

# UNISON Retired Members Forum Newsletter

## Hi Everyone

Since our last meeting back in February there has been a lot of activity. Age Sector Platform has had their plenary meeting back in March which was held in the Europa Hotel. The meeting went very well. At the meeting the Public Affairs Co coordinator Seamus Lynch spoke about the reorganization and the new setup of the campaign committees which are now up and running. Fiona Murphy from the Campaign to End Loneliness addressed the meeting and spoke about the subject. The Sub Working Group on Health & Education have held a meeting back in May and we will be hearing from the

spokesperson on the future of the working group. In relation to health there is a lot going on out there which we need to be keeping an eye on and we will update you on what is happening. The National Retired Members held their latest meeting back in April and a report back will be made available to the meeting. We will hear from the representative on just what is going on across the water and will receive a copy of the regional report on behalf of this forum. The new health committee belonging to Age Sector Platform met for the first time back at the beginning of March. A report back has been

drawn up for the meeting here today. The Utility Regulator held a half day seminar back in April to bring everyone up to speed on the way forward for Consumer Protection here in NI. Over the last few years steady work has been going on to improve better protection for consumers.



## Loneliness

Loneliness is something which affects everybody in society whether you are young or old. The issue has become an increasing topic in society with GP's and the media highlighting the problem. At the plenary meeting of age Sector Platform held in the Europa Hotel in Belfast Fiona Murphy (Manager, Campaign to end Loneliness)

came to talk about the issue and what can be done to tackle the problem. Loneliness is an experience no one wants to go through but at some time in our lives we will experience being on our own. At our National Retired Members Conference in October there will be a number of motions that will come up for debate. Fiona used her time to involve the

audience into the discussion and this proved very helpful. She also highlighted that loneliness can be as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Other factors such as lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression is quite worrying. The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach two

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## Loneliness (contd)

by 2025/6. Half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all. So the question has to be asked 'Are we looking after our neighbour as well as we should? Do we do enough for our older folk living in rural areas? Are we willing to reach out and give the time of day to those in need? All too often we tend to get on without a care in life. When it comes to older people it is important to remember that rural transport is vital for older people ie the bus service as they can use their bus pass to make their way out to town and meet up for a chat and a cup

of tea/coffee. More statistics show that two fifths all older people (about 3.9 million) say the television is their main company while there are over 2.2 million people aged 75 and over living alone in the UK. What needs to be worked on is getting our older people to participate in community groups where they get to meet people their own age. While this is going on in many communities it needs to expand. With the statistics on excess winter deaths over the period 2017/18 in NI standing at 1500 then society has to be more vigilant and work together with all generations to

produce a better future for all. This is all the more reason that as a community we need to uphold the right to keeping our bus pass in order to be able to get out and



about. Everyone has an important role to play in looking after one another in all generations.

## Pensioners concerned over rural ATM crime in NI.

With the ever increasing theft of ATM's growing in the region older people and pensioners are concerned that access to their pensions and state benefits may become a problem.



Already shopkeepers are becoming reluctant to reinstall the machines due to their vulnerability and questions are being asked if enough is being done to catch these criminals. Over the last year banks and post offices are closing in our rural areas and so this means that people depend on the

ATM as a means of accessing their money. A new PSNI task force was set up recently to try and get to grips with the thefts and while one person has been arrested for these crimes there is still a large operating. The public have grave concerns as well over the accessing of their details which may be in these machines. The police meantime are asking the public to be vigilant and report anything suspicious. We will continue to keep an eye on this story as this has implications for all of us.

**'Over the last year banks and post offices are closing in our rural areas.'**

## ICTU Conference a great success.

The ICTU conference was held in the Clayton Hotel, Belfast over two days (21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> February). The first day began with registration and lunch and afterwards began to settle down for the beginning of the two day event. Speakers included Seamus Lynch (ASP), Eddie Lynch (COPNI) and many more from both North & South. The opening address was given by Owen Reidy (Gen.Sec.Congress) in which he spoke about the ever changing

world in which we live in. At the event this year was members of the Youth TU Groups who were there to talk about Trade Unions and Intergenerational Solidarity. As we all know Intergenerational

**"Older people were been blamed for our young people not been able to get on the housing and job markets"**

issues has become somewhat concerning after the Intergenerational Commission published their report 'A New Generational Contract' in which pensioners and older people were been blamed for our young people not been able to get on the housing and job markets. The report was distributed to a number of bodies to have a look at and it made grim reading for some as the report was done by a right wing think tank.

## ICTU Conference a great success (contd)

Victor Murphy (Chair, Retired Members Forum, UNISON) spoke on this very subject after he took the time to read the report which in his words was scandalous. He condemned the report for its attack on older people in which Lord David Willetts who chaired the commission pointed to the fact that the pension system should be changed and that older people are going to be a burden on our health & social care system. They also talked about doing away with the 'Triple Lock' which enhances our 'State Pension'. What is most concerning is that the leader of the TUC and an Economist from the

TUC supported the report which was damning to older people and pensioners. Younger people are being forced out of the jobs and housing market due to austerity that was created by the Conservative government which David Willetts is part of. The report doesn't recognise the great work that is ongoing in our communities by different groups of young people and older people to build the gap which exists between these different groups. Other speakers like the Commissioner for Older People spoke about the disgraceful way in which the elderly were cared for in Dunmurry Manor

and said that things needed to change and Government need to get into Stormont so decisions can be made. Neil Duncan Jordan from the NPC also spoke on the Intergenerational Commissions report and give his views on the Commission's report. Speakers also spoke about the contribution that our older people and pensioners make to the economy each year. Speakers also spoke about the concerns that the commission's report is set to turn generation against generation rather than build the gap that so greatly exists out in our communities.

