



Protecting what you've earned



CSPA
Civil Service
Pensioners'
Alliance
Northern Ireland
Branch

Annual Report

May 2024 – April
2025

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1. Introduction

When CSPA was created over 70 years ago we had a very distinct objective, to improve and then maintain the Pension entitlement which our members received. In those days there was no commitment to increase the Pensions annually and the Pension itself was quite low. We were then, and remain to this day, a strictly Non-Party Political Organisation. We take no directive from any Political Parties, nor do we donate any money to any Political Party. We owe our allegiance and take directive from one group only, you, our members. However, despite being strictly Non-Party Political we do engage with Political Parties and engage in Political discussions. How can that be, some may say? Well, establishing a Civil Service Pension was a decision taken by Politicians as were decisions to increase it. Indeed, all decisions taken by Governments, of all Political Colours, which relate to our Members on issues such as Civil Service Pension, the State Pension, Health and Social Care Provision are political. Therefore, we have to engage with the Politicians to let them know your Aspirations, Concerns, Objectives, Fears and Necessities of Life. That is why whether the Chancellor withdraws the Winter Fuel Payment at Westminster or the Northern Ireland Executive ignores Older People in their Programme for Government, we will be there, as we always have, to be your voice, standing up for you, defending and protecting your interests today, tomorrow and every day.

Our Annual Report sets out the detailed and comprehensive work which your local Committee has done, in a voluntary capacity for you. I want to thank all the Committee for their hard work and dedication to the job. My sincere thanks also go to our Website Manager, Amy Lilley-Richardson for her great support and assistance to us in getting our message out to members. I also want to thank Sally, David and all the team at CSPA Headquarters for their tremendous drive and determination. Christine, the Editor of The Pensioner for giving us the opportunity to keep members informed and Chris our Head Office Pensions Officer for her regular advice and constant good humour!!

We have worked hard for members in 2024, that will continue in 2025. I am pleased, no honoured, to present this record of hard work to members for their endorsement.

Tony McMullan, CSPA NI Secretary

2. CSPA NI Branch Committee 2024/2025

The Branch Committee elected at the April 2024 AGM was;

President - Alastair Hunter

Chair - Stan Blayney

Vice-Chair - Joan Moss

Committee Members - Harry Baird, Frank Cammock, Michael Carson, Roisin Lilley, Lottie McCreanor and Tony McMullan.

The Branch Secretary Post and the Treasurer/Membership Secretary Posts are Honoria Posts and are appointed by the Branch Committee from within their ranks. Tony McMullan was reappointed Branch Secretary and Roisin Lilley was reappointed as Treasurer/Membership Secretary.

3. Sam Caul

Sam Caul, former Branch Chair, National Council Member and a longstanding and dedicated Branch Committee Member did not seek re-election at the 2024 AGM. As a token of appreciation to Sam for his record of support to the Branch over many years, Alastair Hunter, Branch President, presented him with a Card and Gift.

4. CSPA NI AGM – 2024

The 2024 Branch Annual General Meeting took place in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Stormont on 24th April. Forty Members were in attendance. They heard Branch Presentations by the President, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary. They also heard from the two keynote Guest Speakers, CSPA General Secretary Sally Tsoukaris and Charity for Civil Servants Northern Representative Viki Oliveira.

5. CSPA National AGM – 2024

The 70th National CSPA Annual General Meeting took place in the Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth near Coventry on Wednesday 9th and Thursday 10th October 2024. This is the supreme policy making body of CSPA. The Branch

Delegate was Harry Baird and Branch Chair Stan Blayney was there as an Observer. Roisin Lilley, Branch Treasurer/Membership Secretary was in attendance in her role as the National Vice Chair and Tony McMullan, Branch Secretary was there in his role as the Northern Ireland Representative on the National Council. The Branch had submitted three motions for the Agenda. One on the Triple Lock on State Pensions was composited into another motion with similar motions from other Groups and the other two motions were about Consistent and Quality Assured Decision Making in Hospitals and Care Settings and More Funding for Dementia Research. Tony McMullan also proposed an emergency motion on behalf of the National Council condemning the Government's decision to withdraw the Winter Fuel Payment from all but the poorest Pensioners.

