



The Elders Council of Newcastle

Older People working for Older People

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Elders Council of Newcastle

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**THE ELDERS COUNCIL
NEEDS YOU TO HELP
PROMOTE ITS WORK.**

**PLEASE PASS THIS
NEWSLETTER ON TO
OTHERS WHO MIGHT
BE INTERESTED.**

Making Newcastle an age-friendly city

As we reported in the 'Stop Press' in the November newsletter, Newcastle signed up to the Dublin Declaration of Age-friendly Cities and Communities on 2 November 2011. This was followed by a very successful Policy Cabinet on Promoting Active Ageing on 9 November. Over 80 people attended and participated in a wide-ranging discussion on how we can move forward together on making Newcastle an age-friendly city. The papers relating to the Policy Cabinet are available on Newcastle City Council's website:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/community-engagement/thinkabout-whats>.

Now it is time to put words into practice, and we have identified a range of opportunities for the Elders Council to put forward its views on current developments.

These include:

- a meeting with the City Treasurer to comment on Newcastle City Council's budget proposals;
- an opportunity to comment on the NewcastleGateshead One Core Strategy, drawing on the knowledge gained by our Older Person Friendly City, Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods and Transport groups as well as the information gathered at recent events;
- a workshop which will provide an opportunity for Elders Council members to comment on the Decent Neighbourhood Standards, recently published for consultation by Newcastle City Council. If you are interested in being part of this workshop in the New Year, please let us know by contacting Anne on 233 0200 or anne.richardson@qualityoflife.org.uk.

There will be more opportunities in the New Year for Elders Council members to contribute to making Newcastle a good place to grow old. Look out for notices in the newsletter or call us if you would like to get involved.

Report

Lessons from County Kildare

At the end of the Age Friendly Cities conference in Dublin, Mary Nicholls and Barbara Douglas had the opportunity to visit a housing development in County Kildare.

Several years of careful planning and passionate commitment has led to the development of the Nas na Riogh Housing complex. Situated on the site of an old convent, this housing and community complex is right in the middle of town – a stone's throw from a vibrant high street, public transport and two local schools. The complex itself includes a range of community facilities including a Cultural and Arts Centre in the old chapel, where we quickly learnt to play the *bodhran*; and a Community Centre which was being well used by local children for dance and drama sessions. A café and interactive garden are being planned. The first steps in developing the garden involved an intergenerational project sharing stories and clearing a space in the overgrown 'secret garden'. Judging by the beautiful pieces on the walls, art and crafts also play a large part in the life of the complex.

The housing consists of 53 self-contained apartments, which were very well appointed with high quality fittings. If we had a criticism, it is that the one-bedroomed apartments felt small.



Pictured: Mary Nicholls playing the bodhran



Participation by the local community was very evident; both from the presence of a team of volunteers who support a range of activities at the centre and the engagement of young people from the surrounding schools (*pictured right*).

We received a very warm welcome on our visit and were inspired to see the creative solutions that people can achieve together through hard work, commitment and a passion to ensure that older people can enjoy a good quality of life and be a part of their community.

Working Group Updates

Lifetime Homes, Lifetimes Neighbourhoods

We have been improving our understanding of how houses get built with further presentations from Nick Launder (Newcastle City Council) and Amanda Senior (New Tyne West Development Company) bringing us up to date with developments in regeneration areas, in particular in Scotswood.

Members of the group also participated in the first workshop of the co-housing project, which we are delivering jointly with Newcastle University and Moyra Riseborough. The workshop gave us an opportunity to find out more about co-housing, look at some examples of co-housing and consider whether we feel it offers opportunities for us as individuals and whether it should be part of the mix of housing options available to older people. We had a mixed response from the group, but it gave us all plenty of food for thought. We will report on this project in future issues of the newsletter.

Vera Bolter continues to participate, on our behalf, in the work of the Housing and Ageing Alliance. This enables us to feed our views into national work, as well as keeping us up to date with national policy changes and their impact on older people.

Older Person Friendly City

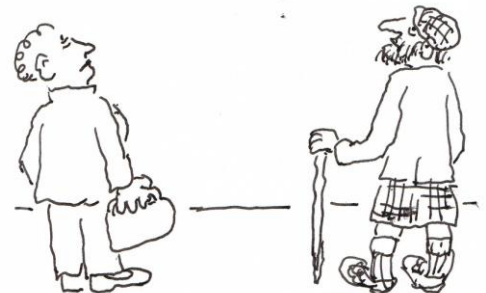
District Shopping Centres

Thanks to all members who returned our questionnaire on this topic. We will be reporting further on this important topic.



Update on supermarkets

A few months ago we published a report of our enquiries into the 'older person friendliness' of supermarkets. Since then we have been trying to persuade supermarkets to introduce those features which you, our readers, told us mattered to you, and which our surveys showed were often lacking in supermarkets in Newcastle. Features such as clear signposting at entrances and seats for the benefit of customers who can not walk too far, and, of course, toilets in all stores. We were also concerned about the prevalence of special offers for multiple purchases, such as 'Buy One, Get One Free', rather than reduced prices for single items to benefit smaller households. Since the Report was published, at least three more supermarkets have been built in Newcastle. We have been prompted to investigate the new stores by a reader who contacted us to say that the new Sainsbury Superstore on Benton Road in High Heaton had consulted customers about facilities in the new store. She cannot walk very far and needs to sit down from time to time while negotiating her way around a large store. So she filled in her customer comment card, and has been supported by other customers in complaining to the Customer Services Manager that their requests for seats



Working Group Updates

Older Person Friendly City – cont. -

have been ignored. So we have extended our survey to three new supermarkets and these are some of our comments.

