

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the summer edition of *Backnumber*. We hope that the relatively fine summer weather (it's cold and raining as I type but hopefully just a blip!) has persuaded people to get out and about and, as ever, if readers have had interesting experiences, let us know.



The weather may have been warm, at least in part, but the political winds are cold becoming decidedly icy. Local Government continues to be razed to the ground and even our local Tory leader, Cliff Jordan, the master cutter of Breckland, is concerned enough to be writing to the Communities Secretary to cry "enough is enough". And no wonder. Pretty soon Norfolk's services will be nothing more than a skeleton. When we see for example the withdrawal of £1.8 million of funding for sheltered housing we need to be raising the alarm. The Council tells us that £1.3 million will be re-invested in a different service to support people in their own homes. This will certainly be welcome but as we have said before, investment decisions need to be for the long term and you can't switch money from one service to another immediately without leaving people in the lurch. Also, new projects do not always work and it is folly to abandon one service for another without planning what is to happen if the new project is a failure. We note that the council wants to "transform" services to allow people to stay in their own homes but what on earth do they imagine a sheltered housing scheme to be if it isn't people's own homes?

The word "transform" brings us neatly to the Norfolk and Waveney Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP). In a Press Release issued on 21st July they tell us that the Plan has been assessed as "advanced" and that this means some capital funding has been allocated to fund additional Mental Health beds in West Norfolk. This is welcome news in itself but the STP is a masterpiece of gothic proportion and impenetrable to the naked eye. Patricia Hewitt, the one time Blairite Secretary of State for Health who opened the door to privatisation, now chairs the STP and assures us that there is much to be done (continued overleaf)

Activities

TALKS

The first Winter Wednesday Talk will be on 25th October at 10am at NCC Sports & Social Club, speaker and topic to be confirmed. We shall notify all our members who have given us their e-mail address and it will be advertised by the Sports and Social Club. This is half term week and car parking should not be difficult.

If you have any suggestions for a topic or speaker you would particularly like to hear, do please, get in touch.

Dates for the diary for future Talks: 22nd November, 24th January, 28th February and 28th March. Looking forward to seeing you there.

WHIST afternoons continue at 2pm on the third Thursday afternoon of each month at the S & S Club. New players are always welcome.

TABLE TENNIS continues from 9.30 to 12 noon every Monday morning. Remember the facilities of the S & S Club are available to all Unison RMs, members of the S & S club and their guests.

As well as Table Tennis, activities can include snooker and pool [for a small charge], short mat bowls, darts or just a gossip and the bar is open for refreshment from 12.00.

We welcome colleagues who have recently retired

We wish you all a long, happy, healthy and rewarding retirement. Do come along and join in the Section's activities, you will find a warm welcome.

If you received this edition of *Backnumber* by post and you have an e-mail address, please let us know by sending a message to our e-mail address on the back page.

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to involve local communities and local people in developing future plans. She's right there. Most people who have even heard of the STP (and it's not high on the agenda of discussion down at the Dog and Duck) struggle to get any sense of what it means. The inevitable conclusion is that it means cuts in frontline services and further opening up of NHS services to the private sector. The suspicion is that the word "transform" is management speak for the words "slash and burn". The STP is certainly likely to transform all of our lives but if we're not careful this will not be for the better so we need to take a close interest in it now.

Finally, a plea for contributions about WWI. We set out our intention to include at least one reference to the conflict in each *Backnumber* up to November 2018. So far we have succeeded in doing this but it would be really good if we could have material which comes directly from family experience. At some point, when time permits, we will raid the Archive Centre for County Council related experiences of the war but in the meantime we would really welcome some local family reflections for future editions.

OBITUARY

We are sad to announce the death **Jennifer Carter** on 22 May 2017. She was a staunch Unison member and a committee member of Unison Retired Members. Many of you will have known Jenny as a social worker and team manager for Norfolk Children's Services. She was, for many years, also the Adoption Panel Adviser and a dedicated worker in wanting the best outcomes for children in care.



She was married to David St Quintin and will be deeply missed. Two of her grandchildren paid moving tributes at her funeral, calling her their "cool gran". A large congregation of colleagues past and present, Unison Branch representatives and friends paid fitting tribute to the affection and respect held for Jenny.

