

## News from Lewisham Pensioners Forum

January - February 2009

### Dear Forum Member

First things first; A very Happy New Year to you all. May this year bring us strength and success in our campaign work, allowing us to live our retirement years with dignity and quality. Secondly, may I just say that there are a number of things packed into this special bumper Newsletter and I hope you will enjoy the read as much as I have and I begin with our AGM in November:-

### Forum Annual general Meeting 2008

Firstly you will notice the AGM photo on the cover sheet. This year's AGM had a bumper attendance which I think speaks volumes about the issues and financial worries facing Lewisham Pensioners, and my thanks go to everyone who was able to come along and contribute to what was a lively debate. All of us will in some way be affected by the current financial crises and these worries face us at a time when we are already trying to cope with escalating energy costs, forcing some of us to choose between eating or heating, and escalating food prices which means that the food we can afford to buy is further reduced in quantity and perhaps quality.

### Campaign Work for 2009

While it is satisfying for us to note that pensioner campaigning brought about the recent 24hr Freedom Pass as well as nationwide travel, there is no room for us to rest on our laurels. At our AGM members asked that we focus our campaign work on the following: 'Free TV Licence for All Pensioners', lower council tax for all pensioners, a better state pension, improved public toilet facilities in Lewisham, adequate heating allowances for all pensioners. Protecting the local Post Office and Keeping our NHS Public.

### The Power of the Pensioner Vote

As you can see, this is a wide remit but with the support of our members I am confident that we will continue to make an impact on local and national decision makers. We need to remind our politicians and ourselves that the 'Grey Vote' is of immense value and it is about time that our MP's and local politicians were seen to be at the forefront of demanding an increase in the state pension and not hiding behind the constraints of party loyalty.

### Forum Membership

Our Membership holds the key to the work of the Forum, it sends a very clear and strong message to our funders and decision makers that we do provide a voice for

Pensioners and with this in mind I would encourage you to draw the Forum to the attention of your friends and older family members. Our aim is to become a voice for ALL of Lewisham's Pensioners but we need your help to spread the message about our work and the benefits of going on our mailing list..

We welcome the opportunity to speak to other Groups that you may be involved in, bringing with us interesting information and updates about our campaign activities, just contact our co-ordinator Kerry Smith on 0208.690.7869 and she will make arrangements to contact the group or organisation concerned.

### **Forum Constitution**

Another issue that was raised at our AGM was the Constitution. The Forum's was constituted just over 21 years ago and it is perhaps timely for us to revisit the original Constitution to see whether it needs to be updated. This is a process that we want to involve all of our members in. I have therefore arranged for a copy of the Constitution to be included with this Newsletter. Every member is invited to comment on this document and provide us with proposals for amendment by the end of February. Any revisions will then be debated and a revised Constitution will be issued for your consideration. A new Constitution would need to be approved by not less than two thirds of the 2009 AGM. The January Forum will also invite members to voice any proposals for change or revision that they would like to see in the Constitution.

### **State Pension Campaign—The Way Forward**

Also expressed at the AGM; members were particularly keen to see our current campaign to raise the state pension take a more proactive and perhaps radical direction, believing that we need to do something more high profile and perhaps extraordinary if we are get our voice heard on this subject. By way of starting the debate on 'What Can We Do Now!', we have arranged for a play to be staged at our next Forum meeting on January 28th 2009 in the Town Hall Chamber. The actors are pensioners themselves and the play has been created to look at the state pension over the last one hundred years and it ends with the question..."So what do we do now"? At this point, forum members will be invited to consider just that, and we hope by the end of the debate to have agreed our next steps in the 'State Pension' campaign.

### **State Pension Petition**

Some of you may recall signing the NPC 'State Centenary Pension' petition and I thought you would like to know that in December we submitted 1602 signatures to the NPC that had been collected from our Friday stall at Lewisham Shopping Centre, Pensioners Day and our 2 Black History events. These will now be collated with petitions up and down the country. I shall of course keep you informed on this aspect of the state pension campaign.

