

Public Policy Statement

The built environment in communities

December 2019

Summary

Being able to take part in community life, with good access to local services and facilities, is a lifeline for many older people. There are already high levels of loneliness and social isolation amongst older people in Wales and an inaccessible built environment that deters people from being involved in community life can contribute to this.

The features that make a place desirable to live in can change as people get older. It is essential that the built environment around us is designed and adapted in an age friendly way so that it is sustainable and suitable for people of all ages.

An age friendly community is one that has the capacity to support older people to enjoy the best possible quality of life. It includes facilities, services and amenities that are accessible and that accommodate the needs of older people, to help them enjoy health and wellbeing and to fully participate in society.

However, many older people come up against barriers that prevent their participation in communities, and what should be an enjoyable stage of life can become a time of loneliness and isolation.

Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey (2018/19),¹ which enabled older people across Wales to assess how age friendly is their community, highlighted that many older people face considerable barriers in the built environment on a daily basis:

- over 55% of survey respondents rated access to public toilets in their community as 'poor', with the lack of public toilets being the key issue
- over a third of survey respondents assessed the pavements in their community as 'poor'; uneven pavements and brick pavements that are slippery when wet were seen as hazardous, and pavements obstructed with parked cars, bins and street furniture restricted access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters
- over 22% of respondents regarded public seating and places to rest in their community as 'poor', with a general lack of facilities being the main issue.

Sufficient provision of public toilets is vital to enable older people to maintain their dignity and participate in community life.

¹ Age Cymru (published March 2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator. Based on over 1000 responses. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/our-impact/policy-publications/community-calculator/>

Pavements in a poor condition, car parking on pavements, and street 'clutter' can be hazardous for older people and can inhibit access and pose an increased falls risk.

Accessing community areas and facilities can present a substantial challenge for older people if there is nowhere to rest or to sit down.

The Community Calculator also highlighted other barriers in the built environment, including inadequate street lighting, which can impose an unacceptable restriction on many older people, and concerns over a lack of safe crossing facilities for pedestrians in some areas, especially where there is speeding traffic.

Such barriers in the built environment can exclude older people from being fully included members of society. It is vital that the built environment enables, rather than prevents, older people taking an active part in their communities.

All outdoor environments and public spaces across Wales should be accessible, inclusive and usable for all older people. Safe and accessible streets, places to meet to socialise that are easily accessible by public and community transport, and adequate public seating, street lighting and public toilets in our communities all help to facilitate this. Increasing opportunities for older people to take part locally can do much to boost independence, combat social isolation and loneliness and promote health and wellbeing.

All local authorities in Wales have signed up to the Dublin Declaration, showing commitment at local levels to creating communities that are inclusive and supportive for all,² and have produced local Ageing Well plans.³

Improvements to communities and services are needed in all areas of Wales. Local authorities have a key role in making sure that the built environment and streetscapes throughout our communities are safe and inclusive. With local authorities experiencing budget cutbacks, many of the essential services and facilities that older people rely on are under threat.

Politicians at all levels must pay close attention to the impact that cuts to services will have on older people. Local authorities must conduct meaningful equality impact assessments to ensure that cuts and changes to services and facilities are not having a disproportionate effect on older people. Decisions about changes to services and facilities must take older people's needs into account through effective engagement and consultation. The cumulative effect of cuts to essential facilities and amenities can incrementally erode the infrastructure of the built environment and take the heart out of our communities.

We acknowledge the significant financial challenges facing local authorities and public bodies in Wales. However, we believe that maintaining facilities to provide an inclusive age friendly built environment, and protecting essential amenities and services to enable the participation

² Ageing Well in Wales. Age-Friendly Communities. <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/themes/age-friendly-communities>

³ Older People's Commissioner for Wales. Changing Practice, Changing Lives, Impact and Reach Report 2016-17. http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/Impact_and_Reach_Report_2016-17_-_online.sflb.ashx

of older people in communities, could bring savings in terms of limiting demands and reliance on health and social care budgets.

