

Business Plan 2025-26

Background

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) was established by the Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which took effect from January 2011. COPNI is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Department for Communities (DfC). The Commissioner is a Corporation Sole.

The principal aim of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) is to safeguard and promote the interests of older people.

The role of the Commissioner is unique in providing a strategic vision and focus on the rights and interests of older people in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner's powers to influence policymaking and service delivery and provide advice to Government relating to older people adds significant value to the public discourse. The scrutiny powers of the COPNI Act on legislation, policy, and practice of public authorities, holds the Government to account on providing adequate protections and services to older people. The Commissioner's remit to address the wider impact on older people, to inform systematic improvements and influence the wider social policy agenda, strengthens the rights and interests of older people, and enables their voice to be heard in public and political debate and discourse.

The Commissioner actively engages with older people across Northern Ireland and communicates proactively with older people, defined as everyone over the age of 60. This includes older people in all their diversity of chronological age, community identity, sex and gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and lifestyles. Other key stakeholders include, Ministers and officials of central and local Government, the criminal justice system, and the legislature and the media in all its traditional and modern forms.

The Commissioner, Siobhan Casey

In April 2025, the First Minister and deputy First Minister appointed a new Commissioner for older people, Siobhan Casey, for a four-year term of office. On taking up the post Siobhan Casey said:

"I truly believe that older people are a wonderful asset, who carry generations of experience and wisdom which greatly enriches our society. I am delighted to get started as the new Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland. I have great admiration and respect for the office and the work of my predecessors Eddie Lynch and Claire Keatinge.

"Many of us have heard the repeated message that we are an 'ageing population' but few really know what that really means. It presents both great challenges and

significant opportunities. The challenge lies in ensuring that our systems and structures are equipped to support an ageing society, while the opportunity lies in harnessing the potential of older people to contribute to the community, economy, and the continued growth of society. Our society must be ready to embrace this great demographic shift."

You can find out more about Siobhan on our website, www.copni.org. You can also follow The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) on Facebook, X and subscribe to our newsletter from the website.

Staff of the Commissioner for Older People

Organisational Chart



Review of activity in 2024-25

Last year, 2024-25, was marked by a transitional phase for COPNI, during which Eddie Lynch completed his second term as Commissioner in June 2024, and then subsequently acted in a caretaker role until December 2024. The former Commissioner provided comprehensive evidence to the COVID-19 Inquiry in May 2024, highlighting the experience of older people in Northern Ireland during the pandemic. He emphasised age-based discrimination and the seriously adverse impact of the pandemic on older people.

Judicial Review

2024-25 also saw further developments on former Commissioner, Eddie Lynch's legal challenge through Judicial Review regarding the Department of Health's Continuing Healthcare policy. This policy determines whether an older person can receive free health care in a care home setting on the basis of critical health needs. The issue is very detailed and complex and has required clarification in how it is administered. The Judicial Review at the High Court in Belfast initially upheld the challenge on all grounds in 2023, however, the judgement was appealed by the Department of Health and the Court of Appeal upheld the appeal. This remains an issue actively under review and the outcome will provide clarity for a number of older people, some of whom have asked the Commissioner for support, others who have not. COPNI applied to the Supreme Court to be heard on this issue but have been advised that the application has been unsuccessful.

Key Publications

Research reports published, provided advice to Government, included:

- **"At the Centre of Government Planning,"** advocating for the inclusion of ageing population considerations in the Programme for Government.
- **"Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse"**, which presented PSNI statistics on the prevalence of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland, and finding that older age categories have seen the greatest increase in reported domestic abuse crimes in Northern Ireland.

The reports include recommendations for change that will improve the lives of older people.

Copies of all reports are available on the COPNI website, www.copni.org

Advocacy and Legal Support

In 2024-25, the Legal and Advocacy team experienced a 7% increase in new casework in comparison to the prior year and a 16% increase in enquiries from older people and their families. Enquiries to the Commissioner were consistent throughout this period and relate to a diverse range of issues, such as the provision of goods and services to older people, access to core healthcare services, dementia care, the availability of rural transport routes, and the impact of increasingly digitised services on older people who chose not to be online.

Communications and Engagement

COPNI received 40 media bids in 2024-25, with 25 of these bids accepted either through a statement issued, or a broadcast interview carried out. The number of bids accepted was lower than usual given there was a 9-month period where there was no Commissioner in post and there were restrictions on the powers and duties available to the former Commissioner in his caretaker role. A total of 21 statements/press releases were issued by COPNI in 2024-25. There were also 175 pieces of media coverage, with significant coverage of COPNI's involvement in the COVID-19 Inquiry.

Corporate Plan 2025-2029

The new Corporate Plan is well developed and ready for engagement with older people across Northern Ireland. The Commissioner has agreed a series of priorities to work on during her 4-year term and now wants to share her plans with older people and listen to their views. The Corporate Plan captures a series of issues of importance to older people across many sectors, like health, crime, housing, technology and others. The issues arise from multiple strands of work that COPNI undertakes throughout the year. The plan will use the Commissioner's powers to promote awareness of issues, powers to review the policy, practice and services of Government departments, bodies and local Government.

