

State of Ageing Overview

Foreword – Cllr Mary Aspinall

I am delighted that we are prioritising Ageing Well in Plymouth. We are all ageing, so all have a vested interest in ensuring that our city provides the best environments and opportunities for us to thrive as we move into our later years.

We have tended to concentrate on the perceived difficulties of getting older with discussions often focussing on the cost to health and social care services. We can often think that ageing is a problem to be solved. In Plymouth the Ageing Well programme is committed to changing this and starts with the mindset of ageing as an opportunity and older people as valued assets that make endless contributions to their families, neighbourhoods and to the city.

We are fortunate that there are already so many great opportunities for people to age well in our city. We have a wonderful natural environment that invites people to stay active, we have a great cultural and heritage offer across our diverse communities, varied opportunities for lifelong learning and volunteering and responsive services supporting people to stay well. In Plymouth we know there is lots more we can do to support people to age well. We believe that the amount of time people spend in poor health towards later life is largely preventable and that people in poorer health can continue to lead healthy, connected and fulfilling lives.

We have based our Ageing Well programme on the Centre for Ageing Better Framework for Age Friendly Communities. This means we are giving focus to creating age friendly places and spaces, ensuring relevant and good quality work and training opportunities and making sure that people feel included and connected as they age. The themes of our programme are distinct, but in reality they interact and align and should be seen as an integrated approach to creating the conditions for Ageing Well.

This report and the initial priorities we have identified are the start of our work towards more Age Friendly Communities. We recognise that the programme will grow over time and invite our residents, communities, businesses, employers and other partners to join us in this collective action.

1. Introduction

This report gives a brief overview of what it is like to age and live life as an older person in Plymouth. It is a summary version of the full State of Ageing in Plymouth report and presents some key statistics, a snapshot of the voices and insights of people in the city, and brief case studies of things that are in place to support people as they age. The report outlines some initial priorities for the Ageing Well programme.

People are living longer. In the UK someone 65 years old today can expect to live to 85, nearly 10 years longer than their parents' generation. One in five babies born today will live to see their 100th birthday.¹ Improved working conditions, reduced smoking rates, and improved healthcare have all contributed to increasing life expectancy from generation to generation. However, these gains in overall life expectancy are not shared across the population. Inequalities in education, employment and living conditions and variations in health, social care and other services over the life course mean that people in more deprived communities do not benefit equally from these additional years and quality of life. This can be seen in the inequalities in life expectancy in Plymouth where men living in the most deprived areas of the city live nine years less than those living in the most affluent areas and women living in the most deprived areas live five years less than those in the most affluent areas.

People's experiences of ageing and living life as an older person are diverse. They are influenced by our gender, our ethnicity, our sexuality, our education and financial security. Our approach to Ageing Well in Plymouth recognises this diversity and works to ensure that we support people to age well in an inclusive and equitable way whilst giving focus to where there is the greatest need.

The Ageing Well programme in Plymouth has an overall vision for Plymouth to be *One of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone: and where age is no barrier*. It is based on the Centre for Ageing Better Framework for Age Friendly Communities that focuses on the areas of the built and social environment that contribute to our experiences of ageing.² The programme in Plymouth recognises the importance of health and social care responses in supporting people to age well. As such it sits alongside and seeks to influence existing integrated care systems and partnerships. Similarly, it recognises the fundamental importance of safe, affordable, well-maintained homes that support independence and wellbeing as people age. The programme will work with established housing structures and partnerships to ensure that ageing and the needs of older people are integrated into all developments.

Ageing Well Plymouth does not use a clear definition of older age but takes the broad approach of 50 years and above. Whilst the programme is focused on the later part of our lives it recognises that people's health, wellbeing, and life experiences in

¹ Life expectancy calculator, ONS. [Life expectancy calculator - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/life-expectancy-calculator)

² Centre for Ageing Better, Age Friendly Community. [What's an Age-friendly Community? | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk)

later life are also shaped by the social, economic, and environmental conditions and opportunities during earlier life. In doing so it aims to align with other local plans and programmes including the Plymouth Plan for Economic Growth, the Plymouth Plan for Nature and the forward plans for Thrive Plymouth – the city’s approach to improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities.

This report and our work going forward values and prioritises the experiences and insights of people, including older people in the city. It recognises the positive aspects to ageing and the huge contributions older people make across our communities. During the drafting of this report, we have had conversations with residents and organisations across the city to understand what matters to them as they age. A snapshot of their voices and insights are shown throughout the report. As the Plymouth Ageing Well programme develops, we will continue these conversations and learning to ensure that developments are rooted in people’s real-life experience.

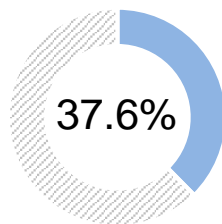
2. Plymouth population

Plymouth in 2022



100,300

people aged 50+ ³



proportion of people aged 50+ in the population



3.4 : 1

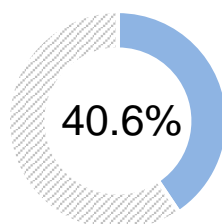
Ratio of working age (16-64) to older population (65+)

Plymouth by 2043



110,800

people aged 50+



proportion of people aged 50+ in the population



2.5 : 1

Ratio of working age (16-64) to older population (65+)

³ In this document the use of the “+” symbol used after an age refers to those of that age and older e.g., 50+ refers to those aged 50 years and over.

The 2022 mid-year population estimate reports that around 100,300 people out of the population of almost 266,900 in Plymouth were aged 50 and over (37.6%), 50,000 were aged 65 and over (18.7%), and just over 13,200 were 80 and over (4.9%).⁴ 95% of Plymouth residents aged 50 and over identify as White British.⁵

37.6%
Over one third of the Plymouth population are aged 50 and over

Population predictions suggest that the number of individuals aged 50 years and over will rise from 37.6% of the population in 2022 to 40.6% of the population in 2043. The number of people aged 80 and over will increase from 13,200 people to 22,600 people by 2043.