Asda Superstore, Shopping Park, Fossway, Byker/Walker

Access is from bus-stops on Fossway, or from car-park on site. Large, spacious store with staff around with noticeboards offering help and directions to check-out with no queue. Mainly individual pricing on goods, but with some special offers for bulk purchases. Only one chair at pharmacy, but three benches by exit doors. Amenities include café and toilets.



Sainsbury Superstore, Benton Road, High Heaton

Access is from bus-stops in Benton Road, or from car-park on site. Good signposting from entrance to all sections. Prices are mainly on shelf edges and not always next to goods they relate to. Special offers are mainly for bulk purchases but there are some single items at reasonable price (e.g., small quantity of minced beef or chicken). Also noted a range of single-portion ready-meals at reasonable prices. Toilets on ground floor and also on first floor near café, of good standard and including disabled and baby-changing facilities. Only two chairs by pharmacy for their customers; otherwise seats in café on first floor, access by stairs or lift.

Waitrose, Osborne Road, Jesmond

Access is from bus-stops on Osborne Road (half-hourly services only) or West Jesmond Metro (1-3 miles approximately). Restricted parking on Acorn Road and adjoining streets. Signposting within store is good and shelves are easy to reach. Publicity leaflet before opening stated: 'You can buy what you need in just the right amount' but quite a few special offers are for larger quantities. No seats at all and no toilets. One amenity is a self-service hot drink dispenser by exit door (but nowhere to sit down!).

SOME CONCLUSIONS:

There are still issues we need to follow up with supermarkets in Newcastle, for example, the absence of seats in the larger Superstores. Why not provide trolleys that can be used as a seat if necessary? They have been observed in another country, so why not here? And we are not the only group campaigning against the prevalence – and wastefulness – of 'Buy One Get One Free' and similar offers. So the challenge to a supermarket company to provide the first 'older person friendly' supermarket in Newcastle still stands!

Please let the Working Group know if you would like a copy of the full Report on Older Person Friendly Supermarkets – and please continue sending your comments and observations on your experiences.

Working Group Updates

Action for Health – Senior Citizens in Newcastle (Working Group on Health and Social Care)

Speaking up about health and social care has preoccupied members for many months recently. We have been highlighting the issues of most importance to older people in responding to national, regional and local policies and plans. These are some of the points we have made:

Caring for Our Future, a Department of Health consultation about shared ambitions for care and support. We have said:

Greater prevention and early intervention is our top priority, and that means:

- access to health checks and to preventive services;
- support to schemes e.g. handyperson, community care alarm systems to support independent living at home;
- investment, both public and private, in existing housing stock to meet decent home standards;
- promotion of well-designed new housing, built to lifetime homes standards, in all tenures.

Increasing personalisation and choice, and better integration of services is our next priority, which means that:

- joint planning by health, social care and housing agencies is an essential step to providing integrated services;
- diverse solutions are needed for a diverse population of older people, so ensuring that personalisation of services requires the development of varied ways of meeting needs.

Increasing quality and supporting the workforce should be the main priority for service-providers, which means:

- improving quality of services depends on better training for care workers, recognition of the value of the work they do and a proper career and structure for them;
- residential and nursing care will still be needed for some people with high support needs who cannot be looked after at home. So regular and rigorous inspections will be needed, together with a well-trained workforce.

Conclusions

These are just some of the points we have made again – and again – in response to consultations about the Dilnott – and other – Reports. As we try to plan for care in our later years, we would still like an early response about proposals for the funding of

Working Group Updates

Action for Health – Senior Citizens in Newcastle (Working Group on Health and Social Care) – cont. -

social care. We are encouraged to save and to plan ahead but it is difficult when we do not know what help there will be with the costs of care.

What Next – Over to You!

In attempting to speak up on your behalf, have we truly represented your views? If not, then please come and join us and have your say at our meetings. And starting with our January meeting, we shall be trying to move away from responding to those national consultation papers and trying to put forward our suggestions for the services that will enable us to live a better life in our later years. In 2012, meetings will take place on 6 January, 3 February, 2 March, 30 March, 27 April, 25 May, 22 June, 27 July, 7 September, 5 October and 9 November.

Please inform the Elders Council office if you would like to join the discussions and would like to receive notices and agendas, etc.

Transport and Highways

Two items to report from Nexus:

1 Metro Fares and Gold Card

Metro fares are to rise from 1 January 2012, but passengers will still be able to get bigger discounts by buying tickets online.

Nexus say that they “have kept the price increases as low as possible while meeting tough budget targets. The changes are necessary to offset higher Metro running costs, particularly electricity.” And, as a result of being able to win additional support from the Government, it has been possible to limit the increase on all Metro single tickets to 10p.

The price of a Metro Gold Card, which is available to Tyne and Wear residents with a National Concessionary Travel pass for a one-off annual payment of £25 per year, is being reviewed separately and recommendations will be presented in January 2012.

Your Transport Working Group will continue to monitor this on your behalf and make representations to Nexus whenever possible.

2 Quality Contracts

You may have seen discussion in the Press about “Major change proposals for local bus services”.

For your information, this is a summary of what it is all about:

Working Group Updates

Transport and Highways – cont. -

The Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority (ITA/Nexus) has voted to begin a process that could lead to major changes in how local bus services are planned and delivered and has begun work to develop a “**Quality Contract Scheme**”.

This scheme – which would be the first in the country if finally approved – would see the ITA (through Nexus) take responsibility for all local bus services (around 340 different routes in Tyne and Wear).

