

Commissioner's NEWSLETTER

An update from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales // Feb 2022



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

A message from Heléna

“If you're struggling financially, please check you are receiving what you're entitled to”

As we start to see the first few signs of spring, I know that many of you will be worried about the ways that rapidly rising living costs will affect you, or the potential impact on family and friends.

The representatives from older people's groups throughout Wales, whom I meet with regularly, have told me that many of their members are already limiting their use of the central heating to save money, and I am particularly concerned that the rise in living costs we will see in the weeks and months ahead will force an increasing number of older people, particularly those on the lowest incomes, to have to choose whether to 'heat or eat', putting their health at significant risk.

That's why I've called on the Welsh Government to extend the availability of its recently announced Winter Fuel Support Scheme to older people who receive Pension Credit, who are currently

excluded despite living on very low incomes (see below).

The additional financial support would make a big difference to over 86,000 older households in Wales that claim Pension credit, which are most likely to be in fuel poverty and struggling financially.

I've also called on the Welsh Government to take action to increase the uptake of Pension Credit in Wales, through a high-profile campaign aimed at older people. Over £200m of Pension Credit went unclaimed in Wales last year – money which should be in older people's pockets.

So if you're struggling financially, please do check that you are receiving what you're entitled to, which could help as costs start to rise. You should also contact your energy supplier if you're worried

A message from Heléna

about paying your bills – they may be able to provide support through initiatives such as the Warm Home Discount Scheme.

You may also be able to make your home more energy efficient, with support available through the Nest Scheme, which provides funding for energy efficiency improvements to low income households and those living in deprived communities across Wales. Contact details for the initiatives mentioned above are below.

I know that there is a great deal of concern and anxiety about what the next few months will hold,

but please remember that help and support is available if you're struggling.

And if you're unsure about where to turn for help, please get in touch with my team, who can provide you with advice and assistance.



Heléna Herklots CBE

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Cost of Living

Key Info / Contacts

Pension Credit:

www.gov.uk/pension-credit

0800 99 1234

Age Cymru Entitlements Check

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/money-legal/benefits-entitlements/>

0300 303 44 98

Nest Scheme

<https://nest.gov.wales/en/>

0808 808 2244

Warm Home Discount Scheme

Please contact your energy supplier to find out more

Commissioner calls for financial support to protect older people from rapidly rising living costs

As highlighted above, the Commissioner has called on the Welsh Government to provide additional financial support for older people on low incomes, to protect them against rising energy and living costs.

The Commissioner has called on Ministers to extend the availability of the recently announced Winter Fuel Support Scheme to include older people who receive Pension Credit, who can be particularly vulnerable and least able to withstand increased financial pressures and steeply rising bills.

In her letter, the Commissioner highlights that the long-established Winter Fuel Allowance – whilst a crucial form of support for older people – is now worth far less in real terms today, and that the additional support that would be offered would make a significant difference in helping people to make ends meet.

The Commissioner is also calling on the Welsh Government to take urgent action to increase the take up of Pension Credit through a high-profile media campaign aimed at older people and to extend initiatives already underway to identify individuals most likely to be eligible and provide them with the support they need to claim what they are entitled to.

Alongside these calls, the Commissioner also issued a joint statement with key older people's organisations – including Age UK and Age Cymru, Scottish Care, Independent Age, and the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland – which sets out further areas of concern where government action is needed to ensure that older people get the support they need during this challenging winter.

This includes greater investment throughout the UK in community and voluntary services that support older people's physical and mental health, including widening the availability of services for older people experiencing loneliness, which will be crucial to support older people's health and well-being and prevent the need for more costly health or care interventions.

The Commissioner said: "Throughout the pandemic, older people have shown great resilience, but we have also seen how important help and support has been for older people, particularly those who may be vulnerable.

"Living costs are already rising significantly, and with costs expected to rise even further we are likely to see even more older people plunged into fuel poverty, potentially forced to choose whether to eat a proper meal or heat their homes and putting their health and well-being at risk.

