

Introduction from the Commissioner

2025-26 marked my first full year as Older People's Commissioner, and I was pleased to be able to take forward a range of work to drive change and improvements for older people across Wales, as highlighted in this report.

Older people's voices and experiences have remained at the heart of my work, captured across my research and reports, as well as through engagement events and contact with my Advice and Assistance Service. This is invaluable to guide the action I deliver and call for, influence policy and practice and enable me to respond effectively to emerging issues impacting upon older people.

As you'll see below, my work was focused across four key national objectives, which not only underpin what I deliver as Commissioner, but also provide a framework for the action required from public bodies and services to address the range of challenges and barriers being faced by older people and deliver the improvements needed:

- **Older people can access the information, services and support they need;**
- **feel safe in their homes, communities and relationships;**
- **are treated fairly and their contribution is recognised; and**
- **can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives.**

A crucial aspect of my work during 2025-26 was ensuring that policy- and decision-makers understand the day-to-day realities of growing older in Wales, particularly for individuals facing difficulties and those in vulnerable situations.

This included shining a light on key issues impacting upon older people's well-being and quality of life and calling for meaningful change and improvements from the Welsh Government and public bodies.

Tackling ageism also remained a priority, alongside producing and distributing helpful resources to empower older people directly and ensure their rights are protected.

I have also continued to champion the positive aspects of growing older and the significant contribution older people make to our communities to challenge stereotypes and assumptions, while working with local authorities and other partners across Wales to support the development of age-friendly plans, activities and opportunities.



Moving forward, there are significant opportunities to deliver meaningful change and improvements for older people, building on strong foundations and capitalising on the energy and momentum generated by a new Welsh Government.

Yet the evidence gathered through my research, engagement and day-to-day work also shows that too many older people continue to experience a gap between ambition and practice, meaning their experiences are falling short of what they should be able to expect. This is despite the fact that many of the challenges facing older people are well understood, and the action needed to tackle them is clear.

That's why as Commissioner I will continue to be a strong, independent voice and champion for older people, driving change and improvements through my work programme and holding public bodies to account to ensure that commitments are translated into action, that good policy is translated into good practice so that older people across Wales can live and age well, with the dignity, rights and opportunities they deserve.



Rhian Bowen-Davies
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

This paper provides a summary of the impact and reach of the Commissioner's work during 2025-26. The Commissioner's full Annual Report is available here:

www.olderpeople.wales/about/annual-reports

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT

A key focus of the Commissioner's work during 2025-26 was capturing evidence about older people's experiences of accessing information, services and support to ensure the issues and challenges they face are recognised, understood and responded to by policy- and decision-makers.

Older People's experiences of social care services



The Commissioner reached out to older people receiving different forms of social care across Wales to explore what's working well, as well as where improvements are needed.

Over 260 older people and family members responded via questionnaire, while in-depth telephone interviews provided opportunities to explore issues with some participants in greater detail.

The Commissioner will publish her findings in the summer, setting out the action needed in key areas and how this might be prioritised effectively.



Growing older without children



The Commissioner's 'Older people without children report' highlighted that while growing older without children can bring many benefits people without children can also feel invisible, marginalised and ignored during discussions about ageing within a family-orientated society.

The report also found that many policies and services assume the presence of some form of family support and set out a range of action needed to ensure services and communities are inclusive and fit for the future.

To explore the findings and the ways public services can be more inclusive in greater detail, the Commissioner hosted a webinar event attended by over 150 delegates, which included contributions from older people and other experts.

Older People's perspectives on access to car parking in Wales

The Commissioner examined the impact of the growing use of digital and app-based payment systems in car parks, which often act as a barrier for older people, impacting on their independence well-being and ability to take part in community life.

The Commissioner's report also highlighted additional barriers older people are facing, which often leave people reliant on others or no longer feeling confident about parking independently.

The report included a number of practical actions for local authorities to respond to the issues highlighted, including maintaining a range of payment options, and improving communication to promote the availability of non-digital payments.



FEELING SAFE

The Commissioner's work under this priority during 2025-26 was focused on improving understanding about the risks older people may face, particularly in situations where they may be particularly vulnerable, and on working with partners to identify and drive forward the action needed to strengthen support, improve responses and ensure older people are safe and protected.

Waiting times for home adaptations



The Commissioner published findings of her research into waiting times for crucial home adaptations, highlighting that the average waiting time has increased by nearly 80% in less than a decade.

The Commissioner's report also found that the systems and processes surrounding home adaptations can be complex, inconsistent and difficult to navigate, creating barriers, while rising demand and increasing costs are adding further pressure.

The Commissioner is working with the newly established Welsh Government, as well as with local authorities across Wales, to ensure that the action required is taken forward and improvements are delivered.

