Northern Ireland Branch
Newsletter
Issue 10 – September 2026

CSPA
CIVIL SERVICE PENSIONERS' ALLIANCE

HERE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS

Older People's Parliament to meet in October

An Older People's Parliament will be held in the Assembly Chamber on 15 October. A Preparatory Committee of older persons' organisations, alongside NI Assembly Commission staff, has been working hard to draw up an attractive programme for the day. CSPA NI has been represented on this committee.

As a first step to engaging the population of Northern Ireland on the key issues, 1,800 posters and surveys were distributed across all 96 libraries and all MLA constituency offices. Adverts were shared across the Assembly's social media sites, urging people to take part in a survey, with a promotional video and survey details shared on a range of older persons' websites, including CSPA NI's.

The survey, from 1 June to 24 July, asked people to identify the main issues of concern to older people. Some 1,396 responses were received. Many more women than men replied – 957 (71.31%) versus 364 (27.12%). The age range of respondents was also interesting. The highest response rate was among people aged 66-75, with 580 responses (43.22%), followed by 55 to 65-year-olds (373, 27.79%) and 76 to 85-year-olds (270, 20.12%). In addition, 75 under-55s replied, 32 aged 86-95 and two aged 96+.

The Preparatory Committee was delighted to note that people responded in every part of Northern Ireland. The three highest areas were North Antrim, followed by North Down and Fermanagh & South Tyrone. The lowest number of responses came from South Down, West Tyrone and Strangford.

As to the surveyed issue – "What are the priority issues affecting older people?" – the top 10 topics, in order of importance, were:

1. **Equal access to appropriate healthcare and services**
2. **Adequate income and tackling poverty in later life**
3. **Transport, travel and access**
4. **Tackling loneliness and social isolation**
5. **Rights and advocacy for older people**
6. **Protection from scams and financial abuse**
7. **Effective planning for a society where people are living longer**
8. **Support for older people with caring responsibilities**
9. **Domestic violence against older people**
10. **Age discrimination**

Although others were mentioned, the number to be addressed must be manageable, so the 10 issues will be merged into five topics reflecting the range of concerns. These will then be formulated into 10 relevant questions that participants can, we hope, ask ministers directly. All Executive ministers have been invited to listen to the issues and respond.

It is anticipated CSPA NI will be represented by a delegation of about five. We look forward to a constructive day, and particularly what ministers might have to say in reply to older people's issues.

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Capita despair

Newly retired or prospective retirees who are members of the UK civil service pension scheme, administered by Capita, continue to experience major problems, often with a complete lack of detail or explanation on what's gone wrong.

Across the UK, tens of thousands of retired civil servants and widows/widowers have suffered stress and financial hardship due to delayed lump sum and pension payment.

The CSPA has dealt with hundreds of cases. In Northern Ireland, our members in HMRC, MoD, Passport Office and some courts have faced the same issues, and the Branch has helped every member to contact us.

Across the UK, more than 8,000 retirement applications to previous administrator MyCSP had not been processed prior to the transfer to Capita in December 2025. It took until May 2026 for these to be paid.

NICS scheme members have not had to wait for hours to speak to someone

There were also 26,000 requests for a pension quote, which were not expected to be cleared before the end of June 2026. This shambles compares dramatically with the efficiency of NICS pension scheme administration, carried out in-house by the Department of Finance.

Whilst there are overpayment issues and there has been criticism over the time taken to deal with the complex McCloud cases, there have been no issues of people not getting their pension estimates. Nor has there been any delay on people receiving their pension entitlement on time. NICS scheme members have not had to wait on phones for hours to speak to someone.

The Treasury must learn from this. The NICS pension administration is a jewel in the crown; take the UK pension scheme back in-house as soon as practicable.

Farewell Sally

It was a sad day when the Branch learned that our brilliant General Secretary was retiring in July. Sally Tsoukaris has been a dedicated and committed member of staff since she started four years ago and as General Secretary for the past three. She has been a great source of encouragement and wise counsel to the Branch, and we will miss her very much.

