



Charity No: 1043081

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

January 2016 Newsletter

Our very best wishes to all our members and supporters for 2016!

And now we are getting ready for our

“Beat the Winter Blues”

party which will be held on

Wednesday 24th February 2016

1.30 to 3.30 pm

Highbury View

Garden Gate, 87-89 Ronalds Rd N5 1XQ....

Food, drink, music

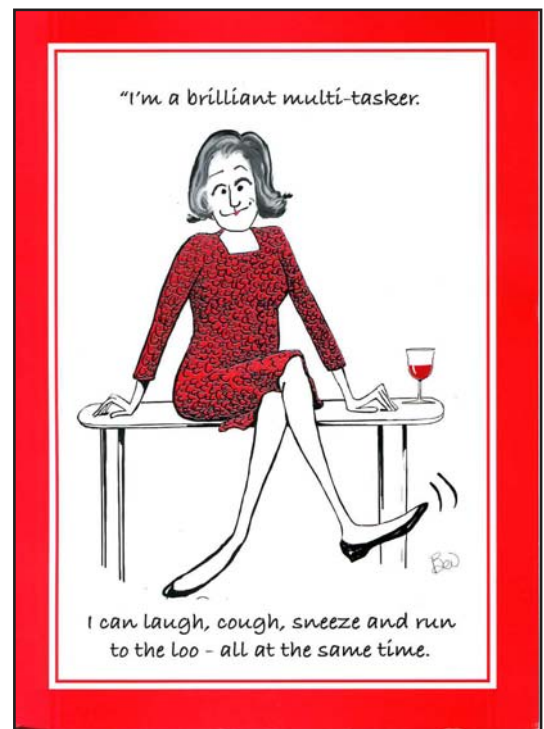
See directions on back page, and please let us know if you will need transport to get there: ring IPF on: 020 7226 7687



The picture shows Pam Zinkin making a sale under the watchful eye of the Christmas elves at our Christmas Fair on 12 December. It was a great occasion and our thanks go to all those who made and donated the goods for the stalls and the refreshments. We raised £450.



Picture of pensioner representatives assembling opposite the Houses of Parliament on 4 November 2015. See report and picture of the IPF delegation on page two



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

New Year's eve and about to write these notes; in the background a colourful pop concert with "Take That" on TV, and although my watching or listening to pop music is limited, I took notice; the music was good and the story interesting. This mellowed my thoughts from my stronger political campaign write-up, to the end-of-year holiday and thoughts of peace and good will.

Peace and good will? Helped along by our MP Jeremy leading the opposition in that ten-hour debate on bombing Syria. Sadly we lost the vote; wrong decision in my opinion. How could the majority of our MP's choose to bomb and kill innocent people? It is no surprise that news about the bombing has become non-existent.

I am also with Jeremy about Trident, a weapon costing billions that no one dares use and millions of people worldwide without enough food, clean water or shelter. It's obscene. Let's hope 2016 will see the peace movement make tremendous inroads toward stopping world wars

The "Take That" concert was on the good old BBC which, without a doubt, has the best of programmes, and we need to support all it stands for. That's why a small group from IPF with our banner stood alongside the NPC with actors' and broadcasting trade

unions to protest about cuts to services, and in particular to the government's use of every public relations trick to undermine and weaken the BBC -- our not-for-profit excellent broadcasting service.

Of course sometimes we have reason to criticise the BBC, but the government's animosity is an insult to what in general is a wonderful service with top entertainment covering a much wider field than any of the commercial broadcasters without charging the exorbitant fees of Sky TV and the Murdoch empire. And how many of us want another commercialised advertising TV company with jingles and sales talk every few minutes? So public support for the BBC is essential.

Osborne and Murdoch met recently, no doubt something along these lines: "what can I do for you Rupert?" Both want a BBC failure and the government has obliged by transferring the cost of free TV licences for the over 75's to the BBC! Clearly this is a state welfare expenditure!

Hoping that our Forum can combine with all other community groups in 2016 to reserve our energy to campaign for peace, rights and justice, including a living pension and not the pittance we receive today!

