

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS LOCAL SERVICE COORDINATOR
Case Study of Ireland's Age Friendly Cities and Counties
Programme

LAURA SHANNON

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1.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a case study of Ireland's Age Friendly Cities and Counties (AFCC) Programme to demonstrate the role of local government as local service coordinator. In line with international trends and a shift towards local networked governance (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998), local authorities have been given greater responsibility for economic and community development and as a result their role as coordinators of local services is increasing. This trend is reflected in the vision set out for reform of Ireland's local government system:

Local government will be the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level - leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p. 1).

In response to austerity, various efficiency and reform measures have been introduced in an effort to streamline local governance structures. However, local authorities not only have to respond to fiscal austerity, but also to growing populations and changing demographics. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has predicted that the number of people over the age of 60 is expected to double by 2050 (WHO, 2015). As a result of this ageing population, policymakers and service providers are increasingly aware of the importance of providing 'age-friendly' services or products to older people (Lui et al., 2009).

In 2005, the WHO launched a Global Age-Friendly Cities project in 33 cities around the world in an effort to develop communities that better meet the needs of their older residents. Ireland was among the first countries to pilot the WHO initiative, and has since rolled out a national programme to all 31 local authorities. Ireland's AFCC Programme brings together a wide range of stakeholders, in addition to involving and consulting older people. The literature suggests that within such joint efforts, the leadership and coordination by local authorities is a critical success factor in developing age-friendly communities (Lui et al., 2009; Buffel et al., 2014).

The AFCC Programme was, until the end of 2016, supported by joint-funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies (hereafter referred to as 'Atlantic') and the Irish Government. As this funding stream came to its end, the focus was to optimise the impact of the Programme on the quality of life of older people through embedding the innovative services and initiatives of the Programme in the mainstream, informing national policy and deepening older people's participation at the local level. The role of philanthropic funding is examined throughout this report.

The primary methods used in this study are literature review, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. The initial research, including interviews with key stakeholders, was conducted as part of a wider study commissioned by Atlantic to examine their approach of working with government to influence policy and practice (Boyle and Shannon, 2018).

2.

WHAT ARE AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES?

An age-friendly city and/or community is an inclusive and accessible environment that optimises opportunities for health, participation and security for all people, in order that quality of life and dignity are ensured as people age (WHO, 2007). The WHO endorsed the age-friendly approach in initially creating their Healthy Cities Project in 1986 and in their emphasis of the relationship between health and the built, natural and social environments as well as the role of local government in promoting active living for all.

Age-friendly communities actively engage stakeholders from multiple sectors within a typically local geographic area to make social and/or physical environments more conducive to older people's health, wellbeing, and ability to age in place in the community (Greenfield et al., 2015). Lui et al. (2009) provide a comprehensive overview of the international literature to define what makes a community age-friendly. According to the authors, the idea of age-friendly communities is the latest trend in ageing and policy discourse. Governments and international organisations now agree that supporting older people to continue living in the community for as long as possible makes both economic and social sense. This reflects current trends in Ireland, which are discussed in the following chapter.

In 2005, the WHO launched a Global Age-Friendly Cities project in 33 cities around the world in an effort to develop communities that better meet the needs of their older residents. Dundalk, County Louth, was one of the early adopters of this project. The idea of an age-friendly city builds on the WHO's active ageing policy framework. In an age-friendly city, policies, services, settings, and structures support and enable people to age actively by:

- recognising the wide range of capacities and resources among older people;
- anticipating and responding flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences;
- respecting their decisions and lifestyle choices;
- protecting those who are most vulnerable; and
- promoting their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life (WHO, 2007, p. 5).

A bottom-up participatory approach is used, involving older people in analysing and expressing their situation to inform government policies. The WHO set out eight themes (or domains) to define the quality of everyday life for older people, which were discussed in each of the consultations with older people. The eight themes are as follows:

- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Social Participation;
- Respect and Social Inclusion;
- Civic Participation and Employment;
- Communication and Information; and
- Community Support and Health Services.

