



Age-  
friendly  
Belfast

A city where older  
people live life to the full  
plan 2014-2017



**Belfast Strategic  
Partnership**  
supported by  
Belfast Health Development Unit

## Context

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) was established to foster the exchange of experience and mutual learning between cities and communities worldwide.

***An Age-friendly City is defined as an inclusive and accessible urban environment that promotes active ageing.<sup>1</sup>***

The city of Belfast has undergone a process of transformation following years of conflict; the diversity of the city's population continues to increase, however, segregation remains high. Many of the initiatives within this action plan will make a positive contribution to how we tackle these challenges and address respect, social inclusion and civic participation to develop the opportunities which an Age-friendly city brings.

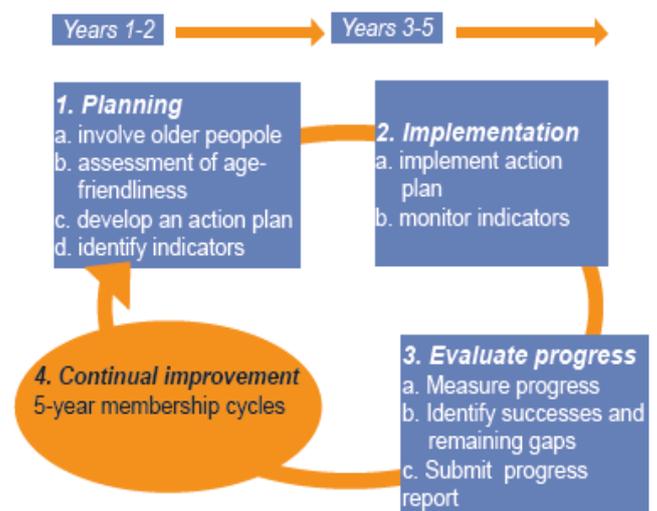
In 2012, Belfast City Council All Party Reference Group on Older People provided the initial leadership to explore Belfast becoming an Age-friendly City. Subsequently, in May 2012, the Lord Mayor signed a declaration committing Belfast to this process.

Many of the key voluntary, community and public organisations providing services for older people are members of Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP). This partnership identified healthy ageing as a priority within its Framework for Action to reduce life inequalities in Belfast. It was therefore agreed that BSP should lead the age-friendly process supported by the existing Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP).

An Age-friendly City must:

1. Establish mechanisms to involve older people throughout the age-friendly process
2. Develop a baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the city under eight domains;
  - outdoor spaces and buildings,
  - transportation,
  - housing,
  - social participation,
  - respect and social inclusion,
  - civic participation and employment,
  - communication and information, and
  - community support and health services.
3. Develop a 3-year city-wide action plan
4. Identify measurements to monitor progress against this plan

### Cycle of WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities©



## Involving Older People

HASP works closely with Greater Belfast Seniors Forum, a representative group of

<sup>1</sup> The National Conference on Ageing, March 21 & 22, 2011, Bermuda

older people in Belfast. Age Partnership Belfast (APB) supports this Forum and a network of numerous forums and groups, which play an important role in involving older people throughout the age-friendly process.

Considerable consultative work with older people was conducted during 2013. Our aim was to place older people from diverse backgrounds at the heart of this process. This was achieved through an age-friendly survey, consultation events and focus groups with equality groups. This consultation involved over 700 older people.

### **Developing the baseline assessment**

Having consulted and established older people's views, these were used together with statistical data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Services (NISRA/NINIS) to develop a baseline assessment for Belfast.

### **What do we know?**

Population ageing is one of the major successes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In Belfast we have seen a 17% increase in the numbers of people age 85+ since 2001. Currently 19% of the population is over 60 and this is expected to increase to 36% by 2050.

Older people have told us "Belfast is already a good place to grow old" However, we must continue to improve our services and structures to meet the needs of an ageing population with a wide range of abilities and needs.

This City relies heavily on the contribution older people make to their families, their communities and the economy.

