



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Strategic Planning and Governance
Northern Ireland Policing Board
James House, Block D
2-4 Cromac Avenue
The Gasworks
Belfast
BT7 2JA

By email: corporateplan@nipolicingboard.org.uk

17/02/25

Re: Northern Ireland Policing Board Consultation on new Corporate Plan 2025 - 2030

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with you on the development of your Corporate Plan. I offer this response on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI). Eddie Lynch ended his term as Commissioner in December 2024. In his eight-year term, Commissioner Lynch completed four crime reports on the disproportionate impacts crime can have on older people in Northern Ireland.^{1 2 3 4} As we await the appointment of a new Commissioner, it feels timely to detail some of the key criminal justice issues pertinent to older people for your consideration as you develop a new Corporate Plan.

Older People's Experiences of Crime

In Northern Ireland, older people are much less likely than younger age categories to be victims of crime.⁵ When crimes are committed against older people however, the impacts on older people appear to be significant. COPNI's *A Different Crime* report found that "a major factor as regards the extent to which a crime impacts an individual victim, is the victim's pre-

¹ Brown and Gordon (2019) ['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'](#).

² Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2019) ['Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland'](#).

³ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) ['A Different Crime: Offending Against Older People'](#).

⁴ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2024) ['Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland'](#).

⁵ For instance, police recorded crime statistics showed there were 4,193 recorded victims of crime in Northern Ireland aged 65 plus in 2023/24. In the same year, there were 5,007 recorded victims aged between 45 and 49, 7,733 aged between 35 and 39, and 7,656 aged between 25 and 29. Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) ['Annual Trends in Police Recorded Crime 1998/99 to 2023/24, Pivot Table 4'](#).

offence status”.⁶ Older people in Northern Ireland are more likely to live alone,⁷ live with a disability or long-term health issue,⁸ live in poverty⁹ or fuel poverty,¹⁰ be widowed,¹¹ as well as experience loneliness and social isolation.¹² An older victim who is socially engaged, with a strong support system may have a better chance at overcoming the impact of a crime when compared to an isolated older victim with less mechanisms in place to deal with the aftermath of the crime. Therefore overall, older victims who experience vulnerability before a crime has been committed may suffer more profound and lasting effects from crime.

Despite being relatively safe from crime in Northern Ireland, older people often experience high levels of fear of crime.¹³ Older people frequently report feeling less capable of protecting themselves, making them more anxious about potential victimisation. With many older people living alone in Northern Ireland, feelings of insecurity may be amplified, especially in areas with higher crime rates. Past experiences, media reporting or hearing about crime in their local area can also heighten fear about experiencing crime. This fear of crime can have significant impacts on older people, even if they have never been direct victims.¹⁴ For older people across Northern Ireland, policing is about much more than experiences of crime. Rather, older people need to feel confident, safe and secure in their communities to allow them to age well.

⁶ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) [‘A Different Crime: Offending Against Older People’](#), page 9.

⁷ In 2016, there were 47,249 one-person households in Northern Ireland where the resident was aged 75 or over. By 2041, this figure is projected to rise to 79,622. NISRA (2018) [‘Northern Ireland Household Projections \(2016 Based\)’](#).

⁸ In Census 2021, 185,300 people aged 65 or more in Northern Ireland live with a limiting long-term health problem or disability, equating to 56.8%. NISRA (2022) [‘Census 2021, Main Statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical Bulletin, Health, Disability and Unpaid Care’](#), page 18.

⁹ The estimated proportion of pensioners in Northern Ireland in relative poverty was 12% and a further 7% in absolute poverty. NISRA and Department for Communities (2024) [‘Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report, 2022/23’](#).

¹⁰ 36% of households where the resident is aged 60 plus in Northern Ireland are living in fuel poverty. The Consumer Council (2022) [‘A Review of Fuel Poverty Levels in Northern Ireland’](#), page 21.

¹¹ Census 2021 results found there were 80,802 usual residents aged 65 plus widowed in Northern Ireland. NISRA (2023) [‘Census 2021, Main Statistics, Demography Tables – Household Relationships, MS-A33 Marital and Civil Partnership Status by Broad Age Bands’](#).

¹² 18.7% of those aged between 65 and 74 and 22.6% of those aged 75 plus in Northern Ireland reported feelings of loneliness at least some of the time. Additionally, 6.2% of those aged between 65 and 74 and 7.7% of those aged 75 plus reported feelings of loneliness often/always. NISRA and the Executive Office (2023) [‘Wellbeing in Northern Ireland, 2022/23 – Tables’](#).

¹³ The 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey found that 11% of respondents aged 75 plus had high levels of worry about crime. Similarly, respondents aged 65 plus were more likely to describe the effect of fear of crime on their quality of life as ‘moderate’ or ‘great’. NISRA (2022) [‘Findings from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey’](#).

