



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Siobhan Rafferty
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RE Consumer Council Draft Forward Work Programme

I am writing to you on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) in relation to the Consumer Council's consultation about the Draft Forward Work Programme 2017/2018. The role of the Commissioner is to promote awareness of issues relating to older people and to be an authoritative independent champion for them.

The Commissioner's legislative duties and obligations apply to those who are 60 and over. The Commissioner notes that the Consumer Council have centred many areas of work on older people or pensioners, and have proposed programmes the Commissioner believes will assist older people. The Commissioner welcomes the inclusion of these programmes, as demographic projections show older people will form a larger part of Northern Ireland's population over the coming years. Over the next five years, NISRA Population Projections forecast the older population will increase from 396,000 to 445,000, an increase of 10%, making up nearly a quarter of the population. ¹

The Commissioner has no significant objections to the projects the Consumer Council has proposed relevant to older people, and thinks the new evidence and data generated will be potentially valuable. The proposed evidence report on the needs of pensionable age consumers will be of great interest to the Commissioner's office. Given the changing demographics of Northern Ireland, the Commissioner believes that older consumers will be a more important demographic for companies and service providers to consider.

COPNI notes that the Consumer Council 'aims to work in partnership' with COPNI over this project and hopes to communicate more with the Consumer Council about this in the near future. The Commissioner will also view with interest the results of the "*evidence based report on the needs of rural consumers.*" The Commissioner also

¹ NISRA, 'Northern Ireland Level Projections', <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp20.htm>

hopes that the Bus and Rail station accessibility audit will suggest improvements to the ability of older people to access bus and rail services. Older people proportionally suffer more from disability and mobility issues. Disability levels range from 17% among 16-64's, compared to 60% among those aged 65 and over. ² 2014 figures show disability causes 38% of older people a problem with travel and getting where they want. ³

The Commissioner has particularly noted plans to hold a consumer parliament, *“allowing consumers from across NI to have their say on the issues that matter to them.”* The Commissioner hopes this engagement is undertaken with particular reference to ensuring the sessions are accessible for all older people.

If you would like to discuss any of these queries in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact the Policy Team via:

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(028) 90 890 894
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Yours faithfully,

Emer Boyle
Head of Legal and Policy Advice
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

² NISRA – ‘2011 Census Results’.

³ OFMDFM, ‘A Profile of Older People in Northern Ireland – 2014 Update’, <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/a-profile-of-older-people-2014-update.pdf>