



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Department of Justice
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SG

By email: DOJ.RORS@justice-ni.gov.uk

30.07.26

Re: Call for Views on a new Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending in Northern Ireland

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) in response to the Department of Justice's (DoJ) call for views on a new Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending. COPNI welcomes the opportunity to engage with this consultation and provides the following response for the Department's consideration.

The role of the Commissioner was established under legislation. The Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011¹ dictates that the primary aim of COPNI is to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of older people. Thus, COPNI has reviewed this Strategy from the perspective of an independent champion for older people in Northern Ireland.

As an initial point, Northern Ireland's population is ageing. This means there will be more older people here than children and more people entering State Pension Age (SPA) than working age.² An ageing population presents opportunities and challenges for all public services. In a justice context, an ageing population means there may be more older victims, more older offenders, and an ageing prison population in Northern Ireland. In the context of offending and reoffending, Public Prosecution Service (PPS) data shows that, even in the last 5 years, there has been an increase in the number of older suspects on files received by them. For instance, in 2021/22 there were 3,121 suspects aged 56 plus, 3,886 in 2022/23, 3,967 in 2023/24, 3,512 in 2024/25 and in 2025/26, there were 3,426.³ Likewise, the prison population has seen a growth in the number of older prisoners. In 2024/25, there were 104 prisoners in Northern Ireland aged 60 plus, the highest recorded since 2015/16.⁴ COPNI has consistently highlighted that "Northern Ireland's ageing population introduces demands on the justice system to respond to this demographic change by adopting more accessible processes, ensuring better

¹ [Commissioner for Older People Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#).

² NISRA 'Mid-2024 Population Estimates: Age bands and sex'.

³ PPS Statistical Bulletins Tables, Table 6a, [2021/22](#), [2022/23](#), [2023/24](#), [2024/25](#), and [2025/26](#).

⁴ DoJ (2025) 'The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2024-25', Table 2c.

cross-sector collaboration, and providing support that can address the distinct needs of older people”.⁵

The focus of this Strategy, offending and reoffending, is not of direct relevance to COPNI. That said, the Commissioner considered it important to respond to this consultation. Many of the Strategy’s proposed aims, commitments and outcomes align with issues COPNI’s office has consistently called for in other arenas.⁶ Therefore, if implemented fully and resourced properly, this Strategy has potential benefits for many older people across Northern Ireland. Thus, the Commissioner welcomes the Department’s recognition that “efforts to prevent offending and reduce reoffending also realise secondary benefits that contribute to safer communities, increased public confidence and better outcomes for all those affected by crime”.⁷

COPNI supports the vision of the new Strategy: “A safer, fairer Northern Ireland where opportunity, support and partnership working, prevents harm and reduces offending and reoffending”.⁸ While older people are less likely to be victims and perpetrators of crime in Northern Ireland,⁹ ¹⁰ many experience heightened levels of fear of crime.¹¹ Thus, any Strategy that commits to making Northern Ireland safer and fairer is welcome.

Further, COPNI supports the Strategy’s two Strategic Aims to “reduce offending through prevention and early intervention” and “reduce reoffending by strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement”.¹² The successful implementation of these aims has the potential to improve community safety, reduce victimisation and support more effective rehabilitation, benefitting people of all ages.

As well as this, COPNI welcomes the four Strategic Themes, their Outcomes and Priorities:

1. Health & Wellbeing: Improved health, wellbeing and resilience.
2. Community & Inclusion: Strengthened community support, cohesion and inclusion.
3. Education & Employability: Increased participation of education and employability opportunities.
4. Justice & Rehabilitation: Strengthened restorative and rehabilitative justice and accountability for harmful behaviour.

⁵ COPNI (2025) ‘[Consultation on Draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy 2025-2030](#)’.

⁶ See, for example, COPNI (2026) ‘[Voices of Concern: The Reality of Health and Social Care for Older People in Northern Ireland](#)’, COPNI (2025) ‘[Advancing Age-Friendly Practice in Northern Ireland: Supporting Collaboration, Impact and Sustainability of Age Sector Organisations](#)’ and COPNI and ILC (2014) ‘[Working Longer in Northern Ireland: Valuing an Ageing Workforce](#)’.

⁷ DoJ (2026) ‘[Call for Views, New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending](#)’.

