

Age Friendly Dorset. Dorset Council

Understanding Ageing in Dorset: Key Findings from the Age- Friendly Survey

Parsons, Morrell & Carpenter

June 2026

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Foreword by Councillor Matt Bell



It is my pleasure to introduce this first Age Friendly Dorset survey report, a significant milestone in our shared ambition to make Dorset a place where people can live well as they age.

The population of Dorset is ageing, and the over-65 age group is projected to grow by 22% between 2025 and 2035. Dorset is a county with a strong sense of community, and with the life expectancy in Dorset being above average, it is important that we increase people's independence and keep their quality of life high. Becoming an age-friendly county is not only about responding to demographic change but about creating environments that work better for everyone.

This report helps us to gain an understanding of ageing in Dorset through the lived experience of our over 50's population. It highlights important strengths and challenges across the 8 Age-Friendly Domains.

We are incredibly grateful to respondents who generously shared their time, experiences, and honest feedback, as the voices of Dorset are what make this report and the age-friendly programme so powerful. The data and qualitative insights provided in this report highlight what we are doing well and, equally important, where we have opportunities to grow and improve.

As a Council, we are committed to listening and taking action. This report marks the beginning of an ongoing journey and will inform the development of our action plan, guiding how we work with partners across health, the voluntary sector, local communities, and businesses.

Thank you once again to everyone who participated. We look forward to working together to turn this valuable feedback into meaningful results.

Councillor Matt Bell

Dorset Council

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Introduction

This report presents findings of the Age Friendly survey undertaken between October 2025 and January 2026. This is the first survey of its kind in Dorset. It aims to provide a snapshot of what life is like for the over-50's in the county. It does this by looking at measures under 8 domain areas, Housing, Social Participation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transport, Respect and Social Inclusion, Communication and Information and Community Support and Health Services, and identifying clear indicators of what is already good in Dorset and which areas still need work. This survey forms a key part of our broader commitment to creating communities where people can age well – remaining healthy, independent, connected, and able to participate fully in everyday life.

The findings in this report highlight both strengths and opportunities across Dorset. Importantly, the survey also brings forward suggestions and priorities identified by respondents themselves, providing valuable evidence for future action. Ultimately, the insights gathered through this survey will help guide the next phase of the Age Friendly Dorset programme, strengthening our shared ambition to enable all residents to live well and age well in their communities.

What is Age Friendly Dorset?

Age Friendly Dorset has been set up by Dorset Council to improve life for everyone as they grow older. The international movement was founded by the World Health Organisation in 2006 to create inclusive, accessible communities for older people. They currently hold a global membership of 1739 cities and communities in 57 countries, covering over 370 million people worldwide.

In the UK, the work of age-friendly communities is overseen by the Centre for Ageing Better (C4AB). They run a national programme of support for age-friendly areas and

national campaigns to promote older people and challenge ageism. In October 2025, Dorset became the 100th area in the United Kingdom to sign up.

Dorset Data

To build a clear picture of how people age across Dorset we chose to survey the over 50's residents of Dorset using both paper and digital formats.

We sent mailouts to every library, GP surgery, Town & Parish Council office, village halls, and many charities. In total, we posted around 2500 paper surveys, and the digital survey had moderate coverage for the 4 months the survey was live. 700 respondents from a standing start with very little press coverage and hardly any track record is really very good.

The original survey question set came from the Centre for Ageing Better, and we were one of the first member areas to use it. They helpfully split their questions into the 8 domain areas and a section to cover personal information. In fact, we only removed 1 question, which was about comfort to walk outside after dark, because a very similar question was already available elsewhere in the council. Our work was to develop the survey layout of both the paper form and its online equivalent. We had additional input from NHS Dorset, who added questions around the use of the NHS App and accessing support for digital services. We added two new questions to summarise the experience of being older, "I am ageing in a way that feels positive to me" and "Do you feel you have control of the things that matter to you?". We didn't use their version of the demographic questions, in favour of our own established content and wording.

There are important demographic questions that would have a bearing on other questions in the data set. It is important to know whether you live by yourself or are in a relationship, and whether you have any children or dependents. These questions help us to better understand people's circumstances and what support they might have available.

