



A universal offer:

International Day of Older People

HAPPI Hour Webinar

29 September 2026

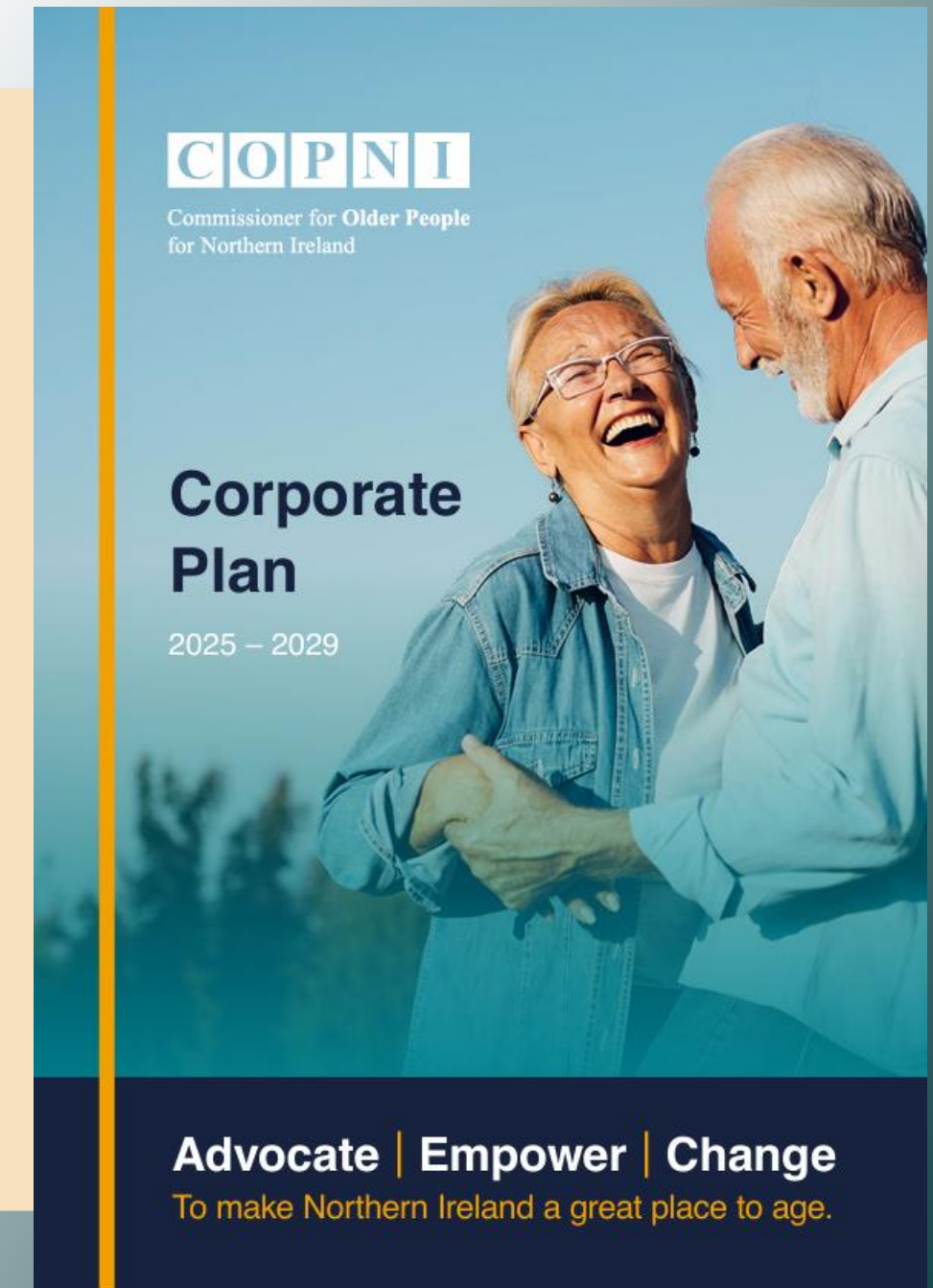
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Presentation Outline

- 1) Introduction to COPNI
- 2) NI Housing Supply Strategy
- 3) Experience of Older Renters



About COPNI

The Commissioner's office was established in 2011 under the **Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011**.