6. CSPA NI AGM – 2025

The 2025 CSPA Northern Ireland Branch Annual General Meeting (our 43rd) will be held in the Boardroom, Presbyterian Assembly Building, Fisherwick Place, Belfast on Wednesday 7th May 2025. There will be two keynote Guest Speakers. The newly appointed Commissioner for Older People Siobhan Casey and CSPA National Chair, Les Priestly. There will also be the usual reports from the various Branch Officers and the opportunity for members to have their say.

7. CSPA National AGM – 2025

The 71st CSPA National AGM will be held in the Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth near Coventry on Wednesday 8th and Thursday 9th October. The Branch have yet to determine whether or not to submit Motions for the AGM Agenda.

8. CSPA National Council Vice Chair - Roisin Lilley

In early 2024 Don Makepeace stepped down from his role as the National Chair of CSPA. Linda Ridgers-Waite, then the Vice-Chair replaced him as Chair. That left a vacancy for the Vice-Chair position. The NI Branch decided to nominate Roisin Lilley. As there was another candidate an election took place with all CSPA

Groups and Branches eligible to vote. We were pleased to learn, in May, that Roisin had been successful in the election and would be the Vice-Chair until the AGM in October and in accordance with CSPA custom and practice would have to resubmit her name for the Annual Elections. The Branch renominated Roisin and we were delighted that she won the election, at the AGM.

9. CSPA National Committee Representative

Tony McMullan, CSPA NI Branch Secretary, continued to serve as the Northern Ireland Representative on the CSPA National Committee and also on the Finance & General Purposes Committee. The main issues dealt with by the Executive Committee were defending the Triple Lock on Pensions, McCloud Judgement, falling CSPA Membership, Democratic Engagement with Members, Winter Fuel Payment, New Travel Insurance Scheme plus a plethora of other issues.

10. Civil Service Pension Rise – 2024

The Annual Civil Service Pension Rise is underpinned by the Inflation Rise in the preceding September (2023). This was 6.7%.

11. State Pensions Rise – 2024

The State Pension Rise is dependent on which of the three elements of the Triple Lock apply. These are Average Wage Growth, Inflation or 2.5%. The highest applies. Therefore, the State Pension rose, from April 2024 by 10.1%.

12. Civil Service Pension Rise – 2025

The Annual Civil Service Pension Rise, as set out in Paragraph 10 above, was determined by the Rate of Inflation in September (2024) which was disappointingly for Members only 1.7%. This was confirmed by the Chancellor in her 2024 Budget. As there is a different approval mechanism in Northern Ireland, we wrote to Civil Service Pensions Branch (CSP) to ensure that the principle of Parity would be

maintained. In March, CSP wrote to CSPA confirming that Northern Ireland Civil Service Pensioners would receive a 1.7% increase in their Pensions from April 2025.

13. State Pension Rise – 2025

The Government confirmed that the State Pension would continue to be increased by using the Triple Lock Formula (See Paragraph 11 above). This meant that the State Pension would increase by 4.1% from April 2025.

14. Civil Service Pensions Branch (CSP) - Department of Finance

Relations between ourselves and CSP remained very positive throughout 2024. We had our Annual Meeting with Senior Representatives in June in their Waterside House Headquarters. Amongst the issues discussed were the McCloud and Walker Judgements, Online Access, Pension Overpayments and Annual Benefit Statements. Our Branch Secretary had regular contact with CSP regarding the Civil Service Pension Increase and Personal Cases. We also liaised closely with them to include the most up to date information in respect of McCloud and also accommodated CSP representatives to appear on a CSPA Webinar on McCloud (see Paragraph 15). Our Membership Secretary had ongoing and regular engagement with CSP colleagues to ensure that new CSPA members could have the opportunity to have their CSPA membership fee deducted at source, helping us to avoid heavy bank charges.