3.

IRELAND'S AGE-FRIENDLY POLICY IN CONTEXT

This section provides a brief overview of ageing demographics in Ireland and national policy on ageing. As the AFCC Programme is led by local authorities, some context is also provided on the structures most relevant to the Programme. The wider context of the role of local government in ageing is then considered by drawing out some lessons from the literature.

3.1 AGEING IN IRELAND

Life expectancy at birth in Ireland is currently 78.4 years for men, and 82.8 years for women (CSO, 2015). This is similar to the European average. While Ireland currently has the lowest share of people aged 65 or older in the EU 28, that is expected to change. It is predicted that Ireland will experience unprecedented ageing in the first half of the twenty-first century and by 2041 there will be an estimated 1.3 to 1.4 million people aged over 65 years, representing 20-25 per cent of the total Irish population (Department of Health, 2013). The population aged 65 years and over increased by 19.1 per cent since 2011 to 637,567 (CSO, 2017). This currently represents 13.4 per cent of the total population.

Ireland's first national ageing strategy was produced in 2013. The vision for the National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) is:

Ireland will be a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. It will enable and support all ages and older people to enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential. It will promote and respect older people's engagement in economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and foster better solidarity between generations. It will be a society in which the equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people are pursued at all times (Department of Health, 2013, p. 3).

The NPAS provides the blueprint for Ireland to become an age-friendly society, and is grounded in and consistent with the WHO's active ageing policy framework. It is recognised in the strategy that 'local implementation is key' (Department Of Health, 2013, p. 49).

In December 2014, a new National Dementia Strategy was launched which aims to 'improve dementia care so that people with dementia can live well for as long as possible, can ultimately die with comfort and dignity, and can have services and supports delivered in the best way possible' (Department of Health, 2014, p. 8). This strategy recognises that dementia requires a 'whole community' approach, incorporating both a medical and societal response.

3.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND

Ireland's local government system was extensively reformed in 2014¹. Simultaneously, local authorities were also experiencing significant cutbacks. Local government revenue expenditure reduced from €4.72 billion in 2008 to €3.95 billion in 2013, and the total head count was reduced by 23.6 per cent from 37,801 in 2008 to 28,882 by December 2015 (National Oversight and Audit Commission, 2016).

It is widely acknowledged that the role of local government in Ireland is narrow by international standards. Ireland had the highest share of general government expenditure allocated at national level in the OECD in 2016, with just over 90 per cent of expenditure undertaken by central government (Boyle, 2017). The reform programme intends to increase the capacity of local authorities to undertake services for a wider range of sectors by addressing factors such as funding, operational arrangements and governance that have inhibited the development of local government in Ireland to date. Programmes such as AFCC are aiming to fulfil this wider coordination role through collaboration with a wide range of public and private sector partners.

To strengthen the capacity of local authorities to lead on economic, social and community development, these sectors have become more closely aligned with local government. Local community development committees (LCDCs) were established on June 1 2014, under the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, with the purpose of developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. The LCDCs replaced the former City and County Development Boards, which were organisations independent from local authorities. The introduction of LCDCs is intended to enhance the role of local authorities in relation to planning, oversight, and management of locally focused programmes and to provide for greater coordination across the full breadth of these programmes.

A key function of the LCDC is to prepare the community elements of a six-year local economic and community plan (LECP) and to work with partners in the implementation of the plan. LECPs are developed as part of an integrated local, regional, and national planning process. This ensures that each plan will be consistent with county development plans, regional spatial and economic strategies, and regional action plans for jobs. The first set of LECPs cover the period from 2016 to 2021. LECPs will be the key mechanism to bring forward action arising from measures under the National Action Plan for Jobs and other relevant national government policies and strategies. The integration of age-friendly policies and initiatives within LECPs is discussed in detail in section 4.2.

