



Making North Tyneside an Age Friendly Community

Summary of Residents' Views

March 2025

Contents

Contents and About this Report	2
Background.....	3
What an Age Friendly North Tyneside means to residents.....	6
Challenges for the future	10
What happens next.....	11

About this report

This report provides a summary of the views of 970 residents about making North Tyneside an Age Friendly Community.

Age UK North Tyneside and Healthwatch North Tyneside worked in partnership to engage with residents from across the borough to hear their views and experiences. Healthwatch North Tyneside has led on the analysis of the evidence gathered and produced in this report. Some older residents of North Tyneside have supported in the reviewing of the data and drafting of the actions.

A further report, providing more detail about each of the areas investigated will be published separately. Please see www.hwnt.co.uk or e-mail info@hwnt.co.uk

Thank you

We would like to thank all of the residents of North Tyneside who spoke to us and shared their views. Particular thanks to the residents who have helped to review the evidence gathered.

We would also like to thank the community groups, voluntary sector organisations and services who also helped us to reach residents across the Borough.

Finally, we would like to thank the staff and volunteers at both Healthwatch North Tyneside and Age UK North Tyneside for their commitment to this project.

Background

In 2023, North Tyneside's Health and Wellbeing Board agreed that partners should work together towards making North Tyneside an Age Friendly Community.

The World Health Organisation describes an age friendly community as:

"a place that enables people to age well and live a good later life. Somewhere that people can stay living in their homes, participate in the activities they value, and contribute to their communities, for as long as possible"

In the UK, there is a network of over 80 age friendly communities. North Tyneside's Health and Wellbeing Board wants North Tyneside to be part of this network enabling our older people to live happy healthy lives for as long as possible. This is increasingly important as projections indicate that our older population is set to grow significantly – it is expected that in North Tyneside between 2020 and 2030, the number of people aged 65–74 will increase by 16.2% and people aged 75+ will increase by 30.8% (North Tyneside Council Adult Social Care Strategy, 2025–26).

Age UK North Tyneside were asked to lead the push to make North Tyneside an Age Friendly Community. A key starting point for this work is understanding what residents think about ageing in the Borough. Healthwatch North Tyneside led the engagement and involvement activities, the results of which are summarised in this report.

The aim of this project was to:

- **Create an evidence base to support the development of the next Ageing Well Strategy for North Tyneside**
- **Produce a report that will form the basis of the application to become an Age Friendly Community**
- **Inform Age UK North Tyneside's strategic planning.**

What we did

To find out more about the experiences of older people in North Tyneside, we developed a survey covering the eight areas or 'domains' used by the World Health Organisation to create age friendly communities:

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

Between June and August 2024 we worked with Age UK North Tyneside and visited various community venues and events to distribute the survey to older people including exercise classes, summer fairs and lunch clubs. We also made the survey available online and promoted it via email and on social media, using our contacts to reach as wide an audience as possible.

970 residents completed the survey, and we engaged with over 1,300 people about this opportunity. This has created an amazingly rich data set that can be analysed in different ways. Healthwatch North Tyneside has led on the analysis of the findings. We shared highlights of these findings at a stakeholder event in September and in discussion groups with residents and voluntary sector stakeholders in November, December 2024 and February 2025. During these sessions we tested the findings with participants to understand the issues better – this approach can be built upon for the future.

Alongside this summary report, we have detailed summaries of responses to questions about the eight domains listed above. Healthwatch North Tyneside has suggested actions to address issues with each of these areas that partners will need to consider in their next steps.

We have tested the findings and recommendations with small groups of residents and used their feedback to refine the recommendations.

The limitations of this work

We achieved a good demographic and geographic spread, with 72% of responses from women (typical for this type of work), other areas being in line with the population demographics. 90% of responses came from people aged 55+. Our report summarises all of the responses we received.

The consultation closed just before the government announced the limits to winter fuel payments in 2024. We know this sparked significant concern about cost of living issues that were not captured in this activity, but have been a key issue for residents in subsequent activity.

We are very much aware that our main way of reaching people was through community activities and therefore we predominantly heard from people who are already engaging in activities. We did undertake some door drops and delivery through domiciliary care providers, but response was limited. We will continue to attempt to hear from those harder to reach in future activities.

