

# SCOTTISH SENIORS

Campaigning for a better deal for older people since 1992



Newsletter of the Scottish Pensioners' Forum Issue 40/December 2015

## SPF GIVE EVIDENCE TO WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

In July, the Welfare Reform Committee at the Scottish Parliament called for evidence on The Future Delivery of Social Security in Scotland and asked for feedback on how society felt the new powers proposed by the Smith Commission (2014) should be used.



sessions on disability and carers benefits, housing and new benefit applications and on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015, John McAllion, SPF Executive Committee member, and representative for Dundee Pensioners' Forum, was called to give evidence on the Regulated Social Fund

alongside representatives from other organisations whose service users were also affected by the proposed changes.

Under para 49(2), the Smith Commission proposed that "*Benefits which comprise the Regulated Social Fund: Cold Weather Payment, Funeral Payment, Sure Start Maternity Grant and Winter Fuel Payment*" should be devolved.

The full official report of the session makes very interesting reading and is available from the Scottish Parliament website on: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10191&mode=pdf>

The committee had previously held

## DRAFT CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In October, the SPF was involved in the draft consultation process of the National Standards for Community Engagement, an event organised by our colleagues at Disability Alliance. The talks centred on the need for more negotiations and participation between local authorities and community groups and organisations to help effect change within their communities.

The need for proper staff training on the standards was also discussed, as was a proper checklist being put in place to ensure proper monitoring of the engagement process.



The talks also looked at the need for more case studies to be included within the standards as well as the need for them to be published in a simplified format, rather than in 'academic speak' language so as to be properly understood by all service users.

*The process is still in the draft stages and we will continue to feedback to our members on its progress. Current standards can be found on:*

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf>



Seasons Greetings to all of our readers and Best Wishes for 2016



## Poverty Alliance 6th Scottish Annual Assembly for Tackling Poverty

Members of the SPF Executive Committee were in attendance at the event in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015. Guest speaker was Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners Rights and the main topic of his presentation, *Towards A Fairer Scotland*, was on the proposed new powers for the Scottish Parliament and



the Regulated Social Fund.

Speaking out on funeral poverty in particular, the Minister indicated that it was an issue which the Scottish Government was taking particularly seriously and that they

were doing everything in their power to help tackle poverty in Scotland.

The conference also looked at the theme *What Social Justice Means To Us*, with an excellent sketch by ToonSpeak Youth Theatre showing how social justice affects communities.

Breakout sessions looked at different themes including *Respect for All; Communities Shaping a Fairer Scotland; Social Security and Social Justice and an Economy for Health and Social Justice*.

The afternoon session included a participatory exercise asking delegates to envisage what a fairer Scotland would look like in 2030 as well as a discussion on the priorities to be included in the new Social Justice Action Plan.

## Ageing, Loneliness and Isolation Conference

The conference took place in Edinburgh on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015, with Sandra White MSP, convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee at the Scottish Parliament, opening proceedings. Ms White informed delegates that the committee understood how important the issue of age and loneliness was in older people and had launched an inquiry, with findings to be published by October 2015. Other guest speakers at the event included Professor Mima Cattan, Tom Berney, Chair of SOPA, Kellie

Payne of the Campaign to End Loneliness; Alex Neil MSP and Derek Young of Age Scotland who discussed such issues as Scotland's ageing population; social changes impacting on older people; ailments besetting older people; the concessionary travel scheme and social prescribing. Here are just some of the statistics on loneliness and isolation in the UK from the Campaign to End Loneliness website :-

- 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends, neighbours less than once a week, with 11% of those less than once a month
- Over half of all people aged 75 or over live alone.
- Two fifths of all older people (approx 3.9 million) say television is their only company.
- A higher percentage of women than men report feeling lonely some of the time

A recent report carried out by Stirling University on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland shows that more Scots are working past retirement age and as many as two thirds of older people in Scotland are facing isolation due to health issues and lack of proper transport networks. The report also highlighted the major issue of unpaid care with around 11% of over 65s contributing in excess of 50 hours per week with no financial compensation.

Alistair Pringle EHRC Scotland director remarked "The over 60s are the fastest growing group in society....As Age UK say, ageing is not an illness, but it can be challenging and we at the EHRC want to do all we can to reduce inequality."

## THE SPF OUT AND ABOUT

Over the past few months, the SPF have been in attendance at several conferences and events including a consultation on the Draft Integration Strategic Plan on Health and Social Work as well as a Later Life Conference in Edinburgh and another on Delivering Health and Social Care for Older People. Our information stall has been at several events including the STUC Women's Conference, STUC Black Workers' Conference and STUC Disabled Workers' Conference and reports from these events.

### STUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, DUNDEE, 2015

Conference delegates joined others to march through Dundee in solidarity with workers lobbying MP's in Westminster against the Trade Union Bill. Marchers heard Labour Councillor Richard McCready praise the decision by Dundee City Council to oppose the Bill and refuse to implement the attacks on trade union facility time and the check-off method of direct payment of union dues. Dundee Council have agreed not to use agency workers to break strikes.



Speaking to the Trade Union Bill motion at Conference, Fire Brigades Union delegate Denise Christie warned that the Bill would 'pave the way for privatisation of our public services.'

