

**Shona Robison MSP,  
Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport & Equalities**

Shona Robison was unable to attend SOPA on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 due to the terrible weather. If she had attended, here is the speech she would have delivered which includes answers to previously submitted questions.

“Before I begin, I’d like to congratulate Tom Berney on your new role as the chair of the Scottish Older People’s Assembly, which I understand is more casually known as ‘SOPA’. I hear that it is a busy hands-on-role and a bit more demanding than you expected!

The chair was only recently given up by Agnes McGroarty following expiry of her term so thanks are due to you too Agnes for your efforts over the last 2 years.

I am delighted to speak today at the 5th annual Scottish Older People’s Assembly as Minister with responsibility for Equality. Today’s Assembly is not just about giving a voice to older people and to strengthen their position of equality within society, but for the Scottish Government to listen to what you have to say.

The key themes are on the ‘Impact of Welfare Reform on Older People’ and ‘Active Citizenship’. Bill Scott of Inclusion Scotland will talk to you on welfare reform later on, and I will touch on that too.

But first let’s focus on active citizenship and reflect on the activity that has taken place over the last year.

We have been listening to you, engaging with you and working with you to find solutions to the issues that you present to us. You may be surprised at how much has been achieved this year.

There have been regular discussions between Alex Neil, The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing with SOPA. Overall, Scottish Ministers have met with various Older people’s groups more than 12 times on a range of Issues including reshaping care, integration and national Care standards.

In setting this in context, Scotland’s population is changing in size and shape as we are all living longer. This is due to a mix of healthier lifestyles choices, advances in technology and science and improvements in our health and social care services. At the core of this, there is the big question of how care for older people is provided and funded in Scotland and how we prepare for the challenges of the next twenty years.

The reshaping care programme has been the driver for this, as we shift resources from acute to primary settings, and there has been much to learn from the achievements and challenges of the last two years.

For instance, your concerns about care standards raised at last year’s SOPA were taken forward with the Chief Nursing Officer Ros Moore and her team, to look at how care systems and quality can be improved. We are also reviewing our National Care Standards. These new standards will describe what makes a quality care experience and act as a focus for service improvement. SOPA will be involved in this review.

We also wanted to ensure that older people, especially the most vulnerable, have the chance to amplify their voice and share their experiences to shape this work. To support this, the Scottish Government have recently funded Highland Senior Citizens Network to produce a DVD.

This will be an important tool to highlight to others the issues, experiences and concerns of older people, their carers and families - regarding the quality of their care. More importantly it will be through their own words.

With the focus around positive and active ageing, it is all too easy to forget about older people who are lonely and isolated, often house bound, or in rural areas.

I know that many of you here do much to help these older people by volunteering locally, providing sustenance and friendship and taking on board their views to bring to SOPA.

Last week saw the launch of Silver Line Scotland, a Partnership between Age Scotland and Esther Rantzen's charity the Silver Line Helpline. The Scottish Government provided funding for Silver Line in Scotland. It is a free confidential 24 hour service for every older person who needs information, friendship, advice and protection from abuse or neglect. As well as the helpline, trained volunteers will become Silver Line friends and provide regular friendship calls. Silver Line Scotland's aim is to assist older people to be Happy and healthy, supporting them to live independently at home for as long as possible and helping them to overcome the barriers of isolation and loneliness.

Since the Assembly last year, there have been a few Changes to the SOPA framework to make the new structure streamlined and effective. Scottish Government officials have also been actively involved making sure that SOPA is signposted to the right people to get the answers they need and to ensure that funding opportunities are made known as they arise.

We can get more done together by a partnership approach. Members of SOPA recently met with COSLA to find out how stronger links can be forged with local authorities and how older people can be represented in decisions about the services that affect them.

The importance of local decision making is being Recognised going forward especially in the Community Empowerment Bill. Councillor Peter Johnstone and Ron Culley from COSLA are here today to demonstrate their commitment to continuing these discussions.

