Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester: evidence from the Ambition for Ageing programme

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Contents

Glossary / List of terms

AfA	Ambition for Ageing
GM	Greater Manchester
GMCVO	Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation
LA	Local Authority
LDLs	Local Delivery Leads

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Introduction

Context and Literature

Twenty years from now, 1.1 million people in Greater Manchester (GM) will be over the age of 50, representing 37% of the population. This reflects a substantial demographic shift taking place on a national level, as the proportion of older people is set to rise significantly in the coming years. By 2039, the number of people in GM aged 65+ is expected to increase by over 50%, compared to an increase of only 5% in the number of people of working age. As such, it is becoming increasingly important to ensure our communities and neighbourhoods are age-friendly, enabling people of all ages to participate in society and be treated with respect.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines age-friendly communities as environments where 'policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively', working together to enhance quality of life as people age[1]. Age-friendly initiatives typically take a community approach rather than an individual approach, using upstream, preventative strategies to create environments conducive to active ageing[2]. Commonly, these take a place-based approach, developing local solutions tailored to particular areas and contexts.

A key concept in the ageing policy agenda is that of 'ageing in place'; the idea that people should be able to continue living in their chosen communities as independently as possible for as long as possible. If older people are to successfully 'age in place', age-friendly neighbourhoods are essential to ensure local environments remain inclusive and accessible to people as they move through the life course.

Previous literature has indicated that, whilst older people tend to spend more time at home and in their locality, they are also at increased risk of neighbourhood exclusion[3]. This is due to a variety of factors such as: loss of amenities, poor public transport and neighbourhood planning; perceived risks of safety and crime; and local population changes leading to a loss of 'togetherness' and reduced feelings of belonging[4]. These reflect the increasingly acknowledged idea that ageing in place is not simply about the physical environment, but that the concepts of home and place are also made up of interconnecting social and symbolic meanings[5].

This risk of neighbourhood exclusion highlights the importance of involving older people in the creation and design of age-friendly communities, to ensure their views are represented and that they are not further excluded from their neighbourhoods. Increasingly, age-friendly initiatives have begun to recognise the importance of participatory approaches, giving beneficiaries a voice alongside other stakeholders[6].

The Ambition for Ageing programme (AfA) embodies this approach, putting older people at the heart of designing the places they live. Ambition for Ageing is a £10.2 million Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age. Funded by the Big Lottery's Ageing Better programme and led by GMCVO, the 5 year programme is delivered by a cross-sector partnership with

[1] World Health Organization (WHO) *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide (*WHO: Geneva, 2007), 5

[2] Emily Greenfield, Mia Oberlink, Andrew Scharlack, Margaret Neal, and Philip Stafford, "Age-friendly community initiatives: conceptual issues and key questions", *The Gerontologist* 55, No. 2, Special Issue: 2015 WHCoA (2015): 191–198.

[3] Tine Buffel, Chris Philipson and Thomas Scharf, "Experiences of neighbourhood exclusion and inclusion among older people living in deprived innercity areas in Belgium and England", *Ageing and Society* 33, Special Issue no.1 (2013): 89-109.

[4] Tine Buffel, Liesbeth de Donder, Chris Phillipson, Nico de Witte, Sarah Dury and Dominique Verté, "Place Attachment Among Older Adults Living in Four Communities in Flanders, Belgium", *Housing Studies* (2014): 1-23.

[5] Janine Wiles, Annette Leibing, Nancy Guberman, Jeanne Reeve and Ruth Allen, "The Meaning of "Aging in Place" to Older People", *The Gerontologist* 52, No. 3 (2011): 357–366.

[6] Greenfield et al, "Age-friendly community initiatives: conceptual issues and key questions", *The Gerontologist*

Local Delivery Leads (LDLs) leading on the work in 24 wards across 8 local authorities in Greater Manchester.

This report uses research and learning gathered from the programme to provide insight into what older people across GM think makes a neighbourhood age-friendly. In the context of the themes identified from the research, the report discusses work being done by AfA in these areas; sharing stories of age-friendly activities taking place across GM and exploring successes and challenges encountered by the programme. Conclusions and recommendations can be found in the final chapter.

Methods

This report uses data and information collected from the following key sources:

- Event feedback survey responses – snapshot taken in April 2018, consisting of 2266 cases recorded from programme commencement up to this date
- Participant and volunteer survey responses – snapshot taken in May 2018, consisting of 1641 cases recorded from programme commencement up to this date
- Project records report – snapshot taken in July 2018, consisting of cases recorded from programme commencement up to this date
- Case studies submitted by LDLs – selected from a snapshot taken in June 2018, consisting of those submitted to the database between 2017 and June 2018
- Structured, in-depth conversations with Local Delivery Leads (LDLs) – conducted in Spring 2018

All surveys included the question 'To what extent do you feel that you live in an age-friendly neighbourhood?'. This was then followed up by the open questions 'Why?' on the event feedback surveys, and 'What do you think makes an 'age-friendly neighbourhood'?' on the volunteer and participant surveys. These responses were coded initially using open coding, and then clustered into key themes. These themes were then checked against previous work done in this area, to check for commonalities and further refine codes before verifying final themes.

It is important to note that responses are not collected from a random sample of those partaking in the Ambition for Ageing programme, and as such are not designed to be representative of either all those taking part in the programme or all older people in GM. Whilst the volunteer and participant surveys indicate an over-representation of white females, the anonymity of the feedback surveys mean the demographics of those completing the forms is unknown.

A second limitation is in the understanding of the term 'age-friendly'. As this is not a widely used term in everyday language, some respondents may have been unsure of what they were being asked. Additionally, with AfA sometimes providing support for filling in forms and explaining terms, it is possible that respondents' understanding of the term, and the themes they subsequently mentioned, may have been influenced by the programme.

There were no identifiable differences found in definitions of age-friendliness due to perception of current neighbourhood age-friendliness. The reasons given for a neighbourhoods being age-friendly were typically the inverse of the reasons given for an area not being age-friendly. This is promising, as it suggests a level of shared understanding of what constitutes age-friendliness for respondents, and that tackling these issues will generally improve perceptions of age-friendliness overall.

Whilst the programme uses a place-based approach, tackling challenges in context and providing local solutions, this research has identified broad principles that cut across the districts. These themes could help create a framework of what age-friendly neighbourhoods in GM could look like.

