

Cross-Party Group on Older People, Age & Ageing

Thursday 7th September 2023 1pm-2.30pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Jeremy Balfour - Convenor
Colin Smyth

Invited guests

Emma Agnew – Presenter
Karter Kane – Presenter

Non-MSP Group Members

Tilly Robinson-Miles – Food Train/Eat Well Age Well
Ingrid Fitzsimons – Outside the Box
Freya Young – Outside the Box
Diana Findley
Hetty Malcolm- Smith – SOPA
David Paterson - SOPA
Jo Savege – SASW
Ashley Martin – ROSPA
Brian Murphy – Fire Scotland
Elaine Thornton-Nicol – Scottish Borders Older People's Champion
Eileen Cawley - Scottish Pensioners Forum
Rose Jackson – Scottish Pensioners Forum
Kim Stringer – Vegetarians for Life
Alan Gow – Heriot Watt University
Ruairidh Smith – Generations Working Together
Elizabeth Friel – Carers Trust Scotland
Laura Wilson – RPS Scotland
Murdo McLeod – Church of Scotland
Pat Scrutton – Intergenerational Network
Susan Hunter – Befriending Networks
Sarah Murray – Royal Voluntary Service
Jennifer Forsyth – Obesity Action Scotland
Colin Scott – We are Hourglass
Barb Fraser – Luminare
Eve Young – Housing Options Scotland

Carolynn Malone – Housing Options Scotland
Arvind Salwan – Care Inspectorate
Mark Macdonald – Scottish Autism
Martin Robertson
Rebecca Hoffman – LGBT Health & Wellbeing
Sarah van Putten – Life Care Edinburgh
Jo McGilvray – Age Scotland

In attendance

Julia Shilitto – Senior Caseworker Jeremy Balfour MSP
Christine Ryder – Outside the Box (Secretariat)
Robert Mcgeachy – FSS
Jane Horne - FSS
Marta Tycinsk
Mehtar Staguftu – Playlist for Life
Ai Media Captions

Apologies

Katy Clark – MSP
Alexander Stewart MSP
Graham Galloway – Kirrie Connections
Anne Gallacher – Luminare
Elizabeth Lumsden – ROSPA
Michelle Riddock – Simeon Care
Iain Templeton – Partners in Advocacy
Sophie Bridger – Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland
Martha Pollard – University of Edinburgh
Ian Wallace – Irvine Seniors Forum
Bernadine Blair – Fire Scotland
Elizabeth Baikie – NHS Lothian
Prof Anne Hendry – IFIC Scotland
Rohini Sharma-Joshi – RJS Equality Consultancy
Leeanne McGurk – Dundee University
David Cavanagh – Salvation Army
Barbora Skarabela – University of Edinburgh
Dave Budd – Partners in Advocacy

Agenda item 1

Welcome

Jeremy Balfour MSP welcomed and thanked everyone for their attendance to this meeting.

Agenda item 2

Minutes 20th April 2023 meeting

Meeting minutes were agreed as accurate.

Agenda item 3

Matters Arising

Rose Jackson (Treasurer) informed the membership that the bank account has now been transferred to her. A decision on how we use the money will be agreed at the December meeting.

Agenda item 4

New Members

It was agreed that Food Standards Scotland, Playlist for Life, Life Care Edinburgh & Dr Chloe Fawns-Ritchie would be approved as members.

Agenda item 5

Presentations

Risks to, and vulnerabilities of older people to foodborne illness – Dr Emma Agnew, Senior Scientific Adviser, Team Leader of Foodborne Illness Control, Food Standards Scotland

Emma, started by explaining that Food Standards Scotland (FSS), is the public sector food body in Scotland who ensure any food items that are on our plates are safe and healthy by working with consumers and businesses to ensure that that is the case.

Emma explained that FSS is interested in the top foodborne illness pathogens that are of critical importance in the older population where high rates of campylobacter, listeria and norovirus are reported in the older age groups (65+) than in the rest of the Scottish population.

FSS work on a farm to fork approach to prevent transmission of these contaminants reaching the food chain along with colleagues down south at the Food Standards

Agency on a lot of projects and develop guidance and resources for businesses including an online tool.

FSS is particularly focused just now on the vulnerable population, this includes the over 65. We know that the over 65 population are higher risk for hospitalisation and sadly, death from foodborne illness. This is because organs and immune systems do change as we age including a reduction in the production of stomach acid. Underlying chronic conditions such as diabetes that can lead to increased risk of foodborne infections.

Physiological aspect that can put the older generation at higher risk to foodborne infection as our behaviours changing as we age. A study conducted by Cardiff University with 100 participants in the older age population looked at their behaviours including washing raw chicken meat, so we know that if you put raw chicken under a running tap, it can splash harmful bacteria all around kitchen surfaces, utensils yourself too, and then therefore make someone very sick. The study showed that up to 70% of these participants would actually do this. Reasons given for this include:

- It was passed down generations, so seeing mothers, grandmothers etc.
- Wanting to remove germs from these food products.