The nature of this survey is that it's very varied, with questions that cover many aspects modern life. When we repeat this survey, we will think carefully about how some of the questions are worded and whether some questions might be removed.

Although we need to avoid the survey being too long, in the future it would be helpful to add in questions about finance (such as banking), shops and the high street, and exercise.

Demographic Data

According to Dorset Council's State of Ageing report¹, we're getting older as a county. We are currently fifth in the country, with 31% of our population over 65, when the national average is only 20.33%. That's equivalent to 119,046 people in the

¹ [Older People Reports - Dorset Council](#)

over 65 age group and this is set to increase by an additional 24,000 by 2029. The median age of a Dorset resident is 52, where nationally the median is 40 years old.

We had an even split across the ages, with **32.05%** (224 people) in their 60's, **35.62%** (249 people) in their 70's and roughly 13% of people in their 50s and 80s respectively. 7 people reported that they were in their nineties. Two thirds of respondents to this survey were female, **60.80%** (425 people) and **33.48%** (234 people) are male. It would have been ideal to have a near 50:50 split, so we will pay more attention to this next time.

90.27% (631 people) reported themselves as White British with another **2.15%** (15 people) White Other. An additional **5.5%** (38 people) preferred not to say or didn't answer the question at all. Representation from other ethnicities is limited to a few individuals from backgrounds in Australia, Eastern Europe, Brazilian and Germany. We need to do a better job of reaching out a wider range of minority communities that exist in Dorset.

The data for sexuality looks more in line with national trends. **87.70%** (613 people) reported as Heterosexual with only **1.72%** (12 people) Gay or Lesbian. The 2024 data from the Office of National Statistics states that only 2.1% of people reported that they were gay or lesbian. Most people stated that they were the same gender that they were born with, with only **0.57%** (4 people) who did not. We need to make sure that everyone feels welcome at Age Friendly activities, regardless of their sexual and gender identities.

A clear majority stated that they are a Christian, with **56.65%** (396 people), with people of no religion in second place with **31.47%** (220 people). Most other religious beliefs were not picked up in the survey, and only a small group of people said that they were Buddhist **1.43%** (10 people) and Jewish **0.43%** (3 people).

87.98% (615 people) have not served in the Armed Forces before, but **6.87%** (48 people) had previously served in Regular Armed Forces and another 4 people had served in the Reserve Armed Forces. We acknowledge that with the number of responses received this does not show the full representation of people in the Armed Forces.

A lot of people cared for another adult in their household. **28.61%** (200 people) said that they supported someone over 18 who wouldn't manage without their help. Whereas, caring for people under 18 to provide childcare was much lower with only **14.02%** (98 people) who did. Formal help in their role of being a carer is available, but only **7.44%** (52 people) are registered carers.

Disability in Dorset

In general, our data on people with some form of disability, including frailty from older age, is lower than expected. In our survey, **22.03%** (154 people) considered themselves to be disabled. According to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 32% of people aged 55-64 reported a disability, rising to 48% of people aged 75 and older. Similarly, **16.45%** (115 people) used a walk a stick, had a wheelchair, a scooter or use some form of walking frame to get around. We should take this into account as we analyse how older people move around and stay active.

"I have mobility issues, arthritis but would not have considered the relevance of the Equality Act."

A total of **38.05%** (266 people) felt that their illness or condition limited their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This statistic is higher than for the previous question because it doesn't require the user to strictly identify with having a disability. Of the **177** people who reported their 'type' of disability, only **5.64%** (10 people) reported that they used a wheelchair, compared with **46.89%** (83 people) who had a wider array of mobility issues.

Other notable statistics include that **46.32%** (82 people) had a Long-Term Health Condition, **12.42%** (22 people) had a Mental Health issue and **26.55%** (47 people) had a Physical Impairment. If the sample size was much larger there would be more detailed information available about disabled respondents. As of 2021, Dorset had **17.6%** (75,077 people) of all ages that are reported to have a disability.

Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

As we age, the design and accessibility of public spaces play a crucial role in supporting mobility, independence, and overall quality of life. When outdoor areas include amenities like toilets, shelter, and heating, they become more inviting and usable – not just for older adults, but for everyone.

