

# Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 1 – April 2023



**HERE TO DEFEND AND PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS**

## Message from the President

A warm welcome to all of our members to this newsletter, which sets out to provide you with timely information about local issues.

The Northern Ireland Branch of the CSPA has been functioning on your behalf for some 70 years, something your committee feels is well worth celebrating.

From the very outset, the locally formed civil service pensioners group realised that if they were to meet their main objective – to protect and defend what you and your colleagues have earned – then they would benefit from being part of a much larger national organisation.

So, an amalgamation with the national CSPA was arranged. The Northern Ireland Branch retained a large degree of autonomy but, with an assured seat on the Executive Council, a degree of influence on national affairs.

Over the years, this has worked to the advantage of both parties. After 70 years, we have a good deal to



thank our predecessors for.

Naturally, like most organisations, we have had our ups and downs, most recently the Covid interruption and the loss of three valuable committee members.

However, I am glad to say the Branch is well on its way to recovery.

We have a new Secretary, a new Treasurer/Membership Secretary and most recently a new Website Manager. And membership of the Branch stands at a very healthy 4,700.

**Ivan Baxter, CSPA NI President**



## Branch AGM 2023

This year's annual general meeting of your Branch will be held on **Tuesday 18 April**. It will be a very special one as it celebrates the 70th anniversary of the creation of a Northern Ireland civil service pensioners organisation in 1953.

The AGM will be held in the **Banqueting Room** of the prestigious **Belfast City Hall** (pictured) at

**2.30pm**, with **tea, coffee and light refreshments** served from **2pm**.

Your committee would be **delighted to see you there** so you can learn all about what they've been doing on your behalf.

The committee is delighted to announce that the Lord Mayor, Councillor Tina Black, will open the meeting.

## CSPA team to meet pension officials

At the request of the CSPA Northern Ireland Branch, a meeting has been set up with the Department of Finance Pension Branch on 4 April.

The CSPA NI team has tabled the following items for discussion:

- Pensions overpayments and the McCloud Judgement
- Online access
- Annual benefit statements.

This article was written before the meeting took place, so we have been unable to report on the outcome. An up-to-date report will be published on the CSPA NI website as soon after the meeting as possible.



## Overpayments shock: we can help

As the organisation recognised by the civil service, CSPA NI was recently notified of a number of pension overpayments. Not only do the affected pensioners face requests to pay back the overpayments but they are also faced with moving onto the amended pension rate of pay.

We've been advised that no fault for the overpayment lies with the pensioners. Acting on their behalf, we have strongly urged Civil Service Pensions (CSP) to deal with

each case individually, taking into account the level of overpayment and any direct impact on the pensioner. Cases should be made to write the overpayment off.

We've asked that agreements should be reached in every case to set repayments at a level that the member feels they can cope with.

Overpayment notifications must come as a real shock. If you have been contacted by CSP, don't try to deal with it on your own. Contact CSPA NI for professional support.

## Branch membership

The CSPA is recognised by the Cabinet Office in Great Britain and Civil Service Pensions in Northern Ireland as the body that speaks for civil service pensioners. However, we are only as strong as our membership.

We are delighted that, on a pro rata basis linked to population, we have the strongest membership of any of the four UK nations. But we cannot be complacent. We need new members. So if any of your family or friends are retired civil servants, please encourage them to join.

Members will benefit from: the CSPA's quarterly magazine, *The Pensioner*; a range of discounted benefits; a £20 Specsavers voucher; and professional advice and guidance on pensions issues.

• **Contact our Membership Secretary, Roisin Lilley:**  
[roisincspa@gmail.com](mailto:roisincspa@gmail.com)

## McCloud Judgement update

The Remedy arising from the 2015 McCloud Judgement applies to all members as a result of the age discrimination legislation introduced by the 2015 public sector pension reforms. This is commonly known as the McCloud Judgement as this case was one of the first to settle.

As part of the 2015 Remedy work for the Northern Ireland civil service, a public consultation is being launched by the Department of Finance in late March/early April. The purpose is to seek views on the

draft public sector pension scheme regulations.

The consultation will set out how the regulations work in practice and explain the Remedy choices that members will have.

About 40,000 members are affected, a mixture of active, deferred, retired and deceased members. To check whether you are eligible for this, visit the CSP (NI) website and select the 'Am I Affected' tool – [www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/am-i-affected](http://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/am-i-affected).

More general information on the McCloud Judgement can be found on the Department of Finance Civil Service Pensions (NI) website, the national CSPA website and the CSPA Northern Ireland Branch website.