We also note, from the number of group discussions undertaken to date, the impact of health inequalities and life experiences on people's aspirations and expectations.

What an Age Friendly North Tyneside means to residents

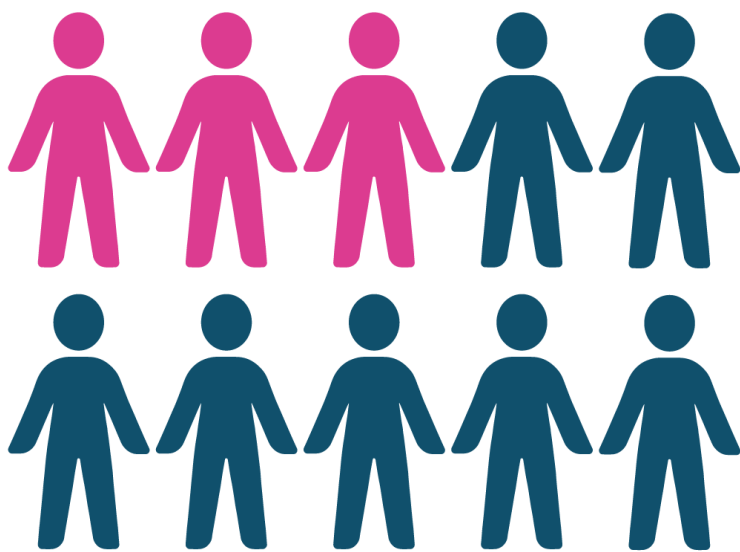
We heard from 970 people. We asked them about what it's like to age in North Tyneside at the moment but mainly focused on what people want in the future.

Residents were generally very positive about living in North Tyneside.

They told us, in the future:

- People want to avoid **loneliness and isolation**. Many told us they already felt lonely or isolated at times, others said they worried about becoming isolated as they got older. This appears to be particularly an issue in evenings and at weekends and some reflected that it has got worse since the Covid pandemic.

"I am incredibly lonely at times. This is particularly so at weekends and evening where I often find myself spending days and nights completely without company and visitors".



7 in 10 people told us they felt they had enough contact with friends and

- People are keen to find ways to **stay fit, healthy and mentally active**. They want to learn new skills, spend time with others and get out and about. People said they want more opportunities to do this.

"I need to remain physically able to walk and exercise in order to manage aspects of my health such as type 2 diabetes prevention, keeping BP low and cholesterol low."

- People need to be **better informed about opportunities and support**. They want **access to high quality information** about what is available in North Tyneside, with **more printed as well as digital information**, so they can easily connect to support and activities. The vast majority of people told us they found it difficult to find out what activities and support were available and 'stumble across' something they might be interested in.

"People don't know what they don't know".

- They need provision of **a better range of activities, opportunities and support services at times and locations suiting various circumstances**. This includes opportunities for people to develop their interests, volunteer, learn new skills, improve their confidence with technology and meet other people. Consideration needs to be given for people who are working, have family and caring responsibilities. Many felt there are not enough opportunities that meet their needs and that opportunities that do exist are poorly promoted.

"For me it is not about what, but more about when. With a full-time job from 9 to 5, I could only attend anything in the evenings or at the weekend".

- They need a **good transport** service. Many said they rely on their own cars at the moment and are concerned about what they will do if/when they stop driving. People commonly felt public transport is unreliable, unsafe, unaffordable, inaccessible and/or unavailable in the times and places they need it. People with mobility issues said they struggle to get transport from their front door without significant personal expense or relying on family and friends.

"I don't drive – we chose to give up our car some years ago. I live very close to a Metro station and on two bus routes, but cannot access everywhere I want/need to go by public transport. My husband has mobility issues so cannot walk as far as I can. We are fortunate to be able to afford taxis as necessary."

- They need **access to medical appointments and services that are integrated and centred on the needs of the person**, along with **advice and support on how to stay fit and well**. There are some examples of great practice, with other people expressing the opposite. They also want to get **prompt access to high quality care and support when they need it**, including mental health support, GPs, strength and balance classes and memory support.
- People are concerned about their changing housing needs as they get older. People said they wanted **affordable safe housing** meeting their **physical needs**, in a **safe area** (anti-social behaviour free) close to the required services, facilities and places they know. There is a strong desire to stay in their own homes and adapt their homes to their changing needs, but people will need advice to do this.

