





WASPI CAMPAIGN



Women Against State Pension Injustice

 www.waspicampaign2018.co.uk
 waspigroupnetwork@gmail.com

Annual Report November 2024

“At the heart of every case of maladministration is someone who has suffered injustice.”¹



October 2023: Vice Chair Dilys Jouvenat and other supporters outside the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool

¹ [The Ombudsman in Question: the Ombudsman’s report on pensions and its constitutional implications](#) (2006), p3

1. The Campaign

The campaign has been dominated over the past year by two events:

1. the publication on 21 March 2024 of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's findings on injustice and remedy;
2. the calling of a General Election, which took place on 4 July 2024 and resulted in the formation of a Labour government.



Campaign Chair Hilary Simpson with Rebecca Long-Bailey MP (Chair of the APPG) and Angela Madden (Chair of Women Against State Inequality) at a drop-in for Labour MPs in February 2024, shortly before the publication of the Ombudsman's final report

The Ombudsman's Report (March 2024)



The long-awaited final report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman was published at the end of March 2024. It ran to 96 pages. The Ombudsman found that

maladministration in DWP's communication about the 1995 Pensions Act resulted in complainants losing opportunities to make informed decisions ... and diminished their sense of autonomy and financial control (paragraph 12)

and that

maladministration in DWP's complaint handling caused complainants unnecessary stress and anxiety and meant an opportunity to lessen their distress was lost. For some complainants, it also caused unnecessary worry and confusion. (paragraph 18)

However, the Ombudsman did not find that the six sample complainants suffered direct financial loss.

The remedy proposed by the Ombudsman fell into three categories:

1. Acknowledgement and apology
2. Financial remedy
3. Service improvements

The financial remedy proposed by the Ombudsman for the sample complainants was compensation at level 4 of the Severity of Injustice scale (£1,000 to £2,950). The report acknowledged that “as a matter of principle, redress should reflect individual impact”, but that “the cost and administrative burden of assessing potentially millions of individual women’s circumstances may indicate the need for a more standardised approach” (paragraph 502).

In a departure from its normal practice, the Ombudsman laid the report directly before Parliament to resolve the issue, rather than making recommendations to the DWP.

What DWP has told us during this investigation leads us to strongly doubt it will provide a remedy ... Given the scale of the impact of DWP’s maladministration, and the urgent need for a remedy, we are taking the rare but necessary step of asking Parliament to intervene. We are ... asking Parliament to identify a mechanism for providing appropriate remedy for those who have suffered injustice. We think this will provide the quickest route to remedy for those who have suffered injustice because of DWP’s maladministration. (paragraph 21)

MPs from all parties urged the then Work and Pensions Secretary, Mel Stride MP, to provide details of a compensation scheme as quickly as possible, but he refused to give a response except to say that the report would be given proper consideration.

On 7 May 2024 the Work and Pensions Select Committee held a one-off evidence session on the findings of the report. The meeting was chaired by Sir Stephen Timms MP (Labour) and representatives from the APPG, the Ombudsman and Women Against State Pension Inequality gave their views. It was generally felt to be a fair, thorough and cautiously positive session (<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14780/html/>).

However two weeks later, on 22 May 2024, the government announced that it was calling a General Election to be held on 4 July, which put a stop to any further discussion in Parliament.

The General Election (July 2024)

As election campaigning got under way, clear commitments to compensation were included in the manifestos of the Liberal Democrats, the SNP and Plaid Cymru, with the Green Party also pledging their support. The Conservative manifesto included a commitment to “work with Parliament to provide an appropriate and swift response.”

The Labour manifesto, in contrast, contained no reference at all to the Ombudsman’s report or its recommendations for compensation. On 31 May 2024, the Labour leader Sir



Keir Starmer said that it was "shocking" that Conservative ministers had failed to respond to the Ombudsman's report, but refused to commit a future Labour government to a compensation scheme. And on 5 June, his prospective Chancellor, Rachel Reeves (who in a former role as Shadow Pensions Minister had

campaigning against the 2011 acceleration of the changes to the state pension age), said "I recognise that injustice, but we have not set out any money for this." Nevertheless, many 1950s women believed that a successful conclusion to the WASPI campaign was more likely under a Labour government, given the support that the party had shown in opposition.

