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**09/08/24**

**Re: Consultation on Draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) in relation to the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030. The Commissioner welcomes the opportunity to engage with this consultation.

COPNI is supportive of the Strategy's vision to create safer communities "through collaborative partnerships, proactive interventions and a steadfast commitment to empowering tenants and residents", as well as the strategic aims of building community confidence, ensuring local solutions to creating community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB), and working together with other agencies to do so.<sup>1</sup>

Older people are less likely to be victims of crime when compared with younger age groups<sup>2</sup>, but are more likely to have high levels of fear of crime, which can have a material impact on their lives.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the concept of community safety for many older people goes beyond experiences of crime and victimhood. COPNI was, therefore, pleased with the Housing Executive's definition of community safety as "a multifaceted concept that encompasses the overall wellbeing, security and resilience of a neighbourhood. At its core, it involves creating

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 4. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In 2022/23, there were 8,833 police recorded crimes where the victim was aged between 25 and 29. In the same year, there were 4,567 police recorded crimes where the victim was aged 65 and above. Data available from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Police Recorded Crime 1998/99 to 2022/23, Pivot Table 4: Police recorded crime by victim gender, victim age and policing district*. Available at:

[https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice\\_Recorded\\_Crime\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_1998-99\\_to\\_2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice_Recorded_Crime_in_Northern_Ireland_1998-99_to_2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*. Available at: [a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf \(copni.org\)](https://www.copni.org/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf)

an environment where residents feel safe, secure and empowered to engage with their community without fear of crime, ASB, or other threats or nuisances to their quality of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, different age groups experience different proportions of different types of crime. The Police Service of Northern Ireland’s (PSNI) *Police Recorded Crime Statistics* show, of all crimes experienced by older people, violence against the person is most common (27%), as well as criminal damage (25%) and theft and robbery (9%).<sup>5</sup> The Strategy’s definition of ASB as “engaging in or threatening to engage in conduct causing or likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to a person residing in, visiting or otherwise engaging in lawful activity in the locality of a dwelling house”<sup>6</sup> shows how older people’s specific vulnerability to ASB-related offences, such as criminal damage, theft, burglary, makes this Strategy particularly relevant to older people’s experiences of community safety.

In relation to the three Strategic aims of the Community Safety Strategy, COPNI offers the following comments:

### **Strategic aim 1: Building community confidence**

The draft Strategy states that the Housing Executive will “tackle fear of crime issues for those elderly groups within our communities”.<sup>7</sup> COPNI was especially pleased to see this objective. Eliminating older people’s fear of crime will go a long way in ensuring their sense of confidence and safety in their communities.

Although older people are relatively safe from crime in Northern Ireland, it has been shown that older people have higher levels of worry and fear of crime.<sup>8</sup> COPNI’s *A Different Crime* report detailed how discussions regarding crime and older victims risk a view among older

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<sup>4</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 5. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Annual Trends in Police Recorded Crime 1998/99 to 2022/23*, Pivot Table Victim Gender\_Age. Available at: [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice\\_Recorded\\_Crime\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_1998-99\\_to\\_2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice_Recorded_Crime_in_Northern_Ireland_1998-99_to_2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

<sup>6</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 5. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 30. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey found that 11% of respondents aged 75 and above had high levels of worry about crime, compared to 4% of respondents aged 35 to 44. Data available from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey (2022) *Findings from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey, Table 7c*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.justice-ni.gov.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2Fjustice%2Ffindings%2520from%2520the%25202020-21%2520niscts%2520-%2520excel%2520tables.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

people that “crime is ubiquitous and society in general is hostile”.<sup>9</sup> For instance, media reporting of crimes such as ASB may work to increase older people’s fear of crime in their local community and reduce their sense of community safety and confidence. Older people are likely to experience acute impacts from such a fear of crime, disconnecting themselves from family, friends and society, rarely leaving their homes, which in turn contributes to poor mental health and wellbeing.

Similarly, *A Different Crime* found that a “victim’s pre-offence status” is a major factor in determining how crime can impact an individual.<sup>10</sup> Older people, for example, are more likely to live in poverty when compared to younger age groups<sup>11</sup>, are more likely to live alone<sup>12</sup>, and have a higher likelihood of living with a long-term health condition or disability<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, older victims are less likely to have mechanisms in place to cope with the aftermath of their experiences. COPNI, therefore, welcomes the Strategy’s objective to provide “support for victims and witnesses of ASB”<sup>14</sup> and commends the Strategy’s consideration of fear of crime as a key issue requiring planning, resources and intervention to protect citizens.

