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A message from Siobhan Casey, Commissioner for Older People



Hello,

I'm delighted to be writing my very first newsletter as Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland. Since starting in post in April, I've been travelling across Northern Ireland meeting with many older people, community groups and organisations who support them. These conversations have been invaluable in helping me understand the issues that matter most to older people and will directly shape the priorities in my upcoming Corporate Plan.

great place to age and my work will play a key role in making that vision a reality. If you haven't had the chance yet, I'd really encourage you to take a few minutes to share your views. You can find the survey further in this newsletter.

I'm looking forward to keeping in touch with you through these newsletters, and really excited to continue the important work of promoting and safeguarding the rights and interests of older people in Northern Ireland.

Warm regards,

Siobhan Casey

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Commissioner comments on Winter Fuel Payment U-Turn



Last month, Sir Keir Starmer announced that he would reverse plans to means test the Winter Fuel Payment later announcing that older people earning £35,000 or less will continue to receive the benefit.

The Commissioner publicly acknowledged the change in policy direction as a marked improvement from earlier plans to restrict the payment even further, asked for urgent clarification for Northern Ireland's position and also highlighted that the newly proposed income threshold will still leave many older people struggling.

least a step in the right direction. However, the £35,000 threshold will not be enough for many older people who are already under pressure.”

“Many older people in Northern Ireland live on modest incomes and face high living costs. Those living with health conditions, mobility issues, or disabilities often require additional heating, as they spend more time at home. With energy prices still high, the cost of heating a home throughout the day can quickly become unaffordable.

“Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland remains severe. Past estimates suggested that one in four older households live in fuel poverty and that figure is likely even higher today due to soaring energy prices. The Winter Fuel Payment is a lifeline.

“I hope this is a turning point, a lesson to all political leaders. Older people must never be treated as an afterthought. Policy decisions must be grounded in dignity, fairness, and a commitment to protecting our most vulnerable.”

Rise of domestic abuse against older people

In the lead up to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which took place on Sunday 15 June, the Commissioner raised concerns about the rising number of older victims of domestic abuse and the unique challenges they face. The Commissioner warned that older people can be more severely affected due to circumstances that may prevent them from recognising abuse, seeking help, or accessing appropriate support.



There has been a steady rise in the prevalence of domestic abuse crimes against older people in the past two decades (with only a slight reduction noted between 2022/23 – 2023/24). For instance, there were 639 cases involving older victims* in 2014/15, which had more than doubled by 2023/24 with 1,419 reported cases**. While this increase may partly reflect growing awareness and

“Domestic abuse is a deeply distressing experience for anyone, but older people can face particular challenges that heighten their vulnerability and the impact of the abuse. In Northern Ireland, for example, older people are more likely to be living with a disability, which can significantly limit their ability to protect themselves or seek help.”

“Some older people may view abuse as a private or family matter, which can result in them enduring harm for much longer. Factors such as cognitive decline, poor mental health or reduced capacity can also make it harder for them to recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse.”

Our **Growing Concern** report which we published late last year, called for improved data collection on the levels and nature of domestic abuse experienced by older people; the introduction of interventions to address barriers to reporting and accessing support; and more awareness regarding the provision of support services that are tailored to addressing the needs of older victims.

[Read our Growing Concern report](#)

Time to end age discrimination

Northern Ireland is still the only part of the UK where it's legal to discriminate against people because of their age when accessing goods, services or facilities.

That means you can be treated unfairly when accessing services such as insurance, travel, healthcare, simply because you're older – and there's currently no law to stop it.

We've responded to a public consultation calling for urgent change. We're calling on the NI Executive to finally introduce legal protection against age discrimination.




Everyone deserves
fair treatment, no
matter their age.

COPNI

Everyone deserves fair treatment, no matter their age.

Calling all older people - we need your help!




Your opinion matters!

Help shape the future priorities of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland.

If you're aged 60 or over, we want to hear what matters to you!

Fill out our survey and make sure your voice is heard.



COPNI Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

www.copni.org

If you are aged 60 or over and living in Northern Ireland, please take our survey to help shape the Commissioner's priorities in her new Corporate Plan.

This plan will set out the key issues the Commissioner will focus on over the coming months and years, alongside the day-to-day work of the office.

What matters to you matters to us.

By taking just 10 minutes to complete the short survey, you'll help ensure that the Commissioner's work reflects the real needs and concerns of older people across Northern Ireland.