Jenny was Welsh and proud of her heritage, a keen supporter of the Welsh Rugby team and a good friend. Following a short illness she died aged 67 years. May she rest in peace.

PENSIONERS' PARLIAMENT

6th to 8th June, 2017

The weather in Blackpool for the Pensioners' Parliament was torrential rain and a force six gale, and so I did not participate in the march from the tower to the Winter Gardens having failed to take a mackintosh or umbrella.

The Winter Gardens now looks superb after its recent refurbishment and was our venue as usual. The parliament is not like our UNISON conferences, where Motions are heard, discussed and voted upon, instead speakers are invited and then discussions take place and our views are taken forward to the bi-annual conference. The Mayor of Blackpool opened proceedings. Please find below some bits and pieces that I noted from various speakers.

I thought that the best speaker of the parliament was the first speaker who is a professor at the University of Manchester. She said that the political context and the political economy are central to the social cohesion of young and old, and explained that generational divisions are politically constructed and divert attention from the real issues of social inequalities. Newspaper articles are presently dividing young from old in the competition for resources. For example the housing crisis has been created by government policy including the sale of council houses. The young are unable to get on the property market and are saddled with debt from tuition fees etc. The elderly are being blamed for not 'downsizing', but we need appropriate housing in order to 'downsize'. Another attack states that the old are rich and the young are poor - this attack will keep pensions down. Preserving universal benefits is preserving the rights for those in the future, and universal benefits benefit everyone. The whole of society has a stake in what kind of society we want to create.

BREXIT - There are 750 separate pieces of legislation that impact on us, and the UK must affirm to strengthen the rights that already exist. For example, will those pensioners living in Europe have their pensions up-rated? What happens to the European health certificate? Everything will depend on the economy. There are serious implications for social care by Brexit. Social care has one of the highest vacancy rates, and Brexit has meant that it is now more difficult to recruit staff. Looking ahead, will there be a substantial increase in vacancies?

Heather Wakefield from UNISON was one of the speakers. She said that there is a crisis in social care, and 1.3 million workers are employed within it. The service is being privatised, and public money is going into private companies. Youth services have disappeared in a lot of Councils. Paula Peters gave a rousing speech on disabled people against cuts, and told us of the direct action that has been taken to oppose those cuts.

A speaker outlined the plight of those pensioners living abroad who are on a frozen state pension. Four per cent of UK pensioners live abroad. Moves are afoot to try to get Great Britain suspended from the Commonwealth over this issue.

A speaker from NACC told us that the supply of meals on wheels has reached tipping point because of the cuts, and that this is not a statutory service.

Brexit and Social Care were the over-riding topics of this parliament. Circa five hundred delegates attended at £10 per head, unfortunately this did not cover the cost of £6,000 for the venue.

Brenda Underwood

WASPI WOMEN UPDATE

It's been a hectic time for the WASPI group in Norfolk since we gave our first talk to the NCC UNISON Retired Members, and Lynn and I would say that it gave us the confidence to do more talks which has helped to raise awareness not only in Norfolk but further afield as well.

The position that WASPI women find themselves in, waiting up to six extra years for their State Pension, with little or no notification played a part in the General Election. We found ourselves lobbying not only our own MPs but candidates from all parties. Great links were established which we hope will continue. We reiterate we are not against the equalisation of the State Pension Age with men, it's the way it was poorly communicated which has caused such difficulties.

Our Facebook supporters have risen to 70,000 strong. Our membership growing daily. This in no small way thanks to Guy Opperman's dismissal of the WASPI women's situation in the

Westminster Hall debate just last week. He suggested that apprenticeships were available to women in their 60s seeking work. This as you can imagine caused uproar, in a place which is used to respectful calm in the public gallery. Over 100 MPs from all parties attended, and many spoke in favour of their constituents and described the issues affecting their lives. They congratulated the campaign and its supporters for the way it's been managed, and our determination not to give up.

WASPI were invited to the UNISON women's conference in Brighton in February, and ran a workshop for delegates to find out more about how to support their members and the WASPI Campaign. The motion was carried. In June we were back there again for the National Conference and once again we were big news. The Motion of support was carried, and 200 people attended our fringe meeting. UNISON will offer advice and literature to Branches and in Norfolk the relationship gets stronger between the WASPI group and the UNISON Branches in the County.