The themes and their frequency of mentions are shown in table 1.1. The themes are addressed within the report in order of frequency raised.

Table 1.1 – Themes for what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood	
Theme	**Frequency**
Community integration and belonging: 'we look out for each other' *(Including subthemes of: friendliness and light support; cultural differences and sub-communities; inter-generational relationships)*	1620
Meeting and participation opportunities: 'something I can be a part of' *(Including subtheme of: civic participation 'somewhere I can have a voice')*	484
Accessibility, facilities and transport: 'things that let me stay independent'	403
Community resources and spaces: 'A place where I can…'	290
Feelings of Safety: 'a place we feel safe and secure'	137
Information and communication: 'how do I find out what's going on?'	105

Where case studies are included, pseudonyms have been used in cases where participants have chosen to keep their names confidential. Consent has been obtained for case studies to be used for the purposes of research and evaluation. Some case studies have been edited for length and clarity.

Community Integration and Belonging: 'we look out for each other'

By far the most frequent theme raised when describing what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood was a need for positive social interactions and community cohesion.

For those who felt their neighbourhood was age-friendly, they talked about friendly faces, looking out for one another, and respecting one another:

> *"Being able to chat to your neighbours and knowing they are there if you need them. Keeping an eye on each other to make sure you are ok."*

Rather than referencing a need for strong social connections, respondents often considered neighbourhoods to be age-friendly if there were weak but positive social ties with light touch support. This would consist of gestures such as a friendly 'hello' over a garden wall, putting out each other's dustbins, or keeping an eye on each other's houses whilst they were away on holiday. As neighbourhood relationships often have a basis in proximity rather than compatibility, there was a general sense of the importance of respectful reserve in managing these connections:

> *"If somebody is needed, they will help, but you don't live in each other's pockets"*

These brief but positive interactions created a sense of familiarity, trust and belonging, without being too overbearing.

For those who felt their neighbourhood was less age-friendly, many respondents expressed feelings of disconnectedness and segregation within their communities, with neighbours commonly described as "keeping themselves to themselves". The primary reason given for this was residential instability and population change: issues of demographic shifts in neighbourhoods due to people moving on or passing away; younger people and young families moving into the area; and a lack of people of a similar age to spend time with. For some, large numbers of renters in their area meant a high population turnover within the community, making it difficult to create and maintain social connections.

For many respondents, perceptions of change in the demographic make-up of their neighbourhood had lessened their sense of belonging, with some feeling that they no longer "fit in" in a place that they used to feel a part of. Younger neighbours were often seen as "too busy" and many respondents described feeling alone due to their neighbours being out at work all day. One respondent described this absence of people and neighbourhood activity as feeling like "Sunday every day".

> *"All younger people live here and go to work and keep themselves busy, all my neighbours have left and gone now and I have lived here 57 years."*

The topics of belonging and social connection within neighbourhoods were commonly framed in the context of whether respondents felt they could relate to the other people in their neighbourhood. In the words of many respondents, whether there are "people like me". Tensions between the different and the similar were mentioned most frequently in relation to cultural and generational differences.

Cultural Differences and Sub-communities

When asked what defines an age-friendly community, older people cited good communication, shared understanding and respect as vital components.

> *"An age-friendly neighbourhood is one where when you say hello you get a response. You don't feel prejudiced, excluded or segregated by others. You are recognised as an individual with talents and respect"*

Some respondents felt there were issues surrounding cultural differences within their neighbourhoods, often raising concerns rooted in feelings of community segregation and unwanted change. These comments were frequently based on cultural misunderstandings and a fear of the unfamiliar:

> *"There are too many foreigners [sic] who don't mix, don't talk together. They don't want to mix but stick to their own kind."*

> *"It's difficult when people come in from other countries because of language barriers."*

In response to these issues, Ambition for Ageing (AfA) ~~programme~~ has invested considerable time into facilitating communication and understanding within neighbourhoods, alleviating fears and challenging prejudices. One Local Delivery Lead said:

> *"A key role of AfA staff and volunteers is to raise awareness about equalities and encourage conversations about inclusion and encourage groups to think about ways in which they could make their activities more accessible to people."*

This increased awareness and understanding has helped to break down barriers between sub-groups within neighbourhoods, and supported the programme's asset-based approach to be fairer and more inclusive. By bringing people together who would not ordinarily have been connected, the programme has helped to make the unfamiliar familiar. This work has assisted in widening perceptions of who participants consider to be 'people like me'.

Norman's story below is one such example of how Ambition for Ageing has changed perceptions and brought communities together:

Norman's story

During a Participatory Budgeting event, Norman from the local reminiscence group did a pitch for an investment and spoke about his knowledge of local history. Some of the audience found this particularly interesting, especially those who were not born in Bolton and had moved into this country as adults, and had never seen the ward back when it was full of mills and had a river. As a result of their interest, Norman arranged to give a dedicated talk to community members at the local Community Centre. The feedback was that attendees found his knowledge amazing, and Norman has now built a friendship with some of the South Asian men who attend the Centre's groups.

Norman said to the Ambition for Ageing staff member: "I want to thank you for something you said to me some months ago which has really resonated with me and stuck in my thoughts, I told you that people from my community - older white people in this area - are a bit worried about mixing with the Muslim community, not because they are racist but just because they are scared. In response you said to me 'but do you not think the Muslim community may feel the same and may be scared too?' I had never thought if it from that perspective and I went home and told my wife because it really made the think differently, it opened my eyes to how we are all the same and will change my approach to things in the future".

In addition to promoting equalities in their day to day approach, AfA staff have also provided tailored training to older people through partnership with the Equalities Board. Sessions covering topics such as equality, diversity, accessibility and inclusion have been delivered to LDL volunteers in each borough. Further, events such as 'Ambition for Ageing for All', held in September 2017, have looked at the equalities progress made by the programme. With a strong focus on learning, this event identified new ways to be more inclusive and re-focused efforts to reach older people at greatest risk of social isolation.

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Inter-generational Relationships

Age was a very divisive factor for respondents, both within neighbourhoods and also in defining what makes a place age-friendly. Comments relating to age differences within a neighbourhood made up over a fifth of all comments about social interactions and community cohesion.

