

Report of the Meeting with Christina McKelvie-Minister for Older People 21st August 2018

We had several issues we wished to discuss with her, including Fuel and Funeral Poverty, Housing, Health and Social Care, NHS Health Boards, Concessionary Travel, Loneliness and Isolation and Pensions.

We presented the Minister and her Secretariat with copies of our Organisational Profile which explained our origin and the fact that we were a campaigning organisation. In response to our statements, she replied that many people who went to food banks asked for cold food since they couldn't afford to heat up meals. However, there is a fund, "Social Responsibility Money" that comes from the Energy Companies and people can be referred to this from Food Banks, Social Workers, Citizens Advice Bureaus, Age Concern and can receive Energy Advice and "credit vouchers" for £49 at a maximum of 3 times per year from the "Energy Action Trust"?

On funeral poverty, we stated that at present the maximum grant from the DWP for those on benefits was £1400, yet the average funeral cost is now £3,716. We hoped that the Funeral Expense Assistance level from the Scottish Government would be set at a level which reflects the real cost of saying goodbye. She responded that the Scottish Government had launched its Consultation in Glasgow on 17th August, asking people and organisations what they think this level of assistance should be. We also expressed our concern that prepaid Funeral Plans are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and I got the impression that she wasn't aware of this, though I could be wrong.

The issue of Health and Social Care was briefly discussed with us expressing concern about the amount of time carers had to spend with an individual elderly person and the issue of wage level of carers. She replied that carers are now paid the Scottish Living Wage, which is £9.40 an hour. We also stated that we wanted to have an elderly representative on all Area Health Boards.

Housing was also raised, and she informed us of a project between Stirling University and Clackmannanshire Council about setting up an Intergenerational Village. Also, in Blantyre, her own constituency, they are building a bespoke facility covering 1. Long Term Care, 2. Intermediate Care and 3. Re-enablement Care. She will also send us details of the proposals from Kevin Stewart, Housing Minister, on dealing with homelessness.

We stated that we were pleased that the Transport Minister had agreed to keep the concessionary travel pass at age 60, but we would continue to campaign for this to be extended to rail and ferry travel. We pointed out that many people cannot take advantage of this since there are no bus services available, particularly in rural areas, or the service is withdrawn in the evenings. This contributes to the feeling of Isolation and Loneliness experienced by many elderly people. We suggested that it is time to consider the reregulation of buses, and that the railway service should be brought into public ownership. The Minister did say that the issue of railways is being looked at.

With regards to State pensions, we know that this is a Westminster issue, but asked that the Scottish Government support our aim of a "Living Pension" and raise this matter with Westminster Representatives whenever there is an opportunity to do so. The Minister said that she had supported the campaign by the WASPI Women.

Maureen Gardner