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**GENERAL SECRETARY’S REPORT 2016**

The 2015-16 year was dominated by the follow up to the General Election, changeover of the Secretariat, and a re-examination of our campaign priorities to ensure they are consistent with the challenges faced under a new Majority Conservative Party Government. A major manifesto promise has already been broken in the delay of the £72K Social Care cost cap. We are continuing to be vigilant and to work hard to protect current and future pensioner interests.

**PSPC manifesto**

The Manifesto, first agreed at the 2014 PSPC AGM, highlights the specific interests of retired public servants and all older people. The areas it covers, such as State pensions including the single-tier pension, income tax allowances, accrued rights in public service schemes, indexation arrangements, the suspension of pensions on cohabitation or remarriage and universal pensioner benefits remain extant and relevant.

**Single- tier pension**

The Pensions Act received Royal Assent just after the 2014 PSPC AGM and the single tier pension was introduced from 6 April 2016. We do not oppose the concept of a single-tier pension. Our main concerns are the level of the pension payable, especially where a member has been opted out of the second state pension, and the exclusion of existing pensioners. The PSPC is therefore continuing to ask the Government to make a commitment to an early review which considers including existing pensioners on a no detriment basis, and a 15-year transitional period for derived spousal rights accrued under the current system.

**Suspension of dependents’ benefits on remarriage or cohabitation**

The PSPC Election Manifesto included the issue of suspension of dependents’ pensions on remarriage or cohabitation. Although improvements have been made prospectively in some schemes, the ‘no retrospection’ policy operated by previous Governments means that many people are still subject to these provisions. NARPO and Forces Pensions Society have campaigned on this over the last few years and made some progress. Constituent organisations have been asked to contact their pension schemes and report back to the Secretariat on the position with regard to widow’s pension on cohabitation/remarriage. The PSPC will maintain this as a priority issue with the view that the work done so far could open the door to changes in other schemes

**Pension indexation**

A motion carried at last year’s AGM, proposed that PSPC continued to work with other pensioner organisations to; ***consider, in the wake of the 2015 General Election, whether a return to the use of RPI remained a realistic objective and whether there are more achievable measures for protecting pensioners from inflationary pressures.***

During the summer, the PSPC responded to the consultation *Measuring Consumer Prices: the options for change.* In line with the Motion passed at the 2015 AGM, we made the point that RPI was our preferred measurement of increase in the cost of living but that we were aware that the UK Statistics Authority had removed recognition of RPI as a “national statistic”. Failing the reinstatement of RPI we believed the CPI (H) was the next best measurement, because it at least takes into account housing costs, but that more accurate construction was needed. Furthermore, PSPC expressed its support for the work on the development of the Household Inflation Index (HII) by Jill Leyland and John Austin.

Initial indications in a letter from the National Statistician to the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority show that he is likely to conclude,when he publishes his report by the end of 2016, that CPI(H) should become the ONS preferred measure of consumer inflation, that the development of HII had potential, and that RPI was not a good measure of inflation.

Further discussion will take place on this issue around the Motion submitted from Prospect Retired Members Group for the 2016 AGM.

**Universal pensioner benefits**.

Shortly after the General Election, we heard that the cost of providing Free TV Licences for over 75 year olds would be transferred to the BBC as part of their funding agreement. This represents a transfer of responsibility for social policy and is a worrying development. PSPC will seek a meeting with the BBC Director of Strategy to put forward our concerns after the Government has published its White Paper on the future of the BBC.

Last October, Alex Wild, Director of the Taxpayers Alliance, caused uproar at a Conservative Party Conference fringe meeting when he said that all Pensioner Benefits should be cut and that this would not impact on future votes because many of those affected would be dead, and those who weren’t would probably not remember which Government made the cuts! PSPC will remain vigilant to any threat to Universal Pensioner Benefits.

**Uprating of State Pension for Overseas Pensioners**

PSPC have continued to support the case for uprating the state pensions of some British pensioners who have retired overseas. PSPC met with PHA Media who represent the International Consortium of British Pensioners campaign on state pension indexation and have agreed to bring the campaign to uprate frozen pensions from their current level to the attention of politicians and to ask for constituent members support on future lobbying action.

**Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI)**

The Executive Committee have agreed to support a campaign known as WASPI. The Campaign has been gathering momentum over the year and relates to those women who have received late notification of increases to their State Pension Age.

**Age related personal tax allowances**

Since last years’ AGM, where the EC confirmed that this policy would no longer be pursued, Personal Allowance Levels have been increased and have overtaken the threshold of the previous age-related personal tax allowance.

**PSPC Executive Committee**

During the past year, the Executive Committee has met four times to co-ordinate the above work to protect the interests of public service pensioners. As always, thanks are due to Brian Sturtevant, Chair of PSPC, Clint Elliott, Treasurer, who retired at the end of January 2016, Vice Chair, Carol Regan, and the other PSPC officers and members of the Executive Committee.

Thanks are also due to Nick Kirby and Anita Brown who have been extremely helpful in facilitating the handover of the Secretariat from NUT to CSPA and NARPO. The General Secretary is also grateful for the support of Marion McAuliffe and Mike Duggan at CSPA HQ.

**Lisa Ray**

**May 2016**