For some respondents, being surrounded by people of a similar age was a key feature of what made their neighbourhood age-friendly. Similarly, respondents who perceived their areas as not age-friendly commonly felt that this was because there were few people their age nearby.

"Most of my immediate neighbours are of a similar age to myself, so understand the problems we may face."

"Quite a lot of my neighbours are aged 50 plus and look out for each other and are willing to help out"

"There's not many people my age that live in my area. I am very isolated where I live"

For these respondents, being surrounded by people of a similar age meant being surrounded by people like themselves, who could relate to their life experiences, understand their circumstances, and give a sense of familiarity and belonging.

Additionally, some respondents highlighted the fact that having a high concentration of older people in their neighbourhood had resulted in their area being more accommodating and responsive to the needs of older people, thus creating a more age-friendly and accessible local environment in which to live.

"Due to older population living here, there's pretty good disabled access, as a disabled person I pick up on this"

In contrast, other respondents saw their neighbourhood as age-friendly specifically because there was a diverse mix of age groups living there. These respondents emphasised the importance of neighbourhoods being 'friendly for all ages', and of communities supporting each other across generations with "people of all ages working and socialising together". Similarly, a lack of mixing across age groups was a frequently stated reason for neighbourhoods not being considered age-friendly.

"Ideally this would be an area that has a wide range of ages living together. The intergenerational [aspect] would be very positive as the stigma of a certain age would be removed."

"We have a community centre which gives us older people an opportunity to meet and socialise, but it doesn't offer anything to the younger generation, so we do not mix"

This exemplifies the fact that 'people like me' means very different things to different older people, and that they should not be treated as one homogenous group. Some respondents identified primarily with people of their own generation; others saw themselves as part of a wider, more diverse, community; and others again distanced themselves from their age-group, wishing for the company of younger people.

A second factor that could explain the disparity in responses is that diverse age-demographics are often seen as positive when they work well together, but seen negatively when older people feel that younger people tend to be prioritised in resource allocation, or when young people are unfriendly or dismissive of older people. This latter element in particular was felt by many of the respondents, who were frustrated that younger people were not providing them

with the support they desired, did not take the time to get to know or value them, or were disrespectful towards them:

> *"Although a fair number of residents are older and considerate, the younger families who also arrived in the area are not"*

> *"I feel that the younger generation does not necessarily help old people and aren't aware of what they need to do to improve their lives"*

> *"If middle aged and youths in the community interacted and helped the older residents they could benefit enormously from the knowledge and life skills of the elderly."*

The prevalence of the age divide found in the responses highlights the importance of intergenerational work for building age-friendly neighbourhoods. Bringing a range of ages together in intergenerational programmes can challenge misconceptions and promote understanding, as well as supporting communities to share and make better use of existing skills. Additionally, intergenerational programmes have been found to be effective in reducing social isolation, improving well-being, and addressing community concerns.

Just as many societal structures segregate by age, it's common for services and funding streams to also segregate by age. In this sense, Ambition for Ageing is no exception. However, whilst Ambition for Ageing is a programme specifically targeted at over 50s, the programme has included some intergenerational projects as part of its work.

Many of these project designs have focused on dispelling myths about older people, and tackling the stigma around ageing. Work done by Bolton AfA is a good example of this, where the LDL used innovative activities to encourage students to rethink their preconceived ideas about older people, prior to them volunteering with AfA. The Project Lead gave each student a piece of paper with a character profile they had to keep secret, such as 'You are 73 year old Audrey, you are a widow and live alone, with your dog in a small house. You have arthritis which you control with medication and your favourite food is garlic'. The students were then asked questions such as 'could your character go to university?' and 'could they have political influence?' which they had to answer on behalf of their characters. At the end of the activity, Yasmin revealed that they all had the same character profile. The project lead said:

> *"I went on to share evidence of case studies where people in a similar to Audrey had done lots of amazing things. This really surprised the students and hopefully will change the way they look at older people moving forward in their lives, and feed into creating more Age-friendly Communities".*

A smaller number of projects have also been specifically designed to dispel myths about young people. Whilst this may appear to take the focus away from older people, the benefit is that this can play a key role in making older people feel safer in their communities. One local AfA staff member said of one such project:

> "*They* [older people] *are finding out that not all children carry out anti-social behaviour and target the vulnerable members of society".*

Additionally, some projects have encouraged older people to take part in inter-generational activities in spaces that previously were viewed as 'off limits' or threatening, to help alleviate fears surrounding certain community spaces within neighbourhoods. This kind of work facilitates the re-negotiation of spaces in communities, transforming the social meaning of places.

The case study below of the Letter Links Scheme in Tameside shows how deep-seated this initial fear and distrust of younger people can be, as well as highlighting a range of benefits that the intergenerational project had:

Letter Links - Intergenerational Pen Pal Project

The main aim of Letter Links was to reach older people who are isolated in their own homes. The idea came about through several conversations with older people in a housing scheme, which uncovered issues such as feeling cut off from their community, lack of social interaction, feeling out of touch due to the digitalization of services, the increasing use of mobile phones and a general mistrust of young people. A funding application was made to Ambition for Ageing support the project. Children from a local school wrote the initial letter as part of their English lesson, and letters were checked by member of staff to avoid misunderstandings and to safeguard children.

Initially, concerns were raised around the perceived attitude of young people and their ability communicate without the use of mobile phones or computers. The residents also raised concerns about having a lack of things to talk about - whether this was worries around a lack of shared interests or a lack of confidence amongst older people that their lives were not interesting enough. However, all stereotypes and concerns were subsequently dispelled through the running of the project. Support was given for people who experienced physical barriers to writing, or had difficulties with literacy.

The project culminated in the older people and the school children meeting for a celebration event, giving them the opportunity to meet their pen pal in person over a shared lunch. The project was able to link different generations together who would otherwise have been unlikely to meet, building friendships and challenging age-related stereotypes on both sides.

One staff member said: "It went from a project about isolation, about loneliness, to more of a project about older people passing on their skills and feeling valued in the community".

