# Exploring the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population

## 1.    Introduction

*"An ageing society is no longer on the horizon, it is here with us today"[1]*

The population of the UK is ageing. Over the last 25 years the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 15 per cent in 1984 to 16 per cent in 2009, an increase of 1.7 million people. Over the same period, the percentage of the population aged under 16 decreased from 21 per cent to 19 per cent[2]. The growth of the older population raises both opportunities and challenges for policy makers and service deliverers at the local level particularly in terms of the impact that this change might have on the labour market and local economic vitality.  However, there is currently very little discussion within economic development about this issue, either in terms of forecasting demographic change and links with the economy, or how local economic strategy may need to respond.  To date, the debate has been dominated by concern about the potential impact of an ageing demographic on public health services, particularly the health and social care agenda and concern about the potential cost of this to central and local government.  There is also concern about pensions and retirement policy and the extent to which government can continue to support people as they grow old.  Despite these concerns and the inescapable reality of an ageing population for us all, what might be the opportunities of demographic change be for our economy and how could local economic development strategy respond imaginatively to maximise the opportunities as well as manage the challenges?

As with all of CLES' Rapid Research, this publication provides a swift and concise summary of the issues and examines how practitioners are responding at the local level, particularly to the opportunities of ageing.  Our findings in this briefing are based on an analysis of existing data and literature and three telephone interviews conducted with local authority officers, with the aim of starting to explore how councils are responding to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population.

---

[1] DWP website on an Ageing society: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/
[2] Source: Office for National Statistics, 2010

## 2.      The impacts of an ageing population

Echoing trends elsewhere in Western Europe, the UK's population is ageing. This is being driven by two key demographic changes. Firstly, there is a low/declining birth rate in the UK due to the fact that women are having fewer children than in previous generations. Secondly, people are living longer due to improvements in health, diet, preventative care and medical advances. The ageing trend can be seen clearly when you look at some of the current data.

Figure 1 below, shows the trends in the projected English population growth during the next two decades for both the working age and older populations, using 2008 as a baseline.[3] The graph shows a substantial increase in the number of older people living in the UK and only a small increase in the level of the working age population during the next twenty years.

**Figure 1: Trends in population growth in England**
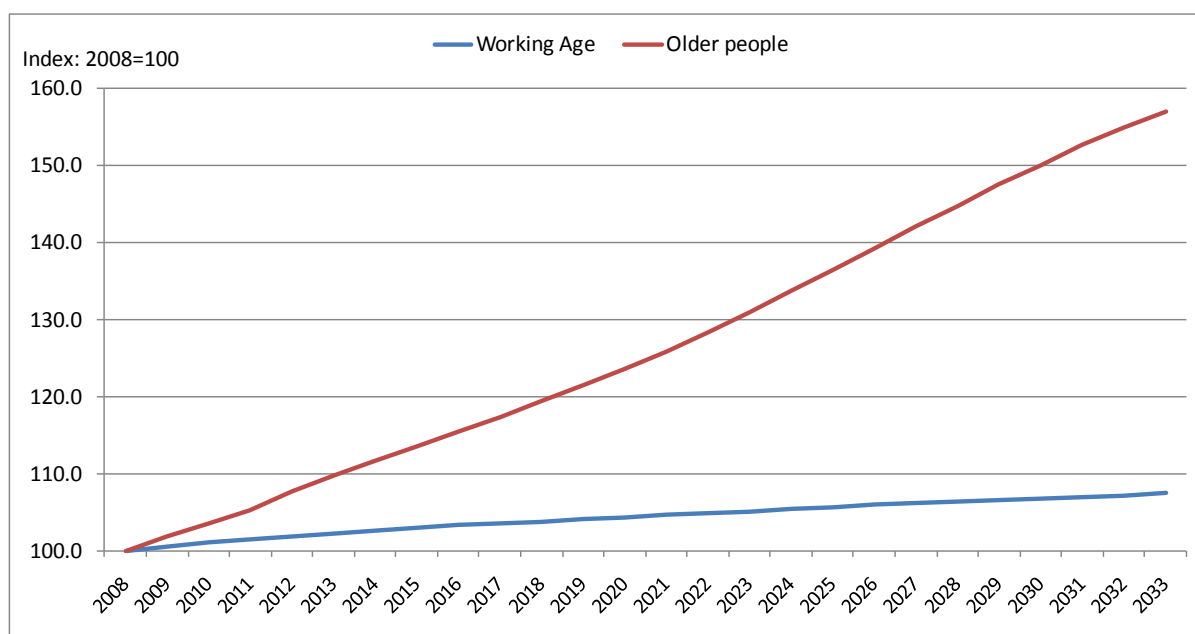


*Source: Office for National Statistics, Sub-national population projections, 2008*

