Department for Communities
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Active Ageing Strategy Action Plan 2027-2032

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Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Active Ageing & Disability Policy Branch
Department for Communities
Level 7, Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford St,
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Email: **agefriendly.consultation@communities-ni.gov.uk**

This publication is also available to download from our website at: **www.communities-ni.gov.uk**

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Active Ageing Strategy Action Plan

Vision

The Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2032 and associated Action Plan's vision is that Northern Ireland becomes a truly Age-Friendly society in which people, as they grow older, are valued and supported to live actively to their fullest potential; with their rights respected and their dignity protected.

Purpose

The Strategy and Action Plan sets out a strategic approach for supporting older people (50 years+[1]) to remain active, healthy and economically engaged.

The Strategic Context

Northern Ireland's population is ageing. People are living longer than previous generations and the number and proportion of older people within the population is projected to continue increasing over the coming decades. This presents significant opportunities for society but also creates challenges for public services, communities and the economy.

Older people make an invaluable contribution to family, community and civic life. They contribute through employment, volunteering, caring responsibilities, informal support networks and community leadership. The experience, skills and knowledge of older people are a significant asset and should be recognised and supported.

At the same time, many older people face barriers that can affect their quality of life and ability to participate fully in society. These can include poor health, disability, loneliness, social isolation, financial insecurity, digital exclusion, transport difficulties and limited access to suitable housing. These challenges can be more pronounced for those living in rural areas, people experiencing poverty and those with additional support needs.

The strategic context that informed the development of the original Active Ageing Strategy remains highly relevant. While demographic, economic and societal changes have continued to evolve, the key opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing population continue to apply. Older people continue to make a significant contribution to society through work, volunteering, caring and community participation, while many also experience barriers relating to health, social isolation, housing, transport, financial security and access to services. Improving financial security in later life is a key theme throughout the Action Plan. Through actions relating to fuel poverty, housing costs, access to benefits and support services, and improving awareness of

1 Although primarily focused on older adults, through stakeholder engagement the importance of preparing for ageing from age 50 onwards in order to help people remain healthy, independent, active and connected as they grow older was identified.

financial entitlements, the Strategy seeks to reduce financial barriers that can prevent older people from participating fully in community life and maintaining their independence.

Supporting healthy and independent living, reducing social isolation, promoting participation, creating age-friendly environments and addressing inequalities remain central to improving outcomes for older people.

Evaluation findings, stakeholder engagement and cross-departmental consultation have indicated that the strategic priorities contained within the existing Active Ageing Strategy Framework remain appropriate and relevant. As these priorities continue to reflect the needs and aspirations of older people, the decision was taken to build upon the existing Strategic Framework and develop a new Action Plan to reflect current priorities, emerging evidence and departmental activity. This approach provides continuity of strategic direction while ensuring that delivery remains responsive to the current needs of older people.

The Strategy and Action Plan complements a range of Executive Departments strategies by promoting independence, participation, wellbeing and inclusion for older people, including:

- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Warm Healthy Homes 2026-2036 Strategy
- Disability and Work Strategy
- Housing Supply Strategy 2024 - 2039
- Rural NI: Our New Approach (2026-2041)
- Health and Social Care NI Three-Year Plan (2025-2028)
- Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031

It provides a mechanism through which departments can contribute collectively to shared outcomes relating to tackling fuel poverty, improving housing conditions, enabling older people to live independently, supporting employment and employability, and improving financial security. In doing so, it supports the delivery of wider Executive priorities while ensuring that the opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing population are reflected across government policy and service delivery.

What this Action Plan Will Deliver

This Action Plan, which covers the period 2027-2032, builds on the continued relevance of the existing Active Ageing Strategy Framework. While many of the actions contained within this Action Plan build on existing programmes and policies, the added value of the Active Ageing Strategy lies in bringing these actions together within a single, coordinated Executive framework focused on improving outcomes for older people. The Action Plan strengthens the focus on active ageing by bringing together relevant actions under a shared set of objectives, improving accountability for delivery, establishing clearer monitoring and reporting arrangements, and providing a mechanism for ongoing engagement with older people and their representative organisations.

This approach will help ensure that existing and future programmes make a more coordinated and measurable contribution to supporting older people to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.

Executive Signature Projects

The Active Ageing Strategy and Action Plan contains a wide range of actions across Executive Departments. While all actions contribute to the overall ambition of creating a more age-friendly Northern Ireland, a number of initiatives stand out as Executive Signature Projects due to their scale, visibility and potential to deliver significant benefits for older people. These projects provide a focal point for delivery and demonstrate how collective action can support healthier, more active and more independent later lives**.**

Collectively, these projects support the core foundations of active ageing by strengthening the voice of older people, improving housing and independent living, promoting health and wellbeing, and enabling access to services and community life through improved mobility and inclusion. Together, they represent the Executive's most significant commitments to creating a more age-friendly Northern Ireland.

1. Regional Age Friendly Forum

The establishment of a Regional Age Friendly Forum will provide a structured mechanism for engagement between Executive Departments and older people's representative organisations and support the implementation and monitoring of the Active Ageing Strategy and Action Plan.

2. Warm Healthy Homes Strategy

The Warm Healthy Homes Strategy represents a major long-term commitment to reducing fuel poverty and improving housing conditions. Through investment in energy efficiency, consumer protection and targeted support for vulnerable households, the Strategy will help older people live in warmer, healthier and more energy-efficient homes, supporting both health and independent living.

