



ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

February 2019 Newsletter

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Office opens from 10.30 am to 2.30 pm Monday & Wednesday (but 'phone first)

Charity No: 1043081

Friday 1st February

National Dignity Action Day

Islington Pensioners Forum campaign stall

11a.m. to 1 p.m. "Morrisons Arcade" Holloway Road

Everyone accepts that the social care system is in crisis, yet the government has delayed a Green Paper on the subject a staggering six times! Meanwhile, many older people and their families are struggling with a complicated and unfair means-tested system which treats them all differently.

- Every year 40,000 family homes are sold to pay for care.
- At the same time, care workers are very poorly paid and overworked.
- There has been an increase of 35% in the number of informal (family) carers since 2001.
- In 2017-18 there were 32,115 requests from people who later died waiting for social care.

This can't be right! We believe all care should be funded by society as a whole — like the NHS — through general taxation, and provided publicly, free at the point of need.

We are asking members to come along, even for a short time between 11 am and 1 pm and help give out leaflets on this important day. We in the Islington Pensioners Forum stand up for the basic right to a free National Care Service for all.

SAVE THE FREE OVER 75 TV LICENCE

The government has forced the BBC to start paying for the free TV licence for over 75 year olds, and now the BBC is proposing that this universal benefit should be scrapped. Islington Pensioners Forum will be joining the National Pensioners Convention protest at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 100 Parliament Street (off Whitehall):

Free coach leaving Islington Town Hall, 11 a.m. on Thursday 7th March

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU WANT TO COME ON THE COACH — YOU CAN TELEPHONE 0207 226 7687 OR 0207 226 7226 (leave message including your telephone number)

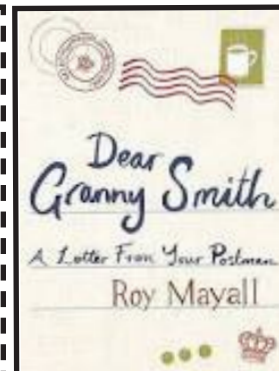
NPC PENSIONERS' PARLIAMENT

10 - 14 June 2019, Winter Gardens, Blackpool

PLEASE LET US KNOW WHETHER YOU WILL BE ON OUR DELEGATION SO THAT WE CAN MAKE THE BOOKINGS

Cost £250 — Pay £10 deposit and spread the cost over the months

BOOKING FORM AND MORE INFORMATION ON BACK PAGE



page 3
Chapter Seven:
"Out on the Round"
"This is the best part of the job"

A VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

The first Islington Pensioners Forum of the New Year was well attended, with a lot of new members and new faces. We had a very good speaker in Professor Sue Richards from Keep Our NHS Public (see report page 5), who spoke about the problems arising in the National Health Service including the policy known as PoLCE, "Procedures of Limited Clinical Effectiveness" (previously known as Low Priority Treatments).

As chair I would like to thank our speaker and also Forum members for the marvellous input in the question and answer session, which included the crisis of social care and the increasing number of informal (family) carers.

There are demands (included in the Daily Mirror's social care campaign) that the Carer's Allowance should be increased from the current £65, and one of the things I found out was that once such a family carer reaches the state pension age they are no longer eligible for this allowance!

This made me think of Sandra (my partner) and I, for we travel to Sandra's Mum in Rye Sussex twice a month, a round trip of seven hours with fares of £34.00. We are not alone in these circumstances but you cannot find help financially and age takes its toll.

In April the basic state pension for those who retired before April 2016 will rise by just £3.25 to £129.20 a

week. The importance of defending the right to the state pension, paid through our National Insurance contributions, cannot be emphasised enough, and we must be aware that this is constantly under attack.

In fact the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has called on the UK government to consider means-testing the state pension, and the same idea was put forward by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2017.

Both of these organisations welcome the government's decision to raise the state retirement age, and consider that the "triple lock" should end — this is the annual rise of the basic state pension by the higher of wages, inflation, or 2.5%.

There can be no doubt it is important that we build the campaigning pensioners' movement, and so it was with great pleasure that we saw so many new people at our January meeting.

The speaker at our next Forum meeting (Thursday 21 February. 10.30 am in Islington Town Hall)) will be Dave Ward, the general secretary of the Communication Workers Union (of which I am a member) and the meeting will be followed by our annual End the Winter Blues get-together with a buffet and time to get to know each other.

Hope to see you there! **Bob Collins**

Paying Islington Pensioners Forum Subscriptions

Dear Friends,

£5 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

A couple of years ago I was approached by members asking when their subscriptions were due for renewal.

At that time members renewed their subscriptions throughout the year. This led to some members forgetting when their renewal date was due.

We decided therefore that all renewals should be paid in January or February of each year.