It would mean bus services would operate with a single brand and fare structure, with prices set by the ITA and income re-invested to support the whole network.

As an alternative, the ITA has also approved a parallel process to develop “**Voluntary Partnership Agreements**” with local bus operators, which at present run most of bus services and set their own fares, routes and timetables.

Cllr David Wood, Chairman of the ITA, said: “If we are going to save essential bus services from years of cuts, rising costs and falling passenger numbers, we need to think in a totally new way about how they are delivered. Commercial bus companies rely heavily on taxpayer income, but there is no single body planning public transport to meet local needs and making sure it is delivered cost-effectively. The result is a complicated, confusing and wasteful mess with dozens of brands, more than 100 ticket choices, and some of our communities poorly served. The time is right to explore change, and the ITA has begun that process.”

In addition, the ITA says that, in a Quality Contract Scheme, bus-users would benefit from a high-frequency core of services tied in with Metro, simplified fares, accessible quality buses, full consultation on changes to routes and a customer charter to guarantee standards of service. A single body would determine where and when buses ran and how much they cost, with private companies providing routes under contract, similar to the way Tyne and Wear Metro operations are run now.

The Elders Council Transport Working Group agrees that the present system is complicated and confusing and that improvement is necessary. However, it is too early to say whether the compulsory or voluntary scheme would be better, so we will watch the development of both schemes carefully and comment as necessary.

Editors' note:

What do you think about these developments?

Working Group Updates

Communication



Everyone's tomorrow – today!

If you want to listen to the programme live, tune in to 102.5fm from 2-4 on the first Friday of every month or 10-12 on the following Monday.

And, if you miss either of these slots you can go to: <http://www.elderscouncil.org.uk/audio/> and listen to all our interviews on line.

If you would like to join the team, please get in touch with Steve Whitley on tel. 273 4727 or email steve.whitley@phoncoop.coop .

Information

Reduce your energy bills

Are rising energy prices driving you mad? Are your energy bills out of control? Would you like to learn how to reduce your energy costs in a fun and informal way?

Then why not join us at the new Beacon Building on Westgate Road to discover simple things you can do to reduce your energy bills; uncover energy-saving myths; and find out if you are on the best energy tariff for you.

Groundwork South Tyneside and Newcastle are hosting a series of two two-hour workshops kindly supported by Newcastle Science City in partnership with the European Social Fund. To get the most out of the workshops, you need to attend both of them.

Workshop 1: Friday 3 February, The Beacon, Westgate Road 10am-12 noon

Workshop 2: Friday 9 March, The Beacon, Westgate Road 10am-12 noon

Refreshments are provided and each participant will receive an Energy Monitor to take home. The workshops are FREE to attend, but booking your place is essential. Please contact Rebecca Gibbs or Danielle Pollard at Groundwork South Tyneside and Newcastle on 0191 536 4873.

And did you know ...

An Elders Council member, Patricia Simpson, has written to us saying that there's no need to use a solicitor to prepare and register a lasting power of attorney. She says that there's a government website (www.direct.gov.uk in the *Government, citizens and rights* section) which tells you how to do everything without incurring any solicitor's fees at all. (However, you still can't avoid the £130 fee for each form that you register.)

Reports

Creative Writing

Cinquaine

Heavy

Solid, simple

Telegraphic machine

Fragile, transient, light mobile

- same use?

Written by Teresa Smith

A member writes about her experience with the creative writing group and says that, when the creative writing was re-started, they continued the theme of communication and met at the Discovery Museum, where they had a talk by two of the curators on methods of communication. The group was shown and talked about the telegraph, telephone, Morse code, radios and semaphore. Some of these items were on display in glass cabinets and generated much discussion.

When the group met again in the EC offices, Celia, the tutor, brought photos that she had taken in the museum and each member of the group chose one to write about. They also made messages using semaphore flags, Morse code and wrote some telegrams.

On the next session, they met at the City Library to discover more about up-to-date communication and they talked about and handled mobile 'phones, kindles, computers, Facebook and Twitter. Some of this tech talk overwhelmed some of the group but generated much discussion on the pros and cons (but not much writing was done).

The group settled down again the following week to write about the new methods of communication, some of which Celia had brought along to show again (*see photo below*). The session ended after a few photographs were taken and the group considered how they could present what they had written during these sessions. Some favoured a folding board which could be easily carried with a view to show other interested groups; a scroll was also suggested. The decision hasn't been made yet.



We are hoping to do more creative writing in the new year if you think you would like to give it a go please let us know by calling Anne on 233 0200.

Health and Care

Did you know ...

... that, if you're over 60 and need minor medical treatment, you can get free medicines from your local chemist?

Sometimes when you are unwell, you may not need to make an appointment to see your GP. Your local community pharmacist is a trained medical professional who can provide free advice on the best treatment for a wide range of illnesses and minor ailments.

As well as free medical advice, your local community pharmacy can now also provide certain free medication from a set list for some illnesses and minor ailments under a scheme called **Think Pharmacy First**. Think Pharmacy First allows people who receive free prescriptions to go straight to their pharmacist to receive treatment without needing to visit their GP to get a prescription first.

The service includes the following illnesses:

Aches and pains	Bites and stings	Chicken pox
Colds	Cold sores	Conjunctivitis
Constipation	Warts	Cystitis in women
Diarrhoea	Ear wax	Eczema or dermatitis
Haemorrhoids	Hay fever	Mouth ulcers
Threadworm	Thrush	Verrucas

Where is Think Pharmacy First available?

