



# OLDER PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE NEWSLETTER



July 2009

## Paving the Way for the Older People's Commissioner

As I have been out and about attending different events I have become increasingly aware of the discussions taking place in the community about the establishment of a Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland.

While I welcome the discussions and debate I have also become increasingly aware of some confusion and I would like to take this opportunity highlight a few facts:

- **Legislation:** This is to give the Commissioner for Older People powers to carry out their work effectively. This is a slow process because it involves drafting the new legislation, agreement at a Ministerial and Executive level, presented to the Assembly for scrutiny through the Committee and in Plenary and finally it will go out to consultation with everyone having the

opportunity to debate on the role and powers of the Commissioner

- **Advocate:** It is my role to identify the issues and concerns, to develop a mechanism to share this information with the government and policy makers within the departments. Furthermore I will be monitoring the roll out of the consultation process and ensuring that all older people have the opportunity to participate.

The Advocate for Northern Ireland role is unique, the Commissioner for Wales did not have an Advocate, but this means while the legislation is prepared and agreed and the Commissioner is appointed I have the role of listen and reporting to Ministers on the issues and concerns of older people which I have been doing over the last 8 months.



## The NIO Community Safety Unit

Crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour can have a damaging impact on the quality of life of our senior citizens. Ensuring the safety of older people in our communities is a priority for the Government and I recently held a meeting with the NIO Community Safety Unit who are publishing a Strategy and Action Plan for the Safety of Older People.

The strategy will provide reassurance to older people through taking forward projects to reduce crime and help ensure they are safer and feel safer in their homes, their neighbourhoods and communities.

The strategy is being developed in partnership with key stakeholders from the age sector and will be published in the Autumn.

## The Legislation for the Older People's Commissioner

The legislation which will set down the role and responsibilities of a Commission for Older People was presented to the Committee of the First and Deputy First Minister on Wednesday 1 July 2009 by the Legislative Team of the Office of the First and deputy First Minister. The Committee will be given the opportunity to read the draft legislation over the summer the Legislative Team has requested to have it heard by the Committee at their first meeting after the summer.

The Legislative Team is still aiming for the consultation on the legislation to begin in the Autumn when everyone who is interested will have the opportunity to comment and they have informed me that every clause has been broken down into layperson explanation making it an easy read. If you have any ideas about innovate ways in which to communicate with older people during the consultation process please do not hesitate to contact my office with your suggestions **[info@olderpeoplesadvocateni.org](mailto:info@olderpeoplesadvocateni.org)**





## Vetting and Barring Scheme

A new Vetting and Barring Scheme, the VBS, is being introduced in Northern Ireland, which aims at improving protections for children and vulnerable adults. The VBS will be overseen by a new body, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). The VBS seeks to strengthen and build on existing vetting arrangements, which are well established in Northern Ireland, for posts that involve work with children or vulnerable adults. It introduces a range of new features and requirements and the scope of the new Scheme will be much wider than existing arrangements. In vetting and barring terms, it is the biggest undertaking of its kind in the western world. It is expected that around 600,000 individuals in Northern Ireland will be impacted by the VBS when it is fully phased in.

Individuals who work in certain positions with children and vulnerable adults will be required to register with the ISA and those proposing to employ them or offer them volunteering opportunities will be required to check they are ISA-registered. Individuals who become ISA-registered will be subject to continuous monitoring.

From 26 July 2010 new employees and job movers will be able to apply to become ISA-registered. Existing employees will also be required to register and will be phased into the VBS over a period of five years. The fee in Northern Ireland for ISA registration will be £58. This is a one-off fee and does not have to be renewed on an annual basis. Volunteer applicants, who are currently not charged for disclosure certificates from Access NI, will not be charged for ISA registration.

**Further information on the VBS** is available on the ISA website at: [www.isa.gov.org.uk](http://www.isa.gov.org.uk) or on the Northern Ireland VBS Implementation website at: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/svg](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/svg)



Aims and Objectives of the  
Older People's Advocate

The Older People's Advocate  
will:

- **Facilitate** public consultation events on the proposed role, remit and powers of an Older People's Commissioner;
- **Provide** a focus for individual older people and representative groups from the voluntary and community sector to highlight issues that are of concern for older people;
- **Bring** these issues and concerns to the attention of the Junior Ministers in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister;
- **Provide** Junior Ministers with analysis based on the views of the voluntary and community sector of the impact and practical workings of policies and strategies aimed at older people.



## Life and Times Survey and Equality Commission NI —Attitudes to Ageing

**The Northern Ireland life and Times Survey** last monitored attitudes to age and ageing five years ago in 2003 and recently the general views on the position of older people in 2008 was measured and the good news is that for the population as a whole, there is a sense that things may be slightly better for older people in terms of the respect in which they are held. However, analysis of respondents' perceptions of how their own older family and friends are treated shows that they think unfair treatment and discrimination has increased, particularly with regard to employment. What is also noteworthy is that among older people themselves reported experiences of unfair or unequal treatment are relatively low. Those most likely to be pessimistic in their attitudes are the 44-59 year olds. For further information on the survey go to:

<http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/olderpeople.html>

**The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** appointed Social and Market Research (SMR) to conduct a survey of the general public in Northern Ireland regarding age-related issues and attitudes.

- Just under half of respondents were aware that age discrimination is now unlawful
- 66% of those who were aware of the new law correctly indicated that job applicants and employees are covered by the Regulations, while fewer correctly cited contract workers and employment agencies
- There was strong disapproval of the exclusion of goods, facilities and services from the Regulations. Only 9% approved of the exclusion.
- A difficulty in obtaining employment was perceived to be the main work-related issue facing both younger and older people
- 70% of respondents were of the view that the different National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates payable to young people, 16 - 22, are unfair
- Considerable public support was evident for a flexible retirement age: 62% agreed that "people should be allowed to retire when they want to." Further information go to: [http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/AgeSurveyResearchUpdate\(F\)180608.pdf](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/AgeSurveyResearchUpdate(F)180608.pdf)