



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Performance Directorate
Northern Ireland Policing Board
James House Block D
2-4 Cromac Avenue
The Gasworks
Belfast
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By email: policingplan@nipolicingboard.org.uk

01/10/24

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Consultation on the Draft Policing Plan 2025-2030

I am writing on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) in relation to your draft Policing Plan. The Commissioner, Mr Eddie Lynch, who is currently in a caretaker role in the office of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, and his office welcome the opportunity to engage with this consultation.

COPNI is supportive of the Plan and the three outcome statements. The Plan's emphasis on partnership working will encourage older victims to feel heard and voice their opinions. This will increase confidence in policing, encourage reporting of crimes and reaching out for support. Consequently, this will go some way in encouraging older people to age well in their communities. COPNI is, also, supportive of adopting a "rights-based approach" to policing and "embedding human rights principles into day-to-day policing in Northern Ireland"¹, as it allows for a building of trust between the police and the community, based on mutual respect and understanding.

In relation to the specific outcomes, COPNI offers the following comments:

Policing Plan Outcome 1: PSNI is victim focused

COPNI is pleased to see a focus on victims as a priority in the draft Policing Plan and agrees that victims navigating the criminal justice and policing system must be "treated with compassion and respect".²

¹ Northern Ireland Policing Board & PSNI (2024) Policing Plan Consultation 2025-2030, p 12. Available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-09/Tagged%20Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20Consultation%20-%20Final.pdf>

² Northern Ireland Policing Board & PSNI (2024) Policing Plan Consultation 2025-2030, p 9. Available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-09/Tagged%20Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20Consultation%20-%20Final.pdf>

In Northern Ireland, older people are less likely to be victims of crime when compared to younger age categories.³ Despite the low prevalence of crime among older people, those who do find themselves victims have a unique set of additional, distinct characteristics that can encourage their vulnerabilities and lessen their ability to cope with the aftermath. COPNI's *A Different Crime* report highlights that a major factor in understanding the impact of a crime on an individual is the "victim's pre-offence status".⁴ For instance, older people are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness⁵, live with a disability or long-term health condition⁶, have poorer health⁷, live alone⁸, be widowed⁹, and experience poverty¹⁰, among other things. Criminal justice organisations, such as the PSNI and Northern Ireland Policing Board, should be aware of these additional complexities and act accordingly to ensure they are equipped to provide older victims with tailored support that addresses their needs. Often, older people do not see themselves or their needs reflected in services on offer and, consequently, avoid reporting their experience or reaching out for support. Thus, having a victim-focused priority in the Policing Plan will go some way in encouraging many older victims to feel confident in policing, in reporting and in receiving suitable support. Continued awareness raising among older people themselves is vital and will ensure that the PSNI is truly a victim focused organisation and, also, that it is seen to be one.

³ For instance, in 2022/23, there were 7,773 recorded victims of crime aged between 20 and 24, 9,295 aged between 30 and 34, 7,206 aged between 40 and 44, and 4,567 aged 65 and above. Data taken from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Annual trends in police recorded crime 1998/99 to 2022/23*, Pivot table 3. Available at [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998-99 to 2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2023-11%2F517487509%2FPolice%20Recorded%20Crime%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%201998-99%20to%2022-23.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

⁴ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 9. Available at <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>

⁵ 18.7% of those aged 65 to 74 and a further 22.6% of those aged 75+ report high levels of loneliness. NISRA (2023) *Wellbeing in Northern Ireland, 2022/23*, p 5. Available at: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/wellbeing-in-northern-ireland-report-2022-23.pdf>

⁶ Census 2021 results showed that 56.8% of people aged 65+ live with a limiting long-term health problem or disability. Census 2021 (2022) *Main statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical bulletin, Health, disability and unpaid care*, p 18. Available at <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-2-statistical-bulletin-health-disability-and-unpaid-care.pdf>

⁷ Census 2021 results showed that 17.4% of people aged 65+ have 'bad or very bad general health' compared to 11% of 40 to 64 year olds, 3.1% of 15 to 39 year olds. Census 2021 (2022) *Main statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical bulletin, Health, disability and unpaid care*, p 10. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-2-statistical-bulletin-health-disability-and-unpaid-care.pdf>

⁸ In 2025, the number of people aged 75+ living alone is projected to be 57,560. By 2040, this figure is projected to increase to 77,924. NISRA (2018) *Northern Ireland Household Projections (2016 based)*. Available at https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nisra.gov.uk%2Fsites%2Fnisra.gov.uk%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FHHP16_NI.XLS&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

⁹ Census 2021 results showed there were 80,802 people aged 65+ who were widowed or a surviving partner from a civil partnership, equating to 24.7% of all those aged 65+. Census 2021 (2023) *Marital and civil partnership status by broad age bands*. Available at <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nisra.gov.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fstatistics%2Fce%2Fnsus-2021-ms-a33.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

¹⁰ In 2022/23, 12% of pensioners were in relative poverty, and a further 7% were in absolute poverty. NISRA (2024) *Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report, 2022/23*. Available at https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/communities/PII_report_2223.htm#

Policing Plan Outcome 2: We have safe and engaged communities with confidence in policing

COPNI's *A Different Crime* report found that, although older people are less likely to experience crime in Northern Ireland, older people have much higher fear of crime levels than younger age groups. The 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey found that 11% of those aged 75 plus had high levels of worry about crime. Respondents aged 65 and above were, also, more likely to describe the effect of fear of crime on their quality of life as 'moderate' or 'great'.¹¹

Similarly, COPNI's *Crime and Justice* report highlights that there may be a number of factors that contribute to some older people's reluctance to engage with and participate in the criminal justice system. Some older victims may be hesitant to give evidence in court and recount traumatic experiences, often exacerbated in cases where older victims know their offender. There are, also, concerns of increased instances where older victims may be unaware that what they have experienced is a crime, which can cause a delay in some older victims' reporting certain types of crime.¹²

Policing is about much more than the crime itself for older victims. In order to facilitate the creation of safe and engaged communities for older people, policing must consider the impacts of crime for this cohort to ensure that effective interventions can be shaped to build confidence in policing and lessen fear of crime levels. COPNI is, therefore, pleased by the Plan's emphasis on building community confidence so that the public "feel assured" about reporting crimes to the police.¹³

Policing Plan Outcome 3: PSNI have a representative, valued and enabled workforce

Older people are not a homogenous group. Having a representative police force that speaks to the multiple identities that older people embody will further encourage confidence in policing, foster trust, improve relationships between police and communities, and encourage victims to report their experiences and reach out for support.

¹¹ NISRA (2022) *Findings from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey*. Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/findings-202021-northern-ireland-safe-community-telephone-survey>

¹² Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2019) *Crime and Justice: The experience of older people in Northern Ireland*, p 23. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/206567-online-a4-crime-report-56p.pdf>

¹³ Northern Ireland Policing Board & PSNI (2024) *Policing Plan Consultation 2025-2030*, p 7. Available at: <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-09/Tagged%20Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20Consultation%20-%20Final.pdf>



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Finally, COPNI is supportive of the priorities identified in the Policing Plan and hopes it will serve to support victims of crime in Northern Ireland and create safer communities.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this response, or the Policing Plan, should it be necessary or helpful.

Best wishes,

Anna Doran

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