You can go to any pharmacy across Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland displaying a Think Pharmacy First window banner or door sticker (there are over 50 of them).

To find details of your nearest pharmacy, please contact NHS Direct on 0845 46 47; or visit www.nhs.uk.

Is your care up to standard?

The Prostate Cancer Charity has asked us to help them to build a picture of what quality care looks like for men with prostate cancer. They say that it is not acceptable that men face a postcode lottery when accessing prostate cancer services across the country, so they would like to work with us to make improvements where they are needed most. To do this, they are identifying standards of quality care that all men with prostate cancer deserve – at every stage of their journey.

You can help by going to <http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/qualitycare> and taking part in their survey. Anyone with experience of prostate cancer is welcome to take part, whether you have been diagnosed with the disease or are a friend or family member of someone who has. If you would like a paper copy of the survey, please ring 0208 222 7182.

Health and Care

Safe sex in older age

It's no surprise that people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s are having sex with new partners but this also means that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in people over 50 are rising fast – and have been for several years.

Some people are coming out of relationships and forming new ones. Some have always been single. And many over-50s are enjoying fantastic sex and finding new love at this point in their lives.

The problem is that lots of people over 50, single or in a relationship, don't think that safer sex applies to them. If you've been in a long-term relationship, it may not have been something you've had to factor in for years. And after the menopause, when pregnancy isn't a concern, using condoms can be easily forgotten about. Result? STIs are making a comeback in a new generation.

STIs don't care about greying hair or a few wrinkles. If you're having unprotected sex, an STI will find you just as attractive whatever your age.

So, if you're over 50 and having, or thinking about having, sex with a new or different partner(s), you can get in touch with the Family Planning Association by ringing 0845 122 8690 or by going to <http://www.fpa.org.uk/helpandadvice/askwes>.

Some Elders Council members are already participating in some research on this subject and the researcher has undertaken to let us know her findings when her final report is ready (probably this autumn).

Factsheets for older people on the benefit system

The Newcastle Welfare Rights Service has recently produced a set of simple factsheets for older people to help them, and their families and carers, to understand aspects of the benefits system. The factsheets cover the following topics:

Retirement Pension	Pension Credit
Attendance Allowance	Other benefit help
Other help	Away from home
Benefit office contact details	Changes to pension age
Benefit help and advice	Challenging a benefit decision

The above are all available on the Newcastle City Council website, approximately two-thirds of the way down the following page: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/benefit-factsheets?opendocument> . If you have no access to the internet, please ring Anne on 0191 233 0200 and ask her to send you a pack of paper copies.

Health and Care

Picture to Share: dementia books

Newcastle Libraries now have a number of *Pictures to Share Collections* available to borrow. These are high-quality, beautiful books which combine pictures and text for adults in a meaningful way. They can help to stimulate conversation between families, professionals and people with dementia, and the feedback the libraries have had from customers already has been extremely positive. Comments included:

“The images are very varied and beautiful; they were definitely a catalyst to encourage people to talk about special times in their lives. We found they were age-appropriate and think they would appeal to quite a wide age group.”

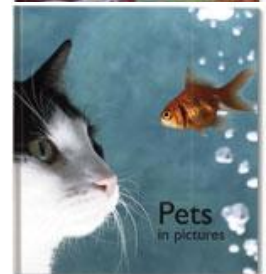
“It was especially good that the books are very inclusive and those with short-term memory loss were on equal footing with those who did not suffer this loss. Everyone we shared them with appeared to enjoy them.”

“We particularly enjoyed the mixture of small snaps of classic poetry mixed with witty quotes that made people laugh. There were emotional responses too when people recounted loss and shared these with others”

City and Gosforth Libraries have individual copies of these titles available to borrow. All you need is a Newcastle Library card.

To find out more about the books, ring 0191 277 4100; and to see inside them go to:

<http://www.picturestoshare.co.uk/shop/books> .



Living with Dementia

Do you care for someone with dementia? Are you interested in sharing your experiences? Would you like to raise awareness about the reality of living with dementia?

Perhaps do some creative writing or simply chat with a writer who's been through a similar experience?

To find out more, come to Room 2, 5th Floor, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle, on Tuesday 17 January at 2pm and chat with the writers. To book in advance or find out more, call Laura or Sharon on 0191 233 3852; or email Sharon@newwritingnorth.com .

Health and Care

Do you need advice about pensions and benefits? ...

... Are you looking for care and support to help you manage at home? Do you have financial, housing or personal problems?

Age UK Newcastle can help!

They will be holding drop-in sessions (*no appointment needed*) in the Bewick Hall, Level 2 at the City Library at the following times:

- Friday 10th February, 9am – 12pm
- Friday 17th February, 9am – 12pm
- Tuesday 21st February, 1pm – 4pm
- Friday 2nd March, 9am – 11.30am
- Tuesday 6th March, 1pm – 4pm
- Friday 16th March, 9am – 11.30am
- Thursday 22nd March, 9am – 12pm
- Tuesday 27th March, 1pm – 4pm

Their specialist advisors offer free, confidential and independent advice and support across a range of issues including money and benefits advice, housing options and health/social care.

They aim to help people get the right practical support, individual guidance and information they need before a problem becomes a crisis. The support might be about help in the home, help with shopping, getting out and about or keeping in touch with friends.

They can also provide information about the diverse range of other services and support offered by Age UK Newcastle, including our Active Ageing programme, IT classes, lunch and leisure clubs, Day Service, Care at Home services, Befriending service, Hairdressing at Home service, and Will Advice.

