

AGE FRIENDLY WALES: OUR STRATEGY FOR AN AGEING SOCIETY

[*Age Friendly Wales: our Strategy for an Ageing Society*](#), published in October 2021, sets out how we will work with a range of partners to address the factors that influence how we age – from our health, social care and transport systems to the way we socialise, work and care for others.

This report provides an update on progress against key actions in the strategy which have impacted on older people over the last twelve months.

Implementation of the strategy is monitored with valued support and guidance from the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing.

£1.1 million funding to local authorities

As a response to global population ageing, in 2010 the World Health Organisation (WHO) established the [Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities](#). The Network ‘focuses on action at the local level that fosters the full participation of older people in community life and promotes healthy and active ageing.’ Membership of the Network currently includes 1606 cities and communities in 53 countries, covering over 330 million people worldwide.

Creating Age Friendly Communities is a key objective in our Strategy for an Ageing Society. £1.1million per annum is allocated to local authorities – £50,000 each – to fund a dedicated age friendly post. The funding supports local authorities to gain membership of the WHO’s Global Network and to involve older people in the planning and delivery of local services. Placing older people’s voice and experiences at the centre of the policy making process is a fundamental element of creating an age friendly Wales.

Eight local authorities have now joined the WHO’s Global Network - Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Flintshire, Anglesey, Gwynedd, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Ceredigion and Newport. Another four are aiming to become members in spring 2025 and we anticipate that all will have gained membership by the end of this term of government in 2026.

Close working relationships continue between Welsh Government and the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (OPCW) to promote and realise our shared vision of an age friendly Wales. The Commissioner is recognised as an affiliate member of the WHO Global Network and provides guidance and support to local authorities with their applications.

Welsh Government’s funding for the age friendly officers has led to the development of a broad range of community-based activities offering preventative support. The funding is also allowing local authorities to broker new partnerships between older people and the statutory and third sector under a shared goal to work towards an age friendly Wales that supports people of all ages to live and age well.

An analysis of local authority activity shows that all are developing innovative ways to connect older people with advice and information; influence local service

development; volunteer or participate in healthy ageing activities and to combat loneliness and isolation.

We asked local authorities to provide us with an estimated figure of how many older people are benefitting from age friendly initiatives, linked to the funding they receive for an age friendly post. We obtained figures from **19** local authorities, showing that **66,500 older people have benefitted in some way from the age friendly activities** over the last 12 months up to November 2024.

Over 33,000 had taken part in, or attended, a face-to-face engagement event with 2000 taking time to respond to a survey or consultation.

A frequent request from older people we engage with is that they are better informed about what activities are available in their communities. Over the last 12 months, almost 23,000 people have been reached directly with information about local events and activities. Older people are also receiving information about their rights, entitlements, support for unpaid carers and access to health and social care.

All 22 authorities referenced new engagement within their initial workplan. Many operate a 50+ forum which offers older people the opportunity to influence the design and development of local services. Alternative routes to hear from older people have also been explored, these are particularly successful in hearing from people who do not wish to be a part of formal groups.

Cross sector partnership working is also a key feature of the local authority activity - 21 authorities work with a wide range of partners from third party organisations, volunteers, local citizens, local and national organisations.

Welsh Government also continues to fund four national older people's groups and Age Alliance Wales, an alliance of 23 third sector organisations working with and for older people. The older people's groups, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, the local authority age friendly leads and Age Alliance Wales are all represented on the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing.

Through this collective effort, combining national commitment and local action, Wales has become part of a global movement towards improving policies and services for older people to the extent that we are now noted by the WHO as an international example of good practice.

Combatting ageism and promoting older people's rights

The Older People's Rights Campaign, initially funded by Welsh Government in 2022, continues to have impact. Age Cymru has trained a group of volunteer ambassadors to raise awareness of human rights and continues to promote the [Human Rights toolkit](#) within their own communities.

[The Making Rights Work for Older People](#) guidance was prepared to inform older people, their friends and family about their rights in a care and support setting. It was co-produced between Welsh Government, Age Cymru, Social Care Wales, older people, representatives from the third sector and the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. An additional [version](#) was prepared for care providers.

In September 2024, a working group was convened with members of the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing to consider the impact of ageism and age discrimination on older individuals in Wales. The group aims to instigate a national debate on ageism that will influence a positive change in attitudes towards older people and

ageing. Age Cymru is facilitating a series of focus groups to ensure the voices and experiences of older people inform this work.

ENHANCING WELL-BEING

Unpaid Carers

Our National Strategy for Unpaid Carers represents our commitment to improve the recognition of, and support provided to, unpaid carers. It sets out our national priorities for unpaid carers in four key priority areas. The strategy is underpinned by a delivery plan and an annual report. We will be reviewing the strategy later in 2024.

£9million over three years (2022-2025) has been awarded to Carers Wales to establish and deliver our [Short Breaks Scheme for Unpaid Carers](#); the scheme aims to increase opportunities for unpaid carers to take a break and have a life alongside their caring role.

