

Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 3 – December 2023



HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS

Happy Christmas to all CSPA NI members

The past year has flown, but at CSPA NI we have done our best to represent your interests – ensuring your civil service pension is at least maintained, supporting pension overpayment cases, campaigning to save the Smartpass fares scheme.

We have also secured exclusive deals for members with Specsavers or through our legal offer with McCartan Turkington Breen.

And we continue to work with other organisations such as the Commissioner for Older People and the National Pensioners Convention.

We were set up 70 years ago to build on the pensions paid, which was low and not regularly uprated. This year we saw the civil service pension rise by 10.1%. We will never lose sight of our reason to exist.

As we approach the Christmas season, we are very conscious that this year has been a difficult one

for many members who may have lost a loved one and are still coming to terms with such a tragic loss. To them, and to all our members, we send our solidarity and the hope that all of us can have the very best Christmas that we can have.

Please remember any CSPA NI member who may be vulnerable and lonely at this time. A small act of kindness would be very much appreciated.

So, 2024 will be upon us all too soon. We wish you all a very happy Christmas and good health and success for the new year.

Tony McMullan, Editor

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the very best Christmas**



Notice of AGM 2024

In April we celebrated our 70th anniversary in the beautiful surroundings of the Banqueting Room at Belfast City Hall. Next year we will move our AGM to Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

This is advance notice, so please put Wednesday 24 April at 2pm in your diary. Already CSPA General Secretary Sally Tsoukaris and a representative of the Charity for Civil Servants have been confirmed as keynote guest speakers.

Work continues in planning the agenda, so please check the CSPA NI website – www.civilservicepensionersalliance-ni.co.uk. We would love to see you in Stormont in April.

Overpayment write-offs

In our last newsletter we highlighted that, following representations by CSPA NI and others, Civil Service Pensions (CSP) had had 60 civil service overpayment cases written off.

In August we were notified by CSP that they had identified a further seven overpayment

cases, ranging from £5,500 to £65,000 and totalling £152,000.

Although the seven pensioners had to move to the recalculated pension, we were pleased that the overpayments themselves were written off on the same basis as the previous 60 had been.

Active Ageing Strategy update

CSPA NI wrote to Northern Ireland's Department for Communities (DfC), seeking an update on the Active Ageing Strategy (AAS).

In reply, DfC said the AAS had originally been issued in 2016 but had been updated in 2020 and extended until the end of the last Assembly mandate – May 2022.

The refreshed strategy updated on existing actions, included new actions that had not featured in the original strategy but contributed to the wellbeing of older people, and pointed to actions in response to Covid-19. You can find the refreshed

strategy at this weblink: <https://tinyurl.com/3sr59t24>

Evaluation strategies have taken place on the expired strategy, including Citizen Space surveys that looked at each outcome, the overall strategy and Covid responses; interviews with key stakeholders such as Age NI and Age Friendly Network NI chairs;

A series of workshops in 2022 considered problems the strategy could address



and surveys with officials in the government departments that had contributed to the strategy.

As to the development of the AAS, key stakeholders took part in a series of workshops in 2022, which considered

the problems the strategy could address, produced a longlist of actions and prioritised them.

There was also direct engagement with a range of older people about their lived experiences and identified areas for consideration in any new strategy. This will not recommence until the appointment of a new DfC minister in any future Northern Ireland Executive.

Commissioner for Older People attends meeting with CSPA NI

CSPA NI Branch Secretary Tony McMullan and Vice-Chair Joan Moss recently attended a meeting in County Down, hosted by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Older People, Eddie Lynch. Pictured below are (left to right) Tony McMullan; former Northern Ireland Public

Service Alliance Deputy General Secretary, Kieran Bannon; Eddie Lynch; and (far right) Joan Moss.

The meeting discussed items of concern including ageism, the triple-lock on state pensions, the impact of the pandemic on older people, and the proposed changes to public transport concessionary fares.

As reported in the Autumn issue of *The Pensioner* magazine, Eddie Lynch has succeeded in a legal challenge to a decision of the NI Department of Health that would have denied funded healthcare to many pensioners on the basis of their response to a new question on whether the individual's healthcare needs "could be met properly in any other setting than a hospital".

The judge quashed the policy on the basis that it was adopted "in breach of its obligations to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different ages".

The CSPA is campaigning with other pensioner organisations for a Commissioner for Older People in England, and one in Scotland, to independently promote the interests of older people and challenge government policies where necessary.



2024 pension increases

On 18 October, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced that the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) for September remained at 6.7%.