For further information call Age UK Newcastle on 232 6488 or email kaye.turner@ageuknewcastle.org.uk .

Do you want help to sort out your tax?

Tax Help for Older People (TOP) is an independent, free tax-advice service for older people on low incomes (under £17,000) who cannot afford to pay for professional advice. They can help with any tax problem, no matter how minor it may seem. TOP hold regular advice sessions at Age UK Gateshead or home visits can be arranged if travel is difficult. For further information or to arrange an appointment, please ring 0845 601 3321, e-mail taxvol@taxvol.org.uk or write to TOP, 17B Pineapple Business Park, Salway Ash, Bridport, Dorset, DT6 5DB. They also have an informative website: www.taxvol.org.uk .

Swags & Tails

**Open Clasp Theatre Company
presents
Swags & Tails**

**14 February 2012 at 1.30pm
(includes workshop)**

To help celebrate Newcastle City Council's endorsement of the Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Cities and Communities, the Quality of Life Partnership is supporting a performance of *Swags and tails* on Tuesday 14 February at 1.30pm at Blackfriars. Tickets cost just £3.00 and include refreshments.

Set on the day Margaret Thatcher dies, *Swags and tails* tells the stories of women who live and work in care homes, use day centres and can't easily get out and about – showing that there's more to life than a custard cream and a chocolate bourbon!

*"Open Clasp is truly a
treasure of the north east"*

British Theatre Guide



www.openclasp.org.uk

To secure your ticket, please ring Anne Richardson at the Quality of Life Partnership on 0191 233 0200 or e-mail anne.richardson@qualityoflife.org.uk .

Get online

Keep in touch

On Thursday 27 October, the Elders Council joined with the Youth Council and Newcastle Libraries to hold a “Keep in touch” day in the Central Library.

Eighteen young volunteers from the Youth Council, from the university charity SCAN (Student Community Action Newcastle) and from local schools came into the library to help older people “keep in touch” through using computers. Some older people wanted to know how to keep in touch with family and friends through such means as skypeing, Facebook and sending photographs by e-mail.



Pictured: Younger volunteers helping out on day



The older people who attended (over 30 of them throughout the day) gained new skills but also gained in confidence. Everybody asked said that they had enjoyed the day and quite a few wanted other sessions like this.

So that’s what we’ll do: again in collaboration with the library, in the spring we’ll put on another session like this. Watch this space for details.

Did you know ...

...that by going online you can save money on, for example, train tickets? Let’s say that you want to travel to London and back in March. If you bought your ticket at the station – even with a senior railcard – you’d pay £197.80; when you buy online (e.g., from www.eastcoast.co.uk/tickets), you pay £72.40, saving £125.40.

Computer Classes in 2012



Enrol for these classes starting in January 2012. Please call 0191 235 9914

Where?

1. The IT Suite at the Blackfriars Centre, New Bridge Street (nr Byker Bridge)
2. Newcastle Central Library, Princess Square, Newcastle NE1 8AX. **(Drop in only)**

Class	Duration:	Day and Tutor	Time	No. of weeks	Price
Page Plus x5 Desktop Publishing software. <i>This course is suitable for those who have completed other courses and are familiar with using a computer.</i>	16 th January-26 th March	Monday Allan Wilson	10:15am-11.45am	10	£40
Absolute beginners for the Terrified! <i>No experience required! An introduction to computing, the internet, email and word processing.</i>	16 th January – 26 th March	Monday Allan Wilson	11.45am-1.15pm	10	£40
Advanced Word 2003 extension course. <i>This course is suitable for those who have completed previous Word courses and are confident using the word processor.</i>	16 th January-26 th March	Monday Allan Wilson	1:30pm-3:00pm	10	£40
Digital Photography <i>Revise what you have learnt so far, improve and take better pictures transfer them to a PC, print and share on the internet.</i>	17 th January – 27 th March	Tuesday David Ferguson	10.30pm-12:00pm	10	£40
Intermediate Internet and Email revisited. <i>This course is suitable for those who have completed an internet course or are familiar with using the internet.</i>	19 th January - 29 th March	Thursday Allan Wilson	1.30pm-3.00pm	10	£40

Computer Classes in 2012

<p>Intermediate Internet and Email revisited. <i>This course is suitable for those who have completed an internet course or who are familiar with using the internet.</i></p>	<p>19th January - 29th March</p>	<p>Thursday Allan Wilson</p>	<p>3:00pm- 4.30pm</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>£40</p>
<p>Step by Step computing II. <i>This course is suitable for those who want to progress their basic knowledge of computing and practice skills on the internet, email and word.</i></p>	<p>20th January – 30th March</p>	<p>Friday Steve Boyd</p>	<p>10:15am- 11:45am</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>£40</p>
<p>Step by Step computing I. <i>No experience required! An introduction to computing, the internet, email and word processing.</i></p>	<p>20th January – 30th March</p>	<p>Friday Steve Boyd</p>	<p>11:45pm- 1:15pm</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>£40</p>

<p>Computer Drop - in Re-launched! at Newcastle Central Library Princess Square, NE1 8AX <i>Friendly volunteers will support you to help you get started, learn basic skills, develop your skills and even help you to solve problems in many areas of computer use e.g. internet, emails, letter writing, spreadsheets, photograph downloads etc, To include bring your own laptop sessions. Refreshments will be provided. Phone to reserve your weekly place! 0191 235 9914.</i></p>	<p>17th January - 26th March</p>	<p>Tuesdays IT Suite Floor 4</p>	<p>2-4pm</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>£2.50 (pay as you go)</p>
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For further information please contact Age UK Newcastle on 0191 235 9914 or 0191 232 6488

Everyone's tomorrow – today!

