



Bedford & District Group Newsletter December 2024

I begin this Newsletter with some sad news, my husband, Peter, died on 14th November. Some of you may know that he had been suffering from Motor Neurone Disease for some time. It is a truly terrible disease. However, Pete achieved his ambition and stayed at home until the end.

I missed the Annual General Meeting in October but a report of the meeting by John will follow.

Romy Neeves, Editor

Chair Report

Two major CSPA events since our September Newsletter. The first was the National Annual General Meeting held on 9th and 10th October, for which there is a separate report in this Newsletter. The second was the move of the CSPA Head Office from Croydon to Clapham between 29th October and 1st November. The new HQ postal address is 160 Falcon Road, Clapham, London SW11 2LN. The telephone number remains the same, namely 020 8688 8418, and HQ staff and other Executive Members' email addresses have not changed either.

Now that the new government has settled in, its policies with respect to pensioners and our pensions are becoming clearer. While the Winter Fuel Allowance has been stopped for all except those receiving Pension Credit, we are promised that the Triple Lock for the annual uprating of the State Pension will not be tampered with – at least for the time being. The State Pension will rise by 8% from April 2025. Our Civil Service pensions will rise in line with the Consumer Price Index which will be 6.1% again from April 2025. The

Executive has been active in making itself known to the new Ministers and other senior officials in the new government, and is continuing with our ongoing campaigns, of which the main ones are a basic state pension linked to a triple lock mechanism, fairly uprated pensioner benefits and entitlements such as the winter fuel payment, travel concessions and free prescriptions, good access to primary health care, a decent quality sustainably funded free social care service operating in cooperation with the NHS, maintenance of a universal postal service and retention of a network of local post offices and banks, digital social tariffs from all providers.

May I take the opportunity to make a point in this Newsletter and urge more of our members to come forward and attend our group meetings if you can. Our group meetings need your physical presence and willingness to support the CSPA's aims and campaigns by volunteering, especially from newly retired pensioners. The duties are not onerous but without new blood to take things forward, our group like many others in the country will be likely to fold in the not too distant future. It is still considered that the CSPA Groups and their members are the foundation of the CSPA, and that the CSPA needs them for itself in turn to survive into the future.

Finally, I see that Christmas and the New Year are on the horizon again, so I wish you all the Season's Greetings and a happy and prosperous 2025.

JohnAbington

Report of the National AGM.

The National AGM was once again held at Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth on 9th and 10th October this year, and was attended from Bedford Group by me, and Sidney Miller. John McLaughlin was once again in attendance as a Teller. The meeting was opened by Linda Ridgers-White, Chair of the Executive Council, and the Mayor of Kenilworth, Cllr. Alan Chalmers who gave a presentation. He pointed out that 2025 will be an auspicious year for Kenilworth, as the Council will be 50 years old, and it will be the 450th anniversary since Queen Elizabeth 1st visited Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth Castle where she declined his offer of marriage.

Linda Ridgers-White then welcomed all and her opening remarks concentrated upon the negative press comments concerning Civil Service Pensioners and "Gold-plated" Pensions. She advised the Triple Lock for uprating state pensions would remain despite the loss of the Winter Fuel Allowance except for those receiving Pension Credit. She thanked the work of the still active groups and their volunteers. Sally Tsoukaris CSPA General Secretary, presented her annual report, the main points of which were that CSPA was giving consideration to changes in its negotiating policies in line with the change of government. However, the main problem that the CSPA faces is the ongoing decline in total membership and the reduction in income that this results in. The outcome of the voting for Executive Council members, and passing or otherwise of the debated Motions, have been presented in Group Circular 962/24, which has been sent to all those who have email. In between the business of the meeting in respect of debating the motions proposed, presentations were made by the following people:

- a) Organisation and Recruitment – David Luxton, Deputy General Secretary (on behalf of the Executive Council).
- b) The Post-Election Campaign Landscape – David Halliwell (Connect)
- c) GDPR Update – Bernard Seymour (Affinity Resolutions/Regulatory Solutions)

- d) How to stay safe Online – Conol O’Gorman (BC Technologies)
- e) Current Care Related Campaigns – John Perryman (Carers UK)
- f) Insurance Offers for CSPA Members – Ann Pelaez (CSIS)
- g) NPC Campaign Updates – Jan Shortt, General Secretary (NPC)

For those members with access to the internet who would like to know more about the presentations, slides can be found through the web address below.

<https://cspa.cpo.uk/document-library/#AGM>. If you would like printed copies of any of the presentations to be sent to you in the post, please contact Benedetta Makanju by telephone on the 0020 8688 8418 (Office) /07827 291 073 (Mobile) or by writing to her at CSPA Headquarters. Please note the change of address in my chair report.

The meeting was closed on the afternoon of 10th October by the outgoing Chair Linda Ridgers-White, who gave votes of thanks to all involved in organising the AGM, the staff of the Chesford Grange Hotel and all CSPA members in attendance. Finally, she welcomed the incoming Chair Les Priestley.

Society

I get most of my information from the I newspaper and I’m sure they would be pleased that I am spreading the word. I have taken a paper copy since its establishment in 1986 as a national morning printed paper. Nicknamed the Indy, it began as a broadsheet and changed to tabloid format in 2003. In my opinion, it is a politically independent paper, most worthy of being called a "newspaper".

