



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# Update: Older People's Parliament 2026: Horizon Scanning Report

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This briefing note provides a summary of further information, following the March 2026 Horizon Scanning Report for the Older People's Parliament Consultative Panel.

This information is provided to the Older People's Parliament Consultative Panel, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

## Introduction

In March 2026, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) shared a Horizon Scanning Report with the Older People's Parliament Consultative Panel.<sup>1</sup> The Report provided an update on progress made against the recommendations from the previous Older People's Parliament, held on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024.<sup>2</sup> It was intended to help inform the topics they may wish to discuss during the 2026 Older People's Parliament. RaISe staff attended the Panel's meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026 to provide an oral update to the Panel members.

As noted in the Horizon Scanning Report, RaISe has requested information from Northern Ireland Government Departments on specific actions relating to older people. Not all Departments had responded at the time of finalising the Horizon Scanning Report.

This update briefing:

- shares information received from the Departments of Health and Infrastructure;
- responds to questions from the Consultative Panel's March meeting in relation to the Department of Finance's Go ON NI fund; and
- provides an update on relevant legislation progressing in the NI Assembly

RaISe understands that the Department for Communities intends to share information on actions it has taken in relation to the recommendations made by the 2024 Older People's Parliament.<sup>3</sup> We also understand that the Department of Finance may be able to provide further information on the Go ON NI fund,

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<sup>1</sup> M Grieg, Older People's Parliament 2026: Horizon Scanning Report (2026)

<sup>2</sup> NI Assembly, [Report on the Older People's Parliament](#) (2024)

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence between RaISe and Department for Communities Officials, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

following engagement with its partners.<sup>4</sup> Any further information received will be shared with the Consultative Panel.

## 1 Department of Health Update

RaISe have received the below response,<sup>5</sup> signed by the Health Minister, in relation to the Older People's Parliament 2024 *Recommendation 29: the need for options, capacity and availability to accommodate older people who are being discharged from hospital with appropriate support and care packages.*

'Appropriate care and support on discharge from hospital for Older People is a paramount consideration in ensuring that individual needs are met within an overarching approach and within an environment which presents the least restrictive option available. In approaching this challenge, it is important that older people experience care and support which offers minimal intervention and interference in their personal life, whilst balancing this with the need to ensure that their needs are safely and adequately met to a high standard. It is also important that individuals transition from hospital to the most appropriate setting and with the requisite support in situ to meet assessed need, so that they are not availing of inappropriate care and support required by others. It is also necessary to have measures in place which maintain an overview of levels of need with packages of care being amended accordingly as people transition toward greater level of independence or conversely experience the need for more comprehensive provision of care and support.

Please be assured that my Department has placed a specific focus on the reform of Adult Social Care. There have been a number of initiatives as outlined below, some which go some way to address the recommendation made by the Older People's Parliament.

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<sup>4</sup> Correspondence between RaISe and Department of Finance Officials, 31<sup>st</sup> March -1<sup>st</sup> April 2026

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence between RaISe and the Health Minister, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2026

### Early Review Teams

The Early Review Team model was developed in October 2023. This model ensures early and timely review of new and increased home care packages for adults, within 8 weeks of the support being implemented. In the event that home care hours are identified as no longer being required, these hours can then be recycled back into the system, to be made available for those awaiting care either at home, in a care home or in hospital.

### Care Line Live

Care Line Live is a digital system which houses schedules for Trust-led home care services. This system provides oversight of the capacity on schedules, therefore optimising the number of hours that can be delivered within existing staffing levels. The system can identify areas that are at capacity and where staff recruitment needs to be focused. In a similar vein to the Early Review Team model, this approach strengthens the DoH and HSC Trusts' ability to meet individuals' needs in their own home when appropriate to do so.

### Trusted Assessor

The underlying principle of the Trusted Assessor role is to promote safe and timely discharges from hospitals when individuals are transiting to care homes. This model is working towards ensuring that individuals are in receipt of the most appropriate care home setting on discharge from hospital and that there are no unnecessary delays in their transition.

### Care Home Availability Digital App

This is a digital solution to accessing information on the availability of care home beds on a daily basis. Furthermore, and importantly, when implemented, this system will ensure HSC professionals have access to information on care home settings available to meet the needs of the individuals requiring a particular level of care.

In the event an individual is experiencing a delayed discharge from hospital, secondary to a housing issue, the health and social care team will work collaboratively, on a case by case basis with individuals and other key agencies

including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) who have the statutory responsibility for housing, including homelessness and social housing assessment.’

## 2 Department of Infrastructure Update

The Department for Infrastructure has provided updates, following questions in relation to a number of recommendations from the 2024 Older People’s Parliament, as below.<sup>6</sup>

*Recommendation 6: consider the number of well-covered, seated bus shelters, the safe access to and egress from bus stops, and the number of accessible, affordable and user-friendly public car parking facilities*

‘Translink has advised that its Phase 2 Bus Shelter Improvement Project includes the installation of 111 requested new bus shelters. Translink has now submitted an Outline Business Case (OBC) to the Department seeking funding for these works and continues to engage with officials.

Subject to business case approval and overall funding availability, Translink intends that installation of the new shelters could commence within 12 months, with the programme delivered over a five-year period. Progress will depend on the capital allocation available to Translink and the prioritisation of these works within their wider capital plan. A budget beyond 2025/26 not yet been set.

