



Policy Position Paper

Commissioner for Older People in Scotland

Scotland

February 2026

Re-engage supports the establishment of a Commissioner for Older People in Scotland. This role would ensure that the rights, needs, and voices of older people are heard at the highest levels of decision-making, helping to address issues of loneliness, social isolation, and ageism.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill was introduced by Colin Smyth MSP on 2 April 2025.¹ A call for views was extended, to which Re-engage responded in support of the introduction of a Commissioner for Older People in Scotland.
- 1.2 The Scottish landscape requires safeguards are put in place to ensure the voices of older people are listened to and amplified, ensuring that issues such as loneliness, social isolation and ageing are not only heard but acted upon.
 - 1.2.1 Scotland is an ageing population, the number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by over 300,000 over the next 25 years, whilst the number of children and young adults is projected to fall.² In 2023 20.1% of the Scottish population was aged 65+ (over one million). This is a quarter of a million higher than the number of people under 15.³
 - 1.2.2 When people reach retirement age, they are more likely to live in rural areas, and over a quarter (26%) of people aged 65+ live in remote rural areas.⁴
- 1.3 At Re-engage we believe establishing an independent Commissioner for Older People will provide a voice at the highest levels of decision making for a demographic that largely feel their voice is ignored. Offering a vital opportunity to engage with older people across Scotland, and demonstrate, through action, that the government is genuinely committed to hearing and valuing the perspectives of older people across demographic landscapes.
 - 1.3.1 Last winter, we ran a consultation that provided older people with the opportunity to share the issues that matter most to them and highlight where they believe government action is needed. There was a sense among respondents that the government does not consider the needs of older people in decision making, nor care about the disproportionately negative impacts some policies may have.
 - 1.3.2 As an organisation we would welcome a Commissioner taking on a strong advocacy role on behalf of older people and working with us and others to drive meaningful change that reflect the lived experience of older people in Scotland. Having a central contact would enable smooth collaboration between government, charities, and communities.
- 1.4 A Commissioner for Older People would send a clear and powerful message that older people must have equal rights in society, with their contributions recognised and their needs supported. Appointing a Commissioner for Older People would demonstrate a strong and tangible commitment to valuing older people - not just in

words, but through meaningful action. We believe it would be a transformative step towards a fairer, more inclusive Scotland.

1.4.1 In 2024 Re-engage signed an open letter written by Age UK in support of the creation of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, the creation of a Commissioner for Older People aligns with the same mission, working towards the following:

1.4.1.1 Combat age discrimination and ageism

1.4.1.2 Ensure access to healthcare, social care, and other essential services

1.4.1.3 Protect older people from violence, abuse and neglect

1.4.1.4 Safeguard the right to work and financial security in older age

1.4.1.5 Promote the active participation of older people in society

1.5 The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is a successful case study, demonstrating why it is valuable to have a Commissioner independent of Government. Being a fully independent role, the Commissioner has been able to: critically assess public services without political interference; speak directly to the concerns of older people without being constrained by government priorities and push for systemic change in areas like ageism, digital exclusion, and safeguarding.

1.5.1 Independence is essential for the Commissioner to serve as a strong and impartial advocate for older people. To build trust and meaningful engagement, it is important that the Commissioner is seen by older people as free from political influence, particularly among those who have lost faith in government.

1.5.2 In order to build trust with older people, it is vital to have a trusted, independent voice, someone who can hold public bodies and decision-makers to account without bias or favour.

2. Our statement

2.1 At Re-engage, we work with thousands of older people who face loneliness and social isolation. Our consultations have found a strong perception among older people (75+) that government policies do not reflect their needs and, in some cases, cause disproportionate harm. We believe that appointing a Commissioner for Older People in Scotland is essential to amplify their voices, and promote their rights.

2.2 The Commissioner could rebuild trust between older people and government, serve as a visible advocate, and enhance collaboration between public bodies, charities, and communities. This role would send a powerful message that older people are valued and deserve to be treated as equal rights holders. It aligns with global efforts like the proposed UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, aiming to combat ageism, ensure access to services, prevent abuse, protect financial security, and promote participation in society.

3. Implications and recommendations

3.1 The Commissioner for Older People in Scotland should play a distinct and complementary role within the wider landscape. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

3.1.1 The Commissioner's remit should be explicitly focused on the rights, wellbeing, and lived experiences of older people. By placing an emphasis on areas such as loneliness, social isolation, social connection, ageism, digital exclusion, access to services, the built environment and social participation, the Commissioner will add unique value, different from other bodies.

- 3.1.2 The Commissioner should work closely in partnership with existing bodies and organisations (including the third-sector) who actively consult and co-produce work with older people, to ensure efforts are complementary rather than duplicative and are shaped by the real needs and experiences of older people, ensuring more targeted and meaningful impact.
- 3.1.3 Rather than focusing on individual issues or sector-specific concerns, the Commissioner for Older People can focus on systemic and long-term impact, with a focus on shaping policy and influence culture – creating meaningful change for older people.
- 3.2 To ensure meaningful impact, we believe that the Commissioner for Older People in Scotland should:
 - 3.2.1 Operate as an independent office, free from political influence, to act as a strong, independent voice for those who cannot advocate for themselves.
 - 3.2.2 Prioritise systemic issues such as loneliness, social isolation, ageism, digital exclusion, and access to services.
 - 3.2.3 Engage directly with older people across Scotland, including those in remote or rural areas and those without digital access.
 - 3.2.4 Use an age range which acknowledges ageing challenges can emerge at different points, whilst applying a nuanced, non-uniform approach to reflect the diversity of older people’s experiences. In particular acknowledging the depth of adversity faced by those aged 75 and over.

References

- ¹Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill (The Scottish Parliament, [2025](#))
- ²Projected Population of Scotland: 2022-based (National records of Scotland, [2025](#))
- ³Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends (National Records of Scotland, [2023](#))
- ⁴Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021 (Scottish Government national statistics, [2021](#))

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