

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM
The voice of Islington's older community
February 2016 Newsletter



Forum members were joined by Cllr. Richard Watts (Council leader) second right and Cllr. Janet Burgess (deputy leader) third left on 1st February at the Dignity Action Day demonstration outside the Town Hall. Then Forum members attended Islington Council's Annual Awards to Care Workers for which the National Pensioners Convention Dignity Code is a guide. Nominations for these awards came from the people they care for; the short texts accompanying the nominations showed what a difference these caring, compassionate, friendly and thoughtful people make to frail, vulnerable older people.

Beat the Winter Blues! Food, drink, music!

Come to a party on Wednesday 24th February 2016, 1.30 to 3.30 pm

Highbury View, Garden Gate, 87-89 Ronalds Rd N5 1XQ

see map on back page showing bus services

If you need transport, please let us know at the next Forum meeting or 'phone 020 7226 7687

IPF unanimously supports the NHS Junior Doctors

Junior doctor Ed Palmer from Whittington hospital, has completed six years and is half way through his training as an anaesthetist. He spoke to our Janury Forum meeting.

Explaining that the junior doctors'

strike was not about week-end working and money, it was about a new contract which the government is trying to impose, he said "this would be unsafe to patients, unfair to doctors and undermine the future of the NHS".

Doctors already work at week-ends and were covering emergencies during the strike. Contrary to government statements, there was no evidence of more deaths at week-ends and

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I attended a 75-strong meeting of representatives of pensioners' organisations in Lambeth on 28 January, where they launched a Lambeth Older People's Association (LOPA) to defend services and resist the cuts.

Faced with huge cuts in government funding, most Councils are reducing their services dramatically, including loss of jobs, and at this meeting the main complaint was that the Council is not talking to the people.

This lack of consultation and explanation creates a scenario of blaming everyone else for all the problems. We have seen this far too often, even injecting mistrust among friends; this dirty political persuasion is deliberately being fed into politics. I do not like it! Many cannot see the implications when people only get to know what is happening far too late, and don't understand what this means to them.

John McDonnell -- Labour's Shadow Chancellor spoke at this meeting, and took note of these problems. There is certainly a breath of fresh air blowing in from Jeremy and John, which is having the good effect of opening eyes to the politics of today.

Dot Gibson was the other speaker, representing the National Pensioners Convention, and like John her emphasis was on building unity across the generations to defend services. The housing crisis and the

NHS were big topics at this meeting.

The more I read about hospitals, I wonder who the government think they are kidding! Although already over budget, the government is constantly telling the NHS to make savings when in fact they are in debt. This government, from the coalition in 2010 to the present, have been clear that they want to privatise and fragment NHS services and go as close as possible to the health system in the US by 2020, and most of the damage will be done, unless we put a stop to it.

We have been able to book the Council Chamber for a Mayoral Hustings on 11 April. Sadiq Khan, Labour and Zac Goldsmith, Conservative have been invited -- at the time of writing we are waiting for their reply so that we can invite the other candidates.

Other North London pensioners from Tottenham and Wood Green and Hornsey have already agreed to come to the meeting

The election of London Mayor is important; it will demand a change of direction to maintain much of London for those who live and work here. The present incumbent has presided over the sale of most of London; meanwhile the housing crisis grows resulting in many people having to move out and commute to work. This adds to the transport problems. So being able to question the candidates in this election is very important for us.

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IPF SUPPORTS JUNIOR DOCTORS

Ed was worried that some patients came very late to emergency care because they had been told there were fewer doctors on duty -- this was not true.

Working hours at present are not more than 72 hours in seven consecutive days and no more than 13 hours in four consecutive nights, but the new contract would define normal working hours as 7am to 10 pm Monday to Saturday inclusive, and only after that would working hours be considered as anti-social. Only 30 minutes rest would be allowed in a 10-hour shift. Doctors are so

busy that they usually don't have time for a break anyway!

Ed currently works one week-end in four, but he would be expected to work one in two, and would never know when these might be and nor would his partner, also a junior doctor. They can't plan a family as it would mean that they would not know if either of them would be there for their children. They accept transfers as part of their training, but do not know where their next training position would be, and now their removal costs would not be paid.

Also, if they decide on further training (e.g. anaesthetics and radiology) the years spent on specialising in one would not

count and they would have to go back to the basic salary as if they had just started out. Time spent in medical research would not be allowed either. Also the GP training supplements will be removed.

