



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Gail McGreevy
Head of Communications
Probation Board for Northern Ireland
80-90 North Street
Belfast
BT1 1LD

By email: info@probation-ni.gov.uk

23/10/25

Re: Draft Corporate Plan 2026-2029 Consultation

Dear Sir/Madam

I write on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI), Siobhan Casey, in response to your call for views on your draft Corporate Plan. This office welcomes the opportunity to engage with this consultation. As the independent voice for older people in Northern Ireland, COPNI reviewed PBNI's Corporate Plan with a focus on how it interacts with the needs, rights and wellbeing of older people and sets out some issues for consideration below.

Aim and Vision

The Commissioner's office is supportive of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's (PBNI) organisational aim of "changing lives for safer communities".¹ In the context of Northern Ireland's ageing population, this aim is more urgent now than ever before. Soon, there will be more older people here than children.² Given that older people are "from a social grouping that is pre-disposed to be fearful of crime",³ COPNI supports PBNI's vision to "reduce reoffending by tackling the root causes of offending behaviour and rehabilitating people and reintegrating them into communities...reduce the number of victims of crime and build safer communities".⁴ In working towards your vision, PBNI contributes directly to safer communities, which in turn helps reduce fear among older people and improve their sense of security.

¹ PBNI (2025) '[Corporate Plan2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 8.

² For instance, in 2040, there is projected to be 283,082 children aged 14 and under, compared to 474,527 older people aged 65+ in Northern Ireland. NISRA (2025) '[2022-based Population Projections for Northern Ireland, Tabular 5 Year Age Bands](#)'.

³ COPNI (2023) '[A Different Crime](#)', page 35.

⁴ PBNI (2025) '[Corporate Plan2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 8.

Strategic Priorities

1. Develop the quality of our practice and delivery of core statutory functions, taking account of best practice.

COPNI is supportive of the PBNI's work to "deliver a range of services to reduce reoffending, protect the public and make communities safer".⁵ Despite being less likely to be victims of crime, many older people in Northern Ireland have a heightened fear of crime.⁶ This fear can stem from factors such as concerns about vulnerability, living alone, reduced confidence in public spaces, or past experiences that have interrupted their sense of safety. Media and community reporting can also heighten anxieties. Fear of crime can have profound impacts on older people, such as increasing social isolation, limiting physical activity, diminishing engagement in community life, as well as undermining confidence and independence. It is vital that efforts to build safer communities recognise the importance of enabling older people to continue living independently and without fear in their own homes and communities. COPNI is hopeful your work across "courts, communities, custody and with victims of crime" will be informed by the voices and experiences of older people.

2. Develop our practice, systems and processes in response to emerging needs and priorities.

Northern Ireland's population is ageing. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) 2022 Population Projections show, in 2025, there are 484,121 older people aged 60 plus in Northern Ireland. By 2050, this figure is projected to increase to 645,036.⁷ The ageing population presents a significant shift for public services, including the criminal justice system. As the population continues to age, older people are likely to represent a growing proportion of both victims and perpetrators of crime. As victims, older people can experience specific vulnerabilities that require tailored support. As offenders, factors such as physical disability, reduced mental capacity and poor health can impact rehabilitation and the management of probation. In practice, this calls for age-aware approaches within probation services to ensure that interventions are appropriate, effective and responsive to the unique needs of older people. For instance, PBNI's statutory function to provide pre-sentence reports and

⁵ PBNI (2025) '[Corporate Plan 2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 12.

⁶ 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](#)'.

⁷ NISRA (2025) '[2022-based Population Projections for Northern Ireland, Tabular 5 Year Age Bands](#)'

assessments should take such factors into consideration, while also still addressing the nature and seriousness of the offence. This would ensure justice is both fair and appropriate.

Your Corporate Plan also mentions emerging risks and priorities such as domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. In December 2024, COPNI published a report on older victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.⁸ It further discusses the distinct factors older people face when in contact with the criminal justice system, with particular attention to domestic abuse crimes. Recognising these unique challenges is essential to ensuring an inclusive justice system.

COPNI is therefore hopeful that PBNi's commitment to "respond to changes in the profile and emerging needs of our caseload" will consider the impact of our ageing population, be aware of the additional complexities older people face and act accordingly.⁹ In doing so, the system will be better equipped to provide older people with tailored and effective services.