## Lay Visitor Scheme—Care Homes In Lewisham

In our November/December 2008 Newsletter, we informed you about a Lay Visitor Scheme being developed in the Borough by Lewisham Council. Concern was expressed about the article lacking clarity on key aspects of the scheme and in an attempt to address any misunderstanding we have invited Cllr Fitzsimmons to provide you with more detail in this letter:

### *Lay Visitors Scheme*

*"Following research by my advisory panel, we set in motion proposals for a visiting scheme by older people to visit residential homes in the Borough. This was welcomed by the Mayor and was supported by funding for the training of volunteers. We also held a meeting with home managers and owners who very much welcomed the idea".*

*"The volunteers will be trained by Age Concern and will follow strict guidelines of confidentiality and also be C.R.B. They will visit the homes with our monitoring officers. Once they are at the home they will be able to go off on their own To talk to residents and be able to gain knowledge of the quality of life they have. There may be very small things that residents bring up that will enhance their every day comfort there may also be times when volunteers are at the home and experience a volatile situation, but with the training they have received they will have the knowledge on how to cope or even withdraw".*

*"We are also hoping that the visitors will be able to highlight good practice in homes that they will be able to share with other providers and our older community at large."*

*"When the visit to the home ends the volunteer will then join the monitoring officer and the manager of the home and have a discussion of their findings and observations after which they will leave. They will then do a written report which will be sent to the head of monitoring.*

*If they so require they will be able to have assistance in producing this report.) This will help Directors of the service, Senior Managers and elected Members to address and enhance the residential service. If at anytime the volunteers witness a serious situation they will be trained to give a red alert".*

*"We look forward to this enhancing the care that our Senior Citizens can expect and enjoy, should they need or want to go into residential care".*

*"I would like to acknowledge and thank the Pensioners Forum for the campaigning that they have undertaken".*

*Councillor Peggy Fitzsimmons  
Cabinet member for Older People*

## National Pensioners Convention

Our colleagues at the NPC have been very active on a number of campaign issues and have recently provided us with updates on various topics. Some of these updates are enclosed with this report for your further reading.

## Adult Education & Libraries In Lewisham

You will also find information about the next meeting of the Mayor's Commission on Libraries and Learning in the Borough. If older people are to shape what is available in the Borough then we need to make every effort to attend the meeting on 29 Jan 09 more details are given on pages 5 & 6.

## Public Toilets In Lewisham

With regards to the Public Toilets Campaign I would confirm that the Forum did indeed write to key Lewisham Councillors, copying the letter to all Lewisham Councillors and we hope to hear back soon with information about how Lewisham proposes developing and consulting Lewisham residents on public toilet provision in the Borough. Feedback from our members suggests that this topic is a real cause for concern and we would like to share with you a letter we received on the same topic.

*"After reading your admirable and outspoken article in the recent Newsletter, may I, as an elderly and disabled pensioner add my heartfelt support for your campaign. Whilst Lewisham Council is seemingly unable (or unwilling) to observe the basic principle of corporate hygiene, the Borough will, I'm afraid continue its slow decline, for few firms of repute will be prepared to invest in such a wayward backwater. And for those of us who value peace of mind away from home there is always the option of Bromley or Croydon..."*

*Mrs Smith (full name and address supplied).*

## Merrill Lynch Christmas Calls

The Forum has had tremendous feedback from the 25 members we were able to go along to the 'Calls Abroad' scheme run by Merrill Lynch, a great day was had by all and everyone left feeling very spoilt but festive. Our thanks to Merrill Lynch and the Greater London Forum for making our participation possible.

Finally, some of you may have collected the Forum's Annual Report for 2008 at the AGM. For those of you who were unable to attend but would like a copy sent to you please do contact either Kerry or Tamsin on 0208.690.7869.

**Best Wishes for 2009**

**Doris Smith—Chair Lewisham Pensioners Forum**

## Notice of Meeting

### Mayor's Commission on Libraries and Learning

Open meeting: 29 January 7pm-8.30pm\*\*

Venue: Civic Suite.

The Mayor's Commission on Libraries and Learning was established earlier this year to look at the borough's library and adult education services and make recommendations about their future development.

This meeting is an opportunity to hear about the work of the Commission, and a chance to put your views to the Mayor and other members of the Commission.

**Because space is limited if you wish to attend the meeting you will need to book a place in advance by contacting Janet Nicholson on 020 8314 6139 or email [janet.nicholson@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:janet.nicholson@lewisham.gov.uk)**

The Commission is keen to hear from all those with an interest in libraries and adult education across the borough. In particular, we would like to hear your views on what you value about the Library and Information Service and Community Education Lewisham, and your ideas for how these services should respond to the opportunities and challenges they face. When you book your place we will ask you to suggest a question in advance of the meeting that you would like to have answered.

