

# Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 5 – August 2024



**HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS**

## “Older people were let down”

The older people of Northern Ireland were let down by their own government. That is the conclusion from the devastating evidence provided to the UK government’s Covid enquiry by Northern Ireland Commissioner for Older People Eddie Lynch (pictured).

He had hoped that “the evidence would provide answers and understanding on why older people and many vulnerable others were so badly failed by the Northern Ireland government’s response to the pandemic”.

But, he said: “Regrettably, the answer to the ‘how’ question is deeply depressing and concerning, and the ‘why’ question has not been answered.

“In the Commission’s view, it will need

**Eddie Lynch,  
Commissioner for  
Older People**



to be, not least, to build the public’s trust and confidence in the government’s ability to adequately respond to the next pandemic so that their lives are protected.

“The evidence heard has done little to start that process. But it must apply, as without such trust and confidence the public may not respond with the necessary compliance to whatever measures are considered necessary, and that would be to the detriment of everyone.”

The Commissioner was scathing in his criticism of the practice of transferring older people from hospitals to nursing/care homes untested.

“The discharge of older people from hospitals to care homes, without testing, was reckless.

“Mortality, morbidity and the sheer trauma experienced by older people during Covid-19

must be avoided in the future. Older people paid a high price for the government’s failures in the handling of the pandemic. The government failed in its most basic task – to ensure the public would be as safe as possible from the impact of the pandemic – and a high price was paid for that by older people and the professionals and families who cared for them.”

**“Discharge from hospitals to care homes without testing was reckless”**

Mr Lynch pointed out that 90% of deaths in the first wave of Covid in Northern Ireland were people over 65, with more than 50% care home residents.

“Whilst the figure was shocking, it failed to adequately convey their experience. Frequently they died isolated from their loved ones and the loss of physical contact and the absence of family was incomprehensible but extremely frightening to older people.”

Baroness Hallett, who is chairing the Covid enquiry, thanked Mr Lynch “for all you did and tried to do”. She added: “Don’t give up. Keep banging the drum.”

# Discrimination campaign: Private Members Bill

CSPA NI and other pensioner groups have campaigned for years over the issue that in Northern Ireland it is still legal to discriminate against older people in the provision of goods and services.

This is unlike England, Scotland and Wales, where such practices have been outlawed for some time.



The CSPA has recently written to justice minister Naomi Long and communities minister Gordon Lyons about it. We were also delighted to

hear that independent Unionist MLA for East Londonderry Claire Sugden (pictured) has committed to tabling a Private Members Bill in the Assembly to ban such practices.



## Giving thanks to NIPSA

CSPA General Secretary Sally Tsoukaris has been meeting London-based civil service trade union general secretaries. So it was helpful when she was in Belfast in April that she accompanied CSPA NI Secretary Tony McMullan to meet NIPSA General Secretary Carmel Gates and Deputy General Secretary Maria Morgan in the union's Belfast headquarters.

It was an ideal opportunity for both sides to get to know each other and for the CSPA to thank NIPSA for its longstanding support for the CSPA, and for providing meeting and photocopying facilities and NIPSA's postal address for CSPA NI's use.

## CSPB meeting

CSPA NI representatives Roisin Lilley and Tony McMullan, along with the organisation's Pensions Officer Chris Haswell, took the opportunity to meet senior Northern Ireland Civil Service Pensions Branch management at its headquarters in Waterside House,



Derry/Londonderry. Among the items discussed were the McCloud judgement, pensions overpayments, annual benefit statements and the Walker and Goodwin cases.

## Smartpass saved!

We reported in the last edition that, following the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January, new infrastructure minister John O'Dowd had stated his intention to retain the Smartpass Scheme, which

**The only change is a £20 initial charge for 60 to 64-year-olds**

gives older people free rail and bus transport throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

But he also said he would have to have further discussions with his Executive colleagues about funding.

It was therefore very good news to hear his further statement on 12 June that the scheme would definitely be retained. The only change would be a £20 initial charge for people aged 60 to 64 years old applying for a Smartpass.



# Highlights from our AGM at Stormont

After last year's successful 70th anniversary AGM in Belfast City Hall, we moved this year's AGM, held on 24 April, to the Parliament Buildings at Stormont.

