

Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 6 – November 2024

CSPA
CIVIL SERVICE PENSIONERS' ALLIANCE

HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS



MATTHEW HILL

Winter Fuel Payments

In 1999, Chancellor Gordon Brown brought in winter fuel payments for older people. As with access to the NHS and state pensions, this was a universal benefit and not means-tested. Gordon Brown said: “We are simply not prepared to allow another winter to go by when pensioners are fearful of turning up their heating even on the coldest of days.”

Some say the richest people should not receive the payment and it should be means-tested, but the fact is that 800,000 pensioners do not claim means-tested Pension Credit. This could be from pride or the complexity of the forms or both. At least a universal benefit ensures every pensioner gets the money.

While some civil service pensioners receive a comfortable civil service pension, only 3% get more than £30,000 a year. Many are in receipt

of a small civil service pension. In fact nearly 40% of NI civil service pensioners receive a pension of £5,000 or less a year. Add that to the British state pension, the second lowest in Europe, and it's easy to see that the winter fuel payment was a godsend to many.

The recent CSPA AGM carried unanimously a motion condemning the new Labour government's decision to remove

“We are simply not prepared to allow another winter to go by when pensioners are fearful of turning up their heating even on the coldest days”
Gordon Brown

the payment from eight million pensioners. The payment is devolved to the four UK nations. NI Communities Minister Gordon Lyons condemned the UK government for not consulting the devolved administrations.

He said the Executive would need £443 million to keep paying the 249,000 pensioners in NI, and while they were keen to keep paying it, Westminster would not provide the money to do so.

He added: “The decision will have health implications and people may be hospitalised as they are not the richest in society. Those on the edges and fringes of society will be deeply affected.”

National Pensioners Convention NI organised a protest (pictured) to Parliament Buildings at which CSPA NI were represented.

Programme for Government: CSPA NI respond

“Having waited since the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly in January, the agreed Programme for Government (PfG), issued for consultation by the mandatory four-party coalition, was extremely disappointing for older people.”

So said Tony McMullan (pictured), CSPA NI Secretary, as part of the organisation’s response to the consultation.

Tony highlighted that older people and their issues were completely absent from the PfG.

He pointed out that the birth rate was falling and, thanks to advances in healthcare, older people were now living much longer lives. This was a timebomb that the politicians needed to tackle.

He added that there was an urgent

Older people and their issues were completely absent from the PfG



need to plan for more hospital beds and places in both residential and nursing homes for those older citizens who require that support.

Tony also said that the NI Executive needed to address the withdrawal of the winter fuel payment and, once and for all, ensure that the Warm Home Discount Scheme – currently only applicable in England, Scotland and Wales – is extended to Northern Ireland.

Tony added that age discrimination legislation for goods and services, on which CSPA NI has campaigned for many years, needed to be brought in.

Finally, he pointed out that not all older people were ill or incapacitated; many were still keen to work, if the hours suited them.

As a result, he said, the government should ensure that employment opportunities are provided.



Did you know...

If you are 70 or over and live alone, you may be entitled to the Lone Pensioner Allowance, a rate relief scheme that could give you a 20% discount on your rates. To claim, you must:

- Be a pensioner aged 70 or more
- Live on your own (though if someone lives with you as a carer, you may still qualify)
- Be a homeowner or tenant.

If you are a homeowner, complete an application form at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/lone-pensioner-allowance

If you are a tenant, complete the application form at: www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/housing-benefit/lone-pensioner-allowance

If you have any difficulties, please call 0300 200 7801.

Annual renewal changes

Members who pay their CSPA subscription fee on an annual basis will shortly receive their reminder letters for 2025.

CSPA NI incurs considerable costs in respect of annual payees, including for stationery and ink to print the reminder letters, postage costs and fees imposed by the bank for cashing cheques and processing bank transfers. We have therefore,



regrettably, decided, like many other organisations, to ask members for a small supplement to cover these

costs. Members can avoid any additional costs by signing up to pay their subscription fee through their NI CS pension or by direct debit. Deductions are £1.50 per month for individual membership or £2.50 per month for joint membership. Members can switch to these payment methods by contacting Roisin Lilley at roisincspa@gmail.com or by phoning on 9065 8513.



Pension increases

An announcement made in October will likely forecast the civil service pension increase from April 2025.

Although the NI CS pension rise does not automatically follow Great Britain's, it has done for many years, and we've heard nothing to suggest that 2025 will be any different.

Any civil service pension increase is determined by the CPI rate in the preceding September - this was 1.7%, as announced on 16 October 2024.