Other results showed that those living alone tend to have worse food handling practises than those living with others, this is sometimes linked to change in life circumstances in the older population. There can be a low motivation to prepare food and maybe they would serve food themselves that they maybe wouldn't necessarily serve to others.

Food Standards Scotland has taken all this data and analysis together to use the evidence to communicate the risk to the target audience that are most heavily affected. The average length of stay in hospital due to campylobacter infection massively increases in the over 65s, so we know there's a big risk in this age group and we know that the source of campylobacter infection and food is predominantly from chickens. FSS brought together experts to develop a campaign going forward where we had a stand in Morrisons where we handed out information leaflets about this campylobacter and recipe cards for chicken Curry.

The science team visited assisted living premises, we informed them about the risks and gave live demonstrations about how to use meat thermometers. FSS is also working with press and media and have started some community engagement which they are looking to further expand.

Another area of risk for the older population is not adhering to use by date labels on products. Products after that date can contain harmful bacteria that can make somebody sick. We know that many of the older population treat used by dates as a guide or maybe ignore it altogether. In the study by Cardiff University again out of the 100 participants, a huge proportion of them, 41%, had food past the used by date in

their fridge and a large proportion said that they would eat food past they used by date. 67% doubted the credibility of used by dates. When you delve deeper into the sort of reasons why use by dates are not taken so seriously people said:

- They didn't have these dates before or even fridges when they were little, and it was all fine. However, food products and manufacturing has massively changed now.
- Common sense 'I would never eat it if it was off '
- Wanting to avoid food waste, which we do see through the generations. If it doesn't look or smell bad, people would rather eat it than waste.
- But and this is a big one, 'I've eaten this before and it's not caused me a problem'.

Emma also spoke about listeria. Case numbers in Scotland are very low, but it's extremely severe if infection occurs, particularly in the vulnerable populations, those who are pregnant, those who have a weakened immune system and those 65 and over. Listeria can be found in some ready to eat products such as pie packed, cooked, sliced meats, blue cheese and smoked fish. FSS has recently updated our advice along with Food Standards Agency in relation to eating cold smoked and cured fish products for these higher risk consumers in accordance with the scientific evidence from our risk assessment. Our advice is to avoid these products as the risk increases with age. FSS is sharing information about Listeria and suggesting safer alternatives so that those at higher risk can still consume these products in a safe way.

Emma finished by asking the group from your experience, what do you find are the best routes to engage and seek feedback from older age groups? And to ask the members to help FSS raise awareness of foodborne illness risks amongst the over 65 population and to help disseminate some of the FSS resources on how to stay safe from food poisoning.

Discussion and Questions

The questions and discussion focussed on:

- Training or resources available not professionals, but people who are working with older people and food or old people themselves.
- Cost of living crisis where people are having to make difficult decisions and the work FSS are doing to help people difficult decisions about the public health challenges around and being exacerbated.
- How it is key that the messaging is proportionate in the sense that we're not telling people not to have something because that won't land well but giving options and also making sure all the messaging that goes out is received in the most appropriate way.
- Free REHIS training provided by the Food Train and Train the Trainers training from FSS.

Electrical Safety for vulnerable people winter campaign get priority services for the vulnerable – Karter Kane, Electrical Safety First

Karter started by explaining that Electrical Safety First are a UK wide charity that are dedicated to reducing the number of accidents, deaths and fires that happen due to electricity.

Karter then went on to speak about their campaign coming up over the winter which is calling for the introduction of regular electrical safety checks as a requirement for those on the priority services register. The priority services register currently includes a requirement for free gas safety checks annually for vulnerable groups including groups with children under 5, those who have reached state pension age, people with a disability or chronic illness and those who receive a means tested benefit. However, there's currently nothing in place for electrical safety checks.

A few of the reasons why it's important for this to be expanded out:

Due to the fire risk that's involved with electricity, electricity is one of the leading causes of fires in Scotland's home now, around 72%. People who are in vulnerable groups, can be more at risk if a fire does occur in the home. Over the last five years, around 61% of all accidental dwelling fire fatalities where people aged 60 and over, so it's important that we take the steps to act.

Currently in Scotland we have a difference between different tenures with regards to electrical safety requirements. In the private rented sector and social renting sector, there is currently a requirement for five yearly electrical safety checks, but there is nothing in place for the owner-occupied sector and that's concerning. The owner-occupied sector has a really large proportion of Scotland's older homes, and those homes may have older electrical installations which might be in a poorer state of repair. They also have a higher proportion of older people who would be more vulnerable if a fire would occur in the home. Many owner-occupied homes may be classed as asset rich but cash poor, so having a policy like this would help people in this group get an electrical safety check who may otherwise not be able to afford one.

