

# Shona Robison has vowed to fight for fairness for senior citizens

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More than 200 older people and the organisations that represent them will join MSPs at the Scottish Parliament to look at how to tackle problems facing senior citizens.

Discussions at the sixth Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) will produce an action plan to influence and shape policy. Topics to be discussed will include assisted suicide for those facing incurable illness; greater investment in the care sector; reducing tax for pensioners; and increasing the state pension. The session will also look at standardising care homes; improving care for those

with dementia; encouraging the use of plain English; and helping the elderly master the internet.

The subjects have been raised during a Sopa review of the elderly across Scotland.

"SOPA exists to give a strong voice to older people about their concerns and experience," said chair Tom Berney. "To make sure we captured as wide a range of views as possible and reached people throughout Scotland, we held a roadshow in 12 areas from Dumfries up to the Shetlands.

"We asked everyone the same question: 'If you had the chance to speak at the Scottish Older People's Assembly in the Scottish Parliament, what one action would you request to benefit older people in Scotland?' "

The issues raised at the grassroots will be conveyed directly to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament today and to Westminster in the near future.

Mr Berney said: "There are many structures in place to deliver many of the suggested issues and actions raised by the older people we have spoken to, but credibility gaps are evident. We see there is so much energy and so many resources going into trying to make life better for older people, but people tell us that public and private bodies are often still falling short."

The Assembly will also examine the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill, which aims to improve and strengthen the voices and involvement of people in developing and providing community services. Pensioners' rights secretary Shona Robison, who will speak at today's gathering, said: "Recognising and celebrating the contribution older people make to society is vitally important. In seeking to harness this and empower older people, we must do all we can to ensure their rights are fully protected, respected and realised. As a government, we are committed to advancing equality of all our people so that everyone has the opportunity to make the most of their talents."

And she had a message for older people: **"SOPA is your voice in the government and we will be engaging in an ongoing dialogue with you going forward to ensure that everything you hold dear – the NHS, free personal care, your pensions, concessionary bus travel and the winter fuel allowance – continues to be part of the social fabric of a modern, inclusive Scotland."**

Picture: John Devlin

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