

SCOTTISH SENIORS



Campaigning for a better deal for older people since 1992

Newsletter of the Scottish Pensioners' Forum Issue 43/November 2016

SPF DEMO, UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

To mark United Nations International Day of Older Persons, the Scottish Pensioners' Forum, in collaboration with the STUC, held a demonstration of the Scottish Parliament on 29th September 2016.

With help from our members and affiliates, who also turned out to support us on the day, as well as

contributions from SPF Chair Rose Jackson, Davena Rankin, STUC Women's Committee and Bill Kydd MSP, who put through a Members Motion on our behalf (please see text box opposite), the event was a success and allowed us to put our message across on the many issues facing older

people in Scotland.

The theme of this year's UN International event was loneliness and isolation in

older people and Rose Jackson made reference to this by telling those in attendance that it was one of the biggest challenges facing society today, often caused by the breakdown of communities and social relationships which has seen



many older people being confined to their homes. Rose touched on the future campaigns being undertaken by the SPF but noted that this specific day was all about uniting in solidarity with older people from around the world to make their collective voices heard.

As well as the valued contribution made by Bill Kydd MSP on our behalf, over a dozen MSP's came out to meet with us and

to listen to our concerns. This has led to the opportunity for a series of meetings with

many of them in the very near future.

(Please visit our website for more on the day's events)



Members Motion S5M-01689 Tabled by Bill Kydd MSP for Glasgow Anniesland

That the Parliament notes that 1 October 2016 is the designated UN International Day of Older Persons; welcomes the opportunity to focus on the contribution that older people make to Scotland's economy and society at large; commends the work done by the Scottish Pensioners' Forum, which is the campaigning organisation for older people, with the support of the STUC, in giving voice to older people's concerns; recognises that the issue of loneliness and isolation is a priority for older people, and considers that the transition from working life into retirement can contribute to addressing this issue, alongside the agenda set by the Fair Work Convention.

JOINT MEETING WITH JEANE FREEMAN MSP, MINSITER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

On 6th September 2016, members of the SPF Executive Committee, along with members from the Scottish Seniors Alliance, met with Jeane Freeman MSP, Minister for Social Security, to discuss areas of concern to older people on behalf of their members.



During the discussion, Ms Freeman encouraged both the SPF and the SSA to hold, and attend, events in line with the Social Security consultation and that a written response to the consultation would also be welcomed from them.

Other issues for discussion at the meeting included the possibility of reinstating the Older

People's Consultative Forum which both organisations felt would provide a more direct mechanism for older people to liaise directly with government on issues of concern, a much strengthened Cross Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing, with more active representation from MSPs and the issue of fuel poverty, with an increase to the Winter Fuel Allowance without the need for means testing.

Ms. Freeman commended both organisations for the work that they do on behalf of older people and the meeting closed on the promise of further meetings once decisions had been made.

In a very open and frank meeting, Ms. Freeman indicated that she viewed the meeting as a starting point to ongoing discussions between both organisations and stated that she was keen to ensure that older people's voices were heard across government and that their contribution to society as a whole was recognised. Ms. Freeman remarked that she was keen to find a way of effectively bringing together all older people's organisations as cross Government responsibility for older people's issues formed part of her remit.

SPF GIVE EVIDENCE TO SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

On 22nd September 2016, the SPF, along with our colleagues at Age Scotland and Poverty Alliance, was called to give evidence to the Social Security Committee of the Scottish Parliament on the newly devolved powers.



Our Executive Committee member, John McAllion, once again represented the SPF at this session and a full report is available from the committee's webpage <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/social-security-committee.aspx>

Prior to the meeting the SPF were asked to put forward our views on the consultation in relation to areas of concern for older people and these were as follows: - (Cont'd)

SPF GIVE EVIDENCE TO SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

(Cont'd)

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum asks that the Scottish Government give consideration to the following points:-

Funeral Poverty

We urge the Scottish Government to consider introducing measures to help standardise funeral costs in Scotland to ensure that all people can have dignity in death, not just those who can afford the inflated costs being charged by some local authorities and private providers of funeral services. Recent research by Citizens Advice Scotland revealed that the cost of burials can vary by as much as £2091 between different council areas, while the cost of cremations can vary by up to £378 between different crematoriums. Several areas of Scotland have the highest rates for funeral costs across the UK. This inevitably places many people on lower incomes at risk from funeral poverty in order to bury their loved ones.

We hope the Scottish Government will ensure parity of burial and cremation costs across all of Scotland's local authority areas. We also request that in addition to more standardised measures being put in place, the Scottish Government ensures that funeral payments made to eligible parties will meet the real costs of a basic funeral.

Winter Fuel Payment

We would ask that the Scottish Government use its new legislative powers to help combat fuel poverty by making an annual supplementary payment to the current rate of Winter Fuel allowance until such time as its "Fuel Poverty" and "Warm Homes" targets are met.

The Winter Fuel Payment is the only universal benefit of those benefits now being devolved to Scotland. Given the current limited scope for increasing public spending, there will be some who will argue for a reprioritising of spending and for the targeting of available money on those who are in the greatest need. However, a resort to means-testing the Winter Fuel Payment would be counter-productive as it would waste scarce resources on unnecessary bureaucracy that only serves to stigmatise and to ensure that many of those in the greatest need do not take up the benefit. The pensioners' movement across Scotland and the UK remain opposed to any means-testing.

It would be a tragedy if the new social contract between the Scottish Government and the people of Scotland began with an attack on universal benefits and a resort to a reactionary and stigmatising system that cuts off the poorest from the rest of society.



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OUT AND ABOUT

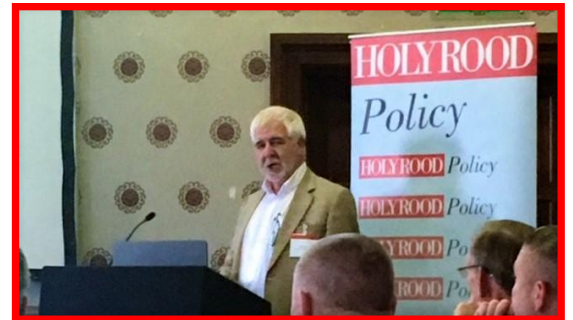


Since our last newsletter, the SPF has been in attendance at several events and conferences which have included Poverty Alliance seminars on the Social Security Bill as well as their 7th Annual Assembly on Tackling Poverty. We have also had our information stall at the STUC Black Workers' Conference in Falkirk and the STUC Women's Conference in Perth and we will be taking it to East Renfrewshire and Stirlingshire over the next few weeks.

Last month also seen the first meeting of the newly reformed Cross Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing where discussions focused on the new Social Security Bill and the work being carried out by Age Scotland and the STUC on dementia in the workplace.

You may also have heard us on the radio or seen us in the press as we are always being asked to make contributions on issues affecting older people.

As well as this, our Executive Committee member Brian Martin recently served as guest speaker at the Holyrood event on *Community Transport in Scotland: enabling preventative and accessible public services* with his contribution dealing with issues surrounding community transport in rural areas.



If you have any forthcoming events you would like us to attend with our information stall, please get in touch. We would be more than happy to come along.



The Scottish Pensioners Forum are always keen to hear about what our members are getting up to, so don't be shy, please get in touch. The more we know, the more we can help publicise your event and help get

you the recognition (and audience) you deserve for your hard work and effort. So whether it's an event in your local area or you are planning a campaign on a much larger scale we'd like to hear about what you're doing on behalf of older people.



If there is something you would like us to include in our next newsletter, for example a certain forthcoming event or a particular issue you are campaigning on, please get in touch with us to have your say