We have found that older people are a diverse group involved in a wide range of

activities including; seeking employment, caring for family members, volunteering, taking part in lifelong learning, getting married, participating in local groups and using leisure centres. For example Belfast City Council employs 177 people aged 60+ which is 6% of the total number of employees and there are currently 10 Belfast City Councillors aged over 60.

Older people reported favourably on transport availability which enables them to stay in contact with family, take holidays, go shopping, access services and socialise.



55% of older people rate their homes as good or excellent.

Belfast has a strong community infrastructure, with a healthy and vibrant older people's sector. It is estimated that there are approximately 400 to 500 community groups providing services and activities across the city. Consultation highlights that there is much good work being done in local communities and that many staff in Belfast are courteous towards older people.

Free public transport, information received through the City Matters Magazine and access to public attractions are all rated quite highly by older people.

Planned developments through the Streets Ahead project in the city centre, the Belfast on the Move project to increase use of public transport, the

Active Belfast plan and arts and older people programmes, will all contribute to Belfast becoming a more Age-friendly City.

### **What do we need to improve?**

Older people have told us the area they would most like to see improve in Belfast is respect for and inclusion of older people. Older people feel in general they are not valued and customer care needs to improve in some areas. They also identified a need for greater diversity of events for all groups of older people, including those with dementia.

It was also acknowledged that there is a need to give priority to the inclusion of isolated older people. If the levels of isolation are similar to studies in England then approximately 10,000 older people could be living in isolation in Belfast.

We have found that older people are concerned about their future housing options and want to be involved in shaping decisions about their future housing needs.

We have found that 53% of older households in Belfast are in fuel poverty<sup>2</sup>, and a quarter of older people in Belfast live in the top 10% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.

A high number of older people in Belfast have a bus pass, but usage of public transport and specialist transport services needs to improve. Consultation with older people has made reference to the importance of customer care on public transport.

Older people would like to see improved provision of public toilets and outdoor seating to increase accessibility. Public areas must also be safe. The NI Crime Survey<sup>3</sup> indicates that in terms of

personal safety, older respondents are much more likely to feel very unsafe walking alone after dark, with those aged 75+ over four times as likely to feel very unsafe as people aged under 35.

### **Developing a Vision and Action Plan**

A series of briefings and workshops were held throughout the year involving a wide range of organisations, service providers and older people's representative's. These considered the baseline assessment and developed the vision, key themes/priorities and Age- friendly action plan. Which are set out below:

***Our vision is that Belfast will be a city where older people live life to the full***

#### **Key themes**

- **Age-friendly Image** - creating a positive view of ageing
- **Age-friendly Lives** – reducing life inequalities and isolation
- **Age-friendly Neighbourhoods** - creating friendly places to live in

For each theme, we have secured commitment, from key stakeholders, to deliver specific projects to improve the age-friendliness of Belfast



<sup>2</sup> NIHE Housing condition survey (HCS) 2011

<sup>3</sup> DOJ, Perceptions of Crime, Findings from the 2009/10 Northern Ireland Crime Survey

## Age-friendly Image

### **We aim to:**

Create and promote a positive view of ageing

### **We have secured commitment for:**

Belfast City Council with the support of Belfast Strategic Partnership to co-ordinate and lead on the development of a positive ageing campaign through the development of positive and diverse images, a community awareness campaign and a yearly calendar

Belfast Strategic Partnership with the support of Business in the Community, Belfast City Centre Management, Age NI and Alzheimer's Society will develop an age-friendly charter and quality standards

Belfast City Council and Belfast Police and Community Safety Partnership should champion intergenerational work and deliver a coordinated city wide approach building on the success of work between relationships through a city wide project between Belfast City Council Youth Forum and Greater Belfast Seniors Forum

