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Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Promoting and safeguarding the interests of older people

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## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2022



### A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Over the past few months, I've had a busy programme of engagements, meetings and events. As part of my engagement programme, I aim to ensure older people are aware of the role I play in safeguarding and promoting their interests, but also to hear

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October was Positive 'Ageing Month' which celebrated older people and the contribution they continue to make to our families, community and economy - our society is greatly enriched by their active involvement throughout all aspects of life.

The last number of years however has been extremely difficult for older people, with the COVID-19 pandemic putting over 65's in the 'high-risk' category and being marked as some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I have such admiration for those who demonstrated such resilience and positivity through times of hardship.

However, as we are moving away from the fear of COVID-19, I am now hearing first-hand the real fears of many older people as we face the cost-of-living crisis.

I am growing increasingly concerned about the impact this will inevitably have on the health and well-being of our older population. It's more important than ever to make sure you are receiving all the support you are entitled to, and I want to make people aware that there are services out there ready to help. You can find out more about this by watching our short video further in the newsletter.

As we enter the winter which might feel bleak, I'd like to remind everyone of the importance of staying connected. Getting out of the house to meet friends or joining a local community group can make a huge difference to how we feel, and I've been asking local council's what they can do to support such groups in their areas.

For now, I hope you all stay safe and well over the coming months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lynch'.

**Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland**

## FINANCE TO DISCUSS COST OF LIVING CRISIS



Commissioner pictured with Finance Minister and representatives from Causeway groups. **Pictured L-R:** Billy McNaul, George McAuley, Ciara Forsythe Community Navigator, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Eddie Lynch, Minister of Finance Conor Murphy MLA, Alex McNaul, Marie-Louise McClarey, Val McDonald, Michele Sheridan

In September the Commissioner for Older People held a meeting with the Minister of Finance, Conor Murphy MLA, to raise his increasing concern about the serious impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on older people.

The Commissioner and Minister were joined by a number of older people to discuss their concerns about the challenges they are facing due to increased energy and food costs, something which is due to become worse over the coming winter months.

Speaking at the event Eddie Lynch said: "I welcome the opportunity to meet with Minister Murphy to highlight the growing fears among older people as we enter the winter months and the increasing impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on their daily life. The concerns raised are issues that I have been hearing regularly from older people over the past year. There is a genuine fear about rising food and energy bills, and extreme worry about how they will cope with heating their homes and being able to eat over the coldest months of the year.

Many older people are already unable to meet their spiraling bills and with no end in sight for energy price increases many are having to make a terrible choice of eating or heating their homes. I am extremely concerned about the impact this will inevitably have on their

The Commissioner continued, “It is vital that the £400 energy payment already promised is delivered as soon as possible so people can get this help when they need it. But this payment does not go far enough, extra financial support is desperately needed if people are to safely get through this winter. Northern Ireland citizens are already disadvantaged by not getting the Warm Home Discount Scheme in GB, so something similar needs to be introduced here in the near future as well.”

Speaking about the meeting Minister of Finance, Conor Murphy added:

“I welcome the opportunity to meet with the Commissioner for Older People and older people. Unfortunately, the Westminster’s Government announcement does not provide the support that citizens here so desperately need. It is also disappointing that there has been no update on when households here can expect to receive their £400 Energy Bill Support Scheme payment.

“Along with my counterparts in Scotland and Wales I continue to press the Westminster Government to take urgent steps to provide much needed certainty to those suffering hardship and poverty.”



*Nixon Armstrong, Michael Monaghan, Margaret Galloway and Ivan Baxter pictured at round table discussion with Commissioner and Minister of Finance.*

## ENERGY ADVICE FOR COLD HOMES AND YOUR HEALTH

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Every year, millions of pounds in benefits goes unclaimed by older people in Northern Ireland. It is now more important than ever to optimise money saving advice services and receive all the help you are entitled to.

[See more useful contacts](#)

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## POSITIVE AGEING MONTH OCTOBER 2022

October was 'Positive Ageing Month' which was celebrated across Northern Ireland as a month-long campaign of events, activities and programmes that promote positive ageing.