Meanwhile the state pension increase is decided by the triple-lock (the highest figure of: CPI inflation rate the previous September; average earnings growth; or 2.5%). Average earnings growth was 4.1% and was the highest element of the triple-lock. This was confirmed by the Chancellor Rachel Reeves in her Budget speech on 30 October.

For comparison, the rises over recent years and the expected rise in 2025 are set out below.

	Civil service pension	State Pension
2023	10.1%	10.1%
2024	6.7%	8.5%
2025	1.7%	4.1%

NI successes at national AGM

The national AGM on 9-10 October was a success for the Branch. First, Les Priestly and Roisin Lilley, both nominated by CSPA NI, were elected Chair and Vice Chair of the national CSPA. We were especially delighted that our very own Roisin increased her majority from the

byelection result a few months ago.

Branch Delegate Harry Baird got two Branch motions carried unanimously - on consistent, quality-assured decision-making accountability in care homes, hospitals and care settings; and on more funding for dementia research.

Tony McMullan, NI representative on the national Executive Council, also proposed an emergency motion condemning the government's decision to withdraw the winter fuel payment for pensioners.

Les Priestly and Roisin Lilley were elected national Chair and Vice Chair

Christmas Greetings!

This will be our last newsletter of 2024. In a short time, the Christmas and new year period will be upon us. Everyone on the CSPA NI committee sends season's compliments to all. If you know any member who lives on their own or who might have lost their husband/wife/partner in 2024, why not call over to see how they are? See you all in 2025 - there's lots of campaigning to be done!!!



CSPA NI 2025 AGM

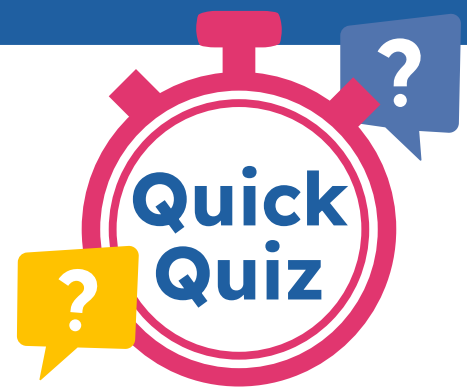
The AGM of CSPA NI will return to Belfast city centre in 2025 in the Presbyterian Assembly Buildings, Fisherwick Place, on Wednesday 7 May at 2pm. A buffet lunch will be provided from 1pm.

Get the date booked in your diary now. We look forward to seeing many of you then.

Specsavers Deal

Since our last newsletter, another 24 members have requested a CSPA NI Specsavers voucher. This means since we launched the offer, 230 vouchers have been issued – saving members £4,600! If you'd like a voucher

worth £20 (for Specsavers glasses in the £99 or above range) for either you, a family member or friend, email: tony.mcmullan@outlook.com and provide the name(s) of those who want a voucher.



Last edition's quiz stumped all but four members. Everyone correctly identified Gerry Armstrong as the scorer of Northern Ireland's famous winner against Spain in the 1982 World Cup final, but our Eurovision Song Contest question brought many incorrect answers. We asked: who was the first Northern Ireland and female singer to represent Ireland in the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest? The four correct entries identified Muriel Day; the incorrect entries stated Dana, who actually sang and won in 1970. Interestingly Dana had lost the Irish Eurovision heat to Muriel Day in 1969! Congratulations to the winners: **Ann Scott** and **John Steen**.

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CSIS travel Insurance

We have received lots of enquiries about the exclusive travel insurance scheme recently launched for CSPA members. Please ring the CSIS on 01622 766960 or check the CSPA website for further details.

Remember when...?

We're going back to 2017 to the launch of the Age Sector Plus report on the impacts of Brexit. Pictured (l-r) are the late Brenda Irvine (Secretary, Age Sector Platform and Chair, Unite Retired

Members); Nixon Armstrong (Vice Chair, Age Sector Platform, NIPSA Retired Members, CSPA NI member); and Ivan Baxter (Age Sector Platform and CSPA NI committee member).



This issue's questions:

1. Name the year and the country venue in which Mary Peters won her Pentathlon Olympic gold medal?
2. Name the well renowned Comber jazz singer who married jazz royalty Christopher Barber?

Send your answers, along with your name and address, to: tony.mcmullan@outlook.com

We'd love to hear what you liked or didn't like. Is there something you'd like to hear more of or something you particularly didn't like about the newsletter? 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



TODAY, TOMORROW AND EVERY DAY!