



# Newsletter

## The Crisis in Social Care

**Dot Gibson was the speaker at the SPAG meeting in December. She gave a very clear overview of what is happening with social care – an area which has concerned pensioners for a very long time.**

Dot emphasised that there needs to be a universal public National Care Service, delivered at home and in care homes. This must be free at the point of delivery and funded in the same way as the National Health Service. Care workers must receive proper pay and conditions and the National Pensioners Convention Dignity Code and Unison's Ethical Code must be enforced. Privatisation must be brought to an end.

Dot looked at the history of Health and Social Care in Britain, explaining that in 1948 when the NHS was set up the National Assistance Act set out in broad terms the responsibilities of Local Authorities to provide residential and home care services. They were empowered to set up home help services, day centres, luncheon clubs and meals on wheels at a low and affordable cost. But in the 1980s things changed; hospital beds for older people were cut and illnesses such as Alzheimers which affect older people, were reclassified as "social" rather than medical needs. This means they are no longer funded by the NHS, and they became means tested. Care services were put in the hands of private providers and were increasingly hard to access.

Over the last 25 years a large number of inquiries looking at social care have taken place. All have advised that the system is not fit for purpose (the Equalities Commission said that the system was an attack on human rights!).

More recently, a government "Fair Access to Care Services" initiative recognised four levels of care – low, medium, substantial and critical—but currently most local councils only provide home help services for those with substantial or critical needs. Lack of care means more hospital admissions for older people, many of whom are forced to stay in hospital for long periods because there is no suitable help available at home; this is causing a greater crisis for the underfunded NHS.

Currently, anyone with more than £125,000 of assets has to fund their own social care (sounds a lot, but most London people who bought their council flats are in this position). Many care homes are closing and many other care home providers are more interested in making money than in providing a good service for those forced to live in care.

As Dot says, we have to end privatisation in health and social care.

**Cllr. Richard Livingstone will be coming to the SPAG meeting on Friday 3 February to talk about social care in Southwark.**

*Affiliated to*

**NPC**

*National Pensioners Convention*



*SPAG members joined a recent demonstration about cold weather deaths of older people*

# A Happy New Year to Everyone

SPAG got a new lease of life in 2016 and we are all very grateful to Cllr Steve Lancashire and the new SPC Director Cathy Deplessis for the support they gave us. As 2017 approaches, we are aware of how much we have to do to make sure that life for pensioners and everyone else is good.

Since the end of the Second World War people in Britain have enjoyed unparalleled prosperity, with most of us having a standard of living our grandparents would have envied (it's hard to think back about life before central heating!). And our generation benefited from free university education and a national health service which has been the envy of people from all over the world. However a lot of things need to improve, and even our Conservative Prime Minister has spoken of the need for more equality; it is generally recognised that an ever smaller group of very wealthy people (the 1%) take a larger and larger percentage of the national cake. This year has seen changes whose outcome can only be guessed. We don't know what will happen as a result of Brexit and the immoderate language of the billionaire US President Elect does not bode well for the future.

As Southwark Pensioners we fight for better conditions not only for ourselves but for younger generations in Britain and all over the world. We are only too aware that we have to improve our underfunded national health service, and we have campaigned actively over the years for better services, particularly mental health services at the Maudsley Hospital.

Another important concern is housing; after the war hundreds of thousands of council houses were built in a short space of time. Most of these have now been sold off and there is a terrible problem for young people who would like to leave home but cannot find a house or flat at a reasonable rent and will never be in a position to buy. There are more people sleeping rough on the streets than there have ever been. Housing subsidies have benefitted landlords without alleviating the real problem and there seems to be no political will to sort out this ever deepening crisis.

There are other issues; women's pensions are still a great concern, and a number of politicians have said that the Triple Lock which safeguards pensions from the effects of inflation is unaffordable—they think pensioners have been overprotected from the austerity culture which has such devastating effects on the poorest section of the community.

The SPAG meeting in December, led by Dot Gibson, focussed on one of the most important issues facing pensioners of today - the need to bring in a properly funded system of social care. The recent government announcement that Councils can raise Council Tax by up to 3% for the next two years to fund social care is just a sticking plaster on a failing system and will have further detrimental effects on the poorest section of the community as Council Tax is regressive and many people cannot afford to pay it. Council budgets have been cut savagely in recent years and Local Authorities are not responsible for the problems.

**SPAG will continue to campaign on all these issues in 2017.**

## Dates for your diary

Fri 6 January 10.00 for 10.30	SPAG Meeting Programme for 2017	Southwark Pensioners Centre
Thursday 19 January 7.00 pm.	Brexit: What are our Demands? Organised by the People's Assembly	St Pancras Church, Euston Road, NW1 2BA
Tuesday 31 January 7pm	Southwark Defend Council Housing Organising meeting	Alvey Estate Tenants Hall.
Friday 3 February	SPAG Meeting	Southwark Pensioners Centre
Saturday 4 March	National demonstration to defend the NHS, in London called by Health Campaigns Together	