The Commissioner plans to issue surveys, conduct meetings across Northern Ireland, and use the engagements she is undertaking to hear directly from older people about their needs and the issues that matter most to them. Subject to a full opportunity to engage with older people and other bodies, the Commissioner hopes to publish her Corporate Plan in the autumn.

Priorities for 2025-26

Subject to the Corporate Plan that is in draft form until consultation with older people is concluded, the Commissioner wants to ensure there is no delay in progressing important work this year. So, concurrently with the development of the 4-year plan of work, she has agreed to progress the day-to-day work of COPNI and a limited number of projects this year. You will see over the next pages, the issues she has prioritised for 2025-26.

All work will be taken forward with a proportionate project management approach. All expenditure will be made in accordance with internal controls and compliance with the requirements of Managing Public Money NI.

High-Level Outcomes

All the work of COPNI is directed towards these high-level outcomes. The business plan focuses on the best use of the Commissioner's powers and duties to deliver outcomes that improve the lives of older people through;

Information and Engagement

- 1) Older people are better informed of the role of COPNI and how it can support them.

Advocate and Represent

- 2) Older people have access to independent advocacy and legal support, and their rights are promoted and protected through individual and systemic action.

Review and Investigation

- 3) Legislation and policy for older people are reviewed or investigated and advice given.
- 4) Government services for older people are reviewed or investigated and advice given.

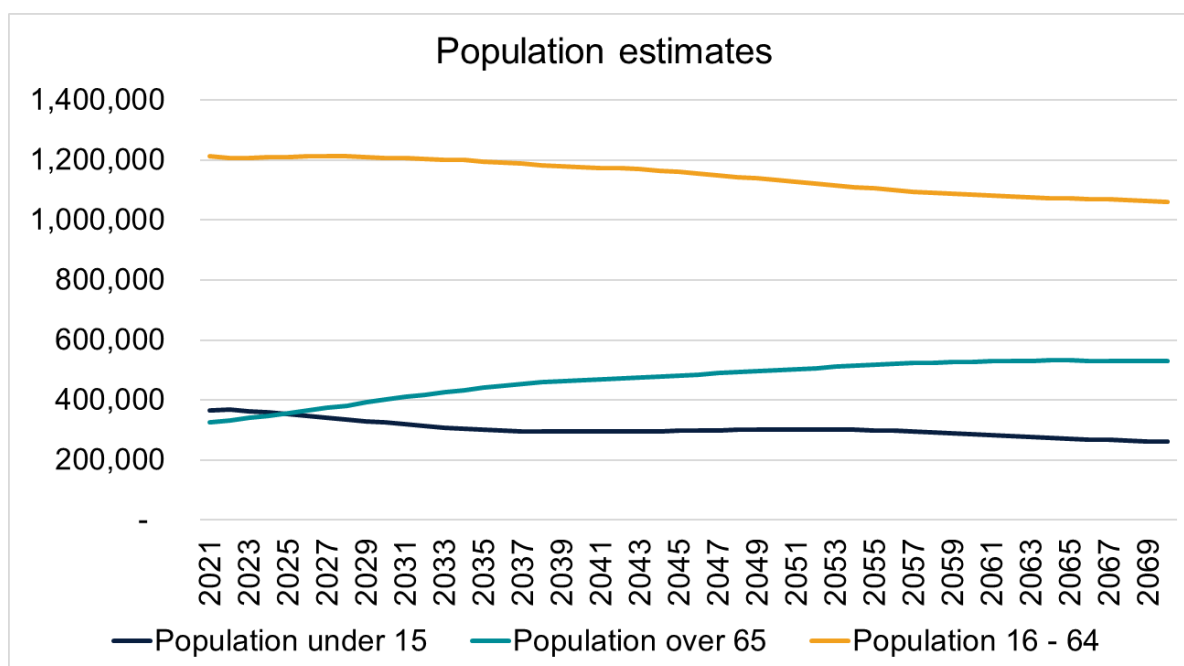
Governance Framework

- 5) COPNI is an efficient and effective organisation that progresses its work in accordance and compliance of all regulations and policies managing the use of public money.

Preparing for an Ageing Society

All of the work undertaken by the Commissioner is informed by and seeks to address the significant growth and ageing of the population in Northern Ireland. The population of NI increased from 1.7 million in 2001 to over 1.9 million in 2021 (*NISRA, 2021 Census*). The population of people aged 65+ is growing more quickly in comparison to the population under the age of 15 (*NISRA, 2022-based Population Projections*), and this tendency is expected to continue in the coming decades, indicating a demographic shift that poses challenges for public services and for everyone in society.

- **Population growth and ageing trends:** Northern Ireland's population has increased by 13% over the past 20 years, with projections indicating a peak of approximately 1.97 million by the mid-2040s (*NISRA, 2022-based Population Projections*), followed by a decline.
- **Implications of an ageing society:** The ageing population requires a life-course approach to public health, ensuring that individuals can age healthily and maintain independence, reducing the burden on public services and enabling NI to cope with some of the challenges of an older society. Effective engagement with older citizens is crucial for informed policy-making and service delivery.