Happy New Year!

IPF delegation to the Lobby of Parliament on 4 November 2015



Islington Pensioners Forum members on College Green on 4 November National Pensioners Convention Lobby of Parliament

A packed meeting in the House of Commons, hosted by Kelvin Hopkins MP focussed on the two main issues of pensions and care that affect millions of existing and future pensioners.

Government Ministers of Pensions and Care said they were "too busy" to come.

But Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, the Shadow Pensions Minister spoke and answered questions. Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union gave a rousing speech and Neel Radia, the chair of the National Association of Care Catering, gave a measured but passionate report on the cuts in the meals-on-wheels services (see page 4), Jan Short (NPC vice chair) spoke on the crisis in Social Care and Dot Gibson (NPC general secretary) called on those present to build for action on 1st February National Dignity Action Day and the 2016 Pensioners' Parliament.

The 2015 Koestler Awards

Art by offenders, secure patients and detainees

This is the annual national showcase of arts by prisoners, offenders on community sentences, secure psychiatric patients and immigration detainees. It is the eighth exhibition in an ongoing partnership with the Koestler Trust and Southbank Centre.

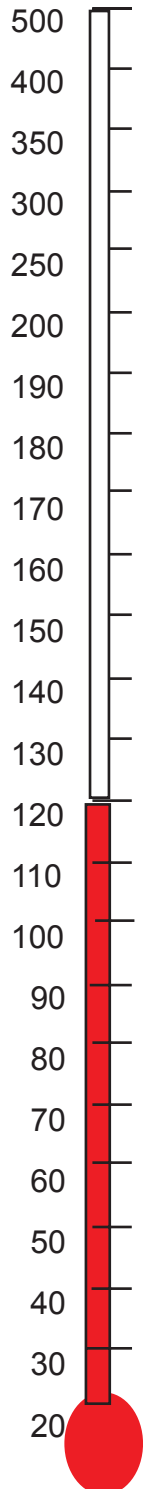
The picture shown here was painted by a woman in Brook House Immigration Removal Centre, and below there is a poem by a prisoner in HM Prison Glenochil.

But these are just a taste of the amazing, interesting, thoughtful, clever and revealing pictures, sculptures, poems, needlework and videos produced by people who are otherwise out of sight and out of mind to most of us.

The exhibition ran from 1st October to 29th November, but we will remember to put an advert in our Newsletter in time next year, for we certainly think that there are members who would like to see for themselves; there are exhibition tours twice a day, which give personal insights and enable visitors to hear first-hand how the arts reflect, enrich and can sometimes change the lives of people in secure criminal justice settings.



THANKS to all those members who've paid the £5 sub for 2015. Let's keep it up now for 2016!



Chemical Cash Cow

The pink one keeps me happy and stops me feeling sad
 The red one keeps the pink one from making me go mad
 The white one helps me sleep and the dark blue one helps me think
 Though I sometimes think of suicide if I take it with the pink
 Two green ones keep me calm and help me not to panic
 But I do not take the green ones if I think that I am manic
 My orange one, it has side effects, they make me feel quite ill
 So I told this to my doctor who gave me a yellow pill
 Now I've got a rainbow which I swallow when I'm told
 And the makers of the rainbow? They earn a pot of gold.

**YOUNG
& OLD
UNITE
FOR
RIGHTS
AND
JUSTICE!**

In our last Newsletter we reported on the Taxpayers Alliance advice to government to cut older people's benefits, now we are pointing to the Resolution Foundation's report that 65-74 year olds have a bigger share of total wealth than the under-45 age group. So what is their advice to politicians? They don't advocate properly paid jobs and affordable homes for the young! They don't say that increasing the retirement age whilst there is so much youth unemployment is wrong. Instead they advise cutting older people's income and services! The truth is that both young and old are under attack whilst those at the top of society have been awarded tax cuts and bonuses. We must resist these divide-and-rule policies and unite young and old for rights and justice!

Latest government figures show that.....

- three-quarters of tenants hit by Bedroom Tax have to miss meals.
- there is a 45% rise in the number of homeless families living in bed & breakfast.