We appreciate Sally will want to take on new challenges. Her husband retired on the same day, and she intends to spend some time with her elderly father in South Africa. We wish her all the very best.

Read all about it!

Since its formation in 1952, the CSPA's overriding aim has been to protect the retirement pension of civil servants. In those days, there was no regular, never mind annual, uprating of civil service pensions; and we still had the marriage bar, which meant female, and only female, civil servants had to retire compulsorily when they married.

There has been considerable change since then, but it has remained the CSPA's number one objective to maintain, protect and enhance the civil service pension.

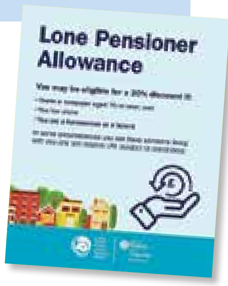
We have also got involved in other issues of concern – digital exclusion, concessionary fares on public transport, pensioner poverty, TV licences, heating, isolation, domestic violence – because our role is a campaigning one.

We also try to use our membership size to negotiate deals and discounts for members with a range of companies. That's why in this special six-page newsletter we have highlighted the main added benefits that CSPA members in Northern Ireland can enjoy from our partners, be that travel insurance, financial services, travel, IT support or optical support.

All the companies chosen provide services that can make a real difference to members' lives. Happy shopping!

The Editor

Rates relief



If you are 70+ and live alone, you may be entitled to the Lone Pensioner Allowance, which could mean a 30% discount on rates. To apply you must:

- Be a pensioner aged 70 or more
- Live on your own (though if you have a live-in 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're a tenant, visit www.nihe.gov.uk and search for the Lone Pensioner Allowance online application form. Any difficulties, call 0300 200 7801.

CSPA NI AGM 2026

This year's AGM was another success for the Branch. There was a good turnout of members to reflect on the year and elect a full nine-person committee.

They also listened to two great contributions from the guest speakers. Independent MLA and former Justice Minister Claire Sugden outlined her work in the Assembly to advance issues close to pensioners. She praised the Branch: "The role you play in representing retired civil servants is incredibly important. You have not just the lived experience but a real understanding of how government works, how decisions are made, or not made, and how those decisions actually affect people's lives."

She spoke of long hospital waiting lists, delays in accessing GPs, transport barriers and isolation for older people, and finished with a rallying call: "Progress will not happen on its own. It will happen because people continue to make the case, challenge where needed and work together. That is why your voice matters so much."

Deputy General Secretary Jonathan Safir spoke of the CSPA's work, particularly around the McCloud judgement and in highlighting the appalling mess resulting from Capita's administration of the civil service pension scheme.

"Progress will happen... because people continue to make the case"

Discrimination action

Why should an older person in Northern Ireland be discriminated against in the provision of goods and services because of their age? This is banned in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, yet it is legal here.

CSPA NI and other organisations have campaigned for years for legislation to apply in NI. But Claire Sugden, Independent MLA and Chair of the Assembly All Party Group on Ageing and Older People, has done something about it.

Claire submitted a Private Members Bill to the Assembly after a major public consultation. The consultation had 68 responses from a variety of organisations including CSPA NI; 94% said they would support the Bill. The Bill then passed its first stage on 30 June.

When the Assembly returns from summer recess in September, the Bill will go for its second stage to the relevant scrutiny committee.

While this is to be welcomed, campaigners note that the Assembly elections take place in May 2027, with the current Assembly being dissolved in April 2027.

So, it's still a very tight timescale to achieve legislation – but this is the closest we've ever been.

CSPA NI AGM 2027

Fresh from 2026's AGM, the Branch committee has set about organising next year's. We return to the Presbyterian Assembly Building, Fisherwick Place, on Wednesday 7 April 2027. The meeting will start at 2pm, with a hot buffet lunch from 1pm. New CSPA General Secretary Josie Irwin has confirmed her acceptance to be a guest speaker. Get the date marked in your diary!!