2.2 Life expectancy and inequalities

On average, a male born in Plymouth would be expected to live to 78 years, with 64 years in ‘very good’ or ‘good’ health (healthy life expectancy) and 61 years free from day-to-day activity restriction due to a long-lasting physical or mental health condition (disability-free life expectancy).⁶

On average, a female born in Plymouth would be expected to live to 82 years, with 59 years in ‘very good’ or ‘good’ health, and 57 years free from day-to-day activity restriction due to a long-lasting physical or mental health condition.⁶

Male and female life expectancy in Plymouth



Women in Plymouth live on **average four years longer** than men but spend more of their life in poorer health

⁴ Mid-2022 population estimates, ONS. Rounded to nearest 100.

⁵ Census 2021: Ethnic group by age and sex (RM032), ONS via NOMIS

⁶ Healthy life expectancy at birth 2018-20 (A01a); Life expectancy at birth 2020-22 (A01b); and Disability-free life expectancy 2018-20 (A01c) indicators, Public Health Outcomes Framework, OHID

Deprivation and poverty make a big difference to life expectancy and healthy ageing. Men in the most deprived areas of Plymouth have an average life expectancy nearly nine years less than those in the least deprived areas, whilst for women the difference is just over five years. These inequalities are strongly associated with the social and economic circumstances that we experience and accumulate throughout life.

9 years less

Men living in the most deprived areas of Plymouth live nine years less than those living in the most affluent areas

5 years less

Women living in the most deprived areas of Plymouth live five years less than those living in the most affluent areas

Over **15%** of over 60 year olds are living in income deprived families

Around **4,000** people over 60 are living in fuel poverty

3. Healthy ageing

As we age, we experience an increased risk of long-term conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, dementia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. However, increasing ill health and disability are not an inevitable feature of ageing. Many of these conditions are preventable and the risk and impact of such conditions can be delayed through environmental changes, the things we do and the access we have to health promotion and screening and vaccination programmes

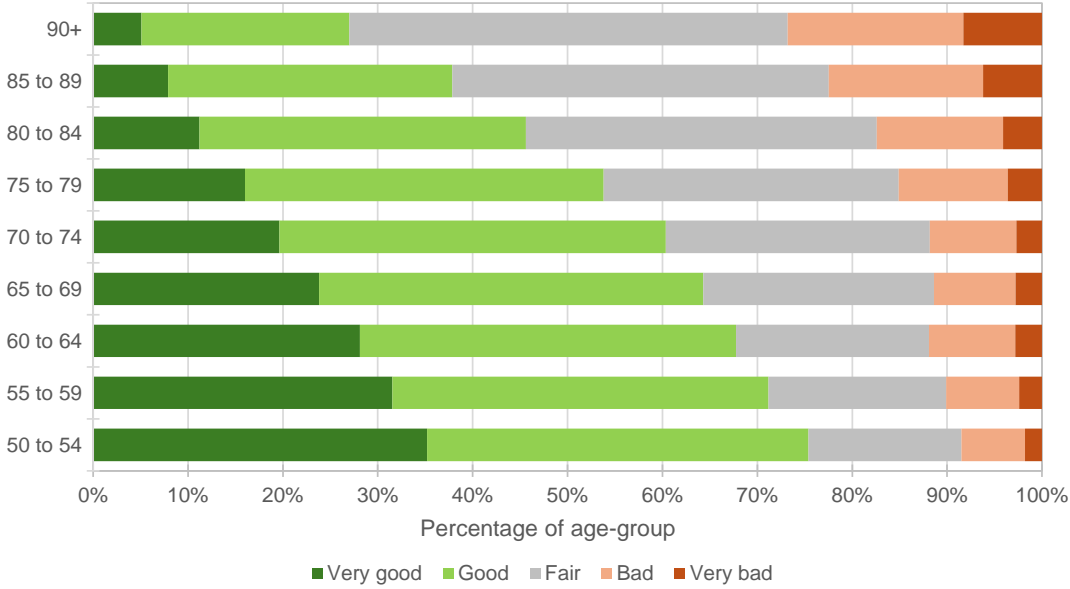
Wellbeing is generally accepted to refer to the way that people feel about themselves and their lives. Those aged 45 to 59 report the lowest average ratings of happiness and life satisfaction. As people age into the 60 to 74 generation their wellbeing generally increases dramatically. Applying national positive wellbeing scores to the population in Plymouth for those aged 50 and over there may be around:⁷

- **79,750** individuals (79.5%) with high life satisfaction,
- **83,446** individuals (83.2%) who rate the things they do in life as worthwhile
- **77,179** individuals (76.9%) with high happiness ratings, and
- **64,626** individuals (64.4%) with low feelings of anxiety.

General health in 2021 nearly 80% of Plymouth residents described their health as 'very good' or 'good'. The percentage of people who reported being in very good or good health reduced with age; 63.2% of those aged 50+ compared with 54.6% of those aged 65+ and 39.8% of those aged 80+ (**Error! Reference source not found.1**). For each age group the values are lower for females in the city compared to males.

⁷ Public Health Plymouth City Council applying national wellbeing estimates to 2022 mid-year population estimate for Plymouth

Figure 1: General health status of Plymouth residents aged 50 and over, 2021



Long-term conditions - increases in life expectancy and advances in healthcare have led to increasing numbers of people living with long-term health conditions.