Source: Census 2021, ONS 2020-based interim population projections for Northern Ireland

The Challenge for an Ageing Society

While increased life expectancy is a great achievement of public health, and one which we should celebrate, the key challenge for Government, is not only the extension of life expectancy but to ensure those extra years are healthy and disability free for as long as possible. All countries, including Northern Ireland, face major challenges to ensure that their public services, including health and social systems, are ready to make the most of this demographic shift and meet the needs of the population.

To note

The following pages show the plan of work for 2025-26. The plan identifies the key pieces of work to be undertaken and the minimum targets to be met during the year. The full delivery of the plan will be subject to obtaining an adequate budget allocation from DfC, although in the absence of these resources COPNI recognises elements of the work are scalable to some degree, and that the plan will be flexed based on the resources available. All Government funding is under extreme pressure this year, and COPNI is no different. The Commissioner is committed to finding innovative ways to carry out the work of engaging directly with older people and staying available to them throughout her term of office. Progress will be reviewed on a quarterly basis throughout the year.

This plan is high level and is not intended to capture all the operational activities and day-to-day tasks of all staff. COPNI will continue to exercise flexibility around the movement of budget and human resources across the work programme as required.

Planned research reports are highlighted in blue.

Information & Engagement

High Level Outcome 1: Older people are better informed of role of COPNI and how it can support them

Commissioner Duty: The Commissioner must promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of older persons and of the need to safeguard those interests & the Commissioner must promote positive attitudes towards older persons and encourage participation by older persons in public life.

Reference no.	Objective	Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Outcome	Responsible Officer
1.1	Engagement with older people Increase engagement and listen to older people on matters of importance to them	Devise and implement an engagement strategy which will identify areas and groups of older people to proactively engage with through range of consultations, events or focus groups. Organise pop up 'clinics' in key locations where COPNI will provide advice and assistance to local residents. Update the stakeholder mapping for COPNI	Number of engagements – target of 50 engagements/events with older people's groups across all of NI by March 2026 . Stakeholder engagement – build/maintain 10 new or strengthened relationships with key stakeholders by March 2026 . By July 2025 , complete and present a refreshed stakeholder map to the Commissioner. Number of older people engaged with – target of 1,000 older people engaged	Older people will have a say in decisions that affect them COPNI's work will focus on the issues that matter the most to older people in Northern Ireland. Older people will have a better understanding of our work and the role of COPNI. Strengthen stakeholder engagement and	Head of Communications and Engagement

			<p>with in person by March 2026.</p> <p>Equal geographical spread – no significant gaps between urban and rural areas.</p> <p>Participant satisfaction at events - high satisfaction rates, with at least 70% of participants giving positive feedback across 2025-26.</p>	encourage open communication.	
1.2	Enhance visibility and engagement with older people through effective use of digital channels.	<p>Diversify communications content and channel management strategy and track engagement across all digital channels on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Produce regular and consistent content across all channels which seeks to inform, engage and entertain.</p>	<p>Increase in digital followers and engagement by 15% across all digital channels by March 2026.</p> <p>Increase of 15% in unique website visitors compared to previous year by March 2026.</p>	<p>By engaging more effectively, we build trust and credibility with our stakeholders.</p> <p>Increased engagement allows us to better understand our stakeholders' needs, and gauge public perception and opinion.</p>	Head of Communications and Engagement
1.3	Establish and nurture long term relationships with the media.	Seek to procure a media database that will streamline workflow, enhance	Receipt of a minimum of 60 media bids by March 2026 .	COPNI is viewed as a reliable spokesperson and reputable	Head of Communications and Engagement

		<p>reach, and improve media outreach efforts.</p> <p>Draft and implement both proactive and reactive media relations plan.</p> <p>Daily media monitoring and proactively following up on articles with a statement/response, where appropriate.</p>	<p>Minimum of 60% of relevant media bids accepted across 2025-26.</p> <p>150 pieces of coverage across broadcast, print and online by March 2026.</p> <p>70% of coverage to have a positive/neutral tone and message alignment across 2025-26.</p>	<p>voice on older people's issues.</p> <p>Regular, positive media mentions across key platforms increases public perception of COPNI as a body that older people can trust to provide support to them where necessary.</p>	
1.4	Effectively signpost to other service providers and statutory bodies, where applicable	<p>Training of Advocacy Officers to ensure knowledge of remit of other Government bodies.</p> <p>Engagement with other bodies that COPNI are commonly signposting to, to increase awareness of services provided. Report annually on which alternative bodies have been signposted to.</p>	<p>Record of number of clients signposted to other organisations and noted on ALB Management system.</p> <p>Threshold of 2 complaints per quarter arising from incorrect signposting.</p>	Ensures that older people receive the support that they need from the appropriate statutory body, without undue delay.	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services