Figure 2 (overleaf) represents population growth by age group. It shows that whilst there will be an increase in all age groups, the level of aging is particularly marked within the 85 and over age group which is forecast to grow significantly by the year 2013.

---

[3] Population change in each year is referenced to 2008.  The baseline year is 100 on the vertical scale – the more rapid the growth over time, the higher the figure will be over and above the baseline.  Here, older people are defined as males aged over 65 and females aged over 60.

**Figure 2: Population growth by age group**
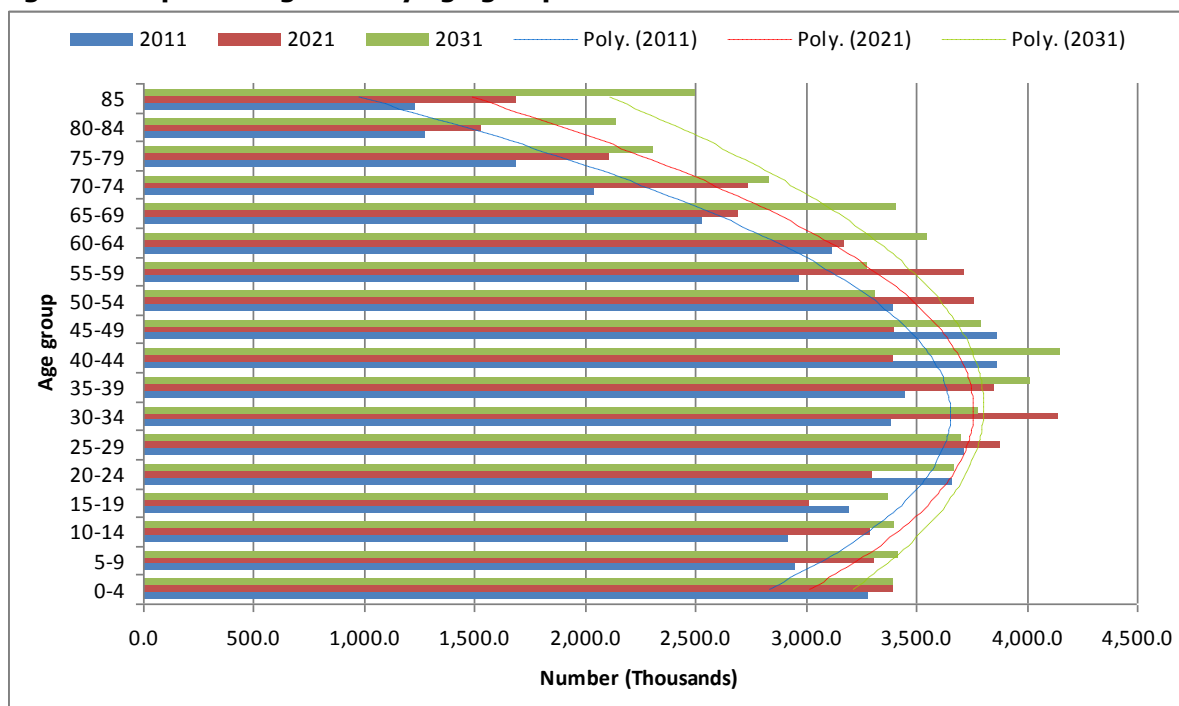


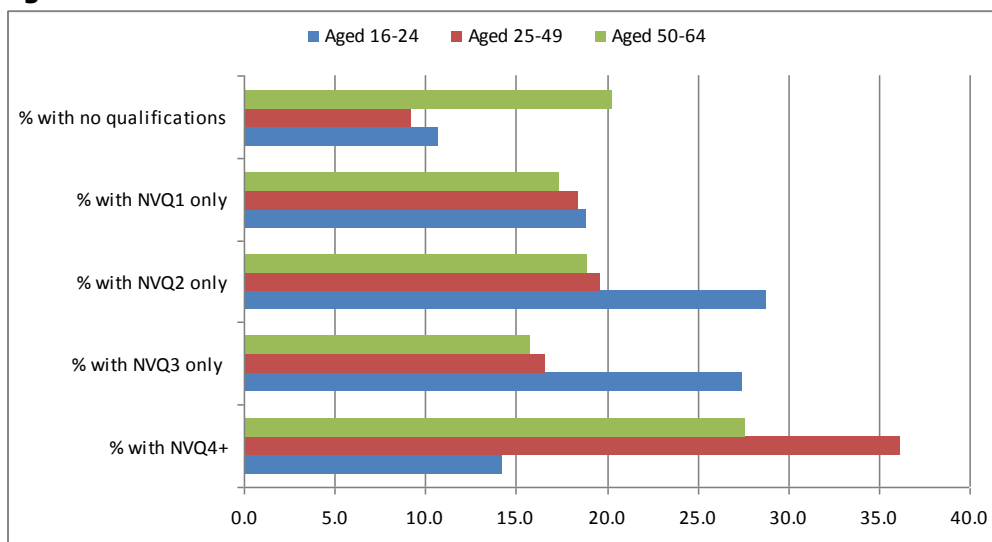*Source: Office for National Statistics, Sub-national population projections, 2008*

## Impact of ageing on the labour market

An ageing population impacts on the labour market and there is concern about the high level of older people who are unemployed, many of them for long periods of time. Figure 3 (overleaf) shows that people aged 50-64 have fewer high level qualifications than their younger counterparts. In an increasingly competitive job market, this may well act as a barrier to older people entering employment. Previous research by CLES into unemployment amongst over 50s in Blackburn uncovered a range of challenges that older people can face when seeking to enter the labour market. These include both 'internal' barriers, such as low self esteem and poor health, and 'external' barriers such as a mismatch between older people's skills and the requirements of local employers. In future, the phasing out of the Default Retirement Age means that people will be required to have longer working lives, working well into their 60s.

The effects of an ageing population will include a decline in the ratio of workers to pensioners, placing a greater pension burden on those in work. Data[4] show that in 2008 there were 3.3 people of working age to each person above state pension age (SPA). By 2032 this figure will have fallen to 2.9 people of working age to each person above SPA. As older people move into retirement, taking their experience and skills with them, there may not be enough younger people to replace them; as growth in the labour force slows down, so too will the labour contribution to economic growth. Historically, immigration has played an important role in rebalancing the ratio of workers to pensioners (and indeed migrants already play a key role in the provision of health and social care to older people), yet political rhetoric continues to run counter to this.