The big winner in Outdoor Spaces & Buildings is the high percentage of people who were able to access Dorset's parks and greenspaces. **84.37%** (589 people) could attend a park when they wanted to and **76.11%** (532 people) found that their parks were well maintained. Although this is very positive, it would be helpful to understand more about whether accessible spaces are most frequently found in towns or villages.

"There are no safe or accessible green spaces within walking distance."

Just because you are able to visit a park when you want to, doesn't mean that you do. So future versions of the survey should be asking how often they visit their park and how far they must travel to get there. The fact that the parks that we do have are well maintained is good news but is less relevant for those who are unable to access them. We may also want to ask about wild places and walking & cycling routes in the future, as they seem to be missing.

Nearly half of respondents **44.5%** (311 people), were not happy with the state of pavements in their area. An additional **22.03%** (154 people) had no firm view and another 40 people didn't answer the question. The difficulty is that there aren't clear solutions that suit everyone. A lot of villages have no pavements at all, which create pedestrian safety concerns when walking out, while other places have a lack of drop kerbs, or residents hold those same dropped kerbs responsible for uneven surfaces.

"Can't even access my church... wheelchair users having to go on the road because the pavements are so bad or cars are parked on them."

In general, there are problems with A-boards, overhanging trees and unkempt verges, and cars parking on pavements making the problem worse. According to "The path

to inclusive footways” report by the Local Government Association, 31 per cent of adults aged 65 and over find that cracked and uneven footways reduce the amount they walk². These are the kind of local issues which can be raised within the development of Age Friendly Towns and Parishes.

Going out to the shops, a trip to the beach or visiting a stately home is often dictated by how far you can walk, and how easy it is to take a rest. Nearly a third of people, **27.59%** (195 people) thought their local area did not have adequate places to rest. This figure is high, considering that it could be the difference between having your daily walk and staying stuck at home.

Much higher was the number of people, **41.63%** (291 people), who felt that there were no good options for public toilets locally. People complained that toilets were frequently locked and not always clean when they are open. While the alternatives, such as visiting cafés and restaurants is a possibility, it is not always so easy to do. There is nothing worse than being caught short when out and about, and for some it might be the difference between staying home and going out.

Part of orienting yourself to your local area is to familiarise yourself with the services you have locally and further afield. For most people, **67.38%** (471 people), it is easy to find services and amenities that are useful to them. However, **17.74%** (124 people) found this really challenging, which is a reason to do more to highlight local amenities.

Seeing the doctor or making an appointment with a dentist needs to be easy to do and available at a convenient time. Nearly half of the people surveyed, **46.07%** (322 people), could make health appointments when they needed them, but **36.76%** (257 people) found that quite difficult. NHS Dentistry is a big problem in Dorset, and the cost of private care is prohibitive for some. The qualitative feedback reinforces this feeling, and it is clear there is a lot more to do.

“You can access the GP, but you cannot get an appointment for several days.”

Transportation

Transport is another key aspect of the built environment and plays a vital role in supporting independence, access to services and social connection as people age. Affordable, reliable, and convenient transport options empower people to stay active and engaged in their communities.

In a county with no cities and no motorways, it often feels like we operate at a slower pace of life. However, that comes with its own challenges. Most people have access to a private vehicle. An overwhelming **81.69%** (571 people) regularly drive themselves and **27.90%** (195 people) are regularly driven by others. That’s not surprising, most people are living in rural areas and depend on cars to get about.

² [The path to inclusive footways | Local Government Association](#)

Most people, **72.53%** (407 people), have no problem getting to and from the places they need to get to, with only **13.45%** (94 people) who struggle to move around freely. It's this relatively small group of people who are most likely to be isolated and potentially vulnerable as a result. A high percentage of people, **60.22%** (421 people), found that it was easy to park near to where they need to go. However, there is a growing need for more accessible blue badge parking bays, in the correct locations near amenities and services.

"Not enough disabled bays especially for wheelchair users"

It is important to note that **57.65%** (403 people) regularly walked locally and **13.16%** (92 people) regularly used a bicycle to get around. There aren't any additional questions on walking or cycling, but it's important for health and wellbeing that we highlight it.