## 300,000 people in poverty in NI

It is disturbing to think nowadays that there are people out in the community who are finding it hard to make ends meet from one week to the next. The cost of living has put a heavy burden on both generations and things are not set to get any better as time goes on. Over the past 10 years we have seen food prices rise by 26.5% with tariffs on energy set to rise even greater. A lot of concern has been expressed by consumers carrying out their weekly grocery shopping that since the

introduction of the metric measure consumers are finding that they are continuing to pay out the same price on food and drink with measures and weights reduced dramatically. There is a call by consumers for trading standards and the consumer council to

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address this situation. One way of addressing the issue would be for the treasury to put more money into the economy to help households overcome poverty. Dependency on foodbanks to help put food on the table has been an immense help to many on the poverty line. Government needs to be addressing this serious issue now and commit to putting more money into the household.

## Tackling Intergenerational Unfairness.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> May this year the House of Lords Select Committee published their report 'Tackling Intergenerational Unfairness' which follows on from the report done by The Intergenerational Commission. The report in its capacity sets out to divide both generations by turning one against the other. The Joint Chairs of the UNISON NI Retired Members Forum have expressed grave concern at the report which sets out to make

recommendations on taking away the benefits that pensioners, retirees and older people enjoy as part of their later years in life. It points to the fact that older people will become a burden on the Health and Social Care System as they get older and frail and become more dependent on the system. Other recommendations such as doing away with the 75+TV Licence, increasing the pension age and increasing the age by

which we receive the bus pass is very concerning. The Joint Chairs of the Retired Members Forum got together with the National Retired Member for NI to carry out an analysis for submission to Unisons National Retired Members Committee. Aware that the TUC have been involved in the report the Joint Chairs have asked that the submissions are made available through the NRMC.

# Age Sector Platform

Everyone is aware over the last number of meetings that it would appear to be the case that Age Sector Platform is experiencing financial difficulties in that funding is gradually running out. At a recent board meeting discussion took place relating to the two day Parliament due to take place in October/November time. The two day Parliament event has always been a great means for us as retirees and pensioners to air our concerns and views on issues affecting us to the elected body like our MLA's and MP's. The amount of work carried out to put the two day event together is in itself an enormous task and over the years the staff in the office has done a fantastic job in keeping

the momentum going. Over time however staffing levels have fallen down from 5 to 3 and this puts an enormous strain on the current staff to put together the event and do the work they are tasked with in the office.

In issue 30 of the Aspire Magazine there are a number of great stories to bring you up to date with what is going on. Excess Winter deaths has reached an all-time record in Northern Ireland over 2017/18. Loneliness has also become a big issue in our communities and this has an impact on both generations as you will see in the magazine.

There is much more to read such as the launch of the 'Strategic Framework for the

Health and Wellbeing of Older People' in which the framework reflects the outcomes that older people view as necessary for their quality of life. The magazine will be distributed at the next meeting of the forum in June.

If Age Sector is to survive then much needed funding is required. Failing that then all the great work that has been done over time like the introduction of a Commissioner for Older People NI and the various campaign committees such as Health & Social Care, Fear of Crime, Pensions, Transport and Westminster will all have been in vain.

A meeting of the board will be held next in September to determine the way forward.

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## Challenges facing our Health & Social Care

Everyone is by now aware of the big challenges facing our Health & Social Care system. However, one has to be concerned about the number of incidences of what one can only describe as incompetence by senior managers whose role it is to manage and run these services. We have recently become aware of the shortage of radiologists. Some of our A&E departments in our hospitals in the region have to curtail their opening hours due to the lack of doctors.

GP services are also threatened by shortages and increasingly more and more of our nurses are coming from abroad. Members of the public who do not work in health and social care are not always aware that there are departments within

each of the trusts and the Health and Social Care Board who are there to look after manpower planning such as Directors/Assistant Directors. Surely, if manpower planning is not about addressing these issues what is it about? The recent Northern Ireland Audit Report highlights the failure of the Transforming Your Care Initiative to become reality. Part of the reason for this is the lack of funding to put into the service.

The question has to be asked relating to the shortage of our Doctors and Nurses for instance 'Is there an incentive for young people now a days to come into the profession knowing that much of the terms and conditions of service have been eroded over time by bureaucrats who have only business in mind

when running a service that should be 'free at the point of delivery'? Our NHS is the public's health service and is worth fighting for to ensure we get a service that we have paid our taxes and National Insurance for all our working life. At some time whether we are young or getting older there comes a time when we need at



some point in our lives the excellent service that our NHS has to offer and so it is vital for government here in Northern Ireland to get back up and running and deliver a service that the public deserve.

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