



Commissioner for **Older People**  
for Northern Ireland

# Corporate Plan 2022-2024



# Right here, Right now

The need to plan and support NI's ageing population

# Corporate Plan

## 2022-2024

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# Foreword

from  
the Commissioner for Older  
People for Northern Ireland



*We are living in an  
ageing population,  
an age of great  
demographic change.*

I am pleased to publish my second corporate plan as Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland. The development of this plan has been very different from previous ones given the devastating impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on life in Northern Ireland, and particularly on older people.

In early 2020, I had begun work on developing my second corporate plan, but everything changed in March 2020 when Covid 19 hit our shores. Throughout the following months all our attention turned to the impending threat of the pandemic and how we could protect older people as much as possible from it. This not only included protecting people from contracting the virus but also working with many authorities to support the hundreds of thousands of older people who had to immediately shield to help them stay safe.

The pandemic has unfortunately hit our older population, not just in Northern Ireland but across the planet, harder than any other group in society. It has highlighted many stark examples of ageism within our society, and the exposure to this type of discrimination has played a key part in shaping the focus and intention of this new corporate plan, entitled 'Right here, right now'.

This plan aims to highlight the scourge of ageism that continues to exist here today. As Commissioner, I will continue to shine a light on where ageism exists in our society and work to raise public awareness of this deeply damaging form of discrimination so it can be tackled head on.

The pandemic has also had a massive impact on many other key areas of older peoples' lives. Covid 19 has not only cruelly killed many older people, but it has also removed many of the key planks of living an active and healthy life. For almost two years, older people were severely restricted in seeing their families and friends due to the ongoing covid threat.

In addition to this, the many thousands of older peoples' groups and forums across NI that provide so much support, information and friendship came to an abrupt halt. The implications of covid, not just on physical health but on older people's mental health, emotional wellbeing and feelings of loneliness and isolation cannot be underestimated. A big focus of this plan aims to support older people and provide them with the support they need as we emerge from lockdowns and restrictions to live in the new 'Covid World'.

We are living in an ageing population, an age of great demographic change. This is a good news story given the many positive contributions older people make to our society. However, to maximise this opportunity more fully we need to support older people to remain active, live independent lives and remain healthier for longer. This ageing population will also increase the need for an expanded and more person focused health system that better meets the needs of older people. This is not something coming down the line – it is here now. Therefore, our government needs to make supporting our ageing population one of its top priorities. Not in five- or ten-years' time but, right here, right now.

There are major challenges that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Reform of our health and social care system, tackling loneliness and isolation, making energy more affordable and reducing crime against older people are some of the top issues that this plan seeks to address.