According to Dorset Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan³, one in five people live more than thirty minutes away from a town centre using public transport. One of the main comments made is that many of the smaller villages are not on the bus network at all, forcing a reliance on private vehicles, which for some is not possible. **30.76%** (215 people) regularly used the bus, but overall, it is the least used form of travel.

51.78% (362 people) do not think that public transport is frequent and reliable, which is a big concern. However, one in four people, **24.61%** (172 people) had no problem and thought that the service was fit for purpose. It is likely that the people who have positive experiences are living where the networks are stronger, with better connections.

"I am not as frequent a bus user as I would be because of the limitations of the routes (timing; the buses finish earlier than is useful, and destinations; only 3 options) and the lack of easy connections."

One of the main concerns found in the qualitative data was that bus stops don't have timetables. Many people have commented that they have to check bus time online, which isn't possible for everyone. **55.08%** (385 people) can access the information they need, but it's clear that the system doesn't work for everyone. Most people find that they can easily afford public transport for local journeys, but **11.58%** (81 People) felt that public transport was not affordable for them. As the quote below reflects, in some area's services could be better, and it can be expensive just to travel a short distance.

"I live in West Moors and although I can afford the bus fare, if I want to travel more than from "place a" to "place b" the cost is exorbitant, as I have to buy a zone ABC ticket even if I only want to travel in zone C or zones B&C."

Nearly a third of people, **27.90%** (195 people) didn't think that bus stops or public transport vehicles were easily accessible to them. It's hard to know what is meant by 'accessible' in this question. The number of people reporting this as a problem means that it is not limited to those we know are disabled, so it appears that inaccessible public transport is a wider issue. Only **4.43%** (31 people) didn't think

³ [Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 - Dorset Council](#)

that staff on the public transport system were helpful or treated them with respect. Most people spoke highly of staff, with **48.35%** (338 people) thinking positively of them. Perhaps most interesting was the near third of people, **29.04%** (203 people) who didn't know how answer the question. What this suggests is that there a large group of people using public transport who have no reason to speak to the driver.

Housing

Housing is a key foundation for ageing well. The right home environment supports comfort, safety, and health – while poor housing can negatively impact well-being. This section explores how people across Dorset feel about their homes, including suitability for their needs, affordability, and access to support or adaptations.

The State of Housing for Dorset 2025 report⁴ finds that **70.4%** of people are owner occupiers, which is lower than our survey. **79.11%** (553 people) live in a property they own outright and another **10.87%** (76 people) of people owned a home they were still paying for. This reveals that we do not have a demographically accurate sample to work from, with higher rates of owner occupiers than the county average. We need to ensure a more accurate picture when we rerun the survey, better representation in this area is something to aim for in future surveys.

Of the people who rent or are still paying a mortgage, only **9.36%** (25 people) felt that their monthly bill was too expensive, compared with **52.43%** (140 people) who felt their bill was affordable. Interestingly, in a 2023 research paper by the National Housing Federation on Older People in the Private Rental Sector⁵, they identified that 48% of older renters were in the bottom 20% of all household incomes.

Across the whole dataset, **65.96%** (461 people) found their bills and repair costs to be affordable, but as only 22 people didn't answer the question this means **31.04%** of people have some concern about their bills. Again, this is still a more positive picture than other, wider surveys, where 45% (11.3 million) of those over 50 in Great Britain find it hard to afford their energy bills (ONS June 2023, Public Opinion and Social Trends⁶).

“I suspect that help would not be available to me with repairs, adaptations etc. as the family income is above a limit to qualify for any help.”

A minority of the people in the survey had concerns about moving safely around their home, with less than **4%** of people stating that they found this difficult. A huge **88.99%** (622 people) had no issue with keeping safe in their home. The challenge comes at some point in some future, if a ruckled carpet or a sharp cabinet corner suddenly becomes a serious trip hazard. We don't need to make adaptations to our homes until something goes wrong and then it's a rush to find a solution that works.

Only **25.03%** (175 people) knew where to go for help adapting their home. The majority of people had no idea how to achieve this; **30.62%** (214 people) felt that

⁴ [Housing Reports - Dorset Council](#)

⁵ [National Housing Federation - Older people in the private rented sector](#)

⁶ [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics](#)

they didn't know where to go and an additional **19.89%** (139 people) were neutral to the question. We think this is another case of not knowing where to get help until you need to.