Summary of public policy proposals:

- The application of the principles of the Dublin Declaration and the implementation of Ageing Well Plans by local authorities in Wales must be robustly monitored and evaluated.
- Local authorities must conduct meaningful equality impact assessments on their budget decisions to ensure that cuts and changes to services and facilities are not having a disproportionate effect on older people.
- Decisions about changes to services and facilities must take older people's needs into account through effective engagement and consultation.
- Local authorities must provide good lighting and well-kept clean streets to help people feel more confident about getting out and about. Pavements must be well maintained and be free of obstruction.
- Local authorities should ensure that streets are safe and accessible, with increased use of 20mph zones and traffic calming measures in residential areas. Pedestrian crossings must be sufficient in number and allow people enough time to cross roads.
- Local authorities must review public places and spaces and provide reasonable adjustments as required by the Equality Act 2010.
- Local authorities must ensure that older people's needs are taken into account in providing adequate and appropriate seating in communities, including shopping centres, parks, bus stops and other public places.
- Welsh Government should place a statutory duty on local authorities in Wales to provide sufficient numbers of accessible public toilets across Wales.
- The implementation of local authorities' local toilet strategies should be robustly monitored and evaluated to ensure the sufficient provision of accessible toilets in communities.
- Welsh Government should monitor levels of public funding allocated to community toilet schemes to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of these important services. Local authorities should ensure that the community toilet scheme is better publicised and promoted.
- Local authorities should provide support to voluntary and community groups to enable and empower older people to facilitate inclusive social opportunities, including educational, social and health-related activities. Local authorities should consider innovative ways to support such activities by encouraging the use of council facilities.
- Local authorities must provide adequate public library services and comply with their statutory duty.
- The vital role of library services in facilitating digital inclusion must be protected and extended to ensure that such services are accessible to older people.
- Service providers must ensure that services are accessible, irrespective of whether or not someone is online. Services provided online need to be high quality and easy to use, whilst offline services should be of equal quality and fully accessible.
- Town planners should be required to demonstrate how they have engaged the local community in the planning process, and all plans should be subject to an equality impact assessment.

The built environment in communities

This policy statement covers:

- Current policy and legislation
- Street design and maintenance
- Public seating
- Public toilets
- Places to meet in the community
- Public libraries
- Planning

Note: Community services, housing and public transport are covered in other Age Cymru policy statements.

Public policy proposals

Current policy and legislation

Being able to take part in community life, with good access to local services and facilities, is a lifeline for many older people. An age friendly community is one that has the capacity to support older people to enjoy the best possible quality of life. It includes facilities, services and amenities that are accessible and that accommodate the needs of older people to help them enjoy health and wellbeing and to fully participate in society.

Poor neighbourhood design and / or a lack of services can lead to older people being cut off within communities. There are already high levels of loneliness and social isolation amongst older people in Wales and an inaccessible built environment that deters people from taking part in community life can contribute to this.

Age Cymru's policy document 'Creating an age friendly Wales'⁴ highlights that the features that make a place desirable to live in can change as people get older, and it is essential that the built environment in communities is designed and adapted in an age friendly way so that it is sustainable and suitable for people of all ages, and that services and amenities are accessible.

Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey (2018/19) enabled older people to assess whether their community is age friendly. It provided a snapshot of the current status of communities in Wales and how prepared areas are to respond to current and future demographic changes.

The Community Calculator identified that many older people face barriers in the built environment that can prevent them from participating in their communities. It highlighted that improvements are needed to community design and service provision to ensure that all our

⁴ Age Cymru (2015) Creating an age friendly Wales. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/age-friendly-wales/age-cymru-creating-an-age-friendly-wales-e-web.pdf>

communities are suitable for people of all ages. Findings of the Community Calculator are discussed below.

One of the key themes of the Welsh Government's 'Prosperity for All' national strategy is 'United and Connected', the objectives of which include building resilient communities, culture and language, and delivering modern and connected infrastructure. The strategy highlights that 'Communities prosper where people can participate fully and play an active role in shaping their local environment'.⁵

We are supportive of Welsh Government's 'Planning Policy Wales' that states 'Development proposals must address the issues of inclusivity and accessibility for all. This includes making provision to meet the needs of people with sensory, memory, learning and mobility impairments, older people [...]'.⁶ Planning Policy Wales aims to deliver the vision of Wales set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015,⁷ which includes a set of national goals that aim to help to promote sustainability, including 'A Wales of cohesive communities' described as 'attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities'.⁸