15. McCloud Judgement

The Remedy, arising from the 2015 McCloud Judgement applied to all members as a result of the Age Discrimination Legislation introduced by the Public Sector Pension Reforms. This is commonly known as the McCloud Judgement as this case was one of the first to settle. As part of the 2015 Remedy work for the Northern Ireland Civil Service a Public Consultation was launched by Department of Finance in April 2023. Its purpose was to seek views on the Draft Public Sector

Pension Scheme Regulations. At that time CSPA NI worked closely with CSP to promote their Consultation Exercise on our Website. That Consultation led to 98 responses, including one from CSPA NI. Having carefully considered the responses, the Department determined to continue with the proposed regulations to end the discrimination identified by the Court of Appeal in 2016. During 2024 we continued to work closely with CSP including asking them to provide Representatives to a UK wide CSPA Webinar at which the Treasury and the CSPA Pensions Officer as well as CSP provided presentations and answered members' questions on the latest position. CSP has begun to issue some 10,000 letters to affected members providing them with the available information to make their choice of the options available to them. It is anticipated that members will then have 12 months to make a decision. More advice can be provided by the CSPA Pensions Officer.

16. Later Life Ambitions (LLA)

CSPA alongside colleagues in the National Federation of Pensioners and retired Police Officers in NARPO come together under the umbrella "Later Life Ambitions". We work together to advance the Pensioners' cause. On 17th December the LLA organised a reception in Westminster which was hosted by Labour Peer, Lord Davies of Brixton. A range of Politicians from the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party turned up. The NI National Committee Representative Tony McMullan was one of the CSPA team and he took the opportunity to raise NI Civil Service Pensioner Issues with the various Politicians. Regrettably, none of the Northern Ireland MPs or Peers, who were all invited, attended the Reception.

17. Northern Ireland Assembly All-Party Group on Older People

The All-Party Group, in which CSPA NI has Observer Status, continued to meet throughout the year with meetings being alternatively held In-Person and Online. The Meetings normally always include a presentation of a topical issue, such as Health Waiting Lists, Loneliness Strategies, GP appointments etc. Amongst other

issues dealt with in 2024 were Public Transport, Digital Exclusion, Bank and Post Office Branch closures, Domestic Violence against Older People, Lunch Clubs, Shop closures particularly in rural areas, Recreational Options for Older People. In September the All-Party Group held a major seminar in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings entitled “Preparing for an Ageing Population”. This event heard from the Commissioner for Older People Eddie Lynch, Age NI, The All-Party Group Chair Claire Sugden MLA and Vice-Chair, Colm Gildernew MLA, Age Friendly Network, British Association of Social Workers and the Equality Commission for NI. At lunch the First Minister Michelle O’Neill MLA and the Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly MLA joined the event going round the tables engaging with attendees.

18. Northern Ireland Assembly - Older People’s Parliament

CSPA NI warmly welcomed the decision of the Northern Ireland Assembly to hold an Older Person’s Parliament on 12th October 2024 in the Assembly Chamber. Prior to the event we, alongside other interested organisations, were asked to table issues for debate at the event. We submitted 7 issues including the restoration of the Winter Fuel Allowance, Age Discrimination Legislation, Warm Home Discount Scheme, Social Care and Provision of Public Lavatories. We were looking forward to really healthy debate and discussion. However, we became concerned when we learnt that the Assembly Staff had hand-picked a Committee to help organise the event and this Committee did not include a representative from the largest and most representative group, the National Pensioners Convention NI Region. We further learnt that nine groups had been chosen to make presentations at the event but that no one would be allowed to question the presenter and nor would any votes be taken on what was presented. Additionally, a few days before the event we learnt that neither the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister or indeed any of the Executive Ministers were going to attend the event and the Speaker who was to chair it had also withdrawn from it. We were also informed that as a consequence of these developments, a number of organisations including the Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee had decided to withdraw from the event. We urgently considered what to do. We were very keen that the Older Person’s

Parliament be a success but we were genuinely conflicted not to give democratic legitimacy to what we saw as a flawed process. With a great degree of genuine regret, we withdrew our support for the event. We understand that whilst it went ahead and a number of MLAs turned up to meet the participants over lunch, very few stayed for the event.