3. Empower our people, develop our organisational culture and lead a trauma informed approach.

COPNI's *A Different Crime* found that a victim's "pre-offence status" can be a major factor in determining the extent to which a crime impacts them.¹⁰ Given that older people are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness¹¹, live with a disability or long-term health condition¹², live alone¹³, be widowed¹⁴, and experience poverty¹⁵, many can experience acute impacts from crime. Trauma-informed practice within the criminal justice system is therefore especially important for older people. Such an approach recognises crime can profoundly impact a person's behaviour, communication and wellbeing, and also ensures services respond effectively. For older victims and witnesses, a trauma-informed approach can make

⁸ COPNI (2024) '[Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)'.

⁹ PBNi (2025) '[Corporate Plan 2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 8.

¹⁰ COPNI (2023) '[A Different Crime](#)', page 9.

¹¹ 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](#)', page 5.

¹² 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](#)', page 18.

¹³ 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 \(2016 based\)](#)'.

¹⁴ 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](#)'.

¹⁵ 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](#)'.

interactions within the justice system less distressing, allowing for improved engagement, and creating a more effective justice system for older people. COPNI therefore acknowledges PBNi's recognition of the "widespread impact of trauma" and welcomes the commitment to "develop a culture underpinned by the values of transparency, supportiveness, learning, listening, co-operation, kindness and compassion".¹⁶ We hope older people will be at the forefront of these efforts.

4. Enhance external relationships and partnerships.

COPNI continues to highlight that the needs of older victims are not yet fully understood or addressed in the criminal justice system.¹⁷ Partnership and collaborative working within the system can therefore deliver real benefits for older people. By sharing information and coordinating responses, justice agencies can ensure that they are responsive to the needs of older people and offer tailored support that takes such needs into account. COPNI was therefore pleased to read that PBNi will "continue to foster collaboration and leverage the innovation, skills and expertise of statutory partners and the community and voluntary sector, benefitting from their unique perspective".¹⁸

Moreover, COPNI was reassured by PBNi's commitment to enhancing relationships with the wider public and ensuring "people are aware and have confidence in the work of probation".¹⁹ We often hear that many older people struggle to distinguish between the different criminal justice organisations and their roles. Staff from PBNi's Victim Information Unit highlighted to COPNI during the *A Different Crime* project "the confusion of many victims regarding organisations' various roles".²⁰ Enhancing relationships with older people and those who work on their behalf will go some way in encouraging meaningful and effective engagement with criminal justice processes.

Under this priority, it would be remiss of us not to mention the forthcoming Adult Protection Bill.²¹ COPNI has long called for the establishment of an Adult Protection Bill, especially in light of our statutory investigation into safeguarding failings at Dunmurry Manor Care Home.²²

¹⁶ PBNi (2025) '[Corporate Plan2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 13.

¹⁷ COPNI (2023) '[A Different Crime](#)', Foreword.

¹⁸ PBNi (2025) '[Corporate Plan2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 13.

¹⁹ PBNi (2025) '[Corporate Plan2026-29 Consultation](#)', page 13.

²⁰ COPNI (2023) '[A Different Crime](#)', page 32.

²¹ The Adult Protection Bill was introduced to the Assembly in June 2025 and is currently making its way through Assembly processes. See '[Adult Protection Bill](#)'.

²² COPNI (2018) '[Home Truths](#)'.



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The Bill places adult safeguarding on statutory footing and provides key duties to public bodies. Of relevance here, it provides PBNI with the duty to report a suspected adult at risk, as well as co-operate in Trusts' safeguarding inquiries. The Bill will require stronger communication and partnership between probation, police, health and social care, and housing bodies, among others. Effective multi-agency working will ensure adults at risk benefit from a responsive system which will improve prevention, early intervention and protection across all relevant agencies. COPNI recommends that PBNI engage fully with the development of the Bill as a key agency. The Board has a vital role to play in safeguarding adults at risk. By committing to strong collaboration with other partners, PBNI can ensure the Bill is implemented as intended.

In sum, COPNI is supportive of PBNI's upcoming Corporate Plan. We hope it will serve as another step toward creating a justice system that is not only fair and accessible, but responsive to the distinct needs and experiences of older people. COPNI looks forward to seeing the Plan taken forward. In the interim, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this response, or the Corporate Plan, 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