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**Briefing Paper for APG on Ageing and Older People**

**March 2023**

***Age Friendly Network NI***

**Introduction**

The Age Friendly Network NI was launched in 2019 and has a membership comprising of Age Friendly Officers from all 11 Council areas as well as representatives from the Age Sector Networks. In addition to this DfC and PHA are also represented alongside Age NI who act as secretariat for the group.

The PHA funds local councils to implement the WHO Age Friendly Communities Model.

**Current Priorities**

In advance of the Network’s most recent meeting in March 23, members were issued with a survey to identify key priorities for the Network moving forward. The themes were based on the eight pillars of Age-Friendly: Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Transport, Housing, Social Participation, Respect & Social Inclusion, Civic Participation & Employment, Communication & Information and Community & Health Services. Age-Friendly Design Principles, Resourcing of Age Sector Networks, Age-Friendly Training and Annual / Biannual State of Ageing Report for NI were also included as options.

The following options were chosen as Network priorities by members of the Age-Friendly Network NI:

- Resourcing of the Age Sector Networks

- Communication & Information (to include Age-Friendly Training &

Regional Age-Friendly campaigns)

- Transport

- Age-Friendly Design Principles

Based on the priorities selected, it was agreed that thematic subgroups would be developed for each priority area. Each thematic subgroup will have a network member as a lead and be populated by appropriate members internal and external to the network.

In addition to this, it was agreed that a Network Steering Group would be set up to develop a 2-year action plan and support the work of the thematic subgroups using an outcomes-based approach.

**Opportunities**

One of the key opportunities identified for the network includes the ability to take learning from our colleagues in Age Friendly Ireland. Age Friendly Ireland is approximately 10 years ahead of us in terms of timeframe delivery having been initiated in 2009. Age Friendly Ireland has grown to have 80+ members of staff and in December 2019 was formally recognised by the World Health Organisation as an international leader and the first Age Friendly country in the world.

In addition to this, the Age Friendly Network NI model ensures that stakeholders including Councils at local government level, Age Sector Networks and Age NI from the third sector, alongside central government can work together to drive an Age Friendly agenda here in Northern Ireland. We believe that this is a great opportunity to align and strengthen the relationship between Age Friendly and the new Active Ageing strategy as we work towards a regionalised approach, which can make Northern Ireland an ‘age friendly’ region in which people, as they grow older, are supported to live well; live a life that is dignified and fulfilled; have their rights and independence promoted, their participation valued and their voices listened to.

**Challenges**

The key challenge that the Age Friendly Network faces is the lack of direct funding available to support the Age Friendly agenda for the 11 Age Sector Networks who work at a grass roots level with local older people across the region. The delivery of Age Friendly at local government level within the 11 local Council areas is currently secured through PHA funding.

It is imperative that the Age Sector Networks be resourced so that a ‘joined up’ approach can be used to drive forward the recognised and necessary change. This would ensure that for our ageing population, Northern Ireland is an ‘age friendly’ place to live and work for all.

This challenge is unfortunately further compounded by the limited capacity of the network, without paid staff. The funding of paid staff for the network would alleviate this pressure and drive the momentum required for sustained and quality change at all levels.

**Key Asks from APG**

* To continue interest in the work of the Age Friendly Network and the important role it plays in strengthening and driving forward the age friendly agenda.
* To encourage and promote the development of Age-Friendly across central and local government, in partnership with other sectors, including the voluntary and community sector.

***For further information, please contact: Age NI (Age Friendly Network Secretariat) on 028 9024 5729 3 Lower Crescent, Belfast, BT7 1NR***