### Note to Forum Members from The Grove Park Users Group MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON LIBRARIES AND LEARNING

"In May and June of this year Pensioners' Forum and the Users of Community Education Lewisham organised their own public meetings, at which their views on the future of Community Education Lewisham (CEL), and support for CEL were made clear. The Mayor of Lewisham, Steve Bullock, attended the June meeting at the Grove Park Centre. Both meetings were extremely well attended. The Focus Groups on libraries and learning, organised through the Commission, were however, poorly attended. This was partly due to very short notice and meetings held on winter evenings.

Pressure from the user groups has led to the offer of a public meeting to be held on **Thursday 29th January from 7- 9 pm**. Yet again an evening meeting. Both the Mayor and those organising the meeting have been alerted to our concerns over this evening timing. We have also requested much better publicity. You will note no mention is made of libraries. **Please do try to get to the meeting so that the voice of Lewisham's older user group is heard. We must protect Adult Education!**

This dovetails with a country wide campaign to prevent the death of Adult Education. The Campaign Alliance for Lifelong Learning (CALL), including NIACE, UNISON, UCU, WEA and 20 other bodies has drafted an Early Day Motion in Parliament, to be supported by as many MPs as possible. A lobby of Parliament is due to be held in early February by CALL, [www.callcampaign.org.uk](http://www.callcampaign.org.uk)." Please do put pressure on your local MP to protect Adult Education in this Borough. So many of us value the benefits of Adult Learning classes both during the day and the evening and on so many topics, help keep Adult Education in this Borough alive.

**PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 19**  
**LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM**  
**COUNCIL MEETING**  
**26 NOVEMBER 2008**

**Question asked by: Ms M McLeod on behalf of the Grove Park User Group**

Member to reply: Cabinet Member for Community Services

**Question**

Our Committee would like to ask the following questions on the topic of the **Mayor's Commission For Libraries and Learning (Focus Groups)**.

Some of us have been passed information on Focus Group meetings.

This information was received on Monday/ Tuesday (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> November) and replies were required by Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November, the first 2 meetings being on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup>. We are used to short notice, but this is ridiculously short. Firstly, if a true result is required surely users and non/users should have more notice?

Were posters put up in each of the CEL centres and off-sites in order to inform all students?

Have posters been put in each of the libraries?

If an interested person is not a member of any kind of group in the borough how will they get this information?

Holding the meetings in the evening (7 – 9 pm) will naturally exclude some members of certain categories of users or non-users. Why has no day time and/or weekend venue

**Reply**

The officers acknowledge that the timetable for running the focus groups was tight. The focus groups were arranged to take place in November to enable them to influence the development of the Commission's final report, but we have also been keen to ensure that the Commission itself had the opportunity to consider how the focus groups would work, which it did at its meeting on Saturday 8 November. This unfortunately limited the amount of time available to notify people.

The Council has however contacted a range of different groups inviting them to nominate people for the focus groups. Groups that we have contacted include Age Concern Lewisham, the Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham, Contact a Family, Lewisham Ethnic Minority Partnership, Seniors, Lewisham Disability Coalition, Pensioners Forum, Carers Lewisham, Tamil Academy of Language and Arts, Under pressure, Tamil Housing Association, Lewisham and Kent Islamic Centre, Downham Elderly Health Project, Lewisham Autism Support, Turkish Elders Club, FORVIL and The Stroke Association.

In addition to this, library and CEL staff were informed about the focus groups and asked to promote them, with information circulated in library and CEL buildings, and given to students at the CEL awards evening on Wednesday 12 November. We also contacted the following Council teams to promote the focus groups: Lifelong Learning Forum, Town Centre Managers, Street Wardens, Opening Doors, Community Sector Unit, Black Pupil's Achievement Programme, Children's Centres, Neighbourhood Management, Young Mayor's Scheme, Youth Service and Local Assemblies.

In recognition of the concerns that have been raised we are willing to set up further focus groups early in 2009 if there is demand. This will include daytime and/or weekend timings if these are more convenient.

## Additional News & Meeting Notices

### Fighting Cuts to Adult Social Care

During November 2008, a number of groups representing the needs and concerns of both old and young vulnerable people, made representations to the Mayor and Cabinet urging them not to make any cuts to the care services of vulnerable people in the Borough, which annually come under threat as the Authority tries to balance its budget. However, the Mayor was reminded by the Forum that the needs of Lewisham's vulnerable people do not vary so much that each year they can be reviewed for potential cuts. "The closure of day centres will disrupt the lives of both carers and persons receiving care" said Doris Smith... "If we accept these cuts in services, we'll be making a short-term decision which will have to be paid for at a later date". Chairman of Lewisham Mencap, said "This has got to stop. We can't keep going through this year after year". The Mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, ruled out making the cuts but is reported in the Newshopper as saying that 'this decision would lead to other cuts which may well be unpalatable'. The Forum will keep you posted!

