



SEPTEMBER 2014

**The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a 'voice' for older people.**

**Welcome**

This newsletter from the SOPA Committee will be the last before the Assembly in the Scottish Parliament on 31st October, and excitement is mounting. SOPA continues on the campaigning trail around Scotland and you can read stories from these on SOPA's [Facebook site](#).

**Message  
from Chair  
Tom Berney**



I am writing this just after the result of the *Independence* referendum. It was an exciting time and Scotland can be proud of the extent to which citizens became involved in both the debates and in the voting process. 97% of the electorate registered and 86% of them cast a vote. That is a level of participation which few if any other country has achieved. The hope now is that we can continue to maintain that level of interest on how our country is run.

For our part SOPA has been holding meetings all round Scotland to hear and promote the voices of the hundreds of older people who have attended. I have found them very rewarding. The discussions have been lively and even sometimes combative, but they have given us a great picture of the range of opinions and concerns of the people we represent.

We do not yet know what new powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but we will ensure that your voices will be heard in any new structure that emerges. To that end we were delighted that Shona Robison the Cabinet Secretary for Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights attended our August Committee meeting. We discussed proposed pensions reforms and I cited examples of higher pensions in other countries. Ms Robison commented on these and also responded to questions about health inequality, life expectancy and isolation. She thanked SOPA for our involvement in promoting older people's interests and we welcomed her intention to keep in contact with us.



Scenes at the Glasgow meeting

**Visit the SOPA website for the latest news at [www.scotopa.org.uk](http://www.scotopa.org.uk)  
Comment in the Guest Book.**

## SOPA Committee Workshop

### The Electoral Reform Society Scotland

**Electoral reform: a critical issue for SOPA to deepen its knowledge of democratic processes.**

SOPA's existence is testament to a new type of democracy - that of representing a specific set of interests to the policy makers and politicians in a reasoned and collective way. This was the view of speaker Willie Sullivan whose ERS Scotland team has been researching a vision of a good Scottish democracy. Their recent reports ([available to download](#)) provide evidence that people feel strongly that politics is too important to be left to politicians and requires involvement of people at grassroots level.

#### **Willie Sullivan, Director of the Electoral Reform Society Scotland (ERSS)**



The ERSS is the country's leading authority on elections, democracy and political power. The Director has worked at senior levels in the business, voluntary and public sectors.

After the presentation, participants debated reasons for political disengagement (See box below). Issues highlighted specifically were confusion over roles of elected council officers, elected councillors disregarding their election pledges, local authorities implementing national policies differently and Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Groups ineffective follow-up activity.

#### **View of the 'Old Democracy' - ruled by a political elite listening to experts with power and influence**

- Systems too hierarchical
- Centralised power dominant
- Remote, inflexible leadership
- Institutions losing sight of the people they are supposedly serving
- Lack of representation at grassroots
- Evaporation of trust in the political process and politicians



#### **A Campaign for Better Democracy**

The ERS poses important questions -

How well does our political system work?  
 What can be done to make it work better?  
 What values do we want to underpin our society? How can we ensure that they are built into political and civic structures to include, rather than exclude, the majority of the population.

#### **View of a 'New Democracy' - ruled by equals with more control over the structures of society**

- The State evolves quickly
- Flattening and de-centralisation
- Institutions and people fuse
- Empowerment leads to security
- Opening up of new spaces for public engagement
- Social and political cooperation

Public engagement was in evidence in the recent Scottish Independence debate with new spaces opening up at local public meetings, among friends and families, on television, the Internet and in social media. This momentum must not be lost as the politicians return to the business of governance. SOPA is at the forefront of this democratic and cooperative process of civic participation which is followed by government action.

ERS Scotland is keen to hear if there are any different or additional recommendations SOPA would make to ensure that older people's perspectives are taken into account in its vision of a new democracy. Email ideas to [Willie Sullivan](#).

## SOPA Committee Workshop

(Continued)



As reported in the Chair's message Shona Robison paid a visit to the SOPA meeting to discuss pensions. She is pleased to work with SOPA for action on issues of concern, some of which were raised in the short film [Money Matters](#) (SOPA and Age Scotland, 2013). Committee members also voiced a number of concerns about the new DWP arrangements from Whitehall.

