

SEEFA Policy Panel on Later Life and Ageing

Summary of the Key Issues on Ageing Assets: what needs to be in place?

SEEFA has identified that the contribution of the older population to our communities, families, economy and to society as a whole is enormous. An ageing population is a valuable asset. (See *'Key Issues on Valuing the Contribution of the Older Population'*, SEEFA Policy Panel on Later Life and Ageing, March 2014). However, we also identified that this contribution is vastly underestimated and that there are barriers to be overcome if the contribution is to be maximised.

What needs to be in place for the potential of our 'ageing assets' to be fully realised?

1. **Positive portrayal of later life.** The negative portrayal of later life through language and images is a major obstacle to older people being seen as assets. We are concerned that older people are too often portrayed as dependent, frail and vulnerable.

There needs to be a strategic approach to 'debunking the myths' of older people as a drain on resources. This means challenging negative language and images. We'd like to see policy makers and the media valuing and championing older people as contributors to society.

2. **Support for ongoing neighbourhood participation.** Older people contribute hugely to their local communities and to the lives of friends and families. However, a lack of visibility in official statistics means that the contribution is often unnoticed or taken for granted. Properly supporting local activities such as volunteering, information services and carer support strengthens the foundations of the neighbourhood. Age friendly communities support continued contribution and help overcome barriers to ongoing participation. Better public transport, safer environments, a choice of local shops and services, well maintained paths, public seating, access to digital communications etc. are essential for an actively self supporting community. We'd like to see local authorities taking a lead across all sectors on this.
3. **Removal of age related disadvantage when accessing services.** It is shocking that there is still age discrimination in our health services, that care is so often below acceptable standards and that age discrimination is tolerated in the financial services sector. Having a healthy and economically active older population pays dividends for all age groups and is the mark of a vibrant society.
4. **Improved opportunities for employment.** We are concerned that although technically there is no ceiling on retirement age, ageing still presents huge barriers to employment. In the 'age of no retirement' we still have a long way to go to eliminate workplace ageism and see longevity as an asset in the workplace.

5. **Inter-generational planning.** All age groups benefit from our ageing assets but unfortunately this isn't always recognised. We are concerned that different age groups can find themselves apparently competing with each other for services and resources. Inter-generational thinking should be integral to all planning and the impact of decisions should be taken into account across all age groups. In particular we think much more could be done through education to make constructive opportunities for 'equal terms' social contact across age groups to promote good communication and understanding.
6. **Healthy ageing for all age groups.** Good health improves contribution for all age groups. We want to see an emphasis upon health prevention and early intervention so that more people can experience ongoing healthy lives. We want future generations to be able to keep on contributing by adopting healthy lifestyles at a young age.
7. **Digital inclusion.** Developments in digital communications are transforming lives. However, we are concerned that the older population is currently not benefiting sufficiently. We do not believe this is a temporary problem. We'd like to see people from industry and government recognising the positive value of later life digital inclusion and understanding the urgent need to work to combat digital exclusion.

SEEFA would like to see:

- **Policy makers and the media valuing and championing older people's contribution and portraying a positive image of later life**
- **Local authorities taking a lead in increasing mutual neighbourhood support by adopting age friendly communities**
- **An end to age related disadvantage especially in the health and financial sectors**
- **Longevity seen as an asset not an impediment in the workplace**
- **Inter-generational thinking integrated throughout all planning processes**
- **A healthier later life for current and future generations**
- **Active intervention from the IT industry and Government to improve later life digital inclusion**

SEEFA is the South East England Forum on Ageing and aims to bring people together to influence later life strategies, policies and services to make life better for current and future generations of older people. SEEFA's Policy Panel comprises people who by virtue of their own life experiences are experts on later life and who can actively engage with policy makers and commissioners to influence later life policy.

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