---

[4] Source: Office for National Statistics, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/popt1208.pdf

**Figure 3: Skills levels**



Source: *Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey, December 2010*

### The age profile of UK businesses

An interesting implication of an ageing demographic for the UK is the potential impact of ageing on the age profile of UK businesses. Many of the UK's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses depend on entrepreneurs and managers, many of whom are getting older. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has highlighted this challenge in their policy work, highlighting the importance of succession planning for small businesses so that these businesses and their employees are safeguarded for the future. Without this, businesses run the risk of becoming un-strategic and unfocused which may lead eventually to decline.[5] This may have a greater impact upon particular sectors and areas, for example traditional family businesses in rural areas.

### Maintaining levels of health and well-being

Whilst people are staying healthier for longer, in the coming decades an ageing population will undoubtedly lead to an increase in instances of age-related illnesses, such as dementia, coronary heart disease, stroke and Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD). This will place increased pressure on the National Health Service and Adult Social Care services. Moreover, sociological trends in the UK, and in particular the geographical dispersal of family networks, could result in increased levels of isolation, loneliness and depression amongst older people.

### The heterogeneity of ageing

It is important to recognise that an increase in life expectancy will affect groups differently. Women typically have smaller pensions due to time away from the labour market due to caring responsibilities, meaning that women may need to work for longer than men, whilst single women are likely to need to remain in the labour market for longer than their married counterparts in order to be financially secure.

