

# Unison Retired Members Forum

## Newsletter

December 2017.

Issue 4.

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### **Hi everyone.**

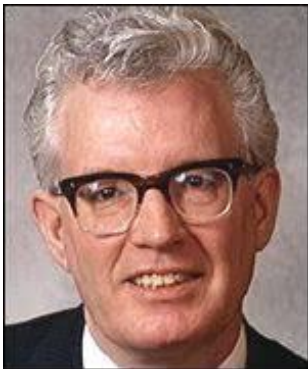
There is a great deal to report on, in this month's newsletter since we last met. With no government in place at Stormont we are seeing deterioration in our services across the region which is having a profound effect on everyone. Our Health Service, our Education System, our Economy, our Infrastructure just to name a few is seeing drastic cuts in services. Voices have been raised, protests have been on the go and people power has been in action with the public coming out in force to highlight their opinions on the breakdown in our society. We have lost dear friends as you will see as you read into the newsletter. The Nora Virus has raised its ugly head in the Northwest which caused widespread disruption to one of the main hospitals in the Maiden City. There is feedback from the two day Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament which took place in Belfast. There is also feedback from the Retired Members Conference which was held in Llandudno in Wales. The National Pensioners Convention also held their Older Peoples day on the 1<sup>st</sup> October and we will be reporting back on the event. Regional Council took place in October where two of our delegates from the forum spoke at same and will hear from them.

### **Tribute to our Friend and Colleague Stanley Bowls.**

It was with great regret at our last meeting of the Retired Members Forum back in May that we learned of the passing of our dear friend and colleague Stanley Bowls. He was a quiet man by nature who felt the need to stand up for the rights of others. Up until his passing back in December 2016 Stanley took an active role in the Unison Retired Members Forum and fought for the rights of Older People. He held the portfolio of Pensions with the forum and had the task of updating the retired members on how we would be affected with the new changes which came into place in April 2016. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him and remembered by this forum.

## **Terrible shock as Unison learns of the passing of a true gentleman**

It was with great sadness across the trade union movement and indeed the Unison branches in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales that news filtered through of the passing of a true gentleman and friend Rodney Bickerstaffe who was for years the General Secretary of NUPE and Unison and later became president of the UK National Pensioners Convention. He was 72yrs of age and commanded great loyalty and affection



among the low-paid workers he fought for and represented, first as general secretary (1981-93) of the National Union of Public Employees (Nupe), then as associate general secretary and general secretary (1993-2001) of Unison, one of Britain's largest unions, with 1.3 million members. Rodney was always recognisable with his NHS dark rimmed glasses and the wave of hair that had many comparing him with Buddy Holly. His tough, uncompromising oratory often held Labour and trade union conferences spellbound, but behind these rhetorical masterpieces, ferociously denouncing inequality and poverty wages. It was he, more than anyone else, who took up the cudgels for a basic minimum wage for all workers following the winter of discontent of 1978-79. At that time public sector workers went on strike against the Labour government's social contract. This was to lead to the collapse of the Callaghan Government and the rise of the Tories under Thatcher. Bickerstaffe himself anticipated an all-out assault on the trade union movement by the Tories on the ability of the trade union movement to organise and negotiate. His mother Elizabeth was a trade union activist and it is clear to see where he got his trade union roots from. Bickerstaff surprised many when he announced his retirement from Unison at the age of 55yrs but he didn't stop there as he succeeded Jack Jones as President of the National Pensioners Convention which champions the rights of well over 11 million pensioners. When union officials would turn to him in times of difficulty and stress, Bickerstaffe would invariably lift their spirits with what became something of a catchphrase: "Keep on keeping on." Bickerstaffe is survived by Pat and their four children. He will be forever remembered by all who knew him in Northern Ireland and the Unison Retired Members Forum send their deepest sympathy to his wife and children.

## **96% drop in EU nurses registering to work in Britain since Brexit vote.**

It was noted by the media back in May/June of this year that official figures has shown that there has been a significant drop by 96% in the number of nurses from the EU registering to work in the UK less than a year since the Brexit vote.