The National Association of Care Catering

are asking the government to consider making Meals on Wheels a statutory protected service for those considered most at risk in the community to help ensure greater provision across England, Scotland and Wales.

Meals on Wheels are currently discretionary. Councils do not have to provide this service. . . . here are THE FACTS:

- Over a third of top-tier councils in the UK have already scrapped the Meals on Wheels service
- 51 per cent of top-tier councils that still have Meals on Wheels services expect further service reductions in the year ahead
- More than one million older people are malnourished in the UK
- 93 per cent of the one million older people with malnutrition in the UK are living in the community
- Average cost of a meal per day is £3.55. . . . a hospital bed costs an average £300 per day
- Prevention of malnutrition will save NHS money
- Cost of malnutrition to UK economy is £13billion per year

***SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS * SOS ***

The Malnutrition Task Force has found that 46,000 older people have been stripped of their meals-on-wheels service in the last three years. Spending on meals-on-wheels fell by 47% over that period.

The Task Force confirms the link between the drastic decline in meals-on-wheels and the significant increase in hospital admissions for malnutrition. The Task Force also says:

“This mainstay of community care not only provides a nutritious hot meal, but it is often the only social contact a vulnerable older person has during the day. Meals on Wheels staff are also well placed to be able to keep a watchful eye and raise any concerns about a person’s health or their ability to cope at home, before a crisis is reached.”

Malnutrition Task Force? Independent experts funded by the Department of Health

NOVEMBER FORUM MEETING RAISES HOT, TOPICAL ISSUES

Bob Archer of the Greece Solidarity Campaign explained that many Greek families are living on their older generation’s pension income, but they have been further impoverished by legislation reducing the state pension and occupational pensions, imposing penalties for early retirement and increasing the retirement age. Meanwhile each new “bail-out” of the Greek economy scarcely reaches the people as most of the money goes straight out of one bank account into another somewhere in northern Europe. In the process the banks are making a huge profit out of the “loans” whilst millions of people suffer increasing poverty. There are big cuts in health and education with many closures of hospitals and schools. There is already 50bn

euros-worth of privatisation in the public sector, the sale or renting-out of big parts of the national estate; market reforms and attacks on rights at work. On the other side of the coin “Solidarity for All” is a Greek movement bringing together volunteers and sympathetic doctors and pharmacists setting up clinics, and local authorities organising food, clothing and toy banks and arranging farmers’ markets to bring cost-price products to local markets. It is this movement which is being supported practically by the Greece Solidarity Campaign, raising donations and building solidarity links between communities and trade unions in Britain with those in Greece.

Councillor Andy Hull told us of the problems for the Council to provide services with a

great deal less in government grants. Most worrying is that Islington has the highest number of children living in workless households than any other part of the country. The Council is streamlining and consolidating services, asking people to access services on line (the cost of face-to-face interviews averages £7 whilst on line the cost is nearer 7p) and they are sharing administration with other Councils as well as re-allocating office space. At the same time Islington Council is in the forefront of a London-wide campaign called “Red Lines” -- enough is enough!
The Council will have Question Time sessions on 1st December and 11th January leading up to the 25th February when the budget must be set.

Continued on page five

NOVEMBER FORUM MEETING

Caroline McGraw: Public Health lecturer at City University.

explained that there is a pilot scheme aimed at improving the training of District Nurses covering Islington, Camden, Haringey and Newham. It will be a one-year full time programme which needs the participation of older people. A number of members said they would accept the invitation to participate in a seminar.

Catherine McLene.

introduced members to a social enterprise with a social mission to alleviate isolation and loneliness by setting up a "buddy-hub". This looks out for those who through physical problems, the loss of neighbours, leaving work and other events find themselves alone. The group sets out to "pair" people and set up befriending schemes connecting the community.

SINCE THE MEETING.

a number of Councillors have made donations from their Local Initiatives Fund to Islington Pensioners Forum for which we give our warmest thanks. And on **5 January** our officers will meet Council leader, Richard Watts and Cllr. Janet Burgess to discuss our campaigning work; in particular the problems of adult social services affecting domiciliary and nursing home care.

