



Message from the Commissioner

The last few months have been an exceptionally busy time for my office with the continuing investigation into the care of older people at Dunmurry Manor Care Home as well as responding to major health and social care issues, crimes against older people and community transport difficulties.

One year on from Stormont collapsing, older people in Northern Ireland are still without a Government to make decisions on the issues that affect them. Yet again we see our Health and Social Care system struggling to cope during the winter months and I have spoken out in the media on the negative impact that long waiting times at A&E departments and the lack of suitable domiciliary care packages is having on older people.

Without a Health Minister in place, I am concerned that the reforms needed to help improve our health and social care system will not be progressed any time soon. We need a Government in place who can take urgent action to better support older people now, while also putting in place plans to better support our ageing population. Until then, older people are likely to continue to suffer without the services that they need and deserve.

I have continued to engage with organisations that deliver services for older people and I have been fortunate to meet with hundreds of older people across Northern Ireland to hear about the issues which matter most to them over recent months.

I hope you find this e-briefing on my work useful and I look forward to working with you to champion the interests of older people across Northern Ireland.

Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Commissioner's investigation into Dunmurry Manor Care Home

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland announced an investigation into the treatment and experience of older people living in Dunmurry Manor Care Home last year. The investigation includes an examination of the actions of all those who are responsible for the commissioning, provision, monitoring and regulation of the care services provided at the home. This was following a number of family members and former employees raising serious concerns.

Once the investigation is complete, the Commissioner will publish his report which will outline the findings of the investigation and any recommendations for each of the relevant authorities.

Due to the quantity of interviews carried out and the volume of evidence submitted, the timescale for the publication of the Commissioner's final report has been affected.

The evidence gathering stage of the investigation is now complete and under COPNI legislation, the Commissioner was required to give the authorities under investigation an opportunity to test any evidence that may adversely affect them. These authorities were issued with the draft findings of relevance to them and they had 21 days to consider them before making a decision to accept them or request an opportunity to test the evidence in oral hearings. The Commissioner is now considering the responses from the relevant authorities and a further update will be given shortly.

For more information on the investigation and to keep up to date with any developments, [click here](#) or call 028 9089 0899.

Call 101 to stop bogus callers



This month, the Commissioner helped to re-launch Quick Check 101, an initiative to help stop bogus callers. The scheme, which includes the PSNI, the Utility Regulator and all of Northern Ireland's energy and water network companies, enables residents to phone 101, the police non-emergency number, to check the identity of callers to their home who claim to represent an energy or water network company. For more information, [click here](#).

Bogus doorstep callers are just one of the ways in which older people can become victims of scams. For a range of top tips on how to avoid scams, [download the Little Book of Big Scams here](#) and remember... if it seems too good to be true it probably is!



Older people keeping their cash at home

Many older people keep large sums of cash at home rather than using banks, building societies, credit unions or other organisations.

This brings a number of safety risks and the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland is keen to better understand the reasons why some older people keep cash and other valuable items at home rather than in a bank or other financial institution.

To take part in the Commissioner's questionnaire on 'Keeping Cash at Home' please [click here](#) and send it back to communications@copni.org or post to Communications Department, COPNI, 7-9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DP.

Cuts, closures and community transport changes

Over the last few months there have been a number of changes, or proposed changes, to a wide range of services which are essential for older people across Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner was disappointed to see yet more bank closures which leaves many older people without a

physical branch in their community. Older people rely on local banks as a safe way to save and access their own money. The Commissioner plans to meet with the financial institutions over his term to discuss the issues facing older people. [Click here for more information.](#)

Safe, affordable and accessible community transport is a vital support for older people across Northern Ireland and the recent changes to minibus licensing are deeply concerning. These changes mean that many community organisations will no longer be able to use volunteer drivers who use their normal driving licences. Instead, volunteers are required to sit and pass a formal test to achieve a minibus driver's licence.

This is not what the majority of people signed up for when they gave their time and goodwill to help older people get out and about. It's also unlikely that many community transport organisations will be able to afford the costly process for all of their volunteers. The Commissioner attended a public meeting with community transport providers and service users and raised his concerns with the Department for Infrastructure. Over the next few months the Commissioner's office will be keeping a close eye on the situation.

The Commissioner attended the launch of the Save Our Community Transport campaign and spoke with representatives from across the political spectrum including the Alliance party, DUP, SDLP, Sinn Fein and the UUP. Pictured with (L-R) Sean Lynch MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Robbie Butler MLA, Colin McGrath MLA, Justin McNulty MLA and Pat Catney MLA.