The Gift of Old Age

I am now for the first time in my life nearly the person I have wanted to be. Not bodily: I sometimes despair over my body – the wrinkles, the laughter lines round the eyes and the saggy bits that I won't go into detail about. I am often taken aback by the old person that lives in my mirror but I don't agonise over it for long.

I would never trade my amazing friends, my wonderful life or my loving family for less grey hair or a flatter tummy. I am entitled to overeat now and again; I am entitled to be messy and extravagant. I have seen too many people I know leave this world too soon before they have understood the great freedom that comes with age.

Yes: over the years my heart has been broken; how can your heart not break when you lose a loved one, or when a child suffers, or when a family pet gets hit by a car? But broken hearts are what give us strength, understanding and compassion and a bit of structure to our personality.

I consider myself lucky to have lived long enough for the laughter lines to show in my face and my hair to start turning grey. Some of my friends sadly never had a lot in life to laugh at and didn't make it as far as the grey hair stage.

I can now say “No” and mean it and also “Yes” and mean it, because as I am getting older it is easier to be positive. You care less about what other people think (not in a selfish way) but it is just not that important any more because I have earned the right to be wrong.

So when people ask me what it's like to be old, I tell them I like it: it has set me free and I am happier as the person I am now. I am not going to live for ever but while I am still here I will not waste time worrying over what could have been: I'll just enjoy the here and now. I will finish by wishing that you all take the time to step back, have a look around and enjoy the special things that life has to give you.

Liz Day

(a piece first broadcast by her on 2 December 2011 on the Elders Council radio programme *Everyone's tomorrow – today!*)

Did you know ...

... that the “night noise” phone number that we gave you some time ago has now changed to (0191) 274 4000 (the Envirocall number)? The number is answered 24/7.

Research volunteers needed



We have been approached by Rachel Stuart, a student from Northumbria University. She is in her final year of an Environmental Management degree. For her dissertation she is conducting a study into environmental awareness and energy efficiency, which is aimed specifically at the over-65s. The study looks at ways in which our older citizens can progress to a low-carbon future and looks at any constraints our older citizens have when faced with the issue of saving energy. Results from her findings will be useful not only to Rachel herself, but also to the Elders Council and the Quality of Life Partnership. To assist with this study and to encourage members to become more involved, Rachel asks if you could take 10-15 minutes of your time to fill out a survey. To request a copy of the survey, please email anne.richardson@qualityoflife.org.uk and enter 'Survey' in the subject box or call 0191 233 0200.

As an incentive for returning the surveys by the closing date of 31 January 2012, Rachel is offering a £15 Eldon Square gift card. The winner will be selected by prize draw. For further information on this study, please email rachel.stuart@northumbria.ac.uk.

Medical Decisions in Later Life

Newcastle University is inviting older people to meet with their medical students to discuss their views about medical decisions at the end of life. This is the seventh year that the event will be held.

These sessions have been very successful in the past, the students gaining valuable insights into how older people consider health issues in later life. The students will want to ask questions around, amongst other topics, living wills, the voluntary forgoing of treatment, physician-assisted suicide and decision-making responsibilities.

The date for the event this year has been set for Friday 9 March, 2-4. The venue this time will probably be St Oswald's Hospice again, but taxis will be arranged for anyone who requires transport.

If you would like to be involved in this event, please let Jacqueline McAloon at the Medical School know as soon as possible. Jacqueline can be contacted by telephone on 0191 222 6683, or by email at j.mcaloon@ncl.ac.uk.

Research volunteers needed ...



Researchers at Northumbria University are looking for volunteers to help them find out which services for older adults are most useful for the people who would use them. These services would eventually be accessed on either a computer, a tablet computer (like an iPad) or a mobile phone; but **there is no technology involved in the study itself**. The services include being able to make video calls to friends and family, finding out about local events, making appointments with your GP online and reporting issues in your local council.

The research will take place either at Northumbria University, MEA House or at the Northern Rock Foundation offices in Gosforth, whichever is best for you.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact David Greathead on 0191 227 3723 or on david.greathead@northumbria.ac.uk. The session should last less than one hour.

Volunteers for medical research

Newcastle University researchers are looking for participants aged between 40 and 79 to take part in the development of new tests for causes of limb weakness. Would you be willing to help? If so, could you please ring Sarah Thompson on 0191 248 1288.

Individual appointments lasting 2½ to 3 hours will take place between 16 January and 20 February; they will be held in the Henry Wellcome Building on Newcastle University campus (you'll be sent a map in due course).

Volunteers should:

- have no previous neurological or psychiatric conditions;
- have no electronic implants such as pacemakers;
- take no medications affecting the nervous system (Sarah will gladly answer enquiries if you are in doubt whether your medications might do so).

And finally: you'll be given **£20** to compensate you for your time and travel costs.

Things to do ...

Photograph Competition

2 x £20 Awards

As reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, Newcastle City Council has now decided to sign up to the WHO Age Friendly City declaration. To mark the event, the Elders Council is inviting members to take part in a photograph competition showing the extent to which Newcastle is (or is not) currently an age-friendly city.

To enter the competition, please send in a photograph which illustrates a feature that either **supports** or that **contravenes** one or more of the principles of the declaration (see below). Alternatively, you may send in two photographs, one for each category.