Improving responses to older people's experiences of sexual violence and abuse

The Commissioner brought together experts and representatives from key organisations to explore the ways in which responses from services could be improved when sexual violence or abuse is suspected or reported.

During the event, participants identified the need for a range of action in a number of key areas and made commitments to support progress across these.

The Commissioner is also playing her part by working with members of her Stopping Abuse Action Group, the Welsh Government and other key organisations to strengthen understanding, influence policy, identify good practice and support improved responses.



Making Wales a nation of Age-friendly Communities



The Commissioner continued working with local authorities across Wales to support a range of action to make communities more age-friendly, offering practical support to develop local ageing well strategies and plans.

With the Commissioner's support, three more Welsh local authorities joined the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities during 2025-26. This means two-thirds of people aged 60+ in Wales now live in an area being recognised for its age-friendly initiatives.

Further work was also undertaken to grow and strengthen the Commissioner's Age-friendly Community of Practice, which provides a space for members to collaborate and share intelligence to support innovation and good practice.

FAIR TREATMENT AND RECOGNITION

A key part of the Commissioner's work during 2025-26 was focused on challenging ageism, strengthening recognition of older people's experiences and growing knowledge and understanding to drive action to ensure older people are valued, included and treated fairly.

Action against ageism learning module



The Commissioner developed an online learning module designed to empower people across Wales to recognise and challenge ageism, which covers a number of key areas where ageism and age discrimination are common.

The course offers practical information about how to take action against ageism, together with links to other helpful resources and organisations that can provide information and support.

The course is primarily being targeted at staff working across the public sector in Wales, but can be accessed for free by anyone who wants to learn more about the role they can play in tackling ageism and age discrimination, and why this is so important.

Growing older in Wales: A snapshot of older people's experiences



The Commissioner examined a wide range of available data and research to provide insights into the issues, barriers and inequalities older people are currently facing, which often limit the opportunities people need to live and age well.

Her report found that while later life is a time of fulfilment and empowerment for many older people, others find themselves at significant risk being left behind or excluded.

The report and calls for action were shared with the Welsh Government and other key public bodies, and the Commissioner continues to use the important evidence within the report to support her work.

Digital ageism



The Commissioner examined the impact of digital ageism on older people, warning that this growing issue puts them at significant risk of social exclusion in an increasingly digital world.

Key issues identified in the Commissioner's report included the accessibility and usability of digital platforms, discrimination within recruitment and employment and bias within AI systems.

The report included recommendations for the Welsh Government and public services, as well as the technology sector and digital service designers, setting out the action needed to address the issues identified.

Spotlights on Ageism



A collaboration with public service leaders and other experts to shine a light on the realities of ageism in a Welsh context, increase awareness and inspire action.

The contributions covered a number of key areas where people may face exclusion or discrimination due to their age, highlighting a number of common themes and issues that provide helpful insights into how the action required might be prioritised effectively.

The evidence captured through Spotlights on Ageism will strengthen the Commissioner's calls for action and recommendations for public bodies, as well as supporting her calls for a national conversation in Wales about ageism and its impact.

VOICE, CHOICE AND CONTROL

Empowering older people to plan for and make decisions about their futures was a key focus of the Commissioner's work during 2025-26, alongside highlighting the issues and barriers that can limit the choices available as we grow older.

Older people's experiences of living in poverty



The Commissioner used the voices of older people, as well as the latest data to highlight the realities of poverty in later life and the significant impact this has on people's health and wellbeing.

The Commissioner's report called for a range of action to ensure that older people living in poverty are better supported, including action to tackle the Pension Credit 'cliff edge', a new fund for older people struggling financially and greater investment in energy efficiency.

The report also highlighted opportunities to build on existing community-based good practice and expand other initiatives such as social tariffs.

An easy guide to Lasting Powers of Attorney



The Commissioner worked in partnership with the Office of the Public Guardian to produce an updated version of her easy guide to Lasting Powers of Attorney.

Written in clear, accessible language, the guide provides helpful information about the different types of Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA), and the steps someone needs to take should they wish to put an LPA in place.

Thousands of copies of the guide have been distributed to older people across Wales, while the accessible versions have been downloaded and viewed hundreds of times, providing crucial information and increasing awareness.

Guide to future care planning



The Commissioner launched a new guide to future care planning, which provides a range of helpful information about the ways in which we can think about, discuss, and record our wishes for the future as we grow older.

The guide covers a wide range of topics – such as making a will, organ donation and Lasting Powers of Attorney – and includes links to resources and templates, as well as contact details for organisations that can provide further information and support.

Over 2,000 paper copies of the guide have been distributed to older people to date, helping to ensure they feel more empowered to put arrangements in place to protect their future needs and wishes. Audio, BSL and Easy Read versions, to ensure as many older people as possible can access its content.



