

Scottish Older People's Assembly Committee
Thursday 21 August 2014
Workshop by the Electoral Reform Society from 11.30 to 12.30
Committee Meeting from 13.00 – 15.30pm
The City of Edinburgh Council, City Chambers

Note of Meeting

Participants

Tom Berney	Chairperson & U3A Scotland
Glenda Watt	Co-ordinator & City of Edinburgh Council
Helen Biggins	Seniors Together South Lanarkshire
Val Bissland	Centre for Life Long Learning, University of Strathclyde
Alison Clyde	Generations Working Together
Rose Jackson	Scottish Trades Union Council
Diana Findlay	Borders Elder Voice
Donald Macleod	Highland Senior Citizens Network
Agnes McGroarty	Scottish Seniors Alliance
Bashir Malik	Interfaith Association
Jeanette Pieper	Scottish Pensioners Forum
Christine Wilson	Human Development Scotland
John White	Dumfries and Galloway Seniors Forum & Public Patient and Participation Forum
Betty Milton	A City for All Ages Advisory Group

In attendance

Shona Robison, MSP	Cabinet Minister for Commonwealth Games, Equalities and Pensioner Rights
Trevor Owen	Scottish Government
Ian Spencer	Scottish Government
Marjory Kenny	SOPA Communications Advisor

Apologies

Paul Adams	Age Scotland
Barbara Barnes	Alzheimer Scotland
Tim Puntis	LGBT Age
Rohini Sharma Joshi	Trust Housing Association
David Hamilton	Scottish Government, Equalities Unit
Mike Liddle	Scottish Government
Helen Reeves	Celebrate Age Network, Dundee
Alan Sidaway	National Pensioners Convention Scotland

Willie Sullivan, Director of the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) facilitated a workshop from 11.30 – 12.30pm. A note of the workshop is at Appendix 1 of this Note.

Shona Robison, MSP Cabinet Minister for Commonwealth Games, Equalities and Pensioner Rights

Ms Robison attended the Committee prior to its formal business to hear of SOPA's concerns on pensions.

Following presentation of the Age Scotland / SOPA film on 'Money Matters', Tom Berney emphasised the scourge of health inequalities, particularly for people aged 65 and over. He cited examples of many people dying in their late 50s or early 60s in deprived areas of Scotland while others living in affluent areas died 14-20 years after this age. Tom presented comparative information on pensions for people in Japan, Germany and Ireland stating that while they faced similar demographic pressure to reduce pensions as a percentage of earnings, they are still proportionately higher than in the UK. Committee members raised a number of further concerns about the new DWP pension arrangements.

The Cabinet Secretary gave information on how the Government would develop its pension arrangements for older people in an 'independent Scotland'. Detailed information is available online: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/09/3492>. This paper explains the benefits of independence for people of pensionable age and those approaching retirement (including a commitment to up rate the state pension by the triple lock, and to retain savings credit), and explains how saving for private pensions would be encouraged under independence. It also makes proposals for an independent commission on State Pension Age, and considers options for public service pensions under independence. The legislative and regulatory landscape is also set out, including plans for a Scottish Pensions Regulator.

Ms Robison paid tribute to SOPA and its work and said she would be pleased to meet with the Committee again after the Referendum and Ryder Cup and prior to the Assembly on 31 October 2014.

1. Chairperson's opening remarks

1.1 Tom welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Jeanette Piper who was recently elected Chairperson of the Scottish Pensioners Forum. Jeanette replaces Margaret Murdoch. Due to pressure of work, Brid Cullen has tendered her apologies and resignation. Tom also invited any member of the Committee to stand for the position of Vice Chairperson of SOPA. He requested that nominations be submitted to Glenda Watt by Monday 13th October 2014. If a number of nominations are received, Committee members will be invited to vote for their preferred candidate at the SOPA Committee meeting on 16 October 2014.

2. Draft Note of Meeting 19th June 2014 and Matters Arising

2.1 The Note of the last meeting was accepted and there were no Matters Arising

3. SOPA Workshop 4th July 2014 Draft Note

3.1 The Draft Note was accepted with no Matters Arising.

4. SOPA Communication Update

4.1 Marjory Kenny outlined her liaison with local media including radio stations. Excellent coverage had been given to SOPA meetings held in Dundee, Ayr and Penicuik. Facebook and Twitter are now operational and we seem to have some followers. Marjory urged Committee members to contact her to provide human interest stories and possible contacts. Future local meetings will be held in Glasgow on 29 August, Stirling on 22 September and Inverness on 25 September. All are welcome.

