



DECEMBER 2013

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a 'voice' for older people.

Welcome

The fourth newsletter from the Committee of the Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) focuses on aspects of the Assembly delivered on 5th December. It also signposts SOPA seminars planned in early 2014 across Scotland to gather views of participants.



SOPA Assembly 2013

Luck would have it that the Assembly fell on the very day when storms hit Central Scotland at the hour

causing severe road and rail chaos. Although many people found travel impossible, others were more fortunate, and 84 people out of a total of 193 expected, made it through the gales and rain to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC). However key people were trapped in traffic jams or were faced with cancelled trains - namely, SOPA Chair Tom Berney, MSP Shona Robinson, committee members primed to facilitate discussions and event host Garry Robertson (of 'Good Morning Scotland' fame).

Thankfully, waiting for their cue to start, were SOPA Vice Chair Liz O'Neill scheduled to speak on productive citizenship and Age Scotland's Brian Sloan to introduce his organisation's films, specially edited by the SOPA Committee for the event. So, the decision was reached to put together a morning programme. Edinburgh Council's Glenda Watt (SOPA Committee member and conference coordinator) handled the role of revising the event. The Assembly

was streamed live and a link to view the recordings will be available on the [SOPA web pages](#) in the new year.

Message from Chair Tom Berney



As I sat in a traffic jam with the hours passing, I was delighted to hear that the people who had reached the EICC on 5th December were not turned away. All involved

in rescheduling a revised programme at such short notice are to be congratulated for showing tremendous initiative in running the event in difficult circumstances for those who had arrived.

The thrust of my message would have been about the substantial progress SOPA has made over recent months influencing policymakers - quite remarkable really in today's political and economic climate. This month I was able to deliver this positive message in person to both the South Lanarkshire Older People's Assembly and the Scottish Seniors Alliance. It is important that SOPA's officers answer queries and concerns of our constituent organisations. Therefore, do not hesitate to ask if you would like us to attend one of your meetings. Remember our Assembly and Committee comprise delegates from the main organisations representing older adults' diverse interests. Communication amongst us all is vital if we are to present a strong front in our representations to the government. We also need to listen at 'grass roots' level, and to that end you will see in this newsletter an invitation to a **SOPA seminar near you**. Do come and make your voice heard. **See page 3 for details.**



**Message to the Assembly
from MSP Shona Robison,
Minister for the
Commonwealth Games and
Sport and Equality**

The full text of the prepared speech by the Minister will be [online](#), along with the written questions from SOPA Committee members and Shona Robison's responses.

Firstly Shona Robison referenced recent productive meetings between older people's groups and Ministers on issues such as reshaping care, integration and National Care standards. SOPA has been involved in discussions this year as care was the dominant issue at last year's Assembly. SOPA will continue to provide input to the care agenda.

She also drew attention to how the Scottish Government has actively ensured SOPA is signposted to the right people to find answers and that funding opportunities are made known. Strategic links with COSLA are also important so the older population can shape the services that affect them. Age Scotland and SOPA partnerships are also welcomed, as demonstrated clearly in this fifth Assembly. The Government look forward to hearing what Scottish older people have to say about welfare reform.

Written questions to the Minister covered the following topics:

- Guaranteed funding for the voluntary sector;
- Electronic-only billing by some energy companies;
- Greater encouragement and schemes to help people commit to becoming fitter;
- Creation of positive attitudes in care settings where LGBT people are accepted without prejudice;
- Capping funeral costs by local authorities.



During August and October, in New Lanark, Livingstone, Inverness and Glasgow, Age Scotland delivered regional assemblies. Attendees were invited to go on camera and voice their concerns on welfare reform or express their views on fulfilling and productive lives. From this film footage two films were created by the SOPA Committee to illustrate the Assembly 2013 themes and create a springboard for discussions. Chief executive Brian Sloan introduced these and explained their context.

**AGE SCOTLAND FILMS
from the Regional Assemblies**

MONEY MATTERS

The speakers' financial position in later life was clearly a priority. This ranged from very specific issues, such as the loss of a disability living allowance through having lived abroad, to being in receipt of a restricted retirement pension. Descriptions were of married women who had the option to pay the small insurance stamp in their earlier working lives, but without the long-term consequences being made explicit. They look set to lose out considerably when calculations are made within the new system due in 2016. [Click here](#) to view film.

PRODUCTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The importance of staying engaged with other people and being part of a community in later life was a recurring theme. It was acknowledged that the risk of loneliness and lack of purpose was ever present in modern society, and people should make the effort to find out what is on offer, and make things happen for self and others. Group activities, volunteering, fundraising, campaigning, new hobbies and friends add meaning and pleasure to later life, plus benefiting all generations, and enriching and enlivening the whole community. [Click here](#) to view film.

Productive Citizenship

Active, Engagedand Visible

Presentation by Vice Chair Liz O'Neill



Liz began by addressing ageist images of older people. These represent age as a stage of life seen by some as sedentary, passive, uninteresting, and

sometimes confusing, where people just muddle through. She said such images are subtle and harmful because they enter the subconscious and undermine a person's confidence. Also press reports emphasise the burden of an ageing population on services. So it is hardly surprising that many older people see themselves as 'a nuisance'.

Liz then asked how should older people challenge this stereotypical view? She referred to messages in the 'Productive Citizenship' film produced for the Assembly. In the film people spoke about meaningful social and community activities, being physically active, engaging the mind, and just getting on with things. For sure, the challenge must come from older people themselves - being active, engaged, and most importantly of all, visible.

"I don't want to think of myself "on an ageing journey". Certainly I'm getting older. And the words I want to link this to are - 'visibly', 'loudly', 'assertively'. I want to be a 'Grey Panther', a 'Silver Fox'. I want to be heard and listened to!

Older adults need to be seen to be active in their communities, in political decision-making and in the media, and they need to think of themselves in this positive light and assertively 'walk the talk'. Her final challenge to the audience was: let's hear from you about the barriers that hinder this process of transforming later life, so essential in today's society. A full (and humourous) text will be available [online](#).

Impact of Welfare Reform



Had the weather not intervened Bill Scott, Director of Policy, Inclusion Scotland, would have presented his account of the changes underway to reform the welfare system. Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

and the 'Bedroom Tax', are some of the changes that will undoubtedly impact on many older people. The Scottish and local government have set aside millions of pounds to mitigate the impact, and people will need to know where to turn if they are affected. These issues will be discussed in the SOPA seminars being organised for early next year to gather information from people on their concerns.

2014 SOPA SEMINARS on Welfare Reform

SOPA seminars will be run in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. The first seminar takes place in **Edinburgh on Thursday 16th January from 11 am till 1.30 pm in the City Chambers, High Street.**

Registration from 10.30 am.

To book a place in Edinburgh contact **Glenda Watt** whose contact information is on **page 4**. Glenda will be able to provide more precise facts about the locations and dates for the Glasgow and Aberdeen seminars after the festive season.

Bill Scott will present his talk on Welfare Reform and you will be invited to discuss, and then vote on the issues that need to be prioritised. The results will be conveyed to Scottish and Westminster Governments.

SOPA FILM for the 2013 Assembly 'Grandparents as Kinship Carers'

The film highlights the role of grandparents as kinship carers. In general, grandparents are recognised as playing supportive roles in the family, but their role as carers who take on full parental responsibilities is less widely understood. Neither are the financial implications and tremendous sacrifices of grandparents as kinship carers fully appreciated. The film was commissioned by Edinburgh Council for SOPA 2013 and made by Dr Val Bissland, University of Strathclyde.

Brian and Jackie are kinship carers. Brian has been looking after his son's two children for 7 years as the parents have addiction problems. He describes his fight for a kinship payment and how he withdrew his application for a residency order, although this would have given him similar rights to adoption. However it might have lost him the kinship payment. He also points out the anomaly that foster parents receive many more payments.

Jackie and her husband took on the role of carers 5 years ago when Jackie's daughter was struggling with addiction. She gave up her job and applied for a kinship payment. However she was unsuccessful because she had volunteered to care for her two grandchildren. Jackie receives child tax credit but this is less than she was earning. As they do not have a social worker this bars them from reapplying for any regular payment. Both families are supported by the charity [Circle](#). Circle strives to improve the lives of children and families in Scotland. [Click here](#) to view the film.



A voice for older
people in Scotland



Background to the Scottish Older People's Assembly

Committee members Brid Cullen and Dianna Wolfson are collaborating to trace the early development of SOPA. Brid has talked to those closely involved about their early recollections and about the role of the Older People's Consultative Forum. This body led to the creation of SOPA. Through studying the four Assembly reports (from 2009), she will clarify how SOPA set about delivering its objectives. Dianna is collating the material and drawing out SOPA's development and its impact on improving people's lives. This document will be online in due course as a SOPA archive.



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• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a collaborative way to promote concerns to the Scottish and Westminster Governments. The Assembly supports or challenges legislation and policies and their implementation which have a bearing on the quality of later life in Scotland.