Providing Advice and Assistance to Older People across Wales

During 2025-26, the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Service supported 707 enquirers, helping older people and their representatives to understand their rights, supporting them if they are having problems with public services (such as health, social care or housing) and offering assistance where someone may have been treated unfairly.

The Team provides confidential advice and assistance to older people via telephone, letter and email as well as face-to-face at engagement events.

Enquiries during 2025-26 covered a broad range of categories:

- Care
- Health
- Housing
- Financial
- Community
- Transport
- Abuse
- Age discrimination

The information and evidence captured from older people is invaluable in highlighting the challenges and barriers people are facing, as well as emerging issues that need to be addressed by policy- and decision-makers. This helps to guide the Commissioners work and calls for action, as well as supporting the development of her and Work Programme and ongoing priorities.

Engagement with older people

During 2025-26, the Commissioner and her team visited 114 groups across Wales, enabling engagement with over 4,000 older people from a variety of backgrounds and communities.

This included visits to social and activity groups and clubs, support groups (such as those for carers and people living with dementia), extra care housing schemes and care homes, as well as meetings with older people's forums across Wales and other groups such as the Women's Institute, Men's Sheds and Merched y Wawr.

In addition, regular meetings continued with the Chairs of national older people's organisations to examine key issues, hear about the experiences of their members and share key information and updates.

The Commissioner also uses other methods to reach out to older people, provide updates and share information and resources, including through her newsletter (which is circulated in hard copy), website and social media.



Engaging with Stakeholders and Politicians

Throughout 2025-26, the Commissioner worked with a wide range of stakeholder organisations across Wales and the UK to influence policy and practice, highlight issues raised by older people, and share evidence and intelligence.

This included participating in key advisory groups and networks, bringing organisations together through roundtable discussions and webinars, and maintaining regular engagement with public bodies and other partners. These activities helped to increase understanding of important issues, secure commitments for action, identify opportunities for collaboration, and support joined-up approaches to improving older people's lives.

The Commissioner also continued to engage directly with politicians and policymakers, raising concerns with the Welsh Government where policies or practice failed to adequately protect or support older people. Regular meetings were held with the First Minister, Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, officials, party leaders and Members of the Senedd to share evidence, highlight emerging issues and press for action.

Alongside providing evidence to Senedd committee inquiries and consultations, the Commissioner continued to provide secretariat support for the Cross-Party Group on Intergenerational Solidarity.

Ahead of the Senedd election the Commissioner published Priorities for the Next Welsh Government, seeking commitments to tackle key issues affecting older people's lives.

At a UK level, the Commissioner engaged on non-devolved issues, including the proposed Digital Inclusion Plan, the Third State Pension Review, and continued calls for changes to Winter Fuel Payment policy and additional cost-of-living support for older people.



Working with the media

The Commissioner maintained a strong media presence throughout 2025-26, which resulted in 172 news items across national, local, and UK-wide publications, leading to 243,866,373 'opportunities to see' coverage related to the Commissioner's work.

Working with the media enables the Commissioner to offer insight and comment on a wide range of policy and practice, to raise awareness about the challenges older people face and the action needed to deliver improvements, and.

Older people greatly value the Commissioner raising concerns publicly and having someone who stands up for their rights, and often feel encouraged to contact our Advice and Assistance Service following media coverage of an issue that resonates with them.



Looking ahead

The Commissioner's 2026-27 Work Programme sets out the range of action she will take forward to deliver positive change for older people in the year ahead.

A summary of the work planned for the year ahead is included below.

Reviewing the delivery of key services and support for older people

Improving access, driving up standards and ensuring rights are upheld

- Formal Reviews into Access to Mental Health Services and Advocacy Services
- Publishing findings of social care research
- Examining older people's experiences of homelessness
- Speeding up delivery of home adaptations

Influencing policy and practice across Wales and more widely

Sharing insight, strengthening practice and enabling meaningful change

- Influencing the new Welsh Government
- Enabling greater scrutiny and accountability in the Senedd
- Mapping progress on tracking digital exclusion
- Making Wales an age-friendly nation

Growing knowledge and understanding across the public sector

Improving services, tackling ageism and protecting older people's rights

- Launching ageism learning module
- Understanding the needs of neurodivergent older people
- Preventing digital ageism

Ensuring older people's voices are heard

Translating evidence into action, driving change and improving outcomes

- Engaging with older people in communities across Wales
- Life in rural Wales research project
- Spotlights on LGBTQ+ voices

You can read the Commissioner's full 2026-27 work programme here:
www.olderpeople.wales/commissioners-work-programme

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

The Commissioner wants Wales to lead the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.

Accessible formats

If you would like this publication in an alternative format, please contact us.

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This document is available in Welsh

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