"That's why I am calling on the Welsh Government to provide additional support to older people who are most likely to be struggling financially, something that would make a big difference in helping them to make ends meet."



Wales-specific Public Inquiry is crucial for older people

In November, the Commissioner issued a statement setting out why she believes a Wales-specific Public Inquiry is needed to examine the action and decisions taken by Welsh public bodies and services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the impact these had on older people's lives.

In her statement, the Commissioner said: "It is crucial that a Public Inquiry to examine the action and decisions taken by Welsh public bodies and services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the impact these had on older people's lives, is underpinned by a set of key principles to ensure that older people are enabled and supported to participate and make their voices heard, that their views and experiences are valued, and that they are able to share their experiences in their own communities and in the language of their choice.

"It is my view that the most effective way to secure these outcomes for older people and their families is for a specific Welsh Public Inquiry to be held that can properly take account of decisions made in Wales, and I would like to thank the older people and their organisations who have engaged with me and shared their views on why they feel a Wales-specific Inquiry is important, which has helped me to reach this position.

"I recognise that there are many elements of the pandemic response where decisions were either taken by the UK Government, or where Welsh Government decisions were considerably influenced by those taken in Westminster, but ultimately, decisions about the health service, social care, education and restrictions placed on our daily lives were made by Welsh Ministers and therefore accountability for those decisions, whether deemed positive or negative, must fall to the Welsh Government.

"Holding a Wales-specific Public Inquiry will ensure that the Chair and the panel running the Inquiry understand devolution and the cultural and political distinctiveness of Wales, as well as being representative of the diversity of our nation and accessible in a way that a UK-wide Inquiry may not be able to achieve.

"This will be crucially important if we are to hear directly from older people and their loved ones, many of whom will have lost someone, and give them the opportunity for their stories to be heard. Enabling people to share their experiences and have their voices heard will be a fundamental part of an Inquiry, and will be part of our collective recovery from this most devastating period.

"Delivering this, as well as ensuring that an Inquiry has people's human rights at its heart, can only be realistically achieved through a Wales-specific Inquiry. Wales has a proud record as a nation that promotes the rights of its citizens and it is crucial that we are able to understand how these rights may have been infringed upon or not upheld.

“In addition to ensuring there is accountability for the decisions made by the Welsh Government and other public bodies in Wales and the ways these affected the lives of older people, a Wales-specific Inquiry will also help to ensure that lessons are learned, that good practice which made a positive difference is recognised and, ultimately, that change is delivered for older people.

“We must therefore not risk missing potential opportunities to identify where improvements are needed – to make our health and care services more resilient and sustainable, for example, or to ensure that older people’s rights are protected and upheld – as we live with the virus and its consequences in both the short and longer-term.”

New guidance to ensure older people can access the information and services in a digital age

The Commissioner has used her legal powers to issue formal guidance to local authorities and health boards in Wales, setting out the action they should be taking so that older people can access information and services in an increasingly digital world – crucial to ensure older people’s rights are protected and upheld.

The guidance sets out how local authorities and health boards should ensure that people who can’t (or don’t wish to) get online have ways to access the information and services they need via non-digital means, and that support should be provided to help older people to get online and use the internet safely and with confidence.

The Commissioner has issued the guidance in response to the rapid shift we have seen in the way that many services are being delivered due to the pandemic, which has also laid bare the impact of the stark digital divide in Wales.

The guidance was developed in partnership with older people and key stakeholders, and has been issued under Section 12 of the Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006, which means that local authorities and health boards must have regard for the guidance in discharging their functions.

The Commissioner said:

“In recent years, the increasing use of digital technology means the ways we access information and services has changed significantly, something that has accelerated a great deal during the pandemic, with a range of new digital services now being delivered by public bodies throughout Wales.



“During this time, we’ve also seen the impact that being digitally excluded can have on older people, and the difficulties and barriers digital exclusion can create when trying to access advice and support.

“So in addition to calling for action to ensure that older people who are not online can access the information and services they need in a way that suits them, my guidance also sets out the need for further action to support older people who want to get online to gain the skills they need to do so.