1.5	Undertake a Rights awareness campaign	<p>Create accessible resources outlining older individuals' rights, focusing on issues addressed by the Legal and Advocacy department.</p> <p>Specific user-friendly resource developed for online users.</p> <p>Organise informational sessions in a variety of community, voluntary and public settings to educate older people about their rights.</p>	<p>Develop a resource outlining older people's rights - 1,000 hard copies to be distributed across engagements and events by March 2026. Information to be posted and promoted through the COPNI website and social media channels.</p> <p>Carry out 6 information sessions across Northern Ireland by March 2026 with COPNI's Head of Legal setting out older people's rights and raising awareness of issues they may not be aware of.</p>	Older people will have greater awareness of their rights in a civil society, ensuring they are empowered to in advocating for themselves.	<p>Head of Communication and Engagement</p> <p>Head of Legal and Advocacy</p>
1.6	Tackling Ageism – Promotion of positive attitudes towards older people through internal media resources.	<p>Promote positive attitudes towards older people proactively tackling media narrative of ageism, where it occurs.</p> <p>Proactively and reactively welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other organisations where the message of anti-</p>	<p>To conduct video interviews with two older people on ageing positively for Words of Wisdom.</p> <p>Monitoring of media daily, advising of opportunities to react or call out ageism via social media, newsletter, or a statement. (connected to the 60% target of media bids and proactive opportunities)</p>	Promotes a positive attitude towards older people within society, ensuring older people are respected.	Head of Communications and Engagement

		ageism can be amplified.	<p>Target organisations to be included as part of engagement plan (connected to target of building relationships) by <i>December 2025</i>.</p> <p>To develop and deliver an awareness campaign on positive ageing by <i>March 2026</i>.</p>		
1.7	Ensure that stakeholders and older people are aware of the Commissioner's views on consultations by Government.	Publish all relevant consultations on the COPNI website, and other relevant publications.	<p>Publish relevant consultation responses on the <i>website within 2 days of submission</i> to the consulting body.</p> <p>Include a list of consultations responses in the <i>quarterly ezine</i> to older people.</p> <p>Respond to media bids and coverage of issues under consultation.</p>	Ensures older people can fully digest COPNI's response to consultations, and how COPNI has advocated for their rights on important issues.	Head of Communications and Engagement

Advocate and Represent

High Level Outcome 2: Older people have access to independent advocacy and legal support, and their rights are promoted and protected through individual and systemic action

Commissioner Duty: The Commissioner must promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of older persons and of the need to safeguard those interests & the Commissioner must promote positive attitudes towards older persons and encourage participation by older persons in public life.

Reference no.	Objective	Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Client-focussed Outcome	Responsible Owner
2.1	Respond to older people who contact the Commissioner for assistance.	<p>Assist with enquiries for assistance from older people.</p> <p>Intervene directly to seek resolution, first through advocacy with potential escalation to litigation.</p>	<p>Handle a minimum of 250 combined legal enquiries and casework items per year.</p> <p>Process at least 60 legal enquiries or casework items per quarter to support a balanced annual total.</p> <p>Provide a substantive response to 90% of routine legal queries within 10 working days.</p> <p>Respond to 100% of urgent legal matters within 48 hours.</p> <p>Ensure 100% of legal case files involving capacity or safeguarding issues include a clear rationale demonstrating how the older person's best interests were considered and applied, particularly</p>	<p>Older people have received assistance / advocacy / legal supporting relation to issues that are impacting on them.</p> <p>Commissioner has gathered information relating to the lived experience of older people and their engagement with public</p>	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services

			<p>in cases where third-party preferences may be in conflict.</p> <p>Monthly reporting of analysis of enquiries and caseload management information to minuted SMT meeting.</p> <p>Preparation of briefing papers to SMT on receipt of 3 or more cases of a similar nature within a 3-month period.</p>	<p>authorities, informing future research.</p>	
2.2	Support and advocate for older people impacted by the Continuing Healthcare (CHC) legal ruling.	<p>Proactively raise awareness of the issue with the public.</p> <p>Engage with representatives across Government to discuss the impact of the judgement on the rights of older people</p>	<p>Issue a public statement outlining the position of CHC in Northern Ireland following the Court of Appeal ruling, outlining COPNI's concerns and recommendations to drive accountability.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the Minister for Health and senior civil servants, to discuss the implications of the ruling.</p>	Ensures older people impacted directly by the ruling are receiving fair and equitable service provision in line with current legislation.	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services
2.3	Process requests for legal funding, where applicable	<p>Assess requests for legal funding support through the acceptance criteria.</p> <p>Bid for required funding through</p>	<p>Business case, and subsequent funding approval obtained from DfC ahead of commencement of work.</p> <p>Legal proceedings progressed in line with counsel advice.</p>	Ensures that older people are represented legally where this is appropriate and within the	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services

		Monitoring Rounds and bids to the Department if required. Where approved, engage with legal counsel to proceed with legal action.		Commissioner's remit.	
2.4	Review of Article 21 of legislation presented to the Sponsor Branch	COPNI instructed to assess potential changes to the legislation in 2023-24, and subsequent recommendations will be forwarded to DfC for assessment now that a new Commissioner is in place.	Recommendations for changes to the legislation forwarded to DfC Minister by <i>September 2025</i> . Monitor proposed actions by DfC to change COPNI legislation in line with recommendations. Advise MLAs and respond to committee and MLA questions about proposed legislative changes as they are being made (debated).	COPNI legislation is clarified, ensuring that the Commissioner is fully aware of their powers and duties.	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services Head of Corporate Services

Review and Investigation

High Level Outcome 3: Legislation and policy for older people are reviewed or investigated and advice given

Commissioner Duty: To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for older persons by relevant authorities & the Commissioner must encourage best practice in the treatment of older persons.

