

# Pensioners take it to the top

**West Midlands Pensioners Convention are campaigning for better pensioner conditions and an end to NHS privatisation. In this briefing, Chris Smith, secretary of WMPC, shares his experience of organising a successful campaign and meeting those with the power to bring change.**

On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006 pensioners from the West Midlands Pensioners Convention took their concerns about the NHS to the House of Commons. The demonstration was initiated by the 'Keep Our National Health Service Public' organisation. Other organisations like ours were invited to take part, including pensioners, community groups and NHS staff.

The main theme of the demonstration was to protest at the privatisation of the NHS and its supply services, as well as to publicly highlight the discontent of some 11.7 million pensioners with the Government's privatisation action. Pensioners rely upon the NHS in their old age and expect top quality treatment, which they have already paid for over their working years.

The demonstration was ahead of a lobby at the House of Commons, where we met directly with our MPs. The secondary objective of the lobby was to raise the issue of improving existing pensioner conditions. We lobbied for pensioners to receive the proposed increase in state pension now and not be deferred until April 2008, when an estimated 3 million pensioners will have died.

## Achievements

Most of the MPs we met agreed to at least look at an Early Day Motion that had been tabled (see box). But the Government never responds immediately – we shall only know our impact when parliament debates the issue and the MPs vote. We had a lot of publicity for both demonstrations, with reports on TV, radio and in the local and national press.



## Lobbying

Lobbying is a way for an organisation or group of people to present its views to Government or others with power (such as a company), through meetings, demonstrations or written material.

## Early Day Motion (EDM)

An EDM is a kind of parliamentary petition. MPs can sign up to them, and although they may not be debated, the number of signatures on an EDM shows the depth of feeling about a particular issue.

## A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

### Tips on organising a campaign

The objective of demonstrations and lobbies is to persuade MPs, through public concern and pressure, to introduce new legislation, or to review or object to a particular parliamentary proposal (white paper), a bill going through Parliament, or an existing law.

#### **Organising demonstrations:**

- Organising such large events requires preparations to begin some 6 months prior to a selected date, a large number of willing hands and of course adequate finance
- For such demonstrations our regional and local branches organise coach, bus and train travel arrangements
- They produce and distribute leaflets indicating time of departures, pick up points and individual costs
- Approximately one month before the date of the lobby, our branches obtain the names of members wishing to attend the event. This indicates if a coach is needed and what size should be hired
- Often costs for people to travel to the demonstration are subsidised or provided by the organisation concerned or by external sponsors
- Banners and hand held posters are encouraged, to display the name of participating organisations and the reasons for the demonstration.

#### **Lobbying in London:**

- When meeting MPs at Westminster, write a letter to them two weeks prior to the lobby, requesting a meeting.
- Showing their reply at St. Stephen's entrance to Parliament provides a quicker method of contact with the MP.

*For further information on Chris' campaigning work, you can contact him through Coventry Community Empowerment Network (see box on right).*

### **Contacting MPs**

You can find out who your MP is at [www.locata.co.uk/commons](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons), at your local library or by ringing the Public Information Office at the House of Commons on 020 7219 4272.

Write to them at:

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Or visit them at their constituency surgeries – you can find out about these on your MP's website, by phoning their office, or it may be in the local paper. You will need to book an appointment to meet them.

### **Organising events**

The Directory of Social Change's guide to organising local events is available from Coventry Voluntary Service Council's resource room – phone 024 7622 0381 to arrange a visit.

### **How do I lobby?**

Helpful guides are available free from the BBC Action Network, [www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork)

Books on this topic are also available from the Directory of Social Change: [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)

### **National Pensioners Convention**

[www.npcuk.org](http://www.npcuk.org)

**T:** 0207 553 6510

**E:** [admin@npcuk.org](mailto:admin@npcuk.org)

### **Coventry Community Empowerment Network:**

C/o CVSC, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor Coventry Point, Market Way, Coventry, CV1 1EA.

**T:** 024 7622 0381

**E:** [covcen@coventry-vsc.org.uk](mailto:covcen@coventry-vsc.org.uk)