In terms of social and community cohesion, a key finding of EHRC's 2018 'Is Wales Fairer' report was that loneliness, isolation and a reduced sense of belonging are some of the most significant issues facing particular groups, including older people, disabled people, carers, new parents, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, and people from some ethnic minorities.⁹

At the time of writing, the Welsh Government's new Strategy for an Ageing Society is being developed. Arising from the original Strategy for Older People in Wales is the Ageing Well in Wales programme,¹⁰ led by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, which aims to support agencies to make the necessary changes, plan better for the future and learn from and adapt the work of the World Health Organisation (WHO) initiatives on Healthy Cities and Age-friendly communities.^{11,12} All 22 local authorities in Wales have signed up to the Dublin Declaration, showing commitment at local levels to creating communities that are inclusive and supportive for all, regardless of their age,¹³ and have produced Ageing Well plans.¹⁴ We believe that the application of the principles of the Dublin Declaration and the implementation of Ageing Well Plans by local authorities in Wales must be robustly monitored and evaluated.

⁵ Welsh Government (2017) Prosperity for All: the national strategy. Taking Wales Forward.

<https://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

⁶ Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales. Edition 10. December 2018

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-10.pdf>

⁷ Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales. Edition 10. December 2018

⁸ Welsh Government (2015) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Essentials.

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/well-being-of-future-generations-wales-act-2015-the-essentials.pdf>

⁹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Is Wales Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018.

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2018-is-wales-fairer.pdf>

¹⁰ Ageing Well in Wales. <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home> [Accessed 29/10/19]

¹¹ Welsh Government (2013) The Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-2023.

¹² Ageing Well in Wales. Local Ageing Well Plans. [Accessed 29/10/19].

<http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/themes/age-friendly-communities>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ageing Well in Wales. Local Ageing Well Plans. [Accessed 29/10/19].

<http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/localplans>

The importance of providing age friendly public spaces and services is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010. To achieve a more equal society, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)¹⁵ requires all public bodies to take positive steps to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and foster good relations between different groups in society. The PSED is supported by Specific Duties in Wales,¹⁶ which require listed public bodies in Wales to develop equality objectives for all protected characteristics, including age, and carry out equality impact assessments on their policies and practices. Together these provide a framework that can assist public bodies to understand the needs of the ageing population and to ensure that decisions they make do not disproportionately impact on particular groups, including older people.

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish local toilets strategies for their areas, and included provisions aimed at improving the planning and provision of toilets available for use by the public.¹⁷ Under the Act all local authorities had to assess the needs of its community and put a strategy in place to ensure the public will have greater access to these facilities.¹⁸

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales' report 'The importance and impact of Community Services within Wales'¹⁹ makes a case for protecting community services, which include public toilets, pavements, public seating and libraries. The report states that these community-based services and facilities are essential to the maintenance of older people's health, independence and wellbeing.²⁰ We believe that community assets have an important role in promoting social inclusion and helping to enable older people to participate in the community, and it is vitally important that older people are able to continue to access them.

Policy proposals:

- The application of the principles of the Dublin Declaration and the implementation of Ageing Well Plans by local authorities in Wales must be robustly monitored and evaluated
- Local authorities must conduct meaningful equality impact assessments on their budget decisions to ensure that cuts and changes to services and facilities are not having a disproportionate effect on older people
- Decisions about changes to services and facilities must take older people's needs into account through effective engagement and consultation.

¹⁵ Equality Act 2010 http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2010/ukpga_20100015_en_1

¹⁶ The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 <http://www.assemblywales.org/sub-ld8462-e.pdf>

¹⁷ Welsh Government (2018) Consultation Document. Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities: Local Toilets Strategies. https://consultations.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultation_doc_files/180110consultationen.pdf

¹⁸ Welsh Government (2018) Local authorities expected to improve the availability of toilet facilities in their communities. <https://gov.wales/newsroom/health-and-social-services/2018/publictoilets/?lang=en>

¹⁹ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2014) The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales.

²⁰ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2014) The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales.

Street design and maintenance

Features of street design and maintenance can have an impact on whether older people are able to feel safe to get about and take part in community life. Problems include a lack of accessible infrastructure for people who need to use mobility scooters and wheelchairs, and people that are unable to navigate steps. Such problems can also be encountered when accessing buildings.