Many junior doctors are considering going abroad. So, please

- Tell friends and family the truth
- Do not believe the media stories
- Write to MPs
- Write to the hospital supporting junior doctors

As agreed unanimously, a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Health telling him we support the junior doctors.

DEMOS, PETITION, AND THE COUNCIL'S LEGAL ACTION, FORCE TfL TO STEP BACK

Transport for London has stepped back from its decision to close Caledonian Road tube station for eight months this year from 14 March to 31 December. But this only came after Islington Council issued legal proceedings saying that the two lifts could be updated one at a time thus enabling the station to remain open.

TfL had claimed their closure decision was based on safety considerations, but the programme director of infrastructure, George McNulty said: "I don't really see that there is much of a safety argument to make." This led to local resident, Nigel Scott starting a petition, which has now been signed by over 7,000 people.

Seen alongside the lengthy closure of Tufnell Park for many months, local people saw TfL's decision on Caledonian Road as a step too far, especially as it is one of the very few step-free stations on the tube network and so a favourite of local pensioners.



However, although TfL are meeting the cost of the Council's legal action (said to exceed £50,000) their definitive decision on the closure plans are still awaited, and so the petition is still alive and kicking! You can sign on line at:

<https://www.change.org/p/transport-for-london-boris-johnson-don-t-close-caledonian-road-tube-station-for-8-months-install-4-lifts-instead/u/13895728>

THANKS to all those members who have paid their 2016 subs. The £5 a year helps IPF to keep going! So keep the subs coming in!

The future of the over 75s free TV licence in danger

The minute the chancellor announced that the new BBC contract would include responsibility for the free TV licence to over 75 year olds, we knew that its future would be in danger.

It is a cynical move by government to out-source a pensioners' universal benefit to an unelected body, and then wash its hands of the consequences.

In effect this is the chancellor managing to privatise government cuts at the expense of Britain's older generation, and this benefit was only introduced in the first place because the UK state pension was and remains amongst the least adequate in Europe.

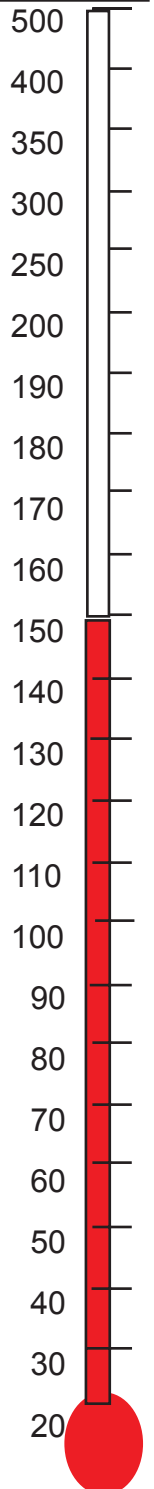
The *Campaign to End Loneliness* says that 5m

older people consider the television to be their only source of company and one in ten pensioners say they feel completely cut off from society, family and friends.

The BBC's responsibility starts in 2017, but the Director General, Lord Tony Hall is already going into action.

He has given former head of the Civil Service, Lord Gus McDonald the job of motivating and mobilising older, famous celebrities to persuade ordinary 75 year olds to give up their free TV licence.

The danger is that some older, vulnerable people may be taken in by this when they should be protected.



YOUR "LOCAL NAVIGATOR".

Elaine Gill from Age UK Islington spoke at the January Forum meeting. She is a "Local Navigator" whose job is to assist people over 16 but more often the over 55s to understand the underlying issues which cause and/or exacerbate their health problems. The NHS pays Age UK to run this scheme. The navigator can send people in the right direction for services, e.g. befriending or exercises, sheltered housing or the telecare service.

Contact details:
Age UK Islington 0207 281 6018

PREPARING DIGNITY ACTION DAY. . .

IPF committee member Eric Hill also spoke at the January Forum meeting, preparing the ground for our demonstration on National Dignity Action Day. He explained the background to the problems of a failing social care service: a low state pension, the high cost of fuel and problem homes leading to 43,900 pensioner winter deaths, the government's austerity measures and privatisation which are undermining our health and social care. He called for support for our campaigns. An article by Eric will be published in the March newsletter.

“INTERGENERATIONAL FAIRNESS” AND GENERATIONS UNITED!