### **We will build on extensive work already underway, including:**

- The provision of dementia friendly awareness workshops by the Alzheimer's Society
- Research and public awareness by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland on the positive contribution of older people to Northern Ireland
- Intergenerational practice promoting positive working relationships between generations supported by Linking Generations NI and other organisations
- The development of child-friendly communities led by Belfast Healthy Cities working with partners and synergising with the age-friendly approach
- Implementation of the new ageing strategy for Northern Ireland through the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers (OFMDFM)
- Development of a Lifelong Learning City Charter for Belfast through Belfast Strategic Partnership

### **Work on this theme links to the age-friendly criteria of:**

- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment

## Age-friendly Lives

### We aim to:

Reduce life inequalities and isolation, and to encourage participation

### We have secured commitment for:

Business in the Community will support employers to plan better for age diverse workforces and encourage businesses to support older workers to remain in work if they wish and support employment opportunities for older people

Belfast Health Development Unit, Belfast City Council and the Public Health Agency to develop a tool kit to reduce the impact of poverty in Belfast (focusing on benefits, nutrition and fuel poverty), this will be age-proofed and its use promoted with older people

Belfast Health Development Unit in conjunction with the Public Health Agency and Belfast Local Commissioning Group to provide financial support to local community and voluntary groups to reduce the health impact of social isolation

Belfast Strategic Partnership together with Belfast City Council to host an annual Age-friendly Convention and circulate a quarterly Age-friendly Belfast Update

Belfast City Council to develop an annual Older People's Art Festival connecting with the Public Health Agency's regional Arts and Older Peoples' Programme delivered through Arts Care and the Arts Council

Belfast City Council, with the support of Volunteer Now, to deliver a comprehensive Age-friendly Older Volunteer Awards programme



## **We will build on extensive work already underway, including:**

- The promotion of fuel stamps and winter warmth events through Belfast City Council
- Belfast City Councils free home safety check scheme
- Initiatives to improve the income level of older people through Age NI Advice and Advocacy service and the Make the Call Campaign through the Department of Social Development
- Support for over 50s to get back into work through GEMS NI
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust implementation of the Reablement programme and work through the Reablement Stakeholder Network to help people live independently
- Public Health Agency's work with community and voluntary organisations to counteract social isolation and put people in touch with local support and services
- Age Partnership Belfast provision of community hubs to increase the participation of isolated older people
- Age Partnership Belfast support and development of older people's groups in Belfast.
- Big Lottery funded Reaching Out Connecting Older People projects
- Tailored physical activity programme for people who have had a fall, stroke, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or lung disease through the Healthwise programme led by Belfast Strategic Partnership Active Belfast Team
- Age Sector Platform Pensioners Parliament
- Good Morning Network across Belfast who provide community based telephone support service for older and vulnerable people
- Belfast City Councils Investment Programme 2012-2015 commits the council to providing work placements and the potential to work in partnership with older peoples groups to assist with employability initiatives
- Volunteer Now Befriending and Time-banking Initiatives
- Provision of IT training for older people

### **Work on this theme links to the age-friendly criteria of**

Social participation  
Community and health services  
Civic participation and employment  
Communication and information

## Age-friendly Neighbourhoods

### **We aim to:**

Create age-friendly neighbourhoods where older people participate, get active, feel safe, influence local decisions and where there are no barriers to active travel

### **We have secured commitment for:**

Belfast Healthy Cities to develop an age-friendly walkability toolkit, promote results and work with Belfast Strategic Partnership and local community groups to improve local neighbourhoods

Belfast Strategic Partnership Active Belfast team to work with Age Partnership Belfast to develop and implement an Active Ageing plan to increase older people's participation in physical activity

Belfast City Councils Leisure Transformation will improve leisure provisions and centres across the city

Belfast City Council to increase older peoples usage of parks and open spaces by improving the facilities, management and activities available in their parks

Northern Ireland Housing Executive to work with Greater Belfast Seniors Forum and local areas forums to explain current provision/options on housing for older people in Belfast and to discuss issues that will influence future planning

