

Up in ARMs

The journal for all **PCS associate and retired members**

Pensioners back-door bedroom tax

The government promised to protect Pensioners from the Bedroom Tax but now intends to swipe at least £300 a year from them because their homes will be deemed to be “under-occupied”.

ARMs national secretary Brian Herbertson explains why we need to continue to campaign with the National Pensioners Convention to ditch this threat.

The Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit that tenants receive will change from 1/4/2019 (with the furore of opposition the government has delayed its introduction from 1/4/2018).

From that date and for tenancies taken out from 1/4/2016 the amount of the housing element will be capped to the local housing allowance (LHA) rate for your household size – which means that, over time, hundreds of thousands of pensioners will be drawn in.

The LHA rate is based on that used in the private rented sector. The LHA rate

currently applies to private tenants but from 2019 it will apply to social sector tenants i.e. Council and housing associations and supported housing.

This means a single pensioner or couple renting a 2-bedroom house will have their Housing Benefit capped at the one bedroom LHA rate. In London and the SE the impact may not be as serious because the LHA rate is likely to be higher than the rent charged, but in the North it could be £1,700 a year.

Frank Field who chairs the Commons select committee on work and pensions has called for the proposal to be scrapped.

The original bedroom tax saw hundreds of thousands of poorer people lose huge sums because they had no smaller homes to move to and, therefore, suffered steep benefit cuts. The same harsh impact is feared from the new measure.

In a statement, the DWP described the delay and rethink as “a simplification



and alignment of the application of the Local Housing Allowance policy for general needs accommodation”.

But the National Housing Federation (NHF) said it feared the policy could end up being more draconian, because it would now affect the existing tenancies of people receiving Universal Credit.

Gill Payne, the NHF's director of policy and external affairs, said: “Today's changes will impact more people than announced previously, although it will start one year later in 2019.”

Welcome to Up in ARMs 2017

Up in ARMs (sometimes abbreviated to UiA) is the newsletter for PCS ARMs members. We will always try to ensure we provide the opportunity for members from every area to provide information on events and campaigns where you live. This newsletter will be as good as you,

your representatives and the ARMs national committee are prepared to make it. We look forward to receiving and publicising your thoughts, opinions and ideas in future editions. Finally, we are working to produce hard copy editions of Up in ARM and will keep you up to date with progress.

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Campaign to save Chorley A&E

Jacqui Hadfield, ARMs national committee member and Manchester local secretary, reports on a successful campaign ARMs members joined about the closure of Chorley A&E

Campaigners petitioned Theresa May and have been protesting outside the hospital every Saturday morning for nine months, gaining great support from the local community, nearby towns and cities. Local businesses and passers-by all helped create an electric atmosphere and fabulous community spirit.

Protesters view the closure as part of the wider attacks on the NHS and also as part of the austerity measures affecting many public services. They draw attention to the wider implications on their Facebook page and highlight the plight of many other hospitals throughout the country.

“The NHS will last as long as there are folk with the faith to fight for it

Aneurin Bevan, Minister for Health 1948

Greater Manchester and North West ARMs worked with the North West Regional Centre asking PCS branches in the region to attend a large protest on 26 November. This was met with great enthusiasm by the regular campaigners.

Campaign efforts were rewarded with the agreement to open the A&E for 12 hours a day from 18 January. Campaigners welcomed



back the staff and were interviewed on North West television. Jacqui commented, “Campaigners are delighted with the outcome but will continue to campaign until their A&E is providing a 24-hour service. ARMs members will continue to give their support.”

Triple-lock travesty and the generational divide

The work and pensions select committee are seeking to end the triple-lock guarantee on the annual uprating of the state retirement pension. This appears their only idea in confronting the phoney ‘war between generations’ that certain politicians and media elements are eager to promote. The government has said it will remain until 2020 although after that the future is unclear.

Ranked 32nd out of 34 OECD countries the British State Pension is one of the worst in the developed world. In the recent state pension age review report commissioned by the government (reported on page 3) it is clear that future generations are going to be even more reliant on the state pension in their retirement than their parents and grandparents. Scrapping the triple lock won’t help younger people it will make their pensions worse in the future.

A recent National Audit Office report found that 76% of people reaching retirement in 2060 will be worse off under the new state pension than if they had been on the old system. Millions of future pensioners are also likely to have less generous defined contribution occupational pensions and a rising state pension age of 67 and beyond. The importance of a decent living state pension will therefore be even more important for this generation than for their parents and grandparents, but reducing it by removing the triple lock will make this almost impossible to achieve.