¹ Previous reports in the IPA Local Government Research Series have dealt with the reform programme in greater detail. For example see: O'Riordan, J. and Boyle, R. (2015) A case-study of the Tipperary County Council merger, Local Government Research Series No. 9; Shannon, L. (2016) Local and regional bodies in Ireland 2012 – 2016, Local Government Research Series No. 12.

3.3 ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT – LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE

The WHO recognises that creating age-friendly environments requires action in many sectors and across multiple levels of government. Healthy (or active) ageing should be supported in all policies at all levels. The leadership and coordination by local authorities is identified as a critical factor in building age-friendly communities. Lui et al., in a review of international literature on age-friendly communities, recognise that:

... [A]lthough there is considerable variation across national contexts, local government generally has a unique position in creating a sustainable environment for older people as it has long been involved in strategic planning and managing of transport, health and social care services. The literature affirms the role of local authorities in building a safe and secure environment for seniors, but it also recommends local governments take a lead in addressing broader strategies for facilitating social participation and inclusion and ensuring a positive public policy context (2009, p. 119).

Everingham et al. (2012) consider the role of Australian local government in the formation and effectiveness of local collaborative partnerships in ageing well. Australia has responded to the pressures of an ageing population by increasing models of partnerships or collaborations between local governments and the non-profit sector, which have been widely advocated as a way of achieving coordination and addressing complex needs. The authors note that while there is a large body of literature addressing the criteria and processes of successful collaboration, in the absence of research evidence about the impact and outcomes of such collaboration, assumptions are being made as to the effectiveness of collaborative governance. There are also significant gaps in understanding the dynamic inter-relationships that are emerging between state and community sector actors particularly at the local level. The collaborative governance scenario implies that the role of local government is not direct governing and control but 'steering' and facilitating local initiatives (McGuire, 2006). However, there is little work to date on the specific role of local government in establishing, steering and facilitating collaborative networks with community sector partnerships. Likewise, there is also an absence of research evidence about the impact of different forms of collaboration on communities, and in particular on those with complex and multi-faceted needs, such as older people, who often require a multi-agency response.

Through two in-depth case studies of collaborative efforts to enhance the age-friendliness of two southeast Queensland municipalities, the authors explore dimensions of local government operating as a partner in local collaboration with the intention of explaining the role that local government can play in the multi-sector networked governance of ageing. Their findings suggest that collaborative networks are unlikely to grow spontaneously but must be cultivated, and that local government is well positioned to undertake this role due to both the skills and resources available to them (Everingham et al., 2012).

Stoker (2011), however, questions the sustainability of local governments that are left primarily with the role of network coordinator. Networked community governance sets as

its over-arching goal the meeting of community needs as defined by the community, within the context of the demands of a complex system of multi-level governance. The model retains a strong role for local government as a coordinator in order to join up and steer a complex set of processes.

Stoker discusses the current functions of local government in an attempt to form a global typology of local governance, based on what he argues are four core societal functions of local governance: expressing identity, economic development, welfare provision, and lifestyle coordination. In relation to creating age-friendly environments, the fourth, and least well-formed and embedded, role is of particular relevance. This community governance role involves 'local government systems stepping beyond the traditional welfare service provision and narrow support for economic development to a broader coordinating role in supporting citizens' changing and developing lifestyle choices' (2011, p. 22). The Lyons Report (2007), and indeed Ireland's own local government reform programme (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012), envision this coordinating role as the future for local government.

However, sustainability for local government, and for all other governing bodies, depends on a combination of access to soft and hard power. The use of hard power, such as coercion, regulation or economic incentives, may be limited by the scale and complexity of the community governance role, leaving soft power (the power to get others to share your ideas and vision) as the only option for local government. Stoker concludes that 'local government systems need a substantial amount of hard power in order to exercise soft power' and that those with strong core functions around identity, economic development and welfare, such as the Nordic countries, may be better placed to hold on to a substantial governing role (2011, p. 29).