The annual civil service pension increase, due in April 2024, is underpinned by a statutory link to the inflation rate in the preceding September, which means civil service pensioners in Northern Ireland should see their pensions increase by 6.7% from next April.

The ONS September statement should also mean that the state

pension increase, also due in April 2024, should rise by the higher savings growth figure of 8.5%.

This is in line with the triple-lock, which links the state pension increase to CPI inflation, savings growth or 2.5%, whichever is the highest figure.

In September, the ONS confirmed

State pensioners should see their pension increase by 8.5% from April 2024

that average earnings, including bonuses, had risen over the 12-month period by 8.5%. As the government has committed to retaining the triple-lock for the remainder of this parliament, state pensioners should see their pension increase by 8.5% from April 2024.

Although these rises may sound generous given the rate of pay increases, which have been particularly low in the public sector, readers should remember that the UK state pension is the second worst in Europe.



Tony McMullan, Roisin Lilley, Harry Baird and Ivan Baxter at the AGM

National AGM report

The national CSPA AGM took place in Kenilworth, near Coventry on 11 and 12 October. The Northern Ireland Branch was represented by delegate Harry Baird, observer Ivan Baxter and NI National Council representative Tony McMullan. Branch Treasurer Roisin Lilley also attended as a nationally elected women's representative.

The Branch's motion calling for the creation of a national social care service similar to the National Health Service was proposed by Harry Baird and carried unanimously.

Harry highlighted that there had been a continual failure of both

the Westminster and devolved parliaments to deliver a fully costed and comprehensive social care systems throughout the four UK countries. He added that this was of critical importance and demanded that a national social care system be established with national standards but designed and developed within the framework of the devolved UK nations.

Among the other topics debated at the AGM were pensions and related matters, digital exclusion, transport, photo ID, artificial intelligence, health, banking hubs, telephone scams and internal CSPA recruitment strategies.

NI Assembly All Party Group

Although the Northern Ireland Assembly is still not functioning, its all-party groups continue to meet and plan activities.

The group focusing on older people, on which the CSPA NI has observer status, met on 9 October. Age NI Director Paschal McKeown presented the organisation's latest Lived Experience Survey, with its underlying commitment to equal access to corporate healthcare.

Among the many other issues discussed were GP services, waiting lists, ageism, prevention and early intervention, and a review of adult care.



Remember when...?

This time we're going back to 27 October 2010, when there was a mass lobby of Parliament at Westminster to stress the need for improvements in the living standards of older people. Holding the CSPA NI banner high were (left to right) Den

Hamill, Nixon Armstrong, Bill Carson and Ivan Baxter. If you or your family have any old photographs of CSPA NI activists, please email them to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com and we'll consider using them in future issues of the newsletter.



Carson Wilson remembered

Everyone at CSPA NI was deeply saddened to learn of the recent death of our former chair, Carson Wilson. Carson was a committed CSPA member who spent a lot of his own time representing members either internally in CSPA NI or at the wider National Pensioners Convention. He was a humble but determined CSPA



activist, always anxious to pursue the civil service pensioner's case. Branch Chair Stan Blayney, Vice-Chair Joan Moss, Secretary Tony McMullan and Treasurer Roisin Lilley attended Carson's funeral. He was a lovely man who devoted his life to helping others. We send our very deepest condolences to Carson's family and friends.



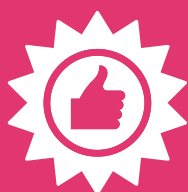
Need new glasses?

If you need new glasses for Christmas or the new year, why not get a CSPA NI Specsavers voucher, which gives you £20 off the £99-and-above range.

You can also get these for your family and friends. Just email Tony McMullan – tony.mcmullan@outlook.com – with the names of the people who require a voucher. To date 137 members have received one, saving a total of £2,740.

Our new legal offer

CSPA NI has negotiated an exclusive legal offer for members, providing free wills, a free initial 20-minute telephone consultation on any legal matter, plus discounted rates on estate planning and enduring powers of attorney. In order to access these services, contact Marie-Anne McVeigh at McCartan Turkington Breen Solicitors by email: marie-anne.mcveigh@mtb-law.co.uk tel: 02890 329801 or post: McCartan Turkington Breen, Northern Court, 16-18 Gloucester Street, Belfast BT1 4LS.



We hope you've enjoyed our newsletter. We'd love to hear what you liked or didn't like. Is there something you'd be keen to hear more of or something you particularly didn't like about the newsletter?

Please let us know and we'll try to accommodate your views in future issues. This is YOUR newsletter, which we are proud to produce on your behalf. Contact us via tony.mcmullan@outlook.com

TODAY, TOMORROW AND EVERY DAY!