

Northern Ireland Branch Newsletter

Issue 7 – April 2025



HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS

Older people forgotten about – yet again

It took the Northern Ireland Executive nine months to produce a draft Programme for Government (PfG). Expectations were raised that this might be a life-changing document for many. To say it was a disappointment for older people is an understatement. The needs, hopes and aspirations of pensioners were completely ignored or forgotten.

There was not a single mention of older people in the draft PfG.

When our great pensioner ally in the Assembly, Claire Sugden MLA and All-Party Group on Older People Chair, raised the absence of older people in the PfG to First Minister Michelle O'Neill, she was told that was the nature of a consultation; Claire and others could raise their issues in their responses.

And that's exactly what happened. CSPA NI and other organisations representing older people made detailed and considered responses to the draft PfG. The CSPA NI pointed out that, having waited nine months for the document,

Nowhere in the 90-page document was there any reference to older people



it was very disappointing to see nothing relating to older people in it. They listed the issues they felt the Executive should deal with:

- A planned increase in hospital, residential and nursing beds
- Winter fuel allowance restored
- Social care
- Age discrimination legislation to bring Northern Ireland in line with England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland
- Warm Home Discount Scheme, which has applied to the other three UK nations since 2011
- Employment opportunities for older people who choose to or need to carry on working.

The Assembly also organised an Older Person's Parliament in October to discuss a range of issues.

Following what we are told was detailed consideration by the Executive Office, the finalised PfG was issued in February. There was

extensive criticism about the lack of targets or resources to achieve results for the many "missions" in it. And pensioner campaigners were horrified to read that despite being asked to set out their concerns, they were again ignored.

The PfG sets out the Executive's determination to deal with the concerns of women, girls, the economy, childcare, waiting lists, children, young people, housing and the public sector.

All extremely laudable and nothing anyone would oppose. The preface by the First Minister/Deputy First Minister says: "We heard from more of you than ever before and it is vital that we work for everyone."

Despite that, nowhere in the 90-page document was there any reference to the needs of older people.

Our needs and aspirations are not too taxing. Is there no one listening?



Age discrimination consultation

Claire Sugden, Independent MLA and Chair of the All-Party Group for Older People, has launched a public consultation on legislation to tackle age discrimination in goods, facilities and services. Claire has called it a crucial step towards recognising the value of older people and closing a longstanding gap in Northern Ireland equality laws.

CSPA NI welcomes this. "We, along with other allies in the pensioner movement, have been calling for

such action for many years. Indeed, a motion to that effect was carried unanimously at the 2022 CSPA national AGM," a spokesperson said.

Northern Ireland remains the only area of the UK or Republic of Ireland that allows older people to be discriminated against. Such legislation would close this injustice.

To complete the consultation online, go to <https://www.ageni.org/news/public-consultation-on-age-discrimination-legislation-launched/>

Annual subscriptions for 2025

Members who still pay on an annual basis should have received a letter from Treasurer Roisin Lilley earlier this year about their subscription fee.

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

Our committee decided to ask members for a small supplement to cover these costs if they still wished to pay this way. Roisin urged as many members as possible to switch their subscription to payment through their civil service pension or via direct debit.

Both are taken monthly at £1.50 (for individual members) at no extra cost to members.

If you did not receive a letter or you still have to pay for 2025, please contact Roisin at roisincspa@gmail.com or leave a message on 02890 658513. Please note: it may take a few days for her to respond due to the volume of messages.

Subscription rate increase

We trust members feel they are receiving a great service from the CSPA. Our aim is to 'protect what you've earned' in terms of your civil service and state pension and help you get the most out of retirement. To that end, we are involved in a significant amount of campaigning and lobbying. We also partner with other organisations to fight for issues that impact members – better healthcare and transport, winter fuel payments and much more.

Much of this work is covered in our newsletters and *The Pensioner* magazine. Members can also avail of our travel insurance, Specsavers vouchers and legal advice.

Members will know our current subscription rate of £1.50 per month (annual fee £18) has been the same for several years. But, as reported at the past few AGMs, our overheads have increased considerably each year. This has resulted in growing in-year deficits – over £20,000 in 2024.

So our Branch Committee has

had to take the difficult decision to propose an increase in

subscription rates. We propose that from 1 January 2026, our monthly individual rate will rise by 50p to £2 (annual rate £24).

A motion will be put to our AGM in May for approval. We hope members will understand and support this so we can continue to serve you as we always have.