It is important that we tell the truth to our children and their children about what government and their friends with vested interests are trying to do to their futures. Our partners in the NPC have produced a valuable leaflet explaining the facts behind the

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state pension and the phoney intergenerational war that you can download at: <http://npcuk.org>

At a national TUC pensions event held on 1 February 2017, ARMs representatives heard Labour’s shadow secretary of state for DWP – Debbie Abrahams – confirm that the Labour Party is committed to maintaining the triple lock beyond 2020. She also recognised the important role the state pension has in tackling poverty in later life.

State pension age review

Following an **interim report** by John Cridland CBE 'independent reviewer of State Pension age' (SPA) ARMs has welcomed a number of comments in the report. The report shows:

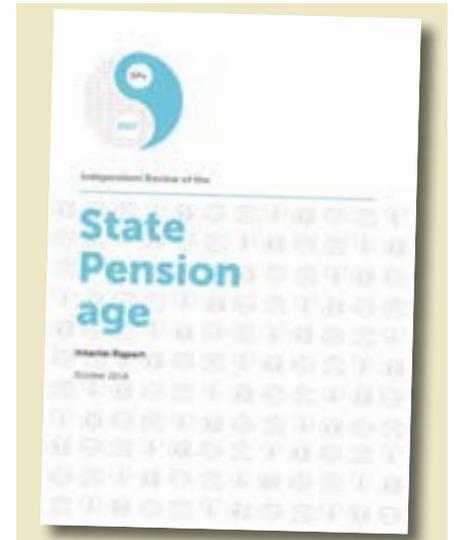
- gross inequality in life expectancy both between and within geographical areas
- only half of all years spent in retirement are in good health
- the UK already has one of the highest SPAs in the developed world, which is set to be 68 by 2044-46. This is matched by just Ireland and the Czech Republic
- how certain disadvantaged groups such as carers, those with a disability, the self-employed, ethnic minorities and women all benefit from the triple lock indexation on the state pension
- that the majority of generations will continue to rely on the state pension for the bulk of their income in retirement.

Cridland also recognises how

important the triple lock on the state pension is to those who will continue to rely on the state pension in the future.

ARMs, in conjunction with the National Pensioners Convention, has now agreed the following points to be submitted to the review consultation:

- there should be no further increases or acceleration of the SPA, and existing plans to raise the age to 67 in 2028 and 68 by 2044-46 should be abandoned because there was a lack of evidence to support any change beyond 66 for both men and women.
- there was no factual case for stating that adults should spend a third of their adult lifetime in retirement. An alternative would be to argue that retirement should be based around the number of years of healthy life expectancy
- the link between Pension Credit and the SPA should be decoupled, so that Pension Credit can be claimed up to 5 years prior to SPA.



- certain defined groups, such as disabled workers and unpaid family carers should be able to access their State Pension up to 5 years prior to reaching SPA without any reduction in value.

Future editions of Up in ARMs will keep you up to date with developments.

Sick of the NHS?

Are you sick of hearing about the NHS? Doctors, patients, GPs and older people particularly are all blamed for driving the NHS into the dust. Salvation may be at hand?

The country is split into 44 regions, with NHS leaders asked to come up with a strategy to 'make services fit for the 21st century'. These sustainability and transformation plans or STPs have been shrouded in secrecy and NHS bosses are hoping implementation will begin later this year.

The plans follow the publication of NHS England's five-year plan for the health service in 2014. That led to the government committing to an £8 billion increase in the frontline NHS budget during this parliament. In

“ Don't wait for someone to ask what you think, find out what is going on in your area and have your say

return the NHS has to make £22bn of efficiency savings.

NHS England says the aim is to 'make the health service more efficient and better geared to keeping people well and out of hospital'. That is leading to some making proposals to consolidate hospital services on fewer sites. Many people say the plans are simply cuts – an observation borne out by the figures above.

There should be full public

consultations in each area. The BBC has analysis of 'Outline plans' for your area at <http://bbc.in/2ln994X>

Our message for ARMs members is – don't wait for someone to ask what you think, find out what is going on in your area and have your say. Question your MP and local councillors and support your local NHS campaign group to understand what's happening in your area and how you can help.

If you want help and advice about this, contact the ARMs reps in your area (details are on the back page).

Some people may say they are sick of hearing about it but if we don't take care of what we have, we may feel a lot sicker in the future.

ARMs and austerity

Austerity remains the order of the day for the May government, **Steve Ion** ARMs North West regional chair talked about how ARMs in his region is responding

Steve told us “We are publicly challenging the way government policies are impacting upon people, public services and our communities.

