

WELCOME to the first Group Newsletter since July 2022. Indeed, only the second Newsletter since August 2019. But more about that later.

Firstly though, news of a re-arranged social event, to be followed by our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Tuesday 9th September 2025, beginning at 11:00am.

The social event will be a guided tour of Newcastle's famous Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Westgate Road. Some of you will be aware the tour was originally arranged for 21st May 2025 as part of our Spring meeting. However, the mail-shot scheduled to notify members about the event failed to be issued. Although I was able to issue an email to 185 of our 695 members, it was a case of too little, too late.

An encouraging number of members expressed a positive interest to the event but could not attend due to the short notice. Unfortunately, too few members were able to attend so it was regrettably postponed. Hopefully, those members who were down to attend can make it in September.

For the benefit of those members who did not receive my email invitation, here is some information about the theatre and guided tour.

The theatre was built in 1867 by industrialist and politician, Joseph Cowen. The Grade 1 listed building is a unique creation of that era. With its lavish auditorium, outstanding acoustics and understage machinery, the Tyne Theatre produced entertainment that amazed the audiences of the time and brought them back asking for more.

The 75-minute tour of the building will explore all areas, including the understage, backstage and many other areas never seen on a normal visit. Your tour guide will reveal the theatre's fascinating history, and highlight tales of its stars and even its ghosts.

The tour includes lots of steps and comfortable shoes are recommended. Regrettably, members with restricted mobility will have limited access.

The tour will begin at 11:00am and will be followed by a light buffet before we have our AGM commencing around 12:30pm. The meeting is expected to last around 1 hour.

David Luxton, our National Deputy Secretary and **Andy Aitchison**, our North East Regional Representative on the Executive Council (EC), will both be in attendance to present updates on the key issues of the day and the campaigns the CSPA is pursuing on our behalf. Also, to answer any relevant questions you may wish to raise.

To ensure sufficient tour spaces, refreshments and seating is available, can members **kindly let me know by Thursday 4th September if they will be attending.**

Please email me at peter.sleightholme@outlook.com, or phone, text or WhatsApp me on 0741 931 2853.

Your attendance will be appreciated by our guest speakers, our Group Treasurer **Alan Butland**, and of course myself.

If you are not attending the event, for whatever reasons, but have any questions, concerns or comments to put to the Group or our guests for discussion, then please feel free to email, phone, text or WhatsApp me.

A little bit about myself. I joined the Alliance in May 2022. I only joined because of the rumoured excellent annual holiday insurance scheme that membership offered. I attended my first meeting in the following July. Due to COVID-19, this was the first meeting held since August 2019.

Including the 3 Group Officials, there were only 8 or 9 attendees. I put my hand up to volunteer to audit the Group's latest annual

accounts and to represent the Group at the forthcoming National AGM.

Shortly after, the current Chair and Secretary had to step down for personal reasons. I then found myself taking on the role of Secretary.

I was later 'Elected by Acclamation'. Rather like what happened to Rodney Trotter when he became vice-Chair then quickly Chair of the Peckham Residents Association. If you're not familiar with Rodney's rapid elevation, then Google it or search for it on YouTube it with "Rodney trotter chairman". It's a hoot.

Myself and our long-standing treasurer **Alan Butland**, are now leading the Newcastle Area Group. We do not have a Chair.

Since becoming Secretary and more "active" than I expected to, I realised the Alliance is more than just cheap holiday insurance and other possible discounts. It is an essential organisation actively campaigning on our behalf to protect ***what we've earned***.

Sadly, most Groups, like us, struggle to achieve respectable attendances at meetings. Attendance remained in single figures at our last 2 meetings held in 2023 and 2024

You will have read in the Pensioner magazine about initiatives to attempt to improve attendances and activity.

Personally, I understand that attendance or involvement at Group meetings and social events is not most people's cup of tea for a variety of good reasons. I am content that by their simple membership of and subscription to the Alliance they are happy to entrust those in office and elected, together with partner organisations, to pursue the right campaigns pertinent to the welfare and well-being of the majority of members and other pensioners.

Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the Alliance to sufficiently ascertain, as far as possible, that this assumption of allegiance is indeed the case. Hence the need for the Group structure and being able to touch base with as many members as possible.

CSPA HQ's framework for the governance of local Groups encourages Groups to hold at least 4 meetings per year (Group Circular 966/25). Given the size of the area covered

by our Group, the Treasurer Alan and I, think this is a big ask. Our immediate plan therefore is to aim for 2 meetings per year.

The first meeting in April to consider motions and nominations for submission to the national AGM.

A second meeting in September to consider our support for motions and nominations submitted by other Groups and Bodies.

At the same time, await or develop other channels whereby Group members' views and concerns can be garnered.

We will attempt to entice attendance by preceding the meeting with an event of interest or entertainment such as the Newcastle Theatre tour. Suggestions for future meetings will be welcomed.

Group's Bank Account

The Group currently banks with Lloyds Business. In February 2025, Lloyds introduced a monthly standard charging fee of £4.25. Like other Groups who have consequently switched from Lloyds to free business banking with Virgin Money, we propose to do likewise. *We will need members approval to make this change.*

Members who currently make an annual contribution to the Group will be updated of our new banking arrangements. Hopefully though, your existing standing orders will be automatically transferred under the Banking's CurrentAccountSwitchService(CASS) procedure.

When the new bank account is set up, any new voluntary annual contributions of £2 will be very welcomed. The contributions are vital to the existence and running costs of the Group, eg room hire, light refreshments, essential out of pocket expenses and enable attraction of external guest speakers.

Agenda for the AGM

The final agenda for the AGM will be posted on the CSPA website, Members Area.

Copies will be provided at the event. Can members also bring their Summer copy of the Pensioner magazine which will include motions and nominations for the forthcoming Annual AGM in October 2025.