Overall, AfA has run some very successful and innovative intergenerational projects across Greater Manchester. However, whilst 13% of all AfA projects had an intergenerational component, this varied largely by district. These interventions have also ranged broadly from projects with intergenerational activities specifically built into the design, to more general activities open to all ages, such as launch and communication events. The nature of intergenerational activities can vary greatly from simply learning about other ages from a distance, to creating effective intergenerational settings in the way communities are organised[7]. Due to the strong generational tensions felt by many respondents, it is important that facilitators of intergenerational activities manage the interactions carefully and ensure that stereotypes or misconceptions are not simply perpetuated further. The prevalence of respondent concerns relating to age segregation within communities suggests that future work in creating age-friendly neighbourhoods could benefit from further efforts to combat this issue.

Previous literature has suggested that older people tend to spend the majority of their time in the home and local vicinity. As such, having neighbours in close proximity that older people feel they can relate to and connect with becomes increasingly important to prevent social isolation and maintain wellbeing. Further research into how different people understand and develop their concepts of 'people like me' would be beneficial, and would assist in the development of more effective social cohesion work within neighbourhoods in future.

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[7] see stages 1-7 of Metlife Foundation Generations United, *Creating an age-advantaged community: a toolkit for building intergenerational communities that recognise, engage and support all ages*, 13.

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Meeting and Participation Opportunities: 'something I can be a part of'

Having available events and activities was the second most commonly suggested theme for what makes an age-friendly community. These activities provided things for people to do, reasons to connect and try new things, and opportunities to discover new interests or maintain existing hobbies. Importantly for respondents, these opportunities allowed them to feel like there was something in the community 'for them', promoting a sense of belonging. Regular events and activities can enable people to construct their own communities based upon shared interests, supporting the development of social connections that individuals may feel are missing within their neighbourhoods.

Some respondents referenced formal groups offering specific activities that fit their interests and the opportunity to learn new things. Others felt that the activities did not necessarily need to be formal or structured, highlighting that the value of the activities often lay in simply providing an opportunity to connect with others.

For some respondents, it was important for events and activities to be specifically for older people. It provided a space of their own, where they would be welcome, and would more likely fit to their age-related needs.

"The groups I am involved in are similar ages and are friendly - we love each other's company"

"I like to attend things as a group. This [group] is good as we're all a similar age and have similar interests"

In contrast, many of the respondents wanted activities to be open to a wide variety of ages. It was important that these activities were made accessible to all, to give them the opportunity to mix with a diverse age-range and not feel excluded from general society. One example is Rod's story, below, who became involved in Moorgate Primary Schools Intergenerational Gardening Group.

Rod's story

I am new to Bolton and this group has given me chance to be involved in the community and meet new people. It has also helped me learn about other community activities and events.

Not knowing too much about gardening the group is enabling me to learn more. The group has varying knowledge provided from members, which they share with others.

For the children involved, it's good for them to develop skills and learn from and with us. It's also a nice change to be able to spend time with another age group as people sometimes think us older people just want to be together.

A diverse range of Ambition for Ageing activities were referenced in the respondents' comments, and this wide variety of opportunities was a highly valued aspect of the programme. This demonstrates the importance of providing choice for older people, and highlights the diverse wants and needs of this age-group.

The asset-based approach of AfA, led by older people, has allowed for a huge range of activities to be developed to suit many different interests. For those attending events through AfA, 99%[8] said they would recommend future activities/events to a friend, indicating a clear enjoyment and appreciation of the activities AfA has to offer.

110 AfA projects had ended with a recorded reason by July 2018. Of these, 15% ended due to the community taking ownership of the activity and 70% ended because the project had achieved its aims or was deliberately funded as a one-off event, often leading to increased activity following the end of the funded project.

Many of the one-off events consisted of funding for a particular item that would support a group, such as the purchase of a portable PA system to allow members with hearing loss to participate fully and hear the speakers invited to the group, or a Curling set for an over 60s club. The particular curling set purchased also included a disabled ramp to enable wheelchair users to participate. The LDL involved said:

> *"The project has made a huge difference to those who have used the equipment. During the winter when the men involved could not bowl, curling for them was the next best thing. Providing specially designed equipment can help to ensure that older people with disabilities are included in more physical activities. This project has provided a community resource which will be of benefit for years to come."*

Some AfA projects have funded training for volunteers to enable them to lead the delivery of activities, such as Tai Chi or healthy cooking courses. This has assisted the activities to become more sustainable post-AfA funding, and has built capacity and skills within the neighbourhoods. Other one-off projects have been organised events which have gone on to inspire further activity. In Bury, for example, a funded trip to Harrogate Flower Show resulted in the creation of a new gardening group to plant and look after bulbs in open spaces within the community.

Whilst being very successful in this area, AfA has also encountered some struggles in using an asset-based approach to develop activities. Although a project idea may have garnered a lot of interest from older people wanting to attend the activity, Local Delivery Leads have sometimes struggled to identify enough people willing to step in and lead these projects. AfA staff have

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[8] Events demographics data snapshot from April 2018, analysis of 2266 responses.

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identified a range of reasons for this, such as lack of confidence, concerns about commitment, and people feeling too old or in too poor health to take on so much responsibility. Additionally, groups with an ageing membership have sometimes struggled to find replacements to lead when committee members want to take a step back, have declined in health, or have passed away.

AfA staff have had to carefully balance processes of identifying and motivating key influencers and potential activity leaders, with ensuring that they are not over-burdened with responsibility and do not suffer from burn out. This has required careful support, management and interpersonal skills, and takes a considerable amount of time and expertise.

Civic Participation: 'somewhere I can have a voice'

For some respondents, the activities went further than simply providing a social connection; they also provided a way to contribute. These activities offered these respondents the opportunity to have a meaningful role, give back, and have a voice. Fiona's story is just one example of this:

Fiona's story

Fiona is 71 years old, she had previously been involved with lots of different activities in her area and an active user of the local community centre. The community centre closed down but Fiona continued to go to the local library where she found out about a course called tech and tea which ran over 5 weeks. Fiona registered herself on the course and began to learn how to use a laptop.

Fiona struggled at the beginning of the course, but with the help and support of the tutor she managed to complete the course and wanted to know what happens next. She went on to do a community reporter course and made friends with people on the group, she then became a member of her local Older People's Network.

Fiona has been involved with the setting up of a Greener lifestyle project and has successfully applied for a small investment grant to pay for a green house and some seating level planting.

Fiona also spoke at the GM Seminar on 'The Loss of Community'. She explained how the closure of a factory in her area, which employed over two hundred local people affected the community, people didn't converse as often and over time the neighbourly relationship between generations became almost nonexistent.