Predicting patterns of disease in our populations supports better planning of health services and also helps direct prevention and health improvement initiatives. In Plymouth by 2040 there is predicted to be a

15% increase in number of 65-74 year olds and a 35% increase in number of those aged 75 and over with diabetes

15% increase in number of 65-74 year olds and a 36% increase in number of those aged 75 and over with cardiovascular disease

15% increase in number of 65-74 year olds and a 36% increase in the number of 75-84 year olds with bronchitis or emphysema

Support needs - as more people live with long term conditions the demand for community-based support will increase. In Plymouth by 2040 there is predicted to be a

41% increase in number of 75-79 year olds and a 47% increase in those aged 80 and over who need help with at least one domestic task

17% increase in number of 75-79 year olds and a 48% increase in those aged 80 and over who need help with at least one self-care activity

17% increase in number of 75-79 year olds and a 29% increase in those aged 80 and over who are unable to manage at least one mobility activity on their own

Hospital admissions - of the 29,069 emergency hospital admissions of Plymouth residents in 2022/23, 15,733 (54.1%) were in adults aged 50 and over.⁸ Falls and fractures are the largest cause of emergency admissions for older people. Of the 75,290 A&E attendances of Plymouth residents in 2022/23, 27,402 (36.4%) were in adults aged 50 and over.

⁸ Public Health Plymouth City Council, Hospital Episode Statistics, Emergency Admissions, 2024

Behaviours - as age increases the prevalence of smoking reduces. 10.7% of adults 50 and over in Plymouth smoke

Regular physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, and colon/breast cancer and with improved mental health. Sport England data suggests that 72.1% of 55-74 year olds are physical active in Plymouth.

Disability and age have separate and compounding effects on activity levels. 32.9% of adults with a limiting disability are inactive.

Obesity is associated with reduced life expectancy and is a risk factor for a range of diseases including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. It is estimated that there are around 71,200 over 55 year olds who are overweight or obese.

Screening and vaccinations – good uptake of screening and vaccination programmes in older adults can improve overall health and improve the likelihood of successful treatment and recovery.

Cancer screening coverage 2023



breast cancer (women 53 to 70 years) **72.2%**



cervical cancer (women 50 to 64 years) **74.4%**



bowel cancer (60 to 74 years) **74.8%**

Vaccination coverage 2022/23



Flu aged 65 and over **81.1%** (target $\geq 75\%$)

Shingles age 71 years **54.9%** (target $\geq 60\%$)

Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine aged 65 and over **68.6%**
(target $\geq 75\%$)

11.1% of the population aged 65 and over are estimated to have a common mental health disorder (anxiety or depression) (2017)



1,929 people aged 65 and over in Plymouth have a diagnosis of dementia (2020)



Ageing Well through Staying Active

Plymouth Active Leisure has a clear vision to encourage people to become and stay healthy and active throughout life. They have a comprehensive programme of activities that offers swimming, climbing, gym and exercise classes, bowls and more. They also partner with local and national organisations to deliver a range of activities and initiatives that are specifically designed for people who are looking to get active again or for people with low-level health conditions, such as free wellbeing walks and organised cycle rides. They also deliver a range of activities specifically aimed at helping people stay active in later life including gentle swims, easy spin, walking netball, table tennis, aquafit and GoodBoost.

Michael (70 years) – Michael joined the gym after being medically retired with arthritis. He attends every weekday morning and focuses on strength-based exercises as recommended by his GP. As a result of his improved fitness he was able to recover from a recent hip and knee replacement much quicker and return to his daily routine. *“I enjoy going to the gym every morning, it sets me up for the day”.*



Maureen (79 years) – Maureen is a regular at Aquafit and attends several classes a week. She enjoys Aquafit as being in the water makes her feel comfortable. Over the years she has made several friends and after the class they can always be found in the café chatting over a coffee.

“Everyone is so friendly and I look forward to getting out of the house”



A Focus on Falls Starts with Prevention

The Livewell South West Falls Management Exercise (FaME) classes guide small groups through a six-month personalised programme. Classes focus on improving an older person's strength, balance, flexibility, endurance and ability to cope following a fall. FaME is also about rebuilding confidence.

People completing the programme report less falls, less fear of falling and improved confidence. Other achievements of the programme include increased physical activity outside of the classes and improvements in self-rated health.

"I'm a lot more confident and you feel that you can go out and walk again. It's improved my stability on my feet."

Staying strong and active is key to ageing well. This includes staying physically mobile through walking and other activities...including running around with grandchildren and doing DIY.

Activities that help with strength and balance are really important and should be promoted from when people are in their 40s.

It's really important to feel in control of any medical conditions

"Living longer – is that a problem?"

"I'm alright, I'm 91 – I carry on as I always have done, cooking and hanging out the washing. Keeping active - "Being as careful as I can not to cause any problems".

3.5 Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will maximise opportunities for ageing well within the relaunched Thrive Plymouth programme
- Falls and fractures in older people are preventable. We will work with partners to develop a broader offer of strength and balance and primary falls prevention programmes for people over 50.

- We will work with healthcare providers to improve the accessibility and uptake of screening and vaccination programmes for people over 50.
- We will work with NHS Devon and other healthcare partnerships and providers to ensure that the needs and views of older people are being considered. Initially we will initiate discussion around the impact of digital first services and access to primary care.

4. Age friendly places and spaces

As we age and live life as an older person we need environments and infrastructures that are safe and accessible and that support us to remain active and maintain positive connections. Older people tend to spend more time in their own local neighbourhoods so access to local facilities and opportunities become more important as people age. The way we plan, design and build our environments is key to achieving Age Friendly Communities.

Streets - our streets and town centres are crucial in supporting healthy ageing. Research suggests that our local high streets can positively impact on older people's social well-being, sense of place and sense of purpose. There are many opportunities for ensuring these areas more age friendly including making areas more pedestrian friendly, integrating public transport, encouraging attractive shop fronts to support a welcoming and safe atmosphere and adding opportunities to sit outside.

The Plymouth Plan and associated planning guidance provides the framework for the ongoing development of the city. The Plan aspires to enable older people to continue to participate in and contribute to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the city. It includes policies to create safe and accessible neighbourhoods through thoughtful design including use of street lighting, dropped kerbs and removal of street clutter to improve mobility and accessibility.