The Commissioner also [spoke out on the Health and Social Care Trusts' proposed savings plans](#) which would have led to drastic cuts across a range of services which many older people rely on, such as care home placements, meals on wheels and domiciliary care provision. Thankfully, the majority of these cuts were avoided due to a last minute injection of cash reallocated from other departments known as the 'monitoring round' but this will only help in the short term.

Many older people who are assessed as needing care packages are still not receiving them and the former Commissioner was so concerned about the situation of domiciliary care provision in NI that [15 recommendations were made to the then Health Minister](#) back in 2015. Two years on and these recommendations have not been acted on and the problem continues to get worse. The Commissioner has called for the creation of health and social care system that is sustainable in the longer term and will meet the needs of our ageing population.

Commissioner's engagements

Over the past few months the Commissioner has been busy meeting with older people across Northern Ireland, as well as a range of organisations who work with, or on behalf of, older people.

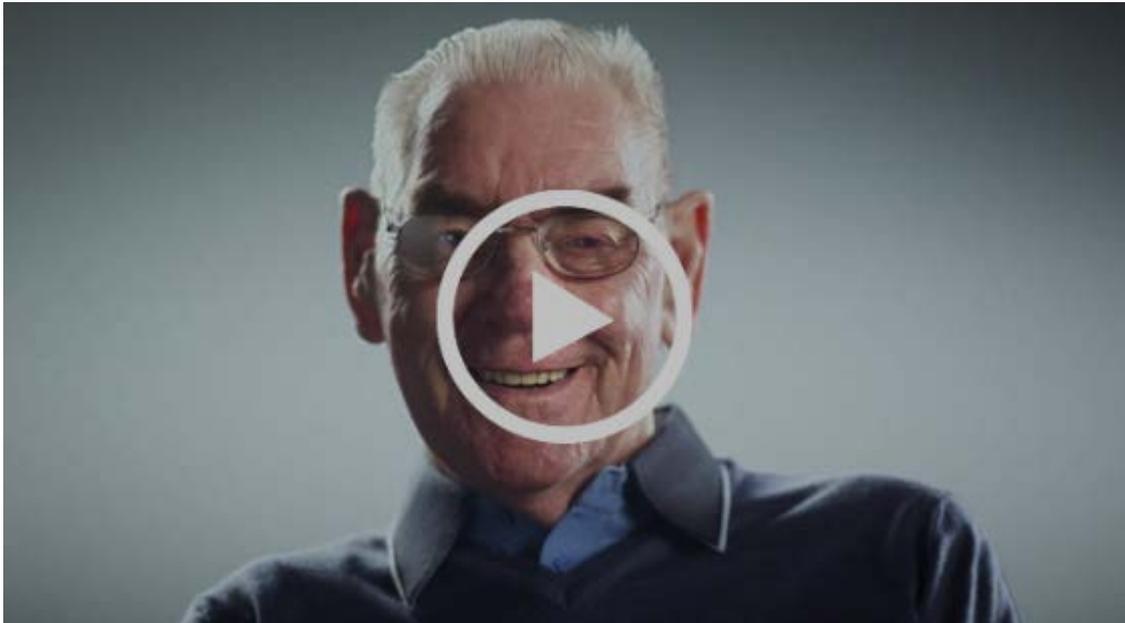
Below: The Commissioner for Older People launching The NI Fire and Rescue Service Fire Safety Week with Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Gary Thompson, Dame Mary Peters and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Alan Walmsley.



Below: The Commissioner for Older People meeting with Annie Lake who is a resident of Ratheane Nursing Home. Annie won the IHCP Flourishing Award for developing her knitting skills after moving in to Ratheane.



Still Me campaign



The 'Still Me' campaign produced by the Public Health Agency aims to raise awareness of the signs of dementia and to reduce stigma about the condition. For more info and more short videos, [click here](#).

The Commissioner would like to thank all those who entered COPNI's annual Christmas Card Competition and congratulations to the winners. The winning artwork (below) was by Olga Theron who is a member of North Down and Ards U3A. The winning verse was by Pauline Diplock who is a member of the Soroptimist Club and can be viewed by [clicking here](#).





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Dear reader, we have identified you as one of our key stakeholders and therefore we would like to keep you updated on our work and progress in safeguarding and promoting the interests of older people.

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