3. Age-Friendly Housing and Independent Living Programme

A range of housing initiatives will work together to support older people to remain independent, safe and connected within their communities. These include housing adaptations, age-friendly design standards, specialist housing allocation arrangements, enhanced Decent Homes Standards, Supporting People services and the Co-Ownership for Over-55s Pilot. Collectively, these measures provide a comprehensive approach to supporting ageing in place and expanding access to suitable housing options.

4. Ageing Well



Preventative and community-based approaches are central to supporting healthy ageing. Through initiatives such as the Ageing Well programme and wider community wellbeing models, older people will be supported to maintain their health, manage long-term conditions, reduce social isolation and remain active within their communities. These approaches promote independence, early intervention and stronger links between communities, voluntary organisations and health services.

5. Enhanced Community Transport and Active Travel Infrastructure



Accessible transport and mobility are essential to maintaining independence and participation in community life. This programme brings together a range of initiatives including delivering Enhanced Community Transport, developing legislation on Disability Parking and delivering active travel Infrastructure by increasing investment in walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure. Together, these interventions will help older people access services, maintain social connections, participate in employment and remain active within their communities.

Strategic Objectives

PROMOTE HEALTHY AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

Outcome 1: Older people live independently for as long as they can, free from poverty and in suitable, safe homes.

Outcome 3: Older people are healthier for longer.

Given the level of synergies, and in order to support older people to maintain physical and mental health, prevent illness, and live independently for longer, it is proposed that outcomes 1 and 3 are combined.

Key actions:

- Implement the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy.
- Promote safer and more inclusive living environments for older people residing in higher risk residential buildings.
- Deliver Disabled Facilities Grant and the Disabled Adaptation grant programmes to help adapt homes for people with particular needs.
- To deliver Ageing Well and community wellbeing models, including Living Well Moyle

Outcomes:

- Improved physical fitness and mental wellbeing.
- Increased years lived in good health.

Outcomes 1 & 3. Promote Healthy and Independent Living

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	1. Implement the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy through delivery of its 33 strategic actions. The vision of the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy is: "To ensure everyone in Northern Ireland can live in a warm, healthy home."The strategy is delivered through three themes: • Make homes more energy efficient. • Protect consumers. • Build capacity through collaboration. Some key actions to be taken forward during the first phase of the Strategy include: • Launch an ambitious, long-term Warm Healthy Homes Fund in 2027 • Significantly increase the availability and accessibility of good energy information and advice for low-income, vulnerable households; and introduce additional measures in Discretionary Support to provide support for boiler repairs, and grants as well as loans for fuel.	The strategy targets households experiencing or at risk of fuel poverty, with specific emphasis on: • Low-income households. • Vulnerable groups, including – Older people – People in poor health – Households in energyinefficient homes. • People who need advice, information or support to improve their energy wellbeing, reduce energy costs or access available schemes and services. • Households requiring additional support during energy-related financial hardship or emergencies.	To enable older people to live in warm, safe and energy-efficient homes, reducing fuel poverty, supporting physical and mental wellbeing, and helping people remain independent for longer. The Warm Healthy Homes Strategy includes six specific objectives: • Increase investment in domestic energy efficiency schemes for low-income, vulnerable households. • Raise housing standards and improve enforcement. • Implement a new support framework for energy affordability. • Ensure robust protection and redress for heating and energy efficiency. • Utilise and build on experience and knowledge of others to increase energy wellbeing. • Ensure consistent, accessible financial support for low-income, vulnerable households in emergencies. The strategy is expected to deliver particular benefits for older people, who are more likely to spend longer periods at home and can be disproportionately affected by cold, damp and high energy costs. Warmer, more energy-efficient homes can support healthier ageing, greater comfort and independence, and reduce pressure on health and social care services.	2026–2036.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	2. Promote safer and more inclusive living environments for older people residing in higher risk residential buildings.	Housing Authorities.	To support older people to live safely and independently in their homes for longer by ensure that the introduction of enhanced building management responsibilities and resident engagement arrangements help with that the specific needs of older and vulnerable residents are identified and considered, supporting their safety, wellbeing, independence and confidence to remain in their homes for longer.	2027 – 2032.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	3. Deliver Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to help adapt private homes for people with particular needs. The DFG is a mandatory grant. The 25/26 budget is £15.95m. This budget will mostly be used for DFGs but also covers some Home Improvement grants. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive manages the administration of Disabled Adaptation Grant funding on behalf of the Department for Communities for adaptations to Housing Association properties to make the properties more suitable for tenants.	Owner-occupiers. Private tenants. Private landlords (where a disabled person lives in the property).	To help older people remain living safely and independently in their own homes and to ensure that properties are more suitable for tenants through timely access to housing adaptations that meet changing health and mobility needs. To supporting health and wellbeing by ensuring that individuals can carry out day-to-day activities more easily and with greater dignity.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	4. Deliver Disabled Adaptation Grant. The Department continues to provide funding through the Social Housing Development Programme to support the Disabled Adaptation Grant. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive manages the administration of Disabled Adaptation Grant funding on behalf of the Department for Communities for adaptations to Housing Association properties to make the properties more suitable for tenants.	NIHE. Housing Associations.	To enable older tenants to remain healthy, safe and independent within their communities through the provision of adaptations that support ageing in place. Promoting independent living by enabling older people to remain in their own homes rather than move into alternative accommodation or residential care.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department of Health	5. Deliver the Ageing Well initiative – to support older adults in maintain their health and wellbeing. This is a community led integrated care model of support delivered in partnership with GP's, Community Pharmacist and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and is funded by the Department of Health.	Older people aged 60+ Specifically: • Those with one or more longterm conditions. • Individuals identified as at risk of deteriorating health or social isolation. • Older people needing communitybased, nonclinical support.	The core objectives of the Impact Age Well programme are: • To support older people to age well, remain independent, and live healthier lives. • To deliver integrated, personcentred care using a communitydevelopment model. • To ensure older people receive appropriate support through wellcoordinated social prescribing. • To strengthen local community services by ensuring funding follows the person, increasing capacity in voluntary and community groups. • To improve identification, monitoring, and support for older people at risk through multidisciplinary locality hubs.	31 March 2027. Extension option: Possible 12month extension beyond March 2027.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department of Health	6. To deliver Ageing Well and community wellbeing models, including Living Well Moyle. Living Well Moyle is a community-based preventative health and wellbeing service. The service is designed to support people to live independently and improve their quality of life within their local communities. The service operates through a locality-based partnership approach in the Moyle/Ballycastle area, working closely with GP practices, Health and Social Care services, community pharmacists, and voluntary and community organisations. Through person-centred assessment, wellbeing planning, social prescribing and community-based interventions, the service helps individuals access appropriate supports to improve their health and wellbeing and reduce reliance on statutory services. The model is staffed by a combination of paid co-ordinators and volunteers.	Adults aged 18 years and over, particularly: • People managing long-term health conditions. • Individuals who may be vulnerable to social isolation, loneliness, or declining wellbeing. • Those requiring additional community support to maintain independence and improve wellbeing.	• Improve health and wellbeing outcomes through early intervention and preventative support. • Support people to self-manage long-term health conditions. • Reduce loneliness and social isolation by strengthening community connections. • Increase independence and support individuals to remain living at home for longer. • Improve access to local community assets, voluntary organisations and wellbeing services through social prescribing. • Reduce avoidable demand on statutory health and social care services, including hospital admissions and primary care services. • Strengthen local partnership working between primary care, community and voluntary sector organisations and Health and Social Care services.	Current contract period runs to 31 March 2027. Extension Option: Possible 12-month extension beyond March 2027, subject to approval and available funding.