On 26th May 40 WASPI women gathered in Hay Hill in Norwich to take part in the Local Day of Action which was replicated around the country by other WASPI groups. We gave out leaflets and specially made cup cakes. We were joined by Clive Lewis who has supported us from the beginning as well as a several other Parliamentary Candidates. Helen McDermott of Mustard TV joined us in a march around the city with our banners and whistles.

We're proud to be taking part in the Burston Strike School Rally this year and will have a WASPI picnic with our members. We'll be providing information and speaking to women interested in finding out what's happened to their State Pension.

The determination of the WASPI women in Norfolk grows no less. We are making complaints of maladministration to the Department of Work and Pensions. Over 800 have now reached the Independent Complaints Examiner, and our final goal is the Parliamentary Ombudsman. We will continue to campaign for justice.

Increasingly now we are contacted by women who were born in the 1960s who have realised the impact the increase on their State Pension Age will have on their lives. WASPI truly are the thin end of the State Pension wedge.

Debbie De Spon

THE GREAT WAR PASSCHENDAELE

In continuing our Articles on The First World War, it would be remiss not to mention one of the bloodiest, costliest and hard fought battles of the whole conflict. I refer to The Third Battle of Ypres, better known as Passchendaele, which took place one hundred years ago between 31st July and 10th November 1917, a period of over three months.

The Ypres salient in Belgium, held by the British on the Western Front, was overlooked by the Germans to the east from a line of low hills. This was advantageous for observation and artillery bombardment purposes, It had been fought over many times since 1914 and as a consequence the land drainage systems had been mainly destroyed by shellfire.

The Battle commenced on 31st July, preceded by a period of intensive shelling, which, as in previous encounters failed to help much when the attack took place, other than to let the enemy know of an impending attack. To add to the misery of the troops involved, the area suffered the worst rainfall recorded in 30 years, added to the shelling and the lack of drainage the area became a quagmire and men, equipment and horses struggled in such atrocious conditions. Many fell into the shell holes and weighed down by equipment drowned in the mud.

Field Martial Haig, Commander of Commonwealth Forces, persevered with the battle, despite increasing casualties and minimal gain in territory. Finally, on 10th November 1917 Canadian and British troops captured the village of Passchendaele which gave Lord Haig the excuse to call off the offensive and claim a victory (!) This was despite British and Commonwealth casualties of some 310,000 with German losses in the region of 260,000, and a failure to create any substantial breakthrough or capture of occupied territory.

The Third Battle Of Ypres remains one of the most controversial and costly offensives in the whole war. The area is fairly flat and featureless and troops "going over the top" would have had little cover as they lumbered forward in the mud. Overlooking the area is Tyne Cot Cemetery, where some 12,000 Commonwealth soldiers are buried, over 8000 of which are unnamed, thus was the nature of the fighting. It is a particularly moving experience to visit this place and makes you ponder the futility of it all.

David Beard



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

I have for a long time found your anti Tory editorials to be negative, repetitive, one sided and predictable in their content and frankly pretty tedious. However your decision to include with the latest edition of *Backnumber* a letter which was so biased, dogmatic and downright offensive and which was received by RM's a week before polling day giving no one a chance to respond to be really bad judgement on your part.

The person who sent this poisonous tirade and who holds Neil Kinnock in such high regard would do well to google "Neil Kinnock - expenses" and see how much a man of the people he really is - or perhaps the articles which can be read on google showing what a grasping couple Kinnock and his wife really are just the bias of anti socialist capitalist right wing press!

How dare he try to tell me and other RM's how they should vote, I think we are all capable of making up our own minds and certainly don't need his twisted advice.

Regarding Labour's spending plans, it would do well to remember the note left for the incoming chancellor by the last Labour administration's outgoing Secretary to the Treasury Liam Byrne "sorry there is no money left".

Yours etc
Christopher Payne

The real trouble with war (modern war) is that it gives no one a chance to kill the right people.

[Ezra Pound](#) (1885-1972) American poet, critic and intellectual.

WHERE TO FIND US

If you have letters, comments or issues about **Backnumber**, please e-mail the Editor Jim Porter at porterjames172@gmail.com

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