

Annual Report Summary – 2015

Buses, Boats, Beds and Berry – A Look Back at 2015

More than ever before, Committee members and volunteers are taking responsibility for making things happen, developing new skills on the way and working together effectively. As you can see in this report we have campaigned with vigour and imagination but we have also shown a willingness to work with the powers that be to improve things.

Our monthly **Potteries Museum Public Meetings** have covered Meals on Wheels, Canals and Wildlife, Hospital Food and Nutrition, Community Hospitals, Economic Development, the European Union, Bus Transport and much more beside. In August, longstanding friend of the Convention Fred Hughes spoke about the local painter, playwright and poet, Arthur Berry and on Monday 2nd March Joan Walley, who retired from Parliament at the General Election in May, made her last appearance at an NSPC Public Meeting as an MP. We made a presentation to Joan to mark her 28 years as the representative for Stoke-on-Trent North.

Grey Power, this quarterly newsletter, is delivered to all members, friends, affiliates and Councillors. Thanks to the efforts of Pat Smith, our editor, it remains a high quality publication and an excellent campaigning tool.

In June twenty seven members attended the **Pensioners' Parliament** trip to **Blackpool**. It is an opportunity to meet Grey Power campaigners from across the UK and a chance to relax and socialise by the seaside. Contact the office if you want to join us on the trip in 2016.

The **Carewatch** team have given our work another dimension over the last few years. On issues such as accounting for care, problems with access to care, difficulties for relatives visiting people in hospitals and care homes, older people faced with anti-social neighbours, house repairs and other housing issues, they have successfully pursued individual cases with tenacity and attention to detail. These are often cases where the individuals seemed to have exhausted all other options and reached the end of the road. I firmly believe that no other organisations in the area

would have achieved what Janet Smallwood and her team have achieved.

The failure of Stoke-on-Trent City Council Housing Officers to act decisively to support the victims and their reluctance to engage with local residents over these matters has, in the cases we have been involved with, led to great and unnecessary distress.

Sam Wu was our student on placement from **Keele School of Medicine**. He will, I am certain, become an excellent practitioner at whatever discipline he chooses within the medical profession. Thank you to Joanna Wright for all her work on this course. We really do value this work with Keele.

Thank you to all our **Friends of Grey Power** volunteers who have worked so hard in 2015. Three Fayres during the year raised well over £1,000 profit for the Convention. In addition, the magic saucer in the office has yielded hundreds of pounds in office sales during the course of the year. Barbara Hollinshead and Barbara Emery have regularly helped sort out the store area in the office. The team have organised tea and cakes for a pound in the office after the public meetings and held buffets after the public meetings in July and December. Pat Smith has also organised craft sessions in the office to make items for sale. The Convention was the preferred charity for the Greedy Pigs Motorcycle club this year. We set up a cake and food stall at their event at the Free Bird in Newcastle on Sunday 3rd May where we raised over £100 to add to the £1,211 raised by the Greedy Pigs themselves. We thank them for their great generosity.

Because we have organised auditors ourselves rather than relying on Voluntary Action, we have saved the NSPC £375.

Although she will still be involved, **Eunice Long** stepped down from co-ordinating the fundraising work because of her health. I thank Eunice for all her efforts over many years on our behalf.

Campaigns

We began the New Year with a campaign to defend **Stoke-on-Trent Meals on Wheels**. The volunteer based service, which delivers hot meals to over 200 pensioners and other vulnerable residents, was facing closure because Stoke-on-Trent City Council were planning to cut the £80,000 a year grant for the service. Meals on Wheels is a lifeline to isolated older people and, even in

these times of Government cutbacks, a very small part of the City Council's overall budget. After two stalls in Hanley with Meals on Wheels volunteers, we had gathered over 700 signatures for our petition and were gearing up for a long struggle. However, in February we heard that the Councillors had changed their minds and agreed that the service will continue to receive local authority funding for 2015/16. Despite this victory, our fear was that Meals on Wheels would again be in the firing line in 2016/17 but with the change of Council in May the Meals on Wheels service is more secure. We believe that there is now an opportunity to expand Meals on Wheels. This service is more necessary than ever because, due to cut-backs, only the most vulnerable older people are eligible for Social Care. Meals on Wheels volunteers provide a hot meal and a friendly face for those who would otherwise have little or no help. The service boosts people's physical and mental health and acts as an early warning system if somebody's health starts to fail. With NHS managers saying they want to provide more care in people's own homes, surely Meals on Wheels should be a key part of this approach.

The **General Election** was on May 7th and some local elections were held on the same day. We sent our 'Public Transport and You', 'Social Care in the Home' and the 'Pensions and Universal Entitlements' Manifestos to all candidates standing in Stoke-on-Trent and all candidates standing for Parliament across North Staffordshire. 28 candidates replied. Committee member, Miriam Crompton wrote to all those candidates who replied to our letter.

