

By Brian Wheeler *Political reporter, BBC Scotlandshire News*



Retired people should be encouraged to do community work such as caring for the "very old" or face losing some of their pension, a peer has suggested.

Lord Bichard, a former benefits chief, said "imaginative" ideas were needed to meet the cost of an ageing society.

And although such a move might be controversial, it would stop older people being a "burden on the state".

"Are there ways in which we could use incentives to encourage older people, if not to be in full time work, to be making a contribution?," he asked the rest of the committee.

"It is quite possible, for example, to envisage a world where civil society is making a greater contribution to the care of the very old, and older people who are not very old could be making a useful contribution to civil society in that respect, if they were given some incentive or some

recognition for doing so."



The 65-year-old crossbench peer, who has taken on a number of roles including the vice presidency of the Local Government Association and the chairmanship of a national after-school film club since retiring from the civil service in 2001, suggested the government should use the pensions system to "incentivise" retired people.

"We are now prepared to say to people who are not looking for work, if you don't look for work you don't get benefits, so if you are old and you are not contributing in some way or another maybe there is some penalty attached to that."

He asked: "Are we using all of the incentives at our disposal to encourage older people not just to be a negative burden on the state but actually be a positive part of society?"

Asked about his proposal after the meeting, Lord Bichard acknowledged it would be difficult for politicians to sell to the public, but added: "So was tuition fees."



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