“Whilst I know that there is good practice underway in different areas of Wales, issuing formal guidance will ensure that local authorities and health boards fully understand the action they should be taking, as well as their duties under key pieces of legislation such as the Equality Act and the Human Rights Act.”

The Commissioner has asked local authorities and health boards to provide details of the action they are taking to ensure older people can access information and services via non-digital means, and that older people who want to get online are supported to do so, which she will review and monitor in order to identify good practice that could be rolled out more widely, as well as potential gaps where further action is needed.

Alongside issuing her guidance, the Commissioner has also published a new booklet for older people, providing information about what they should expect in terms of accessing information and services, and where they can go for help and support if they are facing difficulties.

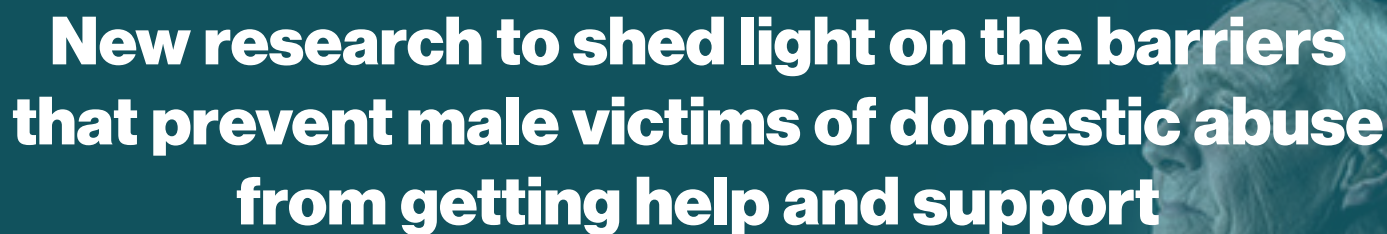
The booklet is available online, including in accessible formats, and is being distributed in hard copy via older people’s groups throughout Wales and through local authorities.

[Visit our website to download the booklet or read the guidance, or contact us if you’d like us to send you a paper copy.](#)

[We want to make sure that as many older people as possible throughout Wales know about their rights to access information and services, so please share the leaflet through your own contacts and networks.](#)

[If you’d like paper copies of the booklet to share with older people you know or work with, please get in touch and we’ll get them out to you.](#)

“Issuing formal guidance will ensure that local authorities and health boards fully understand the action they should be taking, as well as their duties under key pieces of legislation such as the Equality Act and the Human Rights Act.”



New research to shed light on the barriers that prevent male victims of domestic abuse from getting help and support

In December, the Commissioner began new research to examine older men's experiences of domestic abuse, and the ways that help and support for older men who experience abuse could be improved.

In addition to looking at the particular ways that domestic abuse affects older men, the research will also examine the challenges they may face when trying to access support and the barriers that result in abuse being significantly under-reported.

Whilst data is very limited, figures from the Office for National Statistics suggest that around a quarter of people who experience abuse are male, and that male victims are generally older, with the highest proportion of those affected aged 75 or over.

As part of the project, the researchers working on behalf of the Commissioner will hear directly from older men who have lived with abuse about their experiences, as well as capturing evidence from providers of abuse support services and other key stakeholders to identify the improvements needed and how these can be delivered.

Discussing the research, the Commissioner said: "Abuse has a devastating impact on people's lives so it's crucial that everyone who experiences abuse can get the help and support they need.

"There is still a limited understanding of the ways that domestic abuse affects older people, and research and evidence relating to the experiences of older men – who may be reluctant to report abuse or seek help and support – is particularly limited.

"That's why I have commissioned this research, which will allow older men to share their experiences, as well as capturing crucial evidence from service providers and other key stakeholders, to examine the difficulties and challenges they faced and identify the action needed to ensure the right services and support are in place for everyone."

John, an older man who experienced abuse, welcomed the Commissioner's announcement. He said:

"It has to be remembered that domestic abuse takes many forms, not just physical. It can be a gradual process that begins and progresses through control and coercive behaviour over many years and can, but not always, eventually culminate in physical violence.