The literature suggests that local government may be best placed to coordinate or steer local partnerships, such as those associated with age-friendly initiatives, within a broad remit of functions and powers. The outcomes from such partnerships require increased attention and research to further explain the role of local government in complex multi-sector networks.

4.

IRELAND'S AGE FRIENDLY CITIES AND COUNTIES PROGRAMME

Louth County Council launched the first countywide age-friendly programme in 2009. The programme was supported by the Ageing Well Network (AWN), a forum for senior-level executives set up in 2007 and funded by Atlantic. The WHO guidelines informed by the earlier Global Age-Friendly Cities project (WHO, 2007), in which Dundalk participated, were adapted to suit the Irish context. The early stages of the programme in Louth focused on 'easy-to-implement' ways to improve the quality of life of older people. These small changes, such as altering a bus route so it dropped people off in front of the hospital rather than at the bottom of a hill, were found to have a major impact on the quality of older people's lives (Parker, 2015). Following the pilot in Louth, a 12-step approach was developed and the programme was subsequently expanded to 16 counties across Ireland, led by AWN.

The AFCC Programme is governed by a board and advised by a national implementation and integration group, currently chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of Dublin City Council. Membership of this group includes senior representatives from the local authority sector, central government departments, the Health Service Executive (HSE), An Garda Síochána, universities and research institutes, the non-governmental (NGO) sector and the private business sector. This membership is essentially replicated at the local authority level to form local age-friendly alliances. The members of these alliances are recruited at senior, decision-making level.

Age-friendly alliances are established to oversee the creation and implementation of a three to five-year age-friendly strategy, which sets out to address the issues identified by older people in each local authority. A widespread consultation process involving older people across the city/county decides these issues. The process focuses on identifying relevant actions to improve the city/county for people as they age. The boxed text below provides an example of the types of activities implemented through an age-friendly strategy. An older people's council is formed in parallel to ensure the voice of the older person is central to decision making. Members of older people's councils work with the senior managers of the age-friendly alliance to develop and implement the age-friendly strategy.

In 2014 hosting of the AFCC Programme was transferred to a new organisation, Age Friendly Ireland, with the continued support of philanthropic funding. Age Friendly Ireland was tasked with expanding the AFCC Programme nationwide with an overall vision to optimise the impact of the Programme on the quality of life of older people through embedding the innovative services and initiatives of the Programme in the mainstream, informing national policy and deepening older people's participation at local level.

All 31 local authorities in Ireland have now formally adopted the AFCC Programme and have also signed the 'Dublin Declaration on Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in Europe' along with a host of other cities, communities, and regional and local authorities across Europe. The Programme is recognised in the NPAS as an example of inter-sectoral working coordinated by local authorities to promote positive ageing at a local level (Department of Health, 2013).

Age-friendly activities

The first Cavan Age Friendly Strategy was implemented between 2013 and 2016. A review of this strategy found that the vast majority of its actions had been implemented. Some of the actions achieved are listed below and are generally reflective of the types of activities undertaken by age-friendly cities and counties nationwide.

- Establishment of the Cavan Older People's Council.
- Improved information and communication through an age-friendly website, drop-in centre and newsletters.
- Training for public sector staff in age-friendly issues.
- Involving older people in the arts through Bealtaine events (a national festival of the arts and creativity for older people), library programmes and other creative activity such as intergenerational workshops.
- A range of information technology training for older people.
- Improvements in transport including mapping routes, bus shelters, route alterations and a pilot urban loop in Cavan town.
- Development of recreational space including walks, parks and a bowling green.
- Ongoing consultation with older people and walkability audits.
- Age Friendly Business Initiative with 26 businesses taking part. Cavan Chamber of Commerce received national recognition for this scheme through the Age Friendly Awards in 2015.
- Enhanced links with An Garda Síochána through the older people's register and crime prevention ambassadors programme.
- Delivery of the GAA Social Initiative in Cavan that encouraged the involvement of older men in the community.
- Support for the development of 'Men's Sheds' in different locations around the county.
- Improved delivery of health services including a programme for the management of frail elderly, a programme to reduce falls in residential units and delivery of home care packages, as well as ongoing support for day care centres, meals on wheels etc.
- Development of Cavan town as an 'Age Friendly Town'.