Reference no.	Objective	Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Client-focussed Outcome	Responsible Owner
3.1	<p>Advancing Age-Friendly in Northern Ireland: Supporting Collaboration, Impact, and Sustainability of the Age Sector Networks.</p> <p>Advise Government on facilitating local networks to empower older citizens.</p>	<p>Conduct a research study offering an overview of Age Sector Networks, the support they provide to older people and gaps in provision across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>COPNI will evidence need, best practice, and offer recommendations to support more effective age friendly delivery in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>The publication of a report providing evidence-based advice to Government and other stakeholders about the civic, health and social importance of a vibrant, sustainable and consistent age sector network across Northern Ireland, by <i>September 2025</i>.</p> <p>Participate in a minimum of 4 meetings with age sector network stakeholders (e.g. Council Age Friendly Co-ordinators; Public Health Agency (funders); and DfC Active Ageing Unit) by <i>March 2026</i>, disseminating COPNI's recommendations.</p> <p>Follow up on implementation of advice by <i>March 2026</i>.</p>	By emphasising the capacity limitations within the existing support provision, this will increase Government awareness to ensure greater consideration is given to the need for a strong network that meets the needs of a	Head of Research and Policy Advice

				growing population of older people moving forward.	
3.2	Promote awareness of age discrimination and its effects.	Raise awareness about the need for Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities, and Services) legislation to protect older people through public statements and effective campaigns.	Run an awareness campaign/video on social media with older people talking about the impact of no Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities, and Services) legislation by <i>January 2026</i> . Target a media outlet for an exclusive interview with the Commissioner on this topic.	Raise the profile of this important issue to ensure that it is progressed at Executive level.	Head of Communications
3.3	Inform older people of the existence of various assistive technologies, to address the challenges of demographic ageing.	Conduct a research study offering an overview of assistive technologies, their advantages and disadvantages and make recommendations on their use to stakeholders in a published report.	The publication and promotion of an evidence-based report providing advice to older people, Government and other stakeholders about the effective use of assistive technologies within the health and social care sector, by <i>March 2026</i> . Hold a minimum of 4 meetings with relevant stakeholders, by <i>March 2026</i> , to disseminate findings	Will enable better monitoring of conditions with assistive technology and could assist professionals to better target resources, thereby reducing	Head of Research and Policy Advice

				waiting times and improving outcomes for older people.	
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High Level Outcome 4: Government services for older people are reviewed or investigated and advice given

Commissioner Duty: To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for older persons by relevant authorities & the Commissioner must encourage best practice in the treatment of older persons.

Reference no.	Objective	Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Client-focussed Outcome	Responsible Owner
4.1	Continued participation in the COVID-19 Inquiry	<p>Respond to all requests from the Inquiry for information and evidence.</p> <p>Assist the former Commissioner in producing oral evidence for Module 6 (The Care Sector).</p> <p>Evaluate Executive's response to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry's reports on Modules 1 and 2.</p> <p>Engage fully in Module 10, which deals with the impact of the pandemic.</p>	<p>Respond to all Rule 9 requests for evidence by the <i>deadline set by the Inquiry</i> within required timescales.</p> <p>Ensure the former Commissioner avails of legal counsel support by the end of <i>June 2025</i>, in preparation for providing oral evidence to the Inquiry in July.</p> <p>Production of an overview report setting out specifically how older people are impacted by the recommendations arising from the reports from Modules 1 and 2, <i>within one month</i> of the release of the</p>	<p>Ensures that older people and their rights are not neglected in the recommendations of the various Inquiry modules.</p> <p>Ensure that older people, some of the most vulnerable in society, will be safeguarded in future pandemics.</p>	Head of Legal and Advocacy Services

			recommendations by the Inquiry.		
4.2	Adult Protection Bill Provide advice to Government on the introduction of the Adult Protection Bill.	Meet with Department of Health officials on a quarterly basis to consider progress and ensure the contents of the Adult Protection Bill are adequate.	Provide a minimum of two briefings for officials, MLAs and Committees of the Assembly debating the Bill, by March 2026 . Promote awareness of the Bill amongst older people, tracking progress in the Assembly and providing briefings online in lay persons language.	Older people are better protected through stronger safeguarding legislation, practice and awareness.	Head of Research and Policy Advice
4.3	Reform of Adult Social Care (ASC)	Meet with the Department of Health officials to discuss progress of the Reform of Adult Social Care. Follow-up on research on Regional Care Home Contract by liaison with officials.	Provide guidance on aspects of the reform of adult social care through participation in meetings and consultations. Where needed, provide formal advice to the Minister of Health on aspects of the reform programme. Commissioner to meet the Minister in 2025-26 to discuss progress on ASC reform.	Improved protection and practice in the care and wellbeing of older residents of care homes.	Head of Research and Policy Advice

