

Ensuring older folk don't come to harm.....

As we age many of us will enjoy living in a safe environment with care and support from loved ones and also if needed from other agencies such as local authorities or private care companies. Certainly as I contemplate my own later years I know I have a supportive network of family and friends close by.

But not everyone is so lucky – and sadly a proportion of older people in Scotland may not have a support system round them – and even worse than that they may be at risk of harm from others in contact with them. Some also may be at risk from their own actions perhaps as an illness such as dementia progresses giving rise to dangerous behaviours. So for lots of reasons, maybe a dysfunctional family, maybe illness or disability, a number of our older population may need help, support or protection from outside agencies.

The good news is there is in place a multi faceted legal framework in Scotland designed to protect those vulnerable people. Just one part of that framework is covered by one Act of the Scottish Parliament - the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. This act puts in place a protection regime for “adults at risk” – that is those adults who are unable to safeguard their own well being, or are at risk of harm or are affected by illness or disability so as to make them vulnerable to harm.

Basically this act places a duty on local authorities to investigate cases where it may be the case that harm could come to an adult at risk. Various extra powers are given to authorities – such as a right to take entry – to ensure that proper investigations can take place. Thereafter there are powers which can be used in a practical way to ensure the harm does not occur – such as powers to remove an adult from a place where he or she may come to harm – and powers to ban alleged abusers from being with the adult at risk.

To help ensure all relevant agencies are involved the act imposes an obligation on various organisations such as the police, health boards and local authorities to cooperate on matters related to adult protection. At a local level the council must establish an adult protection committee – which is multi disciplinary – to provide an overview of adult protection in that council area.

In short – the Act tries to ensure a “joined up” approach to the difficult and sometimes harrowing issue of vulnerable adults coming to harm for whatever reason.

Anyone can bring to a council's attention the possibility of someone being harmed. Even anonymous reports will be investigated and to make a report you don't need to have an involvement with, or be related to the person you think may be at risk.

I actually can't think of any older person I know personally who may be at risk of harm. I can think of two very frail older people I know well who could come to harm, but they are both well looked after. However – who knows what the future may bring – and even just writing this short article does bring home to me that we all have a

duty to look after older people. If any reader has any worries about an older person – there is a system in place which is designed for all of us to use to reduce harm. We shouldn't be shy about using the system – after all it only needs one phone call.