¹⁴ Perhaps including withdrawing from social interactions or community activities, avoiding leaving their homes, increasing the risk that they may experience loneliness and social isolation, as well as weakened social ties.

COPNI was encouraged to see Objective B in your draft Corporate Plan, “to monitor, oversee and assess the performance of the PSNI through the Board and its Committees and ensure the delivery of Human Rights based, community focused policing”.¹⁵ Under this objective, COPNI was assured by your commitment to scrutinise the PSNI’s performance on the implementation of the Policing Plan measures. In response to your recent Policing Plan consultation, we emphasized that “policing must consider the impacts of crime for this cohort to ensure effective interventions can be shaped to build confidence in policing and lessen fear of crime levels”.¹⁶ COPNI maintains that it is through the delivery and resourcing of community-focused policing that the policing needs of older people are more likely to be met.

Regarding Objective A, COPNI is supportive of the call for more sustainable funding for the PSNI, with police numbers remaining a focus for the Board and the PSNI. A reduction in neighbourhood officers risks disproportionate impacts for older people. By making policing less visible in the community (and therefore less accessible), many older people’s already high levels of fear of crime risk being exacerbated. By contrast, a visible police presence can help older people feel safe in their communities and ultimately contribute to an environment in which they can age well. COPNI is concerned by the PSNI’s funding crisis and will continue to support an improved funding model.

Diversity of Older People

Older people are a highly diverse group, as diverse as any other age group. They vary not only in age – ranging from those in their 60s to those aged over 100 – but also in demographic characteristics. Gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, among other characteristics can influence older people’s identities. It is important that justice agencies are representative of the people they serve. Having a diverse PSNI is important to ensure the multiple identities of older people are reflected in service delivery, encouraging confidence in policing, reporting and receiving intervention. COPNI therefore welcomes Objective A: “to monitor PSNI’s resourcing plans, advocating on issues which support policing, including transformational change and delivery of a representative service”.¹⁷

¹⁵ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2024) [‘Corporate Plan Consultation 2025-2030’](#), page 9.

¹⁶ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2024) [‘Consultation Response on the Draft Policing Plan 2025-2030’](#), page 3.

¹⁷ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2024) [‘Corporate Plan Consultation 2025-2030’](#), page 8.

Service Provisions for Older People

Older people may have limited awareness of the support available to them from justice agencies. COPNI's *A Different Crime* report found that many victims, particularly older victims, find the roles of criminal justice organisations confusing and difficult to navigate.¹⁸ Specific to cases of domestic abuse crimes, COPNI's *Growing Concern* report highlighted that some older people believe the services on offer are not for them because of their age and they view services as being "unfamiliar with older people's distinctive needs".¹⁹ Both *A Different Crime* and *Growing Concern* call for a sustained focus on the needs of older victims of crime by criminal justice organisations to ensure that barriers to justice and appropriate interventions can be removed. COPNI welcomes Objective C, "through engagement and collaboration, to raise awareness of the Board's work to enable local communities, PCSPs and partners to support the delivery of policing outcomes".²⁰ We trust your engagement and collaboration will involve older people and the groups that represent them to create a better justice system for all. We reiterate our commitment to working collaboratively to create a Northern Ireland where older people feel safe and protected.

Conclusion

In closing, Northern Ireland's population is an ageing one.²¹ COPNI's *At the Centre of Government Planning* report emphasizes the need for thoughtful, coordinated planning to address the challenges posed by an ageing population.²² We believe population ageing is one of Northern Ireland's greatest challenges and, if not properly addressed, it will have significant negative impacts for all in our society, particularly older people. With this in mind, we urge you to consider our research reports cited above to ensure that the Northern Ireland Policing Board is preparing for and accommodating the needs of an ageing population.

COPNI is fully supportive of the vision presented in your Consultation document, as well as the strategic objectives. Crucially, we trust the activity outlined in the draft Corporate Plan will

¹⁸ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) '[A Different Crime: Offending Against Older People](#)', page 32.

¹⁹ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2024) '[Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland](#)', page 16.

²⁰ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2024) '[Corporate Plan Consultation 2025-2030](#)', page 10.

²¹ In 2022, there were 335,449 older people aged 65 and above in Northern Ireland. By 2042, this number is projected to rise to 480,482, over a 43% increase. NISRA (2025) '[2022-based Population Projections for Northern Ireland, Tabular 5 Year Age Bands](#)'.

²² Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2024) '[At the Centre of Government Planning: The Programme for Government and Preparing for an Ageing Population](#)'.



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be resourced properly and implemented fully to ensure access to effective policing for all. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this response, your Corporate Plan or any other matter further should it be necessary or helpful.

Best wishes

Anna Doran

Policy Advice and Research Unit

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

e. anna.doran@copni.org