Similarly, you don't plan on moving home until you need to. **87.55%** (612 people) plan to stay in their own home as long as they are able, with only 10% of people who planned on moving. It does raise an interesting question about appropriate housing and downsizing. Quite a few people mentioned that they would move into a smaller dwelling if there were choices available locally.

"There is housing available locally, but at a very high price. As I get older, I do worry about my future care needs and how they can be managed and paid for."

Only **19.89%** (139 people) knew where to find out about different housing options locally, which suggests that more work could be done to raise awareness of housing options. **29.19%** (204 people) did not feel that there was housing locally that would meet their needs if they were to move. A larger group, **32.62%** (228 people) did not know how to answer this question. Ensuring that residents housing needs are met wherever they live will support them to have choices about where they live as they age.

Civic Participation & Employment

Older adults continue to make valuable contributions to society through paid work, volunteering, and civic engagement. Being able to contribute to community life and, where desired, remain in or return to employment are important aspects of ageing well. These opportunities support mental health, financial stability, and a sense of purpose, yet they often decline with age.

According to the UK 2024 Annual Population Survey⁷ 9.5% of people nationally were still in work past their 66th birthday. Just over ten percent of respondents, **11.02%** (77 people) were still in work full time and an additional **9.30%** (65 people) were employed part time. Some of this cohort would still be expected to be employed given their age, however it is interesting that two people are in their 80s and are employed part time. Most people are now retired, with **71.67%** (501 people) no longer choosing to work.

For those who continue to work, **34.82%** (70 people) think that their work gives them good opportunities for career building and skills development. An additional **44.77%** (90 people) were neutral to the question and **20.39%** (41 people) thought their options for professional improvement were minimal. **63.88%** (138 people) agreed that their job offered flexible working arrangements. **55.08%** (385 people) felt that they had opportunities to learn new things, with only ten percent of people having no opportunities.

51.76% did not feel that they experienced a lack of respect in the workplace, which is great news for just over half of those surveyed. However, **17.44%** (41 people)

⁷ [Annual Population Survey](#) (July 2023 to June 2024)

reported that they did experience a lack of respect due to their age, with those who remained neutral accounting for another **29.78%** (70 people). Although this needs a bigger sample size and further exploration, we should do more to challenge ageism in the workplace.

“Respect in 9-5 workplace non-existent but volunteers are relied upon to very great extent locally. Would go so far as to say West Dorset would stop without its army of unpaid volunteers in many civic areas from coastal safety to hospital transport.”

For a lot of people, retirement gives them the opportunity to try new roles and projects without the formal responsibility of a job. **54.22%** (379 people) volunteer in the community in a myriad of places across the county. That said, our voluntary and community sector is reporting that vital charity schemes like volunteer drivers, foodbanks and charity trustee roles are struggling to attract new recruits. 17% of people of all ages volunteer at least once a month according to the Community Life Survey 2024⁸. Of all age brackets, adults aged 65 to 74 are most likely to volunteer at least once per month.

Most people found that it was easy to travel to and from their volunteering, with **47.92%** (335 people) having no trouble doing so. Less than ten percent, **9.3%** (65 people) of people found it hard to travel to their volunteering opportunity, with another **28.33%** (198 people) who did not know how to answer the question.

An impressive **47.26%** (326 people) felt that they could be heard in local decision making, with only **16.74%** (117 people) having little to no opportunity to be heard. It would be great if, regardless of the final decisions made, residents could better see how their views were taken into account in surveys, consultations and engagement.

“I have communicated with councillors over issues that concern me but have, in most cases, not received a response.”

People who have made the effort to write or communicate with elected officials should absolutely receive a proper response. Only **22.32%** (156 people) had good representation with local elected officials, with nearly 40% of people neutral on the question. More people felt that they didn't have good representation, **25.61%** (179 people), which is something we hope to improve on in the future.

Social Participation

Participation in leisure, cultural, and spiritual life is essential to well-being – and its absence can lead to loneliness and isolation. Age-friendly communities highlight the importance of opportunities to connect, and the role social participation plays in reducing isolation and supporting a positive experience of ageing.

