



Alex Neil addresses 'myth' that older people are rich and vows to protect bus passes

OCTOBER 6TH, 2015 Janice Burns

CABINET Secretary Alex Neil insisted it was a “myth” that pensioners were better off than young people, and many were living in poverty.

The minister for social justice, communities and pensioners’ rights also highlighted that depression, not dementia, was the biggest problem facing many older people in Scotland, during a keynote speech at the seventh Scottish Older People’s Assembly (SOPA) yesterday.

Neil said the government was tackling fuel poverty through a £100 million investment and providing increased sheltered housing.

He also announced there was “categorically, unequivocally, not a cat in hell’s chance” the government would scrap concessionary travel, before concluding that SOPA was a “wonderful organisation that is making a massive contribution to older people in Scotland”. Alan Sidaway, from the National Pensioners Convention, asked about pension gender inequality and Neil responded by saying “women deserve the same level of pension as men”.

About 150 older people from the Highlands to the Borders gathered in the Scottish Parliament to voice their concerns on issues including housing and community safety, health and social care, retirement, and pensions and money matters.



SOPA Chair Tom Berney told the delegates their main aim was to “raise the profile of older people locally and nationally”.

The group has spent the past two years travelling around the country, from Orkney and Shetland to Dumfries and the Borders, and has met hundreds of older people in about 40 different towns, gathering information about what matters to them and how governments can help them achieve their goals.

Berney, 74, said: “Often older people are portrayed as a burden, when in reality they add tremendous value to our economy and society.

“We get a bit fed up because every time you

see a reference to older people, you see somebody doing aerobics in a care home or something like that. While there is the need for that, and looking after people in care homes is one of the key priorities, the fact is that 42 per cent of voluntary work in Scotland is done by people over 55.

“Also, 21 per cent of people over 65 are supporting their parents, 73 per cent of carers in Scotland are between 60 and 69. So when you talk about the cost of care, there are only about 30,000 people in care homes. The majority of care is older people looking after other older people.”



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