### Keeping Warm This Winter

The Council's Sustainable Resources Team will be at the Pensioners' Forum meeting on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January to offer one-to-one advice on how to keep warm and reduce your fuel bills.

We can advise on how to make the best use of your heating, give you practical steps you can follow to heat your home for less and we can check to see if you are eligible for funding to improve the insulation and heating in your home.

There are a number of different grants available, each with its own criteria and forms to fill in.

We can make life easier by giving you independent advice on the financial support on offer and, if you are eligible, we can even put you forward for a grant without the need to fill in lots of forms.

If you are not able to attend the meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> January and you would like to know more about reducing your fuel bills or the Council's work on energy efficiency please contact us:

By telephone on 020 8314 6339

By e mail [energy@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:energy@lewisham.gov.uk)

Visit our web pages [www.lewisham.gov.uk/Environment/SustainableEnergy/](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/Environment/SustainableEnergy/)

Write to us at:

Sustainable Resources, Third Floor, Town Hall, Catford, London, SE6 4RU.

### Lewisham Council's Women's Health Inequalities Review Group

Meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2009, 7.30pm, Civic Suite, will cover items on "Sickle Cell and Genetic Conditions/Cancer". This meeting was originally scheduled to discuss the topic of 'Growing Older' looking also at the Ageing Well Strategy and Action Plan as well as the Lay Visitors Scheme for Care Homes, Assistance at Hospital, End of Life Care and general Quality of Life issues. We understand that these topics will now be considered by the February meeting, a date for which has yet to be set. This is a public meeting, please do attend either to make sure the voice of older people is heard. For details of the date, time and venue please contact Roger Raymond on 0208.314.9446.

## 17th Pensioners Parliament 2-4 June 2009

### Request for Stewards and Raffle Prizes

The National Pensioners Convention are looking to recruit volunteers for Steward duties at the forthcoming 17th Pensioners Parliament in Blackpool. If you would like more information on volunteering for this event please contact the Forum office on 0208.690.7869 or the NPC direct on 0207 553 6511. Please note that you will need to submit your details by March 1st 2009.

### Is Your Group Interested in Sending a Pensioners Delegate to the 17th Pensioners Parliament?

If the answer is YES, please let the Forum know. This year the theme for the Parliament will be Democracy and Rights. The Parliament will also be considering a range of important issues such as dignity in care, how the economic situation is affecting older people, the impact that changes in local government and the NHS are having on services that older people receive. Sir Michael Parkinson will be addressing the Parliament on the last day in his capacity as the Government's Care Ambassador. Funding for representatives from Lewisham's pensioner community to attend this event, has in the past been met by the Mayor of Lewisham—Sir Steve Bullock and we shall be writing to him in the hope that he can again support us, giving a national voice to Lewisham's pensioners.

## STOP THE PRIVATISATION OF THE ROYAL MAIL

On 16 December the government endorsed the Hooper report which recommended the part-privatisation of Royal Mail; this is against the Labour manifesto and the "Warwick II" promises to the trade unions. It was announced by Business Secretary Lord Mandelson, and immediately led to the resignation of Jim McGovern MP (Parliamentary Private Secretary to Pat McFadden, Business Minister), Billy Hayes, general secretary of the CWU said: "It is incredible that the British Government which has led the world in overhauling banks needs another European postal service to rescue the Royal Mail. Especially one which has already been disgraced by losing sensitive data disks in the mail. This was meant to be a report about competition but Mandelson has ignored the damage done through irresponsible liberalisation and advocates more involvement by private companies." Dave Ward, deputy general secretary, said: " This would open the floodgates for full-blown, damaging privatisation. Post is a key public and business service which must retain the protection and guidance of Government for sustainable success." If carried though the measure will result in significant job losses and attacks on the working conditions of postal workers. At a Postcomm seminar recently it was announced that such a move would inevitably lead to the curtailment of door-to-door deliveries and cuts in the number of post boxes, which will greatly affect older and disabled people. Our EC will discuss an emergency motion for our AGM at its January meeting.

(Source NPCC Bulletin Jan 2009).

