

The Age Friendly Co-ordinator  
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5 April 2023

**Re: Consultation on Derry City & Strabane District Council's Age-Friendly Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2025**

Dear Sir / Madam

I am writing on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI).

COPNI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Derry and Strabane's Age-Friendly Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2025. COPNI supports the vision statement, the 4 key themes and the outcomes. COPNI is also encouraged by the Council's pre-consultation process of speaking to older people in order to identify areas of concern. In relation to the specific outcomes and actions, COPNI offers some suggestions and comments below.

**Outcome 1: *We live fulfilling lives at the heart of our communities.***

**Reducing Loneliness and Social Isolation:** COPNI believes that initiatives such as good morning services, befriending services, reading groups, friendship days, chatty benches and cafés are excellent ways of combatting loneliness and social isolation as well as improving the overall health of older people. We welcome the continuation and expansion of these initiatives.

**Digital Connectivity and Digital Exclusion:** COPNI is encouraged by the Action Plan's recognition of the importance of digital connectivity. The actions listed in the Plan focus on encouraging greater assistance to help older people get online, which is to be welcomed. However, it is worth noting that some older people may be unable to access the internet either through disability, impairment, or economic factors. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2021) showed 174,000 people in Northern Ireland had never used the internet.<sup>1</sup> Data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for 2019 / 2020, shows that 11% of households had no internet access at home.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2020>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/chs-results>

**Older People and Employment:** COPNI welcomes the inclusion of actions focusing on employment for older people, an issue that can often be overlooked at a societal level. Older people often face discrimination and additional difficulties in the employment market. Currently in Northern Ireland, rates for economic inactivity are the highest for those over 55 and 65, according to the most recent data from NISRA.<sup>3</sup>

**Outcome 2: *We are fit and healthy.***

**Health:** COPNI supports the proposal of annual health and fitness checks and hopes that these are rolled out through the council and that they provide an example to other council areas. The analysis of barriers in accessing care is also a welcome step and COPNI looks forward to the findings of this study.

COPNI also welcomes the proposed efforts to improve health through prevention and education. These measures should go some way to addressing the levels of poor health among older people cited in the consultation document.

**Outcome 3: *We are actively involved in the decisions that affect us.***

**Public Consultation and Engaging Older Persons:** COPNI recognises the importance of engaging with a growing ageing population and also the difficulties in ensuring that the ambition of Outcome 3 is met. The manifesto and age proofing proposals laid out in the actions under this Outcome should be helpful in addressing this matter and perhaps, also serve to influence other council areas to undertake similar initiatives.

**Advance Care Planning (ACP):** On the subject of ACP, COPNI believes discussions around this subject are very important for all members of society and have particular importance for older people, their carers and family. The final policy on ACP has now been published by the Department of Health. COPNI supports the important role that councils can play in disseminating this policy and promoting the consideration of its contents by members of the public.

**Outcome 4: *We live in a world that is accessible and well designed.***

**Accessibility of Public Spaces and Buildings:** COPNI supports the prioritisation of accessibility, provision of toilets and seating. This is vitally important to help ensure the participation of older people in all aspects of community life.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/quarterly-labour-force-survey-tables-february-2023>

COPNI notes that many of Derry City and Strabane District Council's parks have achieved Green Flag status in recognition of their accessibility. COPNI would encourage the Council to ensure that all communal areas and future developments aim to adhere to the criteria necessary to achieve this status. COPNI recommends that members of the public are made aware of these standards and therefore, what to expect from these community and public areas.

***Which challenges for older people in Derry and Strabane District Council do you feel have not been adequately addressed?***

**Cost of Living, Energy Prices, and Fuel Poverty:** COPNI commends the Council's efforts to address energy and cost of living issues with measures such as the Discretionary Emergency Fuel Support Programme, fuel stamp saving scheme and the energy saving factsheet. COPNI also supports the Warm Spaces Hub scheme adopted by Derry and Strabane Council during the winter months.

Research published in November 2022, found that 45% of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Age-Friendly Strategy & Action Plan would likely benefit from further specific actions to address this area, as the matter continues to pose a threat to the health and wellbeing of older people.

Finally, congratulations on a practical, ambitious but achievable Age-Friendly Strategy & Action Plan.

If you wish to discuss this response or the strategy further, please contact us.

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Best wishes

*Conn Mac Gabhann*

**Conn Mac Gabhann**  
**Policy Unit**  
**Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nea.org.uk/fuel-poverty-map/fuel-poverty-in-ni/>