

GROUP CIRCULAR 984/26

To: Branches, Groups and Executive Council

10 March 2026

Dear Colleague

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1. Chancellor's Spring Statement

The Chancellor Rachel Reeves presented her Spring Statement to the Commons on 3 March 2026, insisting that the Government has the “right economic plan for the country”. We are presented with what has been described as a ‘short-term pain for long-term gain’ or ‘jam later’ situation, with the cost of living and taxes continuing to rise.

The statement came just weeks after the Bank of England had downgraded growth forecasts for 2026 from 1.2% to 0.9%.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) says that the economic outlook will brighten from 2027 onwards, whilst also forecasting that UK tax will hit a record high of 38.5% of GDP by 2030/31.

Food Inflation fell from 4.5% in December 2025, down to 3.6% in the 12 months to January 2026. Despite this, cost-of-living pressures remain stubbornly high, and the cost of some essential items, including butter, cheese, bread and cereals have risen significantly in the last 5 years. Figures from August 2025 also show steep rises in the cost of beef, chocolate, coffee and milk more recently.

Typical household energy bills will fall by 7% in April 2026, regulator Ofgem has announced. For a household governed by the price cap and using a typical amount of energy, the annual bill will fall by £117 to £1,641.

Nearly everyone in England, Wales and Scotland will benefit from a cut, irrespective of their tariff, although the amounts will vary between households. But many households are struggling to make ends meet, and have fallen behind on energy payments, leading to a collective debt to suppliers of well over £4bn.

There were no major policy announcements in the Spring Statement, leaving campaigners on issues such as the need to improve social care frustrated.

In responding to the Chancellor's review, Helen Walker, CEO of Carers UK, said:

“The UK's 5.8 million unpaid carers contribute a staggering £184 billion to the UK economy every year – yet many are struggling to get by without the support they urgently need.

“The Chancellor's Spring Statement today will offer little comfort to unpaid carers and families who are providing more care than ever, often at great personal cost.

“Years of under-investment in social care have pushed more responsibility onto families, leaving many carers with no choice but to give up work to care, leaving them reliant on an inadequate social security system.

“Without urgent action, unpaid carers will continue to shoulder unsustainable pressures, to the detriment of their own health and the wider economy.”

2. Civil Service Pensions Administration – Update on Progress

On the 27 February, Angela Macdonald, HMRC's Second Permanent Secretary and Taskforce lead, published her second update on work to improve the state of the Pension Scheme administration service, following the disastrous transfer from MyCSP to Capita on the 1 December 2025.

In the update, Angela Macdonald said that by the end of the week Capita would have settled or done everything possible on all death-in-service cases, and that all ill-health retirement cases would have been dealt with within a week. Significant progress had also been made in respect of caller wait times, with 93% of calls reportedly being answered by Capita within 30 seconds. In early February, senior Capita executives told the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee that the average caller wait time was 1 hour and 55

minutes, but CSPA members had been telling us that they had waited anything between 3 and 5 hours before the calls to Capita were picked up in January.

Ms Macdonald said that Capita were 'on track' when it came to meeting their commitment to issue lump sum payments to all retirees who had received their quotes and returned their forms (8,153 people) by the end of February, with outstanding pension arrears being paid within the next 8 weeks. Members are to receive interest on delayed payments at the Bank of England base rate plus 1%.

You can read the Update on the link here - [Member Knowledge Article](#) or in the *attachments to this circular*.

Angela Macdonald and Catherine Little CB, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office, gave evidence to the parliamentary Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), chaired by Simon Hoare MP, on 3 March. The PACAC was looking into the work of the Cabinet Office generally but chose to spend a considerable amount of time focusing on the administration of the Civil Service Pension Scheme and the Cabinet Office's management of the outsourced administrators. A summary of these proceedings, prepared for CSPA by Connect, is *attached to this circular*.