⁸ [Community Life Survey 2024/25: Headline findings - GOV.UK](#)

Two thirds of respondents were regular users of clubs and groups in their local community, **66.24%** (463 people). The other third is accounted for by people who don't have active membership with local groups and prefer to do things that are more informal. **68.67%** (480 people) had activities or events that interested them, with only **9.73%** (68 people) who were certain that they had no activities at all. This leaves 148 people (**21.17%**) who were either neutral on the question or didn't know how to answer the question.

"There are several activities, like lectures, that I would like to attend but they are in the evening and I have no means of getting to them. Even if I took a taxi, I worry that if the taxi was delayed picking me up, I'd be standing on my own in the centre of town at night."

Most people, **65.81%** (460 people) can afford their activities, including the leisure centre, local faith groups, social meetups and membership groups such as University of the Third Age, The Women's Institute or the Rotary Club. There are **6.15%** (43 people) who really struggle to cover the cost of the activities they're interested in. We should be sure to promote all activities in our communities, especially those that cost little or no money.

64.66% (452 people) found that places were accessible to them, meaning that they were hosted in places with level access, appropriate lighting, disabled toilets and good parking. According to Activity Alliance's Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24⁹, less than half of disabled people, 43%, could be as active as they wanted, compared to 69% of non-disabled people. It is important that all our community spaces are accessible to everyone and maximise participation.

When looking for places to visit and activities to do people will often check local newspapers and online directories. A total of **68.95%** (482 people) felt that they knew where to go for information about activities and events. Another **9.30%** (65 people) had no idea where to look, with an additional **16.60%** (116 people) who were neutral.

One of the most concerning statistics to come from this survey relates to whether residents would have help available when they needed it. **21.46%** (150 people) were not sure that someone would be there if they needed help, and another **17.31%** (121 people) thought that no-one would be there for them. While there may be a variety of individual reasons behind this, it is worrying that so many people don't have support.

51.93% (363 people) had regular contact with their neighbours, with only **10** people who didn't answer this question. There were **28.04%** (196 people) had little to no contact with their neighbours. This doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have contact with others in their community, but might also be an indicator of the way society is changing?

"There is a lack of cultural interests in a market town. Everyone is very busy and times have changed; people do not talk to neighbours like they used to. I know people without anyone for support do not like to ask for help. For

⁹ [Annual Disability and Activity Survey: 2023-24](#)

people without family or close friends nearby, and there are many, society can be very lonely.”

Nearly **60%** (59.37% or 415 people) did not feel lonely at all, but nearly a fifth or **17.88%** (125 people) often did. This appears a high figure. A high number of comments given relate to loneliness, so it is obviously an issue which is high on people's agenda. It would be helpful to understand more about this to know what kind of responses are needed.

Communication and Information

Access to clear information and effective communication ensures that everyone – regardless of language, digital access, or sensory ability – can engage with their community. This section explores how residents across Dorset access information, including digital channels, and how confident they feel in using them.

Most people knew how to access services, including council services, local charities, libraries, financial services and shops. It is important that we have good quality information available for all services, that is up to date and easy to use. **61.09%** (427 people) knew how to find out about services locally, and only **15.31%** (107 people) didn't know where to look.

51.21% (358 people) feel that the information from local organisations is well-written and easy to use. There is another **30.62%** (214 people) who thought that information could be better and only **7.72%** (54 people) found information hard to understand. It is a similar picture with the information given out by the Council and other Statutory organisations. **51.36%** (359 people) thought that information was useful to them, and only **9.87%** (69 people) of people found the information of poor quality; **30.19%** (211 people) were neutral. We are certainly moving in the right direction with the information shared by the council. More work can be done to improve the information on our website and printed literature.

“It's nice to get newsletters and local information brochures in print. There is too much reliance on the internet and especially apps nowadays. I choose not to have a smartphone and so some services I can't access because of it.”