**A public consultation aims to seek views on the draft public sector pension rules**



## National AGM report

The national AGM of the CSPA took place in Kenilworth, near Coventry, in October 2022. The Northern Ireland Branch submitted three motions, which were all carried unanimously.

The first called on the government to restore the triple-lock on pensions, both the state and the civil service pension. The second called on the government to apply the Warm Home Discount Scheme to Northern Ireland. Disgracefully, this has applied to England, Scotland and Wales since 2011 yet still doesn't apply to

Northern Ireland. The final motion highlighted another area in which Northern Ireland pensioners are short-changed compared with pensioners in Great Britain – age discrimination.

Since 2010 older people in Great Britain cannot be discriminated against in the provision of goods and services, but they can in Northern Ireland, where the law does not apply.

The Branch's motion called for the appropriate legislation to apply to Northern Ireland.

**ABOVE: Tony McMullan (Secretary), Roisin Lilley (Treasurer/Membership Secretary) and Ivan Baxter (President) at last year's national AGM near Coventry**

**Northern Ireland Branch submitted three motions. All were carried unanimously**

## Pension pressure produces results

Governments of all political persuasions have committed themselves to ensuring that the state pension increases by what is known as the triple-lock, to try to ensure the pension rate is not devalued.

In 2022, the government broke its election manifesto promise to pay the triple-lock. Enormous pressure and lobbying of politicians was undertaken by the CSPA, nationally and locally, as well as with other pensioner organisations.

We were delighted when the Chancellor confirmed in November that the state pension would increase by the triple-lock formula, which worked out at 10.1%.

Further lobbying took place with the Treasury, and in Northern Ireland with the Civil Service Pensions section of the Department of Finance, to ensure that civil service pensions would also increase by 10.1% from April 2023.

## Exclusive Specsavers deal

In December we announced that an exclusive deal had been done with Britain's largest optician, Specsavers. This will give CSPA members in Northern Ireland access to a £20 voucher to use against any Specsavers glasses in the £99 and above range.

If you use the voucher, you will save your entire CSPA membership (£18) for a year.

To make matters better, you can obtain a voucher for your family and friends too – although only you can request a voucher.

Getting a voucher is easy: email Branch Secretary Tony McMullan at [tony.mcmullan@outlook.com](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com) and let him know the name(s) of the people who require a voucher.

These will normally be sent by email, but a paper voucher can be



requested if members don't have access to technology.

To date, members have saved more than £1,000 in this scheme.



# Remember when...



In every issue of your newsletter, we will be delving into the past to find photos of stalwarts who have built the CSPA NI into the campaigning force it is – always striving to defend, protect and advance the interests of Northern Ireland's civil servants.

Here's a photo of four such

campaigners (at the time, all committee members) beside a campaign battle bus.

Pictured left to right are Tony Damoglou (our much missed Secretary, to whom we owe so much), Carson Wilson, Ivan Baxter (current CSPA NI President) and Sam Caul (former CSPA NI Chair and current committee member).

**Do you have any photos you would like featured in future newsletters?**

• If you have any photos you would like to share in future newsletters, please send them to [tony.mcmullan@outlook.com](mailto:tony.mcmullan@outlook.com)



## New-look website

We hope you're enjoying the first issue of our exciting new newsletter – but we would remind members to check out our website for the most up-to-date news about the range of activities that the CSPA's Northern Ireland Branch is undertaking on your behalf.

We're also pleased to let you know that work is at an advanced stage regarding completing the modernisation of our website to make it easier to navigate.

Visit the national CSPA website at [www.cspa.co.uk](http://www.cspa.co.uk) and our own Northern Ireland website at [www.civilservicepensionersalliance-ni.co.uk](http://www.civilservicepensionersalliance-ni.co.uk)

## National Pensioners Convention NI

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) is the UK's largest umbrella organisation, and many pensioner organisations are affiliated to it. The CSPA plays a full part in the national NPC and the CSPA NI Branch does the same with the NPC NI.

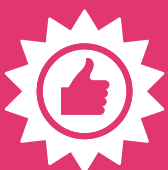
At the latest meeting, the CSPA NI

endorsed a draft Pensioners' Manifesto, which will be used to lobby the Northern Ireland political parties ahead of elections. The six key demands include the following:

- Extend the Warm Home Discount Scheme to Northern Ireland
- Legislate to prevent age

discrimination on grounds of goods and services

- Improve care in the community
- Retain the triple-lock for uprating the state pension
- Ensure the Smartpass continues
- Make the recent Enhanced Winter Payment permanent.



We hope you've enjoyed our first newsletter. We'd love to hear what you did or didn't like, or would like to hear more about. 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!**