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Outcome 2: Older people are involved in their family and community and in civic life.

Ensure older people remain socially connected and included in community life.

Key actions:

- Establishment of a Regional Age Friendly Forum.
- Support the development and enhancement of accessible community facilities through the Community Infrastructure Fund.
- Support Libraries NI in delivering inclusive library services, programmes and community spaces that promote participation, learning, wellbeing and social connection for people.
- Promote and support participation by older people in arts, culture, heritage, museums and creative activities, ensuring equality of access and opportunities for engagement across all communities, including for those who use indigenous and sign languages.
- To work with volunteering infrastructure organisations to encourage volunteering opportunities to enable older people to remain active, connected and engaged within their communities.

Outcomes:

- Reduced social isolation.
- Stronger, more inclusive communities.
- Increased community participation.

Outcome 2. Strengthen Social Connections

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	1. Creation of a Regional Age Friendly Forum with membership drawn from the entire sector including NICS departments, Local Government, the Age-Friendly Network and community-level groups.	• Central & Local Government. • Older Persons representative bodies. • Civic Society.	To strengthen the voice of older people in policy and service development through a Regional Age Friendly Forum that promotes collaboration, engagement and accountability across government and wider society. To ensure that Forum has a remit to monitor and report on the progress of the Active Ageing Strategy and its Action Plan and promote age-friendly approaches across public services.	Within 12 months of the publication of the Action Plan.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	2. Support the development and enhancement of accessible community facilities through the Community Infrastructure Fund, helping to create inclusive spaces that enable older people to participate in social, recreational, educational and intergenerational activities within their local communities.	Community and voluntary organisations, local community facility users, including older people.	To improve access to high-quality community infrastructure that supports social participation, volunteering, lifelong learning and community engagement, helping older people to remain active, connected and involved in community life.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	3. Support Libraries NI in delivering inclusive library services, programmes and community spaces that promote participation, learning, wellbeing and social connection for people. Libraries provide safe and welcoming community spaces that support older people to remain socially connected, access information and learning opportunities, improve digital skills and participate in community life. Through programmes such as Tea and Newspaper, Knit and Knatter and Positive Ageing events, libraries help tackle isolation and support wellbeing in later life.	All people living within Northern Ireland, including older people.	To support active ageing by improving opportunities for lifelong learning, digital inclusion, social participation and community connection through local library services. Through library programmes, digital inclusion support, literacy initiatives and wellbeing-focused activities, libraries to help older people remain connected, reduce social isolation, build confidence and skills, and continue to participate actively in community life. To help elevate financial pressure on older people as libraries provide an important community resource as warm, accessible spaces for older people, particularly during periods of increased financial pressure and fuel poverty.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	4. Promote and support participation by older people in arts, culture, heritage, museums and creative activities, ensuring equality of access and opportunities for engagement across all communities, including for those who use indigenous and sign languages. Participation in cultural and creative activities can improve wellbeing, reduce loneliness, support cognitive health and encourage lifelong learning. Through sponsorship of the Arts Council NI, Northern Ireland Museums Council and wider cultural bodies, the Department supports programmes that increase opportunities for older people to engage in arts, heritage and museum activities, including dementia-friendly initiatives and arts programmes designed specifically for older people.	All people living within Northern Ireland, including older people.	To increase opportunities for older people to participate in cultural, creative and heritage activities; supporting wellbeing, inclusion, lifelong learning and social connectedness. Participation in arts, cultural and heritage programmes can help reduce loneliness and isolation, support cognitive and mental wellbeing, encourage active community participation and provide opportunities for volunteering, learning and personal development. Through support for museums, arts organisations and wider cultural programmes, the Department will encourage accessible and inclusive opportunities that enable older people to remain active, connected and engaged in community and cultural life.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	5. To work with volunteering infrastructure organisations to encourage volunteering opportunities, including for older people, enabling them to remain active, connected and engaged within their communities.	All people living within Northern Ireland, including older people.	To support older people to contribute their skills, experience and knowledge through volunteering, strengthen social connections, enhance wellbeing and increase participation in community life.	Ongoing.