The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has launched a major new inquiry on “intergenerational fairness”. A press release on 13 January announced that it will be looking at “the question of whether the current generation of people in or approaching retirement will over the course of their lifetimes have enjoyed or accumulated much more housing and financial wealth, public service usage, and welfare and pension entitlements than more recent generations can hope to receive”.

But it seems the committee has already made up its mind! They say: “the group born in the middle of the baby boom (between 1956 and 1961) have been forecast to receive from the welfare state 118 per cent of what they contribute, while recent research shows that younger people are on course to have less wealth at each point in their lives than earlier generations had acquired at the same age”, and . . .

“The Committee’s inquiry will investigate the extent to which this disparity is a consequence of government policies, such as the ‘triple lock’ which protects pensioners’ incomes and/or broader and demographic trends. It will consider steps which could be taken to address any intergenerational unfairness.”

Oxfam research shows that the real gulf is between rich and poor. The top five billionaires are richer than the bottom 20 per cent of the population! “Britain is becoming a deeply divided nation,” says Ben Phillips of *Oxfam*, “with the wealthy elite who see their incomes spiral up, whilst millions of families are struggling to make ends meet.”

Britain’s richest family, the Grosvenors, headed by the Duke of Westminster, is worth about £8 billion.

With another £12 billion of welfare cuts still to come, the gulf will become even wider with many more families resorting to food banks just to eat.

The Commons committee seems hell-bent on divide-and-rule to blame today’s pensioners and those between the ages of 55 and 60 (especially those who struggled to buy their home) for the problems of young people (tuition fees debts, zero-hour, low wage short-term contracts, and the housing crisis.)

What is the truth behind the Commons committee’s statement that “the current generation of people in or approaching retirement. . . have enjoyed or accumu-

lated much more housing and financial wealth”?

Ready for Ageing Alliance research states that although housing wealth is around a total of £1.4trn, two in ten householders between 60 and 64 have outstanding mortgage debts of £50,000, and the 2.6m people with assets greater than £100,000 have an income of less than £15,000 a year. Also, in deprived areas people can expect good health for only 52.2 years, and in less deprived areas for 70.5 years; if they end up needing long term care they will often lose their home to pay for this.

The “blame-game” attacks on pensioners has been going for at least four years. Right-wing think-tanks,

like the Intergenerational Foundation, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Nuffield Foundation all issued reports in 2012-13 stating that not only have older people largely escaped the current round of austerity measures, but that the continuation of many universal pensioner benefits (such as the winter fuel allowance and free bus travel) are damaging the economic and social life chances of younger generations, as well as the economy itself. (Bankers?)

(This thinking leaves out older people’s unpaid caring for grandchildren and frail elderly relatives.)

The UK state pension remains amongst the least adequate in Europe; 2.5m pensioner households live in fuel poverty, spending more than 10 per cent of their

income on fuel and this figure is rising. There were 43,900 extra winter deaths of older people in 2014-15.

Of the approximately 11m people over state pension age, fewer than 250,000 have enough income to be taxed at the higher rate; around 4.5m have enough income to pay tax at the standard rate whilst the remaining 6.4m have an income below £10,500 – not enough to pay tax, and 5.6m older people have savings of £10,000 or less. Rich? We don’t think so!

Nevertheless many parents and grandparents are doing their best to assist young family members to get a home to live in and to bring up children. On 15 January the Evening Standard’s headline said: “Cost of housing delays starting a family!”

The social crisis is hitting all ordinary people. The main thing for us is to unite across all generations to stand up to these divide-and-rule actions.

“The ‘blame-game’ attacks on pensioners has been going on for at least four years.”

GENERATIONS UNITED!

The Housing and Planning Bill currently before parliament will:

- Force councils to sell-off existing council homes with no guarantee of replacement.
- Scrap secure tenancies and introduce “pay-to-stay” means-testing.
- Push up rents and waiting lists.
- Divert public funds and land to private developers and away from truly affordable homes for rent.
- Fail to improve security or control rents for private renters.
- Attack the housing rights of travellers.
- Threaten the future of housing co-ops and tenant management organisations.
- Reduce secure housing options for people fleeing domestic violence, people with disabilities, sheltered housing and other vulnerable groups.
- Undermine mixed stable communities.