- Awareness of older people, their rights, their needs, their potentials.
- Developing citizen-centred processes.
- Developing urban and other public places that are inclusive.
- Including housing for older people that is of the highest quality.
- Public transport systems available to older people.
- Promoting the participation of older people in the social and cultural life.
- Promoting and supporting the development of employment, volunteering opportunities.
- Ensuring that community support and health services are available to older people.

Entries will be judged on relevance and photographic merit, and the best one in each category will receive a shopping voucher worth £20.

Entries may be sent by email to anne.richardson@qualityoflife.org.uk or by mail (no stamp required) to Elders Council, Freepost RRAK-YURB-SKGS, 2nd Floor, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS.

ALL ENTRIES TO BE RECEIVED BY NOON ON FRIDAY 8 MARCH

Information

Will there be snow?

Mears Home Improvement are again operating their snow clearance scheme should the adverse weather hit us this year.

The Service is now Mears Home Improvement Small Repairs service, who will be doing the work. If you want your pathway cleared of snow, you can call their usual Freephone number of 0800 111 4418 and their team will come out as soon as they can (usually the same day). The cost is £10; if the path needs salt you will have to pay an extra £3.



Poetry

Recipe for a welcoming city

Newcastle is my home and my treasured city
Land of the Geordie folk, who are so witty
St James' Park, the Gallowgate roar
Can all be heard from my back door

Eldon Square is a sight to see
Selling bargains on view for you and me
Seats are set in resting places
Lots on view at the Chevy Chase's

Boots are there for sound of body
Selling cures to compete with a hot toddy
Marks and Spencer clothe the frame
Man or woman it's the measured same

John Lewis on grand elevation floors
To dress the family from its stores
Eldon Garden's wheelchairs for use on site
Restaurant, cafe, jewellers, diamonds so bright

Grainger Market fruit and veg on display
From distant lands but still fair price to pay
Butchers just like surgeons – clinical cuts
While carcasses are dissected, no ifs nor buts

Earl Grey surveys the streets below
And sees just where the buses go
Blackett Street for east-west travel
Grainger Street access to High Level

This busy city works night and day
Heavy traffic movement come what may
St James' Park – Magpies' loyalty strained
Geordie supporters still tycoon-chained

John Reid (*pictured right aged 6*)



Correspondence

Editors' Note: We very much appreciate members' letters. Please note, however, that we reserve the right to edit them before publication.

Dear Editors

I thought that your readers might be interested in hearing of the problems I encountered this year with my energy supplier and how I managed to resolve them.

Up until July, my Direct Debits were £46 per month for gas and £24 per month for electricity. I then received two letters telling me that these were going to be increased to £142 and £46 respectively. The increase in the electricity charge I could understand, as £24 had seemed quite low, but I was appalled at the tremendous amount demanded for my gas.



On studying my account further, I read that consumption appeared to have risen by 800% from the same period last year – impossible, as nothing in my circumstances had changed. I immediately contacted my supplier querying the possibility that my meter might be faulty, to be told that, as my record showed fluctuating usage and not continued rise, there was obviously nothing wrong with the meter. Someone could come out to check it but I would be charged. Bearing in mind what I was already being asked to pay I declined and my initial reaction was to completely switch off my gas supply. As the weather was still quite warm, this was not a problem!

Just a few days later, I was fortunate enough to read an article about a lady in similar circumstances who had contacted the Energy Officer at Newcastle City Council and had her difficulties sorted out for her so I followed her example and got in touch.

The service I received was superb. My e-mail was answered immediately by the officer concerned, who asked me to send in the relevant accounts so that she could start work on them immediately whilst waiting for an opportunity to fit in a home visit.

Between my initial contact with the officer and the day she came to visit me, I got another letter from my supplier saying that my Direct Debit for gas needed to be increased to £195 per month. By this time I had passed the panic stage, so I just

Correspondence

telephoned them and told them politely but bluntly that they could not do this as there would not be the money in the account to pay them.

When the Council Officer visited me, she explained that she believed that part of the problem was that I had had a number of estimated readings; so the first thing she did was read the meters. She then asked my permission to speak to the supplier on my behalf whilst she was there. She explained my circumstances to the lady in the customer services department, gave her the meter readings and queried the details on my account, particularly the supposed 800% rise in consumption.

It turned out that the new meter that had been installed last year gives a 5-digit reading whereas the old one only had 4 digits, so in point of fact they were comparing two incompatible readings. My consumption of fuel was actually £60 per month for gas and £22 for electricity; with payment for arrears, my monthly direct debit is therefore now £110 rather than the £241 they were first demanding.

I cannot praise the staff in the Council enough and my advice to anyone in similar circumstances is to contact the Energy Officer at Newcastle City Council and ask for help. Please don't panic and turn your heating off, don't risk hypothermia for the sake of a bill, particularly one that may turn out to be not as bad as you thought.

Yours truly
Dorothy Ternent

Winter Travel

A government warning said that anyone travelling in icy conditions should take: shovel, blankets, sleeping bag, scarf, hat and gloves, a day's supply of food and drink, de-icer, rock salt, torch, spare batteries, road flares, reflective triangles, tow rope, a five-gallon petrol jerrycan, first-aid kit and jump leads. I looked a complete prat on the bus this morning!



Correspondence

Dear Editors

Can I just say first of all that I enjoyed John Reid's poem *Wind of Change*. The line 'From North Elswick colliery just down the lane' made me wonder if he could have been referring to Colliery Lane.

I was brought up on Colliery Lane in the mid-50s and my grandmother lived there from about 1937 (apparently the street was called Pit Lonnen before that).