Lesser-quality environments are often considered by older people to pose an increased falls risk, especially by those with vision, mobility or other impairments. They can heighten fears about crime, nuisance and traffic and make going out less enticing, reinforcing feelings of loneliness or entrenching the challenges of socio-economic deprivation.²¹

A lack of safe pavements can place restrictions on freedom of movement and mobility. Age Cymru's Community Calculator (2018/19) highlighted the disabling effect that poor quality pavements can have on the daily lives and wellbeing of older people. Over a third of survey respondents rated the pavements in their community as poor. Uneven pavements and brick pavements that are slippery when wet were seen as hazardous. Pavements obstructed with parked cars, bins and street furniture restricted access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Problems with dog fouling and litter were also highlighted.

Age Cymru has previously campaigned for local authorities to repair dangerous pavements to prevent falls and reduce the fear of falling among older people. A report by Help the Aged²² revealed that local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland were holding back funds to cover the potential cost of personal injury claims when people fell on pavements. In some cases, councils were holding back more to cover these possible expenses that they were spending on emergency pavement repairs.²³

We welcome the announcement (July 2019) that Welsh Government would be putting together an expert group to explore ways of clamping down more widely on illegal parking as well as pavement parking.²⁴

The Community Calculator highlighted concerns about neighbourhood safety, including speeding traffic, a lack of safe facilities for crossing roads, and poor street lighting.

We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to change the default speed limit for residential areas across Wales from 30 to 20mph.²⁵

Research on older people crossing the road at pedestrian crossings reports that the 1.2 metres per second that the Department for Transport advises as the speed allowed for people

²¹ I'DGO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors. Why does the outdoor environment matter? Research findings.

²² Help the Aged (2008) Falling Short: the state of our pavement. An investigation for the National Falls Awareness Day Campaign.

²³ MNT (2008) Help the Aged Reveals Councils Are Holding Back £millions For Pavement Falls Payouts, UK. 24 June 2008. <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/112524.php>

²⁴ Welsh Government (2019) Welsh Government to take action against pavement parking. Press Release, 4 July 2019 <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-take-action-against-pavement-parking>

²⁵ Welsh Government (2019) Welsh Government to take action against pavement parking. Press Release, 4 July 2019 <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-take-action-against-pavement-parking>

to cross a road is not long enough and in around 89% of cases older people aren't walking at a fast enough speed to complete the crossing before returning to the green phase for traffic to proceed.²⁶

Inadequate street lighting can impose an unacceptable restriction on many older people, particularly in winter months, and can impact on their ability to access community services and opportunities to socialise.

Local authorities have a key role in making sure that streets are safe and accessible by providing good lighting and the appropriate use of CCTV cameras. Pavements must be safe and well maintained and be free of obstruction. Tactile paving must be used appropriately. Pedestrian crossings must be sufficient in number and give people enough time to cross roads. Signage should be simple, easily visible and understandable, including signage to toilets and post offices, and appropriate language provision should be considered.

Studies relating to accessible and inclusive age friendly environments identify a number of barriers in the physical environment for older people, including the issue of shared space, which is often not segregated between car and pedestrian.²⁷ Older people have also expressed concern over shared space for cycling and walking. There is the need to ensure that shared spaces are fit for purpose, and to ensure meaningful consultation with disabled and older people to avoid exclusion as a result of poor design.

Policy proposals:

- Local authorities must provide good lighting and well-kept clean streets to help people feel more confident about getting out and about. Pavements must be well maintained and be free of obstruction.
- Local authorities should ensure that streets are safe and accessible, with increased use of 20mph zones and traffic calming measures in residential areas. Pedestrian crossings must be sufficient in number and allow people enough time to cross roads.
- Local authorities must review public places and spaces and provide reasonable adjustments as required by the Equality Act 2010.

Public seating

Without adequate seating and places to rest, accessing community areas and facilities can present a substantial challenge for older people. For some older people, public seating can be the difference between living a full life and feeling cut-off and isolated. Going shopping, queuing at the post office, waiting at the bus stop or taking a walk in the park can become impossible if there is nowhere to sit down. Public seating is an essential feature for any area that seeks to be age friendly, but there is a lack of good quality public seating in many places.