"Us blokes are notoriously bad at reaching out for help and find it difficult to confide in others as a result of embarrassment and lacking the faith that we will be believed by others.

"The older generation are also reluctant to share instances of abuse as they believe it is a private matter and ultimately have a 'you've made your bed, you lay in it' attitude. They are also under the impression that it's unique and only happening to them and honestly don't know where to turn to for help.

"This feeling, I believe, is not helped by the distinct lack of media coverage on this subject through advertising specifically aimed at male victims.

"I, personally, only recall having one local agency specifically tailored for male victims. They were good, but totally understaffed as a result of being under funded.

“As a comparison, who would have thought years ago, that we would now be talking more openly about mental illness. So let’s get talking about domestic abuse where the victim is male!”

Kelly Lock, Head of Qualitative Research at Opinion Research Services, who are leading the research on the Commissioner’s behalf, said:

“We are pleased to be supporting the Commissioner with this important piece of work. The impact of abuse on older people, and older men in particular, is an under-researched area and this is a valuable opportunity to better understand it from the perspective of survivors, service providers and other key stakeholders. The research will, we hope, help develop a robust evidence base from which to identify the help and support required, and ensure it is available to those who need it”

“We understand that older men who are experiencing or who have experienced abuse may be reluctant to ask for help. We are keen to speak to those who have reached out to support services as well as those who have not, to understand what support they need and any barriers they have faced in accessing it.”

The Commissioner will publish a report in Spring 2022, which will set out the findings of her research, and her recommendations for action to deliver the improvements needed.

The Commissioner added: “Through this research and it’s findings, I want to build on the work I’ve undertaken in recent years and the progress that is already being made through the Stopping Abuse Action Group I established last year, to ensure that all older people experiencing or at risk of abuse can get the support they need to keep them safe and protected.

“I know that many men may be reluctant to talk about what they’ve gone through, but their voices will be crucial to drive change. So I would urge men who have experienced abuse to please get in touch with my office so we can understand the issues and challenges they faced and determine the action needed to deliver crucial improvements.”

To find out more about the research, or to share your experiences, contact the Commissioner’s Office on 03442 640670 or email ask@olderpeoplewales.com

“Us blokes are notoriously bad at reaching out for help and find it difficult to confide in others as a result of embarrassment and lacking the faith that we will be believed by others.”

John

Guidance for journalists on writing about older age now available on IPSO website

Guidance for reporting on ageing and older age, produced by the Commissioner and the Centre for Ageing Better, has been included in the Independent Press Standards Organisation's (IPSO) external resources for journalists. The guidance is designed to ensure that older people and their experiences are more accurately reflected and represented in the media.

The guidance urges journalists and editors to move away from stereotypes and embrace more realistic depictions of later life, to use terminology that older people prefer – such as 'older' rather than 'elderly' – and to avoid 'compassionate ageism,' where older people are patronised and framed as vulnerable or needy.

Journalists and editors are also advised not to stoke conflict between generations or present old age as a societal burden. Alternatively, the guidance suggests those working in the media highlight the diversity that exists within generations, and to understand the differences between inequalities in wealth and intergenerational conflict.

The Commissioner and the Centre for Ageing Better welcomed the regulator's willingness to share this guidance, which is an important first step towards updating the Editors' Code to include age as a protected characteristic. Currently age is one of the few characteristics not included in the Code. Adding age would enable a proper process for ensuring quality and appropriateness of references to age and stories relating to people in later life.

The Commissioner said: "The media has a crucial role to play in tackling ageism by making sure that stories about older people reflect the diversity of experiences and do not reinforce negative assumptions and stereotypes about growing older. So we're really pleased that IPSO has included our new guidance as part of its useful resources, providing journalists with straightforward, practical information and advice about reporting on ageing and older people.

"This is an important step towards our longer-term aim of getting the Editors' Code updated to include 'Age' as a protected characteristic, and we look forward to continuing to work with IPSO and journalists to make this happen, as part of our wider work to tackle ageism and age discrimination."