Source: Adapted from Cavan Age Friendly Strategy 2017 – 2019.
<http://www.cavancoco.ie/file/community/social%20inclusion/Miscellaneous%20Documents/CAVAN%20AGE%20FRIENDLY%20STRATEGY.pdf>

4.1 ROLE OF PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

In total, Atlantic has invested over €1bn in Ireland since 1987. Since 2003, Atlantic's grantmaking in Ireland, which has now concluded, focused on three areas: ageing, children and youth, and reconciliation and human rights. To support the delivery of its goals, it has worked directly with government and its agencies to influence policy and practice. A recent study by the Institute of Public Administration examined the extent to which this approach of working could be considered innovative and successful (see Boyle and Shannon, 2018).

Between January 2014 and December 2016 Atlantic provided significant funding to the AFCC Programme, in partnership with local authorities and central government. This built on previous funding with the aim to complete the national rollout of the AFCC model and mainstream the service with state support. An intermediary organisation, Age Friendly Ireland, was established to lead the Programme, and was hosted by Dublin City Council. The funding agreement stipulated that each local authority must provide in-kind support for the Programme. A key aspect of this was establishing the role of age-friendly coordinator at middle management level to coordinate and resource the age-friendly alliances at local city/county level.

A network of age-friendly coordinators was established very early on in the process. They met at regional level, supported by regional coordinators employed by Age Friendly Ireland. The purpose of this network was to share learning. The sharing of learning and of specific examples where the AFCC Programme has shown concrete results acted as 'quick wins' or small, incremental achievements which are seen as essential in collaboration (Hudson and Hardy, 2002; Bryson et al., 2006). The boxed text below provides an example of how Age Friendly Ireland shared learning from some of the early adopters of the Programme. The sharing of innovative services and initiatives has been a core feature of the AFCC Programme in an effort to embed and mainstream the work of the Programme. There is often reluctance to share information between organisations competing for government (or other) funding. Even when information sharing is regarded as valuable, time and resource constraints can often hamper the process (Everingham et al., 2012). The ring-fenced funding provided by Atlantic, alongside the stipulation that local authorities provide in-kind support in order to avail of this funding, provided a supportive environment for shared-learning.

Sharing learning

Age Friendly Ireland (2014) produced a comprehensive 'Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme Handbook' in 2014 to provide practical guidance to local authorities going through the process of establishing their own AFCC Programme. The guide was heavily informed by the early AFCC adopters (e.g. counties Cavan, Clare, Louth and Monaghan).

The handbook outlines the four stages of developing an age-friendly city or county (set up, consultation, planning, and implementation) with detailed step-by-step guidance on what to do at each stage. Importantly, the handbook draws on first-hand experience of local authority chief executives, age-friendly coordinators and others who have already been through the process of establishing the Programme in their area. Templates and examples are included for terms of reference, launch invites, consultation questionnaires and so on.

Atlantic also supported the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI) in collaboration with the Department of Health, the HSE, local authorities and Age Friendly Ireland. The HaPAI aims to promote and sustain the use of evidence to inform policy and practice in ageing. A set of national positive ageing indicators has been developed (Department of Health, 2016) in line with the three pillars of the NPAS i.e. participation, health and security. The purpose of the indicators is to provide a benchmark for the future to assess progress made and identify potential challenges.

Many of the national data sources do not provide any information on the lives of older people on a county by county basis. To address this gap, the HaPAI has carried out local research using a single random sample survey in 21 local authority areas. The results of these surveys will be used to inform policy development and service provision in participating AFCC Programmes. A number of age-friendly alliances have incorporated survey results for their areas, alongside consultation with older people, in producing or updating their age-friendly strategies. Table 4.1 below outlines how the survey areas are linked to the NPAS goals. The survey areas are also aligned with the national indicators, allowing local areas to compare their results to the national average.