Claire Sugden Assembly motion

On 25 February, Claire Sugden (pictured), Independent MLA and former Justice Minister, proposed a motion for the First Minister/Deputy First Minister to embed planning in the final Programme for Government 2024/27 to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience in public services with regard to older people.

At present, one in six people are aged over 65. This is expected to rise to one in five by 2030, one in



four by 2040 and one in two by 2070.

As a result, the motion called on the Executive/Assembly to: manage increased demand on health and social care for older people; have enough resources available for older people; make sure that there is sustainable

housing and public transport for older people; and, crucially, to ensure that support is provided to allow older people to remain in their own homes.



CSPA NI AGM 2025

The CSPA NI AGM will take place on Wednesday 7 May in the Boardroom, Presbyterian Assembly Buildings, Fisherwick Place, Belfast. This is right in the city centre, very close to Grand Central station for bus and rail and equally close to city centre Glider stops.

The meeting will start at 2pm and a hot buffet lunch will be served from 12.45pm. We are very honoured to have the newly appointed Commissioner for Older People Siobhan Casey and CSPA National Chair Les Priestly as guest speakers.

It would be fantastic to see a great turnout of members. If you can attend, please do so.

Winter fuel payments

As reported in the last edition, we were extremely disappointed the Labour government had withdrawn the winter fuel payment of £200/£300 for more than eight million pensioners nationally and 160,000 in Northern Ireland.

Our Secretary, interviewed on the Nolan Show on Radio Ulster, urged Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons to use some of the extra £600 million that the Northern Ireland Executive got

from Westminster as part of the Barnett Formula to fund a winter fuel payment for NI pensioners.

We were happy to hear that on 19 November, Minister Lyons announced that £17 million had been found to give a one-off payment of £100 to NI pensioners. While lower than the previous amount, and for one year only, CSPA NI welcomed it as a start. But we are still determined to push for full restoration on an annual basis.



Legal offer

We would like to remind members we have negotiated special rates for CSPA NI members with one of Northern Ireland's most prestigious law firms, McCartan Turkington Breen. For free wills, a free 20/30-minute phone consultation on any legal matter and 10% discounted rates for enduring power of attorney and estate planning, email Partner Marie-Anne McVeigh at marie-anne.mcveigh@mtb-law.co.uk, call 02890 329801 or contact by post at McCartan Turkington Breen, Northern Court, 16-18 Gloucester St, Belfast BT1 4LS.

You will be required to provide your CSPA NI membership number. If you don't have it to hand, email Roisin Lilley at roisincspa@gmail.com or call 02890 658513.

Specsavers deal

Our Specsavers deal remains very popular with members. Since the last newsletter, we have had a further 45 requests for vouchers, bringing the total to 275. This means members have saved £5,500 by being CSPA NI

members. The voucher gives a £20 saving for Specsavers glasses in the £99 and above range. If you would like one for you, a family member and/or a friend, just email their names to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com.

Remember when...?

This time we revisit an event at Belfast Castle in February 2012. This was after the Executive had found some additional money to provide needy pensioners with some winter fuel money. Four representatives of Age Sector

Platform attended the event. Pictured left to right are: Michael Monaghan, Martin McGuinness (Deputy First Minister), Anne Watson, Peter Robinson (First Minister), Margaret Galloway and Ivan Baxter.



New members

As an organisation made up of pensioners, one of our greatest regrets is losing members through death. Unfortunately, this is as inevitable as night following day.

However, in order to keep our bargaining strength with the civil service, politicians and so on, we need to keep refreshing our ranks with new members.

Whilst your committee does its very best, it would be great if you could encourage any family

members, friends or acquaintances to join. We

accept civil servants who are partially retired as well as fully retired. We also welcome other retired public servants, who can be associate members.

An application form is available on our website or contact our Membership Secretary, Roisin Lilley, at roisincspa@gmail.com



We had a great response to our Quick Quiz in the last edition. Questions are too easy!! The answers were:

- Mary Peters won her Olympic Gold Medal in the Pentathlon in 1972 in what was then West Germany
- The well-known Comber born jazz singer was Otilie Patterson.

The two lucky winners of the £25 M&S vouchers were **Winifred McConaghy** and **Liz Campbell**.

This issue's two questions are:

- Name the now 82-year-old Rugby Union player who went to Campbell College and then Cambridge University. He played 67 times for Ireland between 1964/1979 and was described by Willie John McBride as "the greatest Irish Player I've ever watched".
- In which Northern Ireland city was Snow Patrol's lead singer and songwriter, Gary Lightbody, born?

Send your answers with your name and postal 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!