So, a report in the paper this month stated that vulnerable elderly patients are likely to be hit hardest as failing hospitals are named and shamed in NHS league tables, medics have warned. Trusts can expect to be ranked on a range of indicators such as finances, delivery of services, patient access to care and competency of leadership.

However, frontline medics said the plan would backfire without reform elsewhere. The president of the Society for Acute Medicine said: "Penalising and shaming struggling hospitals while rewarding

apparently better performing organisations with additional funds and less restrictions could have significant detrimental effects.

"It is simply likely to create division, damage patient confidence and further demoralise staff".

Although some medics believed league tables could encourage a determination to outdo rivals, more appeared to oppose the plans.

One consultant said "League tables could make things worse. Focusing on the same metrics that take NHS leadership attention off the needs of the patients. What's a priority to the patient? Waiting time for your knee replacement or surviving the operation? But it could be helpful. If trusts were judged on actual patient outcomes – survival, preventing disability, control of disease, then waiting times automatically improve"

Dr Steve Taylor from the frontline lobbying group Doctors' Association UK, said: "I am not entirely against them. But it encourages a culture where you're trying to occasionally massage the figures".

Residents of a market town which hit the headlines last year for its wonky Christmas tree were left undecided after March Town Council chose to install another imperfect tree this year.

The Cambridgeshire authority said locals learnt to love last year's controversial wonky offering. Many residents took to social media with some criticising the decision to keep the joke running for another year.

Transport

The number of pothole compensation claims made to councils in Britain doubled in a year, according to new analysis.

RAC research found 20,432 claims were submitted to 18 local authorities with the largest road networks in 2023, compared with 8,327 in 2022. Of the councils which provided data, Surrey County Council saw the biggest increase in claims, from 734 to 3,418. The study also indicated that just 15 per cent of claims made last year resulted in pay-outs, Payments averaged just £260 each, whereas the RAC believes a typical repair bill for pothole damage is nearer £500.

Another bit of nonsense!

Train drivers and conductors have won fresh pay offers at under-fire rail operators Northern which the Government hopes will pave the way for wider modernisation of the network. One bit of modernisation is fax machines!

The rail operator northern has been found to still use fax machines to communicate with employees, according to information that was revealed during an emergency meeting of the Transport for the North (TFN) committee. The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, expressed his consternation and challenged Northern's chief operating officer at the hearing. Burnham said: "How come we had three decades of privatisation when money was being poured into the railway, and you are still communicating by fax machines in 2024?" Transport Secretary, Louise Haigh, said that part of the negotiations had been over "addressing the root causes that hold back performance including modernising working practices."

As the editor of this Newsletter, I know I should be unbiased, but as a former commuter into London, I find this extraordinary and goes some way into explaining the workings of the railways!

Overground lines names rolled out.

Individual names and colours for London Overground railway lines will be introduced from 25th November.

Transport for London (TfL) said it will update 6,000 station direction signs as well as maps, digital screens and online journey planners at a cost of £6.3m.

The six names, Lioness, Mildmay, Windrush, Weaver, Suffragette and Liberty were chosen to honour and celebrate different aspects of London's history and culture.

Pets/Animals

I don't think I've had anything about pets before, but as a regular walker round Bedford Park I'm more than aware of the fact that I am the odd one out, not having at least one mutt with me so I was interested to see the following.

According to a report in The Times, Tower Hamlets council in London is considering rules which owners worry may lead to a ban on dogs being allowed off leads. The

council has said the rules are a response to violent dog attacks and repeated fouling. Dogs would be excluded from all "gated play parks and sports areas" and would have to be kept on leads in "all public spaces in the borough.

Open spaces may be the exception but that has yet to be defined. Dog walkers may also be restricted to walking a maximum of four dogs at a time. That all sounds pretty sensible. Dogs should be on leads in public spaces. Obviously, as animals, they need a healthy amount of exercise and it is not being advocated for all dogs to be banned from all parks, but there does need to be a sensible conversation for owners to have better control of their animals. Dogs enjoy parks to run around in, burn energy, do their business – you know, "be dogs".

However, there are degrees to which that can be accommodated. Letting dogs off in urban parks and then scrolling on your phone while they run wild is surely not that responsible. The same could be argued, goes for the size of some dogs which find themselves homed in urban settings. Too many people have their dogs off the lead elsewhere. One time my family was walking on a common in Berkshire with a couple of toddlers. A dog came bounding towards us off a lead, possible attracted by young George's biscuit. The owner shouted from a distance, "don't worry, he won't hurt him! We did point out when they came to collect the dog that to George, this dog was the same size as a young horse would have been to them!

A dog on a lead allows those who are scared, allergic, unable to move fast, whatever, to move past them unperturbed. A dog off the lead can be chaotic.

My opinion, if your dog really needs to be off the lead to stretch its legs, get yourself out of the parks.

Consumer

Drivers are being handed an average of more than 41,000 parking tickets a day by private companies in Britain, figures show, sparking calls for major reforms to how the sector is managed.

Private parking businesses have been accused of using misleading and

confusing signs, aggressive debt collection and unreasonable fees.

A code of conduct received Royal assent in March 2019 but was withdrawn by the Conservative government in 2022.

Romy Neeves

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