"It's no fun being on benefits"

A recent report by several voluntary organisations and advice centres in Islington, subtitled "A study into experiences of Welfare Reform in Islington", gives some impression of how the benefits system can so badly affect the lives of individuals on low income. To view online: www.vai.org.uk/news-policy

REVIEW BY DAVID MILNER

This welcome report characterises the benefits system as punitive. Two of its key findings are

"Rather than incentivising work the reformed benefit system can punish people who do not work." and *"The benefits system is an unpredictable 'roller-coaster' that contributes to mental health problems and crisis-mode existence, for example due to (often wrongful) sanctions against those receiving benefits."*

That government [DWP] officials are making bad decisions can be seen for example in the success rate of people who appeal decisions that they are "fit for work". The success rate averages at 40%, but can be as high as 70% if the appellant is supported by someone who knows the regulations of the system.

This is the tip of an iceberg, since many people are too despondent to even consider appealing. Often it is difficult to even get an appointment at an advice centre, due to the vast increase in enquiries.

Rather than present statistics, the report has used interviews to present an impression of what it is like to try to live on benefits, and the stress of the benefits system. It finds an adverse effect on mental health through:

- Stigma and low self-esteem
- Stress, fear and anxiety from benefit-process complexity, uncertainty and pressures of poverty and debt
- Anger and powerlessness resulting from unfair treatment in the Benefits System, eg. sanctioning

A worrying feature of the report is that state pension is wrongly listed as a benefit when it is an automatic entitlement paid for by our National Insurance contri-

butions. This error was pointed out to Councillor Andy Hull, who wrote the foreword to the pamphlet. The regulations are being changed so that people will need 35 years of NI contributions to get a full state pension. This will leave many people without enough to live on. A recent OECD report finds that 31 out of 34 OECD countries have a more generous state pension than the UK.

Although the report paints a worrying picture of trying to live on benefits, the reality is far worse. Some things which are not even mentioned in the report:

- JobCentre staff have targets for the number of people to sanction, no matter whether claimants fail to comply with the regulations.
- JobCentre staff do not always know the regulations which they are supposed to abide by, and there is evidence of them lying to benefit claimants.
- The deaths and suicides which have resulted from withdrawal of benefits.
- The massive increase in the use of foodbanks.
- The increased difficulty in getting informed help to contest benefit decisions.
- The cuts in legal aid.

But worse is to come! The report mentions that Universal Credit is being introduced, but not the horrors which await. The benefit rules will be stricter and payments in real terms reduced; money will be paid monthly and in arrears. This will make debt more likely, and people running out of money after three weeks with no money for food. It won't be a choice between eating and heating but between eating, heating, rent or children's clothing.

“We need to talk about social care providers”

The King’s Fund has begun a major new research project, in partnership with the Nuffield Trust, to understand the effects of public spending reductions on social care services over the past five years.

Richard Humphries, King’s Fund Assistant Director of policy has issued a statement saying that amid growing concern that most NHS providers are sliding into deficit, we should be even more worried about social care providers. The main points of the statement are as follows:

- This is a complex and sprawling sector with more than **12,000 independent organisations**, ranging from big corporate chains to small family-run businesses, charities and social enterprises.

- Less than 10 per cent of social care is actually provided by councils or the NHS – their retreat from long term care provision is virtually complete. But unlike the NHS, when a social care provider hits the financial rocks, bankruptcy not bail-out is the more likely scenario.

- Our health and social care system is highly dependent on residential care and nursing homes – there are three times more care home places than hospital beds. And nearly half a million people rely on home care services to be able to live at home. The consequences of failure are potentially calamitous for individuals, families, staff – and indeed the NHS and social care system as a whole.

- So we should take the mounting evidence about the fragility of the social care market very seriously. The underlying malaise stems from the widening gap between the actual cost of care and the amount local authorities can afford to pay, which has fallen by almost 5 per cent in real terms over the past five years.