**Government appoints Dame Joan Bakewell as the "Independent Voice of Older People". (Some views expressed—source NPC Bulletin Dec 08).**

**High Hopes**

"All of a sudden, the phone won't stop ringing. The Government Equalities Office has announced that I am to be the Voice of Older People, and everyone wants to hear my particular gripes about the way the old are treated. Seventy is the age at which "old" starts, by the way. Before that you can call yourself late middle-aged. I have been reeling off matters that irk me about the status of the old. The closing of post offices and public loos, for example. You only notice when you need one. Then there's eating out alone, while newer arrivals are tucking into their grilled sea bass, you are still trying to catch the waiter's eye. On Vanessa Feltz's radio programme, on BBC London, a caller asked what right I had to speak for them. Good question. My answer? Age is a great leveller and the risk of slipping over on wet autumn leaves is common to us all. So on I go, taking a deluge of emails and phone calls. In the midst of this, it dawns on me that there are an awful lot of old people, which means our opinions of local authority decisions and government policy really count. So I have high hopes that the government will listen to and hear us. After all, they were the ones who asked me".

**Joan Bakewell**

**Meeting with Joan Bakewell?**

Veteran broadcaster and journalist, Dame Joan Bakewell, has been appointed by the

government to act as an independent voice of older people. However, at this stage it is unclear what Ms Bakewell is actually going to do, or what her role will be.

So far she has written about the need for more lifts in train stations, the right to keep working past 65 and the case for more public toilets. As yet, she has not given a view on the level of the basic state pension and whether or not it should be raised, or if the means-testing of social care should stop.

Dot Gibson, NPC vice president said: "For Joan Bakewell's voice to be credible, rather than just a gimmick, she has to really represent the views of ordinary pensioners on things like pensions, care and fuel poverty."

**The NPC has requested a meeting with Joan Bakewell.**

Report in *'The Message'* Winter 2008/9

**Not so keen on working at 70**

No, it isn't time Joan Bakewell spoke up (Ageism, pensions and the end of high heels, November 10). It's time that those with highly paid and fascinating jobs in the media stopped telling the rest of us how it is or should be. Had she spent her working life in a coal mine, or stacking shelves at Tesco, or trying to teach difficult teenagers, or mopping vomit in a rest home or dealing with drunks in A&E, or worked on a construction site or on a mass production line or a call centre, she might not be so keen to go on working at 70. I know no one whose life has not been enhanced by retirement. Most workers doing humdrum and not particularly well-paid jobs look forward to it. No one working in the metropolitan media seems to have the faintest idea of what working life is like for the vast mass of people in this country.

**Peter Syvret, Southampton**

**THE GUARDIAN, 14 November 2008**

## Free Travel Must be Extended.

(source: 'The Message' Winter 08/09)

The NPC is calling on the new transport minister Geoff Hoon to open talks with parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to introduce free UK-wide bus travel using the new universal pass. The NPC is also requesting the urgent extension of concession to other forms of public transport such as trams and local rails services.

Campaigners are also keen to ensure that free bus travel schemes for older people are not portrayed by local councils as the cause of cuts in other local services. The NPC advise: "The government has allowed each individual authority to negotiate its own payment to the bus companies and some of these operators are overcharging local councils and making huge profits." "This has to stop and be replaced by a centralised system that can give all pensioners the same free travel concessions".

## Some Diary Dates for 2009

28th January 2009

10.30-12.30 Civic Suite, Catford.

Forum Meeting—All Welcome

Mayor's Commission on Libraries and Learning—All Welcome

Open meeting: 29 January 7pm-8.30pm\*\*

Venue: Civic Suite.

25th March 2009

10.30-12.30 Civic Suite, Catford

Forum Meeting—All Welcome

6th April 2009

Day of Action on State Pension

27th May 2009

10.30-12.30 Civic Suite, Catford

Forum Meeting—All Welcome

## NPC calls Day of Action for April 6th 2009

Pensioners and their organisations are being asked to join a nationwide protest on April 6th to highlight the declining purchasing power and real value of the state pension. The NPC is calling for all supporters to mark the day the state pension rises by £4.55 for those on a full pension and £2.70 for women who rely on their husband's contribution. Neil Duncan-Jordan, NPC National Officer said: "In 2008, we marked 100 years of the state pension, and yet even after a century, people will still be getting less than £100 a week." (Source: 'The Message', Winter 08/09).

The Lewisham Pensioners Forum will consider what action it will be taking on April 6th at its Forum meeting on January 28th 2009. If you would like to make a contribution to this discussion please come along or alternatively contact us by phone on 0208.690.7869, or write to: Lewisham Pensioners Forum, The Saville Centre, 436 Lewisham High Street, SE13 6LJ.