

University of Chester

Age-Friendly Cheshire West Baseline Assessment Report 2020

Executive summary

In 2018, Cheshire West and Chester joined the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities and the UK Network for Age-friendly Communities. Consequently, the Age-friendly Cheshire West partnership was established, which aims to continually improve the lives of older people living in the Borough. To achieve this aim, it is essential to understand baseline levels of age-friendliness and identify areas for development and improvement. This document reports the findings of a baseline assessment, conducted by staff from the Centre for Ageing and Mental Health at the University of Chester; the survey was open from 4th February 2020 until 8th May 2020. In addition to administering a survey with residents aged 50 years and over, the University team conducted desk-top research to identify age-friendly activity already taking place in the Borough, some of which is included in this report.

Data was captured from Borough residents, aged 50 and over, via a survey based on the eight WHO age-friendly domains, shown below:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation
- Communication and information
- Community and health services

Respondents were also asked to select three items to be prioritised by Age-friendly Cheshire West moving forwards.

Five thousand paper copies of the survey were posted to households and individuals could also complete the survey online. 1,111 surveys are included in this report (969 returned paper copies and 143 completed online). 13.5% of respondents were aged between 50 and 59, 29.6% were in their sixties, and 56.8% respondents were aged 70 years or older. The majority of respondents (61.7%) lived with at least one other person. Only 0.3% of respondents indicated they had an ethnic background other than white.

Key findings

Communication and information

Communication and information emerged as important issues with significant percentages of respondents answering “don’t know” to questions throughout the survey; this may be because information is not available or easily sourced, or individuals had not needed to seek

information at the time of responding. Nonetheless, to facilitate residents identifying what is available within the Borough and how to become more involved with their communities, it is essential to ensure effective, easily accessible systems of communication are developed. Indeed, it was disappointing that respondents appeared unaware of good practice within the Borough, including many of the existing age-friendly initiatives.

Regarding communication per se, the majority of respondents preferred paper communication or email/internet with few preferring face-to-face communication; this is reassuring given the constraints of the Covid19 pandemic. A number of respondents suggested a central information repository would be beneficial and that existing websites were not always user friendly.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

Ratings of outdoor spaces and buildings varied; green spaces were positively rated but respondents were critical regarding the condition and maintenance of pavements. Obstructed pavements, for example due to inconsiderate car parking, was also highlighted; this is especially problematic for individuals with mobility issues. The "One City Plan" aims to encourage cycling into Chester and some areas of the City are shared spaces for pedestrians and cyclists, however some respondents suggested this can be problematic. Respondents also perceived inadequate provision of public toilets; the City Centre has the "Community Toilet Scheme", which is an agreement where participating businesses allow individuals to use their toilet facilities without being obliged to purchase goods or services, it would be worthwhile considering extending this throughout the Borough.

Transportation

Transportation emerged as a major issue for respondents with provision, reliability, and frequency of public transport being identified as problematic, especially for individuals living outside major urban conurbations, and at certain times such as evenings and weekends. One aspect of public transport which fared well was taxis; this is reassuring given the key role taxis have in Cheshire West and Chester's (CW&C) Transport Plan. Driving in the Borough was generally well rated, although the location of car parks and amount of parking available was less well rated. Transportation intersects with other age-friendly domains, indeed without access to appropriate transport older adults may find day to day activities and attending social and leisure activities difficult unless they have private transport or can afford taxis. Respondents selected improved public transport and public transport links as the second and third highest priorities for Age-friendly Cheshire West.

Housing

In respect to housing, responses regarding the quality of respondents' homes was very positive with a high proportion of respondents rating their home as good/excellent with only 1.1% rating their home as poor/very poor. The availability and location of accessible housing was rated less favourably, however, and a large proportion of respondents did not know about support and adaptations to help them remain in their own homes as they aged.

Social participation

The majority of participants rated the variety of social events and activities, sports and physical activities, and cultural activities and attractions, as average or better. Cultural activities and

attractions fared well with almost 42% of respondents rating these as good/excellent. However, only 14% of respondents rated inter-generational activities as good/excellent. A large proportion of respondents gave "don't know" answers and over half rated the provision of information about events and activities as average, poor or very poor.

Respect and social inclusion

In the main, how individuals working in the public sector, retail and commercial services, and transport respond to older adults was rated positively, especially for retail and commercial services which were rated as good/excellent by 43.3% of respondents. However, there was also evidence that older adults may feel under-valued; only 11.7% of respondents rated recognition of older people's contributions to the community as good/excellent and only 13.1% rated the image depicted of older people as good/excellent.

Civic participation and employment

A large proportion of respondents rated opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and further education/training as not applicable; this may be associated with 72.7% of respondents stating they are retired. When asked about opportunities to be entrepreneurial, 6.6% of respondents stated good/excellent while 8.7% rated them as poor/very poor. Opportunities for further education/training fared better with 19.2% of respondents rating their opportunities as good/excellent. Opportunities to volunteer were rated more favourably by respondents with over one third rating this good/excellent rating.

It is worth noting that, despite evidence of organisations trying to involve older adults in consultation and decision making, 17.5% of respondents rated their opportunities to do so as poor/very poor and 18.4% rated this as being not applicable to them. Improvements in respect and social inclusion may influence perceptions regarding civic participation.

Community and Health Services

Better health and social care services were identified by respondents as their main priority for Age-friendly Cheshire West. 27.3% of respondents rated the range of health and social care services as average and 15.3% as poor/very poor.

However, again communication was an important variable in this domain with high proportions of respondents not knowing about factors such as the affordability of health and social care services, the support available to help them stay in their own homes, and the availability of health and fitness activities.

Considerations

Although WHO assesses age-friendliness in terms of eight domains, the domains actually intersect and action to improve one domain may affect another. In the case of Age-friendly Cheshire West it can be proposed that communication and information, and transportation impact other domains. Indeed, communication and information emerged as a key issue given the high proportion of "don't know" answers and poor ratings regarding information provision. While investing in new and additional services and provision may be difficult, simply improving communication regarding what is already available may positively impact residents' lives. Age-friendly Cheshire West may therefore wish to prioritise communication.

When producing an action plan based on the survey, Age-friendly Cheshire West must highlight that it does not have power to address some of the issues identified but what it can

do is ensure the voice and opinions of older adults are heard and considered by those able to make changes. That said, Age-friendly Cheshire West is able to directly address some issues such as highlighting and tackling ageism.

Respondents rated opportunities for intergenerational activities poorly. Age-friendly Cheshire West may wish to consider bringing generations together to address shared issues. This may also impact the domains of respect and social inclusion and civic participation and employment.