"There are good options for sheltered/supported housing but they need to move with the times – when I'm 80 I'm not going to want bingo and Vera Lynn."

- People want **improved accessibility of outdoor spaces and buildings that the public use** (including cafes), with places to rest and well-tended green spaces and footpaths, and places that are well lit on darker nights.

"Going out in a wheelchair is scary as the paths are so uneven, there aren't enough dropped kerbs".

- They need better access to clean and accessible **public toilets** to enable them to go out and about without worrying about a lack of facilities.

"I am wary of going places for fear of there not being a toilet... It can make the difference between going out and staying home".

- Many **want to see Improved intergenerational relationships** through skills exchange between younger and older people, and older people visiting schools. This may build more trust and help address concerns about anti-social behaviour.

"Children and young people can bring a sense of energy and joy. Older people can share wisdom, perspective and patience".

- **Older people want to be respected as a core part of the community in North Tyneside.** Many describe feeling invisible, forgotten about or ignored by other people, communities, services or society.

"We just want to feel part of the community. We are older but not useless".

"You are invisible when you are older".

"Opportunities for the older community to feel empowered. Our older community are becoming less and less independent (not wishing to) and having to rely on younger family members/friends/neighbours to undertake tasks that they previously could have done in person or over the phone. This is disempowering for them, gives a feeling of uselessness and worthlessness. Primarily this is due to organisations stating that contacts and tasks need to be done online. They do not have IT skills and/or are unable to acquire these new skills or retain the information without intensive daily intervention. Likes of street parking app, council tax, many payment methods online. Fewer and fewer organisations offer face to face and many do not offer the opportunity to contact by phone these days."

Challenges for the future

We have identified the following key challenges to making North Tyneside an age friendly borough.

1. Taking a **coordinated and strategic approach** to making North Tyneside more age friendly and responding to what residents have told us in this project.
2. **Involving people** in finding solutions and building the future – taking co – production approaches to tackle these issues and identify real changes. 173 of the respondents said they would be interested in getting involved in this work in the future.
3. **Providing high quality Information**– opportunities should be widely promoted and available in hard copy, as well as online, advertising in a range of locations.
4. **Improve access to activities, advice and support that meet diverse needs and interests** – People need to know where they can get high quality advice and support on a range of issues including their evolving housing needs, finances and benefits, health and care needs etc. They also said they wanted access to a range of activities to be offered reflecting the diverse interests, needs and lives of older people, including those still working, at an affordable cost, in accessible locations.
5. **Being more safe and inclusive** – ensure everyone has opportunities and feels welcome to attend activities regardless of gender, disability and whether they are attending alone or with friends. Advertising should reflect this. Intergenerational activities welcoming people of all ages. Addressing concerns about antisocial behaviour.
6. **Coordinated transport** – affordable, reliable, accessible and safe public transport where and when it is needed. Door to door transport should be provided for those who need it to access activities.

7. **Coordinated health care and support** – people need to be connected with the various services they need in a simple, joined up way and there when needed.
8. **Taking early actions to support good mental and physical health** – enhancing health and wellbeing and prevention of ill health should be considered in provision of health, care and support services.
9. Addressing **long term infrastructure needs** in the borough including the supply of suitable housing, public realm and accessibility for people with mobility needs.
10. **Evolving needs, interests and expectations**– as society changes and our current younger population become older, activities and services will need to change accordingly.

What happens next

This report is being shared with North Tyneside's Health and Wellbeing Board, which includes leaders of health, care and community services.

We are asking the Health and Wellbeing Board to agree how they will respond to the challenges identified in this report and how to proceed in making North Tyneside an Age Friendly Community.

The detailed findings from this project are being shared with the decision makers and service providers across North Tyneside.

We are also planning to support older residents to come together to create a forum where they can share their views and help to co-design services and activities for older people in the future.

You can find out more about this work by contacting Healthwatch North Tyneside (0191 2635321, info@hwnt.co.uk) or Age UK North Tyneside (0191 2808484, enquiries@ageuknorthtyneside.org.uk).



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