Translink and other transport providers to work with Greater Belfast Seniors Forum to evaluate the impact of driver training to ensure that older people are treated with respect and dignity

Belfast City Council to ensure that older people are involved in community planning in their local areas

The Policing and Community Safety Partnership to build on work taking place on feeling safe and intergenerational relationships in local neighbourhoods

The Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership will continue support and development of older peoples groups by organisations as an integral part of the age network in Belfast

## **We will build on extensive work already underway, including:**

- Work on dementia –friendly design taking place through the Dementia Centre NI and with advice from Age NI
- Use and promotion of the Just a Minute Card (JAM)
- Actions on transport resulting from the Accessible Transport Strategy, Consumer Council Surveys, Translink focus group, IMTAC surveys and Greater Belfast Seniors Forum mystery shopper surveys
- Promotion of ShopMobility Hubs for older people with disabilities
- Ensuring that older people are involved in developing Belfast Strategic Partnership Active Travel Strategy for Belfast
- Implementation of the Department for Social Development's Housing Strategy and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy
- Implementation of Belfast City Council Public Toilet Strategy
- Development of a pilot handyperson scheme by Bryson Care

## **Work on this theme links to the age-friendly criteria of:**

Outdoor spaces and buildings  
Housing  
Transportation  
Communication and information  
Respect and social inclusion

## In order to add to what we know about ageing in Belfast, we will need to take forward the following areas of research:

Update the Age-friendly Profile on the NISRA/NINIS website annually

Work with the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers and other age-friendly cities and communities to develop the database of information held on the Age-friendly Profile on the NISRA/NINIS website <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Home.aspx>

Carry out a robust HASP age-friendly survey to address key gaps in the baseline assessment and collect indicators identified for evaluation

Identify and research the needs of older carers in Belfast

Identify and research the current and future needs of black and minority ethnic, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender older people in Belfast

Work with the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) and the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers (OFDMDFM) to review current research and develop future research on age-friendly cities and communities.

Collaborate with Belfast Healthy Cities, the World Health Organisation and other age-friendly networks to learn from best practice and international innovation

## We will know we are making a difference by measuring the following improvements:

- More older people feeling that they are treated with respect and dignity
- Older people having greater access to good social networks
- Increased feeling of wellbeing and control by older people
- A reduction in the current level of fuel poverty among older people in Belfast (currently 53%) and an increase in benefit uptake
- Increased participation in local parks and physical activity by older people
- Improved usage of public transport and specialist transport services by older people

We will develop indicators for each of the eight age-friendly domains and will regularly report on progress in the implementation of the 3 year age-friendly action plan.

## Making it Happen

Leadership and governance for Age-friendly Belfast will be provided by Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP), which is a collaborative multi-sectoral partnership that aims to reduce life inequalities in Belfast.

The Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) will co-ordinate delivery of the 3-Year Age-friendly Belfast Plan. It will submit a detailed action plan to the World Health Organisation (WHO) with agreed targets over time, and indicators. HASP will periodically monitor and publish progress against the action plan and report to BSP. After three years HASP will evaluate the project, identify successes and areas for future improvement. The evaluation report will be submitted to BSP and subsequently to WHO. The HASP Age-friendly team will also provide specific support for the development of the positive ageing campaign, age-friendly charter, intergenerational work and the Age-friendly Convention.

Lead organisations as identified will oversee the delivery and performance management of relevant aspects of the age-friendly action plan and report progress to HASP.

HASP involves the following organisations:

- Age NI
- The Alzheimer's Society
- Belfast City Council
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Belfast Healthy Cities
- The Department of Regional Development
- Engage with Age
- Greater Belfast Seniors Forum
- The Health and Social Care Board/Belfast Local Commissioning Group
- North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- The Public Health Agency
- Volunteer Now

Finally we would wish to thank all the many contributors to the plan, especially the older people of Belfast who volunteered their time and offered their views and experiences. We would encourage everyone, of whatever age, in Belfast to work with us on this plan.

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