Green and blue spaces - Plymouth has a high proportion of green and blue space and most residents have relatively good levels of access to these areas.⁹ Over 40% of the city is designated as green space, there are 30 miles of waterfront and Plymouth is home to the UK's first National Marine Park that aims to increase community connection with the natural environment

The majority of respondents to the 2022 Plymouth City Survey aged 55 and over agreed that there is good access to parks and woodlands in, or from, their local area.

⁹ Blue spaces: 'outdoor environments, either natural or manmade, that prominently feature water and are accessible to people' – or the collective term for rivers, lakes or the sea.

Perceptions of safety - older people need to feel safe to participate and be active in their local communities. Most respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022)¹⁰ aged 55 years and over felt safe during the day, and over half of those aged 55-64 years and 75 years and over felt safe after dark in their local area.

Most people in Plymouth aged 55 and over feel safe outside in their local area during the day

Culture, heritage and arts - the culture and heritage offer in a local area can play a significant role in supporting people to enjoy older age and can enhance physical, mental and cognitive health in later life. Cultural engagement has been reported to make the highest contribution to wellbeing in later life. There are 380 creative and cultural enterprises in Plymouth including the Theatre Royal, the Barbican Theatre, Plymouth Arts Cinema, Mayflower Museum, and The Box.¹¹ 51% of respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022) agreed that culturally Plymouth has a lot to offer. Respondents aged 55 and older were most likely to agree with the statement than younger age groups.

84% of 55-64 year olds say they are proud of Plymouth's place in history.

Air quality – air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts and is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer. Air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society including the elderly and those with existing heart and lung conditions. There is often a strong correlation with deprivation with less affluent areas experiencing poorer air quality. In 2022 air quality monitoring in Plymouth showed that all national Air Quality Objectives were met.

Climate change – due to physiological changes as we age older people are more likely to be affected by the health impacts of extreme weather (heat or cold). These impacts are compounded by socio-economic factors such as poverty and lack of family and social connections¹². Plymouth City Council declared a climate emergency in March 2019, pledging the city to become carbon neutral by 2030. As well as reducing carbon emissions Plymouth must adapt to climate change. The UK's Climate Impacts Programme has predicted more extreme weather conditions with more frequent wetter winters and hotter summers. Plymouth must also prepare for sea level rise with increased incidence of flooding anticipated.

¹⁰ Plymouth City Survey 2022, Plymouth City Council.

¹¹ Plymouth Report, 2023. Plymouth City Council [Plymouth Report 2023](#)

¹² Effects of climate change in the elderly's health: a scoping review protocol. 2022. BMJ Open Volume 12, Issue 4. [Effects of climate change in the elderly's health: a scoping review protocol | BMJ Open](#)

Plymouth City Council Net Zero Action Plan



In 2019 Plymouth City Council declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to make Plymouth carbon neutral by 2030. This pledge exceeded the climate objectives of the UK and recognised the need for the 2020s to be a decade of urgent and accelerated actions. In March 2024 an updated Net Zero Action Plan was published and includes priorities around cutting emissions from travel, construction and buildings, consuming responsibly and reducing waste and engaging the whole city in the net zero mission. The environmental benefits of these actions will also generate additional benefits for people as they age in Plymouth. For example, improvements in air quality will have a positive impact on the health of older people including those with long term conditions. Similarly, the focus on active travel, including walking and cycling, supports people to stay physically mobile as they age.

The Box – An Age Friendly Social Space

The Box is part museum, gallery and archive, a social space for art, people and objects. It is a purpose-built venue that brings together a blend of historic collections and contemporary exhibitions. The Box provides an inclusive welcome for people of all ages supporting people to age well in Plymouth.



The state-of-the-art building in a convenient city-centre location is fully accessible. The spaces have good access for people with a range of mobility needs; 86% of people surveyed agreed the building is 'very easy' or 'quite easy' to access. Accessibility is considered across the offer - from wheelchairs and mobility scooters available to borrow free of charge to British Sign Language signed tours and large print guides.

From talks and tours to special events and activities, there are a number of ways people can grow their creativity at The Box. In addition special projects, such as the Women's Craft Collective, support people to age well by providing social opportunities for people to connect and 'give back'; this group attracts around 30 regular participants who practise knitting and crochet and undertake regular projects for a variety of charities.



Photographer credit: Dom Moore

“We need more accessible toilets in public spaces and more places to sit like benches”

“Chatty tables outside cafes”

Support mobility with increased pavement access for wheelchairs, bicycles and trolleys.

Importance of bus shelters with seats for people to sit down and rest.

4.5 Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will support customer facing settings to adopt the Age-Friendly Businesses framework¹³ that ensures that respect for and inclusion of older people is central to business practices
- Plymouth City Council will lead work to embed the Healthy Streets human centred framework and principles into how we design and manage our streets¹⁴. This framework is evidenced to improve social, economic and environmental sustainability and is a key to Age Friendly Communities and Ageing Well.
- We will support the development of the Plymouth Plan for Nature and People (2025-20) ensuring that the views of older people are heard and that the value of nature is maximised for people as they age.
- We will promote the Plymouth City Council Climate Ambassador Programme¹⁵ to people over 50 inviting them to act as advocates in their communities to raise awareness of issues and encourage people to act.

¹³ How to be an Age-friendly Business. 2024. Centre for Ageing Better [Age-Friendly-Business-Summary.pdf \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ Healthy Streets. 2024. [Healthy Streets | Making streets healthy places for everyone](#)

¹⁵ Plymouth City Council Climate Ambassador Programme [Climate Ambassador Programme | PLYMOUTH.GOV.UK](#)

5. Transport

Transport, including accessible and affordable public and community transport, is a key feature of an Age Friendly Community. Walking and cycling for short journeys supports people to access community and health services and encourages social and civic connections and participation. As people age accessible and affordable transport services provide support towards maintaining mobility, wellbeing and independence.