ENABLE PARTICIPATION, CONTRIBUTION, AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Outcome 4: Older people remain in employment for as long as they wish or need to.

Recognise and support the economic, social, and cultural contributions of older people.

Key actions:

- Deliver the Condition Management Programme.
- Increase Access to Work NI programme.
- Deliver increased Employment Support.
- Increase access to Workable NI programme.
- Deliver JobStart Scheme.
- Deliver JobStart Work Experience Programme.
- Deliver Labour Market Partnerships.
- Delivery of digital skills sessions providing basic level IT learning opportunities for adults in group (Go ON sessions) and one-to-one settings (Got IT) across the public libraries network.
- Deliver a new Rural Champion Model.

Outcomes:

- Higher employment and volunteering rates among older people.
- Improved skills, confidence, and purpose.
- Reduced age discrimination.

Outcome 4. Enable Participation, Contribution and Lifelong Learning

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	1. Deliver the Condition Management Programme. The Condition Management Programme is a cross departmental work-focussed rehabilitation programme which directly targets clients who have health-related barriers to work and are in receipt of Employment & Support Allowance or Jobseekers Allowance. The program is entirely voluntary and is delivered by healthcare professionals across Northern Ireland's five Health and Social Care Trusts. Its aims to help people manage their physical or mental health conditions to start, stay in, or return to employment and is restricted to working-age individuals.	Working Age people 16-64 years. The Condition Management Programme is also available to Workable (NI) and Access to Work participants who require assistance to stay in work or are off work due to health conditions. For Working age 16-64.	To support workers, including older people, to overcome health conditions to remain in, return to, or move closer to employment by improving health, confidence and work readiness enabling them to remain in work, access employment opportunities and maintain financial independence. In particular, to deliver and ensure: • 1,342 starts per annum. • 95% of all completers to improve overall employability indicator score each year. • 69% of unemployed completers to improve their work readiness indicator score each year. • 84% of completers who are in work to improve their work sustainability indicator score each year. • 88% of all completers to improve their health and well-being indicator score each year.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	2. Increase Access to Work NI programme. To assist employers and people, including those who are ageing, who are in paid employment, or who have a job to start, through the provision of practical support and by helping to meet the additional costs associated with overcoming work-related obstacles that may result from having a disability or impediments that are as a result of getting older.	Working Age people 16-64 years.	To help workers, including older people, to overcome health and disability-related barriers to employment by providing workplace support, adjustments and practical assistance that enable them to remain economically active. • To support 900 Access to Work NI (Access to Work NI) clients. • To start a minimum of 300 new unemployed, employed / self-employed participants. • To guarantee 50% of employers meeting full costs for Specialist Aids and Equipment (SAE) costs.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	3. Deliver increased Employment Support. DfC continues to support a number of people on the Employment Support programme, which was available in Northern Ireland between 1981 and 2006 before being replaced by Workable (NI).	The Employment Support Programme helps people with a disability to sustain their employment. For older people (50+, including those approaching retirement age) who wish to remain in, return to, or move closer to employment, the Programme can provide a range of tailored supports including: • Personalised employment support through local Jobs & Benefits Offices, including one-to-one guidance from a Work Coach. • Skills assessment and career planning, helping individuals identify, including those who are ageing, transferable skills and suitable employment opportunities. • CV preparation, job-search assistance and interview coaching to improve employability and confidence. • Work Experience Programme access for eligible participants aged up to 65, enabling older people to gain recent work experience, refresh skills and explore new career paths. • Training and employability programmes designed to improve skills, confidence and job readiness for those returning to the labour market after unemployment, caring responsibilities or ill health.	To assist people, including older people, who wish to remain in or return to or move closer to employment by providing personalised employment support, skills development and workplace opportunities. To deliver ES to 240 ES participants in 25/26 and to an estimated 228 people in 2026/27 • To pay wage subsidy via providers to employers in 2025/26 & 2026/27.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	4. Increase access to Workable NI programme. DfC delivers the Workable (NI) programme as part of its policy objective to help people with substantial disabilities, including those who are ageing, progress towards employment, move into employment and sustain employment. It also increases awareness and access to the Workable NI Programme among older people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, enabling them to remain in work, develop their skills, and maintain financial independence while supporting employers to retain experienced staff.	For Working age 16-64.	To support people, including older people, with disabilities and long-term health conditions to obtain, sustain and progress in work and maintain financial independence and workplace inclusion. To deliver and ensure: • 1095 people will be helped per annum to 31 March 2029. • 156 people to progress into unsupported employment per annum to 31 March 2029. • 42% of participant reviews to result in a decrease in the level of support required per annum to 31 March 2029.	Current to March 2029.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	5. Deliver JobStart Scheme. The JobStart Scheme provides funding from the Department for Communities to allow employers to create new job opportunities to help those who are currently unemployed or economically inactive, in receipt of working age benefits and wish to enter or re-enter the workplace.	For Working age 16-64.	To provide, if they wish to do so, opportunities for older to get back into employment by providing paid experience and opportunities to update their skills by providing further training and/or education. To support older workers to re-enter the labour market, build confidence and maintain financial independence in later life. To provide work opportunities for older people that will improve their health and wellbeing by providing routine, purpose, social interaction and reduce feelings of isolation.	Current to March 2027 (to support participants already engaged on the scheme – closed to new participants in March 2026). (To be removed prior to final publication if no extension is confirmed by March 2027).