### Impact of public cuts on vulnerable groups

The challenges facing resource allocation and delivery for the older population are significant. Take, for instance, the Supporting People programme which funds housing support services for people with learning disabilities, those with mental health problems, older people and those fleeing domestic violence. In the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, it was announced that the money allocated nationally to Supporting People would be broadly maintained with a 12% real term cut over four years. Crucially, however, the fund is no longer ring-fenced and instead the money will be rolled into local authorities' general grant from government. With no legal responsibility for councils to support those groups that have benefited from Supporting People, there are real concerns that services to

---

[5] Federation of Small Businesses website: http://www.fsb.org.uk/News.aspx?loc=wales&rec=6532

meet the needs of vulnerable older people will be lost. Moreover, cuts to the voluntary and community sector will mean that the important networks and services provided by VCS organisations to older people may well be under threat.

The public spending cuts to the Supporting People programme and to the voluntary and community sector may threaten older individuals' independence and are likely to place increasing caring responsibilities on spouses and family members. For the coalition government this is all part of realising the vision for of the 'Big Society', however clearly this increased pressure will affect carers' own well-being and quality of life and also their ability to access and sustain employment.

## 3.    How is government policy responding to demographic change?

The demographic trends impacting on the UK are becoming increasingly important on the government's agenda and there are indications that government takes this challenge seriously.  A range of useful initiatives has been developed, driven mainly by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) including the establishment of UK Advisory Forum on Ageing.  However, there are a range of policy agendas across government at the current time that will have a significant impact on both the impacts of ageing and our response to these impacts, both at a central and local policy level. What is currently missing from this range of policy are links across to the government's current economic policy, for example, local enterprise partnerships, regional growth fund and enterprise zones.  All of these areas of policy will be critical to the future growth of UK plc, but currently do not appear to be considering the impacts and, perhaps more importantly, the economic opportunities of demographic change in the future.

### The Health and Social Care Bill
Introduced to Parliament in January 2011, the Health and Social Care Bill is crucial to the coalition government's vision of reforming the National Health Service. The Bill builds on the NHS White Paper, published in July 2010, entitled *Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS*[i] which sets out the government's long-term vision for the future of the National Health Service. The most prominent, and indeed contentious, proposals within the White Paper are the changes to GP commissioning: in particular, that of giving clinicians greater control over health budgets with the aim of improving efficiency and effectiveness in healthcare.

---

**Potential implications for older people**

Devolving powers and responsibilities to GP-led consortia and to local authorities raises concerns about consistency across different geographical areas, especially in terms of ensuring that the needs of marginalised communities are met and that they have equal access to health services. Concerns have also been expressed that the introduction of any system that pays on result inevitably opens up the risk that providers target 'quick wins', i.e. people that are already engaged with health providers, rather than those with entrenched challenges and barriers, including some older people.

---

### Welfare Reform
Since coming to power last May, reducing the cost of welfare to the public purse has been a key priority for the coalition government. This has resulted in number of key developments including the rolling together of all existing unemployment programmes into the single Work Programme and also a reform of the benefits system with the introduction of the Universal Credit.

---

**Implications for older people**

The coalition government has introduced a 'crackdown' on incapacity claimancy: from April this year, Incapacity Benefit claimants have been written to and asked to re-submit their assessments. The government hopes that this will identify claimants that can be moved off Employment Support Allowance and onto Jobseeker's Allowance. This could have a significant impact on older people (that are still of working age).  It may be particularly challenging to support older people back into employment because of the particular challenges they may face.  It is also important that the informal work that older people provide to the economy is not overlooked, particularly the provision of care to loved ones and their wider family.

---

### Localism Bill

The Localism Bill[ii] was published on 13 December 2010 and underpins much of the coalition government's current policy-making. Running in parallel to the Big Society agenda, the aim of the Bill is *'to make the case for a radical shift of power from the centralised state to local communities'*. To achieve this ambition, the coalition government hopes to re-localise the running of services with an emphasis upon communities running services in their neighbourhoods. Other important policy developments include the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans which seek to free-up planning procedures and give residents greater control over local developments.

---

**Potential implications for older people**

Many older people are highly active in their local area and may therefore be well-placed to take up the types of responsibilities that the coalition government set out in the Localism Bill. However, there are concerns as to which groups will have a 'voice' in shaping and delivering the localism agenda. Older people that are living in poverty, suffering from poor health or who do not speak English may not have the capacity or willingness to take part in the localism and Big Society agendas.