			Monitor and report on the implementation of recommendations of the Regional Care Home Contract by March 2026 .		
4.4	Work with partners in the criminal justice system and older people to increase awareness.	Provide advice to Government and relevant agencies on COPNI's criminal justice research (A Different Crime, 2023; and a Growing Concern, 2024) and seek appropriate actions/improvements.	Promote findings of research by engaging with key stakeholders such as the PSNI, PPS, and Department of Justice by March 2026 .	Criminal justice services will better consider the needs of older through changes to policies, practice and/or training.	Head of Research and Policy Advice
4.5	Participate in the Scamwise partnership.	Engage in the sharing of information through social media and through the organisation's website to raise awareness amongst older people of how to identify and protect themselves from scams.	Attend and participate in 90% of Scamwise Partnership meetings as arranged by PSNI. Brief the Commissioner on the ongoing activity of the Partnership within 1 week of each attendance.	Ensures that older people, who are often the most vulnerable, are supported in identification of scams through provision of helpful information.	Head of Communications and Engagement
4.6	Tackling Insecure Housing: Older's People's	Conduct a research study offering an overview of the private rental market for older people and make	The publication and promotion of an evidence-based report providing advice to older people, Government and other	Ensures older people's access to quality and sustainable housing is raised	Head of Research and Policy Advice

	Experiences of the Private Rental Sector	recommendations for the improvement of access to quality and sustainable accommodation.	<p>stakeholders about older people's experiences of the Private Rental Sector. Publish the report by March 2026.</p> <p>Meet with key stakeholders by March 2026 to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the research.</p>	with Government, protecting older people's rights in a competitive market.	
4.7	Supporting Older Workers in Northern Ireland	Conduct a study of policy and practice pertaining to older workers and make recommendations for improved support for this group.	<p>The publication and promotion of an evidence-based report providing advice to older people, Government and other stakeholders about supporting older workers in Northern Ireland. Publish the report by March 2026.</p> <p>Meet with key stakeholders by March 2026 to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the research.</p>	Ensures older people's access to employment is raised with Government, protecting older people's rights.	Head of Research and Policy Advice.
4.8	Assess the consistency of application of the Mental Capacity Act	COPNI will conduct a research study offering an overview of the Deprivation of Liberty safeguards in the	The publication of an evidence-based report providing advice to Government and other stakeholders on the	A review of the safeguards system will highlight any deficiencies,	Head of Research and Policy Advice

	2016 in respect of older people.	Mental Capacity Act 2016.	Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards in the Mental Capacity Act 2016, by <i>March 2026</i> . A minimum of 4 meetings with relevant stakeholders, by March 2026, to disseminate research findings (including the DoH, Trusts, RQIA and NISCC).	so that such issues can be rectified, and citizens receive improved social care.	
4.9	Respond to public consultations from relevant authorities regarding matters that may impact older people and those who care for them.	Ensure that COPNI is a key consultee with all relevant public bodies. Ensure officer resources are allocated to adequately respond to consultations that are most impactful on older people. If the consultation topic is of serious or significant nature, the Commissioner may engage directly with older people on the specific issue, and/or issue a media release	Prioritise and screen out consultation requests or assign to researcher <i>within 3 days of receipt</i> . Complete 95% of submissions within the deadlines set by Departments. 5% tolerance in seeking extensions to deadlines, approved by Policy Manager. Respond to a minimum of 15 consultation responses by <i>March 2026</i> . .	The impact of decisions on older people will be fully considered and communicated extensively in each consultation, ensuring older people's rights are taken fully into account. Other bodies and policy makers will have access to COPNI views by the deadline for responses.	Head of Research and Policy Advice

		drawing attention to the Commissioner's/older peoples' views.		Older people will have access to the response to consultations about their rights and interests	
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Good Governance

High Level Outcome 5: COPNI is an efficient and effective organisation that progresses its work in accordance and compliance of all regulations and policies managing the use of public money.

Commissioner Duty: As the legally designated Accounting Officer, the Commissioner is responsible for implementing a robust governance framework within COPNI, and accountable for expenditure of public money within the confines of Managing Public Money NI guidance and the current Management Statement and Financial Memorandum with the Department for Communities.

Reference no.	Objective	Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Client-focussed Outcome	Responsible Owner
5.1	Delivery of 2025-26 Business Plan	Allocation of organisational resources (financial, human and physical) to align with business objectives. Ensure work towards achievement of agreed plans is being developed across COPNI departments to align with objectives.	<i>Monthly review</i> by COPNI's Senior Management Team (SMT) of progress against targets ahead of the formal Senior Management meeting. <i>Quarterly reporting</i> on achievement of set targets against business objectives to ARAC and DfC Sponsor Branch in ALB Assurance Statement and ALB Corporate Performance Report. 95% of business objectives delivered to target.	Older people will benefit from the timely achievement of COPNI's plan of work, which is focussed on COPNI's legislative remit to safeguard older people and promote their interests.	Head of Corporate Services
5.2	Appropriate governance arrangements in place to ensure	Pursue agreement of new Partnership Agreement with DfC.	Quarterly Performance Reports, including ALB Assurance Statement, ALB Corporate Performance Report, Reporting	COPNI's continued provision of services to	Head of Corporate Services