Fiona says "getting involved as helped me stay focused and active and helped me stay connected in the community."

Through staff support Fiona has been able to have a role and feel extremely valuable in terms of having a social structure and a safe and nurturing environment to go to. Fiona stated "Ambition for Ageing is a really good project that gives older people a chance to get involved and have a voice".

In their comments, respondents referenced the importance of feeling included, of feeling part of a cohesive community where their role within it was valued.

"[an age-friendly community is] one that does not discriminate against older people but actively values them and enables them to remain part of the community"

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This combination of both connectedness and contribution has been identified as essential to creating age-friendly communities in previous literature[9].

This sense of agency and empowerment is fundamentally what is at the heart of the AfA programme. As of July 2018, a notable 12,140 older people had been involved in the planning and delivery of projects across 25 wards in Greater Manchester. The delivery leads have supported the creation of boards and Steering Groups of older people, putting older people at the forefront of decision making and investment allocation, and empowering them to have a real say in what is going on in their area. Additionally, the partnership with the Older People's Network has provided further opportunities for older people to have a say in their communities, engaging in activities such as consultation events and community forums.

> *"One voice often cannot be heard but many voices can. It's been lovely talking with friends and making new ones"*

> *"It has been very enjoyable day listening to the problems on the estate and hopefully being able to do something about them like the loss of a bus service at night"*

Being able to identify and connect with key members of the community who can inspire others has been an essential part what has made AfA successful. Talking about one of their projects, an AfA Oldham staff member stated:

> *"The enthusiasm of the volunteer group was essential in making this initiative a success, particularly the chair of the new committee … who was a real asset and is well-known and well-liked in the community. One person who is committed and enthusiastic can really make a huge difference and rally people to contribute to their local community."*

Supporting older people to have a voice and make a difference in their neighbourhoods has not come without its challenges. Many of the participants involved had little prior experience of an asset-based approach led by older people, and required more support, encouragement, and guidance than many staff initially anticipated. To be successful, most of the Local Delivery Leads have needed to invest a significant amount of time into confidence-building and providing both informal and formal training in areas such as committee skills and advocacy skills. Additionally, they have had to support older people to create and maintain democratic structures that go beyond simply representing the views of the 'usual suspects'.

A further challenge has been with wider engagement from external services and organisations. Whilst some districts have had considerable success in this area, other LDLs felt that they had 'worked hard to get the right people round the table' but found it difficult to get continued commitment or buy-in from external organisations. This highlights a wider challenge in creating age-friendly neighbourhoods. With Greater Manchester having recently become an age-friendly city region, staff from a variety of sectors need to continue to champion the need for age-friendliness, to ensure there is a joined-up approach and shared understanding of the value and importance of creating an age-friendly Greater Manchester.

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[9] Andrew Scharlach, "Creating aging-friendly communities," *Generations* 33, no. 2, (2009): 5–11.

Image © Centre for Ageing Better

Accessibility, transport and facilities: 'things that let me stay independent'

The third most common theme raised by respondents was the need for good accessibility, transport and facilities. For many respondents, these features were important because they enable older people to engage with the outside world with dignity, allowing them to be as independent as possible for as long as possible:

> *"[We need] flat pavements where you don't fall over or trip, where it's not easier to walk in the road than on pavements. Where there's no cars parked on the pavements, there's availability of seats in shopping areas, and lifts and escalators are close enough."*

> *"[There needs to be] more seating near bus stops, designated parking for disabled people, a local handyperson service for each community"*

For some respondents, the lack of accessible facilities such as toilets and seating in their neighbourhood had left them physically isolated or unable to participate in general day to day activities. Many respondents felt that key services such as banks, shops and doctors surgeries were situated too far out, and inadequate public transport services meant they struggled to reach them.

Commonly, respondents felt that bus stops were too far apart, and that bus services did not operate within walking distance of their homes. For those who felt their neighbourhoods were age-friendly, key examples of good accessibility referenced were dropped curbs, adapted housing, frequent bus stops, safe road crossings and good street lighting.

Eve's story shows the difficulties in accessibility some older people can face, and how AfA has supported her to re-connect with her community and to become less socially excluded.

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Eve's story

As I'm registered blind I leave my mail for my family to read. I received one of the Ambition for Ageing newsletters in the post and my daughter read it to me and said "this sounds good for you! You should be out among people!". Weekends were fine as the family are always around. But I wasn't getting out at all during the week since my husband died. He always used to drive me everywhere so things became more difficult. I listen to the radio but it gets a bit boring.

My daughter rang Ambition for Ageing, and a member of staff came out to see me. I felt very comfortable with her straight away. She suggested some groups I might want to try. I was a bit resistant at first but she persuaded me to give things a try.

When you can't see, things are a lot different. You don't know if people are looking at you. I do have some vision, but I can't see a lot. I sometimes beam at people I don't know and ignore the people I do know. That's one of the reasons I like using my cane as it tells people that there's a reason that I might be a bit slower and not respond in the same way. People don't necessarily know by looking at you otherwise.

I've tried out a local reading group for blind and partially sighted people and I now go to a friendship group once a week, which is also for blind and partially sighted people. I've also started on a 'Living with Sight Loss' course and it's really helpful.

I'm joining my local Ambition for Ageing steering group meeting and I'm interested in the Equalities Board and their events. I'll need help to go along to things but I'm very interested in giving things a try. I'm in my 80s and I feel like I've got a new lease of life!

Working with Eve, the AfA Oldham team recognised the vital role that Eve's daughter had played in encouraging her to get involved in Ambition for Ageing, and how their standard mail correspondence would not have been seen by Eve if it wasn't for her family support. This has made them think differently about how they promote AfA, and further consider accessibility in their approach to marketing and communication.

In addition to connecting older people with specialist groups, AfA has also provided funding and support for mainstream community resources and activities to be adapted to become more accessible. In Rochdale, AfA funded the adaption of kitchen equipment to help people with mobility issues take a more active part in the local luncheon club. One attendee stated:

> *"I wanted to help out at the luncheon club but thought that would never happen because I am wheelchair-bound [sic] and have multiple disabilities. Now I can take part in helping at the club I'm feeling like I am being included and have become an asset and not just a burden. And I've asked to volunteer with Ambition for Ageing for the future. Thank you"*

Through projects like this, AfA has provided funding for structural adaptations and specialist equipment to be purchased which may not have been afforded otherwise. These investments have enabled neighbourhood activities and spaces to become more inclusive and age-friendly.