²⁶ Age Cymru (2016) EnvisAGE. Towards an age friendly Wales. Article by Charles Musselwhite 'Vision for an age friendly transport system in Wales'. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/policy/age-cymru-policy-publications-1/envisage-1/>

²⁷ Age Cymru (2016) EnvisAGE. Towards an age friendly Wales. Article by Judith Phillips 'Accessible and inclusive age friendly environments'.

Over 22% of respondents to Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey (2018/19) rated public seating and places to rest in their community as 'poor', with a general lack of facilities in community areas, parks and bus stops being the main issue.

Research in England reports how older people are deterred from visiting towns and cities because of a lack of places to sit (and a lack of public toilets).²⁸ In a survey of 200 older people in the UK by I'DGO,²⁹ findings showed that a lack of purpose-built seating placed at regular intervals in neighbourhood streets limits older pedestrians who, primarily for health reasons, need to stop frequently to rest when walking between their home and local amenities.³⁰

Policy proposal:

- Local authorities must ensure that older people's needs are taken into account in providing adequate and appropriate seating in communities, including shopping centres, parks, bus stops and other public places.

Public toilets

Public toilets are essential to making communities age friendly and a lack of them can have a debilitating effect on older people, preventing them from accessing key services and increasing loneliness and isolation. Poor public toilet provision impacts upon many older people as it reduces their ability to remain active and restricts how often, and for how long, they are able to leave their homes. Sufficient toilet provision in communities is vital to enable older people to maintain their dignity and participate in community life.

Over half of the 1,000 respondents to the Community Calculator said access to public toilets in their local area was poor, with a lack of facilities being the main issue. Concerns were also raised regarding cleanliness, limited opening hours, and a lack of signage.

Poor toilet provision and access disproportionately affects some groups including older people and disabled people.³¹ Despite the importance of these facilities, public toilets are disappearing from our communities at an alarming rate and we believe that assertive action is needed to halt this decline. Research shows that more than 100 public toilets have been shut by councils in Wales since March 2013.³² The Welsh Senate of Older People's 'P is for People' campaign has raised awareness of the lack of public toilet provision in Wales.³³ We believe that Welsh Government should place a statutory duty on local authorities in Wales to provide sufficient numbers of accessible public toilets across Wales.

²⁸ The Telegraph (2014) Town and city centres 'becoming elderly no-go zones' 27/04/2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/elderhealth/10790429/Town-and-city-centres-becoming-elderly-no-go-zones.html>

²⁹ I'DGO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors. Design Guide 001. Seating.

³⁰ I'DGO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors. Design Guide 001. Seating.

³¹ Welsh Government (2014) Welsh Government White Paper. Listening to you: Your health matters. Consultation on proposal for a Public Health Bill. Number WG20703. <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/healthsocialcare/white-paper/?lang=en>

³² Flint, R. (2017) Call for more councils to charge for toilets after 113 shut. BBC Wales News, 9 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-38743907>

³³ Welsh Senate of Older People (2012) P is for People. Public toilet provision research.

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 placed a duty on each local authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its areas, to include an assessment of the community's need for toilets, as well as details of how the local authority proposes to meet that need.³⁴ The duty to prepare a local toilets strategy will not in itself require local authorities directly to provide and maintain public toilets, but will require them to take a strategic view across their authority on how these facilities can be provided and accessed by their local population, including facilities in both public and private sector buildings which are potentially available to the public.³⁵ Local authorities had to publish their local toilet strategies by 31 May 2019.³⁶ We believe that the implementation of local authorities' local toilet strategies should be robustly monitored and evaluated to ensure the sufficient provision of accessible toilets in communities.

Welsh Government noted that 'community toilet schemes previously provided under the former Welsh Government Public Facilities Grant Scheme funding have declined since the funding was transferred to local authorities via the Revenue Support Grant'.³⁷ To help ensure the sustainability of the community toilet scheme, we believe that levels of public funding allocated to community toilet schemes must be closely monitored by the Welsh Government to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of these important services.

Research by the Welsh Senate of Older People in 2014³⁸ reported a distinct variation in the involvement, promotion and uptake of the community toilet scheme across Wales. We believe that this scheme, together with the provision of toilet facilities for public use within public buildings, must be better publicised and promoted, with clear and visible signage.