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	6. Deliver JobStart Work Experience Programme. JobStart provides paid employment opportunities and work experience for unemployed and economically inactive people, including eligible adults aged 50-64, helping them develop skills, improve confidence, and support a return to the labour market.	For Working age 16-64.	To help people, including older people, refresh skills, build confidence and gain relevant work experience that supports re-entry into the labour market Target 1: To achieve a 30% increase on average WEP participation levels achieved between 2016 and 2020 (111 participants) in year 1 and an incremental 10% increase in each subsequent year. Target 2: To achieve at least 60% of participants on WEP in each year completing a placement, excluding early leavers who find employment, apprenticeship or enter education. Target 3: To achieve 30% into employment, apprenticeship or education rate for 2- 8-week Work Experience Placements participants within 13 weeks of participation in each year. Target 4: To achieve a 35% into employment, apprenticeship or education rate for Opportunity Guarantee participants within 13 weeks of participation in each year. Target 5: To obtain mechanism of recording feedback and gathering data from WEP participants and employers until March 2026.	Current to March 2027.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	7. Deliver Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs). LMPs are a collaborative approach, designed to address identified issues within the labour market at a local level through a suite of employability provision. Their aim is to improve local employability, reduce economic inactivity, and address skills gaps by providing tailored training, mentoring, and support for unemployed individuals and businesses, collaborating with local partners to connect jobseekers with employment. LMPs support older people where this aligns with local labour market needs and where local action plans identify a need.	The 11 Local LMPs in each Local Government Districts.	To support people, including older people, to access employment, training and skills opportunities through locally tailored interventions that respond to community and labour market needs. To achieve 1.943 employment outcomes, comprising of into employment, self-employment and increased hours/earnings.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department of Finance	8. Delivery of digital skills sessions providing basic level IT learning opportunities for adults in group (Go ON sessions) and one-to-one settings (Got IT) across the public libraries network with a particular focus on people from deprived areas, people from rural areas, people with disabilities and older people. The programme specifically supports groups most at risk of digital exclusion, with delivery partners noting a focus on older people and rural communities. The overall aim is to help people access services, maintain social connections, manage finances, and participate fully in modern society through digital technology.	84% of 50–64-year-olds and 54% of 65+ use the Internet – both increasing trends year on year.	To improve digital confidence and capability for people, helping them access services, manage finances, maintain social connections and participate fully in modern society. • To enhance participants' digital capability beyond basic use. • To increase confidence and safety when using the internet. • To support greater social inclusion, access to services and independent living. • To enable people to carry out every day online activities confidently, including: ➢ Online banking ➢ Online shopping ➢ Accessing government services ➢ Using digital communication tools.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	9. Under the emerging rural policy, deliver a new Rural Champion Model will ensure an amplified rural voice which is diverse and reflects the make-up of rural communities today. Given the ageing profile of rural communities, Active Ageing and Older People will feature as a key issue for consideration at both a central and local government level. All solutions and interventions will be co-designed to address inequalities felt by those most marginalised in rural communities.	Older people in Rural Communities.	To give older people living in rural areas a stronger voice in government ensuring that the needs and experiences of older people living in rural communities are understood and reflected in policy development and delivery. To improve access to services for the elderly. To reduce rural isolation, support independent living, and ensuring that rural policies and programmes are designed with the realities of ageing in rural communities. To increase opportunities for community-based activities, social connections, volunteering, and age-friendly initiatives that help older people remain active and engaged.	Ongoing. Public consultation on the new policy has been completed. The revised policy will be submitted for Executive approval in the Autumn of 2026.

CREATE AGE-FRIENDLY PLACES AND SERVICES

Outcome 5: Older people participate in cultural, educational and physical activity.

Ensure public spaces, housing, and services are accessible, safe, and inclusive.