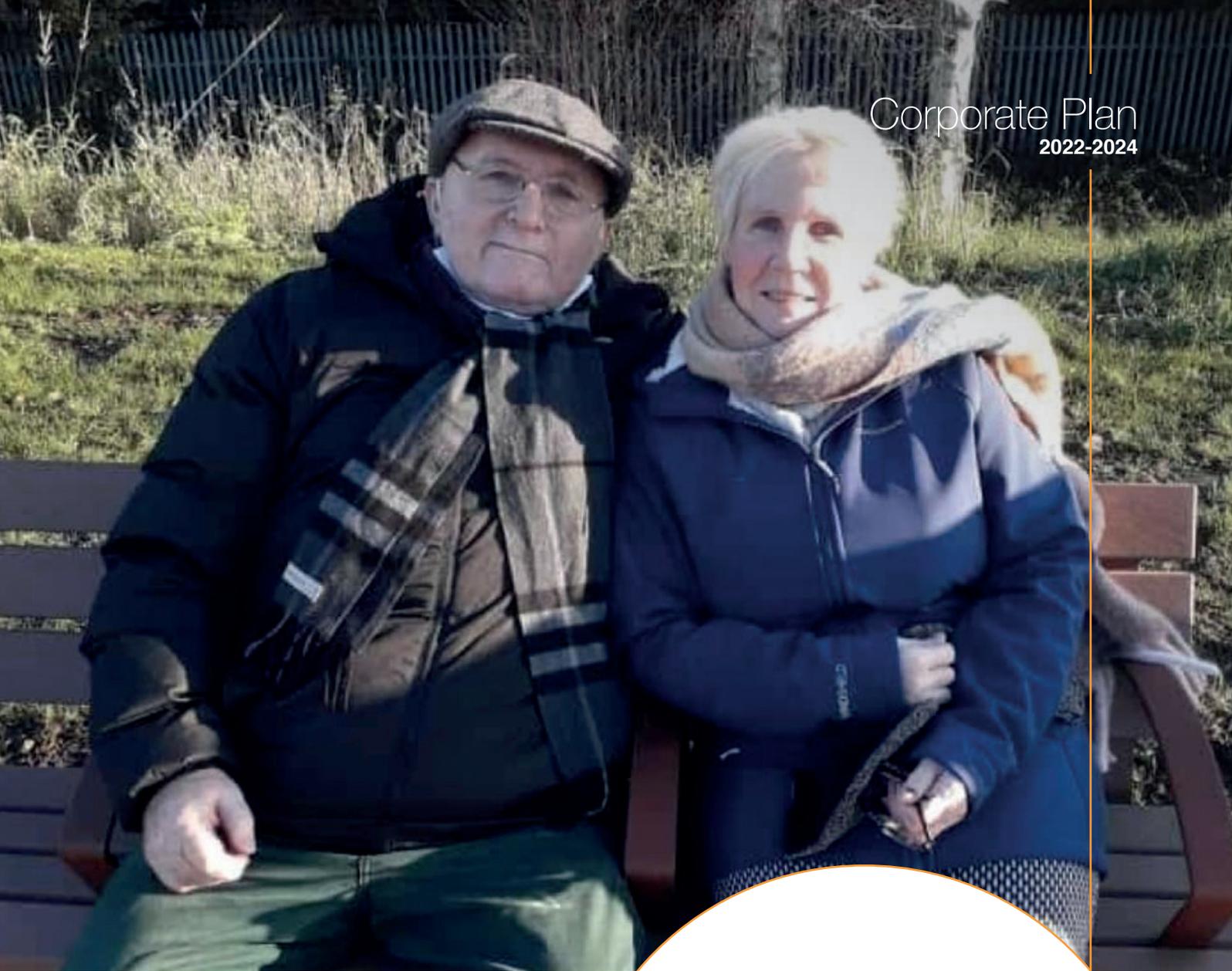
This past two years have made it impossible to have my usual face to face engagement with older people across every part of Northern Ireland. I have greatly missed the richness of these engagements, but I am very grateful to all those older people who attended virtual meetings with me during the pandemic. Your views and experiences, along with almost 500 older people who completed my survey on this corporate plan, form the backbone of the issues that I seek to make progress on between now and the end of my term.

I wish to thank you all for your continued support and together we can make Northern Ireland a great place to grow older.



Eddie Lynch

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland



▲ Gael and Con Connolly, aged 66 and 70

*...our government  
need to make  
supporting our ageing  
population one of  
its top priorities...*