I have many happy memories of the place. The pit had long closed by the 1950s and the surface area was a builder's yard when I lived on Colliery Lane. The old shaft was well cordoned off and although as kids we often tried to gain access by climbing over the wall and into the builder's yard (illegally of course), we were never able to get into the pit. Just as well I suppose.

The poem took me back to those times and in particular to my memories of the neighbours. They were all great characters – one of them was called John Reid! So you can imagine how I felt when I saw his name at the end of the poem.

Poems and poets really do have a way of reaching other realities.

Best regards
Bill Kelly



Dear Editors,

Thank you for printing in your last newsletter my request for volunteers for the good health project investigating the value of a simple technique that detects vascular disease by shining light through the skin. I would like to thank all those people who contacted me to volunteer to take part. I am currently still in need of two men aged 60-69 and two men aged 70-79 who are not known to be diabetic. If anyone is interested, please call Susan King on 0191 233 6161 ext. 26598.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thank You". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent flourish at the end of the word "You".

Thanks once again for your help.
Susan King
Medical Physics Dept., Freeman Hospital

Correspondence

Dear Editors,

I was very interested in P.Taylerson's letter in issue 44 of the Newsletter, as I too have had problems regarding Royal Mail 'redeliveries'.

As I am housebound with very poor mobility, I use the postal service a lot. Until recent years I found it quite reliable. Sadly, this is no longer the case.

Over the last two years I have received several 'you were out' cards – even though I was in! On one such occasion I was sitting only a few feet from the door (with no other door or wall between) and I would certainly have heard the doorbell or the intercom, or even a rattle on the letterbox or doorknocker – but the only sound I heard was of the mail coming through the letterbox (along with a 'you were out' card!) As on other occasions, because I am unable to go to the delivery office, I telephoned the number given on the card, for the local sorting office. "We will endeavour to redeliver tomorrow" was the reply to my complaint.

But, as on all other attempted redeliveries during the last 2 years, I did not receive a redelivery. The item was returned to sender. If this happens once, I would consider it an error or oversight. But, after so many failures to redeliver, I can only suspect it is Royal Mail policy (in the hope of making extra revenue from all these packages having to be re-mailed).

As I can no longer rely on Royal Mail to deliver items which are too large for my letterbox, I can no longer do my shopping by mail order. (Some companies have actually removed my details from their mailing list because parcels have been returned to them by Royal Mail). This is of great concern to me because I have to rely on mail order for all of my shopping except weekly groceries. I feel unable to do any Christmas shopping this year because I have no confidence that my purchases will be delivered to me. It should also be of concern to Royal Mail because, in the longer term, they will lose more business to private carriers.

I would be very surprised if no one else has had similar experiences with Royal Mail. (If it is unlikely that I have been singled out for 'cruel and unusual punishment'!) As I have used Royal Mail a great deal since childhood for personal correspondence as well as mail order, I have come to expect a much better service than I have received in the last two years.

I wonder if the Elders Council would like to look into the issue of redeliveries.

Yours truly,
G. Firbank

Editors' note: Seven weeks after we sent Mr Taylerson's letter to the post office, we received a reply (which arrived too late to go into the last edition of the Newsletter). They assure us that "the interest of [their] customers is always a top priority", so they make "every effort to deliver mail to customers first time". They suggest that, if your needs are unmet, you should ring Customer Services on 0845 774 0740.

What experiences have other Elders Council members had?

Newsletter Information

Newsletter Articles



If you would like to submit an article to be considered for the March 2012 edition of the Newsletter, will you please ensure that you forward it before Friday 17 February. (Contact details on page 1).

Newsletter in other formats

We can make our Newsletter available in alternative formats (e.g. in **larger print** or audio tape).



**To request information please contact the office
(details on page 1)**

Electronic Version of the Newsletter

It costs about £1 per member to send out this newsletter, so would you be willing to have the newsletter sent to you electronically? If you would, it would save a lot of money every year. So please sign up for this service now by emailing anne.richardson@qualityoflife.org.uk, please put "E-mail newsletter" in the subject box.

Advantages to signing up for this service include receiving the Newsletter at least 14 days sooner than you would normally receive it via the post; getting earlier notice of events happening throughout the city; and seeing the various images in colour.



What are you waiting for?

Gift Aid

As you know from what we said in a previous newsletter, the Elders Council grant this year was not increased by as much as we had hoped. So we need to depend more heavily upon voluntary contributions from our members.

Gift Aid is the easiest way to increase donations to the Elders Council by nearly a third at no cost to you (in fact, if you're a higher-rate taxpayer, you can even claim something back).

What is Gift Aid?

Gift Aid is a tax relief that is allowed on any money that you donate to the Elders Council. The government treat your charity donations as though you have already deducted basic tax from them, which in turn means that we can reclaim this. So we get the benefit and you lose nothing: the extra comes from the government.

How does Gift Aid Work?

Gift Aid can apply to one-off donations, or those over a specific period. It can even be backdated for up to six years.

Higher-rate taxpayers are eligible to reclaim 25p from the taxman for every £1 donated to charity by including details of their donations on their Self Assessment form. This rebate can be donated directly to the Elders Council on the same form and, if you so choose, it can be increased further through Gift Aid.

How can I use Gift aid?

If you would like any future donation to the Elders Council to apply for Gift Aid, please contact Nathan Gulliver for a Gift Aid Declaration Form: 0191 255 1980.

PLEASE HELP THE ELDERS COUNCIL TO CONTINUE ITS WORK

I wish to donate £5 [] £10 [] £25 [] Other [£] to the Elders Council of Newcastle and enclose a cheque for that amount. Please send me a gift aid form.

Name: _____

Address: _____