### Recent changes to SOPA Committee

Brid Cullen (*National Forum on Older Volunteering*) has resigned, as had *Futures Forum's* Yvonne Coull (due to ill health).



Jeanette Piper (left),  
Chairperson,

*Scottish Pensioners Forum* replaces Margaret Murdoch.

Betty Milton (right) of Edinburgh's *City of All Ages Advisory Group* represents a new group on the Committee.



Similarly, Helen Reeves from *Celebrate Age Network* (Dundee) has joined after the successful SOPA Campaign in her city. We thank Brid, Yvonne and Margaret for their contributions to SOPA's development.

### Vice Chair Replacement:

Because of Liz O'Neill's resignation (due to ill health) SOPA is seeking nominations from within the existing Committee. Deadline for nominations - 13th October.

### Preventative Approach to Illness

Two written reports are now available on the [Health Scotland website](#) outlining different models. These are destined for the [Joint Improvement Team website](#) in a more user-friendly form.

## The SOPA Campaign Trail



On 22 September Clackmannanshire Provost Tina Murphy and SOPA chair Tom Berney (Right) welcomed over 50 people to the Stirling meeting. Left: Helena Scott, Executive Director of Action in Mind (formerly Head of Policy, Age Concern) and Glenda Watt, SOPA coordinator.

Read about events on SOPA's [Facebook](#) site.

13 June - South Lanarkshire Seniors Together, Hamilton

26 June, Fife Elderly Forum, Kirkcaldy

14 July, South Scotland groups, Dumfries

24 July, Celebrate Age Network, Dundee

7 August, South Ayrshire Seniors Forum

15 August, Extra Care Housing, Penicuik

29 August, various city groups, Glasgow

22 September, Action in Mind, Stirling



**Next venues are Inverness and Lerwick.**

See website [Events Page](#) for details or contact [Glenda Watt](#).

## The Mystery of Memory



Val Bissland gave a presentation in August to one of the latest groups to join SOPA - Edinburgh's *City of All Ages Advisory Group*.

Neuroscientists reckon we can store a million items in our long-term memory. So it is hardly surprising that we cannot always recall facts immediately as we age. Val drew on the work of various educators on healthy ageing, including Tony Buzan. Be inspired by his YouTube video "[Age-proof the Brain](#)" on how to keep the memory sharp and remain energetic and active throughout life. More information on [Val's BrainPower](#) website and see below.

A free guide from the Open University on how to keep your brain healthy and reduce dementia risk. [Click here](#).

### Summary:

Regular exercise - 30 minutes of daily walking.  
 Healthy diet - try a mediterranean diet.  
 Mental stimulation - do some daily brain boosting activities.  
 Avoid smoking - nicotine damages blood vessels in the brain.  
 Manage existing illnesses - diabetes especially.  
 Reduce stress - breathe deeply when you feel stressed, learn meditation techniques.  
 Be sociable - make a date with friends, volunteer, join a new activity club or keep in contact through telephone or social media.

**OpenLearn**

## Further details concerning Friday 31st October Assembly

### *The Voice and Experience of Older People*

200 places will be available for invited guests with additional seats in the public gallery of the debating chamber of the Scottish Parliament. Invitations will be issued shortly by the Deputy Presiding Officer Elaine Smith MSP.

The event will start at 11.30 with a welcome by Elaine Smith MSP followed by a presentation by Tom Berney of SOPA's activities. The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Bill](#) and what this means for the older population will be introduced by a politician. Then there will be a presentation by Shona Robinson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights.

Six Committee Room sessions in the afternoon will cover the themes below, followed by a return to the debating chamber for feedback, MSPs responses and a round-up of proceedings:

- \* Transport, Travel and Environment
- \* Pensions and Money Matters
- \* Health and Social Care
- \* Safety and Housing
- \* Community Empowerment
- \* Communication and Information

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A voice for older  
 people in Scotland



Scottish  
 Older  
 People's  
 Assembly

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a collaborative way to promote concerns to the Scottish and Westminster Governments. The Assembly supports or challenges legislation and policies and their implementation which have a bearing on the quality of later life in Scotland.