For more information about the Bill:
www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/



IHOOPS
 ISLINGTON HANDS OFF OUR
 PUBLIC SERVICES COALITION
www.ihoops.org.uk

**PUBLIC
 MEETING**

THE HOUSING BILL

A THREAT TO ISLINGTON COMMUNITIES

TUESDAY 9th FEBRUARY

**7pm at Islington Town Hall
 Upper Street, N1 2UD**

Speakers: Councillor James Murray (Cabinet Member for Housing), plus local tenants, campaigners and trade unionists. (MPs and London Mayoral candidates invited)

It has been estimated that 26,433 social rented homes are at risk in Islington, at a time when there are 18,000 households on the waiting list.

Council and housing association tenants with household incomes above £40,000 could see their rents triple.

The speculative development boom sweeping through the borough is already pricing many local people out.

Now developers will be able to make even more profit by building publicly subsidised “Starter Homes” instead of genuinely affordable homes for rent. The Housing Bill will do nothing to

improve the housing crisis. It will make it worse.

Scrapping secure tenancies will damage our communities and push more people into sub-standard private renting.

Now the government say they want to “bulldoze” some council estates. This is a land-grab. The government doesn't care about social housing or our communities -- they just want to make money out of them.

We demand:

- Direct investment in council and social housing as part of a national house building programme.

- Secure tenancies for all, including private renters.
- Housing for need, not greed.
- Rent controls.

A national campaign involving tenant groups, housing campaigners, MPs and councillors has been launched to

“KILL THE BILL”.

A national demonstration against the Housing Bill will take place on **12th March in central London**, details to follow.

IHOOPS

Islington Hands Off Our Public Services Coalition
www.ihoops.org.uk

“The Big Short” - cashing in on the 2008 crash

This is not a review, simply a note drawing attention to this film on the dangers of “the market” in housing

Leading up to the 2008 crash, the banks and mortgage companies specialised in ninja loans (no income no job) to poor people desperate to find a place in the “American Dream”. All they wanted was a decent job, a place to live and to bring up their family, but at the mercy of “the market” they lost everything, and ended up with debts they could never meet, no job and no home.

This film dramatises the incredible true story of the men who made a killing on “sub-prime loans” by betting against the US economy, with big human cost. A motley group realise that the housing market is pumped up on bad loans and that it is bound to fail -- “a time bomb”. They go to Florida to investigate the truth of the situation and find a housing estate “like Chernobyl: 1,000 houses, only four people living there”.

INFORMATION

Every Monday BINGO	1pm at IPF Hall, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN
Tuesday 9th February 7 pm	Islington Town Hall : Public Meeting on the Housing Bill (see page 5)
FORUM Thursday 18th February	10.30 am at Islington Town Hall.
BEAT THE WINTER BLUES PARTY: Wednesday 24th Feb.	1.30 to 3.30 pm Highbury View, Garden Gate, 87-89 Ronalds Rd N5 1XQ. MAP 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

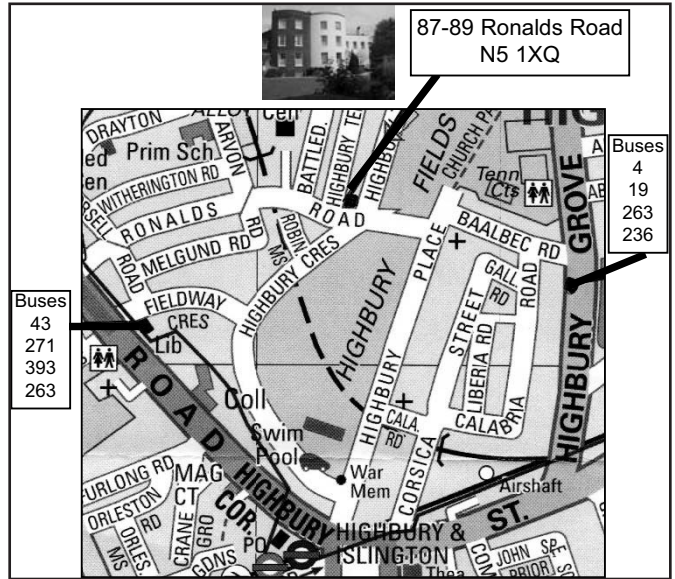
Chair: George Durack **Secretary:** Dot Gibson

Assistant Secretary: Annette Thomas

Treasurer: Eric Hill

Charity No: 1043081

Supported by Cripplegate Foundation & Islington Council



If you would like to send an article, a letter, a poem etc. for publication in the Newsletter, please get it to us by 20th of the month.

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