Anyone who joins the Forum after February will renew the following January or February. There will however be a cut-off point at the end of October, e.g. anyone who joins in November or December 2019 will not need to renew until January or February 2021

Best wishes,

Eric Hill

TREASURER

NEW MEMBER RENEWING SUB

NAME:

ADDRESS:

POST CODE:

TELE NO:

EMAIL:

ANNUAL SUB ENCLOSED.....£5.00

PLUS DONATION?.....

Cheque payable to: IPF Send to:

Islington Pensioners Forum,
1a Providence Court, Providence Place,
Islington N1 0RN

Or hand in at Forum meeting (see back page)

Dear Granny Smith : Chapter 7 — Out on the Round

Last month we published chapter six. Roy explained how the post is sorted, ready for delivery — the postie's workstation and "learning the frame": "It's like banging your head over and over again, and then learning how to duck!"

Now I want to take you out on my round. This is the best part of the job, and is the reason why us postal workers continue to do what we do. We all love this part.

Indeed, I often think, in my paranoid moments, that it is precisely because we like our job so much that the Gods of power and economics — whoever they are who are running the show — have decided to mess it up for us.

"Look: there's a happy bunch of workers. We'll have to put a stop to that!"

It's hard to say what the pleasure is. It's very hard work. We carry a lot of weight. Our bikes are very heavy. They are built of granite and red kryptonite and would probably survive a direct nuclear hit. And then we fill them up with mail. There's mail in the tray on the front, two bags' worth piled high, probably as much as we used to carry for our entire round 30 years ago. There's mail in the panniers at the back. Mail in a bag on our shoulders. Mail on the rack at the back. And we haul this weight from the office to the beginning of the round, straining our knees and our hips to do so.

But after this, of course, the weight is going down. Bit by bit, letter by letter, door by door, the weight is diminishing. And we're out in the fresh air, on our own, no one looking over our shoulders, with enough time, even now to get to know the people on our rounds. So it's sociable and solitary at the same time. And despite the fact that we are walking over the same bit of ground every day, through the same streets, past the same houses, it is our own unique and special corner of God's great creation. It is our territory. It matters to us.

And the weather is different every day. And although the people are the same, the conversations are different. And even now, late as it is, overworked and weary as we can become, there's a real sense of joy, of engagement with the world, of accomplishment, of getting on with the day's business, which is the important task of getting the mail through.

I start my round on Valley Road, up one side and down the other, in two bundles, with any parcels in the bag on my shoulder.

Mr. Jones lives at the top end of the road. I don't know how old he is; in his eighties at least. He's usually standing at the kitchen window when I come up the road. He's looking out for me. When I get to the point where I have to cross the road to get to Mr. Jones's house, I will indicate whether I have mail for him or not.

A shake of the head means no, otherwise I'll hold the letter up to show him what he's got. By the time I've crossed the road, he's made it to the front door and is waiting for me.

"Aren't you supposed to be on strike?" he says. You won't believe the number of times I've heard that. It's because the Union have called a series of one-day strikes over several days, and everyone is confused.

"Tomorrow," I say and hand him his Sky Magazine.

"What's this?" he says, looking disdainfully at the cover. "I never read it."

"Why do you get it then?"

"I don't know. I suppose I'm privileged because I get Sky."

"You like it then?"

"Oh yes. It stops me going down the drain," he says laughing in a self-mocking way.

We have a conversation like this almost every day, a few seconds' banter before I get on with my round. It was Mr. Jones who initiated this daily routine. One day, when I first started doing this round, he came to the door to greet me.

"I always like to see the postman," he said. "It makes me feel that everything's right with the world."

It's moments like this when I know how important my job is. It's not just delivering the mail, it's being a valued and trusted member of the community. It's helping people to keep in touch. It's keeping an eye on people's houses and making sure everything's OK. It's knowing people and who they are. It's being, in some cases, their friend.

Next up the road is Mr. Dawson. If he's expecting a letter he'll be ready at the door. The pretext is that he's polishing his brass letter box. The door will be open, and he'll be bending down, a cloth in his hand. I was faintly amused at his impatient waiting at first, until I realised how important it was to him. He is waiting for a hospital appointment.

Unfortunately all I have to hand over today is a letter from a charity and a handfull of door-to-door leaflets. I carry bags full of this kind of rubbish every day. Some people don't even have the decency to address the mail they're sending out. This is the stuff we call "door-to-door" or "household". You call it junk mail.

It arrives by the box-load: all these oversized bits of glossy paper or card advertising this or that useless

/continued on page 4

/Dear Granny Smith continued

gizmo that nobody wants and nobody needs. No one pays any attention to it. No one bothers to read it. It goes straight through the door and into the bin.

This is the most embarrassing thing about my job. There's Mr. Dawson waiting on a letter that could mean life or death, and all I have to hand over is a begging letter and a bunch of slick, silly adverts.

