



Message from the Commissioner

Welcome to the first edition of my COPNI e-briefing.

I am delighted to have taken up the role as Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland in June this year. As Commissioner, I have unique legal powers and duties that enable me to safeguard and promote the interests of older people.

During my term of office, I intend to use these powers and duties to celebrate ageing, protect and defend the rights of older people and press Government for changes to the law.



Eddie Lynch, The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Draft priorities for my term of office

Since my appointment, I have spent time reflecting on my priorities for my term of office, taking into account the issues identified through research, casework queries directed to my office and from speaking with older people. Some difficult choices have had to be made based on the resources available to me. I have also given careful consideration to those areas where I believe my legal powers and duties can be most effective in creating positive change for older people in Northern Ireland.

After much consideration, my draft priorities for 2016-2020 will seek to Respect, Value and Protect older people.

Respect

- Social inclusion: Ensuring older people remain connected to where they want to be and to their families and friends.
- Examine the arrangements for older people in nursing care and residential settings.
- Press for introduction of legislation to end age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services.
- Monitor and review emerging policy proposals from government to ensure older people receive the health and social care services and support they need.

Value

- Encourage employment and entrepreneurship for those over 60.
- Highlight the benefits of older people getting online and encourage digital inclusion.
- Advocate with government on behalf of older people to be a priority in the Programme for Government.
- Monitor implementation of actions outlined in the Active Ageing Strategy.
- Advocate on behalf of, and support those living with age-related health conditions.
- Help and support older people to make plans and communicate their choices for their end of life.

Protect

- Look at the strategic approach to the provision of services and support for dementia in Northern Ireland.
- Examine the role of the health and social care regulator and make recommendations to improve its effectiveness.
- Identify the scale of financial abuse against older people, raise awareness of the issue and challenge relevant organisations to make required changes.
- Work with criminal justice agencies to better support older people who are victims of crime.
- Press government for the introduction of an Adult Safeguarding Bill for Northern Ireland.

It is very important to me that my work reflects the views and opinions of older people. Over the next two months, I will be engaging widely with older people and the organisations which represent them to ensure that these priorities are truly the issues which matter to older people.

Please feel free to contact my office via post, telephone or [email](#) to provide feedback on my draft priorities using the following contact information before Friday 30th September 2016:

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Equality House

7-9 Shaftesbury Square

Belfast

BT2 7DP

T: 028 9089 0892

E: communications@copni.org

If you wish to receive a copy of my finalised priorities by post or email following the engagement period, please mention this in your response along with the relevant contact details.

Engagement events for older people

I will be visiting various towns across Northern Ireland and would be delighted if older people could attend one of the events below. It will provide an opportunity for me to discuss my priorities for action and seek feedback on the issues that matter to older people over a cup of tea.

Tuesday 23 rd August 11am-12.30pm (refreshments served from 10.30am)	Clayton Hotel, Belfast
Tuesday 30 th August 2.30pm-4pm (refreshments served from 2pm)	Armagh City Hotel
Wednesday 31 st August 2.30pm-4pm (refreshments served from 2pm)	Killyhevlin Hotel, Enniskillen
Thursday 8 th September 11am-12.30pm (refreshments served from 10.30am)	Adair Arms Hotel, Ballymena
Wednesday 14 th September 2.30pm-4pm (refreshments served from 2pm)	Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown
Thursday 15 th September 11am-12.30pm (refreshments served from 10.30am)	City Hotel, Derry/L'Derry

If you work with any older people, their families or carers who would be interested in attending these events, I would be grateful if you could please pass on the event information below. Please ask them to RSVP to christy.hunter@copni.org, mentioning any accessibility requirements that they may have. Friends, family and carers are also welcome to attend.

Alternatively if these events are not suitable, I would encourage older people to send their views to my office either by post or email by Friday 30th September.

My first few months in office...

I am delighted to be an independent champion for older people in Northern Ireland since taking up the post of Commissioner in June. After 8 years as the Chief Executive of Age Sector Platform, the charity responsible for the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament, engaging with older people and advocating on their behalf is something that I am passionate about.

On my first day in the role, I announced my commitment to tackling financial abuse against older people at an Action on Elder Abuse event in Stormont to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness day.

Feedback I have received has indicated that financial abuse is an escalating problem that is too often under reported. It can be painful to report, particularly when the perpetrator is a relative, friend or carer.

During my term, I will shine a spotlight on this issue, uncover the true extent of financial abuse in our society and work with Government and other organisations to tackle it.



Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, signing the Action on Elder Abuse Northern Ireland pledge to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June 2016.

Ageist language about older voters must be challenged

In the wake of the 'Brexit' result, I became increasingly concerned about some of the ageist commentary in the media and across social media platforms. I spoke out on BBC Radio Ulster's 'The Nolan Show', in the Belfast Telegraph and Newsletter and in local newspapers across Northern Ireland to make it clear that this type of language must be challenged.

There can be no excuse for ageist and discriminatory language. The suggestion that older people shouldn't be allowed to vote or that there should be an upper age limit on their eligibility to vote is appalling. As a democratic society we must value and respect everyone's voice.

To read my statement in full, [click here](#).

Ministerial meetings

In June, I met with the Ministers for Health, Justice and Communities to discuss my role and the issues that matter to older people. I also met with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the corresponding Committees in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

All of the meetings were very useful and I look forward to working with Government to ensure real and positive change.



Photographed above:

The Commissioner for Older People with the Minister of Health, Michelle O'Neill MLA (Left)

The Commissioner for Older People with the Minister of Justice, Claire Sugden MLA (Right)

The Commissioner for Older People with the Minister for Communities, Paul Givan MLA (Bottom)

Draft Programme for Government

The Northern Ireland Assembly launched a consultation on the draft Programme for Government Framework for 2016-2021 in May. In this document, the NI Executive set out their priorities and ambitions for the next five years.

I was disappointed at the lack of reference to older people within this document. Many of the outcomes that the Executive plan to achieve focus on the whole population and therefore will address the needs of older people to some extent. However, it is clear to me that within the Executive's priorities, there is a significant absence of outcomes focused on valuing, respecting and protecting older people.

I have submitted a response to Government and pressed for an additional outcome that specifically addresses Valuing, Respecting and Protecting our older people. I have also requested a meeting with the First and deputy First Ministers to discuss this issue directly.

Further focus on the needs of older people is essential before final decisions on the Programme for Government are taken and published.

To read a short briefing paper on my response to this issue, [please click here](#).

To view the draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021, [please click here](#).



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Dear reader, we have identified you as one of our key stakeholders and therefore we would like to keep you updated on our work and progress in safeguarding and promoting the interests of older people.

Our mailing address is:

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