DARRYL BROOKS / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

National AGM 2026

We were delighted that our nominations for CSPA national Chair, Les Priestley, and Vice Chair, Roisin Lilley (both pictured below), were re-elected without opposition.

The Branch has submitted three motions for the AGM, in the Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth on 7-8 October. The motions are on the Capita administration chaos, tax thresholds and subsidised wifi.

Branch Chair Harry Baird will be our Delegate and Tony McMullan our Representative on the Executive Council.

Specsavers voucher

As we grow older, one of the ravages of time is on our eyesight – which is crucial for us to savour the things we enjoy most, such as reading books, watching television or fully appreciating the cinema, theatre or shows. In most cases, this means we need glasses to assist us. It might well mean, for some, that they need to wear glasses all the time. And we all know that the price of glasses continues to rise.

So how would you like to get £20 off Specsavers products? Well, it's dead easy. For a £20 voucher to be used against any glasses in the £99 and above range, just email your name to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com. The scheme is open to any of your friends or family as well; just email their names to Tony.

Since we launched the offer, 394 members have obtained a Specsavers voucher, saving them a total of £7,880.

APT Luxury Travel

CSPA NI members can enjoy an exclusive bonus savings of 10% on all APT cruises and tours in 2026 and 2027, including river cruises, small ship cruises, ocean cruises, rail tours, small group journeys and escorted travel. For some it's a cruise through Europe, Asia or Egypt, escorted tours to Canada or Australia or a yacht adventure along Croatia's coastline. When contacting APT, quote **CSPA10**. Bookings for 2026 and 2027 must be made by 31 December 2026 to get the saving. Contact APT by phone on 08000 126683.

CSIS Travel Insurance

We might want to travel more in our retirement, but a big obstacle is the increasing cost of travel insurance. One of our most popular deals for members is our exclusive travel insurance scheme with the Civil Service Insurance Society (CSIS) – a mutual company that puts any surplus income into great causes supported by many members.

The CSPA/CSIS travel scheme provides European or worldwide cover, and no limit on the number of trips a member can take in a year. Any single trip can last up to 65 days (45 for US, Canada or Caribbean, up to 17 for winter sports). Members can include a partner/spouse and dependent children up to 21.

The big attraction is that no medical screening is required as long as the member is fit to travel. This includes pre-existing medical conditions.

To access the travel scheme, members must comply with the eligibility criteria outlined on our website. The scheme applies to all CSPA members aged 50-79. Once you are in the scheme, the age limit no longer applies as long as you continue to meet the requirements and renew annually. If you are 80 or over, you cannot join this travel scheme – but please call CSIS and their staff will try to get you the insurance requirements you need.

As a CSPA member, you also have access to CSIS car and home insurance and now, in conjunction with ManyPets, lifetime vet fees cover from £3,000 to £20,000. Visit csis.co.uk/partners/cspa or call 01622 766960 and choose **Option 5** for the dedicated CSPA line. You'll need your CSPA membership number.

IT Support

If you're like me, your IT skills will be pretty basic and we can't always seek the IT support of our children or younger relatives when something goes wrong. That's where the CSPA has a great deal with BT Technologies to provide free advice and support. Just call 0330 800 1010, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm or email cspa@bc-group.co.uk at any time. Please always quote **CSPA** when contacting BT Technologies as this will assist them in dealing with your query. So stop panicking and start calling!

Legal offer

McCartan Turkington Breen SOLICITORS

CSPA NI has teamed up with one of Northern Ireland's most prestigious law firms to provide a range of exclusive deals solely for CSPA NI members – free wills, discounted rates for power of attorney and estate planning.

In addition, any CSPA NI members can have a free initial telephone consultation. To access, members must contact practice partner Marie-Anne McVeigh by email at marie-anne.mcveigh@mtb-law.co.uk or call her on 02890 329801. You will need your CSPA membership number.