“Our ARMs members are actively involved in campaigns across our region. We have attended junior doctors’ picket lines, NUT Demonstrations, and supported PCS disputes and

pickets in HMRC, DWP and EHRC. Our members have attended demonstrations against the closure of Chorley A&E and against the threat to close Liverpool Women’s Hospital. We have also supported PCS members in ACAS opposing the closure of its Bootle office. We will be supporting PCS members fighting the threatened

“We are publicly challenging the way government policies are impacting upon people, public services and our communities

closure of jobcentres in some of the most deprived areas of our region.”

With all this activity going on we asked Steve how the region had managed to generate support for all this work. Steve said:

“This hasn’t happened overnight. Our ARMs regional committee and local groups have been working over the last two years with the following aims:

- to improve communications with ARMs members
- to establish better links with PCS branches to explain the importance of ARMs membership
- to work on campaign plans with other groups of union retired members and local NPC groups.”

UiA discussed with Steve the practical work that had been done to meet these aims, he said: “We have a membership newsletter that is also circulated to all PCS branches in the region. We also have a lively



ACAS Bootle dispute



HMRC cleaners’ dispute



Junior doctors’ dispute, Liverpool

ARMs and austerity continued



HMRC cleaners' dispute



Chorley A&E campaign

“What we have learned is that the battle to defend our conditions does not stop once you retire

well-supported Facebook page and blog. We work closely with the PCS regional office and regional committee and receive excellent support. We have two active Local ARMs groups in the region: Merseyside and Manchester and we are in the process of setting up a third group in the Lancashire area. We believe the purchase of a banner for an ARMs Region is a must as it gets our identity out there.

UiA told Steve that one of the problems many ARMs regions face is the lack of any working relationship with PCS branches, often because union reps are under so much pressure with cuts in facility time at a time when departments are imposing major cuts. Steve responded “Last year we



Liverpool NUT campaign

conducted an exercise around AGM time requesting invites to speak where we contacted every PCS branch in the North West region. We attended more than 20 branch committees and AGMs. We were well received and we helped raise awareness of what common issues there are such as pensions, the NHS and social care. We will be doing the same again this year.”

But UiA asked: ‘What about the problem of having a large Region to cover in trying to get members involved?’ Steve replied:

“We consider that local ARMs groups are the future. While our regional committee meetings are open to all ARMs members in a non-voting capacity, the geography involved means that local groups are crucial to maximise attendance. It also makes it easier to support local activities and campaigns and by working with other local groups we can ensure a better presence at events.”

UiA asked what lay ahead for the region, Steve replied: “At the end of last year we attended a ‘generations

united’ event addressed by shadow chancellor John McDonnell and TUC deputy general secretary Paul Nowak. As ARMs members what we have learned is that the battle to defend our conditions does not stop once you retire. Issues of common interest across generations affect us all. We will be working with our members, young members, students and other union retired members to challenge the politicians and media that seek to divide the generations in our community.”

Turning tides in Hull?

Deep thoughts by **Brian Nelson**

Standing opposite Hull's huge aquarium, The Deep, early in January, a feeling of slight trepidation overcame me. In 2017, Hull is the UK's City of Culture, which it launched with an opening week of magnificent video installations projected on to prominent buildings around the city, including The Deep, which rises above the Humber estuary like the side of a giant trawler whose bow is riding high on a stormy sea. On its outside wall, a projected calendar was counting down the many decades of Hull's waves of immigration alongside images depicting how Hull had welcomed and helped them. Then it struck me: two-thirds of Hull people had voted to leave the EU, which has been interpreted as a protest against the very migration that this video was celebrating – which made me wonder, somewhat uneasily, how the people around me would react at the end – favourably or not?

Since the EU referendum Hull, probably like many places, seems to be full of contradictions. Hundreds of Hull's 'leave' voters have now got a new job on the docks with Danish wind turbine manufacturer Siemens; the anti-migration element amongst Hull City AFC supporters who drink in the Tiger's Lair, next to Hull Paragon rail station, seem blissfully unaware of its 19th century origin as a hostel for the tide of Europeans arriving in Hull on their way to Liverpool, bound for the USA. People who oppose immigration nevertheless proudly claim Hull-born pioneer aviator Amy Johnson – the daughter of an immigrant family – as one of their own. As the video was showing us,



“Migration has always been an intrinsic part of Hull's history and culture and I could not help but wonder, had the referendum really changed all that?”

migration has always been an intrinsic part of Hull's history and culture and I could not help but wonder, had the referendum really changed all that?

