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Press release

Life's getting better, but only for some of us

'Life in County Durham and Darlington is much better than it once was....but many places, communities and individuals have been left behind', according to a new report commissioned by local grant making charity County Durham Foundation from Durham University academic and social researcher Professor Fred Robinson.

Wages are higher, unemployment is low, people are living longer, educational attainment is improving and crime rates have fallen. However, too many people are in low skilled, low paid jobs or are out of work due to ill health. Despite people living generally longer, far too many die prematurely. Too many young people are still leaving school without even basic qualifications. And there is increasing concern over anti-social behaviour, drink and drugs, even though crime rates here are lower than elsewhere in the country.

The report, called 'Where are we now?', was commissioned by County Durham Foundation to inform its current and future strategy on where to concentrate grant support. Since its start in 1995, the local grant making community foundation has given out over £12million to local good causes in County Durham and Darlington and now holds over 85 long-term funds on behalf of individuals, families, companies and public bodies.

The report says that economic growth here has been well below the national average and highlights the area's dependency on public sector employment.

There is a need to strengthen the private sector, support enterprise and create new businesses and new jobs.

Out migration of younger people has contributed to an ageing population. Nearly 20% of the population in County Durham and Darlington is of pension age, and that is forecast to grow to almost 30% in twenty years time. That is going to be a real challenge for health and social support services.

Prof Fred Robinson comments: “Conditions in the area have improved a good deal over the past ten years or so. But there is still considerable deprivation throughout County Durham and Darlington. That has to be tackled. In addition, it is essential to raise aspirations and broaden horizons. More people need to take advantage of educational opportunities and adopt healthier lifestyles.”

Gillian Stacey, chief executive of County Durham Foundation adds: “We can’t sit back and let a significant proportion of local people live in conditions and with life expectations that fall considerably short of what they should be. County Durham Foundation will continue to support people in most need who are trying to improve their lives or that of their community by encouraging those of us who can afford to help financially to do so. Where we can spot inequalities or problems that could easily be solved, we will be ensuring that those people with the authority to make changes are listening and taking the right action.’

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For further information contact Melanie Caldwell on 0777 331 9787 or Prof Fred Robinson on 0191 334 3361 or 07765 816749.

Editors notes:

1. Copies of the report can be obtained from County Durham Foundation's office on 0191 383 0055 or downloaded from the website at www.countydurhamfoundation.co.uk.