Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: **PE 1419**

**Main Petitioner:** Jimmy Deuchars

**Subject:** Scottish Minister for Older People

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create a dedicated Minister for Older People

**Background**

The petitioner is seeking the appointment of a Minister for Older People in Scotland. He argues that older people are becoming one of the largest groups in Scotland, many of whom are grandparents who provide financial support and childcare for their families. He also refers to a fear that if grandparents refuse to give support, they may be cut off from their families, which can lead to illness and poverty for older people.

The Petitioner says that a Minister for Older People could look at ways of keeping older people in connection with their families and society in general, in an effort to combat loneliness and depression. One method suggested is the introduction of family education/contact/mediation centres where families can keep in touch and disputes can be resolved through mediation.

**Statistics**

Latest available figures from GROS¹ show that the number of people of pensionable age² is projected to rise from 1.04 million in 2010 to 1.07 million in 2020, an increase of 3%. It is then projected to rise more rapidly, reaching 1.32 million in 2035, an increase of around 26% compared with 2010.

For comparison, the population of Scotland as a whole is projected to rise from 5.22m in 2010 to 5.49m in 2020, and continue to rise to 5.76m in 2035, an overall increase of 10%. The number of children under 16 are projected to increase from 0.91 million in 2010 to 0.96 million in 2020, and then decrease slightly to 0.94 million in 2035, an overall increase of 3% compared with 2010.

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¹ GROS (October 2011) [Projected population of Scotland (2010-based)]
² Pensionable age is 65 for men, 60 for women until 2010. Between 2010 and 2020 the pensionable age for women increases to 65. Between 2024 and 2026 the pensionable age for both men and women increases to 66, and changes again to 68 by 2046.
Scottish Government Action

The responsibility for older people falls within the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy, Nicola Sturgeon MSP. The Petitioner is aware of this, but argues there is a need for a portfolio that prioritises the needs of older people, and refers to the fact there is a Minister for Children and Young People.

In June 2011, Nicola Sturgeon made a keynote speech to the Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Awareness Week Conference, where she outlined that improved care for older people, with a specific focus on dementia, would be a personal priority in this parliamentary term3.

In March 2007, the previous Labour/Liberal Democrat administration, introduced a long term strategy on older people – ‘All our futures: Planning for a Scotland with an ageing population’. This was endorsed by the SNP administration and the main commitments in the strategy have been implemented:

- To set up the Scottish Centre for Intergenerational Practice – this is now known as Generations Working Together. Has been operating since 2007, initially sponsored by the Senior Studies Institute at Strathclyde University, then from April 2011 by the Scottish Mentoring Network.
- To set up the National Forum on Ageing – this has held a series of events each of which has led to a published report.
- A campaign to combat ageism and promote positive images of older people – The ‘See the person, not the age’ campaign ran in three phases, beginning in July 2008. It involved TV, radio and press advertising and public relations work with local authorities and voluntary organisations.
- A national stakeholder event at the end of 2007 - seven regional stakeholder events were held between November 2008 and June 2008. Around 900 people attended these events, and a range of organisations were involved. Workshops covered a range of issues including: lifelong learning opportunities; activities for older people including physical activity; volunteering and work; technology, health and wellbeing; pensions and savings; intergenerational activity and safety.

Other actions, taken forward since ‘All our futures’ include:

- The Scottish Older People’s Assembly – the purpose is to give a voice to older people in Scotland. It is organised by older people, for older people.
- Reshaping Care for Older People: A Programme for Change: 2011-2021 - aims to address the challenges of supporting and caring for older people over the next decade.

3 Scottish Government news release 6 June 2011 Care for older people is top priority.
Scottish Parliament Action

On 20 September 2006 the Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Parliament by Alex Neil MSP. The Bill was referred to the Communities Committee for consideration at Stage 1, although no timetable was proposed for the Bill. The purpose of the Bill was to create the office of the Commissioner for Older People in Scotland. It proposed that the remit of the Commissioner would be “to ensure that the rights and interests of older people aged 60 years or over are protected and promoted”. However the Communities Committee decided that, given its heavy workload, it was not in a position to conduct scrutiny of the Bill as part of its work programme in the time available before the end of the session and the Bill fell at dissolution of the Parliament on 2 April 2007.

Comparison across the UK

The UK Government does not have a dedicated Minister for Older People. However, a recent campaign by Anchor has petitioned for such a Minister, achieving 137,000 signatures, as well as the support of 20 organisations, including Age UK. The ‘Grey Pride’ campaigners presented the petition to 10 Downing Street on Monday 28th November 2011. A petition to the UK Government which achieves at least 100,000 signatures is eligible for debate in the House of Commons. However, Anchor are not calling for an additional Cabinet position to be created, they are calling for an existing Minister to have this responsibility.

The Older People’s Commissioner for Wales came into being on 21 April 2008. The Commissioner’s role is to ensure that the interests of older people in Wales are safeguarded and promoted. The Commissioner provides strategic leadership, acts as an ambassador and authority on older people’s issues and speaks on their behalf.

The first Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland was appointed in November 2011. The commission aims to voice the issues that concern older people.

Nicki Georghiou
Senior Research Specialist
13 March 2012

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4 Scottish Parliament 2006 Older People (Scotland) Bill
5 Anchor provides care services in the home and in residential settings in England.
6 Anchor. Personal communication. 9 March 2012.