We held a General Election Meeting at the Holy Trinity Church Community Hall in Newcastle on Monday 13th April and representatives of Parties putting forward candidates in seats in North Staffordshire were on the panel. This was attended by over 70 people. It featured the use of our Antiwaffleometer which buzzed when candidates reached their allotted time. At the meeting we awarded 100-year old Convention member Jack Hood Honorary Membership.

As all seats were being contested in Stoke-on-Trent, we held a local election meeting in the RVS in Hanley on Friday 24th April with candidates from seven Parties/Groups represented. There were about 60 in attendance.

In the summer, the NHS in North Staffordshire put forward plans that included the closure of Longton Cottage Hospital and put into

doubt the long term future of other **Community Hospitals in North Staffordshire**. The proposals were to reduce Community Hospital beds and provide more services for people in their own homes. In response to the plans, the Trades Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) organised a 'Save Longton Hospital' march from the Cottage Hospital to Longton which took place on July 11th. Convention member, Alex Shaw and I took our banner on the march which was attended by hundreds of local people representing a wide cross section of opinion. TUSC also began a petition that gathered over 10,000 signatures by the time it was presented to the NHS representatives on October 14th. Our August 3rd public meeting was addressed by Ian Syme, the NHS campaigner and Irene Sutton, a nurse at Longton. We issued a statement saying that, although we support more care in people's own homes delivered by properly skilled and supported staff, we believe that Community Hospitals will still have a major part to play. The three Stoke-on-Trent MPs also provided statements that were read out at our meeting. On September 9th over 50 Convention members attended the Adults and Neighbourhood Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Stoke-on-Trent City Council when they were to consider the proposals from the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group. The Scrutiny Committee members stated that they did not support the closure of beds at Longton Cottage until full consultation has taken place and they raised a number of concerns about the impact of these plans on community services. The process turned into a fiasco when in October the representatives from the NHS announced that the official consultation over the closure of Longton Cottage Hospital and cuts in beds at other hospitals was to be abandoned under instructions from NHS England and a new consultation called 'My Care, My Way - Home First' was to begin on the broad principles of the new approach. We continue to have major concerns about the plans and have sent a response detailing these.

We decided that a **canal trip** on Wednesday 8th July should be the first step towards making our public transport manifesto commitments a reality. Jon Honeysett, our public transport expert, arranged to hire a barge to be towed by a narrow boat and 24 members set off from Etruria Industrial Museum in the morning and arrived at Middleport Pottery for lunch and an early afternoon meeting led by Jon that involved Stoke-on-Trent Cabinet member, Councillor Jack Brereton and others involved with canal issues. Despite the adverse weather, the event was a success due to the

Dunkirk spirit of our members. Jon called for the development of the canal front, 'canal taxis' to carry visitors and local people, a co-ordinated approach to publicising visitor attractions with bus links to the canal and much more. If this approach is successful it will boost visitor numbers to the area and help improve the local economy. It will also give local people and visitors a rich experience in celebration of our industrial heritage. This work is ongoing.

Our wider public transport initiative is in full swing. See the 'Reports' section for our Transport Manifesto.

On Thursday 1st October we held a tongue in cheek' demonstration at a bus stop off **Dividy Road** to celebrate the adding of a raised curb after our year-long campaign. Over twenty people attended and Alan Barrett, local campaigner and artist, offered good humoured support, including a poem specially written for the occasion.

Seventy people took part in our '**Free to Pee**' march on November 2nd from the Potteries Museum to the City Centre Bus Station in Hanley. Thanks to Pat Smith's excellent publicity and poster, we gained coverage on ITV regional news, the Sun newspaper, and all the local media. The Council had introduced a 30p charge to use the public toilets on the bus station two weeks before the march. On the same day they made an announcement that the charge will no longer apply. Credit where credit is due - well done to the Council for responding so promptly to the public.

Since the local elections in May we have now received assurances that the funding and support in kind for the North Staffs Pensioners' Convention including the office, will continue until at least the next local elections in four year's time.

For all those who paid their subs and bought raffle tickets, who helped with mailings and activities, who served on the committee, or who got involved in any other way during 2015 – thank you. You are part of an organisation that makes a difference. We have lost many loyal members during this year and we pay tribute to all of them. The Convention has been going for 24 years. As always, a question that we face is how will we sustain the NSPC in the future? I do not want to be over confident but, given the active involvement of members during 2015, I believe we are better placed than ever before to say that we can do so.

Andy Day
Co-ordinator NSPC

(Copies of the full Annual Report are available from the office on request.)