

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture and Facilities****Council: 26 May 2021**

Subject: Older People's Champion**1 Purpose**

- 1.1** The report responds to a request from the Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) and Age Scotland for all local authorities in Scotland to consider appointing an Elected Member to serve as an Older People's Champion.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended members:
- Note the contents of the report
 - Appoint an Equalities Champion representing all disadvantaged groups and incorporating the remit of the Older People's Champion

3 Background

- 3.1** The Scottish Government, Age Scotland and SOPA define older people as those aged 50 and above in terms of policy.

- 3.2** Age is one of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, and in regard to which we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunities
- Foster good relations between different groups

- 3.3** The Council's Equality Statement notes that:

'Everyone has 'protected characteristics', but it is the treatment individuals and groups receive, the level of autonomy they have, and the positive or negative outcomes for them, that are its focus.'

- 3.4** The request from SOPA/Age Scotland states:

'Older People's Champions are councillors who act as a link between the Council and older people in the local area. Their responsibilities include ensuring older people's perspectives are understood in every policy area, feeding back concerns to the Council, leading on Council campaigns around older people's issues and helping to communicate Council policy to older people and the wider community . As the role is apolitical with a focus on representing the views of local older people, any councillor can take up post.'

- 3.5** To date a minority of Local Authorities including Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Dundee City have appointed an Older People's Champion.
- 3.6** The Council's Equality and Diversity Working Group (EDWG) has a broad equalities remit, with a focus on meeting the needs of and minimising disadvantage experienced by people due to their protected characteristics. Protected characteristics include age; disability; gender reassignment, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation. The EDWG is chaired by Councillor Caroline McAllister.

4 Main Issues

- 4.1** Nine Councils have Champions in place. Arrangements vary with the portfolio being added to Equalities Champions' in some instances, and a dedicated Older People's Champion in others. Some Councils have more than one Champion, for example Scottish Borders has an Equalities, Children and Young People's and Older People's Champion who is also the Champion for the Deaf Community.
- 4.2** It is acknowledged that there are a breadth of protected characteristics, and further challenges presented to these disadvantaged groups as a result of Covid. It is therefore recommended that rather than focus on one single equality group – older people in this case – it would be advisable to appoint an Equalities Champion to represent all disadvantaged groups. The post holder would still undertake the remit of the Older People's Champion as outlined by Age Scotland and SOPA, as well as the wider portfolio. This would ensure equity, and also avert queries or potential criticism as to why the Council has focused on one single equality group.
- 4.3** It would be for elected members to put forward nominations for the role, which could be from any political party, and agree the appointment at Council. Thereafter the report and confirmation of the portfolio holder could be remitted to the EDWG for information.
- 4.4** The Council can provide suitable training and learning opportunities alongside second tier advice to the new portfolio holder.

5 People Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct people implications resulting directly from this report.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

- 6.1** There are no direct financial or procurement implications associated with this report.

7 Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There is no legal obligation to have Older People's Champions in place. That said, there is a risk that if the Council does not appoint an Equalities or Older

People's Champion then it could face criticism from the Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) and Age Scotland. Similarly a view could be taken by some local residents that this suggested the Council was not committed to supporting those defined as Older People.

7.2 There is a risk that if an Older People's Champion was appointed it would give the appearance that the Council prioritised Older People above other protected characteristics. There is a subsequent risk that further 'Champion' appointments would be required, with further reports to Council needed on each occasion. An Equalities Champion would be able to represent and act in the interests of all residents with protected characteristics.

7.3 Failure to have a coherent approach to equality supported by strong leadership would undermine the efforts to reduce inequalities and to 'build back better', and recover from the effects of the pandemic in West Dunbartonshire. The Council's approach to Equality is detailed in our published 2017-21 Mainstreaming Report, and draft 2021-25 Mainstreaming Report.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 The proposals are relevant to equalities and an Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is appended to this report..

9 Consultation

9.1 This is an opportunity to advance community engagement and empowerment on an issue of importance to communities and the Council.

10 Strategic Assessment

10.1 The proposals within this report support all the Council's Strategic Priorities with the following one's in particular:

- Supported individuals, families and carers living independently and with dignity;
- Meaningful engagement with active, empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged; and
- Open, accountable & accessible local government.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Champions Role Descriptor from
SOPA/Age Concern
Appendix 2: EIA

Background Papers:

None

Wards Affected:

All wards