

Siobhan Casey Commissioner for Older People N. Ireland 25th Anniversary Afternoon at City Hall 26th February 2026

David Introduces Siobhan Casey

So, Siobhan's background is in marketing and business development but for Age Northern Ireland and she's been doing that for the last 15 years or so. So, her main remit is to safeguard and protect the older people of Northern Ireland. So, I'd like to invite Siobhan up to tell us how she does that, thank you 🙌 🙌 🙌

START

Good afternoon, everyone, can you hear me? Yeah, it's my absolute pleasure and delight to be here with you today. I was explaining earlier to David you know this is a four-year term of office and I'm nearly finished my first year so it's three years before I can join you.

That's my goal and I'll be deciding between whether it's here or in Derry but I'm so overwhelmed by the numbers that you have like there's 1,250 here and I think the one in Derry, Stoke Londonderry, it's over a thousand and it's just I think it's everything that everything that I've been working on for the last sort of 16 years has been around the healthy ageing agenda and you'll not be surprised to know that the two most important things about healthy ageing in our lives is being socially connected and being physically active and that to me embodies what U3A is as well as the crack and the fun and the learning.

But it's in another role of mine I am a what they call a senior Atlantic fellow on equity for brain health which is essentially healthy ageing and keeping our brains active and it's you know the big surprises for me was I used I did I got on this programme and there was doctors and neurologists and psychologists and you know I actually felt quite inferior and but the whole thing about it was that your brain's a muscle and it can you know the more you use it the better it gets and that doesn't change regardless of your age so you know I think it's just a big applause to you all for what you're continuing to do and the example that you're you know you're showing across Northern Ireland.

As David said my role is as commissioner for older people so I am your commissioner my role is to make sure that I represent your voice and thanks to Adrian I did a consultation earlier on in the year where I asked people to tell me what the key issues were facing older people in Northern Ireland and I got 1200 over 1200 responses which was quite good at the time and since that I've spoken to about another two and a half thousand older people but Adrian circulated it through U3A so my big thanks to any of you who filled it in.

But you'll not be surprised to know that one of the biggest issues affecting us all here in Northern Ireland is in terms of age is our demographic ageing there's 100,000 more people

over 60 in Northern Ireland today than there was 10 years ago so that's 100,000 people competing for the same services so when we say that you know that the number one issue that people are telling me is that getting access to services, access to GPs, access to hospitals appointments all of that then you know the big rationale is there's over 100,000 more of us competing for what people got 10 years ago so we they would have more of a service 10 years ago than we're getting today.

I don't know if any of you heard me last week but I was on Nolan on GMU on every Radio Ulster every sort of every point during the day talking about the report that I launched the government which was on the voices of older people and the concern again you know in terms of their treatment and health and social care services so all I would say I don't want to I mean this is a celebratory event today and I don't want to get deep into you know the issues and concerns impacting us all but all I would ask you to do today is if you're interested in knowing more about the work of my office sign up to my newsletter and we'll get that information out to and I'll be able to give you more details about the ongoing work that we're doing there.

I have three teams one is one is the communications teams just so that we can get more information out to people but also have a policy and research team so they're doing things like looking at the experience of older renters in Northern Ireland because we know that there might only be five percent of people renting accommodation today but it's going to be 20 percent in a couple of you know in 10 years' time and they're being their rights are really being affected the other things we're looking at are things like adult safeguarding bills Ada and I've talked about the need for legislation here in Northern Ireland to protect older people against discrimination on the basis of age goods facilities and services so there's a lot of work in terms of getting the legal framework right for vulnerable older people but also to make sure that there's less discrimination so it's a challenging time and it's not exclusive to Northern Ireland.

This age and demographic so we're living longer and that's something that we should be really proud of but it also brings challenges so as we enter this time when there's more older people and proportionately fewer people of working age it changes everything really and how we provide health and social care how we design housing how we provide transport and community services so there's less younger people working basically as the population ages over the next kind of 40 years so it's a difficult time and it's a decisive time and my message to our government is we've got a plan for this and we put you know to be honest we've been saying this then for the last 16 years so that's one of the things that I hope you can hold me to account in account of over the next three years is whether you hear more about what needs to be done here to fix things not just for older people today but the more older people that's coming through over the next 10 years.

So I think what I want to say too well I've just published my corporate plan so the three things that I'm going to be looking at is advocating for change so that people can age well empowering older people to take more to have more choice and control so to understand more about their rights because I think that's something that that you know that continues now that particularly if people aren't getting GP access and they're not getting onto the

system and they feel disempowered and people are feeling less you know worthy or not you know maybe I should let that appointment go to somebody else or not collect their benefits because they think it's going to take away from younger people.

We need to get the message in out there that you know that people have served us you know I mean you know we've my parents your parents your peers we've all served people well and that whole intergenerational conflict needs to not be there and that there needs we need to be celebrating age further so it's basically the last thing it is about changing how we all feel think and act towards ageing so just without further ado as we kind of mark these 25 years let's not only celebrate the past but look to the future.

I'm certainly looking forward to joining you in a couple of years' time with more older people than ever before there's never been a greater need for what U3A offers and equally there has never been a better time to grow this movement to ensure that every older person has the opportunity to say I think the lady said to me earlier about staying curious connected and fulfilling so to all the staff volunteers organisers and members the music was brilliant that that melody there and that that congratulations and thank you I know older people across your communities have benefited from the commitment you've shown so as my as commissioner my primary role is to champion the rights and interests of you and older people out there and to push for society that does not overlook us so you are helping fulfil that vision that older people are not an afterthought but a valued part of Northern Ireland, so today as we celebrate your success I would encourage you all to see this as the beginning of the next chapter I love new chapters.

I look forward to seeing the opportunities that will grow and the new courses and activities that you're bringing in so here's to many more years of u3a and congratulations on your 25th anniversary 🙌🙌🙌

David Thank you very much Siobhan food for thought

END