Mr. Dawson looks at the letter from the charity. "What's this?" he says. "Last week they were begging for orphans. This week it's for animals."

"I'm sorry," I say and then move on. I'm doing this for about four hours: full pelt, non-stop. The first bag takes about an hour and a half to two hours, depending on the weight of the mail that day; the next two bags take about an hour each. I'm always massively overweight. I do thirteen roads, including blocks of flats and an old people's home. There are nearly 600 delivery points on my round, that's letter boxes to you. Sometimes there are gates and gardens to negotiate, sometimes it's terraced streets. I look into your front window as I approach.

There's a cliché about us postmen: the picture of us being chased up the garden path by a ferocious dog taking a bite out of our pants. Unfortunately, that's very nearly the truth. Dogs hate us, with good reason. It re-

veals something about our relationship to you. We are intrusive in your lives. We push something through your letter box. We get quite close to you without you knowing, and we learn a lot about you on the way. We know who's left who for another man. Who is divorced, who is single. We know if your son is estranged from you. We know when it's your birthday or your wedding anniversary or when there's been a death in the family. We know where your Aunt Vera went on her holiday and we know that she wished you were there.

We also know when you are away. We are in a position of great responsibility in relation to you and your property. That's the trouble with all the arguments for casualisation of mail delivery: they don't take this into account. It is being fuelled by the demand of the corporations for faster and cheaper mail, not by the demand of the consumer for security in their homes.

Sometimes we get thieves amongst us, it's true: people who steal your credit cards, or open your birthday cards to see if there's any cash in them. They always get caught in the end. When one man does one round, the customers notice, and they know who it is.

Once the mail is broken up, once the postie has been stripped of his round, once the relationship between a postal worker and his customer has been destroyed, then what?

Then it will be the end of the security of your mail.

Universal Credit and Mixed-Age Pensioner Couples

While all eyes have been focused on Brexit, the government has announced changes to pension credit from 15 May this year which mean that disadvantaged pensioners could lose more than £7,000 a year.

It means couples where only one partner is over the state pension age (which is now 65 or up to 67 by 2026) will no longer receive the extra benefit.

Instead the partner who is below the state pension age will have to make a claim for universal credit, which merges six working-age benefits into a single payment. The information shows this will mean a 50% reduction in benefit income, affecting all new claimants, amount-

ing to approximately £140 a week.

Pension Minister Guy Opperman argues that the change will ensure that the same work incentives apply to the younger partner as others of the same age.

This change exacerbates the problems already being experienced by people forced to keep at work or find other employment as the state pension age increases. For instance such a job could be on a short-term or zero-hours contract meaning that income can vary and force people to constantly re-apply for the universal credit whilst their pension-age partner is denied pension credit.

NHS News. Pam Zinkin (also see page 6)

Beware health care offers that look great but have hidden costs to the NHS or are really deceptive.

● Sight tests or hearing tests may be offered at home. If you can't get out that's good but if you can go to an optician of your choice or can get a hearing test at your family doctor's it is better for you and the NHS. It is obvious that these sort of home visits cost the NHS more.

● "GP at Hand" advertises promise quick access to a NHS GP via your mobile. They target young healthy people, not the frail elderly nor those with a terminal illness. They usually begin with a symptom checker using arti-

ficial intelligence! If you need to see a GP face-to-face you have to travel to their nearest centre. And it means registering with them so you are no longer on your own GP's list.

● Ask your own chemist before you decide to use "Pharmacy2U". Some local GPs do use this for repeat prescriptions. It is another service where they take over supplying your medicines and will send them to you. They say that this service does not cost the NHS more but again it undermines local pharmacies where you have contact with the chemist and can ask questions.

LET'S MAKE THIS A BETTER YEAR — by Eula Harrison

Most nations have recently welcomed the New Year,
Celebrating lustily, happily, with merriment and joy.
Now the celebrations have ceased, let's think peace.
Can we not keep this sense of elation and
anticipation
Where all should be made to feel welcome, happy
and free?

"All wars and strife should cease between nations".
This should be a daily resolution for all leaders,
Scrap the deadly weapons of war, for discussions
and talks,
Pounding smaller nations into submission is
barbarity
Try finding a common ground for some familiarity.

Ways should also be found to keep knives and guns,
Out of the hands of bloodthirsty scurrilous youths,
The handguns, knives, acid and clubs are just as
brutal,
A destructive, destroyer of lives, creating more strife,
Instead they should meet others with smiles not
knives.

Say "hello" to those you meet along the street,
A small gesture "maybe" but could be a catalyst for
change
Lifting the mood, making that person feel happier,
By merely thinking someone smiled at me,
Leaves a smile on the face radiating feeling free.