In the spirit of partnership, Age Scotland linked into the SOPA framework with their four regional assemblies held over the last few months. Again this enabled more older people to have the opportunity to have their say at a local level.

We provided funding to Age Scotland for electronic note takers to ensure that communications at these events were more inclusive for all people participating. This was received well and has been carried through to today's Assembly and at future SOPA events. This is all detailed in the second issue of the SOPA newsletter.

I'd like to turn now to the Scottish Government's white paper on Independence called Scotland's Future and which was published last week. I'd like to touch on our commitment to you in terms of healthcare, welfare reform and pensions.

The Scottish Parliament has a record of using the powers available to it to benefit older people in Scotland by delivering free personal and nursing care and concessionary travel.

This Government have retained these in the face of current spending pressures and we plan to continue them with independence.

The NHS will continue to remain in public hands, free at point of need and delivering high quality care. It is worth reflecting on some of the major achievements of the health and care services in Scotland under devolution, which are:-

- Significant reductions in premature mortality from cancer, heart disease and stroke
- The highest level of dementia diagnosis in the UK
- Removal of prescriptions charges and introduction of free eye tests
- Reduced waiting times and delayed discharge from hospital and
- An agreement to the integration of adult health and social care services

These initiatives give a clear signal of our priorities and commitment to our older people.

However, many of you will be anxious about what our position is on welfare reform. We've made our concerns clear about the UK Government's welfare reforms. From the beginning, their implementation has been unwelcome in Scotland.

Our analysts estimate that the welfare reforms could potentially Reduce welfare expenditure in Scotland by up to £4.5 billion in the five years between 2010 and 2015. This will remove money from the pockets of individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet, and incidentally remove these billions from the local spend in local shops and businesses across Scotland.

Independence gives us the opportunity to design our own welfare system based on Scottish needs and priorities. Immediately following independence people will still be entitled to the same benefits as they are at the moment.

All payments will be protected. We will then work to make the changes required for a Scottish system during a short transition period and we will benefit from the fact that much of the infrastructure for making welfare and pension payments already exists in Scotland.

The Scottish Government wants to see a welfare system which supports people who work, provides support for those who cannot work and fosters social solidarity. Scotland is a prosperous country – we are the eighth wealthiest nation in the developed world in terms of GDP per head – so we can choose to spend to protect our most vulnerable.

We will also have the power to deliver an affordable and fair pensions system and tackle pensioner poverty.

This Government proposes a series of improvements to the state pension and the benefits systems that will:

- extend the triple-lock on state pensions so they increase by either inflation, earnings or 2.5 per cent, whichever is higher
- introduce the new single-tier pension and set it at £160 in 2016

- abolish the "bedroom tax", assisting 82,500 households in Scotland - including 63,500 households with a disabled adult, to save an average of £50 per month
- halt the further rollout of Universal Credit (UC) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in Scotland
- change elements of UK pension and welfare rules to better protect the position of women in work and on retirement

There is much, much more in the white paper and I hope that you get an opportunity to have a look at it. We have done a fair bit but there is still a lot to do and exciting times lie ahead!

I look forward to hearing from Scotland's older people about their views on Scotland's Future".

## Question and Answer Session

### Question submitted by Mrs Helen Biggins - Seniors Together.

**Q1. Seniors Together is concerned about the rising cost of burials and cremations that are sending some older people and their families into funeral poverty. Increased charges by local authorities for Cremation services and burial plots mean people are being left with huge debts after the death of a loved one. This debt can then be passed on to debt collectors. With older people living longer there is a higher chance of this occurring in later life. It's a dreadful situation:**

- The total cost of dying has risen higher than inflation
- Key expenses associated with dying have soared by 80% since 2004
- A steep rise in local authority fees has pushed the cost of an average funeral to £3456
- There are huge differences between what different local authorities charge.

We are asking the Scottish Government to review what Local Authorities are currently charging and to consider the introduction of set charges across local authority areas rather than leaving the pricing up to individual local authorities.