Around 40 members attended. They were welcomed by Branch President Alastair Hunter and Chair Stan Blayney. Branch Secretary Tony McMullan presented the Annual Report of a very busy year for the Branch committee protecting and defending member's interests. Branch Treasurer and Membership Secretary Roisin Lilley outlined the state of the Branch's financial and membership levels.

There were two very interesting guest speakers. CSPA General Secretary Sally Tsoukaris dealt with the implications to older people of March's Budget, the essential impact of the triple-lock on pensions, pension overpayments, the role of



Newly elected Branch committee, Ir: Tony McMullan, Frank Cammock, Stan Blayney, Roisin Lilley, Michael Carson, Lottie McCreanor, Harry Baird, Alastair Hunter and Joan Moss



*The Pensioner* magazine, the McCloud

judgement, and gender diversity.

The other guest speaker, Viki Oliveira from the Charity for Civil Servants, then gave a comprehensive outline of the role and remit of the charity – which, she said, is approached for help every two seconds.

As an appreciation of our support to the its work our Chair, Stan Blayney, presented Viki with a cheque for £3,000 to help its invaluable work for civil servants.

**Forty members attended another successful AGM, this time held at Stormont**

## Thankyou Sam

Sam Caul, former Chair of the Northern Ireland Branch and a longstanding committee member, stood down from the committee at the AGM. As a token of thanks to Sam (pictured on the left) for an amazing number of years' commitment to the CSPA, Branch President Alastair Hunter presented him with a card and gift.



The Branch was thrilled when our Treasurer and Membership Secretary Roisin Lilley was elected as Vice Chair of the national CSPA organisation. A sign of the esteem in which she is held. Well done Roisin, we're all very proud of you!



# Our agenda at the CSPA AGM

The CSPA NI has decided to send Harry Baird as their delegate to the CSPA AGM on 9-10 October, with Chair Stan Blayney as an observer.

The Branch has nominated Les Priestly and Roisin Lilley for Chair and Vice Chair respectively. We have also tabled three motions for debate – the ‘triple-lock plus’ idea in the Conservatives’ election campaign; accountability for decision-making in care homes; and dementia care.

**We have tabled three motions for debate at the upcoming national AGM**



## Specsavers deal

Our exclusive deal with Specsavers continues to be very popular with members. Since our last newsletter we’ve had requests for 36 more vouchers. That’s 206 issued in the 18 months we’ve been running the offer – saving members a total of £4,120. If you’d like a voucher – for £20 off Specsavers’ £99 or over range – for you, your family or friends, send their names to [tony.mcmullan@outlook.com](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com)



We were delighted to receive so many correct answers to our first Quick Quiz in the last issue. Unfortunately only two £25 M&S Vouchers were up for grabs, so a random draw had to decide the winners. They were **Peter Lowry** and **Ritchie McLardy**. Well done to both, who have now received their prizes. The correct answers were:

- Maynard Sinclair was an Ulster Unionist MP, Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, who sadly was lost on board the Princess Victoria when it went down in 1953.
- Our very own Ruby Murray sang Softly Softly.

### This issue’s questions

1. Who scored the goal when Northern Ireland beat Spain 1-0 in the 1982 World Cup finals?
2. Who was the first Northern Irish and female singer to represent Ireland in the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest?

Please send your answers and your name and address to: [tony.mcmullan@outlook.com](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com)

## Remember when...?

This time we go back to 2016, when Age Sector Plus organised a delegation to Parliament with the National Pensioners Convention to lobby for larger state pensions, legislation against age discrimination and the Warm Homes Discount Scheme. Pictured far left

is current NPC NI Branch President and CSPA NI member Margaret Galloway; far right is former CSPA NI Secretary and then President Ivan Baxter.

If you have any photos of CSPA activities over the years, please send them to [tony.mcmullan@outlook.com](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com)



We’d love to hear what you liked or didn’t like about this newsletter.



Is there something you’re keen to hear more of or something you particularly didn’t enjoy? 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](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com)

**TODAY, TOMORROW AND EVERY DAY!**