



## Chelmsford Group Newsletter October 2022

Membership No:

We have all lived through a period of change over the last few weeks. Which started quite normally when Liz Truss took on the mantle of our new Prime Minister. She was asked to form a Government by the Queen, who, while not fully fit looked very well considering her age. Just two days later we heard the sad news that she had passed away. This came as a shock to the entire world, not just the people of the United Kingdom. At that moment the UK took on a new complexion, we have a New King and Queen, a new Prime Minister, and a fresh start. I am sure that you will join me in wishing both the King and Queen our absolute best wishes and the new Government the best of luck as they tackle the problems that we face at this time.

The economy is in turmoil, the NHS is facing a winter of uncertainty, the cost of living is rising at a rate not seen for many years and a war is being fought that is causing hardship for the lives of many people. At the same time our shops are pushing us to use cards on all our transactions and cash is, it would appear no longer fashionable. It has been suggested cash will have disappeared altogether by around 2035.

In Suffolk, a bus company has announced that eighteen routes will be axed at the end of October without any consultation with the public and no doubt this will be replicated all over the country. We are told that they are not profitable. No thought of how this will affect the lives of young and old people who relied on them to go to schools, shops, hospitals and visiting friends and relations. Just the bottom line, profit.

As I wrote in our last Group Newsletter, this is the last time I will be writing a newsletter to you as I stand down from the post of Regional Representative for the Eastern Region at the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Wednesday 12 October 2022.

The new Regional Representative will take over at that time and you will find his/her contact details in the winter issue of The Pensioner magazine. Overall, I have quite enjoyed my time doing the job and have met some genuinely nice people along the way, I will miss many of you and the letters/emails you have sent me. That is life, time to have a new face and innovative ideas, I only hope the new Representative manages to reopen your Group.

So, what is new that I can tell you about? Not a great deal I am sorry to say.

Going back to the time before COVID, people by and large have changed their routines quite a lot. Our pubs, clubs, and other places that we used to meet up with friends and family are all saying that numbers are down. Many have closed their doors for the last time and gone out of business altogether. The shops are less crowded with so many having their goods delivered to their homes.

We the CSPA have lost several Groups during the last three years which is a shame at this time, I understand we have all got older and from my own experience I am far less active than I was three years ago. The average age of our membership is over sixty. Most of you who have written to me have said how your time is taken up with looking after grandchildren or a sick relative, with little or no time to get out and enjoy their retirement. However, the CSPA is still relatively important currently. The number of motions at this year's AGM shows how group concerns over the lack of volunteers to take up committee positions is leaving groups struggling to remain in existence and also suggestions of how we could move to a regional structure in future.

The AGM will discuss a wide range of motions and I will try to give you an idea of the general motions up for discussion. The State Pension Triple Lock Guarantee is also of concern to several Groups, while others are concerned with the alarming rise in the cost of living and its impact on the value of pensions. As dentists withdraw from the NHS Scheme and become private only services, thus denying the poorest, especially pensioners, proper dental care. In the 1980s, pensioners could get free basic chiropody in old age, if lack of flexibility or visual impairment meant being unable to trim one's own nails. The NHS Podiatry service now excludes nail cutting.

The provision of a Free "Eye" Test for pensioners in England is a misnomer, the "Free" test being for sight only. There is no free glaucoma test, no free retinal photography, and no peripheral vision test as of right. Funding of Optometrists in England is far lower than in Scotland.

The Social Care System in England, it has been suggested, is long overdue for reform. Groups are calling for a cap on care home costs. Despite the highly valued skills and dedicated commitment of staff providing health and social care services, both staffing and resource levels are totally inadequate to cope with current and growing requirements. The prolonged pain and suffering of so many are totally unacceptable. Remedy is long overdue and is now critical.

Age discrimination is another area of concern with many, as is the lack of public transport. The Government's programme to support improvements in local public transport services in English Regions is inadequately funded and unequally distributed. Their competitive bidding methodology makes essential travel a continuing postcode lottery, especially for the poorest pensioners and other disadvantaged people. There is also concern regarding the sale of Channel 4 as a further step in plans to diminish and marginalise public service broadcasting, potentially removing a key source of independent information. Public Toilet Provision is also of great concern as over six hundred across the UK have ceased to be maintained by local authorities since 2010, and in 37 areas major councils no longer run any facilities. Under the provisions of Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936, there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide public toilet facilities. Clean, accessible, and well-maintained public toilets are of particular importance to older people.

The recent storms illustrated infrastructure failings in the electricity and water systems resulting in many people having no electricity or water for up to 2 weeks. This is especially difficult for older people.

The EC is asked or instructed to campaign for all the above, one way or another. Feeling is running high on several fronts and the EC and Campaign Committee are in for a busy year.

I hope I have managed to give you all a flavour of the motions for this year's AGM. It must be remembered that this is our first face-to-face AGM since 2019 and on the face of it, should be both entertaining and interesting.

The CSPA cannot wave a magic wand and sort out all the problems we face at this time, however it is to be hoped that some if not all will be followed up, and we will campaign on behalf of members whose lives could be improved.

The Government also have a part to play in many of the motions before us in the coming months and years. One of the main points I believe is that this digital world is moving so fast that many of us are unable to keep up with the pace and are falling behind. We were promised that there would be someone at the end of the phone to help. This I am sorry to say has just not happened, if you can find a phone number to ring you speak to a machine and are told to hang-on, this can take a while, and you must remember you are paying all the time you hang-on. If you happen to be in a call box, you would be surprised at the number of coins you would be feeding in. It is time that companies pick up the phone and answer your call, but this is a thing of the past.

I would like to wish you all long and happy lives, I will miss writing these short epistles and your replies, but this really is the last time.

Yours very sincerely,

**Frank Edwards**