

A Commissioner for Older People in Scotland

Dementia does not discriminate between young and old, however Scottish Dementia Working Group and National Dementia Carers Action Network Members recognise that a significant number of people living with dementia, and dementia carers, are older. That's why we welcomed the opportunity to meet recently with Colin Smyth MSP, to find out more about his proposal to establish an independent commissioner to promote and safeguard the rights and interests of older people.

Colin outlined the background to his proposal explaining that support for an independent champion for people in later life is increasing, particularly as a result of the many challenges older people faced during the Covid pandemic. He advised that Wales and Northern Ireland already have commissioners and expressed concern that Scotland is in danger of falling behind when it comes to an independent advocate championing the interests and amplifying the voices of older people.



SDWG & NDCAN members with Colin Smyth MSP

The meeting heard about the way in which Children's Commissioners in the four nations of the UK have successfully championed the cause of children and considered how having a similar, independent, powerful voice speaking up for older people could help deliver change for them in Scotland. Colin explained that the role of the Commissioner would be.

- Raising awareness of the interests of older people in Scotland and of the need to safeguard those interests.
- Promoting the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against, older people in Scotland.
- Encouraging best practice in the treatment of older people in Scotland.
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law affecting the interests of older people in Scotland.
- Undertaking investigations into how service providers take account of the rights, interests, and views of older people in the decisions they take and the work they do



Colin advised that his proposal would include a legal duty on the Commissioner to consult regularly with organisations who work with older people, such as Alzheimer Scotland, in order to ensure that the issues they are taking forward are those that matter to older people.

Our members explored a range of issues in relation to the proposal including specific aspects of the role and functions of the Commissioner, particularly around conducting investigations and making recommendations; the cost of a Commissioner and the benefits and savings that could be derived from having one; the age of those that would fall within the remit of the Commissioner; the human rights challenges and issues faced by older people and carers; and, the appointment, term length and accountability of the Commissioner.

The discussion with Colin was extremely valuable in allowing our members to consider the proposal prior to responding to the consultation which is currently due to run until 12th September 2023. More information on the proposal is available on the [Scottish Parliament website](#).