Unite, Deputy Scottish Secretary, Mary Alexander pointed out that the proposed legislation 'would criminalise trade unionists' in their struggle to protect jobs and the services that are a lifeline to many vulnerable people.

Conference debated several motions dealing with the economy and employment. Delegates deplored the fact that it is not recognised that older workers especially women, face major challenges to remain in work and called for the introduction of provisions that assist older workers to remain in their roles if they so choose.

Conference was chaired by Ann Dean, GMB, with 130 delegates, representing 24 trade unions attending.

### STUC BLACK WORKERS' CONFERENCE, GLASGOW, 2015

The Black workers' Conference continues to stand for and debate the rights of black workers and their families. Issues debated this year included helping black people to be more prominent in public life; unconscious bias in trade unions; hate crimes; tackling Islamophobia; black workers low pay and insecure employment.

Calling for the retention of the Human Rights Act, Asif Chishti, EIS, described this piece of legislation as 'a key protection of rights for all'. He went on to ask 'how hard are we prepared to fight for human rights?' Sophie Taylor, seconding the motion on behalf of UNISON, reminded delegates that human rights have been achieved through a constant struggle and should not be given up easily, and certainly not because they are inconvenient to the government of the day.'

Michael Anderson USDAW, highlighted the disproportionate impact of the growing casualisation of the labour market on black workers and black communities. He alerted delegates to the unprecedented, worrying and sudden increase in black youth unemployment in Scotland.

Conference expressed concern about the death of Sheku Bayoh in police custody in Kirkcaldy last May. The Bayoh family solicitor, Aamer Anwar told delegates that there is concern about the lack of progress in the police investigation of his death and it is worrying that none of at least nine police officers involved had been suspended as, a neutral act, to assist an open and transparent investigation. Aamer urged delegates to engage the wider community in the Sheku Bayoh Campaign for justice and accountability.

Conference was chaired by Rakiya Suleiman of UNISON with 60 delegates, from throughout Scotland and representing 18 trade unions, in attendance.

### STUC DISABLED WORKERS' CONFERENCE, CLYDEBANK 2015

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Disabled Workers Conference was held this year in Clydebank. The theme was 'Dignified lives – Equality for All' and the conference was chaired by Robert Mooney, from the union Community. Fifty delegates and several visitors were in attendance. Twelve organisations took stalls at conference, including the SPF. (Cont'd on next page)

# CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1992

(cont'd) Delegates spoke passionately about the experiences of their members facing a continuing decline in working conditions and the impact of public spending cuts on essential life-line services in local communities across the land.

Many delegates referred to the consequences of welfare sanctions and the need to highlight the misery and desperation experienced by so many people, forced to use food banks or go hungry. In moving a motion on opposing further cuts to disabled people's support, Sharon Sweeney, University and College Union, described such cuts as 'pure political evil' and urged greater opposition, reminding delegates that 'collectively we are strong.'

Julie Ferguson, EIS, noted the results of a national survey of Additional Support Needs provision in further education colleges, which clearly indicate a significant decline in ASN provision for students since the Scottish Government began implementing funding cuts for FE colleges five years ago.

Other topics debated during conference included: disability hate crime; accessible rail travel; affordable childcare provision; human rights legislation.

Conference was addressed by a number of guest speakers including Graham Smith, STUC General Secretary, who expressed the view that there had been too little public debate on how any devolution of tax powers to the Scottish Parliament would impact on workers in Scotland. He said it is 'absolutely critical that we get this right' otherwise workers and communities could end up with more of the current misery. Graham condemned the Trade Union Bill, outlining some of the obvious intentions in terms of trade union organisation. He also dealt with some of the more hidden objectives of the bill such as obstructing the ability of trade unions to work with vulnerable people in order to defend public services. Graham pledged to ensure that trade unions work for and with disabled people.

Other keynote speakers were: Anne Dean, STUC Women's Committee; Bill Scott, Inclusion Scotland; Councillor Gail Casey, West Dunbartonshire Council; Julie Millar Guide Dogs Scotland.



In our last newsletter, we asked that our members get in touch if they had any important information they wished to share with us. Maureen Gardner, an SPF Executive Committee Member from STUC-Unite had this to tell us:-

"In July I attended Unite the Union Retired Members Summer School in Eastbourne. One of the tutors dealt with Income Tax and although I (and several of my colleagues) thought we were "financially" aware we did learn about the new Marriage Allowance, which is a Transferable Tax Allowance for married couples and civil partners.

It applies to those born after 5<sup>th</sup> April 1938. Briefly the partner who has an unused Personal Allowance can transfer £1060 (equivalent to 10% of the £10,600 full allowance) to their spouse or civil partner, thus saving £212 per year (calculated by the fact that the basic tax rate is 20%).

A few colleagues in my retired members' branch of Unite have applied on line and have been successful. Maybe you too are entitled to another £212 per year. Why not check it out?"

**Remember, if there is something you would like us to include in our next newsletter, for example a certain forthcoming event or a particular issue you are campaigning on, please get in touch with us to have your say.**

**Join the Scottish Pensioners' Forum  
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