As the session ended, Clive Betts MP (Labour) urged the Government to consider bringing pension administration back in-house in future, and PACAC Chair, Simon Hoare MP (Conservative), concluded by reiterating the need to recognise the personal, financial and reputational damage suffered by members and to ensure that they faced no lasting penalties.

Civil Service World covered the PACAC hearing - *see article attached*.

3. Parliamentary Work & Pensions Committee Session on Impact of Increasing the State Pension Age

On 25 February, the Work & Pensions Committee, chaired by Debbie Abrahams MP (Labour), heard wide-ranging evidence from academics, trade union representatives and campaigners on the impact of the rising State Pension Age (SPA), the adequacy of employer support and the need for mitigation measures ahead of the increase to 67.

Jon Richards (UNISON) cited Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) data that showed an increase of 14% to the numbers facing absolute income poverty following the increase from 65 to 66, and Emily Holzhausen CBE (Carers UK) highlighted the financial cliff edge faced by unpaid carers. Joe Levenson (Arthritis UK) pointed to research showing that people aged 55 - 64 were twice as likely to struggle financially as those above SPA, describing people with

long-term health conditions as “collateral damage” of SPA increases without mitigation.

Themes emerging were:

- The need for support to begin earlier – from age 50 – not just before SPA
- Healthy life expectancy is not keeping pace with the rising SPA
- Prevention, retention and workplace reform were critical longer term
- Pension policy must align with health, the labour market and social care systems
- Future SPA increases must include clear mitigation and implementation planning from the outset.

You can read more about the session in the *attached Connect summary*, or view a transcript here -

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/17239/pdf/>

4. Social Care Provision in England – Update on CSA, the Casey Commission and Recent Ministerial Announcements

The Co-Chairs of the Care and Support Alliance (CSA), which CSPA is a part of, have written, on the 2 March 2026, to Baroness Louise Casey to share CSA members’ priorities, insights and aspirations for adult social care as phase 1 of the Commission’s work draws to a close. *A copy of the letter is attached*, but you can also access it, along with the CSA supportive documentation accompanying the letter (to which CSPA contributed) on the website.

In a Casey Commission press release on 5 March 2026, Baroness Casey said that:

“Unlike the NHS or indeed the benefits system, social care had never had its own creation moment. No moment when the nation decided what it was for; what people should expect, or who should pay, and how.

“Instead, we inherited a system shaped for a very different age, held together with add-ons and work arounds, sticking plaster and glue. Without ever having the moment of reckoning we now need.”

Baroness Casey’s statement went on to confirm that she had written to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on the 3 March, asking the Government to take six immediate actions on dementia, motor neurone disease (MND) and adult safeguarding due to the urgency of the reform needed in these areas.

Copies of the press statement and an interview with Baroness Casey, covered by the BBC on 5 March, are attached to this circular.

On the 5 March, a letter in response to Louise Casey, from Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, appeared on the Government

website. Thanking her for the work carried out by the Commission to date, the Minister said that “The issues facing adult social care are complex and deep-rooted, and social care has been on the ‘too difficult’ pile for far too long.”

He welcomed the focus on the need to protect vulnerable adults and ensure services were safe, committing his department to creating a new national safeguarding board and undertaking an urgent review of adult safeguarding statutory duties, as recommended.

The Minister further welcomed Casey’s focus on dementia, reiterating commitments in the Labour Manifesto to drive progress on research and new treatments, including the trial of ACCESS-AD. The department and NHS England were already working on the Dementia and Frailty Modern Service Framework (MSF) to come up with a blueprint to improve outcomes for those with dementia in both health and care settings. He went on to commit to establishing a new dementia leadership role in his department, taking into account lessons learned from the Cancer Tsar role.

Wes Streeting agreed that those suffering from MND needed much more rapid access to assessments, diagnosis and support, committing to the development of a fast-track process to ensure people with MND get the treatment and support they need, safely and without delay.

A copy of the Minister’s letter is *attached to this circular*.