In July 2016, 1304 nurses from the EU came to work in the UK but back in April this year it was reported by the NMC that only 46 had applied to work in the UK. The figures which were obtained via a freedom of information request by the Health Foundation showed that there was a shortage of up to 30,000 in England alone adding that the NHS could not afford such a drop. The fact that EU nurses no longer want to work in the UK is disturbing. Anita Charlesworth (Dir. Research & Economics, Health Foundation) points out that “Without EU nurses it will be even harder for the NHS and other employers to find the staff they need to provide safe patient care. The findings should be a wake-up call to politicians and health service leaders”. She went on to explain “clearly action is needed to offset any further loss of EU nursing staff in the near future. But the overall shortage of 30,000 nurses is not a shortage caused by the Brexit vote. The chronic shortage of nurses is the result of years of short-term planning and cuts to training places. A sustainable, long-term approach to workforce planning is desperately needed.” In the past trusts have relied on turning to the EU to recruit staff to plug the gaps in the service. Theresa May has claimed Britain could not unilaterally guarantee EU citizens’ rights as doing so would weaken her hand in the Brexit negotiations. Right now our nursing workforce is at crisis point across Great Britain, which includes this region and without having the EU to rely upon things are only set to get worse in the NHS. What is needed here in our own region is for the institutions to get back up and running again as this will guarantee a Health Minister in place to make decisions for the people. Currently at this moment in time we will have to rely on decisions being made via direct rule from Westminster which is not good enough. Furthermore funding should never be cut from the nurse training programme and the reintroduction of the bursary for nurses should be a requirement. Nurses have not seen a proper pay rise in over 8 – 10yrs+ and this needs to be addressed as a priority if we are to see an increase in nursing levels.

## **Commissioner continues to Champion Older Peoples Rights.**

Back in June 2016 Eddie Lynch, former CEO of Age Sector Platform took up his new post as Commissioner for Older People NI. Since taking up office he has vowed to champion the rights of older people in the region leaving no stone unturned. He has been out and about meeting older people across Northern Ireland and gathering their views on the issues affecting them. Issues such as Health and the Fear of Crime continue to plague older people's lives in the current climate we live in. Indeed the Commissioner is always pleased to hear from Older People and encourages them to stand up for what is right and speak out.



Over the past year the Commissioner has expressed his concerns over the financial abuse that Older People face in Northern Ireland. This can range from being scammed out of money to siblings taking advantage of a loved one or parent especially towards the end of life. Cold calling has also been a concern of the Commissioner as Older People become vulnerable to strangers turning up at their door and trying to take advantage of their kindness. The Commissioner's Office has taken time to publish booklets on these subjects and encourages Older People to get a copy of the 'Feel Safe' booklet published by Age Sector Platform. Next year 2018 an invitation will be extended to the Commissioner inviting him along to one of our meetings to give us a talk and update us on the excellent work he carries out on a daily bases. Delegates sitting on the Forum will have an opportunity to meet with the Commissioner and ask questions.

## **Norovirus Causes Major Disruption at Altnagelvin Hospital.**



Back in July this year one of the largest hospitals in the North West became the scene of total disruption as up to 6 wards became infected with a vomiting and diarrhoea bug. A total of 25 beds had to be temporarily closed as infection control staff were trying to get to grips with the situation. Staff infected with the bug had to be laid off sick with full pay and visitors became concerned when they could not get to visit their loved ones. While the situation was being reviewed on a daily basis all routine procedures had to be cancelled for the duration of the infection. The duration of the infection lasted for 3.5 weeks before everything finally got back to normal. But questions have to be asked over the recurring infections which continue to raise their ugly head causing mayhem. Does cleaning our wards with soap and water really work? Was disinfection the right way to clean the wards? Do we need more domestics on our wards to get to grips with keeping the wards free from infection? In the past before privatisation came into play the domestic workforce within our hospitals was paramount. They had a daily routine using proper disinfectant to keep our wards clean and the public carried the clean smell on their clothes as they left the hospital. Today soap and water is used to keep our wards clean. Even the nursing staff has to use soap and water when cleaning equipment. We need to see our disinfectant brought back into the cleaning domain again.

## Retired Members Conference in Llandudno a Great Success.

This year the Unison Retired Member's Conference was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> October in The Promenade, Llandudno, in Wales. As delegates and visitors began to gather for the 2017 conference the camaraderie among everyone present was clear to see. Conference is a great place to share with one another the knowledge and experience from the different branches across Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. As always the first day of conference was taken up with a number of self-organised groups holding meetings and various workshops taking place around the venue. There was also a debate going on about Brexit. The delegates representing Northern Ireland were Victor Murphy (Delegate, Unison Retired Members Forum) and Bernie Johnson (Delegate, Branch). The delegation noted that there was only one regional delegate at the conference which was disappointing to say the least. This needs to be addressed. It was clear once again that Northern Ireland women were to the forefront at conference as the new President Margaret Mc Kee took up her position nationally.