Key actions:

- Support delivery of 'Active Living – the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland' by promoting lifelong participation in sport and physical activity and addressing barriers to participation experienced by underrepresented groups, including older people.
- Review of design standards in the housing association guide.
- Deliver proposal 20 of the fundamental review of social housing allocations.
- Deliver an enhanced Decent Homes Standard for all social housing.
- Deliver funding for the Co-Ownership for the over 55's pilot.
- Deliver funding for the Supporting People programme through the Housing Executive.
- Deliver a Disability Parking Policy.
- Deliver Active Travel Infrastructure.
- Deliver Enhanced Community Transport.
- Improve accessibility to Waterways Ireland services.
- Deliver enhanced recreation and tourism facilities for older people.

Outcomes:

- Safer, more accessible environments.
- Increased independence and mobility.
- Better access to services and amenities.

Outcome 5. Create Age-Friendly Places and Services

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	1. Support delivery of 'Active Living – the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland' by promoting lifelong participation in sport and physical activity and addressing barriers to participation experienced by underrepresented groups, including older people. This will contribute to the ambition of getting more people, more active, more of the time and ensuring that sport and physical activity are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming for all.	Adults aged 50+, older people who are inactive or at risk of social isolation and older people with disabilities and long-term health conditions.	Increase opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity throughout later life, helping to reduce participation inequalities, improve health and wellbeing, support social connectedness and enable people to remain active and independent for longer.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	2. Review Design standards in the housing association guide. Reviewing and updating the Design Standards will have a range of positive impacts for older people by ensuring that new social housing is better suited to the needs of an ageing population. There is a growing need for age-friendly, new build social housing that is able to meet the needs and aspirations of older people, now and in the future, and allow them to live active, healthy, independent lives for as long as possible. Specific additional design standards are included in the Housing Association Guide applicable to housing for older people (category 1 and category 2) for new build social housing.	NIHE. Housing Associations. Department of Health.	To deliver DfC's objective of creating age-friendly housing that supports healthy ageing, independence, safety, social connection and wellbeing, while reducing future pressures on health and social care services. Key outcomes for Older People: • Greater Independence and Ability to Age in the homes they have lived in. • Improved Physical Health and Safety • Reduced Social Isolation and Loneliness • Better Support for Health and Care Needs • Increased Energy Efficiency and Reduced Fuel Poverty • More Inclusive and Accessible Communities.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	3. Delivery of Proposal 20 of the fundamental review of social housing allocations. Proposal 20 of DfC's Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations aims to ensure that specialised housing properties, such as wheelchair-accessible homes, adapted accommodation and other specialist housing designed for elderly people and people with particular needs, are allocated through a separate and more targeted allocation process rather than solely through the general Housing Selection Scheme.	Households requiring social housing for older or disabled people.	To improve access to specialist and age-appropriate housing by ensuring older people can more easily access accommodation that meets their changing needs. To improve the allocations process for older people and disabled people who require specialised accommodation, such as independent living and accommodation that has been adapted for disabled people or designed to be wheelchair accessible. To raise awareness and understanding among both housing staff and customers of sheltered and independent living schemes.	From July 2027.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	4. Deliver an enhanced Decent Homes Standard for all social housing, requiring mandatory, tenant-specific adaptations or reasonable adjustments where required.	All social housing tenants.	To improve provision of reasonable adjustments and supported adaptations for older people and disabled people, helping people to age in place safely and independently, and ensuring homes remain suitable as needs change over time.	A revised Decent Homes Standard will be published by December 2026. A compliance date for the new Standard is to be confirmed.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	5. Deliver funding for the Co-Ownership for the over 55's pilot. Co-Ownership for Over 55s pilot will help older people access affordable, age-appropriate housing by bridging the gap between the value of their existing home or savings and the cost of a more suitable property. The pilot was established with £8 million of DfC funding and is designed to support people aged 55+ who wish to downsize or move to accommodation that better meets their changing needs.	Co-Ownership Housing Associations.	To deliver funding for the Co-Own for Over 55s pilot to enable older people to access affordable, age-appropriate housing, supporting independent living, improved wellbeing, and more effective use of housing stock through the release of larger homes for families.	2027.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	6. Deliver funding for the Supporting People programme through the Housing Executive as the commissioning body. The Supporting People Programme provides c.380 housing support schemes, totalling over 10,500 units of housing support for older people.	Households, including those who are ageing, in need of housing support to enable independent living.	To ensure that this support promotes independent living, helping to reduce isolation, prevent crises, and delay the need for hospital admission or residential care, ultimately promoting independence and enhancing quality of life.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Infrastructure	7. Deliver a Disability Parking Policy by developing legislation to ban pavement parking, parking across dropped kerbs, and double parking.	• Older people. • Disabled people. • Individuals, including older people, with restricted mobility.	To support independence, mobility, and safe access to public spaces. To support accessibility and mobility for older and disabled people by addressing obstructive parking where legislative powers permit.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Infrastructure	8. Deliver Active Travel Infrastructure by increasing investment in walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure.	Rural and urban residents, including older people, requiring accessible transport.	To improve mobility, accessibility, physical activity and social participation for older people through walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure. To deliver highquality active travel networks via: • Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan. • Strategic Plan for Greenways. • Active Travel Delivery Plan. • Other pedestrian enhancement measures. To promote physical activity, wellbeing, and outdoor recreation.	Long Term.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Infrastructure	9. Deliver Enhanced Community Transport: • Dial-a-Lift door-to-destination rural transport. • Disability Action Transport Scheme for urban accessible transport. • Shopmobility Schemes providing mobility equipment in town/city centres. • Assisted Rural Travel Scheme offering discounted travel for SmartPass holders. • IMTAC advising government on mobility issues affecting older and disabled people. • Concessionary Fares for people aged 60+ and 65+ on bus, rail and ferries. • Ensure pavements are free from barriers and support independence in public spaces.	• Older people. • Disabled people. • Individuals, including older people, with restricted mobility. • Older people using active travel infrastructure.	To improve mobility, independence and participation by enabling older people to access affordable, accessible and inclusive transport services that connect them to services, employment, and opportunities to participate in community, social, and civic life . This includes: • Ensuring inclusive, accessible, and responsive transport and infrastructure services. • Supporting older people to remain in employment if they wish. • Improving accessibility and removing physical barriers for accessibility. • Support older workers through flexible working, wellbeing initiatives, and pension workshops.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Infrastructure	10. Improve accessibility to Waterways Ireland services by: • Implementing its Equality and Disability Action Plans (current and draft). • Delivering accessible and inclusive services across waterways and facilities. • Hosting cultural, educational, and recreational events aimed at older people. • Improving participation opportunities through collaboration clauses in agreements.	Vistors, including older people, to Waterways Ireland properties and facilities.	To increase opportunities for older people to participate in recreational and community activities that support physical activity, health, wellbeing and social connection through increasing access to the facilities and increasing the range of services available.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	11. Deliver enhanced recreation and tourism facilities for older people both through the Forest Service and the Public Angling Estate. Benefits ageing people by; • Supporting Healthy and Active Ageing. • Increasing Access to Outdoor Recreation. • Reducing Social Isolation. • Promoting Intergenerational Participation.	All people living within Northern Ireland, including older people.	To support healthy ageing, wellbeing and social participation by improving access to outdoor recreation, nature-based activity and angling. To promote the use of forests for tourism and recreation recognising societal age profiles.	Ongoing.