Additionally, the nature of these one-off investments has meant that many of these groups and spaces are not dependent on AfA for further funding, and are more likely to be sustainable after the programme ends. In this sense, AfA has made a longer term impact on these communities.

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A key challenge of accessibility that many Local Delivery Leads faced was a lack of awareness about what the barriers to inclusivity might be. A number of LDLs had encountered 'unconscious exclusion', whereby practices or activities were being conducted in a way that meant they were accidentally exclusionary. One example raised was that of professional external speakers, who had often opted not to use a microphone due to personal taste, without considering whether there may have been people in the room with hearing difficulties.

This 'unconscious exclusion' highlights the importance of training, embodying and promoting an awareness culture around accessibility, and the encouragement of open conversations about what different individuals need in different spaces. Accessibility needs to be at the forefront of planning when developing new neighbourhoods, integrated into the design rather than considered as an afterthought or as a special case for those with exceptional circumstances.

Within our existing spaces, it is very easy to consider only the views of those currently occupying that space, and overlook the concerns of those who are excluded. As such, it is important that those who find the spaces inaccessible are consulted when planning how to better adapt these existing areas, services and activities.

Community Resources and Spaces: 'a place where I can…'

Complementing the other themes, is a need for usable spaces and places within neighbourhoods. Respondents commonly referred to a need for green outdoor space and parks, gyms, swimming pools, local centres and services, and general spaces to meet.

For respondents who felt their neighbourhoods were age-friendly, they frequently emphasised the value of physical spaces that could be used as places to meet others and provide a base of operation for groups and activities.

"There should be safe, clean places for socialising and activities"

For many, these spaces were seen as the hub of their neighbourhoods:

"The local centre arranges activities, events and holidays for the elderly as well as the younger residents and their children. Without the hard work of the organisers a lot of folk would have a life without socialising, the centre is the heart of the community"

These spaces were also important to many respondents as a site for information. With this age-group being more digitally excluded than younger cohorts, physical spaces they could depend on for key information was crucial.

Many respondents desired a 'one-stop shop'; a multi-purpose space where they could go to meet friends for coffee, try new things, and get the information and advice they needed. For respondents who thought their neighbourhoods were less age-friendly, it was commonly felt that community resources in their neighbourhoods had reduced over time due to closures:

'It used to be age friendly but the local community centre and library are about to close.'

"Places where community can meet … this was important to the community. People have lost community places and [ward name] is being destroyed in terms of community. For example, the swimming pools – they used to be bustling with life"

Through some of its projects, Ambition for Ageing has provided investment into neglected and run down spaces within neighbourhoods, supporting them to become valuable community assets. These spaces have then acted as sites from which further age-friendly activities and projects have been able to flourish. The story of Radcliffe Cricket and Social Club shows how, with a one-off investment of a new boiler, AfA Bury was able to transform an old building into a hive of community activity.

Radcliffe Cricket and Social Club

Radcliffe Cricket Club is a non-profit making Sports and Social club, it is used by the community not just for sports but to allow people to hold meetings and other activities by several groups. The Club's boiler had been condemned, and the groups using the building were all looking for new premises as the majority of service users were 50+ and could no longer cope with the cold. As such, attendance had dropped. Various different clubs who used the building all pulled together to support an application for help from AfA.

Since AfA funded installation of a new boiler, even more groups have started using the club space, with more looking to join since the announcement of the library closures. New groups have also been created by some of the life time club members. 'Men in sheds' was started by some older men keen to have something to do without their wives being around and some recent widowers, they maintain the ground and teach each other new skills that may help them in everyday life. Since attending once a week they now attend five times a week; it has had lots of interest and new people joining every week. This in turn has attracted another group 'The Woodies' who needed a premises, and this is also a quickly growing group. The premises is also used by our Critical Friends Group, who offer advice and suggestions to investment applications to make the ideas run more smoothly and ensure the applications fit with the aims of Ambition for Ageing.

The club has since held an increased number of events activities, including a fundraiser for the Manchester appeal raising £4000, and a summer full of events for all ages.
Members using the Club told us:

"The new Boiler has really lifted the Club's spirits"

"We stopped come here, because it was cold and slightly tatty, but recently it seems the place has had a real lift and we come here more often, and have a room booked for a birthday party"

"If this place did not exist I would be at home all day, I come here for the good company, and we teach each other new skills and work to each other's capabilities".

In light of closures of previous services and community resources, AfA has been working with neighbourhoods to re-think the use of their existing spaces. Some LDLs have worked to build connections between community groups that had previously operated in silos, encouraging them to work together to share both spaces and resources. This has ranged from sharing general equipment such as kettles, to more tailored arrangements, such as craft groups making use of leftover wood from woodwork groups. The LDLs have had to negotiate sometimes competing interests and values within communities, to find common ground. While this process can take a lot of staff input, it can also improve sustainability by connecting groups within communities to share resources and become more resilient.

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Feelings of Safety: 'a place we feel safe and secure'

A further theme of respondents' comments was the importance of safety and security in creating age-friendly neighbourhoods. Common examples referenced were a need for good street lighting, the importance of keeping areas clean, clear and tidy, and issues of antisocial behaviour and crime.

> *"I, like others, often feel insecure when we go outside at night to find strangers wandering about the back of the houses. I often find cigarette ends, beer cans and wine bottles at the back. I feel the backs should be fenced off. I, for one, would feel more secure"*

> *"There are many gangs of youths hanging around with nothing to do and I find this very threatening"*

Previous literature has highlighted that older people can often be more worried about crime and safety because the consequences of an unsafe environment can be more severe for them. A neighbourhood environment may be considered too risky to go out in, and, as such, may be avoided by older people, resulting in increased isolation.

However, one method of managing safety concerns is by increasing feelings of control through collective action[10].

Sue's story below gives an example of how AfA Salford is supporting older people to have a voice in their communities, helping to make neighbourhoods safer and increasing their confidence in their ability to make a change.