A. We are not aware of any problem as set out in this question and Scottish Government officials have received no previous correspondence on this topic. So it may be something that you would like to follow up formally.

There were some tabloid articles over the summer with stories about funeral costs increasing, but of course a rise in 'average costs' could be the result of people choosing more expensive options, or having pre-paid them in advance through funeral schemes that only became available in recent years, rather than as a result of being forced to pay more expensive bills.

We are not aware of an 80% increase in the fees from cremation or burial authorities (which they charge to the funeral directors) in Scotland

Prices are rising everywhere. Sadly, rising prices are a common concern for everyone, with death being no exception. Coping with bereavement is one of the most difficult and distressing times in anyone's life, without the added burden of expensive funeral bills. I would expect every funeral director to talk through options and prices with the bereaved, in order to ensure the services they provide are tailored to the budget of the family.

Previous informal conversations about unpaid funeral bills with the National Association of Funeral Directors have actually focused on the adverse impact this can have on their members. It is therefore entirely in their interests to ensure that a family will be able to pay the funeral bill and nearly all offer a range of options and prices to encourage prompt payment of bills.

### **Questions Submitted by Tim Puntis - Age Project, LGBT Health and Wellbeing:**

**Q2. Is the Minister aware of the extra problems facing older LGBT people as they enter permanent residential care? Such problems include:**

- **meeting homophobia and an assumption of heterosexuality from staff and other residents,**
- **the pressures to return to the 'closet' on entering this living context, and**
- **the effective exclusion from participating in social activities which ignore the possible LGBT status of participants?**

A. We are aware of the issues facing older LGBT people. They are often less likely to have children and family support. This can often lead to peer pressure within the older community, from peers who have families, children and grandchildren. This puts pressure on LGBT people when asked about their families. Fears with having to "come out" again.

If the older LGBT person is in a care/residential home, these issues can be intensified and compounded. Many are apprehensive about going into a care home and back into a situation where they don't disclose their sexual orientation. Due to concerns regarding appropriate support and care from care workers who may have either no knowledge of the LGBT community or have prejudice against them. As such older LGBT people are less likely to access services for older people.

Additionally, older LGBT people may be less visible due to the fact that they have lived a great deal of their lives in times when homosexuality was a criminal act (it was only decriminalised in 1980).

### **Questions Submitted by Tim Puntis - Age Project, LGBT Health and Wellbeing:**

**Q3. What measures, in the opinion of the Minister would help to remove these barriers to the equality of LGBT people in situations of residential care?**

- A. I am aware of the LGBT Age Befriending Project run by the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing which offers a social activities programme in addition to befriending.

I am also aware of the LGBT Age Capacity Building Project which is funded through the Innovation Fund (part of the Change Fund for older people from the City of Edinburgh Council) which challenges stereotypes, raises awareness and provides outreach for older LGBT people.

**Question submitted by Dr Val Bissland - Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Strathclyde.)**

**Q4 Given that a recent BMA article stated that older people are less of a burden on health care than the popular media makes out, what plans has the minister to incentivise more people in later life to stay physically active? This has been shown to bring measurable physical and psychological benefits to health and wellbeing at all ages.”**

- A. We are developing a National Walking Strategy, to be launched in Spring 2014. The central aim is to create a walking culture to maximise the number of people using walking as a mode of transport and to get and stay active, together with promoting the preventative health benefits of walking. The strategy will address walking for all ages and abilities with a central premise of access for all. The strategy will link to our new Physical Activity Implementation Plan to be launched in December 2013 and will be a key component of delivering an Active legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Health Scotland are also leading on work to develop an Active and Healthy Ageing Action Plan for Scotland, which will be launched early in the new year. It will be closely aligned with the European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing, which has at its heart a goal to increase the number of healthy living years that we all enjoy by 2020 – after all, there is no point in everyone living longer if those longer years are filled with ill health; we must all try to be fit and healthy to enjoy our extended life expectancies.