TABLE 4.1 LINKS BETWEEN THE NPAS AND THE HAPAI SURVEY AREAS

NPAS Goal	HaPAI Survey Areas	Examples of National Indicators (2016 results)
Remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities.	Civic participation	Percentage of people aged 50+ who engaged in political activities in the past 12 months (22%)
	Volunteering	Percentage of people aged 50+ who did unpaid voluntary work in the previous 12 months (26%)
	Lifelong learning	Participation rate in formal education and training among people aged 25-64 (6.5%)
	Social participation	Percentage of people aged 50+ who engage in one or more social leisure activity at least once a week (85%)
	Transport	Percentage of people aged 50+ who drive (72 %) Percentage of people aged 50+ who rate public transport in their area as good or excellent (49%)
Support people as they age to maintain, improve or manage their physical and mental health and wellbeing.	Healthy ageing	Life expectancy at age 65 (21.1 years (female), 18.4 years (male))
	Health services	Percentage of people aged 65+ who have had a flu vaccine in the previous two years (69%)
	Caregiving	Percentage of people aged 70+ living in the community in receipt of home care services in the previous 12 months (14%)
Enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.	Income	Percentage of people aged 50+ who report that a shortage of money stops them from doing the things they want to do (19%)
	Housing	Percentage of people aged 50+ who have housing condition problems (48%)
	Public spaces and buildings	Percentage of people aged 50+ who experience difficulty accessing essential services (14%)
	Safety and security	Percentage of people aged 50+ who feel that it is safe to walk alone after dark in their local area (72%)
Support and use research about people as they age to better inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland.	All areas	

Sources: Health and Positive Ageing Initiative, 2016; Department of Health, 2016.

4.2 MAINSTREAMING AGE-FRIENDLY PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES

As mentioned previously, one of the primary aims of the AFCC Programme is to improve outcomes for older people by embedding and mainstreaming age-friendly principles and policies. By embedding age-friendly commitments within statutory plans, at both the local and national level, this may provide local authorities with more power to carry out their role as coordinators of services. This section outlines such efforts at both levels of government.

4.2.1 Local Level

Some of the more established AFCC Programmes have begun to develop coordinated reporting relationships with both elected members of their local authority and the city/county LCDCs. To secure further momentum and embedding in mainstream structures, established age-friendly alliances have sought to position key age-friendly commitments within relevant policy documents such as local authority corporate plans, local economic and community plans, and city/county development plans, where appropriate.

The primary strategy for community and economic development within local authorities is the LECP. The purpose of the LECP, as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders (Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2015). The first LECPs were produced in 2016 and cover a six-year period up to 2021.

As each local authority area is obliged to prepare and adopt LECPs for their area, there are currently 31 LECPs in operation. An analysis of these 31 plans showed a wide variation in the level of integration of age-friendly principles and policies. It is worth noting that the layout and structures of LECPs vary significantly. Some local authorities, for example Dublin City Council, produce a plan with high-level goals alongside a separate detailed annual action plan. Others have produced a lengthy plan that includes actions to be completed over the lifetime of the plan, with annual reviews to ensure the plan is kept up to date.

TABLE 4.2 FREQUENCY OF 'AGE-FRIENDLY' MENTIONS IN LECPS

Frequency range	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41+
Number of LECPS	17	8	2	2	2

The analysis undertaken included both high-level strategies and action plans, using both a word frequency analysis and a detailed qualitative analysis of the age-friendly content of the plans, focusing on the goals and actions to be implemented. The findings show that 80 per cent of the LECPs mention age-friendly 20 times or less, with over half falling into the 10 times or less range (see Table 4.2). The trend towards fewer age-friendly mentions is not surprising given the many competing interests and diverse range of target groups that a local authority must consider when formulating and implementing their policies and

strategies. However, the vast majority of the LECPs contain goals and/or actions dedicated to enhancing the wellbeing of older people in their jurisdictions, and the local age-friendly alliance is listed as a supporting or implementing partner in 27 out of 31 LECPs. The case vignette below outlines efforts in Louth County Council to embed and integrate age-friendly policies and principles.