REDUCE INEQUALITIES AND SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK

Outcome 6: Older people's dignity and human rights are respected.

Address the unequal experience of ageing across communities.

Key actions:

- Deliver the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme.
- Improve access to financial support for older people through Service Modernisation & Digital Transformation.
- Promote and support access to the Make the Call service, providing older people with benefit entitlement checks, information, advice and assisted claims support to help maximise uptake of benefits and financial support.
- Work with Money and Pensions Service and delivery partners through the NI Financial Wellbeing Delivery Plan with the aim to are better supported older people to manage their finances to improve access to financial wellbeing guidance in later life.
- Deliver Legislation for Goods Facilities and Services.

Outcomes:

- Reduced health and social inequalities.
- Improved quality of life for vulnerable older people.
- Fairer access to support and services.
- Warmer homes, increased energy efficiency, keeping older people healthy in their homes.

Outcome 6. Reduce Inequalities and Support Those Most at Risk

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	1. Deliver the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme. Offering a grant of between £500 and £2,500 to voluntary and community sector organisations to purchase capital items which will help address a locally identified poverty or isolation issues.	Voluntary and community sector organisations, including those who work directly with the elderly communities.	To improve the quality of life of people living in rural communities, including older people, by supporting community and voluntary organisations to address poverty, social isolation, and wellbeing and strengthen local services and social connections. For older people, the scheme's key objective is to help them remain connected, active, and supported within their local communities, particularly those who may be isolated or experiencing barriers to accessing services.	Ongoing (scheme runs annually).

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	2. Improve access to financial support for older people through Service Modernisation & Digital Transformation to ensure everyone has access to financial support when they need it. To provide clear, accessible, and age-friendly information and guidance. To reduce barriers to claiming benefits, including digital, physical, and administrative obstacles. To improve uptake of benefits such as Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Attendance Allowance, and other support schemes. To offer tailored advice and assistance for older people with complex needs or disabilities. To enhance digital inclusion and support for those using online benefits systems. To ensure benefits processes are efficient, responsive, and person-centred.	The target sector for this work includes older people: • Seeking working-age benefits. • Accessing pensions. • In financial crisis or immediate need of support • Seeking Discretionary Support. • Seeking access to the Social Fund.	• To improve financial security in later life by increasing awareness, accessibility and uptake of benefits, entitlements and support services among older people.	Ongoing.

Lead Department	Action	Target Sector	Objective	Time Scale
Department for Communities	3. Promote and support access to the Make the Call service, providing older people with benefit entitlement checks, information, advice and assisted claims support to help maximise uptake of benefits and financial support.	All people living within Northern Ireland, including older people.	To help older people access the financial support to which they are entitled, improve financial wellbeing and resilience, reduce barriers to accessing services, and support independence, participation and quality of life in later life. The service helps individuals access Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Housing Benefit, Discretionary Support, Social Fund assistance and other services and support.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
Department for Communities	4. Work with Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) and delivery partners through the NI Financial Wellbeing Delivery Plan with the aim to are better supported older people to manage their finances to improve access to financial wellbeing guidance in later life.	Ageing people 50+.	To enable older people to plan for later life and access appropriate guidance and support, helping to improve financial resilience, reduce financial stress and maintain independence.	Ongoing.
Lead Department	**Action**	**Target Sector**	**Objective**	**Time Scale**
The Executive Office	5. Subject to Executive and Assembly processes, deliver Legislation for Goods Facilities and Services.	In the context of this Action Plan Older people aged 60+.	To promote equality and ensure that older people do not encounter age-based discrimination in accessing Goods Facilities and Services.	Ongoing.