The principal aim of COPNI is to act as an **independent champion** for older people, **safeguarding and promoting their interests**.

COPNI's Powers & Duties

Powers

Conduct formal and informal investigations

Issue guidance on best practice

Carry out research and publish information

Provide advice to Government & Secretary of State

Duties

Promote awareness of the interests of older people

Review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and services

Encourage best practice in the treatment of older people

Promote positive attitudes towards older people



COPNI's Role in Housing

- **Advice to Government:** Consultation responses on housing strategies, housing supply, advancing age friendly practice
- **Reports:** planning for an ageing society, age friendly practice, older renters
- **Advocacy and Casework:** support for individual older people facing housing issues and assisting them to understand and exercise their legal rights, intervening where necessary and / or signposting to specialist services

Focus on WHO Domain: 'Housing – to provide adequate, accessible, safe and affordable housing, a continuum of housing choices and the opportunity to age in place.'



NI Housing Supply Strategy

The Department for Communities (DfC) in Northern Ireland manages the regional **Housing Supply Strategy (2024–2039)**, which aims to tackle the region's severe housing shortage and affordability crisis.

Key Goals and Targets

- **100,000 New Homes:** The strategy sets a target to build at least 100,000 new homes across Northern Ireland by the year 2039.
- **33,000 Social Homes:** One-third of the total new builds (at least 33,000 homes) are designated as social housing to address growing waiting lists.
- **Whole-System Approach:** The policy focuses on five core objectives, including increasing overall supply, reducing homelessness, improving home quality, building inclusive communities, and moving toward carbon neutrality.

NI Housing Supply Strategy

Current Challenges

- **Waiting Lists:** Nearly 50,000 households remain on the social housing waiting list, with a vast majority categorized as being in housing stress.
- **Infrastructure Bottlenecks:** Ongoing issues with wastewater infrastructure managed by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) continue to delay new social and affordable housing developments.
- **Funding and Delivery:** Despite recent funding investments—such as a £210 million building program initiated in 2025/2026—meeting annual output targets remains challenging due to inflation, borrowing rates, and capacity



Housing Adaptations for Older People

The NI Housing Executive adapts housing for older people by managing improvement grants, performing direct property modifications, and implementing older persons' housing strategies.

Strategic Planning and Design Guidance

- **Older People's Housing Strategy:** The NIHE works alongside the Department for Communities to shape housing policies, support specialized categories of older persons' accommodation (such as CAT1 to CAT3 active and extra-care housing designs), and encourage inclusive standards. [[1](#)]
- **Inclusive Building Frameworks:** They incorporate universal design concepts and support regional guidelines (such as the 'Designing Homes for All' guides) to ensure accessibility for individuals experiencing cognitive, sensory, or physical challenges.



Housing Adaptations for Older People

Managing Grants for Private and Owner-Occupied Homes

- **Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG):** The NIHE administers DFGs to fund major home adaptations—such as step-free showers, ramps, and widening doors—recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT) for private owners or tenants.
- **Financial Support:** Standard grants cover approved costs up to higher thresholds (with caps reaching up to £35,000 or more in specific low-income or exceptional cases) after a financial assessment.

