

Press Release

29th October 2014

"SOPA exists to give a strong voice to older people about their concerns and experience," said Tom Berney, SOPA Chair. "To make sure we captured as wide a range of views as possible and reached people throughout Scotland we held a roadshow in 12 areas from Dumfries up to the Shetlands.

"We asked everyone the same question, 'If you had the chance to speak at the Scottish Older People's Assembly in the Scottish Parliament, what one action would you request to benefit older people in Scotland?'"

The issues raised at the grass roots will now be conveyed directly to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament for attention and action on Friday and Westminster in the near future.

Tom added that it was important that politicians and communities recognised the "longevity dividend" - the asset which older people bring to society and the contribution they make to their communities.

"That is why Shona Robison, the Minister for Pensioners' Rights, asked us to discuss and comment on possible future policies," he said. "While SOPA has appreciated the chance to be involved in policy development at its early stages, we're seeing and hearing that implementation is variable. In some areas implementation just does not match the policy intent and can conflict with other policies.

"The austerity backdrop for all public bodies is a difficult and stressful situation to manage so we all must work together to find the solutions, hence the need for older people to be involved in helping to create the policies that affect them and in reporting cases where they fail."

Cabinet Secretary for Pensioners' Rights, Shona Robison has attended SOPA committee meetings and she will speak at the Assembly on Friday.

She said: "Recognising and celebrating the contribution that older people make to our society is vitally important. In seeking to harness this and empower older people, we must do all we can to ensure their rights are fully protected, respected and realised. As a Government, we are committed to advancing the equality of all our people so that everyone has the opportunity to make the most of their talents.

"The Scottish Older People's Assembly is your voice in the Government and we will be engaging in an on-going dialogue with you going forward to ensure that everything you hold dear - the NHS, free personal care, your pensions, concessionary bus travel and the winter fuel allowance - continues to be part of the social fabric of a modern, inclusive Scotland and the social contract we enjoy with the people of Scotland."

FOCUS ON ACTION

Possible actions to come from the debate include:-

- investment in the care sector to ensure jobs are valued and paid at an appropriate rate which will result in improved quality of care for older people
- investment in intergenerational projects for the mutual benefit of older and younger generations - making full use of the 'longevity dividend'
- standardised and improved inspection of care homes
- focus on improvements for people with dementia from the LGBT community
- reduction in tax for pensioners and an increase in the state pension – this issue has to go to Westminster
- one stop access to information for older people is established in each local authority - including funding to encourage participation in the digital society
- simplification of required forms by use of Plain English
- proper use of the Power of Attorney

"There are many structures in place to deliver many of the suggested issues and actions raised by the older people we have spoken to but credibility gaps are evident," added Tom. "We see there is so much energy and resources going into trying to make life better for older people but people tell us that public and private bodies are often still falling short."

The Assembly will also examine the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. This aims to improve and strengthen the voices and involvement of people in developing and providing community services.

"This is exactly what SOPA has been doing," added Tom. "We welcome the Scottish Parliament's wish for the Assembly to contribute ideas towards the Bill and hope that the Act will explicitly benefit the older population and that funds will be allocated to support the legislation's implementation."

Detailed feedback from the local Scotland-wide meetings will be fed into the debate on Friday with suggested action points ensuring that:-

- The energy and engagement of older people at local level is harnessed through supporting good quality local news media - important in terms of democratic engagement in the community as it provides a key pathway to recruiting volunteers, supporting local campaigns and maintaining momentum.
- The Community Empowerment Bill (Scotland) encompasses Human Rights and Equalities legislation to create a new standard of democracy in Scotland which embraces the older population.
- Police Scotland implement explicit local measures to ensure that people feel safe with their carers, family and friends in their homes and communities.
- Certain housing maintenance and support arrangements are improved as they

are not adequate or suitable for certain older people, especially with particular disabilities.

- Care home and house planners and developers produce buildings that are designed appropriately and are affordable.
- Local older people's forums campaign and engage with the utility companies to reduce winter fuel costs, particularly in rural areas. Also for the Government to raise awareness among the older population of the Energy Assistance Package and the Warm Homes Fund to tackle fuel poverty.
- The Scottish Human Rights Commission speeds up the implementation of age discrimination legislation affecting later life this up so that the older population can experience immediate benefits from this extra legal protection.

Nine speakers will be introduced by Deputy Presiding Officer Elaine Smith, including keynote speakers SOPA Chair Tom Berney, Shona Robison MSP Cabinet Secretary for Commonwealth Games, Sports, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights and Kevin Stewart MSP.

The Action Plan will be announced at the end of the event, which finishes at 4pm. Feedback and further engagement throughout Scotland will be funded by a £10,000 award from the Big Lottery Fund.