£4.5 million has also been invested over three years (2022-2025) into the Carers Support Fund. The fund is administered by Carers Trust Wales and provides grants of up to £300 to carers struggling to cope with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. In some areas 70% of applicants were previously unknown carers, who now have access to a range of support services including financial advice.

£1million is provided to health boards via the Regional Integration Fund (RIF) to support unpaid carers when the person they care for is admitted to or discharged from hospital. Additionally, the RIF guidance states that regions must allocate a minimum of 5% for direct support to unpaid carers. In the second year of the RIF, the total spend across Wales amounted to £9.3m which equates to 9% of the Fund. This means it is 4% over the minimum investment required annually.

Welsh Government commissioned the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSSC) to undertake a rapid review on how the rights of unpaid carers are being upheld. Their report was [published](#) in November 2023. The previous Deputy Minister for Social Services asked that the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers establish a working group to look at the findings. The task and finish group is focussing on promotion of best practice in the provision of information, advice and assistance to unpaid carers and carers' needs assessments. We are currently working closely with local authorities to self-assess and identify good practice, with the intention of co-producing good practice guidance with local authorities and unpaid carers.

Access to GP services

Over the last three years, we have taken a number of steps to make it easier for people in Wales to contact their GP and make an appointment - we are investing £12 million over 3 years from April 2022 to help GP practices build their capacity through additional staff to support better access. With the introduction of the new Unified Contract in October 2023, we have contractually mandated the systems practices must have in place and the information they must provide to patients on how to book an appointment to ensure consistency across Wales. To address concerns around the '8:00am bottleneck' for appointments, we introduced the [Access Commitment](#), which requires practices to adopt a blended model of access, offering a mix of remote, face-to-face, urgent, on-the-day and pre-bookable appointments. In March

2024 97% of practices confirmed they are delivering this Commitment, suggesting these improvements are embedding within general practice.

We are in the process of reviewing our Access Standards. The [report](#) by the former Older People's Commissioner for Wales on GP access helpfully highlights older people's experiences of using GP services. The report provides important insight to feed into our evaluation and invites us to reflect on how our access offer may need to be tailored to the needs of specific groups to ensure equitable access to services.

The GP speciality training programme has been significantly expanded over the past three years - since the launch of the [Train Work Live](#) campaign, there has been a significant increase in the fill rate for GP training. The current recruitment target of 160 new GP trainees each year is consistently being achieved. A total of 199 trainees were recruited in 2023.

We have also provided financial incentives to attract GP trainees to speciality training schemes in north and west Wales, areas that are historically difficult to recruit to.

Access to Local Authority Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Services

We are currently reviewing IAA services in each of the local authorities across Wales. This will allow us to understand what level of "front-door" IAA support, communication and access is being offered to people about their care and support options. This internal review will assist us to develop our own plan of action to strengthen IAA.

A National Care Service for Wales

The 'Towards a National Care Service [Initial Implementation Plan](#)' was published on 14 December 2023 and work is underway on the delivery of the Stage 1 implementation plan. There are several pieces of research which we will be commissioning to help develop longer-term considerations for the National Care Service. Officials are shortly to go out to tender on a number of research pieces, specifically:

- Fee methodologies –
 - This research will look into the feasibility of creating a national fee methodology, including for care home placements. This will link to our recently launched [National Framework for Commissioned Care and Support](#).
- Paying for care and future funding –
 - Research will consider the level of spend on commissioned preventative social care (relative to the totality of social care spend) by local authority area, annually over the last ten years.
 - Research will also commence with WLGA and Welsh NHS Confederation to assess the required level of investment to inform future policy direction.
 - Finally, research will also consider how a charging regime can evolve into a system in Wales where most non-residential care is delivered free at the point of need.

In addition to research, work is being undertaken to complete the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme which has three main objectives;

- To put in place a national framework for commissioning care and support.
- Establishment of a national office for care and support within Welsh Government.
- Strengthen partnership working and integration of services.

This programme puts in place important building blocks towards the creation of a National Care Service, and this work is now being taken forward as a workstream of the National Care Service programme.

Other work underway as part of the move towards a National Care Service in Wales includes the creation of a Consultant Social Worker role. This role will be based within BASW Cymru and the successful post holder will specifically advise on the delivery of social work practice and the professional development of those working with individuals at risk of disadvantage based on their race and/or ethnicity.

Work is also at an early stage to establish a citizen forum mechanism which will be managed by the newly formed National Office for Care and Support and which will directly support the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales to engage with service users and their carers. Officials are also working closely with Llais and other key stakeholders who represent citizens.

IMPROVING LOCAL SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENTS.

Transport

We published a White Paper setting out our plans to regulate the bus industry in Easter 2022. We will introduce a range of reforms including the franchising of bus services, allowing local authorities to create new municipal bus companies and relaxing restrictions on existing municipal bus companies.

Together with Transport for Wales (TfW) we published "[Bus reform for Wales: our roadmap to franchising](#)" in March 2024 to explain why we are introducing these changes, our vision for bus services in Wales and how we are going to turn this vision into reality.

