

Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 4 – March 2024



HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS

Assembly returns – don't forget the pensioners!

After more than two years of the Northern Ireland Assembly being mothballed because of the DUP's refusal to operate the power-sharing arrangements, the party agreed to return to the Executive following lengthy negotiations with the secretary of state.

To encourage the DUP to return to power sharing, the Conservative government agreed to a £3bn package to help resolve major underfunding of many public sector workers, who had been staging industrial action for some time. More money was also promised for capital infrastructure projects.

According to opinion polls, the majority of the population welcome the return of the politicians to deal with significant crises, whether that be health, education or the chronic state of roads in Northern Ireland.

We pensioners also look forward to the politicians grappling with the huge hospital and mental health waiting lists on which many older people are stranded. And we look forward to political parties honouring the promises they gave to older people in their manifestos.

For the last election, the DUP promised the most for older



people. As well as supporting the retention of the triple-lock on pensions, it committed to: examine legislation to protect access to goods and services; support adult safeguarding; toughen custodial sentences for serious crimes against older people; increase accountability for decision-making in care homes, hospitals and care settings; extend the Active Ageing Strategy; and promote a dementia-friendly approach to public policy.

Meanwhile, the Alliance Party promised action on age discrimination legislation; a programme of government with outcomes for ageing/older people; reform of adult social care; promoting pension credit; creating

We look forward to the politicians honouring their pledges to older people

a loneliness strategy; and improving skills for older people who want to stay in paid work.

The SDLP offered a guarantee that if care is needed it will be of the highest quality. It also promised access to high-quality

personalised services that promote dignity and health in later life, as well as a carers strategy, a carers champion and full funding of regional dementia care pathways.

Unfortunately, neither the Ulster Unionist Party nor Sinn Fein had any specific manifesto commitments for older people. Of the smaller parties, the Traditional Unionist Voice pledged a public enquiry into the pandemic, including how care homes were protected; support for adequate domiciliary care; internet courses in libraries for older people; age discrimination legislation; and adequate funding for the Commissioner for Older People.

Finally, People Before Profit promised to support the triple-lock, while the Green Party committed to supporting dignity in dying.

We look forward to the political parties honouring their commitments to older people. We will be holding them to account.

Concessionary fares update

When the consultation on the concessionary fares ended in August 2023, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) said it would bring forward recommendations on the way forward within two to three months. More than months later, not a peep...

With the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January, at least there is a minister to take it forward. Just a few weeks into the job, John O'Dowd made the

The consultation showed the scheme is important to a big section of society

following statement in the Assembly on Tuesday 5 March: "There were over 20,000 responses to the consultation and unsurprisingly the majority of them were opposed to the scheme's removal, for a variety of reasons.

"My officials are still giving those documents careful consideration. It is my intention to retain the scheme as it is. I have to balance that against the budget that is available to me, and I will therefore have to engage with my Executive colleagues on how we maintain the current scheme.

"As has been proven by the consultation responses, the scheme is important to a significant section



NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY, CC BY 3.0

Minister John O'Dowd

of our society who would be left isolated without it. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement in the Assembly in the near future." Fingers crossed.

Have you considered a power of attorney?

Some members have organised a power of attorney for themselves or their loved ones, while others find the topic upsetting and don't engage with it. It is not our wish in any way to upset or cause any distress to members but to offer practical advice.

Power of attorney is given to someone who can act on behalf of a member in relation to the management of their property and financial matters, if the member is unable to do so for themselves. If the member gives the attorney general authority to act on his or her behalf in relation to all the member's affairs, the attorney will be able to do almost everything

the member could have done – sign cheques, withdraw money from savings accounts, buy or sell shares. However, if the member wishes to restrict the authority of the attorney, this can be done by putting restrictions or conditions in the enduring power of attorney.

While I hope this might never be needed at all in my own case – or if it is, that it will be many years hence – I have decided to draw up a power of attorney now to save it having to be done in haste if I were to take ill. It has given me reassurance.

Drawing up a power of attorney has given me reassurance for the future



Why not do as I have done, using the discounted rate negotiated by CSPA NI with McCartan Turkington Breen Solicitors?