---

### Phasing out the default retirement age

In January 2011, the coalition government announced the end of the Default Retirement Age (DRA) which enables employers to make staff retire at the age of 65 regardless of their circumstances. The DRA will be phased out between April and October 2011.

---

**Potential implications for older people**

For the government, the end to DRA reflects population trends which show the people are living healthier for longer and the changes will benefit older people by giving them the freedom to work for longer and, in turn, help promote growth in the UK economy. This move has been welcomed by a number of campaigning bodies who see this as an end to a discriminatory practice and an opportunity for older people to have real choice regarding working in later life.

---

### Ageing Well Programme

The Department for Work and Pensions launched the Ageing Well Programme in July 2010 with the aim of supporting local authorities to improve their services for older people. The key aim of the programme is to provide a better quality of life for older people through local services that are designed to meet their needs and recognise the huge contribution that people in later life make to their local communities. It is hoped that Ageing Well will: help local authorities to use their resources effectively; promote well-being in later life; ensure that older people can live independently for longer; engage older people in civic life; and tackle social isolation by recognising older people's potential.

---

**Potential implications for older people**

In helping to raise awareness of the issues affecting older people and what needs to be done to improve quality of life, the Ageing Well programme is a welcome step. However, when we consider the wider pressure being placed on local authorities as a result of the public sector spending cuts, and the subsequent impact on vulnerable groups including some older people, questions remain as to what extent local authorities will have the resource to deliver this vision.

---

## 6. How is local government responding to demographic change?

The impacts of ageing will probably be felt most acutely in local government and many areas are beginning to consider how they need to respond to this challenge in their own locality. Below we present four case studies which provide insight into how some areas are beginning to address this issue.

**Case study 1: Manchester City Council**

**The local context**
In contrast to national trends over the last two decades, the number of older people living in Manchester has actually decreased. This can be explained by the outward migration of people from the inner-city in the 1970s and '80s as a result of economic decline. Those who could afford it, moved to greener and quieter areas in the surrounding conurbation. As such, the people that were 'left behind' were, on the whole, poorer and more disadvantaged, meaning that there are a number of social and economic challenges facing Manchester's older population today, not least health inequalities. Compared with all local authorities in England, Manchester ranks second lowest out of 352 local authorities in terms of male life expectancy at birth and fourth lowest out of 352 local authorities in terms of female life expectancy at birth[6]. The city also faces challenges in terms of long-term worklessness amongst older residents and the subsequent impact on household poverty and on perceptions of work and employment amongst young family members.

**The policy response**
The Valuing Older People (VOP) partnership was launched in 2003 by Manchester City Council, NHS Manchester and the voluntary and community sector. Since it was established, VOP has been responsible for improving the lives of older people in the city. In 2009, VOP launched an ageing strategy for the city entitled, *Manchester: A great place to grow older 2010-2020*. Amongst the strategy's aims are to improve health and well-being amongst the city's older residents and seek to encourage better access in mid and later life to work and income.

A key theme of Manchester City Council's work has been that of 'Lifetime Neighbourhoods'. Complementing the City Council's wider work around sustainability and the creation of neighbourhoods of choice, Lifetime Neighbourhoods involves taking a whole-life approach to services, policies and strategic plans with the aim of ensuring that the needs of older people are considered. The Lifetime Neighbourhood approach is being tested in 'real-life' contexts, mainly via the Chorlton Lifetime Neighbourhood Project (CLNP). This demonstrator project focuses on integrating age-friendly approaches into the development of the Chorlton District Centre, which encompasses a shopping centre, a health centre, a school and a library. CLNP has organised:

- a steering group of local and regional agencies;
- a workshop for older residents in December as part of the Talk Chorlton consultation;
- the launch of a Chorlton and Whalley Range VOP network.


**Case study 2: South Staffordshire Council**

**The local context**
South Staffordshire is a rural district covering an area of 101,000 acres on the south-western edge of the West Midlands conurbation. Relatively affluent, South Staffordshire is a commuter area serving Wolverhampton and Birmingham to the south. South Staffordshire has a higher than average number of older people with 48.5 per cent of people in the South Staffordshire District aged over 45 (compared to an England average of 40.8 per cent). 20,000 people in South Staffordshire are over the age of 65 with this figure set to rise to over 28,000 by 2014.