The UK Department for Transport is introducing new Accessible Information Regulations for bus operators which will apply across Great Britain. Between 2024 and 2026 it will become mandatory for most local bus and coach services to provide on-board accessible information, including in audible and visual formats. We will work with our stakeholders to ensure implementation and compliance in Wales.

We are committed to maintaining our concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people which enables qualifying people to travel for free on most bus services in Wales and to get discounted or free travel on many rail services.

Concessionary bus pass holders who require assistance from another person when travelling by bus can apply for a Companion Card from their local authority. This will provide free travel for one person accompanying them.

AIM 3: BUILDING AND RETAINING PEOPLE'S OWN CAPABILITY

Digital Inclusion

The National Survey for Wales (NSW) provides our annual measure for progress against the national indicator. Older people remain the group most likely to be digitally excluded with 32% of people living in Wales aged 75 and over offline.

Officials have been working with wider stakeholders and DataMapWales to publish an [interactive map](#), to allow those supporting people to search by postal code for places offering digital support. A further iteration is planned for later this year.

Welsh Government commissioned the University of Liverpool to explore the concept of a Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) for Wales. The research concluded in November 2023 and was designed as a consensus approach, providing a definition and a list of digital goods and skills which citizens view as a minimum to engage with our digital society. The work benefitted from UK research funded by the Nuffield Foundation which developed a proof of concept focused on households with children.

Officials are in the process of managing a £50,000 capital grant for a 9-month Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) pilot with two social housing associations – Monmouthshire and North Wales Housing. The pilot aims to expand our knowledge of the impact of the MDLS on different sections of the population by funding housing associations to provide digital devices/technology to ensure residents meet the 'defined' MDLS.

The Digital Communities Wales: digital confidence, health and well-being contract has been extended until June 2025. This will ensure ongoing and appropriate interventions are in place and organisations have a central and well-established programme to go to for support.

As the current digital inclusion flagship programme – Digital Communities Wales – is due to end, we are taking this opportunity to start intensive engagement on the next phase of digital inclusion work in Wales. We are keeping engagement deliberately broad and welcoming all views. Options for future digital inclusion delivery will be submitted to Cabinet Secretary early 2025.

Working closely with Welsh Government infrastructure leads and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) we are exploring ways to raise awareness of social tariffs for broadband and mobile. A social tariff is a reduced cost option for either fixed or mobile connectivity eligible for people in receipt of benefits – this includes pension credit.

Welsh Government continue to raise awareness when working across sectors of the need to ensure options for engaging with services are developed based on the user needs and consider those who either cannot or choose not to engage digitally. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales has led this work through the 'Getting the information and services you need in a digital world: Know Your Rights'.

Volunteering

How and why people volunteer is changing, and new and innovative approaches to help third sector organisations attract and retain volunteers, will be underpinned by a new and progressive vision to drive volunteering in Wales.

The Volunteering Cross-Sector Leadership Group, established through the Third Sector Partnership Council, will lead on developing a vision over the coming 12 months.

The group will co-design a new approach to volunteering in Wales to give a unifying and uniquely Welsh vision for volunteering in Wales and a framework for delivering it.

Over the coming months the co-design process, including through surveys and workshops, will provide everyone who wants to the opportunity to help shape the future of volunteering.

AIM 4: TACKLING AGE RELATED POVERTY

In light of the UK Government's decision to change the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment, Welsh Government continues to work closely with the UK Government to increase take up of Pension Credit.

We recently supported the UK week of action on our social media channels and have worked with our partners as part of a coordinated Pension Credit push. To reach older people who are digitally excluded, a poster has been developed for display in GP Surgeries, vaccination centres and other areas older people may frequent. Further resources are in development which aim to encourage younger people to check-in with family members who may be missing out on their Pension Credit entitlement.

It is becoming clear that older people are responding to the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility criteria by making an application for Pension Credit. On the 9 September DWP released ad hoc statistics that show there has been a 115% increase in Pension Credit claims received in the past five weeks compared to the 5 weeks before the 29 July.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip will be chairing the next bi-lateral meeting of an Inter-Ministerial Group on Work and Pensions and intends to discuss with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how both governments can work together to protect older people this winter.

Since the Single Advice Fund was introduced in January 2020, services have helped more than 250,000 people deal with over one million social welfare problems. Those helped were supported to claim additional income of £132.9 million and had debts totalling £36.1 million written off.

Older people are a key priority group for all the Single Advice Fund services. 38% of all people accessing advice and support services are older people -during the last financial year, over 15,000 people aged 65+ have been helped to claim welfare benefit income.

The Welsh Benefits Charter which was launched in January 2024 and is a guiding set of principles for the design and delivery of Welsh Benefits which all 22 Local Authorities have signed up to. It sets out the vision for an inclusive, person-centred approach to the delivery of Welsh Benefits where a person only has to tell their story once to access all their financial entitlements.

As part of the development of the Charter officials engaged with Older People's Commissioner and attended an Age Alliance Wales event to hear feedback first hand from attendees, older people who claim benefits.