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Winter 2023 Newsletter

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

Firstly, I'd like to wish you all a very happy and healthy new year!

2022 was a difficult year for many people, particularly those on low income who are feeling the effects of the cost-of-living crisis most severely.

Households are finally starting to receive the much anticipated £600 Energy Support Scheme payment. This is welcome news, as the payment will be a lifeline for so many people who are having to make the difficult decision to heat or eat. It is imperative however that urgent attention is given to producing an effective fuel poverty strategy to protect vulnerable people and ensure they are supported in the longer term.

I am glad to say COVID-19 became less of a threat to our society in 2022. This demonstrates how effective the vaccination and booster programme have been in reducing serious illness. I would however like to highlight the importance of boosting our protection from the virus. Immunity can wane over time; the Department of



vulnerable. COVID-19 and Flu vaccinations are still available for all eligible groups and are the best protection against the viruses. This could play a vital part in protecting the pressures of our vulnerable health service.

I am deeply concerned about the extreme pressures our health service is currently facing, and how this will affect older people. There are ill people waiting in the back of ambulances and in hospital corridors for hours, which is detrimental to their recovery.

I have been calling for the need to prepare for our ageing population since 2016. In November I launched my 2022-2024 [Corporate Plan](#), [Right Here Right Now](#), which gives focus to key actions needed by Government to plan for an ageing population. The ageing population *is* here, and this should be the wake-up call that is needed to ensure this is a top issue on programme for government.

Lastly, I would like to finish by sharing my admiration for older people, who continue to show resilience in the face of adversity. A big part of my role is engaging with groups of older people from across Northern Ireland and it's been brilliant to see how many have coped so well with the challenges they have faced over the last few years. This is such a fantastic example to our younger generations and something we can all learn from. As I approach my final term as Commissioner, I am keen to do the utmost to address the real issues that older people have told me are important to them.

For now, I hope you are enjoying the slight stretch in the evenings which is always a welcome sign that the brighter days of spring are not too far away.



Government £600 Energy Support Scheme



£600 energy bill support payment

for households in Northern Ireland

Help for Households

The roll out of the single one-off payment has started to reach people, from Monday 16th January 2023. All households with a domestic meter and a domestic electricity contract are eligible.

All you need to know:

This detailed guide by [Advice NI](#) will tell you how to receive your Energy Bills Support Scheme payment and answer frequently asked questions.

£600 Energy Bills Support Scheme information

Received a letter like this?

Your Energy Bills Support Scheme (Northern Ireland) voucher
could be inside, use it before the expiry date.



- Customers who pay by **Direct Debit** will automatically receive the £600 payment into the bank account used to pay their bill. Direct Debit customers do not need to contact their supplier to receive this payment.
- **Keypad meter** and **Standard credit** customers will receive a £600 voucher in the post from the Post Office.
Vouchers need to be redeemed at a Post Office branch. The voucher and supporting paperwork will be needed. To receive the funds straight into your bank account you will need your bank debit card or photographic ID to receive cash payment.

Customers who pay for their electricity via a keypad meter or standard credit will receive a voucher in the mail from the Post Office which will look like this. It may be addressed to the 'Occupier'.

Commissioner joins round-table discussion with Minister for Energy and Climate



20 January 2023, The Commissioner joined with representatives from advice organisations across Northern Ireland and Graham Stuart, MP, Minister for Energy and Climate to discuss the roll out of £600 Energy Bill Support Scheme.

Hosted by The Consumer Council NI, the meeting was an opportunity for organisations to raise questions about the scheme. Questions were addressed by Graham Stuart MP, Minister of State in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), who are responsible for the implementation of the Energy Bill Support Scheme in Northern Ireland.

Representatives from [Age NI](#), [Advice NI](#), [Bryson Charitable Group](#) and [Bryson Energy](#), [Fuel Bank Foundation](#), [National Energy Action NI](#), [NICVA](#), [Police Service Northern Ireland](#) and the [Utility Regulator](#) were also present.

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Eddie Lynch said,

"I welcome the roll out of the much anticipated scheme here in Northern Ireland. The round-table was a good opportunity to raise questions and ensure that this support is delivered to all older people as a priority."

Warm spaces and warm welcomes guaranteed in Belfast



Older people will be guaranteed a warm welcome this winter as community centres across Belfast open their doors for an extended programme of activities.

Centres operated by Belfast City Council will dedicate time each week for older people to drop in for some company, a chat, and light refreshments.

The 'warm spaces, warm welcomes' campaign aims to support older residents in response to the ongoing challenges of the cost-of-living crisis.

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Christina Black said this support will be a vital lifeline for many older residents.

Councillor Black said: "A difficult winter lies ahead for many of us as we continue to face the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis.

"I'm delighted council is acting and reaching out to help our older residents through the 'warm spaces, warm welcomes' campaign. Our community centres are such a vital resource within local communities and this new campaign ensures our senior citizens have a safe and welcome space to visit each week."

Older residents will be encouraged to make the most of the facilities on offer at the centre and will also have access to information on other council services.