## Strategic aim 2: Ensuring local solutions

To ensure delivery of local solutions to increase community safety and tackle ASB, COPNI was encouraged by the Housing Executive’s goal to “provide interventions and resolutions to respond to the needs of communities at a local level”.<sup>15</sup> The needs of older people in the community are distinctive. For instance, older people in Northern Ireland are more likely to experience loneliness. 18.7% of those aged 65 to 74 and a further 22.6% of those aged 75

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<sup>9</sup> Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 14. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 9. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> In 2022/23, 12% of pensioners in Northern Ireland were in relative poverty, and a further 7% of older people were in absolute poverty. Data available from NISA (2024) *Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report, 2022/23*. Available at: [https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/communities/PII\\_report\\_2223.html#](https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/communities/PII_report_2223.html#)

<sup>12</sup> Age NI report there are 80,000 older people who live alone in Northern Ireland. Age NI (2021) *Lived Experience 2021*. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-ni/media/lived-experience-2021.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Older people are more likely than younger age groups to live with long-term pain or discomfort (27.3%), mobility or dexterity difficulty that limits basic physical activities (29.4%), shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (19.2%), deafness or partial hearing loss (21.7%), frequent periods of confusion or memory loss (7.3%), blindness or partial sight loss (6.2%), and mobility or dexterity difficulty that requires the use of a wheelchair (5.2%). Data available from NISRA (2022) *Main statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical bulletin, Health, disability and unpaid care*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-2-statistical-bulletin-health-disability-and-unpaid-care.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 30. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 31. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

and above report high levels of loneliness in Northern Ireland.<sup>16</sup> Older people are also more likely to experience factors that may contribute to feelings of loneliness such as living with a disability<sup>17</sup>, living alone<sup>18</sup>, having limited or no internet access<sup>19</sup>, and being widowed<sup>20</sup>. The Housing Executive's continued investment in and delivery of Good Morning Services will work to reduce levels of loneliness among older people in Northern Ireland, as well as lessen their fear of crime, while, ultimately, increasing their feelings of safety and security in their communities.

### Strategic aim 3: Working together

COPNI was, also, encouraged by the Housing Executive's objective to work with statutory, voluntary and community organisations to "create safer places to live".<sup>21</sup> We were pleased to see the discussion of work in providing support for older victims of abuse in Northern Ireland and trust this partnership will encourage information sharing and understanding of older people's experiences.

COPNI welcomes the Housing Executive's continued investment in the Mid & East Antrim Agewell Partnership (MEAAP). Supporting older people to age well in place will have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing and, indirectly, on their experiences of community safety.

Finally, COPNI commends the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025 – 2030 and hopes it will serve to support the creation of safer communities in Northern Ireland, especially for our older people. It is vital, however, that the Housing Executive considers necessary resources for proper implementation of the Strategy.

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<sup>16</sup> NISRA (2023) *Wellbeing in Northern Ireland, 2022/23*, p 5. Available at: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execcoffice/wellbeing-in-northern-ireland-report-2022-23.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Older people are more likely than younger age groups to live with long-term pain or discomfort (27.3%), mobility or dexterity difficulty that limits basic physical activities (29.4%), shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (19.2%), deafness or partial hearing loss (21.7%), frequent periods of confusion or memory loss (7.3%), blindness or partial sight loss (6.2%), and mobility or dexterity difficulty that requires the use of a wheelchair (5.2%). Data available from NISRA (2022) *Main statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical bulletin, Health, disability and unpaid care*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-2-statistical-bulletin-health-disability-and-unpaid-care.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Age NI report there are 80,000 older people who live alone in Northern Ireland. Age NI (2021) *Lived Experience 2021*. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-ni/media/lived-experience-2021.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Age UK found that 29% of people aged 75 and above in the UK do not use the internet, with a further 9% of those aged 65 to 74 also not using the internet. Age UK (2024) *Facts and Figures about Digital Inclusion and Older People*. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/internet-use-statistics-june-2024.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Census 2021 statistics showed that almost 25% of people aged 65 and above were widowed in Northern Ireland. Census 2021 (2023) *Census 2021 Main Statistics Demography Tables – household relationships*, MS-A33 Marital and civil partnership status by broad age bands. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nisra.gov.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fstatistics%2Fce%2Fnsus-2021-ms-a33.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

<sup>21</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2024) *Building Safer Communities Together, Community Safety Strategy 2025-2030*, p 32. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/62b774fa-1a10-4911-ab22-161b7ce89fe3/Draft-Community-Safety-Strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this response, or the Strategy further should it be necessary or helpful.

Best wishes,

**Anna Doran**

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