Positive ageing month raises awareness of our ageing population and the need to ensure people can grow old with dignity by promoting advance care planning and directing people to appropriate services.

In line with Positive Ageing Month, The Commissioner attended the Ards and North Down Positive Ageing Roadshow. The roadshow which took place on Friday 14 October in Bangor Elim Church was attended by over 80 people where they received key advice and information from local agencies in relation to community safety, home safety, how they can prepare financially for the winter and the importance of keeping active. The event also gave the attendees the opportunity to engage with 25 exhibitors in relation to support services available in the local area.

Rachel O'Reilly, Senior Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement Officer at the PHA, said:

and improving their wellbeing. It can help reduce isolation, become more active and forge important connections beneficial to mental health.

These roadshow events equip older people with valuable information, support and activities to help address their issues and reduce the potential impact of health inequalities.”

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

“We are living in an ageing population, it is now more important than ever that we fully support older people to remain active, live independently, remain healthier for longer and take steps to prevent them from falling into poverty. Events like The Positive Ageing Roadshow are vital for directing older people to the services and help they are entitled to, especially during the cost-of-living crisis. I urge anyone who is seeking advice to reach out, as there are many services across Northern Ireland ready to support them.”

Positive Ageing Month is also a chance to challenge negative stereotypes and misconceptions about older people and recognise the important contribution older people continue to play in our society. Positive ageing seeks to combat this negativity by promoting the good in growing older.

### **Here are ways you can promote Positive Ageing:**

1. Incorporate physical activity to your daily routine
2. Maintain a healthy social life
3. Find a post-retirement sense of purpose
4. Reject self-limiting beliefs based on what is considered ‘age appropriate’ or ‘normal’ for some of our age.



*Commissioner pictured with PCSP Chair Rachel Woods and Senior Health and Wellbeing Improvement Officer, PHA Rachel*

# LAUNCH OF ADVANCED CARE PLANNING POLICY

The Commissioner recently attended the publication of 'For Now and For the Future – An Advance Care Planning Policy for Adults in Northern Ireland.'

Advance Care Planning is an umbrella term covering personal, legal, clinical, and financial planning. It enables a person to think about what matters to them now and for the future, and to make choices that reflect this.

Welcoming the publication, Minister Robin Swann said "Advance Care Planning is about people having the opportunity to have conversations with those important to them, and those who provide care, support or treatment.

Clarifying your wishes, feelings, beliefs and values, can inform future care, providing peace of mind and reducing the potential for confusion or conflict. However, it can also support an enhanced quality of life now as people at any stage of life have the opportunity to talk about what matters to them."

Speaking about Advanced Care Planning, the Commissioner added;

"Whether you are approaching retirement, or it feels like a distant dream, it's never too early to start planning for your third age. I would encourage everyone to read this policy document as a really useful starting point in taking time to make some really important decisions about your future."

Find out more about what 'Advanced Care Planning' means in this short video by Department of Health.



Advanced Care Planning- What is it?

## ORGANISATIONS MEET TO DISCUSS HOUSING NEEDS FOR NI'S AGEING POPULATION

Various Government representatives, organisations and businesses from both the charity sector and the property industry met at an event held by Co-Ownership to discuss the need for more affordable, suitable housing as Northern Ireland's population becomes older. NISRA reports that by mid-2045 one in four people will be over the age of 65, up from the current frequency of one in six.

Representatives discussed the introduction of Co-Own for Over 55s – an affordable housing product recently launched by Co-Ownership and funded by Department for Communities. The product has been purposefully designed in response to Northern Ireland's changing age structure and supports those over the age of 55 to move to a home that better suits their needs as they get older.

Mark Graham, Chief Executive of Co-Ownership, said: "It's very common for people to feel that their current home no longer suits their needs. For instance, a two-storey property may pose issues for someone who has developed mobility issues. Some people may feel their home requires too much maintenance or is too expensive to run, whilst others may feel they would have a better quality of life if they were closer to family, a community or better transport links.

"When a person continues to live in an unsuitable home it can have a negative impact on their wellbeing, so we are proud to have been proactive in finding a solution and to work alongside the Department for Communities to introduce Co-Own for Over 55s."

