This can be evidenced by the number of local authorities who have successfully gained membership of the WHO Network, but also by our analysis of end of year reports which show some local authorities are hindered by competing priorities, issues with staffing or strategic level support.

Despite these challenges, the commitment to age-friendly work remains strong. Across Wales, teams are listening to older people, promoting intergenerational understanding, celebrating diversity, advocating for sustainable funding and bringing a range of partners together to work towards a shared vision of an age-friendly Wales.

Next Steps

1. Funding for AFCO posts for the next financial year (2026-27) has been agreed by the Minister for Children and Social Care. Early notification of funding was announced via a [written statement](#) to celebrate Older People's Day. Funding decisions in relation to 2027-28 onwards will be considered by the 2026-30 administration
2. The Welsh Government will continue to share and encourage best practice via the Local Authority Age-friendly Network and quarterly newsletter.
3. In partnership with the Older People's Commissioner, the Welsh Government will continue to encourage local authorities who have not yet gained membership of the WHO Network to submit an application.

4. The Welsh Government will share this evaluation with the Local Authority Age-friendly Network, the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing (MAFA), the Older People's Commissioner and relevant officials from across Welsh Government to consider cross-cutting issues raised relating to digital exclusion, transport, volunteering and accessibility of services and public spaces. This working group will also consider how to expand awareness of age-friendly communities to more strategic bodies across Wales.
5. Learning from the findings of this evaluation, we will establish a working group of older people, MAFA members, local authorities and other interested parties to focus on engagement and how to reach underrepresented groups.
6. We will work with partners listed above to consider the value of the following:
 - a) Clearer funding criteria for local authorities in 2026 -27.
 - b) Improved visibility and branding for age-friendly initiative to increase awareness.
 - c) A standardised framework for AFCO roles, including clear remit and outcomes.
7. We will fund Age Cymru to work with One Voice Wales to encourage more Town and Community Councils to be part of creating an age-friendly Wales.
8. Welsh Government to engage local authorities in a programme of work linked to challenging ageism.