Public transport - each day over 150 buses operate on Plymouth's roads along 90 different routes. The COVID-19 pandemic led to significant reductions in the number of people taking bus trips and in taking advantage of concessionary bus travel.

Accessibility - as we age, ease of access to essential services such as health services and groceries, becomes increasingly important. In Plymouth in 2019, the average travel time by public transport or foot to a food store was 6 minutes, and to the nearest GP surgery was 11 minutes. Access to GP surgeries varies across different parts of the city and those who do not have access to a car are more disadvantaged in some areas.

97 in every 100
eligible older people in
Plymouth have a
concessionary bus pass.

Car ownership - cars remain the most common form of transport used in Plymouth. The proportion of residents who live in households with at least one car or van decreases amongst those aged 75+. This has implications for people accessing local services and maintaining social connections as they age.

Active travel - keeping physically active in mid-life helps to delay the onset and progression of many age-related health conditions. People in mid and later life are less likely to participate in active travel than younger age groups.

Of the 2,554 people who travelled to work by bicycle in Plymouth (2021), 28.1% were aged 50-64 years and 2.1% were 65 and over.¹⁶



Of the 12,200 who travelled to work on foot in Plymouth (2021), 23.3% were aged 50-64 years and 2.9% were 65 and over.¹⁶



¹⁶ Method used to travel to work by age, Table RM075, 2021. Census via NOMIS

Plymotion



Plymotion is part of the city's approach to promoting sustainable and active travel. It aims to make it easier for people to get around the city by bike, on foot and by bus. It recognises the physical benefits of walking and cycling as we age and the opportunities for meeting and connecting with others in our local neighbourhoods.

Working with Livewell South West and the Ramblers there are weekly free health walks for all abilities in various areas across Plymouth. Plymouth Trails offers free audio guided historic walks across Plymouth encouraging people to take new walking routes and learn about the fascinating history of the city.

Plymotion provides free adult cycle training for people of all ages and abilities and includes bespoke sessions for those not so confident in groups. They have a series of free led and guided rides for complete beginners, through to steady and challenging rides for people wanting to cycle further and faster. Additionally Breeze rides offer women only groups in Plymouth and the surrounding areas.

Free bike maintenance workshops are available for people to give their old bikes some care and attention. Experienced mechanics also provide an opportunity to learn new skills.

"I would like to still use the bus but I can't get down the hill with my walker so have to pay for a taxi"

"It can be hard to go out in the evening" – some areas are not served well by buses and taxis are expensive

People value a community transport system that is reliable and responsive

Cash free parking is a barrier to going out and about especially if you don't have a smart phone

5.5 Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will work with partners to support the delivery of the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan and ensure that the views of older people are central to developments.
- We will work with partners to promote active travel for over 50s
- We will support conversations towards improvements in community transport for older people.

6. Participation and inclusion

Social connections and participation are strongly associated with positive health and wellbeing throughout life. Older adults are at more risk of loneliness and social isolation as they are more likely to face issues such as living alone, loss of family and friends, long term health conditions and sensory loss. Being involved in leisure, social and cultural activities as we age helps us to maintain or establish supportive and caring relationships, supports us to stay informed and gives opportunities to share and exchange skills and experiences. These connections also protect older people from the harmful effects of isolation and provide the additional benefits of staying physically active.

Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards people based on their age. It is sometimes referred to as the last socially acceptable prejudice and can be seen at all levels of life. Ageism can limit our confidence and abilities as we age and fuel negative perceptions of ageing that have an adverse impact on physical and mental health. Beyond the personal impacts ageism exacerbates social divisions and inequalities and damages the economy.¹⁷

Social Connections - loneliness and social isolation are linked to poor mental and physical health. Feeling lonely is correlated with early deaths and its health impact is thought to be similar to other public health challenges such as obesity and smoking. In 2022 15.4% Plymouth adults aged 55 and over responding to the Plymouth City Survey agreed or strongly agreed that they often feel lonely.

46 out of 100 social care users aged 65 and over (2022/23) and **32 out of 100** adult carers aged 65 and over (2021/22) have as much social contact as they would like ^{Error!}
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¹⁷ Ageism: What's the harm? 2023. Centre for Ageing Better [Ageism: What's the harm? | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://ageing-better.org.uk)

Digital connectivity and confidence have become increasingly important in staying connected to our friends and family, in accessing essential services and engaging with employment. Digital exclusion increases with age and disability and is affected by lack of access to digital resources and services, the cost of internet access and digital technologies, concern over digital security and low confidence in learning new skills. 14.5% of Plymouth adults aged 55 and over responding to the 2022 Plymouth City Survey had not used the internet for over three months or had never used it at all in 2022.¹⁸ The two main reasons why were “I am not interested in accessing the internet” and “I do not know how to use the internet”.

31.1%

of those aged 75 and over had not used the internet in the last 3 months or had never used the internet

Community activities and groups – over two fifths (45.4%) of respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022)¹⁹ aged 55 years and over were aware of community activities and/or groups in their local area. Awareness of activities and groups increased with age in the 55 years and over groups. One fifth (21.0%) of respondents to the Plymouth

City Survey (2022)¹⁹ aged 55 years and over participated to some extent in community activities and/or groups in their local area.

Local decisions - Community empowerment and participation are key to influencing local decisions and shaping our local communities as we age. An Age Friendly Community is one that is informed by participatory approaches to civic life, and which facilitates the active involvement of people as they age. Nearly one third (31.5%) of respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022) aged 55 and over know how to get involved in decisions that affect their local area.