The net zero transition to move away from gas in homes to electricity makes it even more important for electrical safety checks to be carried out. This will also help assess homes preparedness for the transition to net zero. Plus, there will be fewer requirements for the gas safety checks than currently taking place, therefore, those could be moved over to happen for electricity instead.

The campaign began with Electrical Safety First contacting the energy companies with some discussions taking place with them so far, we aim to continue these discussions with the aim to hopefully encourage them to voluntarily expand what

they currently offer for a vulnerable customer whilst also building stakeholder support.

Starting next week in Westminster with a 10-minute Rule bill which is asking for an option to amend the licencing conditions for the energy suppliers. The amendment will require them to provide a free electrical safety check to their vulnerable customers. This might take quite a while before it comes to fruition, so in the meantime, Electrical Safety First are always working on consumer awareness around electrical safety issues with different groups across Scotland and across the UK and have several resources available to share with groups. The campaign is in the very early stages at the moment but are looking to do a lot more on over the coming months.

Jeremy asked Karter to keep the members updated particularly what's happening in Scotland.

Brief history and remit of the Older Peoples Strategic Action Forum (OPSAF) – Eileen Cawley, Scottish Pensioners Forum & OPSAF Member

Eileen started by giving a brief history of how the Scottish Government engaged with older people's groups. During the Labour/Lib Dem administration, the direct link to government for national older people's organisations was through the Older People's Consultative Forum. From the 2007 election onwards, since the SNP government took control of Scotland's devolved legislature, no forum was reinstated until 2017. In 2009, a steering group of national older people's organisations continued to work together to bring about the inaugural Scottish Older People's Assembly, to be held yearly in the Scottish Parliament, with the expectation that this would evolve into an Older People's Parliament. The assembly was governed by a committee comprising of national older people's organisations across Scotland and met at least 5 times per year. Administration for the SOPA committee was first undertaken by Age Scotland and then two years later, by Edinburgh City Council.

Due to changes to the Scottish Government's funding conditions, the office bearers of SOPA took the decision to adopt charitable status (SCIO) and work as an organisation rather than merely having the responsibility for the assembly. This decision, which helped safeguard the assembly, then meant that there was now no independent direct link to government for other national older people's organisations and charities other than through another national organisation or charity.

In September 2016, the Scottish Pensioners' Forum contacted Jeanne Freeman MSP, the then Minister for Social Security and SNP spokesperson for older people, with three main aims: -

- To reinstate the Older People's Consultative Forum
- To introduce a Minister for Older People, Age and Ageing

- To ensure that the yearly SOPA assembly took place within the Scottish Parliament

Through a series of meetings between Jeanne Freeman and the Scottish Pensioners' Forum in mid 2017/early 2018, it was agreed that the Scottish Government would create the Older People's Strategic Action Forum, which would be chaired by the Scottish Government's spokesperson for older people. Membership to OPSAF would be limited to national organisations responsible for the care and welfare of older people and it was agreed that 3 meetings per year would be held. The SPF recommended that the initial members should be: -

Age Scotland, Faith in Older People, Food Train, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Generations Working Together, Hourglass Scotland, LGBT Age, Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP), Outside the Box, Scottish Ethnic Minority Older People's Forum, Scottish Older People's Assembly, Scottish Pensioners' Forum, Soroptimists International.

Eileen went on to explain the remit of OPSAF and how it would work in practice. After an initial meeting in November 2017, it was agreed: OPSAF would have two overarching aims:

- To provide a forum for dialogue between the Scottish Government and older people and their representative organisations (older people's organisations) on the range of issues facing older people, assisting Scottish Government to develop and implement effective solutions.
- To enable Scottish Government and older people's organisations to work together to support communities to take action to address issues of importance to older people.

The Group would be:

- A means to agree action to support communities to address the issues that they face.
- A means of communication and strengthening relationships between the Scottish Government and older people and their organisations.
- A source of experience-based advice for the Scottish Government on identifying and responding to older people's rights and interests.
- A vehicle to help develop and test policy / initiatives which affected older people.
- A means of providing feedback on the impact of policies on older people.
- The agenda for meetings would be shaped by the experience and views of older people, with issues given substantive consideration and a clear focus on what action could be taken to address those.
- The direct views of older people, gathered through representative structures would clearly be crucial. This will be supplemented by the views of those working with older people and statistical and other evidence.

- OPSAF would be chaired by the Minister with responsibility for older people's policy – the Minister for Social Security - who would invite other Ministers (or their officials) to attend where helpful to the work of the group.
- Officials from the Equality Unit would provide secretariat for the group.