An impressive **87.12%** (609 people) of respondents are comfortable in using the internet for personal use. This includes activities such as using Facebook (Meta), Newspaper sites and talking to friends on email and messenger apps. This is higher than the national average for people of that age group, where according to Age UK, 20% of people over 65 don't have the skills to thrive in day-to-day life (Age UK, Facts and figures about digital inclusion and older people, 2024¹⁰). It is important to remember that we have some bias in the data towards middle- and upper-income households in our respondents.

80.40% (569 people) of people similarly use the internet for online services, such as banking, booking holidays and purchasing event tickets. Only **10%** of people would not use the internet for this reason. Banking has had some criticism for moving

¹⁰ [Age UK - Briefing: Facts and figures about digital inclusion, June 2024](#)

online and away from the high street. This is seven percentage points less than the number of people who just use the internet for social purpose only.

The figures for people comfortable to use the internet to access the NHS App drops by nearly a fifth, with **63.80%** (446 people) people using the app. That's still very high, but it does indicate that people are less comfortable doing so. One fifth of people, **19.88%** (139 people) did not feel comfortable using it, and another **10%** were neutral to the question. This sentiment is also borne out in the qualitative feedback with many people resisting the move for greater digitisation.

"Not using the internet is not to do with me feeling comfortable with it, it is because I choose NOT to do it. I resent the implication from such as the NHS and Council that old people don't know HOW to use the internet; many of us (and I know that many of my friends feel the same) do NOT WANT to use it - for many sensible reasons. It de-humanises the quality of life and turns everything into what suits a computer, rather than what suits a human being. That is what I object to primarily."

That leads us on to whether people can identify scams and false information, when they are presented with them. **67.53%** (472 people) thought that could easily spot scams, which is probably reflective of the training and support available locally. However, there was still **13.31%** (93 people) who are not confident enough to avoid fraudulent activity.

Community Support and Health Services

As the older population grows, so does the need for accessible, affordable, and inclusive health and support services. Access to community support and health services are essential for maintaining wellbeing, independence and quality of life as people age.

This section is about Health Services, but does not ask questions about the parts of the health service which matter most to people. Hospitals, GP's, physiotherapists and dental surgeries are all ignored in the question set, which has meant that people have given this information in the open text fields. This means that it is hard to evidence trends or make any Age Friendly statements about how we might make improvements to the system.

Most people are unsure, when asked, whether they are satisfied with the care options available to them or the people close to them. The largest group, **43.63%** (305 people) didn't know how to answer it, possibly indicating that most people haven't encountered needing care options yet. Recalculating the data to exclude this group, we still see that people are undecided, with **26.03%** (101 people) not satisfied, **31.70%** (123 people) who are satisfied and **42.26%** (164 people) who hadn't decided.

In contrast, two thirds of people, **67.38%** (471 people) knew where to access healthcare in their community. This means that these people know where services such as their GP and dentist are, as well as their nearest hospital, pharmacy and chiroprapist.

“People do not ask to be disabled or have years of mental health problems due to 51 years of abuse. We should not have to pay for care or counselling.”

38.20% (267 people) know how to access mental health support, which is a good start. Only one fifth, **22.03%** (154 people) did not know where to go to access mental health support. Much like any other specialist service, you don't know where to look for it until you need it.

An overwhelming number of people, **80.11%** (562 people), felt that health services treat them with respect. Just over ten percent of people, **11.16%** (78 people) are less certain about whether they are treated with respect, but only **3.86%** (26 people) said that they had negative experiences. We must continue to champion good, kind customer service as often these are the times when we need it most.

It is essential that the information we receive, whether in printed form, digitally accessed or from a conversation with a health worker, needs to be easy to understand. **68.81%** (491 people) found the health information they were given was easy to understand, with only 10% of people having difficulty understanding it. When it comes to digital services, finding help to use them is good, with **38.49%** (269 people) feeling they know where to go. There is 20% of people who don't know where to get help, and another 20% who are neutral to the question. Of course, this will change in the future as our present digitally connected younger people age.

According to Sport England's Active Lives report, which files an update every six months, there has been a marked increase in physical activity in recent years. By November 2025, there are 7.3% (2.1m people) in the 55-74-year age group that do 150+ minutes of exercise per week¹¹. In our survey, we asked whether people had options to exercise that appeal to them. A huge **71.03%** (493 people) have exercise options that were appealing to them, while only **11.30%** (79 people) had little or no exercise that met their needs.