31.5%

of 55 and overs know how to get involved with local decision-making

local decisions and shaping our local communities as we age. An Age Friendly Community is one that is informed by participatory approaches to civic life, and which facilitates the active involvement of people as they age. Nearly one third (31.5%) of respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022) aged 55 and over know how to get involved in decisions that affect their

Community Digital Volunteers

If we are offline as we age we can miss out on the benefits the internet provides, from keeping in touch with family and friends, to managing finances and looking for work and leisure opportunities. One of the best ways to reach digitally excluded people is through digital volunteers. Plymouth City Council Community Digital Volunteers are people with some digital skills who inspire others and help them to get online. They play a crucial role offering informal advice, information and support to adults in their local community who either want to get online and learn how to use a computer for the first time or improve their confidence with the basics. They support people in a range of settings, such as a community organisation, library, Wi-Fi enabled café, or in people’s own homes.

¹⁸ Plymouth City Survey 2022, Plymouth City Council.

¹⁹ Plymouth City Survey 2022, Plymouth City Council.



Memory Matters

Memory Matters CIC provides a diverse range of initiatives, programmes and support to individuals and families living with memory loss and dementia. Dementia can be a very isolating condition and people with dementia can find it difficult to socialise and get involved in things that they used to enjoy. One of the most popular spaces is the Memory Matters Moments Café and Hub. This is based in the city centre and provides an accessible place for people to meet, eat and socialise as well as raising awareness of dementia and the challenges faced by those living with the condition. From July 2022 – June 2023 the Café had 54,036 visitors generating valuable profit to help Memory Matters continue their important work. In the Hub upstairs from the café over 50 different organisations provide a range of information, support and activities to help people with dementia and their carers to live well. This includes seated exercise sessions, free legal advice, a singing group and a model building club.

'The hub at Moments Café is a valuable asset to the people of Plymouth. It is a place where people with dementia and their carers can find support, advice and friendship. It is also a place where people can learn more about dementia and how to live well with the condition.'

The Age Positive Project

The Age Positive Project is a collaboration between Wolseley Trust Social Prescribing, Timebank South West, and Improving Lives Plymouth (ILP). It is a key initiative within Plymouth's Integrated Care of Older People (ICOPE) strategy. This pilot project aims to reduce social isolation and frailty among residents aged 65 and older by promoting the growth of activities, advice services, and social groups throughout the city.

The project organises a range of social and exercise-based activities. These sessions are further supported by information and advice from local healthcare services, along with referrals to ILP's internal projects including the Wellbeing Hub, Caring for Carers, Sensory Solutions, and the Veterans Hub.

The regular sessions include Tai Chi, Seated Yoga, Silver Swans Ballet, walking and creative groups. The project also collaborates with VCSE partners to provide monthly Tech Support sessions aimed at reducing digital exclusion among older adults in Plymouth.



With the support of Wellbeing Advisors and the Age Positive Project Worker, the project can provide short-term one-to-one support to help build rapport and reduce anxiety among participants. This personalised approach helps individuals find the right activities, groups, or services that they may not have had access to previously.

“I felt so lost. The support I received came just at the right time when I felt I was losing my way and didn’t know where to go. I now have so many different opportunities, have made new friends, and feel so much more positive to do more things on my own.”

‘Improving Lives has been invaluable, and I believe, has supported me in finding a new direction and network of friends and connections within my community. It is so friendly and welcoming and if I hit a critical time, I firmly believe that I could find someone to help me’.

“Allow more opportunities for people to talk to us face to face”

“Having company is the most important thing”

Shared community spaces for cross generational activities could help foster respect and understanding between young and old and help address unhelpful stereotypes

Digital exclusion seems to be getting worse –
“we need to bridge this gap”

Remove the barriers of engagement such as online form submissions that
‘cause frustrations’

Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will support the Centre for Ageing Better Age *Without Limits*²⁰ campaign that challenges ageism and supports a more age-inclusive society
- Working with the Community Empowerment Team and Community Builders we will continue to ensure that the experiences and strengths of older people are amplified and used to inform collective action

7. Skills and employment and volunteering

Engagement in meaningful activities and interests both through paid employment and voluntary pursuits have a positive impact on our physical and mental wellbeing as we age. They also support us to stay connected to others and promote social cohesion across communities.

Learning and skills development are an important aspect of ageing well and have benefits for individuals and employers. Learning for pleasure and leisure have wide ranging benefits as we age. Learning and skills development as we age support people to return to work, support career progression, and are beneficial for employers and the economy.

As the population lives longer there is an imperative to ensure that the options for paid employment, volunteering and lifelong learning are enhanced for the over 50s. Beyond the benefits for health, wellbeing and social connectedness this has the potential to enhance the economic contribution and spending power of people as they age.

Employment

Nationally employment rates for 50 to 64 year olds have declined since the COVID-19 pandemic and employment rates vary between different genders and ethnic groups. Employers in Plymouth are facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitable qualified staff. This is in part due to the ageing population and workforce, an increasing number of people seeking welfare support and a higher number of job vacancies.

65% of people aged 50-64 years in Plymouth were in employment in the twelve months to March 2024.

²⁰ Age Without Limits. 2024. Centre for Ageing Better. [Age Without Limits | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://ageing-better.org.uk)

65%

of 50-64-year-olds were in employment in the 12 months to March 2024

Women aged 50 to 64 years are much less likely to be in employment than men; 59% compared with 70%. The long-term trend is a decline in the proportion of people aged 50 to 64 years being in employment and this is consistent with other age groups.

Economic inactivity since the COVID-19 pandemic economic inactivity (not in work nor actively seeking work) has increased across the UK. This has been driven by early retirement among 50–64-year-olds, increasing ill health among the whole population, changes in the structure of migration and the overall impact of an ageing population²¹.

Overall economic inactivity in Plymouth is higher than the national average and Plymouth has a higher proportion of economic inactivity due to long-term sickness. The latest data for April 2023 to March 2024 shows that 34.9% of people aged 50 to 64 years in Plymouth were economically inactive, significantly higher than their counterparts across England (26.4%). Women aged 50 to 64 years are much more likely to be economically inactive than their male counterparts.