	scrutiny of performance	<p>Quarterly Reports to DfC Sponsor Branch and ARAC.</p> <p>Monthly internal reporting to COPNI Senior Management Team.</p>	<p>Checklist and Risk Register forwarded to DfC <i>within 10 working days from the end of the quarter.</i></p> <p>ARAC papers issued to attendees <i>no later than 1 week before the meeting.</i></p> <p>Papers prepared for Senior Management meetings <i>no later than 3 days before the meeting.</i></p> <p>Updated Governance Statement in Annual Report and Accounts.</p>	<p>older people are underpinned by a strong governance framework, providing assurance over COPNI's Going Concern status, ensuring older people will continue to be safeguarded and their interests promoted for the foreseeable future.</p>	
5.3	Engagement with internal and external audit	<p>Development of an annual Internal Audit Plan 2025-26, with planning meetings held to agree Terms of Reference for assignments.</p> <p>Management responses to audit reports are provided on a timely basis.</p>	<p>Reporting of audit outcomes, recommendations, and management responses to ARAC and Sponsor Branch in DfC at the next quarterly meeting.</p> <p>Action all recommendations included in NIAO's Report (RTTCWG) <i>within the next financial year.</i></p>	<p>This annual governance assurance provides assurance over COPNI's operational capability, with a positive outcome year-by-year providing older</p>	Head of Corporate Services

		Reporting of audit outcomes, recommendations, and management responses.	<p>Satisfactory assurance ratings for individual Internal Audit assignments, and overall Satisfactory annual assessment.</p> <p>Internal Audit report outcomes reflected in Annual Report and Accounts.</p> <p>Recommendations in follow-up audit confirmed as being completed by Internal Audit.</p>	people with assurance that they will continue to be safeguarded, and their interests promoted.	
5.4	Continue to develop an effective workforce.	<p>Development of staff development plan resulting from effective Personal Performance Agreement/Personal Development Plan process.</p> <p>Development of an organisational Training Plan to ensure staff avail of role-appropriate training.</p> <p>Provision of mandatory sectoral training.</p>	<p>100% of Personal Performance Agreement to be completed with line managers by no later than July 2025, to set individual objectives for performance for 2025-26.</p> <p>Organisational Training Plan developed and signed off by Chief Executive by August 2025.</p> <p>100% of staff to maintain mandatory training on LinkS training portal.</p> <p>Recommendations from the Culture and Values review implemented by March 2026.</p>	Ensures that COPNI staff are equipped with adequate and appropriate training to provide assurance that COPNI can deliver services to older people effectively.	<p>Head of Corporate Services</p> <p>(Input from SMT)</p>

		Culture and Values review commissioned.			
5.5	Transparency of expenditure and budget projections, including pressures.	<p>Monthly submission of Consumption Report to Sponsor Branch in DfC.</p> <p>Monthly submission of cash drawdown requests to Sponsor Branch in DfC.</p> <p>Quarterly budget updates.</p> <p>Submission of Monitoring Round returns and bids to DfC.</p>	<p>Commissioner review and approval of Consumption Report within <i>2 working days of the end of the month</i>.</p> <p>Commissioner review and approval of cash drawdown submission <i>within 2 working days of the end of the month</i>.</p> <p>Submission of Consumption Report and drawdown <i>by DfC deadlines</i>.</p> <p>Communication of financial position to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on a <i>quarterly basis</i>.</p> <p>Submission of Monitoring Round bids by <i>deadline set by Sponsor Branch</i> in DfC.</p>	Ensures that COPNI is provided with adequate budget to deliver services to older people, and where this is not the case, take action to reduce the scope of our activity during the year.	Head of Corporate Services
5.6	By year end operate within allocated Budget, avoiding overspend.	Completion of monthly Management Accounts to assess adequacy of budget.	Management Accounts to be completed for review by Commissioner <i>within 2 working days after month end</i> .	By managing the annual budget effectively, COPNI provides	Head of Corporate Services

		<p>Pressures identified in Management Accounts communicated to Sponsor Branch in DfC through Consumption Report.</p> <p>Bids for additional funding through Monitoring Rounds/bids.</p>	<p>Draft Financial Statements <i>by April 2025</i>, and final Financial Statements <i>by August 2025</i>.</p> <p>Obtain an unqualified external audit opinion from NIAO.</p>	<p>assurance to older people and DfC that COPNI are a going concern, able to provide services to older people for the foreseeable future.</p>	
5.7	<p>Ensure a robust risk management process is in place and followed.</p>	<p>Corporate Risk Strategy and Risk Register in place.</p> <p>Quarterly meetings with SMT to update the Risk Register, including any new and emerging risks.</p> <p>Risk Register included in papers to both ARAC and Sponsor Branch in DfC, ahead of quarterly meetings, and represents a standing item on meeting agendas.</p>	<p>Quarterly meetings with SMT to discuss existing and emerging risks, <i>within 1 week from the end of the quarter</i>.</p> <p>Risk Register shared with DfC in Quarterly Assurance Report <i>within 10 working days from the end of the quarter</i>.</p> <p>Committee papers to be sent to all ARAC attendees no later than <i>1 week in advance of the meeting</i>.</p> <p>Training of ARAC and key staff.</p>	<p>By managing the existing and emerging risks within COPNI, this prevents the likelihood of these becoming issues and ensures management time is focussed on delivering services that protect the rights of older people.</p>	<p>Head of Corporate Services</p> <p>(Input from SMT)</p>