Case vignette: Embedding age-friendly policies and principles in Louth

Louth became the first age-friendly county in Ireland in 2009. The age-friendly coordinator in Louth has recently begun to integrate and embed the age-friendly principles and policies within Louth County Council's statutory plans. This effort is clearly visible in Louth's current LECP.

Through consultation with their citizens, Louth County Council identified eight high-level community goals, alongside eight high-level economic goals. One of the eight community goals identified is 'an age-friendly society'. The goal is to 'embrace and foster the rich contribution our older people make to our communities' (Louth County Council, 2016, p. 101). Under this goal, there are five objectives containing 24 specific, time-bound and measurable actions. Each of these actions are assigned a lead partner, who has responsibility for the implementation of the action, along with the support of a range of other partners. In many cases, the lead partner is an external stakeholder. In the case of age-friendly actions, some are led by other public-funded agencies such as the HSE, An Garda Síochána, Dundalk Institute of Technology and Flexibus (a not-for-profit organisation providing accessible transport services in the local area on behalf of the National Transport Authority). By bringing together all relevant public-funded agencies, local authorities aim to target resources in a way that delivers on the high-level LECP goals and the specific actions.

The Louth age-friendly coordinator has also prepared a 'Louth Age Friendly County Action Plan' to coincide with the LECP. This plan identifies all LECP actions relevant to the goals of the AFCC Programme, and maps out who is the age-friendly alliance lead, the measurable indicators and provides updates against these key indicators. There are 64 specific actions identified across all areas of the Louth LECP.

4.2.2 National Level

LECPs are only one of many statutory plans, both local and national, that have relevance for the age-friendly agenda. At the national level, age-friendly commitments have been included in a range of policies and plans. The following case vignette discusses a collaborative housing initiative led by a local authority, with the support of Age Friendly Ireland, and how this pilot initiative has been embedded within a national action plan for housing and homelessness.

Case vignette: 'Housing with Supports'

The AFCC Programme, at both the local and national level, has championed research studies and conducted various pilot programmes for alternative housing models. Following a housing summit hosted by Dublin City Council in conjunction with Age Friendly Ireland in October 2015, an inter-agency housing working group was established to investigate the development of a prototype model of 'Housing with Supports' in Dublin city for older people with the appropriate wrap-around supports required to enable older people to remain living in their communities. The group consists of senior officials from Dublin City Council, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the Department of Health, the HSE, the Irish Council for Social Housing, Alone and others, and is chaired by an independent representative from the community and voluntary sector.

The work of this group, and indeed the wider approach of Age Friendly Ireland in relation to housing was recently noted in the Government Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Rebuilding Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2016). Ireland is currently experiencing a housing crisis, largely stemming from an undersupply of housing. The overarching aim of the Action Plan is to 'ramp up delivery of housing across all tenures to help individuals and families meet their housing needs, and to help those who are currently housed to remain in their homes or be provided with appropriate options of alternative accommodation' (ibid, p. 8).

In order to provide visible evidence of the work of the Action Plan, a series of 'Pathfinder Projects' are identified. The 'Housing with Supports' initiative was identified as one of those projects. The initiative consists of a pilot project for a sixty-home development that will be led by Dublin City Council. Despite their limited functions, local authorities in Ireland have significant responsibilities in relation to spatial planning and the provision of social housing. This pilot project is proceeding, with an 'expression of interest' document sent out to Approved Housing Bodies to identify the most suitable to undertake responsibility for the design, construction and operation of the facility. The Action Plan also states that similar opportunities for other local authority areas are to be pursued in parallel.

This case vignette demonstrates how research and pilot initiatives have the potential to be mainstreamed with state support. The collaborative governance of the pilot project, led by Dublin City Council, has been maintained and highlighted as an example of a cross-departmental/inter-agency approach within national Government policy.