To get the discounted rate, please contact Marie-Anne McVeigh by email: marie-anne.mcveigh@mtb-law.co.uk phone: 02890 329801 or post: McCartan Turkington Breen, Northern Court, 16-18 Gloucester Street, Belfast BT1 4LS. Please identify yourself as a CSPA member to access the discounted rate.

2024 Annual General Meeting



As a member-focused organisation, there is nothing more important to us than providing members with the chance to hear what their elected committee has tried to achieve for them over the past year and to give members an opportunity to decide on the priorities for the year ahead.

Last year, we had our 70th anniversary AGM in the beautiful surroundings of Belfast City Hall (pictured above right). This year it will be held in the Long Gallery at Stormont on Wednesday 24 April at 2pm. A hot buffet, sandwiches,

tray bakes and tea and coffee will be served from 1.30pm, and free car parking will be available in the Stormont car park.

The re-establishment of the Assembly means enhanced security, so we need to provide the names of all members planning to attend the AGM to security staff at least three working days before the meeting.

Please register your intention to attend by emailing Tony McMullan at tony.mcmullan@outlook.com or calling 07902617095 no later than Friday 19 April.



The AGM will hear from Branch President Alastair Hunter, Chair Stan Blayney and Secretary Tony McMullan, who will present the organisation's annual report. Branch Treasurer Roisin Lilley will present the annual financial statement.

We are delighted to have two excellent keynote guest speakers – CSPA General Secretary Sally Tsoukaris and a representative from the Charity for Civil Servants. There will also be plenty of time for you to raise questions or express opinions. They are all highly valued.

Last year we recorded the best attendance numbers at an AGM for many years. Let's improve on that again this year.

We really hope to see as many of you as possible in Stormont on 24 April. And please don't forget to register your attendance intentions by 19 April. See you then!!

Pension increases and Budget disappointments



The annual civil service pension increase in Great Britain was announced to be 6.7% and will be payable from April 2024. This is because the pension increase is underpinned by a statutory link to the inflation rate in the preceding September, which means the increase in civil service pensions in Great Britain and Northern Ireland should rise by 6.7%.

At the time of writing, official confirmation had been provided for civil service pensioners in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland – although it was absolutely expected to be confirmed.

However, the Budget on 6 March

More pensioners will have to pay tax on their pensions for the first time

was a major disappointment. With the government's main tax cut being 2% of National Insurance, this meant nothing to pensioners, who pay income tax but not NI.

To make matters worse, the Chancellor has continued the freeze on the starting rate of income tax – so more civil service pensioners will have to pay income tax on their pensions for the first time.

Remember when...?

This time we turn back to 2016, when representatives from the CSPA joined other Northern Ireland pensioner groups to participate in the Pensioners' Parliament. The event took place in the Chamber of the

Northern Ireland Assembly, hosted by the then Speaker, Mitchell McLaughlin.

If you have any photos or mementoes of CSPA activists in action, please send them to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com.



We have decided to include a quiz in each edition of the newsletter – and two winning members will each receive a £25 Marks & Spencer voucher. All you need to do is answer the questions below and send your answers to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com before **Monday 22 April**.

Q1. The Civil Service Sports Pavilion at Stormont Estate is called the Maynard Sinclair Pavilion. Who or what was Maynard Sinclair?

Q2. What is the name of the Northern Ireland singer who had a number one hit with *Softly Softly*?

Get thinking – and good luck!



Specsavers offer

Our exclusive deal with Specsavers continues. If you would like a £20 Specsavers voucher to spend on any glasses in the £99 or above range, please contact tony.mcmullan@outlook.com.

All you need to do is tell Tony who you would like a voucher for – it can be for yourself or your family or friends. To date, 165 members have used the vouchers, saving CSPA NI members £3,300.

Annual membership fee renewal

We urge you to pay your CSPA membership via your civil service pension as it saves us money and time.

Any members who do not pay in this way should have received a renewal letter from Membership Secretary Roisin Lilley, advising them their annual membership is due. Our fee is unchanged. Please note that if you have the travel insurance, it is invalidated if you are not a paid-up member.

Please contact Roisin at roisincspa@gmail.com if you did not receive a letter or you have not paid yet.



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!