



**SDLP RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION TO
ESTABLISH AN OFFICE FOR A COMMISSIONER
FOR OLDER PEOPLE.**

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A Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland

The SDLP welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation to establish an Office of a Commissioner for Older People. The SDLP agree that an Older People's Commissioner is needed in order to safeguard and promote the interests of older people.

The SDLP believes that the Commissioner for Older People should take account of The UN Principles of independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment, and dignity when deciding how to act in the best interests of older people.

The SDLP feel that the Commissioner should serve those in society over 60 primarily, however the Commissioner may intervene at his/her discretion to help those who are 50 and over. While 60 should be common practice, this age may be subject to change through legislation.

The idea of having a principal aim and a paramount consideration is something that would strength the role of the Commissioner. At all times the Commissioner should act with the best interests of older citizens at the forefront of the decision making progress.

The SDLP agrees that the duties of the Commissioner should be wide ranging. The emphases of the duties are two fold, firstly to make older people aware of the position of the Commissioner, with a view to encourage engagement between the two. Secondly, that the Commissioner must always act to safeguard the position of older people, continually review the law and legislation and how this affects older people. The Commissioner should have significant powers so that they can take on the role seriously and make an impact on the lives of older people.

The additional powers of review, complaint and formal investigation in relation to organisations and relevant authorities are important for the Commissioner's ability to scrutinise. These relevant authorities will include government departments, district councils and other commonly known public bodies. The SDLP regard this as a necessary power because they provide the Commissioner with the opportunity to see how the interests of older people are represented in an organisation, how complaints by older people are treated and how the organisation responds when it is informed about something that could be affecting the interests of older people.

Due to the powers and duties attributed to the role of Commissioner the SDLP want to ensure the position is supported by a realistic budget with a ring fenced operational budget attached.

In conclusion the SDLP are strongly committed to the establishment for a Commissioner for Older People and are disappointed in the delays in doing so. The party wants to ensure that the financial restrictions that are being applied to 2010/11 departmental budgets should not be used as an excuse to pull back on the commitment to provide a commissioner for older people.