

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.

What is a commissioner?

Commissioners are “usually created to give under-represented groups a voice”, and function independently of the government, allowing the ability to hold the government to account.¹

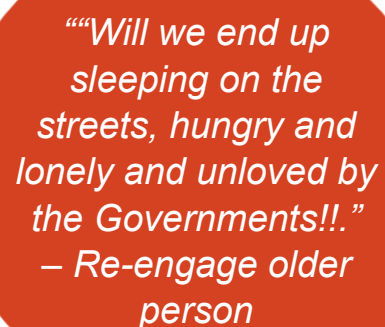
Commissioners are generally appointed by the Scottish Parliament for a set time period (usually 3-5 years), usually with rules about how many terms they can serve as commissioner. The roles and responsibilities of commissioners are generally set out in the law, and their power can vary.¹

Our statement

Re-engage supports thousands of older people who face loneliness and social isolation. Many of them feel that government decisions do not reflect their needs and in some cases cause harm.

We believe that creating a Commissioner for Older People in Scotland is essential to: amplify the voices of older people; protect older people’s rights; rebuild trust between older people and the government; improve cooperation between services, charities, and communities.

This role would send a powerful message that older people are valued, respected and have equal rights.



““Will we end up sleeping on the streets, hungry and lonely and unloved by the Governments!!.”
– Re-engage older person


Background

A new Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in April 2025 by Colin Smyth MSP. Re-engage responded in strong support of this proposal.

Consultations at Re-engage have revealed older people often feel their voices are ignored in decision making. As an organisation we would welcome a Commissioner who will:

- Give older people a strong, independent voice in government;
- Help make sure policies reflect the real-life experiences and needs of older people;
- Work with charities, communities, and government to create meaningful change;
- Commit to hearing and valuing diverse perspectives of older people.

Appointing a Commissioner for Older People would show a clear commitment to treating older people equally, recognising their contributions, and taking real action to support their needs.

A red speech bubble containing a quote.

*“Stop punishing the pensioners”
– Re-engage older person*



20.1%

Of the Scottish population is aged 65+. This is over a quarter of a million higher than the number of people under 15.²

26%

Of people aged 65+ in Scotland live in remote rural areas.³

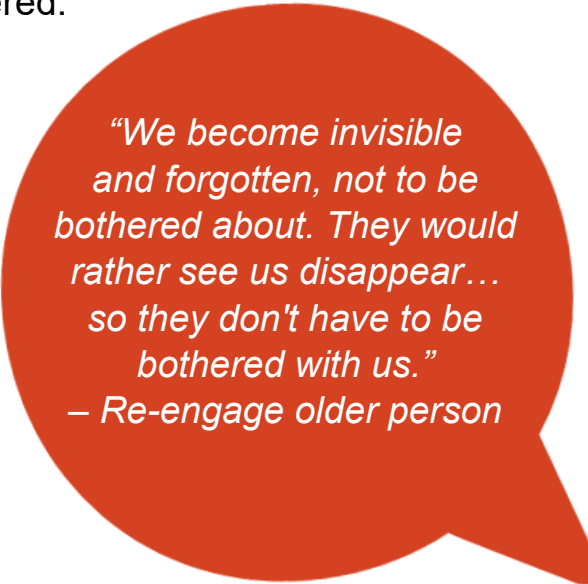
Implications and recommendations

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

- Focuses specifically on the rights, wellbeing, and lived experiences of older people, tackling key issues like loneliness, isolation, ageism, digital exclusion, access to services, the built environment and social participation.
- Works in partnership with existing organisations who actively consult and co-produce work with older people, avoiding duplication and ensure work is guided by the real needs and experiences of older people.
- Focuses on long-term, systemic change and long-term impact, by focusing on shaping policy and influencing culture.

To ensure meaningful impact, we believe that the Commissioner for Older People in Scotland should:

- Operate independently, free from political influence, to act as a strong unconstrained voice for older people.
- Prioritise systemic issues such as loneliness, social isolation, ageism, digital exclusion, and access to services.
- Engage directly with older people across Scotland, including those in remote or rural areas and those without digital access.
- Acknowledging the depth of adversity faced by those aged 75 and over within the age range covered.

A large orange speech bubble containing a quote in white italicized text.

“We become invisible and forgotten, not to be bothered about. They would rather see us disappear... so they don't have to be bothered with us.”
– Re-engage older person

Want to find out more?

Re-engage has policy statements on a wide range of public issues. You can read our policy papers here:

www.reengage.org.uk/policypositions

References

¹ Commissions and commissioners: final report (Scottish Government, [2023](#))

² Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends (National Records of Scotland, [2023](#))

³ Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021 (Scottish Government national statistics, [2021](#))

Published: February 2026

Next review: February 2027