- Another pressure on costs, especially for nursing home providers, is higher spending on agency staff because of a shortage of qualified nurses – **up by 55 per cent according to one survey**. These pressures are making it tougher for providers to deliver good care that meets regulatory standards within the rates paid by councils.

- Last year, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) found that **one in five nursing homes did not have enough staff on duty to ensure residents received good, safe care**.

“austerity is exposing the fragility of the private business model when the requirements of commerce and the values of care point in different directions”

- It is not surprising that many see the Chancellor’s announcement of a so-called national living wage as a potential tipping point – it will add at least £1 billion to providers’ pay bills by 2020 with no indication of how or whether it will be funded from the public purse. If big providers are struggling, spare a thought for smaller operators, grappling with the same cost pressures but without economies of scale.

- The warning signs are clear; **56 per cent of directors of adult social care report that providers are facing financial difficulties now**. Three of the country’s top five home care providers are planning to pull out of publicly funded home care or have already done so; many more have handed uneconomic contracts back to local authorities.

- Many care homes are charging higher rates for people who pay for their own care – **as much as 40 per cent higher in one study** – in order to compensate for or ‘cross-subsidise’ the lower fees paid by local authorities. Inadequate

local authority rates are prompting new investment to be targeted at self-funders in better-off areas. Fears grow that there will be another major care provider failure on a similar scale to the collapse of Southern Cross plc in 2011 which put at risk the care of 31,000 older people.

- The risk of failure is greatest among very large providers who are heavily dependent on local authority funding. The new **market oversight regime** introduced by the Care Act should ensure these are spotted, but options to rescue them remain limited. Along with the withdrawal of some providers from the publicly funded market, the cumulative effect of these responses will be to make it much harder for people reliant on public funding to get the care they need at a rate local authorities can afford.

- There are two fundamental issues, the more obvious being the failure of successive governments to address the now chronic underfunding of the public social care system.

- But a deeper problem is the failure to think through the consequences of shifting the bulk of our care provision to a private business model. Austerity is exposing its fragility when the requirements of commerce and the values of care point in different directions.

THE FUTURE OF THE NHS IN ISLINGTON

Report of 10 December meeting by Pam Zinkin

The main conclusion from this important meeting is that we need to protect the NHS!

The majority do not understand the government's agenda, and as long as we do not pay directly for health care it is hard for many to understand how privatisation is undermining our NHS. Six expert speakers explained this.

Lewisham GP Dr Louise Irvine, who stood against Jeremy Hunt in the recent election, and **Co-Chair of KONP, Professor Sue Richards**, explained the NHS was subject to market forces which are now increasingly weakening the national service.

Louise used to refer her patients anywhere in the country but cannot do so now since the complicated NHS Act took away the Secretary of State's responsibility to provide the *national* service.

The billions of pounds shortfall in current funding, the increasing gap in UK health spending relative to European countries of comparable wealth, are hidden by George Osborne's accounting.

An example is the cost of a tendering system designed to force public health trusts to compete with the private sector. Recently a private company which was awarded the contract for elderly care in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, pulled out because it couldn't make enough profit. The contract reverted to two NHS hospitals at a likely cost of £2m.

The impact of all this underfunding and mismanagement is to be seen all around us in Islington:

- the cuts in local government social care budgets mean that hospital beds cannot be released for new patients;
- the closure of three GP surgeries in Islington, in large part due to the increased costs of commercial rents in the borough, which are not properly accounted for, as well as the low morale of GPs themselves;
- the inadequacy of out-of-hours services in Islington.

Everyone present at the meeting had a story to tell.

Council Leader Richard Watts explained the severe cuts in budget were making it difficult for the Council to plan for a more joined-up health and social care system and measures for greater democracy to ensure that local health services can be more responsive to local demographic needs.

Dr Yannis Gourtsoyannis of the BMA's Junior Doctors' Committee gave a stirring account of the Junior Doctor's dispute with the government, in which an astonishing 98% of doctors voted to take action against Jeremy Hunt's attempts to impose a

new contract. Amongst other measures 'normal' working hours would be redefined as 7.00am to 10.00pm six days a week! So exhausted doctors might be seeing patients. The Junior Doctors' struggle is far from over and will affect all NHS workers so they need our support.