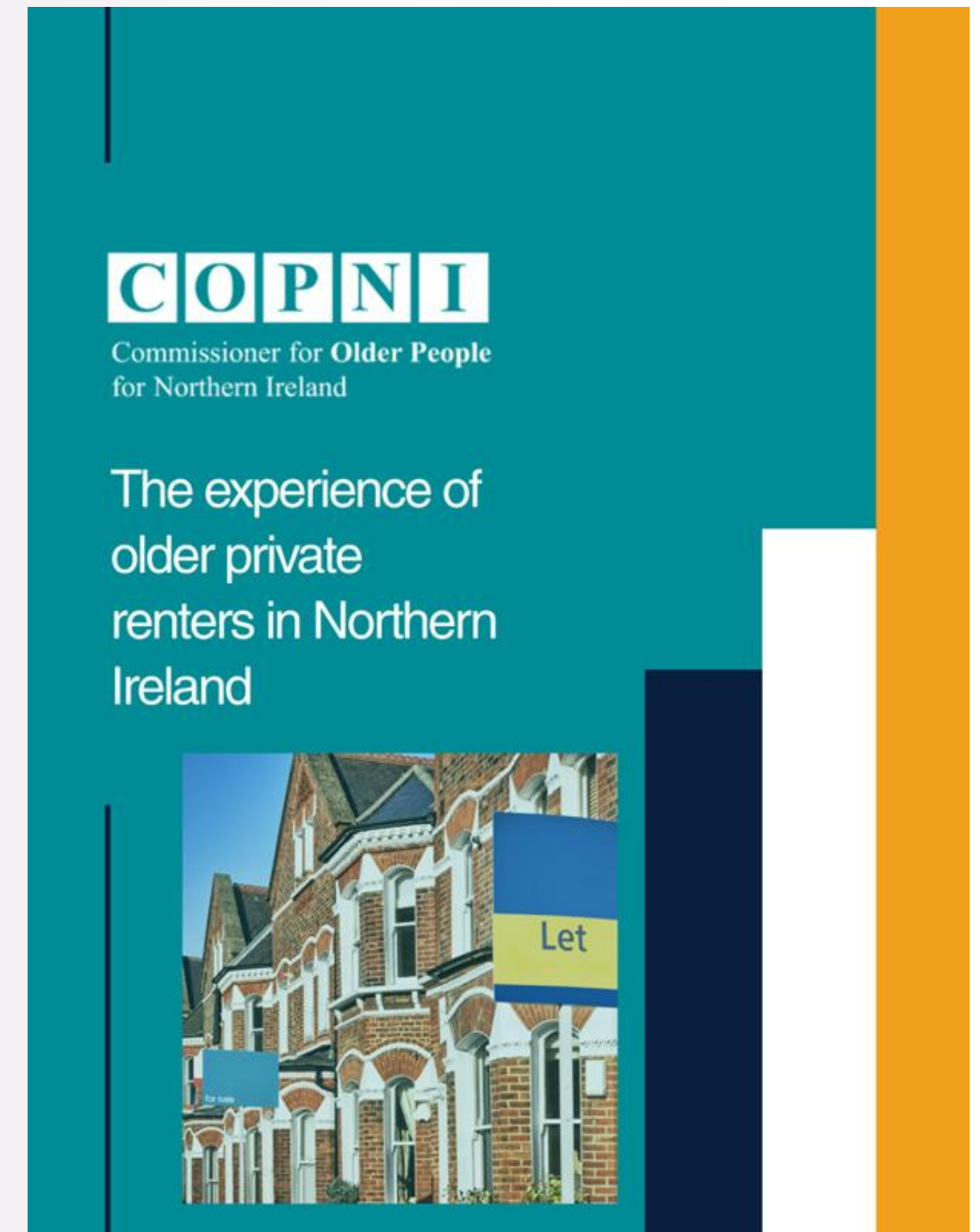
Direct Adaptations in Social Housing

- **Minor Works Without Referral:** For tenants living in NIHE-owned properties, smaller changes (like standard grab rails or minor leverage adjustments) can often be completed directly by the Housing Executive without needing an OT assessment.
- **Major Works:** For substantial changes like extensions or specialized bathroom conversions, the NIHF coordinates assessments and handles the construction work directly.