A key challenge in South Staffordshire is around the sustainability of villages. Many young people are moving out of the area because they cannot afford to buy properties meaning that many of the rural villages are mainly populated by older people. As a result, the future of schools and local businesses are threatened. There is also a mismatch between current housing stock and the demand for smaller, one bedroom properties that are more suited to older people. This means that many older people are living in 'family-sized' homes that are expensive to heat and maintain.

---

[6] Source: NHS Manchester,
http://www.manchester.nhs.uk/document_uploads/Commissioning/NHS%20Manchester%20CSP%203rd%20ed%20final.pdf

**The policy response**

Responding to the ageing population has been described as one of the *'biggest strategic issues currently faced by the council across all service areas'*. The Local Strategic Partnership is in the process of finalising an Ageing Well Strategy which aims to encourage a holistic and multi-agency response to ageing. The draft strategy is underpinned by a four-tiered approach:

- Primary prevention: stopping a negative outcome from happening in the first place, e.g. installing smoke alarms, increasing take-up of flu vaccinations;
- Secondary/targeted intervention: responding to support those already living with existing conditions to minimise their severity and reduce the likelihood of complications;
- Respond and re-able: specialist interventions to address health and care crises;
- Self-directed support: ensuring that older people have the choice to decide what support they receive and when.

---

*Case study 3: Newcastle City Council*

**The local context**

As elsewhere in the UK, Newcastle's population is ageing. There are around 82,900 people aged 50+ living in the city which is almost 30 per cent of the total population. By 2029, there will be an estimated 13.6 per cent increase in this age group. By 2029 the number of people aged 65 to 74 is projected to grow by 17.5 per cent, whilst the number of people aged 75 to 84 is projected to grow by 12.3 per cent. By 2029 it is projected that there will be a 67.3 per cent increase of people aged 85+ in the city. Like many UK cities, Newcastle is culturally and ethnically diverse. Anecdotal evidence suggests that whilst some ethnic minority communities, such as the South Asian community, have traditionally cared for older people within the family this trend is changing as young people increasingly need to move outside of the area for job opportunities. Newcastle City Council anticipates, therefore, that in the future they will see increasing numbers of older people from ethnic minority backgrounds accessing services and as a result the City Council may have to adapt the way in which services are designed and delivered.

**The policy response**

The Quality of Life Partnership was established in 2005 to enable older people and agencies to work together to improve the quality of life of older people in Newcastle. The Quality of Life Partnership along with the city's Elders' Council have direct influence over policy-making in the city with older people involved in most plans and strategies, including: environment; regeneration; creating 'age-friendly places'; and travel planning. The City Council has also worked to increase the representativeness of older people's forums in recognition of the heterogeneity of the older population in the city and the different opportunities and challenges that affect different groups. To this effect, the Quality of Life Partnership is currently seeking to identify and overcome gaps in the representation of: black and minority ethnic communities; lesbian, gay and bisexual older people; and transgender older people.

---

*Case study 4: City of Greater Dandenong*

**The local context**

The City of Greater Dandenong is located in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. Greater Dandenong is the most ethnically diverse area in Victoria, with half of its population born overseas. Among the 156 birthplaces of its residents are Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, China, Italy and Bosnia, whilst the last ten years has also seen a rise in the Sudanese and Afghan population. As elsewhere in Australia, Greater Dandenong's population is an ageing one. It is currently forecast that the ageing of people currently in their middle years will lead to a doubling of the number of older residents by the year 2030.

> **The policy response**
> The City of Greater Dandenong's award winning Living Treasures Programme was initiated as part of the Australian Federation celebrations. Between 1998 and 2000, 24 Greater Dandenong residents were honoured as 'Living Treasures'. Living Treasures are people who are considered to have made positive and long lasting contributions to Greater Dandenong. In 2005, a further seven residents were honoured. The initiative is a celebration of the area's heritage, with the aim of promoting a shared sense of place, thus developing and strengthening the identity of Greater Dandenong. Moreover, Living Treasures is a strong statement that the City of Greater Dandenong values and appreciates the contribution of residents thus instilling a sense of community pride. The initiative may also help to promote good relationships between different generations: many of the 'Living Treasures' are older people and the programme helps raise awareness of older people's continued social and economic contribution to the City.