About

# COPNI



*There are major challenges that need to be addressed right here, right now.*

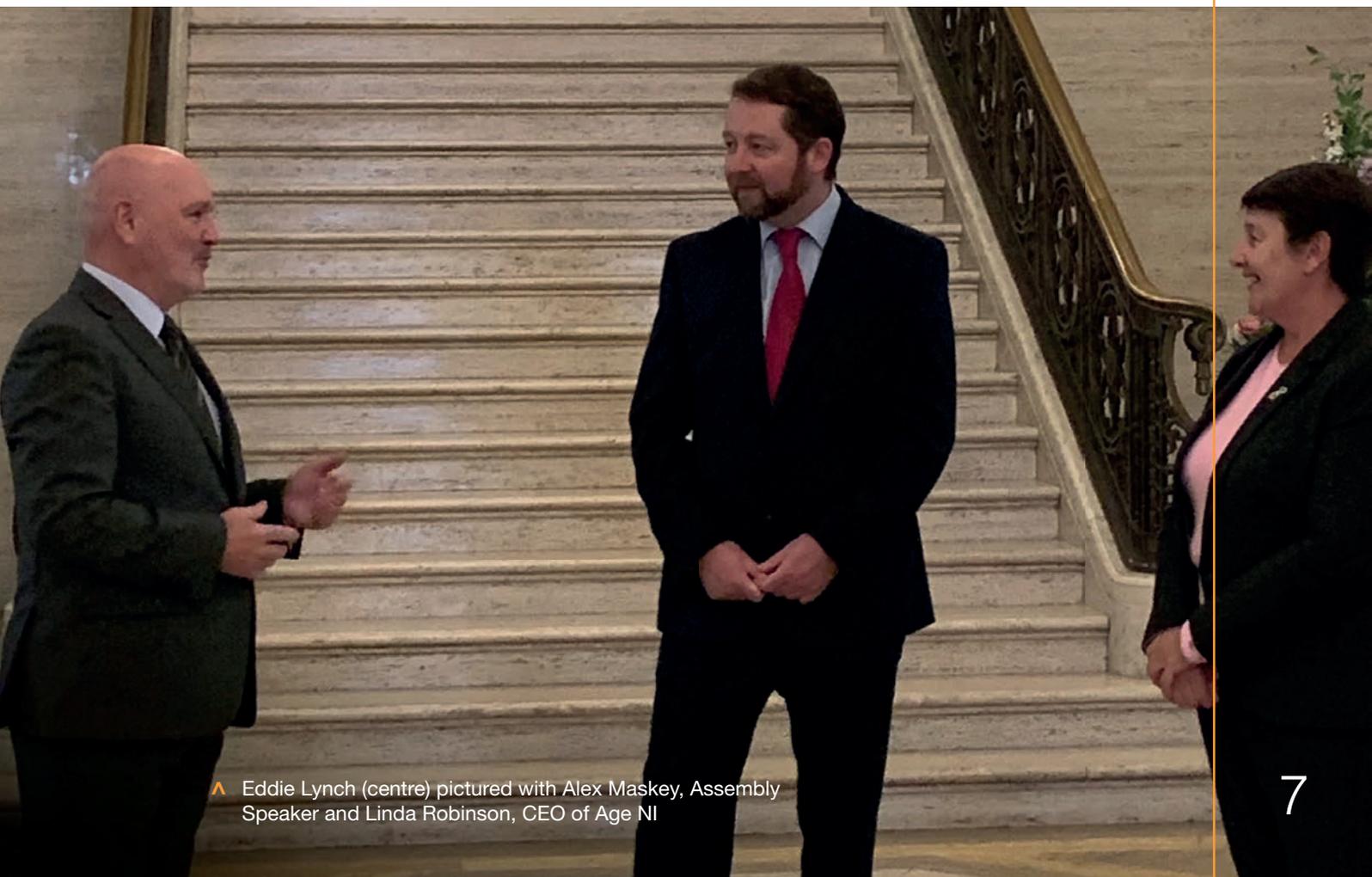
▲ Renee McAllister (right) aged 90 and Lily Robinson aged 92

Older people in Northern Ireland lobbied government for the establishment of a Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland to be an independent champion for older people. The government introduced legislation that set out a range of powers and duties for such a Commissioner and the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland was established in November 2011.

The Commissioner has statutory duties to safeguard and promote the interests of older people, as laid out in the Commissioner's Act 2011. Under this Act, the Commissioner must also keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for older people and to encourage best practice in the treatment of older people.

The Commissioner's office (COPNI) is set up as a non-departmental public body. Both the Commissioner and his office are sponsored by the Department for Communities but are operationally independent.

Eddie Lynch is the second public appointment to the role of Commissioner and took up post in June 2016. His term of office comes to an end in 2024, when a new Commissioner will be appointed.



▲ Eddie Lynch (centre) pictured with Alex Maskey, Assembly Speaker and Linda Robinson, CEO of Age NI

## COPNI supports the Commissioner in the key duties of his role:

- > Promoting awareness of older people's issues.
- > Reviewing and advising government on the provision of laws, policies, and practice in relation to older peoples' services.
- > Assisting and advocating for older people directly with public authorities.

The Commissioner's office is organised into five divisions which are overseen by a Chief Executive. The sections of office include:

*Legal office  
- including case  
work*

*Communications  
& engagement*

*Policy &  
research*

*Finance &  
governance*

*Human  
resources*



*the Commissioner  
acts as an independent  
champion for older  
people*

Our **purpose**  
& **vision**

***Our vision***

*The Commissioner's  
vision is that:*

*“Northern Ireland is a  
great place to age”.*

## Duties of the Commissioner

- (1) The Commissioner must promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of older persons and of the need to safeguard those interests.
- (2) The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the interests of older persons.
- (3) The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for older persons by relevant authorities.
- (4) The Commissioner must promote the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against, older persons.
- (5) The Commissioner must encourage best practice in the treatment of older persons.
- (6) The Commissioner must promote positive attitudes towards older persons and encourage participation by older persons in public life.