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[10] Buffel et al, "Experiences of neighbourhood exclusion and inclusion among older people living in deprived innercity areas in Belgium and England", *Ageing and Society*

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Sue's story

Sue, who is now a regular member of one of our networks within AfA, expressed feeling increasingly frustrated by one issue in particular in her area. Sue wanted to raise an issue of health and safety with her housing association, to make them aware of dangerous pathways within the sheltered scheme. Despite sending various emails previously, the first of which had been sent over 5 years ago, the issue had still not been resolved.

Sue stated that many pathways were not maintained during the different seasons, resulting in slips, trips and falls. Sue had stated in her e-mail that her mum, who is in her 90s and is also a resident, will no longer go out alone due to fear of falling and is reliant on others to prevent her from slipping on the mossy path.

Sue was encouraged by the network to contact the housing provider again and make them aware that she is now a member of a group of residents who come together to resolve issues which affect local older people. Sue sent an e-mail highlighting health and safety issues which affect the residents. She suggested the housing provider maintains the grounds to reduce risk by gritting and jet-washing pathways and clearing leaves in the autumn months.

The Housing Trust area manager responded saying 'I've asked a contractor to come and quote for this, so we can get this done around the estate as soon as possible'.

The network now feel when they come together that there is strength in numbers which enables a stronger voice.

Supporting older people to have a voice within their neighbourhoods has enabled these older people to feel that they have an element of control over the area in which they live. Combined with social cohesion work, such as intergenerational and cross-cultural projects, this can help alleviate fears within neighbourhoods.

Information and Communication: 'how do I find out what's going on?'

For respondents who were asked 'What do you think makes an 'age-friendly neighbourhood'?', the topic of information and communication was mentioned infrequently. This theme arose more often, however, for the respondents who'd been asked **why** they considered their neighbourhoods to be/to not be age-friendly. For many of these respondents, not knowing what was available, or even where to go to find this information, was a key factor that made their neighbourhoods less age-friendly.

> *"Older people are not very visible, I'm not aware of activities for older people – there needs to be more advertisements"*

> *"We have no idea of activities or groups that are being held in our area, unless a friend informs us."*

This suggests that, whilst access to information is clearly important, its significance can be easily overlooked when thinking about age-friendly neighbourhoods in the abstract, or for those who already possess that local knowledge and information.

Analysis of over 2400 event attendee responses found that almost a third of attendees had heard about the AfA events by word of mouth, through a friend or family member. 16% had seen the event advertised in a leaflet or poster. The most commonly selected response was 'other', with 37% of respondents choosing this option. Whilst this category incorporated a wide range of communication methods, the most common was hearing about events through local groups and services, followed by direct invites by AfA staff. Additionally, a smaller number found out about the activity by coming across the event on the day.

Only 5% of respondents found out about the events online or via social media. This was reflected in a desire by many respondents for information to be available in physical spaces, rather than a digital spaces:

> *"[An age-friendly community would have] A central hub available to everyone, open every day. Which offers help, advice, information and activities with a leaflet listing everything posted large on a notice board [or more] together with a distribution to all households."*

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ambition for ageing

The story below demonstrates one way in which AfA has worked with local communities to join up information and distribute it to older people in their neighbourhoods.

Failsworth What's On Guide – Oldham

The Failsworth West Ambition for Ageing Steering Group have produced a printed 'What's On Guide' to Failsworth which includes details of social groups and activities which are available or particularly relevant for the over 50s. The guide is set out like a diary so that it's easy for people to see what's on every day of the week.

The issue we wanted to tackle was that people were telling us that they don't know about what's on in their area and don't know how to find out easily. Lots of people don't have computers or don't use computers regularly and don't have access to the Internet or know how to use it. We wanted a printed guide that could go out to the Failsworth West area and be available in community centres and other local meeting places.

We started out with a project that aimed to do an audit of community information sources. This turned into a local research project with volunteers going out to find out about local groups and activities and how accessible they are. They asked about days, times, venues and prices so that they could give people as much information as possible.

Our project has been supported by all the members of the Ambition for Ageing Failsworth West Steering Group who put together an application for investment money to produce the guide. When we were asking for approval for the a Failsworth West Councillor offered to fund the project as he thought it fit well with the 'Ageing Well' priorities in the Failsworth & Hollinwood District Plan. Another Councillor also offered the services of her volunteers to deliver it door to door.

The investment has also enabled us to pay for an updated version of the guide as we know that as soon as these kind of guides are printed they can soon become out of date as activities and groups change days or times or contact details.

We hope that this will inform people who don't get out about what is going on in their local area and encourage more people to join groups and activities that are close by.

Whilst guides like this have proved popular across most of the districts, some of the LDLs have expressed concerns about the sustainability of some of these publications once the AfA programme ends. With current societal trends indicating that more and more information and services are moving online, there are concerns as to how paper publications such as these will be able to continue funding their activities.

Some LDLs have been running schemes such as 'Tech and Tea', to support older people to become more tech-savvy and tackle digital exclusion. Some of these schemes have also provided technology at discounted rates to those who have accessed the courses, helping to break down financial barriers to digital exclusion.

Unsurprisingly, there is no 'magic bullet' or one size fits all solution to communication, as people aged 50 plus are a very diverse population with different wants and needs. A place-based approach has allowed AfA to tailor their communications to the neighbourhoods in which they operate, consulting with local older people to provide information through the most effective and appropriate media possible.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whilst AfA recognises the need for tailored, local solutions for age-friendliness, research from the programme has identified some overarching themes for building age-friendly neighbourhoods that are reflected across GM. These are: the need for positive social connections and community cohesion; participation and meeting opportunities; good accessibility, facilities and transport; community spaces and resources; feelings of safety and security; and available information with effective communication. It's no surprise that these themes mirror many of the characteristics identified by the WHO for creating age-friendly cities[11], as the themes embody various dimensions of inclusion enabling people of all ages to participate, connect, and contribute. Respondents who felt their neighbourhoods were not age-friendly tended to feel disconnected or excluded from their neighbourhoods in one or more of these dimensions. These themes of exclusion cross-cut a variety of sectors, such as transport, town planning and social care, highlighting the necessity of a joined-up approach if we are to fully develop age-friendly neighbourhoods in GM.

Figure 1.1 'What makes an age-friendly neighbourhood?'