The case vignettes highlighted here demonstrate how age-friendly policies and initiatives can be mainstreamed at both the local and national level. It is also evident in both cases that collaborative working is central to the age-friendly approach. Some of the age-friendly coordinators commented that the level of engagement and commitment shown by staff from outside agencies varies enormously, within the organisations themselves and across geographical areas. One of the key challenges noted by Parker (2015) was that government officials became less involved in the AWN (which preceded the AFCC Programme)

over time. One of the ways this was addressed was to limit the time commitments of participants, and ensure their 'time asks' were more focused on issues that were of real importance to their own day jobs. In the case of 'Housing with Supports', the commitment and participation of partners was noted by interviewees, and the collaborative, inter-agency approach recognised by central Government with regards to progressing housing initiatives for older people (Government of Ireland, 2016).

In respect of the operation of LCDCs (who have responsibility for the community elements of LECs), it is recognised that inter-agency cooperation and working is 'not a given and is a particular skill that needs to be developed. An ethos of collaborative working needs to be fostered so that it is embedded in the culture of an organisation and not viewed as an "add-on"' (Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2016, p. 42). In Ireland, where the remit of local authorities is more limited than would be expected in Western Europe, the engagement of those working outside the local government system (e.g. in health and social care) is crucial for achieving joined-up services. How collaborative working is rewarded and promoted is a key consideration.

5.

CONCLUSION

Local authorities in Ireland have been afforded increased responsibility for economic and community development in recent years and as a result their role as coordinators of local services is also increasing. At a time when local government in Ireland was subject to significant cutbacks and reform, the AFCC Programme succeeded in expanding to all 31 local authorities. Age Friendly Ireland is now being hosted by Meath County Council and is embedded within local government structures. The focus for the new centralised support service will be to lead the national programme, continue to connect the existing 31 local programmes and to support scaling and mainstreaming of age-friendly practices with a focus on demonstrating how best practice can influence national policy.

Atlantic's support, both in terms of financial and non-financial resources, has been crucial in developing and cultivating the Programme. The international literature examined suggests that collaborative networks must be cultivated in order to grow and succeed, and that local government is well positioned to undertake this role (Everingham et al, 2012). In the case of the AFCC Programme, the funding and support provided by Atlantic to establish the national and regional structures and governance, together with the newly created position of age-friendly coordinator embedded in each local authority provided the fertile conditions for collaboration. Now that Atlantic's funding has come to an end, local authorities have demonstrated their capacity to fulfil the role of local service coordinator by continuing to implement age-friendly strategies and through integrating and embedding age-friendly principles and policies within statutory plans.

The AFCC Programme presents a model of collaborative local governance for local authorities to address the complexities of an ageing population at the local level. This model depends on the engagement and commitment of agencies and stakeholders from beyond the local government system, as demonstrated by the range of external stakeholders identified as lead implementation partners in achieving an age-friendly society in Louth (case vignette one). The 'Housing with Supports' initiative (case vignette two) demonstrates how collaborative working can be sustained and produce results, in this case in the form of innovative housing for older people.

As Stoker (2011) warns, however, local government systems that are left primarily with the role of network coordinator, without sufficient hard power and core societal functions, are in trouble. How sustainable, then, is the vision for local government to be the main vehicle of governance and public service at the local level in Ireland? The findings of this case study in addressing the issues of ageing at the local level provide some grounds for optimism, but cannot, on their own, provide a definitive view. The initiative is at a relatively early stage and its applicability more widely has not been tested.

The outcomes and impacts of the increasing role of local government as coordinators in complex multi-sector networks require increased attention and research. We now have a set of local and national positive ageing indicators as a benchmark from which to assess progress made in improving the lives of older people and to identify potential challenges. Further research is required to assess the impact of collaborative initiatives led by local government (such as the AFCC Programme) using such data sets as the baseline, on the health and wellbeing of older people in the community.

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