## Our purpose

### The Commissioner's purpose is:

*“To be an authoritative and independent champion who safeguards and promotes the interests of older people.”*

4.

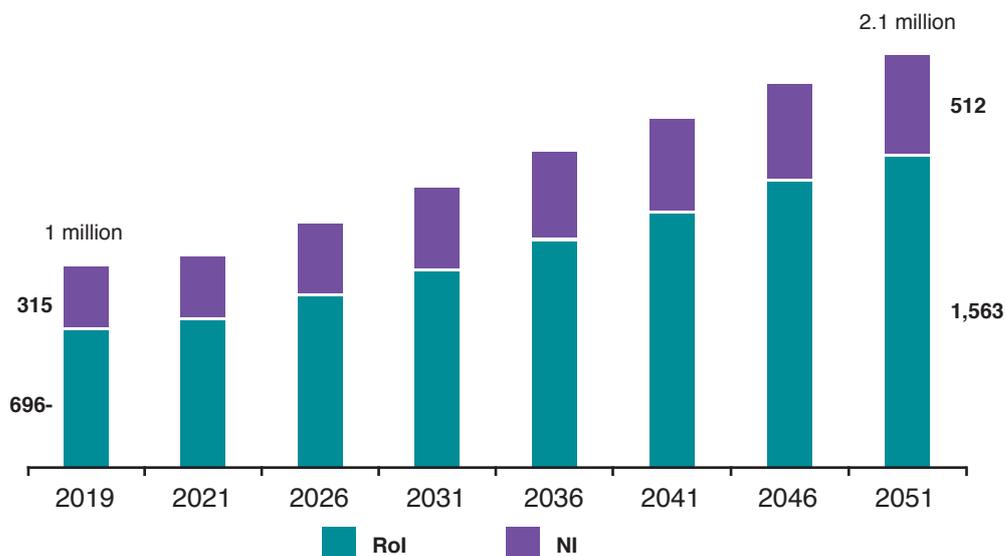
Why our **work**  
is **important**

*In Northern Ireland,  
life expectancy has  
risen by several  
decades in the last  
100 years.*

## People are living longer

- The number of people aged 65 or more rose by over 60,000, to nearly one-third of a million people in Census 2021 - a near 25% increase on 2011 and demonstrates the scale of population change due to ageing. (NISRA 2022)
- As cited by the Institute of Public Health's report; **Ageing and Public Health – an overview of key statistics in Ireland and Northern Ireland (2020)**, people worldwide are living longer than ever. This is also true in Northern Ireland where life expectancy has risen by several decades in the last 100 years.
- The population aged 65 or over in 2019 is estimated to have reached 314,700 in NI, and over 630,000 in the ROI, meaning the combined total on the island has exceeded 1 million for the first time (CSO, 2019a, NISRA, 2019).

Figure 1: Projected number of people aged 65+, thousands, 2019-2051



Source: CSO, 2018; CSO, 2019a; NISRA, 2019

## The challenges & opportunities for an ageing society:

- While increased life expectancy is a great achievement, and one which we should celebrate, the key challenge for government, is not only the extension of life expectancy but to ensure those extra years are healthy and free from disability for as long as possible. All countries, including Northern Ireland, face major challenges to ensure that their public services, including health and social systems, are ready to make the most of this demographic shift and meet the needs of the population.
- Ageing is a life-long process and ensuring people can age healthily and maintain independence in old age requires a life-course approach. Public health interventions can have a significant impact on the quality of ageing in terms of health outcomes, disability, and quality of life.
- The Commissioner will work closely with government to ensure that public services are fit for purpose, adequate and effective in meeting the needs of the ageing population in Northern Ireland.



< Christine McPhilemy, aged 69

*...ensuring people can age healthily and maintain independence, requires a life-course approach.*

5.