Policy proposals:

- Welsh Government should place a statutory duty on local authorities in Wales to provide sufficient numbers of accessible public toilets across Wales
- The implementation of local authorities' local toilet strategies should be robustly monitored and evaluated to ensure the sufficient provision of accessible toilets in communities
- Welsh Government should monitor levels of public funding allocated to community toilet schemes to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of these important services. Local authorities should ensure that the community toilet scheme is better publicised and promoted.

³⁴ Welsh Government (2018) Consultation Document. Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities: Local Toilets Strategies. https://consultations.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultation_doc_files/180110consultationen.pdf

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Welsh Government (2018) Local authorities expected to improve access to public toilets. 31 May 2018. <https://gov.wales/local-authorities-expected-improve-access-public-toilets-0>

³⁷ Welsh Government (2018) Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities: Local Toilets Strategies.

³⁸ Welsh Senate of Older People (2014) P is for People. Campaigning for better public toilets in Wales. Report on findings of Campaign Working Group of the Welsh Senate of Older People. Spring 2014.

Places to meet in the community

Increasing opportunities for older people to take part locally can do much to boost independence, combat social isolation and loneliness and promote health and wellbeing. Loneliness and isolation are a daily reality for many older people, and a vital aspect of creating an age friendly Wales is to enable older people to play an active role in society.

Access to meeting places and social activities is important for older people. We believe that all neighbourhoods should include places for older people to participate in community life and community activities, such as a library (see below), a community centre, or a public park, to help prevent isolation, loneliness and health decline. Day centres and lunch clubs are lifelines for many older people.

Respondents to the Community Calculator told us about the importance of voluntary and community groups in facilitating community activities. Examples of good practice were highlighted, with reference to various community facilities and organisations hosting social activities and clubs.

In many areas, however, places to meet and socialise are increasingly at risk and many community facilities have already closed.

We believe that local authorities have a vital role in supporting community facilities and activities through working in partnership with voluntary and community groups to enable and empower older people to facilitate inclusive social opportunities, including educational, social and health-related activities. Local authorities should consider innovative ways to support such activities by encouraging the use of council facilities.

Policy proposal:

- Local authorities should provide support to voluntary and community groups to enable and empower older people to facilitate inclusive social opportunities, including educational, social and health-related activities. Local authorities should consider innovative ways to support such activities by encouraging the use of council facilities.

Public libraries

Public libraries are greatly valued by many older people and help to enable people to engage in social, cultural and educational facilities. Libraries also have the potential to act as community hubs, as a place where people can access information. A research study³⁹ provides evidence of the importance of learning for older people, reporting that there are real benefits not only in terms of personal enjoyment, but also for physical and mental health, social engagement and the ability to manage their lives.

³⁹ Age Cymru (2013) EnvisAGE. No.13. Article by Stephen McNair 'How important is learning for older people?'

Each library authority in Wales has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964 to deliver a 'comprehensive and efficient' service to its residents.⁴⁰ However, public library services are under pressure in many areas.⁴¹

We believe that cuts in library services will lead to an increase in isolation and loneliness for older people and affect their ability to participate fully in society. A reduction in library services would impact on older people's ability to engage in social, cultural and educational activities, and may inhibit the learning of new skills such as digital technology.

The Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards highlight that the public library has a key role in social inclusion and in providing information, promoting knowledge and developing skills for people of all ages, and that libraries play a key role in supporting older people in using new technologies.⁴² The Standards allow the Welsh Government to assess whether library services in Wales are complying with their duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.⁴³ The Standards' framework was developed by the Welsh Government in partnership with local authorities, and provides a mechanism to enable service providers to plan their provision, and for the public to know what they can expect from their library service.^{44,45}

With a number of information services increasingly reliant on online provision, it is important that older people have the opportunity to access and use digital services to help prevent exclusion. The National Survey for Wales 2018-19 reports that 49% of people aged 75 and over were internet users.⁴⁶ Libraries are vitally important as places where older people can access computer technology and learn new skills, so they have an important role in promoting digital inclusion.