19. Northern Ireland Assembly - Programme for Government (PfG)

The Northern Ireland Assembly had been restored in January 2024 promising a PfG quickly. However, it took them until September before they issued a draft PfG Document for Public Consultation. Claire Sugden MLA and Chair of the All-Party Group on Older People expressed her disappointment, in the Assembly Chamber, directly to the First Minister at the complete failure to mention, anywhere in the Consultation Document, anything to do with Older People. The First Minister replied that that was why they were having a Consultation and this would give Claire and others the chance to respond with their views as to what should be in the PfG. CSPA NI made a detailed and considerate response to the Draft PfG. We said it could be strengthened by the inclusion of matters relevant to Older People including Social Care, the restoration of the Winter Fuel Payment, Age Discrimination Legislation, Planning for more Hospital, Residential and Nursing Home provision for Older People, Employment Opportunities for Older People who either want to or who by necessity, have to work. It was therefore exceptionally disappointing to learn that when the Programme for Government was launched in February 2025 there was not a single mention either of Older People or the issues which are important to them. So much for the Executive listening to Older People.

20. National Pensioners Convention Northern Ireland Region

For a variety of reasons, including illness of Regional Officers, there were not as many meetings of the Region as usual. However, they continued to have their

Annual Dignity at Work Day in Belfast City Hospital in March. They also organised a March and Protest to Stormont regarding the Winter Fuel Payment. CSPA NI continued to support the Region's activities.

21. Review of Concessionary Fares

The then Conservative Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris had announced a major review of the existing Concessionary Fares which allows Free Bus and Rail travel throughout Northern Ireland at Age 60+ and Free Bus and Rail travel throughout the Island of Ireland at Age 65. He said that there was not enough revenue raising at the NI Assembly and it was strongly anticipated that there would be significant changes to the Concessionary Fares. However, when the NI Assembly was restored in January 2024 the matter passed from the Secretary of State to the Minister for Infrastructure John O'Dowd MLA. Just a few weeks after being appointed, Minister O'Dowd confirmed that there had been over 20,000 Consultation Responses, most very supportive of the Scheme. One of those responses was from CSPA who had argued strongly for the retention of the Scheme. The Minister said he wanted to retain the Scheme but that he would have to discuss the funding of it with Executive Colleagues. A Save our Smartpasses Committee was set up on which CSPA were represented. They had a major Rally at Belfast City Hall. Then in August, Minister O'Dowd announced the retention of the Smartpass Scheme with the only change being a £20 admin charge for people aged 60-64 applying for their initial Smartpass.

22. Warm Home Discount Scheme

CSPA NI along with other Pensioner Groups in Northern Ireland have been campaigning for many years to have the Government extend the Warm Home Discount Scheme to Northern Ireland. Citizens in England, Scotland and Wales have been enjoying the benefits of it for over 10 years. We wrote to Communities Minister Gordon Lyons about it in February asking him to meet us. He replied offering us the chance to meet some of his Senior Officials. This took place in April when the CSPA General Secretary was in Belfast. We were surprised when it became clear that the

DfC Officials had not been briefed on the scheme and were instead wanting to talk about a Fuel Poverty Scheme that they were developing. We continue to press to ensure that Northern Ireland Pensioners do not lose out on the benefits of the Warm Home Discount Scheme.

23. Winter Fuel Payment

Like everyone else in the Pensioners Movement we were shocked and distressed at the announcement by the Chancellor Rachel Reeves MP, only a few weeks into the job, that she was intent on withdrawing the Winter Fuel Payment from over 8 million Pensioners. This had not been in the Manifesto on which Labour had won the General Election on 4th July. As this is a Devolved matter, we and others looked to Stormont to see their response. The Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons MLA spoke out in opposition to the decision as did the other three parties in the Power Sharing Executive. However, he added that as the Chancellor would not be providing the resources to make the payment Stormont would not have the means to make the payment themselves. We continued to work with CSPA nationally and our representative asked CSPA to table an Emergency Motion at the CSPA National AGM in October. This was carried unanimously. We also worked with the NI Region of the NPC who organised a protest in October to Stormont. In early November we were invited onto Northern Ireland's most listened to Radio Programme, The Nolan Show. During the interview we called on Ministers Lyons to use some of the £600 million which the Northern Ireland Executive were allocated as part of the Barnett Consequential to fund a Winter Fuel Payment to Northern Ireland Pensioners. We were then pleasantly surprised when on November 19th Minister Lyons announced that the Executive had found £17 million to fund a one off £100 payment to all Northern Ireland State Pensioners. Whilst not as good as the previous £200/£300 recurring payments, CSPA NI welcomed this as a start and something to work on.