# Commissioner's priorities for 2022-2024

*The Commissioner's  
priorities over the next  
two years will focus on  
six key issues.*

## Commissioner's priorities for 2022-2024

The Commissioner's priorities over the next two years are centred around the overarching theme of Tackling Ageism, focusing around six issues. These priorities are derived from our engagement with older people through our recent corporate plan survey, of which there were 466 responses.

Additionally, our priorities have also been informed from our own policy and research and key policy developments across government as well as the nature and theme of the issues that the organisation deals with throughout the year.

## Survey results

The survey results highlighted that:

- Most respondents were from the **65-74** and **75-84** age groups.
- Almost **95%** of respondents cited Health & Social Care as one of their top priorities.
- **95%** of respondents cited hospital waiting lists as their top priority.
- **92%** of people highlighted affordable energy as one of their top priorities, with **72%** of those people indicating that it was one the top three priorities that should be addressed by the Commissioner.
- **90%** & **89%** respectively reported crimes against older people and scams as one of their top priorities.
- **98%** agreed that loneliness and isolation as an issue that should be tackled with government.
- **93%** that older people should be included in the Programme for Government.
- **88%** agreed that tackling ageism should be a key priority for the Commissioner.
- **65%** supported the call for a public inquiry into care homes as a result of the COVID pandemic.

## Other priorities

We asked older people to tell us what other priorities were important to them that were not directly captured in the survey questions. The results have been analysed and are summarised on the next page.

Carers Vulnerable Health GP  
Rural transport Responsibilities  
Older people Live Access GP calls Prioritised Online  
Isolated rural areas Face Changes Hospital  
Disabled Pay Go Free advise given Essential  
Provide council Look Transport Encourage  
Area Benefit Vulnerable Priority  
Support Elderly None Disability Age Department  
Health Enough Care homes Take Help  
Wait People Community Need Older people  
Treatment Access See Services Housing  
Care cost Homes NHS Older Regarding Think  
Available Many Number one Young Knowing  
Issues Place Better Groups Families Longer  
Especially Far Include Lists Patients Society  
Funding Loneliness Keep appointments  
Centres Doctors Pensioners Age groups Able Problems  
Pension Age training Health Social care Ensure  
Northern Ireland Digital



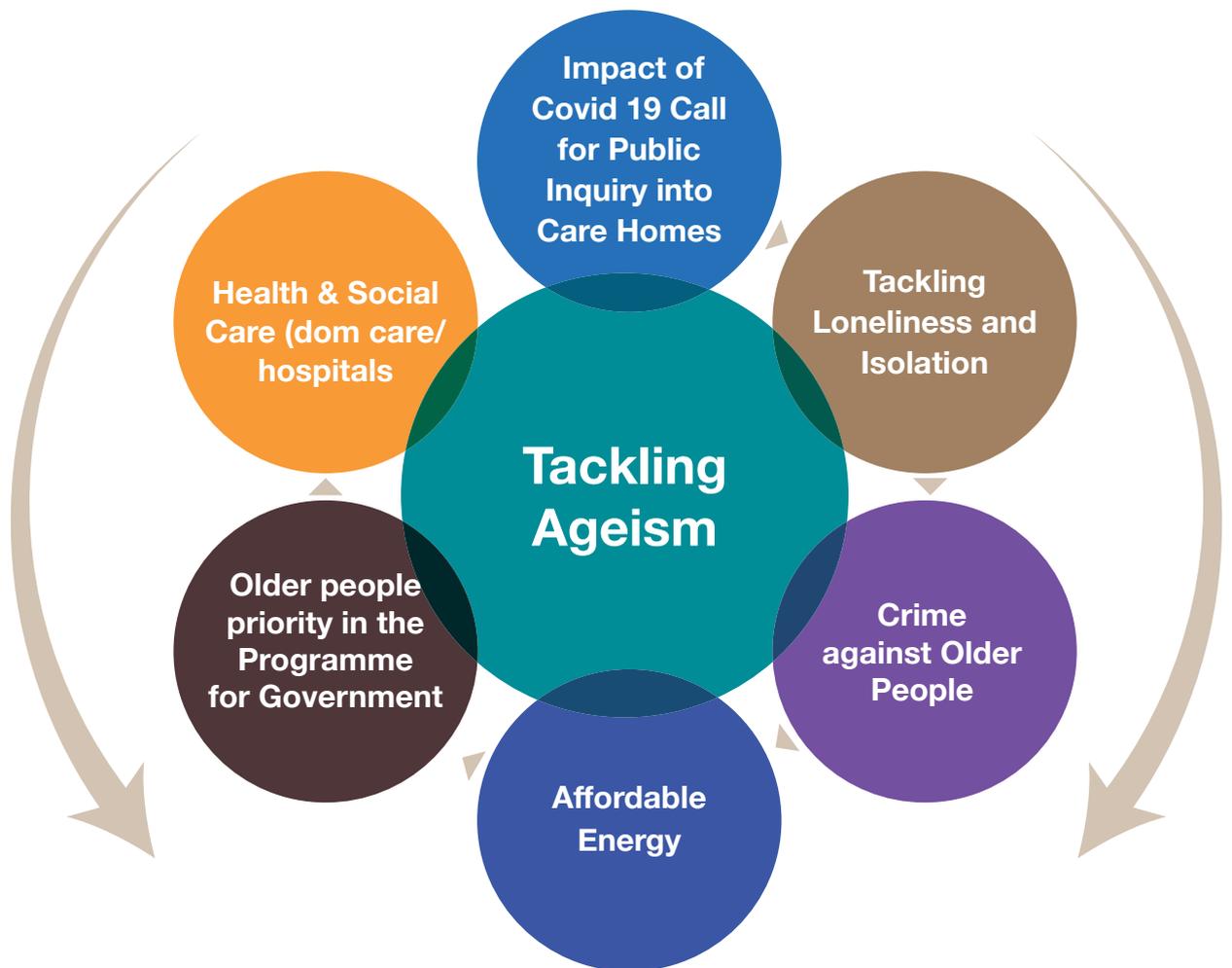
▲ Anil Gautam, aged 76

*The Commissioner's priorities are centred around the overarching theme of Tackling Ageism.*

## What will we do to tackle these issues?

The Commissioner will undertake both planned and reactive work throughout his term, some of which will be planned projects and some of which will emerge as the term progresses. In addition to the specific planned projects, the Commissioner will also keep under close review all issues affecting the interests of, or services available to older people. He will also collaborate with key agencies and government to affect positive change for older people.

## Priorities 2022-2024



## Overarching priority: tackling ageism

**Ageism is important because it can cause a huge range of harms in a wide range of contexts, including employment, health and social care, and media and culture.**

**The World Health Organisation tells us that:** *“Ageism affects how we think, feel and act towards others and ourselves based on age. It imposes powerful barriers to the development of good policies and programmes for older people and has profound negative consequences on older adults’ health and well-being.”*

**Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK or Ireland where older people are not protected in law against discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities, and services.**

**The Commissioner must promote the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against older people.**

### **The Commissioner will:**

- Advise Government on the need for the introduction of legislation in NI that ends discrimination for older people in relation to accessing goods, facilities, and services.
- Support the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) campaign on tackling ageism through adopting its recommendations to tackle ageism. These include:
  - Invest resources to deliver educational and intergenerational interventions.
  - Examine data and research to gain a better understanding of ageism and how to reduce it.
  - Develop and deliver an awareness campaign on the impact of Ageism on NI society.

## 1. Better health & social care

The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of **law and practice** relating to the interests of older people.

The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of **services** provided for older persons by relevant authorities, in the context of the *Home Truths* report.

The Covid pandemic has exacerbated Health and Social Care service provision, including issues around staff shortages and care package waiting lists.

Reform in Northern Ireland is needed urgently and needs to be underpinned by a robust, and evidenced analysis, setting out the “real” cost of adult social care across a range of settings including residential care, nursing care, domiciliary care, dementia care and older people receiving Continuing Health Care.

Ensuring the timely implementation of the Adult Protection Bill is also a key priority for the Commissioner. The introduction of this legislation will ensure that older people across Northern Ireland are adequately protected from abuse.

**The Commissioner will provide advice to government on the following:**

- The Reform of Adult Social Care in Northern Ireland.
- The Adult Protection Bill.
- The contractual arrangements for older people living in care home settings.
- Ensure remaining recommendations contained in the Home Truths report are implemented.

## 2. The Covid pandemic – a call for a public inquiry into care homes

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted us all, but for older people, and particularly care home residents, those impacts have been exceptionally arduous. The pandemic continues to impact heavily on older people in care and their families.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have witnessed the incorrect recording of care home deaths, families having no access to loved ones, personal protective equipment (PPE) supply problems, inappropriate use of 'do not attempt resuscitation' orders, the slow introduction of testing and the transfer of Covid-positive patients into care homes.

The Prime Minister's UK-wide public inquiry will consult with devolved governments across the UK, but the Commissioner has urged the Northern Ireland Executive to conduct an inquiry which specifically looks at the care and management of residents and care homes.

The Commissioner believes that families in NI deserve an answer on why deaths in care homes here were so extensive and why care home residents were disproportionately affected by this pandemic.

In November 2022, the Commissioner called on government to launch a public inquiry into the treatment and care of older people in care homes in Northern Ireland during the pandemic.

### **The Commissioner will:**

- Continue calls for government to launch a Northern Ireland specific public inquiry into care homes and co-operate with any wider public inquiry relating to the Covid Pandemic.
- The Commissioner's office will engage as appropriate and provide key evidence during the Inquiry period.

### 3. A ffordable energy

Households across Northern Ireland are experiencing a steep increase in their energy prices due to supply and demand on the global wholesale market. This combined with the impacts of Covid-19 present great difficulties for older people in Northern Ireland. The two major gas suppliers Firmus and SSE announced in 2021 price increases of 38% and 21.8% respectively, with Firmus announcing a further 33.57% increase in their ten towns area, which will take effect in February 2022. More increases are expected to be announced in 2022.

This coincides with significant increases in electricity prices across all suppliers with the two major suppliers Power NI and SSE Airtricity increasing their prices by 6.9% and 3.9%, and SSE announcing a 9% increase from 1 December, their third price hike in 2021, with additional rises planned in 2022. Home heating oil prices have also increased affecting 64% of the households who use oil as their source of home heating.

The Commissioner is highly concerned about the health impact that rising energy prices will have on older people and the most vulnerable in our society. He has called on immediate government intervention to support older people during this time of crisis and will continue to call for urgent progress on the development of new Fuel Poverty Strategy.

#### **The Commissioner will:**

- Provide advice to government and relevant agencies on the urgent development of a fuel poverty strategy for Northern Ireland.
- Participate in the cross-agency consumer vulnerability group (as necessary) to inform a refreshed terms of reference and promote the needs of older people in relation to energy issues.
- Advise the relevant government departments and the Northern Ireland Executive on the need for financial support to older people during the winter periods.

#### 4. A Programme for Government (PfG) that prioritises older people

**The Commissioner has a statutory duty to promote the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against older people**

Older people deserve to have a decent quality of life, to be healthy and happy, to feel safe and warm, to remain connected to society and to feel valued and respected.

Government needs to respond in many ways to ensure the needs of older people are better met.

The ageing population is one of the great success stories of modern times. It is vital that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly make older people's issues a top priority.

**The Commissioner will:**

- The Commissioner will continue to advise the Northern Ireland Executive, leaders, MLAs, and officials on the need for a specific older people's outcome in the PfG and seek commitment for the inclusion of specific objectives targeted at improving the lives of older people.

## 5. Loneliness and social isolation

The impact of the Covid pandemic has exacerbated the feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst older people in Northern Ireland. Lockdowns, shielding, self-isolation and social distancing have meant separation from family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues.

It's reminded us how much we value our relationships – and given us some insight into the one in five people who are lonely in Northern Ireland.

Loneliness affects one in 20 people in Northern Ireland, and it is impossible to consider the work of the Commissioner in 22/24 without understanding the disproportionate adverse impact of Covid-19 pandemic on older people and how this has contributed to the issue of loneliness and social isolation.

A principal duty of the Commissioner is to 'promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of older people. Loneliness and social isolation is something that older people have highlighted as a key issue they want the Commissioner to address in his corporate plan.

### **The Commissioner will:**

- Advise government on the need for the development of a loneliness and isolation strategy for Northern Ireland.
- Actively participate in All Party Group meetings on loneliness and social isolation to bring forward positive change.
- Support the Northern Ireland 'Campaign to End Loneliness' .
- Actively participate in the North South Loneliness and Ageing Group.
- Promote and support groups and organisations that help increase social inclusion of older people.
- Welcome and endorse programmes that help older people with digital / IT literacy to better connect with family and friends.