She succeeded the outgoing president Lucia Mc Keever also from Northern Ireland who sat nationally for 4yrs and who done an excellent job in her role as president. Lucia Mc Keever was the first president to be elected from Northern Ireland and her successor Margaret Mc Kee has now become the second. Last but not least we should not forget the fantastic job that our own Anna Mc Gonagle did when she was the first woman president and the last woman president of NUPE prior to the amalgamation of the three unions which today forms one of the biggest unions across Great Britain, Unison. Unison Retired Members Forum would also like thank Lucia for all the hard work she put in during her reign as President and to take this opportunity to congratulate Margaret Mc Kee for the future in her role as the new President Nationally.

This year's motion from the Unison Retired Members Forum was as follows:

- **27 TRIPLE-LOCK ON STATE PENSIONS**

Conference calls on the National Retired Member's Committee to work with the National Executive Council on a union-wide campaign to protect the triple lock on our state pensions and to preserve the universal benefits which the Tories have indicated they intend to scrap.



The motion was carried unanimously by all present. Unison's Retired Members Conference is one of the biggest conferences to be held each year as up to 450 delegates and visitors turn up to what is a passionate and rewarding two days. The National Retired Members Committee met straight after the conference to decide which two motions were going to National Delegate Conference.



The two motions chosen to go forward to the National Delegate Conference were Motion 4 – DIGNITY IN SOCIAL CARE – PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT and our own Motion 27 – TRIPLE LOCK ON STATE PENSIONS. This was a great achievement for our Retired Members Forum. Next year's National Retired Members Conference will be held in the Bournemouth International Conference Centre on 9 – 10 October 2018. Concerns were expressed about the hills in Bournemouth with hotels at the top of cliffs not being ideal for older or disabled retired members and branches will need to be aware that taxi fares if necessary should be paid. Finally Unison Retired Members Forum would like to thank Margaret Mc Kee for the excellent job which she did throughout the conference and congratulate her once again in her new role as President Nationally.

### **Education Education Education**

As you all know doing a little course is something that keeps you as a retired member active. It also helps us to focus on keeping our skills, knowledge and experience updated and a means of socially interacting with new people. Doing a Retired Members Course is important as it offers those who are intending to retire the chance in the near future or through ill health to find out about a range of information such as financial planning, benefits advice, volunteering and educational opportunities. Below are a couple of dates to consider for next year:

#### **Planning for Retirement**

Friday 7th April in City Hotel, Armagh

Friday 12h October in UNISON, Belfast

10am – 3pm

Unison invites you to join the

## ***Retired Members Forum***

Help make a difference to older people's lives by campaigning on issues that really matter.

How do I join?

Simply fill in a form **now** and Pay a one off life membership fee of £15 entitling you to benefits.

So be active

**N O W**

## **NPC Dignity Day of Action**

The NPC Branch in Northern Ireland held their Dignity Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 17 to once again highlight the rights of Older People in society. It brought to light the way in which Older People and those in retirement play an important part in the contribution they make to their communities especially when it comes to doing voluntary work. They save the government over £25 billion each year and this was highlighted by the former Commissioner for Older People Claire Keating in one of her reports on Older People. This time round the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) took their day of action to one of the hospitals in the region and began a petition calling for the introduction of the Dignity Code to be introduced into nurse training and for our politicians to support the code.

## **Presentation Course a great success.**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> November 17 a few of our members from the Retired Members Forum attended a course on Presentation which was run by Unison Education. In all up to nine people attended the course. The aim of the course was to help those people who found it difficult to do a presentation and build up the skills needed to become more confident. The tutor Helen Evidence who took the course was brilliant in her deliverance and got everyone involved from the onset. For all present at the course you were made to feel at ease. Helen took the time first to go through her slides and highlight a number of pointers in order to give those present a flavour of what was to come. The course participants were given 45mins to put a presentation together and after lunch each person had to do their own presentation for five minutes in front of the class while the remainder did a critique and feedback. This course is highly recommended for all.

## **Retired Members Sub Working Group on Health deeply concerned over future of Health Service**

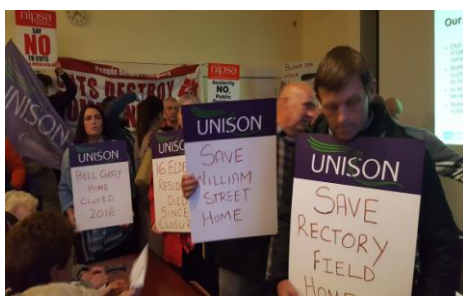
The sub working group on health within the retired members forum have expressed deep concern over the future of the NHS and the way in which our MLA's and MP's are sitting back and letting things go to ruins. Certainly during a number of meetings of the group concerns over having no government in place in the region is deeply regrettable. This region had one of the best Health & Social Care systems in the whole of Great Britain. Now we see it in tatters and hanging by a thread. Clearly our services are in ICU stage for the want of a better word but we as a group will endeavour to continue to fight for our services regardless of the consequences. At an emergency meeting of the working group held on the 16th November the two people at the meeting Martin and Noel had a Brain Storming session and discussion on the future of Health & Social Care. We know already that there are concerns out there that the lack of GP's is becoming a major problem with some Health Centres closing because of it. Look for instance at Mental Health Services were £10,000,000 was supposed to go into same. Where is it? There appears to be an issue around workforce planning or the lack off. Recruiting and retaining staff remains an