Then I recalled that there is another side to Hull – an ingrained spirit of independence and defiance dating back to when Hull shut its city gates on King Charles I, sparking the English Civil War. This made me wonder how many of Hull's Brexit voters, rather than voting against immigration, may have been metaphorically slamming the city gates once again – this time in the face of a modern-day remote

governing elite in Brussels?

Politicians like to draw simplistic conclusions from the Brexit vote as if the 52% majority were all of one mind when in reality they voted for a wide and complex range of reasons, and Hull is no different. No one knows what was uppermost in the minds of Hull's 'leave' voters, but the migration video at The Deep did conclude to reassuringly appreciative applause and no discernible grumbling. Maybe the audience were mostly pro-migration 'remainers' – who knows?

I had not expected a 20-minute video to be quite so thought-provoking, but if this is what Hull's year as City of Culture has in store then I am looking forward to the rest of it.

Brian Nelson is a singer/songwriter based in Hull. He has written a number of songs about Hull's deep-sea trawling heritage, and also performs many songs relating to the struggle for social justice. Brian is a lifelong trade unionist, socialist and ARMs Yorkshire and Humber committee member using his musical talents to campaign against austerity.

ARMs NEWSBRIEF

ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE U-TURN

Plans to devolve administration and payment of attendance allowance (AA) to local authorities have been dropped. On 19 January, DCLG confirmed that AA funding will not be localised as part of the business rate reforms and will continue to be administered by DWP.

Announcing the climbdown, that would have added to the postcode lottery in our social care system, government sources reported: "The government recognises the valuable role that AA has played in supporting older people with care needs as a result of their disability or long-term health condition."

The U-turn follows months of lobbying by ARMs members and our NPC campaign partners.

OPPOSE GLASGOW JOBCENTRE CLOSURES

PCS is holding a high profile meeting which will be addressed by PCS national president Janice Godrich and Chris Stephens MP, chair of the PCS Parliamentary group on: Saturday 18 February 2017 (11am – 13am) Adelaide's, 209 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4HZ.

More details available on the PCS national and Scotland web pages.

NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST?

Worried about 'Northern Powerhouse' guru, former chancellor and 'pension freedoms fighter' George Osborne after he 'lost' his job? He's set to join BlackRock Investment Institute. Osborne still pockets his MP's salary (for Tatton) while in his new role. BlackRock, among others, paid Osborne lucrative sums for speeches since he left his role as

chancellor. The MPs register of interest shows he had been paid £34,100 by BlackRock, £142,000 by JP Morgan and £51,000 by Aberdeen Asset Management.

Blackrock's Investment Institute is 'its internal investment research network on macroeconomics providers to its fund managers' – at least that's clear and obviously nothing to do with pension freedoms and the money investors can make out of them? Osborne's annual remuneration is expected to be "at least" hundreds of thousands of pounds. Worry no more, employment opportunities abound in 'sharing' Tory Britain.

ARMs SUPPORTS ACAS DISPUTE



ARMs members in Manchester and Merseyside supported ACAS members in dispute about 'service restructuring' aimed at closure of the office in Bootle, Merseyside. There has been no consultation with staff to take into account their individual needs. Ironic for the Government Arbitration Conciliation Advisory Service?

PCS protesters lobbied Sir Brendan Barber, former general secretary of the TUC and currently chair of ACAS. He was meeting CEO Anne Sharpe, recently made a CBE in the New Year's Honours list for services to workplace relations.

In their ACAS strategy for 2016 –2021 they state "ACAS exists to

improve organisational performance and working life." It is hoped they will re-read the statement and act upon it for ACAS members.

ARMs SUPPORTS EHRC MEMBERS



Recent EHRC compulsory redundancy notices to staff targeted 11 disabled, nine trade union reps and nine minority ethnic staff. The selection process was designed to select people OUT of a role in EHRC despite 39.5 vacancies existing. Furthermore, no redundancy mitigation measures have been taken to help place those at risk into jobs.

Mike Young, national branch chair at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) explained at a recent ARMs members' meeting in Manchester: "Members were told that there would be an additional cut in the EHRC budget of 25%. EHRC had already suffered a 70% cut in the budget since 2010. The cuts would mean fewer caseworkers supporting victims of discrimination and involves the proposed closure of offices in Birmingham, Leeds, Edinburgh and Newcastle."

ARMs members in Manchester resolved to support staff on the picket lines during their strike action and by publicising this article we hope to encourage other ARMs branches to give support to EHRC staff in your area.

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Send your letters to:
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The letters page is for members to exchange views. Publication of any

letter does not imply support for the views of individual members, either by the union or the editor.

Letters should be under 250 words and may be edited for length or clarity.

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