We believe it is essential to maintain library services in both urban and rural areas. In the event that libraries are under threat of closure, particularly in rural/deep rural areas, we would urge that consideration is given to providing or extending mobile library services.

⁴⁰ Welsh Government (2017) How good is your public library service? A summary guide to the measurement and assessment framework for public libraries in Wales. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/how-good-is-your-public-library-service-a-summary-guide-to-the-performance-measurement-and-assessment-framework-for-public-libraries-in-wales.pdf>

⁴¹ National Assembly for Wales Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee (2014) Public Libraries in Wales.

⁴² Welsh Government (2017) Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020.

⁴³ Welsh Government (2017) Welsh public library standards. 2 October 2017.

⁴⁴ Welsh Government (2017) Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020.

⁴⁵ Welsh Government (2017) Welsh public library standards. 2 October 2017.

⁴⁶ Welsh Government (2019) National Survey for Wales, 2018-19. Internet use and digital skills. Statistical Bulletin SB 37/2019. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-09/internet-use-and-digital-skills-national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019-207.pdf>

Policy proposals:

- Local authorities must provide adequate public library services and comply with their statutory duty.
- The vital role of library services in facilitating digital inclusion must be protected and extended to ensure that such services are accessible to older people.

Planning

The fact that older people make up an increasing section of the population makes it ever more vital that future planning reflects their needs. We believe that planning for, and responding to, demographic change should be a key consideration in planning policy, and that planning decisions should take into account how they will affect people across different stages of the life course of future generations.

An important aspect of creating an age-friendly Wales is to enable older people to play an active role in society. Poor neighbourhood design and / or a lack of services can lead to older people being cut off within communities. An inaccessible built environment can deter people from taking part in community life and can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness. We are supportive of Welsh Government's 'Planning Policy Wales' that states 'Development proposals must address the issues of inclusivity and accessibility for all.'⁴⁷

In order for communities to adequately serve older people, their views and experiences must be considered in the design and delivery of facilities and services. It is essential that older people feel empowered to speak up about their views through meaningful consultation and engagement.

Feedback we have received is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for older people to be involved in town planning, as consultations are often only available online which excludes those older people that are unable to access online services. It was felt that local planning departments should make services available to ensure that details of new planning applications are accessible in other ways.

Age Cymru's Community Calculator reported that many older people felt that their voices were not being heard locally, with over a third of respondents rating their community as 'poor' when asked: 'How well do you think your opinion is taken on board in community decisions and plans?' As more information and consultations are made available mainly or exclusively online, there are real risks of excluding many older people.

Given that Wales has a relatively large rural area, it is important that the impacts on people living in rural areas are taken into account when creating and implementing planning policy, especially with reference as to how they will be able to access services and public and community transport. A report by PPIW highlights that there is a 'rural premium' on some key goods and services because of a lack of competitive markets for food, fuel, energy and transport, which contributes to rural poverty.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales. Edition 10. December 2018

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-10.pdf>

⁴⁸ Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016) Rural Poverty in Wales: Existing Research and Evidence Gaps.

<http://ppi.wales.org.uk/files/2016/06/An-introduction-to-Rural-Poverty.pdf>

One of the key findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's 'Is Wales Fairer' 2018 report, in terms of participation, was that 'Poor transport and digital infrastructure in rural areas is affecting people's ability to participate in all aspects of life, particularly households without cars, older people in rural areas, and disabled people'.⁴⁹

A report by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales⁵⁰ highlights that the need for effective rural connectivity has been heightened by the closure of local banks, shops and other services, meaning that older people have to travel further to access these services and other vital amenities. Lower levels of car ownership and car use amongst older people can also lead to them becoming marginalised and unable to access community services in rural areas, leading to significant impacts on their wellbeing.⁵¹

Policy proposals:

- Service providers must ensure that services are accessible, irrespective of whether or not someone is online. Services provided online need to be high quality and easy to use, whilst offline services should be of equal quality and fully accessible.
- Town planners should be required to demonstrate how they have engaged the local community in the planning process, and all plans should be subject to an equality impact assessment.

⁴⁹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Is Wales Fairer? Summary report 2018.

⁵⁰ Older People's Commissioner for Wales. The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales. http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.sflb.ashx

⁵¹ Shergold et al. (2011) cited in: Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2014) The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales.