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## Spring 2023 Newsletter



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### **A message from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland:**

I hope you are enjoying the brighter nights and slightly warmer weather now that Spring is upon us. I know it has been a difficult number of months for many older people and the cost of living crisis continues to be a big source of concern. The additional government support payment of £301 will be made to those on certain benefits, including pension credit, by 17 May. This payment will be made automatically and if you're eligible you won't need to do anything. There is more information on this at the end of this newsletter.

working on a number of my key priorities which I outlined in my Corporate Plan. I have previously been very vocal in the media in voicing the need for a Northern Ireland based public inquiry of the handling of care home residents during the Covid 19 pandemic. And whilst it is still my view that Northern Ireland should have its own separate inquiry, in the absence of the Northern Ireland assembly and any such inquiry coming to fruition, I pledged my commitment to co-operate fully in any wider public inquiry regarding the government's management of Covid – 19. I am pleased to have been granted “core participant status” in the UK wide inquiry, enabling me to present evidence on behalf of older people of Northern Ireland and ensure that the collective voices of older people here are represented and heard. This is a huge body of work for my team who have been working tirelessly in the background for the past number of months. You can read more about the inquiry in this newsletter and I will keep you updated on this as our work continues.

As Commissioner for Older People, I have conducted several investigations into issues that have been largely overlooked by other agencies, but which are of fundamental importance to older people. The issue of older victims of crime is such an area and again another one of my key priorities identified in my corporate plan. Last month, I published a second report into the experiences of older victims of crime, which was a follow up report to my 2019 report “*Crime and Justice: The experiences of older people in Northern Ireland*”. I am grateful for the efforts of my research team in pulling together this body of work and will be continuing to call on justice agencies to improve investigation and prosecution outcomes for older people.

I hope you enjoy this update and I look forward to updating you again soon on the work of my office.

*E. Lynch*

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## Commissioner granted core participant status for UK-wide COVID-19 Inquiry



During the pandemic, the Commissioner played a significant role as a vocal independent advocate for the rights and interests of older people and in October last year, the Commissioner secured Core Participant status in Module 2C of the UK wide Covid-19 inquiry. This means he will present evidence on behalf of older people in Northern Ireland who were negatively impacted by the pandemic.

The Commissioner will have the opportunity to make opening and closing statements, suggest lines of questioning to be pursued by Counsel and ask questions of witnesses during a hearing.

were lifted in Northern Ireland in March 2022. It will examine the decision-making of key groups and individuals within the government in Northern Ireland.

Module 3 of the UK Covid-19 public inquiry formally opened on 8 November 2022. It will include an examination of the consequences for healthcare systems as a result of the government's response to Covid-19, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

COPNI has been served with a Rule 9 Request for evidence, and will be providing documentation to support the matters of the case.

To watch a livestream of the second preliminary hearing of Module 2C hearing (which took place on Wednesday 29 March 2023) visit [here](#).  
Alternatively, a transcript of the hearing is also available to read [here](#).

All information about the UK Covid-19 Inquiry can be found on their website.

## UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

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# More support needed for older victims of crime



**The Commissioner has published a further report examining the poor experiences of older victims of crime.**

*'A Different Crime: Offending Against Older People'*, is a follow up report to the *'Commissioner's Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland'* which was published in May 2019.

The new report once again consulted with older victims of crime, as well as professionals working in the justice system. It gives an in-depth analysis into older people's experiences as they pass through the criminal justice system, compared to the findings four years ago.

The Commissioner said: "Although statistics show older people are less likely to be victims of crime, we found crimes such as violence without injury, criminal damage and harassment continue to have a lower outcome rate for older people than for most or all other age groups."

"I'm disappointed that four years on, we are still seeing evidence that older people are being served less effectively by justice agencies than other sections of society."

[Read more here](#)

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# Commissioner appoints new risk and assurance committee



*The Commissioner for Older People pictured with newly appointed ARAC members (L-R) Lee Wilson, Eddie Lynch (Commissioner), Alan Walker (chair) and JP O'Doherty*

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland has appointed three new members to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), for the next four-year term.

The ARAC committee is comprised of independent, external members, who objectively advise and support the Commissioner on good governance, accounting and audit standards and risk management.

Alan Walker will chair the new committee with support from members John Paul O'Doherty and Lee Wilson- all starting in their new roles this month (April 2023).

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*The Commissioner is pictured with (L-R) Emma Hingston Ards and North Down Age Friendly Councillor, Vicki Titterington, Director Linking Generations, Sandra Grieg events co-ordinator, Krisptoher Morrow teacher at Movilla High School, with residents of Movilla Care Home and students from Movilla High School.*

The Commissioner marked the end of Global Intergenerational Week by attending Linking Generations Northern Ireland Arts for Older People project- funded by the Arts Council for Northern Ireland.

The project links nursing homes and schools to promote intergenerational connections.

The session took place at Movilla Care home in Newtonards, along with students from Movilla High School.

Facilitated by local artist Trisha McNally- both residents and students created brilliant pieces of work!

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## **Update: Commissioner's challenge of Department of Health's continuing healthcare policy**





Continuing healthcare (CHC) is a policy in Northern Ireland which relates to the current assessment of whether a person's needs are primarily health care related or social care related. The determination of the assessment can impact on whether a person is required to make a contribution to their cost of care.

In June 2017, the Department of Health issued a consultation to review the current continuing healthcare policy in Northern Ireland and the outcome of this consultation was published in February 2021 setting out the new policy of the 'single criteria question'.

This now means that anybody applying for continuing health care is assessed by answering the single eligibility criteria question of:

**'Can your care needs be met properly in any other setting other than a hospital?'**

If the answer is yes, then the individual would be discharged to the appropriate care setting and the relevant charging policy would apply.

This means that anybody, even those with complex medical conditions, with assets worth more than £23, 250, would need to pay for their own continuing healthcare.

In April 2022, The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Eddie Lynch was successfully granted leave of the Court to challenge the Trust and the Department of Health on the Continuing Health Care policy in Northern Ireland.

The Judicial Review of CHC is on the basis of a client of COPNI's in his 70s, with complex medical needs and who has been refused continuing healthcare funding. This client's case provided the opportunity to challenge the reasonableness of the Department of Health's CHC policy, as well as the Trust's decision.

We are currently waiting for the listing of the final hearing and look forward to providing you with an update soon.





## Words of Wisdom with... Elaine Somers

The Co. Down Woman always loved writing but thought working life was over.

Defining active ageing, during lockdown Elaine, 77, began to follow her dreams, writing a book inspired by her old friend Marjorie. The book 'Marjorie and Claudette' is a fictional novel based on real events from stories Elaine shared with Marjorie and her amazing life which starts during the war.

COPNI caught up with Elaine, for a words of wisdom interview- and what wisdom she has!

[READ HERE](#)



## We are hiring!

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland is seeking to recruit a Head of Communications and Engagement (Job-share: 15 hours per week).

The role requires an individual to provide professional, strategic communications advice to the Senior Management Team on a range of high-profile issues.

More information and how to apply can be found here:

[APPLY NOW](#)



## Cost of living support payment

Thousands of people on low-incomes in Northern Ireland, are set to get £301 from the government as part of a nationwide support package to help with the rise in the cost of living.

You do not need to do anything to receive this payment. If you are eligible it will be automatically credited to your account.

If you get a call, email or text asking you to do something in order to receive the payment, then it is likely a scam.

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