⁸ DoJ (2026) ‘[Call for Views, New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending](#)’.

⁹ PSNI (2025) ‘[Annual Trends in Police recorded crime 1998/99 to 2024/25, Pivot Table 4](#)’.

¹⁰ PPS (2026) ‘[PPS Statistical Bulletin 2025/26, Table 6a](#)’.

¹¹ DoJ (2025) ‘[Experience of Crime and Perceptions of Crime and Policing and Justice: Findings from the 2023/24 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey, Tables 17b and 18b](#)’.

¹² DoJ (2026) ‘[Call for Views, New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending](#)’.

For older people to experience their benefit, the Commissioner trusts that all stakeholders will consider and recognise the distinct needs of older people. For instance, in Northern Ireland, older people are the most likely to live with a long-term health condition or disability when compared to younger age groups.¹³ Further, multimorbidity also increases with age.¹⁴ Older people aged 75 plus are the most likely to feel lonely across all age groups. Likewise, over 20% of people aged between 65 and 74 and over 24% of people aged 75 plus report low levels of self-efficacy.¹⁵ The exit rates of older workers from the labour market are increasing which has contributed to a labour supply challenge.^{16 17}

In relation to Strategic Theme 4: Justice and Rehabilitation, to support the creation of “seamless rehabilitation pathways” and the modernisation of “justice processes to improve outcomes and reduce harm”, COPNI agrees that justice needs to be connected to “health, education, housing and community supports”.¹⁸ In the context of older people, interventions to reduce offending and reoffending must take into consideration the above complex needs, among others. As such, measures must be inclusive, accessible and responsive across all life stages. Public services, including justice, thus need to be reflective of the needs of an ageing population. This approach will support the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of older offenders and reduce offending among the older population.

Finally, COPNI welcomes the underpinning approach of the Strategy: Collaboration and Partnership. COPNI welcomes the Department’s recognition that “people’s needs span departments and sectors and no single organisation can meet them in isolation”.¹⁹ This is particularly true for older people who have increasingly complex, interconnected needs. COPNI reiterates our call for strategic planning by government for the opportunities and challenges presented by an ageing population.²⁰ Similarly, the Commissioner maintains her concern that the needs of older people are not yet fully understood or addressed by the criminal justice system. This is partly due to the lack of available and consistent data on older people who engage with the criminal justice system.²¹ As such, COPNI supports the Strategy’s commitment to improve data-sharing, evidence use and joint problem-solving.

¹³ NISRA (2022) ‘[Census 2021 Main Statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical Bulletin, Health, Disability and Unpaid Care](#)’, pages 18 and 27.

¹⁴ NISRA (2022) ‘[Census 2021 Main Statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical Bulletin, Health, Disability and Unpaid Care](#)’, page 25.

¹⁵ NISRA (2026) [Individual Wellbeing in Northern Ireland Report 2024/25](#).

¹⁶ Government Office for Science (2017) Longer working lives bring significant benefits to individuals, employers and wider society p. 4.

¹⁷ NISRA (2026) ‘[Labour Force Survey tables – July 2026, Table 2.10](#)’.

¹⁸ DoJ (2026) ‘[Call for Views, New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending](#)’.

¹⁹ DoJ (2026) ‘[Call for Views, New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending](#)’.

²⁰ COPNI (2024) ‘[At the centre of government planning: The Programme for Government and preparing for an ageing population](#)’.

²¹ See, for example, COPNI (2024) ‘[Growing Concern: Older victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland](#)’ and COPNI (2026) ‘[Written Evidence to the Northern Ireland Committee for Justice on the Criminal Justice \(Sentencing etc\) Bill from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland \(COPNI\)](#)’.



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In sum, this new Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending may appear to have limited relevance to older people. However, closer consideration highlights the importance of ensuring that such strategies are inclusive and able to recognise the distinct needs of older people. As an example, some individuals may spend many years in custody and return to the community in later life with distinct health, social care and housing needs. Embedding age inclusive principles to reducing offending and reoffending will help ensure services are equipped to support older people, promote effective rehabilitation and contribute to better outcomes for society. This approach is increasingly important in the context of Northern Ireland's ageing population.

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

Yours faithfully

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