Translink currently manages 1,460 bus shelters on behalf of the Department province wide. A further 20 shelters have recently been added along Corridor 11 in Belfast, and Translink plans to install a further 200 shelters over the next six years across Northern Ireland. There are also plans to refurbish existing shelters to bring them in line with current accessibility standards within the same timeframe.

Translink offers a strong Park & Ride network with more than 4,300 free spaces, all compliant with accessibility regulations. A further 2,500 free spaces

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<sup>6</sup> Correspondence between RaiSe and Department for Infrastructure Officials, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026

are planned over the next six years as part of an ongoing expansion programme.

The organisation remains committed to improving accessibility and capacity across the Park & Ride network’.

*Recommendation 7: develop an Accessible Transport Strategy for older people to be implemented in Northern Ireland.*

‘While the Department hasn’t produced a specific Accessible Transport Strategy for Older People, it has produced the new Transport Strategy 2035 which includes many relevant policies including a section on Inclusive Transport and Policy CC01 that states “The Department will ensure people with disabilities and additional mobility needs are reflected in the design and management of the transport system”’.

*Recommendation 8: ease access to appropriate benefits to assist with transport costs.*

‘The Department for Infrastructure provides free and discounted travel through the NI Concessionary Fares Scheme. Under the Scheme all those aged 60 and above are eligible for free travel on public transport services at any time of the day. People aged 65 and over also receive free cross border travel and free travel within Ireland. Free travel is also available on Dial-a-Lift services in rural areas, as well as the Strangford and Rathlin Island ferry services.

In 2023, the Department ran a public consultation on proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for the Scheme, which included the option to raise the age of eligibility from 60 to 65 or State Pension Age. Recognising the positive impact that the Scheme has for older people and on the wider community, Minister O’Dowd agreed to make no changes to the age eligibility for the Scheme. This means that free travel benefits will continue to be available from age 60’.

### 3 Department for Finance– Go ON NI Update

At the March 2026 meeting of the Consultative Panel, a Panel Member queried what proportion of attendees at Go ON NI events were older people. We are

awaiting further information from the Department of Finance on the overall breakdown.<sup>7</sup>

For now, RaiSe has identified Linking Generations Northern Ireland's Connect IT 25, as an example of a project funded by Go ON NI. It brought younger and older participants together to learn about the uses and benefits of IT. 22 young people aged 15 – 17 and 22 older people, aged 65 – 75+ took part, and an [evaluation report is available](#).

At the March meeting, the Panel also suggested it could be difficult to find online information on Go ON NI. The below links may be helpful:

- [Get online with Go ON NI | nidirect](#)
- [Events - libraries NI](#)
- [Generations Connect through IT – Linking Generations NI](#)
- [Digital Inclusion — Supporting Communities](#)

## 4 Legislative Updates

Further to the Horizon Scanning Report, the Panel may also find updates on the below legislation useful.

### 4.1 Adult Protection Bill

The Horizon Scanning Report<sup>8</sup> referred to the [Adult Protection Bill](#), which would introduce a statutory framework for safeguarding adults at risk in Northern Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

The Bill passed its Committee Stage on 27<sup>th</sup> March, with the next stage (known as Consideration Stage) to be scheduled.

The Health Committee's Report on the Bill is available: [Report on the Adult Protection Bill](#)

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<sup>7</sup> Correspondence between RaiSe and Department of Finance Officials, 31<sup>st</sup> March -1<sup>st</sup> April 2026

<sup>8</sup> M Grieg, Older People's Parliament 2026: Horizon Scanning Report (2026), p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> For further information, see Sinéad McMurray, [Adult Protection Bill 2025: RaiSe Bill Paper](#) (2025)

## 4.2 Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill

The Justice Minister introduced the [Criminal Justice \(Sentencing etc\) Bill](#) on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Second Stage, where MLA's debate the principles of the Bill, was held on 16<sup>th</sup> March. The Bill has now gone to the Justice Committee.

The Bill covers a wide range of issues, but of most relevance:

- Clauses 33-35 relate to hate crime. Although age is not currently a protected characteristic in hate crime legislation, the Bill would allow the Department to add other groups in the future, via Regulations. There have been some calls for age to be included, and the Department has indicated that it will consult further on this.<sup>10</sup>
- Clause 36 would allow existing crimes, such as assault, to be 'aggravated' by reason of vulnerability. This would be recorded in an offender's criminal record, and the court would have to explain how affects the sentence. Under this clause, the definition of vulnerable person includes a person whose 'ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age or for any other reason'

## 4.3 Age Discrimination in Goods, Facilities and Services

The Horizon Scanning Report referred to proposals for a Private Member's Bill to expand protections against age discrimination to cover goods, facilities and services.<sup>11</sup> As of 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026, this Bill has not been introduced.

Within this Mandate (i.e. before the NI Assembly elections in May 2027), there is a deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026 for Private Members' Bills to be introduced into the NI Assembly. The Bill would then to need to go through the usual legislative stages.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [AQW 42799/22-27](#)

<sup>11</sup> M Grieg, Older People's Parliament 2026: Horizon Scanning Report (2026), pp. 7-8

<sup>12</sup> NI Assembly, [Law Making in the Northern Ireland Assembly](#) (accessed 24/04/26).