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Eddie Lynch said: "It's great to see the "Warm Spaces, Warm Welcomes" programme running throughout the city over the coming months. Earlier this year I contacted all Council's calling for a community response to the cost-of-living crisis, so this initiative by Belfast City Council has to be applauded. The range of activities organised will offer older people the chance to get out of the house for a few hours and socialise in a warm community centre, which will make a big difference to anyone who might be struggling alone in a cold home."

Sessions are free to attend and will continue throughout January, and February.

For more information on warm spaces warm welcomes visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/warmspaces

High Court dismiss legal challenge over hospital waiting lists



"It clearly involves high level political decisions in relation to resources and also in relation to structural reform of the health service. Manifestly, that is not a matter for the courts."

January 2022, The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland had been granted Third Party Intervenor Status by the High Court in the case of May Kitchen, a 77 year old woman from Northern Ireland who was diagnosed with cataracts six years ago and was advised that the waiting list for the necessary operation would take up to four years. Ms Kitchen, who was fearful of losing her sight completely, resorted to paying for private surgery.

The first case of its kind in the UK, A judicial review had been brought by May Kitchen, on breach of statutory duty by the department and two health trusts over the length of time patients are waiting for treatment.

9 January 2023, High Court judge, Mr. Justice Colton, dismissed the legal challenge, affirming the issue was for politicians, not the courts.

Mr. Colton said:

identified as a major priority by various ministers for health and by the department itself. What is involved in resolving the problem is a matter of contention. It clearly involves high level political decisions in relation to resources and also in relation to structural reform of the health service."

"That is not a judgment which the courts can make."

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, commented:

"Despite the outcome of this case, the bottom line is that Northern Ireland has the worst waiting lists in the UK, with more than 300,000 people currently waiting on a consultant-led appointment, more than half of them waiting over a year. It is simply not acceptable that any older person should be waiting this length of time for surgery to improve their quality of life."

"Unfortunately, the issue of hospital waiting lists remains resistant to change at a political and policy level, however, the trajectory of the lists continue it will affect many more older people for years to come."

Winner of 2022 Photography Competition announced



stood out.

Maggie Morris' picture of her 103-year-old mother Elizabeth, with her grand-daughter Joanne and great-grand-daughter Isla, captured this year's theme perfectly.

Maggie shared her personal reason for the interpretation of this year's theme of 'joy' captured in the snapshot:

"I took this picture of my mother aged 103 on some recent visits to her at home. She is confined to bed but still wears the biggest smile and delights in visits of family and friends.

"Her smile simply shows the joy she still experiences in life."

Despite everything, 2022 has created a sense of resilience and positivity through times of hardship and this moment captured is testament to joy in the midst of adversity.

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Eddie Lynch said:

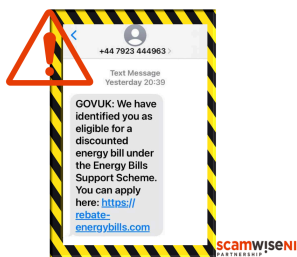
"I'm delighted to announce Maggie Morris as this year's competition winner. The selection process wasn't easy due to the number of fantastic submissions we received. Ultimately, Maggie's entry stood out due to the joy encapsulated in the picture."

"I'm thrilled at the enthusiasm shown to the competition, we received many outstanding photos from across Northern Ireland, and it was great to see how the theme of joy is interpreted through the eyes of older people."

"I'd like to thank all those that took the time to enter our competition."

Other stand-out entries...





Scams associated with Energy Support Scheme.

The PSNI and ScamWise are urging you to be vigilant of scammers cashing in on energy payment vouchers. Suppliers generally have all the information they

COPNI

2023 Engagements

COPNI aim to ensure regular engagement with older people from all backgrounds, across all of Northern Ireland. Meeting groups of older people, ensures that all of the Commissioner’s work reflects the real experiences of older people living here and is enables the Commissioner to develop



Bereavement Survey.

The Commissioner for Older People is supporting the Patient and Client Council in their work to develop of a Bereavement Charter for NI as part of the NI Bereavement Network. A Bereavement Charter sets out pledges to

should receive the single payment or voucher by 28th February.

If electricity suppliers need to contact you they will do so directly.

⚠️ Communications from any source suggesting you need to provide personal information, phone a number, or follow a link are likely to be scams! ⚠️

Please exercise caution.

Do not click on suspicious links, emails or SMS messages.

You can report messaging you think is suspicious at report@phishing.gov.uk

[READ PSNI STATEMENT](#)

If you would like The Commissioner to come and visit your group to outline his priorities until the end of his term as well as get feedback from yourselves on the big issues that are affecting you, please get in touch.

GET IN TOUCH

standards of service and care they should expect to receive following the death of a loved one. To help the Patient and Client Council to begin the wider societal conversation needed for the development of a Bereavement Charter for NI, the PCC are running the following survey to understand what matters most to the people of Northern Ireland when considering death, bereavement and grief. Your input will ensure that charter development is more representative of our society and the communities within it. **Find out more [information here](#)**

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