



This year has been strange all round, lots of things to worry about with no easy solution in view. The value of houses is reducing but the interest rate is going up, numbers increasing of people on waiting lists for hospital appointments but the numbers of doctors, nurses and care workers is reducing. I've just had an appointment letter through telling me that the wait is 70 weeks! Roll on a general election!

Romy Neeves

Chair Report

Following Lisa Ray's departure at the end of June, we now have a new General Secretary Designate, Sally Tsoukaris. Sally joined the CSPA office in 2022, and was the successful candidate selected to take over from Lisa Ray following the recruitment process. Her appointment will be confirmed at the National Annual General Meeting in October, and I'm sure we all wish her every success in her new job. At the same National AGM we shall present the four Motions that our group proposed for debate, which have all been accepted by the Standing Orders Committee. These fall under the headings of CSPA Business, Pensions and Related Matters, Digital Exclusion and Health and Social Care.

I note from numerous articles in the media that the Triple Lock uprating of the State Pension and use of the CPI to uprate our Civil Service Pensions, both continue to come under attack from time to time by various "think-tanks", so both the CSPA Executive and we as members need to remain alert to any changes that may be proposed by the government of the day. As members, we shall need to

take the necessary action with our local MP's should adverse changes be proposed.

Recruitment of new members continues to cause concern. This has dropped from around 1,700 a year in 2019, before Covid, to only 244 in 2022. Total membership at the turn of the century (1999/2000) was just under 69,000 but now stands at 43,000. If this trend continues the future of the CSPA hangs in the balance. It is known that there are some 450,000 retired civil servants in the UK, so how to encourage them to join us, has to be a priority.

Otherwise, life seems to go on much as usual from day to day, apart from the somewhat miserable weather of July and early August. Let's hope for an "Indian Summer" in September or October, and I wish you well. **John Abington**

Travel

A current worrying hot topic is the announcement by Government that 1000 railway ticket offices around the country are destined to close. In place will be roaming staff on platforms ready to answer customer queries.

Lines affected are Avanti West Coast, C2C, Chiltern, East Midlands Railway, Greater Anglia, GTR (Great Northern, Thameslink and Southern) Great Western, LNER, Southeastern, South-Western Railway, West Midlands (including London Northwestern Railway, TransPennine Express and Northern.

Representatives of the RMT, Equality Trust, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Disability Rights UK, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), Greater

Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, Campaigns and Justice, Inclusion London, National Pensioners' convention, Transport for All and Winvisible (Women with visible and invisible disabilities) have made a case to Transport Focus and London Travelwatch pointing out that if these closures go ahead, it will be disastrous for passenger accessibility, safety, security and service, and therefore the proposals must be rejected for the following headline reasons.

1. **Accessibility** for disabled, deaf and older people. Already, disabled people face numerous barriers in accessing the rail network. The presence of staff is vital for ensuring the railway is accessible to all. At many stations ticket office staff are the only staff present, and their duties often include assisting passengers on to trains etc. Ticket offices provide a fixed location for passengers to locate staff. This is particularly important for many disabled people who would not be able to search a station for a roving member of staff, who may or may not be present. Guide dogs are often trained to learn the route to the ticket office.

2. **Widespread and easy access** to the purchase of rail products. There are a range of products and services available at the ticket office, which may not be available from ticket vending machines. These include refunds, season ticket changes, ranger and rover tickets, ferry/bus connections, park and ride group save, disabled persons discounts, season tickets over one month, rail card purchases, to name but a few.

3. **Quality of Service.** Ticket offices provide passengers with dedicated advice and expertise about their journey and onward travel. At many stations access to facilities such as toilets, disabled toilet, waiting rooms and lifts is dependent on ticket office staff.

4. **Safety** at station for passengers. Transactions on the station concourse could put people at risk.

5. **Impact on staffing** levels. This is an issue which has been ongoing for some time and has been the cause, and continues to be one of the causes, of many disruptions on the railways.

People

The following item, I suppose, is loosely linked to the item above inasmuch as that we can't easily get hold of a person to help us and to which I can sympathise. We recently booked a flight to the same airport but through a search engine rather than Ryanair's own website. They sent us an email refusing to recognise our booking until we went through a complex verification process, culminating in the necessity to take a selfie from about 4 different poses. Happy days!

Ryanair defends a £110 pass fee.

An elderly couple who printed the wrong boarding passes for a Ryanair flight said they were "horrified" after being hit by the airline's £110 fee. The couple from Ealing, west London, had mistakenly printed their return boarding passes instead of the ones for their outward bound flight to Bergerac in France.

This meant they were charged for having their tickets printed at Stanstead airport. Ryanair said the couple "failed to check in online" and were "correctly charged".

The couple told the BBC's Radio 4 Today programme that the airline's website was "very confusing" and she believed they had printed the correct tickets. Ryanair said in a statement: "We regret that these passengers ignored their email reminder and failed to check in online".

Environment

Butterfly aflutter for UK's warm winters. According to an article in my daily paper this morning, and led by a citizen science project, climate change is causing a migratory butterfly to stay in the UK over winter and abandon its usual flight south.

The red admiral normally travels up from continental Europe or North Africa in the spring to lay its eggs in the British countryside. Sightings of the insect rose by more than 150,000 between 14th July and 2nd August compared with the same period last year.