What these examples illustrate that the main response to date from local government is similar to that of national government, in that the focus is still upon the implications for health and social care. There is limited discussion around how planning and economic development departments in local government need to respond. For example, how should local government encourage entrepreneurship among older people, what opportunities might there be to support older people in employment for longer or how should spatial planning ensure that new housing supports intergenerational cohesion and limits the isolation of older people in communities?

## 5.    The social and economic opportunities of an ageing population

The discussion to date has explored in detail some of the challenges of ageing and the types of response being explored by central and local government.  However, as highlighted, a key gap in the debate to date is the economic opportunities that an ageing population presents and how economic and spatial policy should or could respond positively to harness the skills, wealth and business acumen of older people.  In this final section, we explore some of these opportunities in more depth.

### Demand for new goods and services
A growth in any section of the population brings with it the emergence of new markets. Data shows that older people's spending reached an estimated £97 billion in 2008, around 15 per cent of the overall household expenditure[7]. The purchasing power of older people, the 'grey pound' will therefore make an increasingly important contribution to the UK economy. Data from the Office for National Statistics' Expenditure and Food Survey show that recreation and culture account for a large share of 65-74 year olds' spending. Harnessing this spend will be increasingly important for localities – for example, exploiting the opportunities of tourism and the subsequent multiplier effect. The increase in the number of older people living in the UK is also likely to lead to an increase in demand for new technologies and products designed to support people to live independently in their own homes for longer. As today's middle aged and internet-savvy population move into old age, they will create a growing market for online-based services and support. An ageing population also presents opportunities for the growth of medical and pharmaceutical sector in the UK as the demand for new drugs and health treatments continue to rise.

### Changing costs of infrastructure
There may also be changes in the type of infrastructure required in an ageing society. For example, the way society uses public transport may change with reduced pressure on commuter services as the working age population decreases.  Housing and services provision will also need to change, as people may decide to move out of highly populated areas to suburbs and rural areas.  This may provide opportunities for developers and the construction industry to explore new types of housing provision and communities to support older people and the wider community.  The digital industry is likely to play an important role in these changes helping to improve access to services for an increasingly internet literate older population.

---

[7] Source: Age UK, http://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/archive/the-grey-pound-set-to-hit-100bn-mark/

### Entrepreneurship and investment

An interesting potential economic benefit of an ageing population is an increase in entrepreneurship particularly for active older people who while planning to retire, are keen to use retirement as an opportunity to explore new life opportunities. Retirement as a process is changing rapidly. Where once people retiring at 50 or 60 were seen as being in the 'twilight' of their years, nowadays people retiring in their 60s can expect to live until they are at least 87. Currently, there are 10,000 people aged 100 or over. By 2050 there will be 275,000[8]. Setting up a business may be one of the many options older people consider as they retire, particularly if they have capital to invest from a lump sum payment. This may be for lifestyle reasons or simply a desire to create a new career or try out a new idea. Even if older people are not interested in setting up their own business, they may be interested in the idea of investing in local business for financial reasons, particularly in a context of low interest rates. In addition, former business leaders who are retiring or scaling back their involvement could play an important role in supporting or mentoring future younger entrepreneurs who are starting out in business.

### Volunteering and social activism

In many communities, older people are a huge source of volunteers and play a key role in sustaining a vibrant voluntary and community sector and their contribution is well documented. As the population ages, more and more older people may be interested in playing a wider role in their community as they retire, particularly if they are keen to remain active. This volunteering role is likely to become increasingly important as we continue in an era of public sector spending cuts. The government hopes that as public services are cut back, the voluntary and community sector will step in to fill the void under the banner of the Big Society. Many older people are already socially active and embedded in their communities and are therefore well placed to make a real contribution to the Big Society agenda; however it is important to recognise that they themselves are likely to suffer from cut backs in public services which may inhibit their ability and willingness to volunteer.