The European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing is a flagship project of the European Commission, and at an awards ceremony in Brussels earlier this summer Scotland was one of only 3 regions in Europe to be awarded 6 stars in recognition of our innovative work on the Reshaping Care for Older People agenda, with several initiatives highlighted as being of significant benefit not just to the people of Scotland, but also to the whole of Europe:

In total, 32 cities and regions across Europe have been rewarded for new ways of helping older people. These award-winners have been implementing innovative technological, social or organisational solutions to enhance the efficiency of health and social care systems.

Star winners came from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden. The Netherlands and the UK. 13 Reference Sites have received three stars (with Scotland receiving two lots of three stars), 12 two stars and 7 one stars.

The British Journal of Sports Medicine last week, reported that taking up exercise in your 60s will help stave off major ill health and dementia. Its overall conclusions were that :-

“Sustained physical activity in older age is associated with improved overall health. Significant health benefits were even seen among participants who became physically active relatively late in life”).

**Question submitted by Mrs Helen Biggins - Seniors Together.**

**Q5. Seniors Together is concerned that many of the major energy companies are insisting on charging for paper bills and indeed are making it difficult for customers to opt out of the electronic route. This disproportionately affects many older people. We would like a commitment from Scottish Government that they will vigorously oppose this practise.**

A. We oppose any action which is not in the interests of consumer choice. Energy companies are currently able to pass on savings which result from reduced costs related to paperless billing to those customers who wish to use online billing however those who choose to continue receiving paper bills should not be charged for this service.

Ofgem have recently carried out a Retail Market Review looking at ways to make the energy market work better for all consumers, including older people.

As part of this review they have focussed on providing clearer information to ensure consumers receive accurate information which is relevant to them. The Scottish Government welcome the proposals for the Retail Market Review and will continue to monitor the energy market to ensure these reforms provide a simpler, clearer and fairer market for all consumers in our society.

My colleague Kenneth Gibson MSP lodged a motion on 15 November that the Parliament should support the Keep Me Posted (KMP) campaign, which recognises the issues caused by the increase of paperless services, and that access to information can be restrictive for people across Scotland, including many older and disabled people;

**Question submitted by Mrs Helen Biggins - Seniors Together.**

**Q6. Seniors Together understand that Scottish Government recognise that the voluntary sector currently provide essential services in health and social care, however we know that groups who provide services in this field are worried about their future funding. We feel that a commitment should be secured from health boards and local councils and we are therefore asking the Scottish Government to secure a commitment on our behalf, from all health boards and local councils that they will continue the present funding arrangements.**

A. To achieve the best outcomes, public services must work ever more closely together and in partnership with local communities – including the Third Sector,

which has an important role to play. We need to make sure that the Third Sector is properly resourced and properly included in planning and delivery, so that they can bring their unique contribution to bear.

We need to involve the Third Sector much earlier ideally from the commissioning stage, when we design the kinds of high quality, innovative and person centred public services that we all want to have in future. By the time a contract is advertised, the die is cast in terms of design. We are then forced down a competitive route rather than engaging in co-production.

The third sector has a role in the designing of interventions and approaches within a more collaborative and integrated environment, it is not merely a contractor. It's about co-production and the Agreement on Joint Working enshrines public bodies working with the third sector. Third Sector organisations are often more willing to take risks, working with groups and communities that are hard to reach; those who do not enjoy popular support; those with more complex needs; and in areas where service provision may present commercial risk.

Encourage public authorities to have the courage to take forward different ways of doing things - needs to be accompanied by confidence in the capability and sustainability of the Third Sector. This can lead to the innovative, individually tailored services and early interventions that we are keen to see developed, and which are essential to the delivery of our public services in future.

The work that is being carried out to enable us to identify practise around three year funding to third sector organisations is being undertaken with COSLA and the third sector, with considerable good will to find solutions being expressed.