Fred. Olsen

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines does things differently. Cruising is about enjoying the journey as much as the destination, ensuring customers see the world in comfort and style, with the freedom to explore. Fred. Olsen has teamed up with the CSPA to give members up to £200pp on-board spend on experiences you will love.

Just call 0800 0355 108 quoting **CSPA26A** and your CSPA membership number (if you do not have it to hand, call our Membership Secretary Roisin Lilley on 028 9065 8513). This is travel at its most rewarding – unhurried, carefully considered and full of character.

Wendy Wu

Wendy Wu Tours is one of the UK's leading escorted tour specialists, offering excellent fully inclusive escorted group tours to Japan, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, South East and Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Latin America. With Wendy Wu tours you get a full range of iconic highlights, hidden gems and cultural experiences. As a CSPA NI member you can get an exclusive 5% discount on any tour featured in Wendy Wu's extensive collection. Visit wendywutours.co.uk to see the full range of tours or when telephoning 0800 035 5091 quote **CSPA5**.

Wendy Wu Tours

Quilter Financial Advisers

For financial services you can trust, use CSPA partner Quilter Financial Advisers – offering advice on a wide-ranging list of financial services including pensions, ISAs, junior ISAs (to support your children and grandchildren), investment bonds and cash savings accounts. Choose from Quilter's wide range of products designed around your needs. For a free no-obligation initial consultation with an expert from Quilter call 0800 858590 quoting **CSPA** or find out more at www.quilter.com/cspa.

Quilter FinancialAdvisers

Welcome Josie!

Following Sally Tsoukaris' retirement, the CSPA has appointed Josie Irwin as General Secretary. Josie brings to the CSPA more than 25 years' service with the Royal College of Nursing and more recently eight years with UK trade union Unison, where Josie was Head of Equality following a period as National Women's Officer. She also led the Retired Members section of Unison, which will stand her in good stead at the CSPA. Josie took up her new post on 24 August. The Northern Ireland Branch looks forward to working with her closely to combat the challenges facing retired civil servants.

Remember when...?

We go back to 2019, when then Commissioner for Older People NI Eddie Lynch addressed the Belfast East Seniors Forum. Beside Eddie is pictured Anne Greenan, Chair of the Forum, and on the far right, Ivan Baxter, then CSPA NI Secretary. If you have a photo to share, please send it to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com

Alastair Hunter stands down

There was much sadness but deep appreciation at the Branch AGM as Alastair Hunter, after more than 30 years' dedicated service to the Branch, decided to stand down from the Branch committee. Alastair has been a trailblazer for civil service pensioners, showing huge commitment to the CSPA over very many years, and we wish him and his wife, Libby, all the best for the future.

Quick Quiz

Great to see a bumper bundle of correct answers to the last newsletter Quick Quiz. I thought I might have you stumped when I asked which year Alex Higgins won the World Snooker Championship. But all but two of you were able to point out that he had won it twice, in 1972 and 1982. Well done!! And it was Newry-born Clodagh Rodgers who sang Jack in the Box for the UK in Eurovision.

Unfortunately, we have only two prizes and this time the winners are **Pauline McClure** and **Alastair Hamilton**. Congratulations to them.

This time we ask:
Q1. The current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was born in which country?
Q2. The Olympic pommel horse gold medallist was born in which Northern Ireland town/city?

Email your answers, as well as your name and address, to tony.mcmullan@outlook.com by 30 September 2026. Good luck!!

Meeting CSP

The annual meeting between representatives of CSPA NI, national Pensions Officer David Luxton and senior representatives of Civil Service Pensions Branch (CSP) took place on 2 June in CSP's HQ in Derry/Londonderry. Among the items discussed were the McCloud judgement and the need to get payments out to affected members of staff as quickly as possible; civil service pension increases; civil service pension administration; an operations update; and an update on relevant civil service pension policy and legislation.