[Take me to the survey](#)

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interview. These interviews take place with an older person and the purpose of them is to not only help change people's perceptions of older people and promote the positive contributions they make, but to also get their valuable take on life, lessons learned and advice they would give to their younger self.



We can't think of anyone better to kick off our series than our very own Commissioner, Siobhan Casey. Siobhan is aged 62 and lives in Hollywood with her husband Niall and two children Cara (26) and Rory (24) and her two dogs Simba and Nala.

Hi Siobhan, you're obviously very busy with work and home life, tell us how do you like to spend your spare time?

I spend a lot of time walking the dogs and I also do a bit of yoga and sea swimming. I also love nothing more than spending it with family and friends. I love to spend time with them and my brothers and sisters too.

What age has been the best age of your life? Why?

I always felt that my 50s were really good as they weren't what I was expecting. But I'm loving my 60s so far too! The great thing about getting older is you are not as concerned about what other people think. You become more comfortable in your own skin too so I'm enjoying that part of my life.

What is your proudest achievement?

My children. I think that's the case for both myself and my husband, we are very proud of them. More recently, I feel very proud to have been given this job. It's something I wanted for a long time and I worked hard to have the credentials to get it and I'm really honoured to be given the opportunity.

What would you say are the best and worst things about growing older?

The best things about growing older is you become more comfortable in yourself but the worst thing is loss. As you get older you do lose people that you love along the way and I think that's really difficult for a lot of older people - you become lonely for the people you had.

What in your opinion was the best decade? Why?

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America and Europe and I really enjoyed that. That experience to travel and learn new cultures and meet new people was great. But I was also really settled when I returned home to Northern Ireland having got the travelling out of my system. I think Northern Ireland is a beautiful place to live.

Lastly, any parting words of wisdom/ advice you would give to your younger self?

One of my brothers, Liam, used to always make my siblings and I state the (Bing Crosby) song which had the lyrics to accentuate the positives, eliminate the negatives and latch on to the affirmative. That was a very strong belief of his that he instilled in us. I think it's great advice for any age to try to keep a positive mindset.

Engagement round up

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Since taking up post, the Commissioner has hit the ground running meeting lots of older people and the organisations that support them right across Northern Ireland.

Her first official engagement was a visit to the Craigavon Area Talking Newspaper, a vital service run by a team of dedicated older volunteers. The group ensures local news remains accessible to people with sight loss by recording and distributing audio versions of local newspapers.

In April, the Commissioner visited the Healthy Living Centre at the Old Library Trust in Derry/Londonderry. This charitable organisation delivers services and programmes aimed at tackling the root causes of poor health and reducing health inequalities in the local community.

Last month, the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance welcomed the Commissioner to their AGM, where she heard directly from members about their experiences and views on shaping public services that work better for older people.

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group hosted by Strabane and District Caring Services two opportunities to engage with older people in community-led settings to hear about the groups and activities they engage in. It was also an opportunity for the Commissioner to seek their views on her future work priorities.

Most recently, on 5 June, the Commissioner had the honour of being the keynote speaker at the NI Regional Executive Committee of u3a's Summer School. Speaking at the Greenmount Campus of the College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise, she shared her vision, priorities, and early thinking on her upcoming Corporate Plan.

These early visits mark the beginning of a busy period of engagement, as the Commissioner continues to listen, learn and advocate for older people across Northern Ireland.

The logo for COPNI (Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland) consists of the letters C, O, P, N, and I, each enclosed in a dark blue square, which are then arranged horizontally.

Events and engagement

A key part of the Commissioner's role is meeting with older people from all across Northern Ireland. This gives real insight into the issues older people are facing on the ground and gives them a chance to voice their concerns with her. It also provides an opportunity for the Commissioner to talk about her role and the ways in which we can provide support.

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responses.

Our policy team has recently submitted a public consultation response on the need for age discrimination legislation in relation to goods, facilities and services.

You can read our full response to the consultation - and all other COPNI consultation responses by clicking the below link.

Age NI wants to hear from people aged 65 and over about the care they received in hospital by inviting older people to fill in a survey that is open until 31 July.

There is also an opportunity for some participants to take part in an interview with Age NI's peer researchers, for those wanting to talk in detail about a hospital stay.

Commissioner visit your group or attend an event, you can get in touch with us at communications@copni.org.

[More info](#)[Find out more](#)[Information & survey](#)

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