Experience of Older Renters

Key Findings of the Report

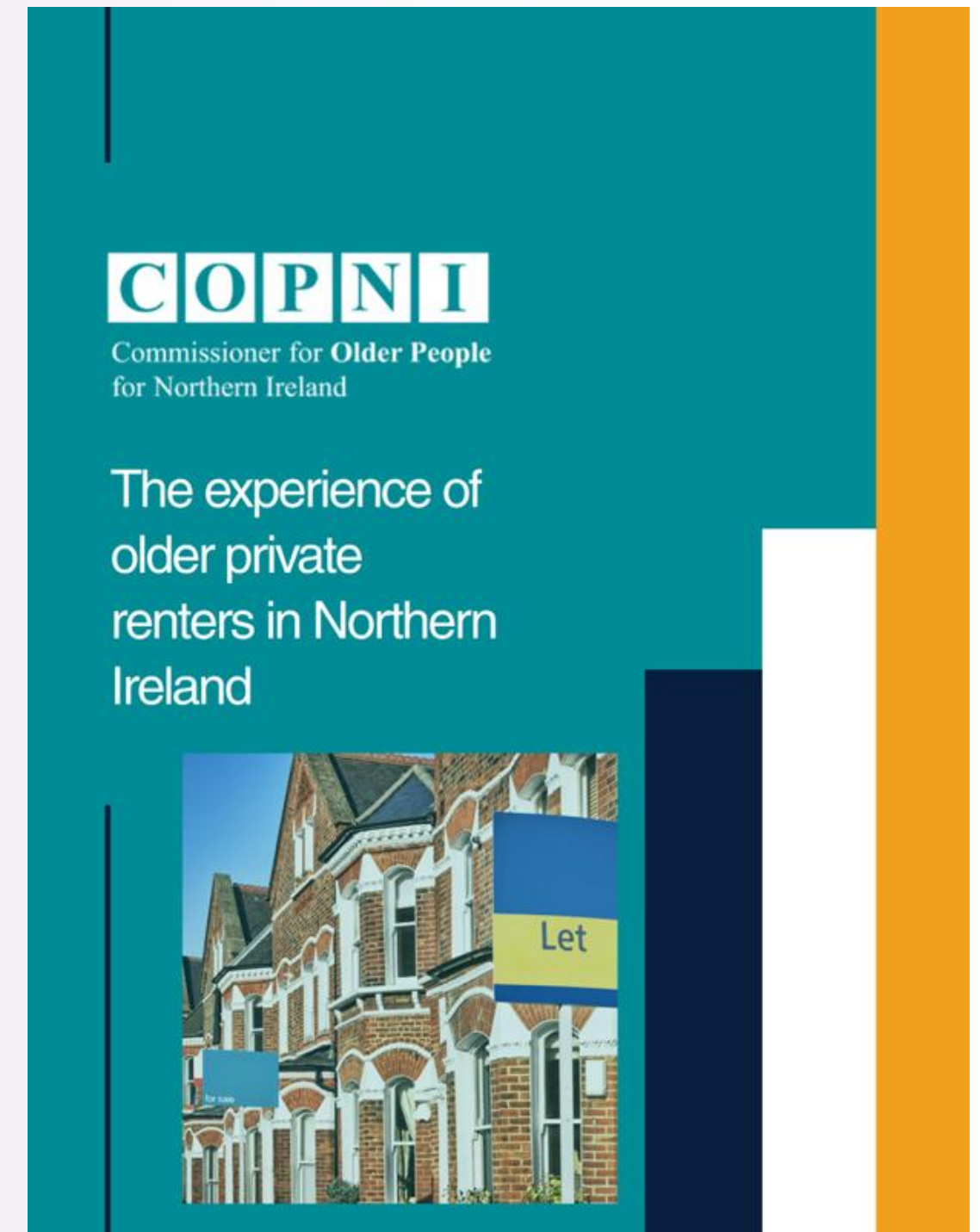
- **Scale:** Around **17,600 people aged 65 and over** currently rent privately in Northern Ireland, a figure projected to increase significantly by 2040.
- **Financial Strain:** Older renters live on fixed or lower incomes with little ability to increase earnings, making them highly vulnerable to rising rents.
- **Unsuitable Housing:** Many live in properties that fail to meet mobility or health needs (such as a lack of ground-floor access or adaptations), and landlords have no legal obligation to make changes.
- **Insecurity & Anxiety:** Tenure insecurity and the constant threat of eviction cause severe psychological distress during later life.



Experience of Older Renters

Key Recommendations by COPNI

- **End No-Fault Evictions:** Restrict landlords from evicting tenants unless clear statutory grounds apply.
- **Age Discrimination Protections:** Introduce legal duties for private landlords to make reasonable adjustments for older tenants.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Improve minimum energy efficiency standards across all rental properties to combat fuel poverty. [\[1\]](#)



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