		Any significant risks identified between reporting cycles are communicated to the ARAC and Sponsor Branch in DfC at the earliest opportunity.			
5.8	Prompt Implementation and / or updating of relevant policies, procedures and practice as required.	<p>Policy and Procedures register is maintained.</p> <p>Monitoring of relevant information sources i.e. DoF, DfC, legislative requirements.</p> <p>Policies and Procedures shared with COPNI staff for consultation at drafting stage and relevant Human Resources policies forwarded to NIPSA to ensure input from Trade Union side.</p> <p>S75 Equality Screening completed alongside policies to</p>	<p><i>Monthly review</i> of the Policies and Procedures register.</p> <p>Responsible owners informed <i>no later than 3 months</i> ahead of revision date of policy of the requirement to review the relevant policy.</p> <p>All policies are shared for consultation with staff and all relevant Human Resources Policies are shared with NIPSA.</p> <p>A S75 Equality Screening completed for all policies.</p>	Ensures COPNI's policies are aligned on a regular basis with NICS policies, and that COPNI has policies in place to support staff	Head of Corporate Services

		assess any adverse impact on S75 groups.			
5.9	Drafting of Corporate Planning 2025-29	Drafting of the Commissioner's Corporate Plan 2025-29 for assessment by the Minister.	Corporate Plan submitted to the Minister by <i>September 2025</i> . Approved Corporate Plan published on COPNI's website <i>within 2 working days</i> of Ministerial approval being granted.	The Commissioner, having engaged widely with older people, will set out her priorities for her term and older people will have a clarity on the issues that are to be prioritised in the next 4 years.	Head of Corporate Services Head of Communications and Engagement
5.10	Drafting of Annual Business Plan for 2026-27	Schedule of development of Business Plan 2026-27. Submit to Sponsor DfC Branch in DfC.	Business Plan drafted including annual Budget requirements, to align with new high-level outcomes from the new Corporate Plan 2025-29. Business Plan submission to DfC by <i>31 January 2026</i> .	COPNI can plan for the next year of the Commissioner's term, based on further engagement and the Commissioner's own priorities.	Head of Corporate Service (Input from SMT)

5.11	Agree and implement recommendations of the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) review	COPNI will discuss with the Minister the recommendations from the NDNA report, and work with the Department to implement where directed.	Meet with the Minister and Officials from DfC during the 2025-26 year to discuss recommendations from the report. Implement any agreed recommendations <i>within deadlines set by the Minister.</i>	COPNI will align the organisation to ensure older people are protected within any possible new structure.	Commissioner and Chief Executive.
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Allocated Budget 2025-26

Budget Category	Allocation
	Total £
Salaries*	1,142,000
Overheads**	231,000
Programme Costs	50,000
Provisions	75,000
IFRS 16 depreciation (Leases)	39,000
Total Projected Expenditure (exc. depreciation and capital)	1,537,000
Depreciation	35,000
Total Expenditure	1,572,000

*COPNI has been required to absorb significant increases arising from the 2024 and 2025 Pay Remits, as well as the increases in employers National Insurance from April 2025 onwards.

COPNI's projections for the 2025-26 year are based on maintaining vacancies within the approved staffing structure, as implementation in full of the new structure is not affordable within the opening allocation. The work of the COVID-19 Inquiry has had a significant impact on the capacity of COPNI's legal team, and the case for an additional fixed-term Legal Officer was accepted in the final approval of the COVID-19 business case in February 2024. With participation in Module 6 and Module 10 in view, this post was extended through to August 2025. An additional backfill resource has also been approved by the Department to cover a long-term absence in 2025-26.. Elsewhere, COPNI is unable to recruit vacant posts owing to budgetary pressures, which if unaddressed will materially impact on the achievement of the objectives within this business plan.

Inescapable pressures identified for 2025-26:

Programme costs – Supreme Court (£20k)

Although COPNI has been unsuccessful in the application to the Supreme Court in respect of the Judicial Review into Continuing Healthcare, it is anticipated that there will be a cost order from the courts for review of the submission. The Department approved COPNI's submission to the Supreme Court.

UK COVID-19 Inquiry (£30k)

The former Commissioner has been called to provide oral evidence for Module 6 (The Care Sector), and COPNI anticipates significant participation in Module 10, which will assess the impact of the pandemic, in which older people were so disproportionately impacted. COPNI is also expected to receive mandatory Rule 9 requests for information from the Inquiry, which will require counsel review ahead of submission.

Provisions (£75k)

COPNI is seeking to close out ongoing legal cases in the current financial year, in line with approvals provided by the Department.