### Opportunities within the labour market

Many older people are keen to remain active when they retire and a high proportion work part time. This will be increasingly important as the working age population declines and there are opportunities to support the role of older people in the workforce in the future and explore how their experience and skills can be used best. In future, in order to fill vacancies, employers may want to explore the option of more flexible working conditions with more part time opportunities, which may better suit the preferences of older people, particularly in highly skilled professions where replacement demand may be difficult to sustain. In addition to paid employment, numerous studies have sought to highlight and quantify the economic contribution older people make in caring for loved ones and other family members, particularly the role of grandparents in caring for grandchildren. As people live healthier lives for longer, there may be an increase in the number of people willing and able to perform this role. In turn this could, potentially, help to enable older people into employment, take full account of the important role that they can play in providing unpaid care within their family and wider community.

## 6.    Implications for central and local government policy:

### Local economies needs to plan and adapt to the opportunity

Issues relating to the ageing population are often seen solely in terms of the challenges the demographic trend presents in terms of health and social care. However, local authorities must adopt a much broader understanding of the ageing population and realise the impact it will have across local authority service areas. The ageing population should be understood as a key issue for economic development: as highlighted earlier in this publication. As such, new structures, particularly local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) should understand the demographic trends of their areas and their strengths in providing and creating services to benefit older people, particularly within the health and biomedical sectors. They should also be flexible to new ideas about the role that older people might play in both setting up and financially supporting local business.

---

[8] Figures from DWP website: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/

### Changing the discourse around ageing

Many local strategies focus on the challenges of ageing and its threat to economic vitality. This needs to change. There is little that we can do in the UK to avoid the inevitability of ageing that will affect all of us in due course. We cannot easily reverse the trend we are seeing in the UK and the rest of Europe nor ignore the fact that this trend is already well established. Therefore we need to explore how our society and economy will adapt to this new challenge and harness the skills, resources, experience and contribution of older people to support their local economy in the future.

### Recognising the heterogeneity of the older population

It is crucial that policy-makers understand that 'older people' are not simply one homogenous group. Failing to recognise the complexities of this section of the population, as with any other group, risks encouraging stereotyping. It is important that when planning, designing and delivering services for older people, the needs of potentially marginalised groups of older people are recognised, including lesbian, gay and bisexual older people and those from minority ethnic communities. Whilst many older people are active, engaged and keen to articulate their views and perspectives, there are many who do not have the capacity to do so. Moreover, some older people may feel that their needs and requirements resonate more closely with younger people that share similar characteristics, such as ethnicity or sexuality, than with other older people. It is vital that service providers adopt effective engagement approaches that are sensitive to the heterogeneity of the older population, with an increased emphasis on the importance of treating older people as an integral part of the wider population, rather than in isolation.

### Ensuring older people have a voice in shaping emerging policy agendas

Since last year's general election, the rate and scale of policy change has been rapid. Emerging policies, from the Big Society to GP-commissioning, are set to radically change the way in which services are designed and delivered. There are opportunities for older people within these policy developments. The Big Society agenda could, for example, result in greater recognition of the role of older volunteers, whilst GP-commissioning could encourage the development of more targeted and locally bespoke health-related services. Yet, as has been widely commented, there is a real risk that the voices of certain groups in society will not be heard as these policy developments unfold. Important questions remain, for example, as to how GP-commissioners will engage and consult with older people. Whilst some older people (namely affluent retirees) may be well-placed to contribute to the Big Society many more will not, for example, older people with health-related challenges and those with responsibilities for caring for family members.

### Understanding the importance of joined-up working

Traditional approaches to service delivery for older people will become less appropriate as the population ages and the demographic profile shifts. As CLES observed, during our aforementioned work in Blackburn, local authorities will need to develop long term plans to set the foundations for more effective service delivery, especially in the current climate of public sector cuts. Developing joined-up working practices will be important for ensuring more responsive services. This will require collaboration and effective communication between the full range of different providers and modes of provision: the public sector; the private sector; and the voluntary and community sector.

### Engaging with the private sector

Following on from the previous paragraph, it will be increasingly important for the public sector to engage with employers from the private sector. With the phasing out of the default retirement age, employers will need to be supported in order to create the conditions for older people to continue working for longer; such as making adaptations to the workplace or introducing flexible working practices. In an increasingly competitive job market, there will also be a continued need to raise awareness amongst employees of the skills and qualities of the older population, and also to take action against discriminatory employment practices. Organisations such as trade organisations, business groups and trade unions will continue to play an important role in this process.

---

[i] http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/LiberatingtheNHS/index.htm
[ii] http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/localismbill/