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issue and the question has to be asked 'is there an issue around incentive or is it hard to just recruit staff?? A point was brought to the fore that 3140+ doctors belonging to the EU is leaving Great Britain due to Brexit which again is going to put a bigger strain on the Health Service. A report has been published for today's meeting by the Sub Working Group and Martin and Noel will be reporting back to all present.

## **Protests against health cuts stormy.**

People turned out in their thousands across Northern Ireland to make their voice heard against the cuts been imposed on our health and social care system. The protests where in relation to the £76 million in cuts which Richard Pengelly had asked all the health boards to carry out on services here. There were angry scenes across the region as the public turned out in their thousands to make their voice heard at the cuts being imposed on the Health Service. It was clear for all to see that the frustration of the people was wearing thin across Northern Ireland by the large turnouts at the venues where the consultation meetings took place. The public were not prepared to see their services dwindle any further. Enough was enough.



There were reports of disruption at a number of venues as consultation meetings got under way across the region as members of the public and protesters vented their anger and frustration at board members. At the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry there were angry scenes as protesters heckled the CEO of the Western Board as she tried to talk on a number of slides she wanted to present. She could not speak as the public and protesters raised their concerns at the size of the venue. Protesters pushed back tables and chairs towards the wall to try and make room for the large crowd that had turned up. It appeared that the board were not prepared for the large crowd of people. People made their voices heard about Older People, care homes for the elderly, waiting lists, care packages etc and at times it got really heated.

At one point the protesters turned their anger towards the DUP councillors at the meeting as they began to shout about the £1.5 billion which the DUP had negotiated with the Tories. Again things got heated and the two DUP councillors got up and walked out of the consultation meeting claiming they were harassed and intimidated. Later as the protesters finally left the room things began to settle and the consultation process got under way with the tables and chairs been set up again.



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Staff members from the board took up their positions at the various tables round the room and the consultation process finally started. Everyone round the tables got to voice their opinion on any topic they needed to say something about. People power prevailed in the end.

A fortnight later after the consultation process the various boards held a number of extraordinary meetings across the region to feedback to the public and the various organisations just where the cuts were going to take place in their board areas. A day or two before the feedback was due to take place there was an announcement that £40 million was going back into the Health Service. Clearly this was a softener for all those who were attending the meetings as £36 million in cuts was still going to be announced. A number of people were allowed to speak at the meetings before the boards were allowed to deliver their statements. Once the entire process was over everyone made their way home.

Indeed we haven't seen the end of cuts to our services and if direct rule comes into force in this region we may see drastic action been taken by the Tories for as long as they are in power. Be prepared for more in the way of protests in the future.

### **Does Private Health Insurance Really Guarantee your Care.**

Back in the 17th June of this year dispatches ran a story on the institutional abuse at BUPA's Crawford's Walk Care Home in Chester. An undercover reporter for Channel 4 Dispatches programme began carrying out some covert filming. The reporter by the name of Ellis who was in a role as an assistant became disturbed after seeing a client had been shouted at after she became incontinent of faeces. The reporter's findings also found that the clients who were suffering from Dementia were given used incontinence pads and were getting bed baths at 3.30am in the morning. Taking into consideration that BUPA charges £1000 per week for each client it is disgraceful to think that elderly clients suffering Dementia were treated in such an uncaring fashion. Private care companies are only in the game for profit.