The new Islington GP Federation, consisting of 29 of the 34 Islington GP surgeries, was explained by **GP Tom McAnea**. This has been formed to enable practices dedicated to public provision to bid for GP contracts.

As Sue Richards explained, the government has stacked the procurement of the out-of-hours service in favour of larger private bidders by forcing the five clinical commissioning groups in North Central London to offer a single contract for the work.

Islington Keep Our NHS Public contributed to consultations which altered the contract specification, and is delighted that Islington GPs have united to defend their patients against privatised health care.

Shirley Franklin of the Defend the Whittington campaign reminded us that public outcry and well-organised public action can reverse decisions which would have disastrous consequences for local communities. Shirley and others from the floor also spoke movingly and knowledgeably about the neglect of the needs of mental health patients.

But none of these battles are over, and as Sue Richards reminded us in the closing session, quoting the familiar words of Nye Bevan:

“the NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it.”

National Dignity Action Day
Monday 1st February, 11 a.m. at the Town Hall
 Join Islington Pensioners Forum to support Islington Council's opposition to Government cuts in services leading to the isolation, loneliness and death of frail elderly and disabled people



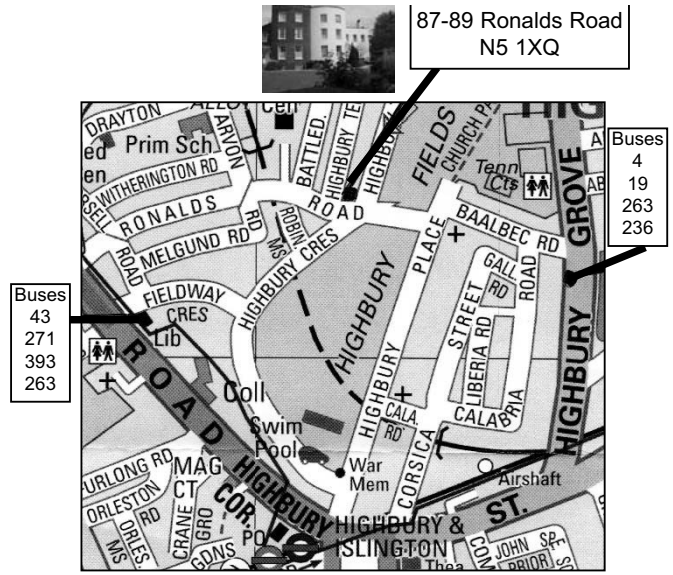
INFORMATION

Every Monday BINGO	1pm at IPF Hall, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN
FORUM Thursday 21st January	10.30 am at Islington Town Hall. Speaker, Eric Hill, Secretary of Islington Unison Retired Members on Unison's Ethical Care Charter and the NPC's Dignity Code
NATIONAL DIGNITY ACTION DAY: Monday 1st February	Outside Islington Town Hall at 11 a.m for a photo opportunity in support of the stand against the cuts in social care funding
FORUM Thursday 18th February	10.30 am at Islington Town Hall, Speaker to be arranged
BEAT THE WINTER BLUES PARTY: Wednesday 24th Feb.	1.30 to 3.30 pm Highbury View, Garden Gate, 87-89 Ronalds Rd N5 1XQ. SEE DIRECTIONS BELOW. . . .

We want to hear from you.

- Write to Islington Pensioners Forum, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN
- Call us on: 020 7226 7687
- Email us at: ipf@talktalkbusiness.net
- Office open from 10.30 a.m. -- 2.30 p.m., Tuesday to Thursday, but please call first.
- Sign up for our online newsletter on our website: www.islingtonpensionersforum.co.uk

Presidents: Jeremy Corbyn MP & Lord Smith of Finsbury
Chair: George Durack **Secretary:** Dot Gibson
Treasurer: Eric Hill Charity No: 1043081
 Supported by Cripplegate Foundation & Islington Council



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