Nearly 35% of people in Plymouth aged 50-64 are economically inactive (not in work or seeking work)

The Employment and Support Allowance offers financial support to those who are unable to work as a result of a health condition or disability. In Plymouth, over 7,800 people had a live claim for ESA as of November 2023, approximately 60% of which are aged over 50.

Approximately 60% of people claiming Employment and Support Allowance in Plymouth are aged over 50

Universal Credit (UC) is a single payment for each household to help with living costs for those on a low income or out of work. As at

²¹ Where have all the workers gone? 2022. House of Lords Library. [Where have all the workers gone?: Economic Affairs Committee report - House of Lords Library \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/library/research-and-briefings/house-of-lords/2022/07/where-have-all-the-workers-gone/)

31% of all claimants of Universal Credit aged 50 and over are in employment – the majority of these are female

May 2024 approximately 22% of claimants are aged 50 and over with a broadly even split in gender. Over half of all claimants aged 50 and older have been on Universal Credit for over three years, a similar proportion of younger claimants aged between 25 and 49.

Pension Credit - provides extra money to help with living costs for people over state pension age who are on a low income. As of February 2024, almost 5,900 people in Plymouth were in receipt of Pension Credit, the majority aged between 70 and 79 (52.1%). Women are more likely to be in receipt of Pension Credit, 67.1% of recipients in February 2024 were female. This proportion increases with age; 84.5% of recipients aged 90 and over are female. As of May 2024 data provided by the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) shows 398 households are eligible for pension credit and have not claimed, with a total value per month of £104k.²²

Nearly 400 households are eligible for pension credit that has not been claimed

An estimated 16.6% of people aged 50-64 years in Plymouth have some level of unpaid caring duties

Caring responsibilities - it is estimated that a total of 9.5% of residents in Plymouth have some level of unpaid caring duties. This rises to 16.6% in those aged 50-64 years.

Volunteering can contribute to personal wellbeing, an enhanced sense of purpose and self-esteem and create stronger social connections. People aged 50 and over are more likely than younger people to be involved in volunteering. Two thirds of respondents to the Plymouth City Survey (2022) aged 55 and over do some kind of voluntary work.²³

65.9% of people aged 55 and over in Plymouth say they are involved in some kind of voluntary work

Lifelong learning - throughout life can bring a range of benefits to people as they age. Education and training improve mental capital, which in turn can increase resilience in later life. There are a number of organisations and institutions offering learning opportunities to adults as they age in Plymouth. This includes flexible study options at City College Plymouth and a range of inspiring learning opportunities through On Course South West. On Course South West

²² [Unclaimed Pension Credit: value by local authority - Policy in Practice](#)

²³ Plymouth City Survey 2022, Plymouth City Council.

reports that 20% of their learners are over the age of 55 and are studying digital skills, arts and crafts, maths and learning for life and work.

On Course South West



On Course South West provides lifelong learning opportunities with over 140 free courses for adults that aim to transform lives and meet the demands of employers. This diverse offer supports people to learn something new, explore a new hobby and boost career opportunities. They work with partners across the city including Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Shekinah Mission and Odils Learning Foundation to provide a comprehensive in class, blended and online suite of programmes.

Case Study – Michael, aged 75

Since starting with On Course South West I have achieved my level 1 certificate in maths functional skills and have now commenced my level 2 course. I am a senior citizen, 75 to be exact, and I have found my learning experience extremely satisfying. I have enjoyed getting to grips with maths and the experience of being in a classroom environment again after so many years. The social aspect of learning with On Course South West has also been a very positive one. I have been able to meet new people again and brush up on my interactive skills which suffered a great deal after the loss of my wife.

Elder Tree One to One Befriending Service



The Elder Tree Befriending service supports some of the most socially isolated older people who are housebound in neighbourhoods across the city.

Hazel - is 90 and housebound due to a number of medical conditions. She was feeling lonely due to losing her husband and her dog in recent years. In August 2023, Hazel was introduced to an Elder Tree volunteer befriender called Elizabeth who is in her early twenties. They hit it off immediately and Elizabeth started visiting each week. She taught Hazel how to do her online shopping and encouraged her to get help to repair her stair lift. Using her walker, Hazel and Elizabeth started enjoying short walks in the garden.

Hazel feels that Elizabeth is a great support to her. She said she has a wonderful personality, and they have interesting and fun conversations. She really looks forward to her visiting.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is 22 years old. She found that the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on her life due to social isolation and she left her university course because of this. In January 2023, Elizabeth decided that she wanted to volunteer to help other people struggling with isolation. Her volunteering journey started with supporting various Elder Tree groups and this helped her gain confidence before visiting Hazel as a 1-1 volunteer befriender.

She feels that she is making a real difference to Hazel's life by providing a listening ear and hearing her life stories, whilst supporting her with any issues that arise. Elizabeth feels that volunteering with the Elder Tree has helped so much with her confidence that she is now ready to start a diploma course in September. She hopes to continue her volunteering alongside this as it makes her feel happy and fulfilled.

Need to move towards recruitment processes that are really based on skills and experience – not age.

Employers could provide more focus on retiring planning and support for people retiring to get involved in '*better types of volunteering*'

Can we create more opportunities for skills exchange between generations, e.g., digital skills and DIY skills

Better support for people not working due to long term health conditions who want to get back to employment

Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will lead work to promote the uptake of the Age Friendly Employer Pledge²⁴ that provides employers with a framework for improving work for people in their 50s and 60s and supports a multigenerational workforce
- We will work with On Course South West and other training providers to promote and develop learning opportunities for people aged 50 and over
- We will promote volunteering opportunities for people aged 50 and over

²⁴ Age Friendly Employer Pledge. 2024. Centre for Ageing Better [Age-friendly Employer Pledge | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://ageing-better.org.uk)

8. Housing

Our homes and neighbourhoods are key to our wellbeing, health and quality of life as we age. Safe, warm homes that are in good repair help us to live independently for longer and stay actively involved with family, friends and our communities. Most people want to remain in their own homes as they age. An adequate supply of decent, well-designed homes, as well as specialist and supported housing, will support more older people to age well in their own homes for longer. Affordable improvements and adaptations can support people to live well in their homes as they age.