5. Updates on the NHS 10 Year Plan

On the 17 December, the Government published a policy paper setting out the 11 Working Groups’ reports, which have been fed into the ‘10 Year Health Plan for England’. Each group had 2 co-chairs – one from either the Department of Health and Social Care or NHS England, and one external to these organisations. There were 4 “Vision” working groups and 7 “Enabling” working groups.

You can access these and other updates on the 10 Year Plan’s development online here - [10 Year Health Plan for England - GOV.UK](#) or request copies from CSPA HQ if you aren’t able to access this information this way.

6. Independent Age Campaign for Social Water Tariffs

Research carried out for Independent Age has shown that:

- 1 in 5 (21%) people over 65 in England and Wales have cut back their spending on water. This increases to 2 in 5 when looking at people over 65 on incomes of less than £15,000 a year,

- Of those currently cutting back on their water usage, nearly 3 in 10 people (28%) over 65 in England and Wales have cut their water usage to such an extent that it is affecting their overall health and personal hygiene.

People over 65 in England and Wales are cutting back to manage the cost of their water bill, with:

- 3 in 10 flushing the toilet less
- 1 in 4 spending less time in the shower
- 1 in 6 showering less often.

Their research showed that a national social tariff would lift hundreds of thousands of households out of water poverty and create a fair, consistent system for everyone who needs support.

Independent Age's online petition is now live and you can find a copy on the link below - please feel free to sign and share it if you would be able to support them:

<https://campaigns.independentage.org/page/187255/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=independent-age-water>

You can request paper copies from CSPA HQ if you are not able to access the petition online.

7. Digital Exclusion: Updates on Post Office branches, access to cash and banking facilities

In LLA meetings with MPs in recent months, we have been raising concerns that the closure of Post Office Branches and Counters in high streets is adding to the loss of banking facilities resulting from the precipitous loss of high street banks. We were therefore heartened by the recent article in the Express, on 26 February 2026, confirming that a minimum of 11,500 Post Office branches are to remain open. *A copy of the article is attached to this circular.*

Discussion about access to cash and banking often focus on the ability to withdraw and deposit cash, rather than cash acceptance. Access to cash is, of course, of little value if local businesses won't accept it. A report by LINK's Consumer Council, called "Keeping Choice Alive: Measuring Cash Acceptance on the UK High Street", has recently challenged assumptions that many high street businesses are making 'inevitable' or 'consumer driven' choices when they stop accepting cash in exchange for goods and services. The research found that the choice to stop accepting cash was often driven by cost pressures, security concerns and businesses' own access to the necessary, local services. The report sets out survey results from 1,116 high street SMEs on levels of cash acceptance and the implications for communities. You can

read LINK's report online, on the link hereafter, or request a printed copy from CSPA HQ - [link-cash-acceptance-report.pdf](#)

Another matter of concern in this regard was highlighted in an article in the Sunday Telegraph, on 1 March 2026, reporting on Lloyds and Halifax customers being unable to deposit cheques at Post Office branches, despite local bank closures. You can *read the article on the attachment*.

8. NPC Update / NPC Connections for All Newsletter (Jan '26)

CSPA and the EC have long supported the work of the NPC in several ways, and in turn, the NPC has brought CSPA campaigns to a wider audience and national platform.

At an NPC Special Delegate Meeting on the 24 February, a decision was taken to wind up the unincorporated membership organisation on the 31 March 2026, with any remaining assets to be transferred to the NPC's Company Limited by Guarantee.

The NPC are now exploring how best to take their campaigns forward, and we will keep members updated on progress.

A copy of the NPC's Digital Working Party's January Newsletter is *attached to this circular for your information*.

If you have any questions or require any further information about the matters covered by this Group Circular, please don't hesitate to contact me, either by email at sally.tsoukaris@cspa.co.uk or by telephone on **020 8688 8418 (Office)**.

Yours sincerely



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