Carole Easton, Chief Executive at the Centre for Ageing Better, said: "The inclusion of this guidance is a vital step forwards in ensuring that older people's experiences are more accurately reflected in the media.

"Clause 12 in the Editors' Code sets out expectations with regards to avoiding discrimination. However, the exclusion of age within the Code is a big omission. Age is one of the Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and should be afforded the same protections as any other type of characteristic – including in media reporting."

Jane Debois, Head of Standards and Regulation at IPSO, said: "We are pleased to publish this guidance from Centre for Ageing Better and the Older People's Commissioner for Wales on our website, as part of the selection of external resources from other organisations we make available to journalists interested in the reporting of specific topics."

"These guidelines are separate to the Editors' Code but may be of interest to journalists when reporting on sensitive and challenging issues."

Visit our website to download the guidance, or contact us if you'd like to receive a paper copy.

Spotlight on...

Inspire! Adult Learning Awards 2022 Call for nominations

In this edition, Learning and Work Institute highlight the 2022 Inspire! Adult Learning Awards, and how you can nominate people, projects and organisations that demonstrate the positive impact of lifelong learning...

Nominations have opened for the annual Inspire! Adult Learning Awards 2022 coordinated by Learning and Work Institute in partnership with Welsh Government and other partners.

Do you know an inspirational learner? You may be driving change in the workplace and developing training opportunities for progression. Are you making an impact within your local communities and widening access to learning, skills, and volunteering? Are you working on environmental projects or an innovator developing learning pathways for green skills? Has your passion for sport led you to return to learn and inspire others to become active? If you have already got someone in mind, send in your inspiring stories for the awards.

Learning and Work Institute welcome nominations for people, projects and organisations across Wales who demonstrate the impact that lifelong learning can make on their lives and the lives of others. Nominations will demonstrate outstanding passion, a commitment and drive to change their stories and inspire others to take the next step.

There are eleven categories that reflect a broad range of learning and skills – including two exciting new categories for 2022.

- Skills for Work
- Young Adult Learner
- Life Change & Progression
- Ageing Well
- Starting Out – Welsh Beginner
- Different Past: Shared Futures
- Essential Skills for Life
- Active Wales
- Wales for Future Generations
- Hywel Francis Award for Community Impact
- Workplace Change Makers

The Ageing Well category recognises the value of continuing to learn and gain new skills at an older age – to protect health and wellbeing, maintain an active lifestyle, and to stay connected with other people.

The winner of this award will demonstrate the contribution that many older people make to lifelong learning. Nominations will illustrate why and how they have continued to learn or engage in learning in later life, they may be active in sustaining self-organised learning in their community or may be passing on their skills across generations. This category is open to learners over the age of 60.

If you need some inspiration with your nomination, you can read or watch all of the award winner stories of the Learning and Work Institute Website – www.learningandwork.wales - each story demonstrates the visible benefits of lifelong learning. The website also provides information and links to the guidance and nomination form. The awards will be celebrated as part of Adult Learners' Week. Find out more here: <https://adultlearnersweek.wales/>

Please email inspire@learningandwork.org.uk if you have any questions about the nominations process or call 029 2037 0900. Entries for nominations close on Tuesday 1 March 2022.

Our Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to any colleagues or contacts that you think would be interested in receiving it.

If you have received this newsletter via a third party and would like to be added to our distribution list, please contact us (details below). We can also provide hard copies of the newsletter or a large print version on request.

Please contact us if you would like to be removed from our newsletter distribution list.

Your comments, feedback and stories

We welcome your feedback about our newsletter so please feel free to contact us to share any thoughts or comments that you have.

We also welcome suggestions about potential content for the newsletter, so if you have any information that you would like us to include in future editions, please get in touch.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of older people throughout Wales, scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve their lives. She provides help and support directly to older people through her casework team and works to empower older people and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. The Commissioner's role is underpinned by a set of unique legal powers to support her in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account when necessary.

The Commissioner is taking action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner wants Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.

How to contact the Commissioner:

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Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)

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