The Plymouth Report (2023)²⁵ highlights the projected increase in the number of people aged 65 and over living with long term illnesses and mobility issues and the need for planning and housing delivery to respond to this through a range of housing provision including extra care housing and wheelchair accessible homes as well as larger family homes.

Housing tenure - data from the 2021 Census shows that 76% of people aged 55 years and over in Plymouth owned their own home, while under a fifth (16%) were in the social rented sector. This indicates that 8% were in private rented accommodation. These figures vary widely across different wards. 92% of residents aged 55 years and over own their own homes in Plympton St Mary, whilst 34% lived in social rented accommodation in St Peter and the Waterfront.

Predictions for living status for people aged 65 and over shows that the number of people in Plymouth living alone and the number living in a care home will increase significantly by 2040.

Plymouth population predicted to *live alone* aged²⁶

		In 2023	By 2040	
	65 to 74 years	25,800	29,600	Increase of 15%
	... 75 to 84 years	18,600	23,700	Increase of 27%
	85 and over	7,100	11,000	Increase of 55%

Plymouth population predicted to *live in a care home with or without nursing* aged²⁷

		In 2023	By 2040	
	65 to 74 years	212	244	Increase of 15%
	75 to 84 years	555	708	Increase of 28%
	85 and over	1,055	1,634	Increase of 55%

²⁵ Plymouth Report. 2023. Plymouth City Council. [Plymouth Report 2023](#)

²⁶ Living Status: Living alone. Projecting Older People Population Information System.

²⁷ Living Status: Living in a care home. Projecting Older People Population Information System

Disabled Facilities Grants - are available to help residents who are struggling to get around their homes due to a disability or long-term illness, visual impairment, or old age. During 2022/23 47% of the 304 grants completed were where the occupant was aged 66 years and over.

New homes – between April 2021 and March 2024, a total of 89 new homes were constructed on affordable housing developments that were category M4(2) and M4(3), 25% of the total number of new homes constructed on these developments. 77 new homes were constructed to be accessible and adaptable dwellings (M4(2) category) and 12 constructed to be wheelchair user dwellings (M4(3) category).

Fuel poverty - In 2022 sub-regional fuel poverty statistics show that an estimated 14.5% of households in Plymouth were in fuel poverty, equating to approximately 17,000 households. Over 10,000 low-income households (in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support) are assessed as being in fuel poverty. One fifth of such households are of pension age. There is considerable variation across the city. 39% of low-income households in fuel poverty in Plymstock Dunstone ward are of pension age, compared with only 12% in Devonport.

8.3 A snapshot into what are we already doing

The Plymouth Digital Living Lab²⁸

Organisations in Plymouth are collaborating to pilot new technologies for older Plymouth Community Homes residents with mild to moderate frailty. The Plymouth Digital Living Lab research project will give residents opportunities to help co-design and pilot technology such as sensors in the home and wearable devices with the aim of helping them remain independent in their own homes. This housing and health partnership also supports wider efforts towards providing care and support in community and homes settings thus avoiding hospital admissions.

Home Upgrade Grants



Plymouth City Council have partnered with Plymouth Energy Community to administer grant funding opportunities to upgrade homes – helping people to stay warm and save money.

²⁸ Digital Living Lab, 2024. Plymouth Community Homes.

In 2023 the Sustainable Warmth Fund was used to provide a number of energy saving measures for an elderly woman living on her own. 'Kathy' had mobility issues, was socially isolated and had a hoarding disorder that meant her property was inaccessible and unsafe.

Following a retrofit assessment and with support from a decluttering specialist a number of energy efficiency measures were installed including external wall installation, roof repairs and several remedial measures. These measures typically lead to lower bills, greater comfort and a reduction in carbon footprint. 'Kathy' talked about '*getting her home back*' and following a referral to Adult Social Care received ongoing support to maintain her independence at home.

We need a Housing Strategy for ageing that includes more options for communal living, intergenerational living and adapting other housing like student accommodation

'More house shares and housing co-ops'

'More accessible housing and innovative options for people to remain at home'

Opportunities for using existing housing stock differently should be explored

Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will work with existing planning and housing partnerships and providers to make the case for an adequate range of housing options and adaptations for people as they age.
- We will work with energy delivery partners to promote and improve the uptake of Home Upgrade Grants to insulate homes and improve energy self-sufficiency among those aged 50 and over.

9. Communication

As we age it is easy to focus on the negative aspects of ageing and this is reflected in the language and images we see used in the press, popular culture, and even policies and services directed towards ageing and older people. Ageing is often shown as an inevitable process of physical and mental decline and linked to vulnerability, dependency, and a burden to society. This negative view clouds the positive experiences of ageing and older people and the huge value that our older populations bring to society.

Language and imagery that stereotypes people in later life as weak, not fit for work, lonely and incapable, or not deserving of health treatment ignores the huge diversity

of backgrounds, experience, and ambition of the millions of people who are older. There are many positive aspects to ageing. People describe a greater sense of wellbeing, greater independence, and feeling more connected to family, friends and neighbours.

As described earlier in this report ageism operates at many levels of society and the language and imagery that we use in our communications around ageing and older people can drive and exacerbate this.

Importance of recognising and giving value to older people's histories and experiences

'Language is really important – we need to think about how we talk about older people'

We can change negative perceptions of ageing through our communications and celebrating older people

Digital and online communications are not always relevant to people as they age and may exacerbate isolation

Our language and imagery should reflect the diverse lives of older people in the city

Priorities for an Age Friendly Community

- We will ensure that all our consultation and engagement processes are accessible to older people.
- We will challenge negative stereotypes of ageing and older people.
- We will actively recognise and celebrate the diversity of ageing and older people in our communications.