Delivery and Governance

Cross-Departmental Leadership

Active ageing is influenced by a wide range of factors including health, housing, transport, employment, financial wellbeing, participation and access to services. As a result, achieving better outcomes for older people requires action across multiple departments and agencies.

The Strategy and Action Plan provide a framework for collective Executive action to support positive ageing including co-ordinated action across health, infrastructure, communities, education, economy, and local government. While individual departments will be responsible for their specific actions and programmes within their remit as part of the Strategy and Action Plan, they represent a collective programme of work designed to improve outcomes for older people across Northern Ireland. The Department for Communities will continue as the lead department with responsibility for co-ordinating delivery and driving collaboration through its governance structures and reporting on the delivery of this strategy to the Northern Ireland Executive.

Partnership Approach

The successful delivery of the Active Ageing Strategy and Action Plan will require a collaborative and coordinated approach across government, local government, statutory agencies, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and older people themselves.

Delivery will involve liaison and collaborative working between:

- Northern Ireland Executive departments and their respective Arm's Length Bodies.
- Health and Social Care Trusts.
- Local Government.
- The Community and Voluntary Sector.
- Older people's representative groups.
- Private sector partners.

This partnership approach recognises that the factors which influence how people experience later life, including health, housing, transport, financial security, social connection, digital inclusion and participation, are interconnected and require coordinated action across multiple sectors. The Strategy therefore seeks to strengthen collaboration, promote shared responsibility and maximise the collective impact of actions delivered by departments and partners.

Older people and their representative bodies

Older people have played an important role in shaping the development of the Strategy and Action Plan through independently facilitated Strategy Design Workshops, face-to-face engagement sessions and online consultations. This approach ensured that the voices, knowledge, experience and aspirations of older people are heard and have helped inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of the priorities and actions that affect them. The establishment of the Regional Age Friendly

Forum will ensure that these voices will continue to be heard in implementation and oversight.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation will be critical to ensuring that the Active Ageing Strategy and Action Plan deliver meaningful improvements in outcomes for older people. Responsibility for the delivery of individual actions will remain with the relevant lead departments, while the Department for Communities will coordinate overall monitoring, reporting and review arrangements.

Progress will be reviewed annually through established governance structures, with lead departments providing updates on delivery against agreed actions, milestones and intended outcomes. This will enable progress to be tracked, barriers to implementation to be identified, and opportunities for collaboration and improvement to be explored

An annual progress report will be prepared to provide an overview of delivery across the Action Plan and assess progress towards the Strategy's strategic objectives. This reporting will support transparency, accountability and continuous improvement across departments and partner organisations.

Measurement will be through a combination of action-level performance measures and strategic outcome indicators. Indicative indicators may include healthy life expectancy, fuel poverty rates, relative poverty rates amongst pensioners, employment rates among older workers and measures of financial security and social connectedness with data disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and geography where available and relevant. These indicators will be refined and developed in collaboration with Executive Departments and the Age Forum and will inform annual reporting on progress towards the Strategy's outcomes. Amongst others, the indicators will include:

- Department of Health / NISRA Life Expectancy Statistics.
- Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report including pensioner poverty and income indicators.
- Family Resources Survey (Northern Ireland) will provide information on income, disability, savings, pensions and caring responsibilities.
- Labour Force Survey / ONS labour market will provide statistics on employment indicators for older workers.
- Northern Ireland House Condition Survey will provide information on fuel poverty and housing condition measures.
- Continuous Household Survey will provide details on the general well-being of older people within the over-65 population.

The Action Plan will also be updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that actions remain responsive to emerging evidence, demographic trends, budgetary considerations and Ministerial priorities. This flexible approach will enable the Strategy to respond effectively to changing circumstances while maintaining the focus on improving outcomes for older people.

What does success look like?

Success by 2032 will mean that more older people are living healthy, independent and fulfilling lives, are connected to their communities, are financially secure, can access age-friendly services and environments, and are supported to continue making valued contributions to society.

The Active Ageing Strategy and Action Plan will have strengthened collaboration across government and partners, ensuring that the needs and aspirations of older people are better reflected in policy and service delivery across Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

The Active Ageing Strategy for Northern Ireland and its associated Action Plan provide a renewed framework for collective Executive action to improve outcomes for older people across Northern Ireland. Building on the continued relevance of the existing Strategic Framework, the Strategy recognises both the opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing population and sets out a coordinated approach to supporting older people to remain healthy, independent, connected and active within their communities.

Through a combination of cross-departmental action, partnership working, monitoring and accountability arrangements, and a number of strategic Signature Projects, the Action Plan provides a practical framework for delivering meaningful improvements in the lives of older people. It will help ensure that older people are supported to live independently for longer, participate fully in community life, access age-friendly services and environments, and remain valued contributors to society

Working together, the Executive, local government, statutory agencies, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and older people themselves will help create a more age-friendly Northern Ireland where people can age positively, actively and with dignity.

Available in alternative formats.

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