## 6. Crime against older people

Whilst statistics show that older people are less likely to be victims of crime, typically crimes committed against older people in Northern Ireland were less likely to result in a conviction and prosecution.

However, the reality is that whilst incidents of crime against older people are not high, the impact of those crimes is significant. Crimes committed against older people, particularly burglary, tend to be intrusions into what should be a safe space or place.

Being a victim of crime can be a traumatic experience for anyone, but there are factors that make older people more vulnerable to the effects of crime. These include: a higher rate of fear of crime; a higher rate of physical and mental impairment and disability; a greater likelihood of living alone; a greater likelihood of the absence of support networks; and higher rates of feelings of insecurity.

When older people become victims of crime, they need to be able to have confidence in the response of the statutory agencies, including the PSNI, the Public Prosecution Service and the court system.

There should be appropriate support from the reporting of an incident through to conclusion and although the Commissioner is encouraged by existing inter-agency working but believes more could be done to support older victims of crime.

### **The Commissioner will:**

- Fully participate in the Scamwise partnership, enable the sharing of information through all of COPNI's communications channels to raise awareness among older people on how to identify and protect themselves from scams.
- Work with partners in the criminal justice system, as well as offenders, to increase understanding the deliberate targeting of older people.
- Provide advice to government and to older people that will strengthen prevention of crime against older people.
- Work with criminal justice agencies, to ensure the recommendations in COPNI's Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland Commissioner's report 2019; are embedded in their investigatory work in 2022/23.

# Monitoring our work

*Older people  
deserve to have a  
decent quality of life,  
to be healthy  
and happy....*

▲ The Commissioner, Eddie Lynch, pictured at the launch of COPNI's crime report alongside Dr Kevin J Brown, lecturer in criminal law and criminal justice, Queen's University Belfast.

We recognise that the outcomes identified in this Corporate Plan are ambitious, some of which are long term and require the input of many partners.

The Commissioner, however, is committed to working to see his priorities implemented, as far as possible over the period of the plan.

We will use a number of key indicators, aligned where possible against the Programme for Government, which will serve as measures to monitor progress towards the implementation of the priorities as described.

Additionally, delivery will be tracked and monitored through the annual business plan. In doing this, we will look to answer:

- how much we do
- how well we do it
- what impact we have.



7.

# Appendix

*Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies...*

## UN Principles for Older Persons

The United Nations Principles for Older Persons were adopted by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 46/91) on 16 December 1991. Governments were encouraged to incorporate them into their national programmes whenever possible. There are 18 principles, which can be grouped under five themes: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment, and dignity.

The Commissioner is legally obliged to have regard to these principles and is pleased to do so. They are principles which should be considered by all organisations and regarded as a framework for their treatment of older people.

### The principles acknowledge:

1. The tremendous diversity in the situations of older persons, not only between countries but within countries and between individuals.
2. Those individuals are reaching an advanced age in greater numbers and in better health than ever before.
3. That scientific research disproves many stereotypes about inevitable and irreversible decline with age.
4. That in a world characterized by an increasing number and proportion of older persons, opportunities must be provided for willing and capable older persons to participate in and contribute to the ongoing activities of society.
5. That the strain on family life in both developed and developing countries requires support for those providing care to frail older persons.

### Independence

1. Older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help.
2. Older persons should have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income generating opportunities.
3. Older persons should be able to participate in determining when and at what pace withdrawal from the labour force takes place.
4. Older persons should have access to appropriate educational and training programmes.
5. Older persons should be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.
6. Older persons should be able to reside at home for as long as possible.

## Participation

1. Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.
2. Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
3. Older persons should be able to form movements or associations of older persons.

## Care

1. Older persons should benefit from family and community care and protection in accordance with each society's system of cultural values.
2. Older persons should have access to health care to help them to maintain or regain the optimum level of physical, mental, and emotional well-being and to prevent or delay the onset of illness.
3. Older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection, and care.
4. Older persons should be able to utilize appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation, and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.
5. Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

## Self-fulfilment

1. Older persons should be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential.
2. Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

## Dignity

1. Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.
2. Older persons should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.



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