

# IT'S NOT JUST BLACK AND WHITE, GREY MATTERS



## The North East Charter for Changing Age

### **Professor Tom Kirkwood, Professor of Medicine, Newcastle University**

“ The good news is that due to better science and healthcare, life expectancy is dramatically increasing. We need to wake up to a new 29 hour day - research shows that for every 24 hours we live, on average we accrue an additional five hours each day. In other words, UK life expectancy is currently increasing by two or more years every decade. The key issue is how best we make the most of our lengthening lives by improving health and wellbeing. ”



### **Councillor Paul Watson, Chair, Association of North East Councils**

“ We are proud to support this Charter and to play our part in achieving its aims in every community we serve. Whilst we recognise that there will be challenges, there will also be opportunities to be grasped as councils take forward their increasingly important role in supporting everyone, regardless of age, to live healthy, safe, active and positive lives. ”

The North East Charter for Changing Age is based upon a concept developed by Newcastle University as part of its award-winning Changing Age Campaign, launched in 2010 to highlight the University's reputation as a world-leading centre for ageing research.

## The North East Charter for Changing Age

Longer lives bring significant changes to the shape of our society. As the number of older people increases, the number of young people is more stable and in some cases is decreasing. There is a change in the balance of the population from younger to older – a change which is happening more quickly in the North East than in other English regions.

This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future and a radical reassessment of the place of older people in society is long overdue. Changing Age is a campaign that argues for a profound change in attitudes to ageing, informed by facts and not by outdated misconceptions. Those who are young today will in time be old. Those who are old were once young. Ageing is something which happens to everyone and therefore it should matter to us all.

Too often, debate has focused on population ageing as a negative issue, a 'burden' to be managed. This negativity can pervade attitudes commonly seen in the media, business, employment, education and even in health and social care. It ignores both the huge social triumph represented by increased longevity and the opportunities of an ageing society, often overlooked due to prevailing attitudes and conventions.

A differently shaped society affects every aspect of our daily lives and an effective response needs to bring together contributions from many different organisations, people and communities. Such far-reaching change requires positive leadership and a partnership approach across all sectors of the community whether this be public, private, the voluntary and community sector or individuals.

Endorsing the North East Charter for Changing Age is the first step for each partner to commit to playing their part in creating a society in which people of all ages can live their lives to their fullest potential.

Partners endorsing the North East Charter for Changing Age believe:

### 1. Increased life spans represent one of humanity's greatest achievements.

For the great majority of the population, health and wellbeing have improved. Illness and death have been postponed through centuries of scientific research, ingenuity and perseverance.

### 2. Increasing life expectancy is an economic good.

Longevity has made, and continues to make, an enormously positive contribution to our economy. Older people are contributors and consumers of products and services, adding substantially to economic growth.

### 3. Each individual has an equal place in our society regardless of age.

Ageism, in its widespread and corrosive forms, can no longer be accepted. The wide inequality and divergence in life expectancy levels across the region and within local communities must also be eradicated.

### 4. Much better information about older people is needed.

We need to know about the contributions, capabilities, needs and aspirations of older people in their enormous diversity. Older people should neither be marginalized nor treated as a separate category ("the elderly") within society.

### 5. Older people are an under-acknowledged asset.

The mental capital, experience and skills of older people should no longer go to waste. Arbitrary ages of exclusion from full participation in any social activity, including education, should in future be abolished.

### 6. We need to use and expand our scientific knowledge about ageing and health.

A wealth of internationally respected research on ageing and health exists through the North East's universities. There is an opportunity to develop better working partnerships between local government and Universities to contribute to innovative solutions to address the health and socio economic challenges of the North East, and realise opportunities.

### 7. Infrastructure requires adaptation for an ageing population.

Consideration needs to be given to the adaptation of national and local infrastructure for transport, housing, and communications to accommodate the changing age structure of our population. In turn this could help to create major opportunities for growth and innovation in the region.