[11] World Health Organization (WHO), *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide.*

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Of all the themes identified, the need for social cohesion and positive social connections was mentioned by far the most frequently by respondents. This demonstrates the importance of understanding age-friendly neighbourhoods and 'ageing in place' not simply as issues relating to the physical environment - although this is still crucial - but also in relation to the social and symbolic meanings attached to places that make them feel like home. Whilst younger people often have established social connections rooted in environments other than the neighbourhood, such as work and school, older people tend to spend more time at home and in their local vicinity. As such, neighbourliness and the design and development of age-friendly neighbourhoods are particularly important to help cultivate social connections and a sense of belonging for older people. AfA has shown how events and activities can be used to foster meaningful connections, helping older people to develop communities of their own choosing and rebuild a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods. The programme has also highlighted the importance of community resources and spaces for creating age-friendly neighbourhoods, and how investing in existing resources and re-thinking spaces can enable a hive of activity to flourish.

This research has found friendly 'micro-interactions' to be particularly important for creating age-friendly neighbourhoods, with many respondents stressing a need for weak social ties and light touch support. In order to develop this, community cohesion work is key. Both cultural and generational differences were contentious issues in the research, with feelings of neighbourhood division on these grounds being identified by many respondents. These were frequently raised in the context of self-identity and conceptions of who are and, crucially, are not, 'people like me'. AfA has invested time and expertise into bridging some of these divides, empowering, educating and connecting different groups and negotiating interests. Research from the programme has highlighted a need for further work in this area, to challenge misconceptions and increase awareness and understanding. Additionally, more research is needed to further unpack what the concept of 'people like me' means to different older people, to inform and support the development of future social cohesion work within neighbourhoods.

Ambition for Ageing has succeeded in mobilising thousands of older people across GM and empowering them to have a voice in their communities. The programme has also provided an outlet for them to have their say in what age-friendly neighbourhoods should look like, recognising the importance and value of their voices in this narrative. However, just as gender equality is not achievable by only engaging with one sex, age-friendly neighbourhoods cannot be created by only engaging with older people. Future work should aim to bring other age groups further into the conversation, to break down stigma and age-based segregation, promoting a community-wide approach to age-friendliness where its value is recognised by all ages. Without this, we risk developing pocketed zones of age-friendly activity, with dedicated 'older people areas', rather than fully integrating age-friendliness into our neighbourhoods.

AfA has raised the profile of older people in GM, acknowledging the importance of actively involving older people in creating age-friendly neighbourhoods and investing considerable time and expertise into supporting and empowering the programme's participants. However, in order to be successful, this work needs to be complemented by the activities of wider societal structures and services. Whilst some Local Delivery Leads have had good engagement from external agencies, others have had had inconsistent commitment and buy-in from wider organisations. Work is still needed to promote the value of age-friendliness more widely, to ensure a joined-up, cross-sector approach to age-friendliness in GM.

Going forward, further research in this area would benefit from a closer look at inequalities within neighborhoods. Although this research has identified over-arching themes, it has not been able to look more specifically at how experiences of neighbourhoods may differ due to existing inequalities. It is important to acknowledge that older people are not a homogenous group, and age should not be looked at in isolation of other social and economic factors. With the voices of white women being likely to be over-represented in this research, it's important that further work continues to explore the experiences of other groups to ensure that their voices are heard. For example, whilst issues of discrimination were raised rarely by respondents in this research, this may shape experiences of age-friendliness for other groups. Additionally, this research does not take into account any contextual differences between stable and more transient neighbourhoods. More work could be done to explore and understand the nuances of different neighbourhood environments, in order to better support local and tailored solutions in developing age-friendly neighbourhoods.

Whilst both people and places change over time, age-friendly neighbourhoods can prevent people being involuntarily excluded from their communities as they move through the lifecourse. For many older people, this exclusion is already a reality, and programmes such as AfA are using activities and empowering mechanisms to rebuild a sense of belonging within neighbourhoods, providing opportunities to re-connect, regain control and have a say. Thousands of older people across GM have contributed to the research in this report, having their say about what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood. The themes explored in this report should not be viewed in isolation, but rather interconnect to create a whole neighbourhood experience:

> *"I think, most importantly, an age friendly neighbourhood would be understanding and respecting each other regardless of our culture, religion and race. An age friendly neighbourhood should have access to good, healthy functional community centres where people can socialise, get advice and information, help with tackling issues, do activities to keep well mentally and physically, and learn new things such as IT (as there is a saying you never stop learning!). An age friendly neighbourhood would look like a welcoming place, a place with accessible local amenities such as mosques, shops, medical centres, and leisure facilities. It should have nice and clean surroundings inside the neighbourhood, with safe and secure streetlights, and good, clean benches in parks."*

When all these themes come together, through a joined-up, cross-sector approach, GM can get it right for all ages, enabling people to age actively and stay as independent as possible for as long as possible.

Key recommendations:

1. 'Ageing in place' is inextricably linked to age-friendly neighbourhoods, and the social components of this are just as important as the accessibility and adaptions of the physical environment. As places change over time, it is necessary to ensure that older people can retain a sense of belonging in their communities and have control over their environments by ensuring they have access to opportunities to participate, connect and contribute.

2. There is a need for more community cohesion work across GM, particularly with a cross-cultural and intergenerational focus. Due to existing tensions, it is important to ensure this work is managed and facilitated carefully, challenging misconceptions rather than reiterating existing stereotypes. Further, promoting more intergenerational settings is needed to further develop age-friendly neighbourhoods more widely. With neighbourhood relations often considered in the context of whether there are 'people like me', further research into how different people understand and develop their concept of this would be beneficial, and would assist in the development of more effective social cohesion work within neighbourhoods in future.

3. Community spaces and resources are key to enabling community activity and for building social connections. Funding cuts and closures risk further segregating communities and isolating older people. More support is needed to enable communities to maintain key spaces, and think more innovatively about the use of space including connecting community groups to share skills and resources.

4. The themes of age-friendliness identified in this report cross-cut a variety of sectors, such as transport, town planning and social care, highlighting the necessity of a joined-up approach if GM is to fully develop age-friendly neighbourhoods. AfA has mobilised and empowered older people across the city region, but further buy-in from other sectors and services is still needed.

5. More work needs to be done to explore how experiences of age-friendliness differ between transient and stable neighbourhoods, and how existing inequalities may impact on the experiences and understanding of age-friendliness.