24. CSPA NI Website

A lot of work was undertaken by local representatives including our Website Manager Amy Lilley-Richardson working with CSPA Headquarters to redesign the existing Website to bring it into line with the both the CSPA National and the Scottish Branch CSPA Websites. It is hoped to launch the new CSPA NI Website early in 2025.

25. CSPA NI Membership

Last year we had a considerable drop in Membership because of a major Data Cleanse by CSPA Headquarters. Whilst we have tried to recruit as many new members as we could unfortunately 2024/25 saw a further, albeit slower, decline in Membership from 3,740 to 3,404. We deeply appreciate the fact that Members have stayed loyal to CSPA for many years and we do our utmost to earn their loyalty. Unfortunately because of our ageing membership profile we do experience significant losses every year through death. In order to be a sustainable organisation we need to grow our Membership. We encourage every existing Member to talk to a Family Member, a Friend or Colleague who is either a Retired Civil or Public Servant and encourage them to join CSPA. Spouses/partners of existing members are automatically entitled to become members of CSPA.

26. CSPA NI Newsletter

Three further issues of our All Colour, 4 Page Newsletter were issued to all Members in March, August and November 2024. We had a very positive response from members. The only issue raised by a small number of members was whether they could receive the Newsletter online rather than in hard copy format. We intend to discuss this with our Publishers to see what possibilities there might be to have that as an option but that physical copies would remain for those that want them.

27. Specsavers Deal

The Exclusive CSPA NI Specsavers Deal continues to be very popular with Members. Last year's Annual Report reported that 165 members had requested a Voucher, saving Members £3,300. This has now increased to 270 members, meaning a Saving of £5,400!! The Vouchers provide a Saving of £20 to be used on any pair of Specsavers glasses in their £99 and above range.

28. Legal Offer

Our Exclusive Legal Offer secured with the help of one of Northern Ireland's top legal firms, McCartan Turkington Breen, continued. Our Offer includes Free Wills, a Free 20/30 minute initial Telephone Consultation on any legal matter and discounted rates for Power of Attorney and Estate Planning.

29. The Pensioner

The Pensioner, published four times a year by the CSPA nationally and edited by the Award-Winning Editor Christine Buckley continues to be very popular with members. In each edition there are two Columns relating to Northern Ireland. One on the work of the NI CSPA Branch and the other on the work of the NI Assembly.

30. Charity for Civil Servants

We continued our longstanding support to the Charity for Civil Servants, formerly the Civil Service Benevolent Fund. We had a Speaker from the Charity, Viki Oliveira at our 2024 AGM. After her contribution, Stan Blayney, our Chair, presented her with a £3,000 donation to the Charity for all their good work.

31. Working with NIPSA

The CSPA General Secretary has been meeting London based Civil Service Trade Union General Secretaries. Therefore, it was helpful when she was in Belfast in April that along with Tony McMullan, CSPA NI Secretary, she met Carmel Gates,

NIPSA General Secretary and Maria Morgan, NIPSA Deputy General Secretary in the Trade Union's Belfast Headquarters. It was the ideal opportunity for both sides to get to know each other better and for CSPA to thank NIPSA for its longstanding support, providing meeting rooms, photocopying facilities and the use of NIPSA's postal address for CSPA NI's use.

32. Northern Ireland Civil Service Retirement Seminars

One way of trying to raise our profile with prospective members is by having the opportunity to let them know who we are, what we stand for, our values and objectives. That is why we have agreed a text that is used on every Civil Service Retirement Seminar setting out exactly what we can do for Retired Civil Servants. We thank the Northern Ireland Civil Service for allowing us this opportunity.