The Commissioner for Older People, Eddie Lynch spoke at the meeting about the importance of safeguarding and promoting the interests of our aging population.



make to our society. However, this population needs and demands housing options. Co-ownership is one important option which can contribute to improved housing for older people and is to be welcomed as part of the answer to our society's housing needs.”

Funded by the Department for Communities, the new product helps to bridge the gap between the value of where someone is currently living and their desired new home. Customers use the equity from the sale of their current home, or savings, to fund their share of their new home. They pay a small rent on the share that Co-Ownership owns and can choose a new build or existing property anywhere in Northern Ireland up to a maximum value of £190,000.



Commissioner pictured with L – R: David Polly (Department for Communities Director of Housing Supply Policy), Mark Graham (Chief Executive of Co-Ownership), Eddie Lynch (Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland), Linda Robinson (Chief Executive of Age NI) and Charlie O'Neill (Director of Product Development at Co-Ownership).

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## CHRISTMAS CARD PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION 2022

It's that time of year again...our annual Christmas competition is back!

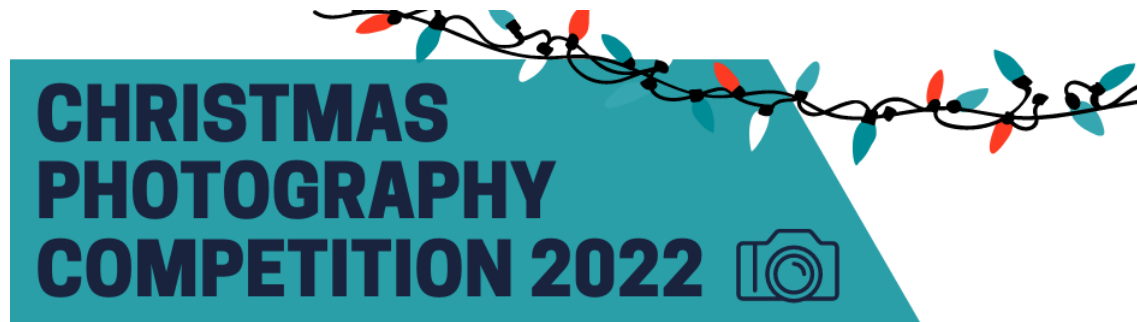
This year's theme is '**Joy**'- so we'll leave the interpretation up to you.

The winning photograph will be featured on The Commissioners virtual Christmas card, and the winner will receive a £100 voucher of their choice.

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Submit your entries by emailing your photograph to [communications@copni.org](mailto:communications@copni.org) or sending it via Facebook Direct Messenger, including your name and contact details.

*The competition will close **12 noon, Thursday 8th December**- The winner will be announced and notified Monday 12th December - happy snapping!*



[communications@copni.org](mailto:communications@copni.org)

**SUBMIT YOUR ENTRIES BY 08.12.22**



### Flu and COVID-19 winter vaccination roll out



If you are aged 50+ you are within an eligible group of people who will be offered the winter flu and COVID-19

### The funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II



**The Commissioner attended the state funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II in London on Monday 19 September. Speaking on the day the**

### Scamwise NI and Energy Scams



We continue to work with the ScamwiseNI partnership to educate the public on how to detect a scam before it's too late. Scams such as SMS impersonations

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for vaccination should make themselves aware of their own GP surgery's, community pharmacist's or trust's vaccination arrangements.

### READ MORE

"Today is a difficult day for many older people throughout Northern Ireland who held Queen Elizabeth II dearly in their hearts and it was an honour to represent them in London at this momentous occasion. The Queen was an exemplar of active ageing, discharging her public duty and service right until the very end of her reign. To carry out her duties with the dedication and commitment that she did at the age of 96 and until the day before she passed away, is truly inspirational to us all."

becoming all too common. Possible approaches from scammers include making false offers of energy refunds, energy discounts, tax rebates and cost-of-living payments, all of which attempt to get your personal or banking details.

The prospect of this may be alluring to many during these difficult times but please be vigilant and recognise this as a scam.

Follow the ScamwiseNI Facebook page for more advice or download the *Little Book of Big Scams* from nidirect below.

### DOWNLOAD



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