“Opportunities to walk and cycle are readily available, however access to gym facilities is prohibitively expensive”.

It is reassuring to note that just under two thirds of respondents, **60.18%** (420 people) felt they were ageing in a way that was positive to them, but that still leaves a lot of people who could have a better experience of ageing. One fifth of people, **20.60%** (144 people) have expressed a neutral perspective, with **17.07%** (120 people) saying that things were not OK. This is obviously concerning and something that we will want to explore further.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Respect and Social Inclusion is about how you are treated, perceived and celebrated, both as an individual and as part of your community. The people of Dorset should feel safe to express themselves, to interact with people from younger generations and have places on the high street that meet their needs.

¹¹ [Active Lives Adult Survey November 2024-25 Report](#)

This domain has a big link with personal identity. Although, **97.1%** of people in Dorset are white (ONS Census Data, 2021¹²) there will obviously be significant diversity within this group.

Less than a third of people feel their culture is celebrated (only **26.611%** said they had their culture celebrated). It is important to have a range of cultural engagements, events and activities that reach all areas of our population. We should make sure that we have a varied and lively cultural calendar that celebrates difference and that doesn't lose sight of the things that keep us together.

The same is true for positive imagery of older people in our community. Only **28.89%** of people felt they had seen images that promoted positive older age in society. We can take an active part in how older people are portrayed in the future, the biggest challenge will be to keep up the momentum longer term.

"After retirement, you are invisible, yet you have half a century of experience to share!!"

69.09% of people did not feel that they were badly treated because of their age with only **5.08%** (35 people) who did. It is heartening to find that overt examples of ageism are as low as they are. That said, a study of the qualitative feedback shows subtler examples of ageism, including patronising behaviour against women and disabled people.

According to Intergenerational England's Omnibus 2024¹³, people aged 55 and older are most likely to have friends in other age groups and 25-34 are most likely to be open to intergenerational friendships. **47.64%** of people felt that they had opportunities to interact with people from different generations, with only **19.60%** (137 people) having no opportunity. The benefits of these types of relationships are so important to community cohesion, fostering greater understanding and better outcomes for all.

"I feel older people are often put into separate groups away from younger people. I enjoy seeing younger people and hearing their views."

Abuse often goes unnoticed or unreported. **30.47%** of people knew how report abuse or discrimination when they needed to, that leaves **69%** of people who don't know how to report it. With **4,328** domestic abuse incidents in Dorset last year (Dorset Council, State of Dorset: Health & Wellbeing, 2025¹⁴) it is important that at we tackle this as a priority.

Whether online, or on the local high street, businesses need to keep their customers by listening to them and by selling products and services they want. **63.52%** (444 people) think that businesses meet their needs in the community, with only **12.59%** (88 people) who think that businesses could do more. This is something that we could explore further through the Age Friendly Businesses initiative.

¹² [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹³ [Intergenerational England Survey Results](#)

¹⁴ [Health and Wellbeing Reports - Dorset Council](#)

Conclusion

This survey is the first of its kind in the county and has provided an important baseline for understanding what it means to age in Dorset today.

Overall, the findings across the 8 age-friendly domains show that many older residents in Dorset are ageing well. The responses show people remain active, connected, and able to access services and opportunities that matter to them. There are also high satisfaction levels with Dorset's local environment.

However, the findings also identify areas where further work is needed. Issues such as uneven access to health and care services, access to transport, availability of suitable housing and experiences of loneliness or isolation highlight the need for coordinated action. There are also gaps in awareness, for example where to access support, adapt homes, or report concerns suggest that improving communication and signposting awareness will be key priorities moving forward.

Importantly, this survey represents the starting point of the Age Friendly Dorset programme. The insights gathered here will directly inform the development of the first action plan, ensuring that future work is grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of Dorset residents. As a baseline, it also provides a benchmark against which progress can be measured over time.

Looking ahead, continued engagement with communities, alongside stronger partnerships across public, voluntary, and private sectors, will be essential to delivering meaningful change. By building on the strengths identified and addressing the challenges highlighted, Dorset has a clear opportunity to create more inclusive, accessible, and supportive environments for people as they age.

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