The greed of industrialisation causing pollution
discharged
From factories into rivers and streams ending in the
seas
Destroying the ecology of oceans and reefs,
The rape of the earth for minerals, gems and oil,
Leaving harmful waste behind, polluting the soil.

The harm that we humans do daily to our planet,
Entrusted to us to take care of to nurture and enjoy,
Instead the destruction of vast areas of the rain forest
for timber
Destroying wildlife, leaving the land scorched causing
droughts,
Turning farmland into dustbowls so farmers abandon
their ploughs.

Let's do our very best in making this a better happier
year,
For the people we come in contact with in our daily
lives
A bright "hello" a few kind words or a friendly smile,
By doing our small part in making our world a happier
place
Where all feel welcome more smiles will be etched on
faces.

Now let us think about plastic, but without happiness
or smiles!

The government's 10-year plan for the NHS

Our January Forum meeting welcomed **Professor Sue Richards** speaking on the next 10-year plan for the NHS; she warned of current and future cutbacks and rationing due to chronic underfunding.

Saying that the government has the ability to manage the news, she emphasised the need for all of us to understand what is behind the promises given when this plan was launched on 7 January

A £2.5 billion a year increase for the NHS until 2023/4 is a big improvement on the 1% increase between 2010-2018, but lower than the 3% per year between 1980-2010 when waiting lists were reduced, and definitely not enough to reverse the nine years of underfunding due to the government's austerity measures.

Waiting lists for surgery are already increasing, from 4.1million in March 2018, to 4.3 million in September 2018. The target of 62 days from diagnosis to treatment for cancer patients is increasingly not being met. and the so-called "Winter Crisis" has become year round.

One highly contentious policy is encouraging hospitals

to sell off land to help keep within budget and avoid financial penalties, but exploiting capital assets goes against all prudent financial advice.

A positive proposal is to encourage people to live more healthy lifestyles. but this requires investment in prevention and support services and there are insufficient resources for this, especially in deprived areas, and especially when this goes alongside the rationing of services to people who are already suffering and require NHS treatment. For example, in North Central London (our area) such rationing (PoLCE) is aimed at saving £2 million a year.

Although it is reasonable to restrict some operations, which are considered to be ineffective, it is unreasonable and cruel to force patients to wait longer for surgery by having to prove they have been in severe pain, and sleep-deprived for at least six months, thus "reducing" the numbers on the waiting list, and using this to tell us that the NHS is coping — government policies are working!

Frances Bradley

INFORMATION

BINGO	This is suspended for the time being. We will keep you informed.
Lunch and a chat on Wednesdays	1 pm in IPF Hall, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place N1 0RN
IT and Smart Phones on Wednesdays	3.30 p.m in the IPF Hall, address above
Friday 1st February	INTERNATIONAL DIGNITY ACTION DAY (SEE FRONT PAGE)
Thursday 21st February	10.30 a.m. Forum meeting at Islington Town Hall. Speaker: Dave Ward, General Secretary, Communication Workers Union followed by a lunchtime END THE WINTER BLUES BUFFET
Thursday 7 March	Coach 11 a.m. from Islington Town Hall (SEE FRONT PAGE)
Monday 11 March, 7 p.m.	Keep Our NHS Public meeting Islington Town Hall (see article below)
Thursday 21 March	10.30 a.m. Forum meeting at Islington Town Hall
Thursday 18 April	10.30 a.m. Forum meeting at Islington Town Hall

NHS News. Pam Zinkin (also see page 4)

There is such a lot happening in our NHS so rapidly and so hidden from us so that it is hard to recognise the NHS.

- The 2012 Act changed the NHS so that it is no longer the responsibility of the Secretary of Health to *provide* our health care only to *promote* it.

- So running the services has been delegated to 211 local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) but these are now being forced to work with other CCGs in new structures. Islington now has to work with Camden, Haringey, Enfield and Barnet (North Central London) with joint financial and planning control.

- One of the policies is community care and care closer to home. This sounds good but the priority of those that now manage and control the finance and structure of our NHS (no longer doctors and patients) is to save money not to improve care.

● So how does this affect us and can we have our say?

Come to the meeting on Monday 11th March, 7.00pm at Islington Town Hall where more will be explained.

TO BOOK FOR PENSIONERS' PARLIAMENT 2019 IN BLACKPOOL

10 June: a comfortable coach from Islington Town Hall, returning on 14 June

We will have bed, breakfast & evening meal in the Gresham Hotel just over the road from the Winter Gardens, where Parliament takes place

There are informative sessions on issues of importance to all of us and there is a great social evening in the Winter Gardens ballroom on 12th June

Name.....Address.....

.....Post Code

Tel:..... Email:.....

Enclosed £10 deposit (cheques payable to "IPF")

**Send to: Pensioners' Parliament,
IPF, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, Islington N1 0RN**