4.2 Val Bissland displayed the SOPA homepage live on the Internet and explained how to go direct from there to SOPA's Facebook, Twitter sites by clicking on the symbols there. She demonstrated that by logging in to the SOPA site a 'Members' Docs' page appears in the menu. The password to this page is the same for all Committee members and provides access to the uploaded draft Committee papers ahead of a meeting. All other pages do not require a password. If you missed the meeting on the 21st and would like the password, email Val direct at v.bissland@strath.ac.uk. She has also prepared an illustrated handout on logging in to scotopa.org.uk and downloading, which she can email to you. She drew attention to the Library webpage where all documents on the SOPA website are available to open, read or download, including previous Assembly reports and newsletters. Val is pleased to provide one-to-one assistance to any Committee member who would like some practice navigating web pages or other computer help. This could be organised on the day of our next Committee meeting, before, after or during the meeting. Please let Glenda or Val know what would be particularly useful for you, so we can make best use of time.

5. Draft Update of SOPA Programme for 31 October 2014.

5.1 Glenda Watt provided an update on the draft SOPA Programme to be held in the Scottish Parliament. Members approved the draft arrangements noting that further work will be undertaken to analyse responses from local meetings, prepare for discussions in the Parliament Committee Rooms, consider two facilitators for each meeting and try to encourage the attendance of MSPs. All Committee members were asked to contact their local MSP to encourage him / her to attend.

AOCB

SOPA has been notified of a conditional offer of £10k by the Big Lottery. The funds will be used to deliver local SOPA meetings. More information on this will follow.

Dates of future meetings

Thursday 16th October 2014 1.30 – 3.30 Waverley Court, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh

Thursday 11th December 2014 1.30 – 3.30. Waverley Court, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh

Appendix1

Workshop – Electoral Reform Society

Tom Berney welcomed everyone and set out the format for the workshop advising that after the presentation from The Electoral Reform Society (ERS), everyone would join in a discussion.

The Electoral Reform Society (ERS)

Willie Sullivan, (WS) Director described the work of ERS sharing the findings from ERS Scotland's Democracy Max inquiry and from the recent 'Centre to Community' event which discussed reclaiming local democracy. He asked SOPA to consider their relevance to older people and to provide feedback on whether the findings resonate with them. He also asked, if there are any different or additional recommendations SOPA would make to ensure the work of ERS Scotland is fully inclusive of older people.

WS described a declining trust and involvement in representative democracy, stating that trust for elites and experts is also low. The ERS has focused on 'What Future Scotland?' in terms of making democracy more inclusive and reactivating people. He explained that as they conducted their 'Democracy Max' investigation over a two year period, ERS found that a large number of social changes are driven by technology and especially 'information, storage, sharing and presentation'. WS further explained that ERS had found that the moves were leading to people moving away from what they classed as "Old Democracy": For example,

- Hierarchical and increasingly centralised
- Strong , single minded leaders
- Institutions separate from people
- Solely representative
- Fails to function without trust

People now wish to be seen as equals and want to have more control over the structures in society. ERS had formed a vision of what they deemed best

and worst case scenario for a new democracy. WS referenced the COSLA Report 'Reforming Local Government' as an example of good practice.

Worst would be;

- Maintenance of the old order
- Continued centralisation and hierarchy
- Populist –anti-politics
- Anxiety leads to authoritarianism
- State clamps down on emerging sites of dispersed power
- Social and political tribalism

Best could be;

- State evolves quickly
- Flattening and decentralisation
- Institutions and people fuse
- Empowerment leads to security
- State open up new spaces for engagement
- Social and political pluralism/cooperation

On putting this to SOPA, WS asked for the group's views.

A lively debate ensued and SOPA Committee members responded by explaining why they felt people were disinterested and disengaged. For example,

- Councillors are elected by the people but they don't seem to follow the election pledges;
- armed police on the streets is a big concern;
- loss of faith in councillors and councils perhaps due to confusion over the role of elected members and officers;
- The Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Groups seem to be a tick box exercise
- 32 local authorities appear to be implementing national policies in different ways. However, evidence suggests that locality working is taking hold in the Highlands and Islands.

WS concluded by saying that SOPA is representing a set of interests in the parliament and in policy consultations and in so doing is demonstrating the new type of democracy. He thanked the group for their time and discussion.