### **Coming up in 2018**

*Is Student Nurses been treated unfairly?*

*How Brexit will affect our health service and older people in the future.*

*What direct rule will mean for our services.*

*Does Community nursing have all the tools to look after us at home under Bengoea?*

*What are the implications of people discharging themselves from hospital before a proper care package is put in place?*

**This and much more coming up in our 2018 Unison Retired Members Forum Newsletter.**

## **Serious issues addressed as Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament gets under way**

As over 200 people gathered for what was to be a lively Parliament it was clear in the background that one thing was certain and it was that the institutions were not up and running. This year the Europa Hotel in Belfast became the venue for the 7<sup>th</sup> Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament. People from all backgrounds and organisations began to mingle and chat over a cup of coffee or tea and shared their experiences in life. While this was going on the team from the office was busy preparing to get the Parliament under way. People such as the Vice Chair of the Policing Board Deborah Waters and the two policemen Con James Boyd and Supt Simon Walls who was attending for the first time were amazed to see the numbers who turned out at the Parliament. Finally delegates began to settle and the Parliament got under way at 10.15am with Alison settling everyone down. The newly elected Chair of Age Sector Platform Ivan Baxter who preceded Anne Watson the outgoing Chair began by welcoming everyone to the Parliament. Ivan congratulated Anne on the work she had done during her role as the Chair and went on to say how important the Parliament was and pointed to the fact that it continued to be an excellent voice for Older People. He went on to say that the Parliament continues to empower Older People to speak out on the issues affecting them. On summing up he congratulated the team Eamon, Seamus, Alison, Eleanor and Nichola for the outstanding work they put in to organising the Parliament. He also commended the work that Julie did during her time with Age Sector Platform.

Next on the podium was the speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly Robin Newton MBE, MLA who describes himself as a staunch supporter of the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament. He went on to say that it was so important that the voice of Older People is heard across Northern Ireland. Robin went on to say that we are in difficult times with no assembly up and running. He encouraged ASP/NIPP and the delegates present to continue on with the good work been done and to unite together as one in a unified voice. He went on to condemn outright the attack on an Older Person in Drummore, Co Down on 25<sup>th</sup> October where the victim a male was beaten up and robbed at his home. In summing up Robin pointed out that telephone and email scams are on the increase against Older People and that this was terrible to say the least. He welcomed the fact that the PSNI were in attendance at the Parliament. He finished by saying that he wanted Older People to continue to highlight the issues and concerns affecting them.

Next on the podium was Cameron Watt, Alpha Housing. He began by saying that Alpha Housing was delighted to be the principal sponsors of the 2017 Pensioners Parliament. He felt it a privilege to be able to address the Pensioners Parliament and acknowledged that the Parliament has provided an increasingly influential voice for Older People. He pointed to the fact that Alpha has around 900 homes in sheltered housing across Northern Ireland.

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The sheltered housing schemes have managers who offer help for residents who need it to live independently alongside regular social activities which can include coffee mornings, exercise classes, outings and film night. Cameron went on to say that housing choices will also need to expand to meet the changing aspirations of older people.

Eamon Donaghy the CEO of Age Sector Platform went on to outline to the delegates the format of the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament.

Then Session 1 got under way as the first big topic of day 1, Scamwise began with the launch of the NIPP Scams Report. As Raymond Mc Garvey was unable to attend the Parliament the presentation of the report was read out in his absence. The findings were gathered as a result of running an online survey on scams by ASP. Fear of crime still remains one of the biggest fears for older people across the province. The 'Feel Safe' booklet launched by ASP in 2015 is a great guide that helps older people feel safe in their homes and the communities. In 2016 Age Sector Platform became a partner in the Scamwise NI initiative which brings a number of agencies together such as the policing board, PCSP's, police, Dept of Justice and many more. The aim of the initiative is raising awareness of scams so people can avoid becoming a victim to them. The piece of research carried out by the NIPP showed that 23% of those surveyed responded to a scam. Further evidence showed that one in ten victims lost more than £1000 as a result of a scam with the majority living in rural areas. Online scams are the most difficult to identify for older people. This is just a flavour of what is in the report and you are asked to have a read at just what is going on out in this crazy world of ours. Copy provided today.

Damien Doherty from Trading Standards also gave a very detailed account on just how scams are affecting the lives of people using the internet.

Health and Social Care also came up for big discussion and debate as the ever increasing damage to the service is becoming more debilitating. Indeed people made their voice heard loudly and there were calls for a minister to be put in place and for Stormont to get back up and running. The keynote speaker was Professor Deidre Heenan from Ulster University. She pointed to the fact that money was not always the answer to the problem and she also called for the institutions to get back up and running as a minister needed to be in place to sign off any decision making affecting services. Paula Bradley MLA also agreed with Prof. Heenan but also vowed to do everything in her power to fight for the Health Service she so dearly loves.

Day 2 of the Parliament seen Transport, Brexit and Westminster on the agenda. Again there were lively debates around both subjects not least the removal of the Boyne Bridge to make way for the new hub for bus and rail services. The project team connected with the 'Belfast Hub' did an excellent presentation on the way forward for the future. Finally the NIPP launched their Brexit Report at the parliament and quite a number of concerns were expressed during discussion and debate over the issue.