There is "no doubt" that climate change is the main driver behind this, the senior survey officer at the charity Butterfly Conservation has said.

Wildlife

Continuing our interest in the goings on at Whipsnade Zoo, the birth of twin red panda cubs offers "double hope for the species" whose existence is under threat the Zoological Society of London has said.

ZSL announced that the twins were born at the Bedfordshire conservation zoo on 25th June and are to be named after their first vet visit at eight weeks' old.

The pair, whose sex is yet to be determined, each weighed just 113g at birth, and are being cared for by their parents in the nest.

Science

A study has found that people who regularly pick their nose are three times more likely to contract Covid.

The research found that 17.3 per cent of nose pickers contracted the virus compared with 5.9 per cent among those who refrained.

Researchers in the Netherlands also found that 85 per cent of their participants – all of them hospital healthcare workers – admitted to picking their nose.

Ayesha Lavell, of Amsterdam University Medical Centres said "nose picking may facilitate a viral entry into the nose by introducing virus particles present on the hands and by damaging the musoca.

NHS

All GP surgeries in England will move to a digital phone system by spring, potentially bringing an end to the "8am scramble" when patients usually rush to secure an appointment.

More than 1,000 practices have signed up for the upgrade, which will come into force from March.

The switch has been backed by a £240m investment from the Government, which was announced in May as part of the Primary Care Recovery Plan.

It is hoped it will allow patients to contact their GP faster and have their request dealt with on the day rather than having to call back.

Patients should also be able to avoid getting an engaged tone, with online systems able to provide them with more options. Consultations will also be launched to explore the possibility of

giving dental hygienists and pharmacy technicians more power to prescribe certain medicines. The Government wanted to "make sure we are making the best use of skilled professionals" while "freeing up dentists and pharmacists to carry out vital services".

Councils – in brief

This piece was gleaned from my daily newspaper, The I, as is most of the content of this Newsletter.

Please also bear in mind that we are in the middle of the "silly season" a time when government is on its long summer break and newspapers are scratching around to fill their columns!

UK cuts cost of pothole spending

UK cuts to spending on fixing potholes are among the most severe out of 13 major nations, according to analysis. Annual expenditure on local road maintenance in the UK dropped from £4bn in 2006 to £2bn in 2019, which was the last year of international comparable data available. The Local Government Economic Co-operation and Development, said out of 13 countries only Italy and Ireland have seen deeper cuts by percentage.

More serious!!

State Pension set for 7% boost after pledge to honour triple lock

The Government is set to promise that pensioners will get a 7 per cent income boost next year as a result of stubbornly high inflation.

The future of the "triple lock" is likely to be secure with the Conservatives and Labour expected to commit to the policy in their election manifestos.

Economists have criticised the commitment – which ensures that the pension rises at the same rate as inflation, average earnings or 2.5 per cent, whichever is the highest – because it has recently ensured retired people enjoy significantly faster income growth than workers.

The state pension has been protected by a triple lock since 2010, ensuring that it rises in line with the highest average earnings.

In 2012, the first year it was put into full effect, those on the basic state pension – paid to those who retired pre-2016 – it was £107.45 per week and is now £156.20 a week.

However, if it was only tied to August's inflation figure, it would be just £140.90 per week, which over the course of a year works out at around £800 less.

The new state pension, introduced in 2016, pays out £203.85, but this would be just £192.25 per week if only August's inflation figure had been used.

Both pensions are set for a boost in April, due to a forecast bump in August's inflation figure, which will probably mean a basic state pension of £166.80 a week and the new state pension rising to £217.90.

Finance – and another one of the issues we have had discussions about – Digital exclusion!

Banks face being fined if they fail to provide access to withdraw and deposit cash within a three-mile radius of consumers and businesses under rules outlined by the Treasury.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) will have powers to fine banks and building societies that fail to provide free access to cash under the rules.

The move follows widespread anger and concern at bank branch closures and the shutdown of free-to-use ATM cash machines.

The consumer champions Which? say that since 2018, over 12,000 free-to-use ATMs – almost a quarter of the entire network – have vanished.

Branch closures, which banks say is in response to customers preferring to bank online, have also shot past 6,000 branches, leaving some smaller towns without a single branch and forced to rely on building societies or the Post Office.

A Treasury spokesman said cash had “an important and continuing role to play” despite the shift away from reliance on coins and notes.

He said “people shouldn't have to trek for hours to withdraw a tenner to put in someone's birthday card – nor should businesses have to travel large distances to deposit cash takings.

If a cashpoint or other facility is earmarked for withdrawal, a replacement should be in place before the closure takes place to maintain access levels.

These are measures which benefit everyone who uses cash but particularly those living in rural areas, the elderly or those with disabilities.

The FCA has been given powers to protect the provision of cash access services, including without fees for those who hold personal current accounts.

Jenny Ross, of Which? which led the campaign to protect free access to cash, said “Now it has passed new laws, the Government must put in place measures which ensure those who want to withdraw or deposit cash are appropriately served in their local communities.

A couple from the Fringe

I started dating a zookeeper – but it turned out he was a cheetah!

The most British thing I've ever heard?

A lady who said, “Well I'm sorry, but I don't apologise.”

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