



Commissioner for **Older People**  
for Northern Ireland

Enabling Access to Justice Division  
Department of Justice  
Block C, Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
Northern Ireland  
BT4 3SG

5 February 2025

**RE: Public Consultation on Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan  
January 2025**

Dear Minister Long

The office of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) welcomes your current proposal. Your consultation is timely as access to justice is a key element of COPNI's research, which often explores the barriers faced by older people, and the complexity of criminal justice issues facing older people. Briefly, COPNI's research on criminal justice includes:

- *Improving Access to Justice for Older Victims of Crime: Older People as Victims of Crime and the Response of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (2019)* examined how to improve access to justice for older victims of crime in Northern Ireland, exploring crime against older people and the response by the criminal justice system.
- *Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland (2019)* examined the impact of crime on older people and their families, as well as the response of the criminal justice system.
- *A Different Crime: Offending against Older People (2023)* assessed the experience of older people in the criminal justice system and includes an analysis of crime statistics.
- *A Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland (2024)* presents an overview of the developing policy and legislative landscape as it relates to domestic abuse, alongside an overview of PSNI prevalence statistics, and some of the unique characteristics of domestic abuse as it relates to older victims.



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I hope that COPNI's research, and that of partners such as the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> can support your ambitions. Indeed, COPNI welcomes any future engagement to improve access to justice. There are two specific ways in which COPNI's previous research may support the department's proposed deliverables in the current plan:

- **Deliverable 1: Issue proposals to improve specialist support, including legal, for specific vulnerable groups, focusing initially on victims of domestic abuse, people in housing stress, and migrants including refugees:** In 2024, COPNI published the *A Growing Concern* report. This offers a good starting point to understand the unique ways in which domestic abuse is characterised among older victims. COPNI asks that this report is considered as part of your review, and older victims considered in all future work to address violence against women and girls.
- **Deliverable 2: Introduce management information changes to capture information on section 75 characteristics of those receiving support:** The development of a robust evidence base is required to identify the issues that exist across different section 75 groups. COPNI is currently strengthening its partnerships with criminal justice organisations like the PSNI. We are keen to engage with representatives from the Department of Justice in future conversations, aligned with this action, to develop a better understanding of the experience of older people in their efforts to access justice.

I look forward to hearing back and wish you every success in the development and delivery of your plan.

Conor Tinnelly

**Policy Advice and Research Unit**  
**Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland**

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<sup>1</sup> [CJINI - Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland - An Inspection of the Criminal Justice System's Approach to Vulnerable Older People in Northern Ireland](#)