After the tester meeting in November 2017, the first 'official' meeting of OPSAF took place on Wednesday 6th June 2018. In June 2018, a Minister for Equalities and Older People was appointed. In October 2018, funding was made available to members to allow them to carry out work to be fed into the A Fairer Scotland for Older People framework for action included in the Programme for Government. On 3rd April 2019, the framework was launched.

There were 3 meetings of OPSAF in 2019, chaired by the Minister Ms. McKelvie MSP and 5 specialist workshops on consultations and issues affecting older people including hate crime, local governance, older people and media representation, ageism and housing. The first meeting in 2020 was on 11th March. In the first few weeks of lockdown, the Minister used OPSAF as a means of securing emergency funding to be used to help communities and older people's organisations. Extra funding to combat loneliness and isolation was announced. Instead of the agreed 3 meetings per year, in 2020 there were 7 meetings and in 2021, 6. From these meetings, members were chosen to represent older people on representative boards dealing with covid emergency, human rights, loneliness and isolation, community engagement – each member reporting back to the wider membership at each session. Engagement and partnership working among members escalated.

Eileen finished by saying that a review of OPSAF is now being undertaken by the Older People's Unit with contribution and participation from members.

Discussion and Questions

The key points from the discussion and questions were:

- The importance of lived experience voices and boards feeding in directly rather than organisations speaking on their behalf.
- The Food train was suggested as a member of OPSAF but they have never been invited to any of the meetings.

Older People's Commissioner Scotland Bill – Colin Smyth MSP

Colin started by saying that the plan is to bring a proposal of Members bill to the Scottish Parliament for an Older Persons Commissioner. A Commissioner for older people isn't a new idea, many groups have been campaigning for this for several years. We have a children's Commissioner in every nation of the UK. They have Older Persons Commission in Wales, one in Northern Ireland, a big campaign for one in England and a strong case to have one in Scotland.

Colin explained that we have a growing older population, but too many of our older people are spending too long in their later years in poor health or in poverty. In fact, the Scottish Government's own figures show that one in six people in older age are in poverty, and that number is rising, we also know that older people face multiple forms of discrimination and are too often negatively stereotyped when we should be celebrating more the immense contribution they make to our communities. What really prompted Colin to bring forward this proposal was the COVID pandemic, when big decisions were being made that affected older people and the heartbreaking stories that he was receiving as an MSP at the time. In his view nobody was championing the human rights of older people, making sure their voice and their views were being listened to and that the issues that affect older people are high enough up the political agenda. A recent survey from Age Scotland showed that 88% of over 50s felt that decision makers weren't properly considering older people. We need to change that, and Colin believes an Older Person's Commissioner could play a key role in helping achieve that.

A Commissioner would mean that older people have someone independent of government looking across all government departments to ensure that the rights of older people are being fully considered and speaking out when they're not. The Commissioner would not be appointed by Government and would have real statutory power.

Colin very much supported having a named Minister for Older People and is disappointed that it has disappeared making that point in Parliament yesterday. A Commissioner is not an alternative because they're independent of government, it's also not designed to replace or duplicate work being carried out by many of the organisations who are doing some excellent work on a day-to-day basis. One of the clauses in the Bill is to place a duty on the Commissioner to always consult with organisations working with older people and those with direct living experience which will be one of the statutory requirements. The Commissioner would have several powers, including:

- The power to or a statute duty to raise awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Scotland and they need to safeguard them.
- To promote opportunities for and elimination of discrimination against older people in.
- Encourage best practise in the treatment of older people.
- Powers to carry out investigations into particular issues affecting older people for example to call witnesses published report, put forward recommendations to the government.

So far, Colin is pleased to say the consultation has had a lot of support from organisations and crucially lots of individuals. A recent poll showed, around 80% of over 50s back having a Commissioner in Scotland and 70% of young people

supported it too. And he thinks that's been reflected in the consultation responses so far.

In terms of where we are, the consultation is open until 23rd of October, extended from September. People can take part online or you can also receive copies of the survey and information and other formats by contacting Colins office.

Colin finished by saying that he is happy to come and speak to anyone about the proposals in detail, because he is keen that the consultation will shape any possible Bill that will hopefully come before Parliament hopefully early next year.

Discussion and Questions

The questions and discussion that followed centred on:

- How the Commissioner will be appointed and how they will ensure they are doing the job properly.
- Where the money will come from to pay for the Commissioner's office, when money is already stretched and what the impact will be on the grassroots organisation and groups.

Jeremy asked Colin to keep the membership updated with the progress of the consultation and the proposed Bill.

Agenda item 6

Discussion on how as a Cross Party Group we ensure the voices of older people are being heard across Government.

In light of what we have heard today, it was agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary to invite her or one of her Ministers to come along to our next meeting in December for a question-and-answer session.

Agenda item 7

AOCB

It was agreed that the meeting in December would be a hybrid meeting.

Next meeting will be on Thursday 7th December 2023. The meeting will be hybrid.