In the event, a Labour government was elected in July with a substantial majority but it soon became clear that there would not be a swift response to the Ombudsman's report. Despite meeting with campaign representatives – including our Chair, Hilary Simpson – on 5 September 2024, the new Pensions Minister, Emma Reynolds MP, continues to assert that the report is complex and that the Government's response will take time. Her reply on 24 October 2024 to a question from Steve Darling MP, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Work and Pensions, is typical:

The Ombudsman's report took around five years to complete and deserves serious consideration. This Government respects the work of the Ombudsman and we are currently working through all aspects of the Ombudsman's final report along with the evidence provided during the investigation.

There continues to be a high level of support from backbench MPs of all parties. On 11 September 2024, two members of our Steering Group met some of them at a drop-in session at Westminster for new and returning MPs organised by Women Against State Pension Inequality.



Elizabeth Stanley and Hilary Simpson with new Labour MPs at the Westminster drop-in on 11 September 2024. L to R: Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire), Simon Opher (Stroud), Jacob Collier (Burton & Uttoxeter)

Despite torrential rain we once again had a large and colourful presence outside the 2024 Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, which complemented the information stall inside the conference hall run by Women Against State Pension Inequality colleagues.



Campaign members in the rain outside the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, September 2024

On 30 October 2024 – the day of the new Labour government’s first budget – our supporters joined the demonstration at Westminster organised by our fellow campaigners at Women Against State Pension Inequality.



Durham WASPIs with their MP Mary Kelly Foy (centre) at the Budget Day demonstration in Westminster on 30 October 2024

3. The Steering Group

The following Local Group Coordinators were elected to form the Steering Group at the 2023 AGM:

1. Janet Blackman *Lewes*
2. Elizabeth Daly *West Dunbartonshire*
3. Dilys Jouvenat *Rhondda*
4. Pamela Judge *Ceredigion*
5. Carla O'Hara *West Lothian*
6. Judith Robertson *Salford & Eccles*
7. Hilary Simpson *South Cotswolds*
8. Elizabeth Stanley *Stroud & District (English groups representative)*

At the first meeting of the Steering Group Hilary Simpson was elected as Chair, Dilys Jouvenat as Secretary, and Elizabeth Stanley as Treasurer.

Further roles were allocated as follows:

1. Dilys Jouvenat Vice Chair and Local Group Network Coordinator
2. Pamela Judge Vice Chair and Public Relations
3. Janet Blackman Social media (Twitter)
4. Elizabeth Daly Social media (Facebook)
5. Carla O'Hara Website

The Steering Group normally meets once a month via Zoom; during the period covered by this report the group met 11 times. Steering Group meetings continue to be efficiently organised and minuted by our Secretary Dilys Jouvenat, who is also the Local Group Network Coordinator and a Vice Chair.

4. Local Groups

We have a total of 56 local groups - 36 in England, 11 in Scotland and 9 in Wales. These remain crucial in keeping the campaign alive at a local level.



Lewes WASPI group with Ed Davey, Lib Dem Leader and James MacCleary, their new Lib Dem MP, in August 2024

Monthly Zoom meetings are held for local Coordinators to ensure they are kept in touch with developments. Ten were held during the period covered by this report.

5. Public Relations



The media coverage of the publication of the Ombudsman's report in March 2024 was extensive. Between us and our fellow campaigners at Women Against State Pension Inequality there were around 50 broadcast interviews and over 60 articles in the national press. Of these, our Steering Group members contributed four radio interviews, five TV interviews and five newspaper interviews. The highlights can be seen on our website [here](#). A number of co-ordinators also used our template news releases to get the story published in their local press.

During the last year WASPI Inequality, working through their PR company, have achieved an increasing amount of media coverage in the national and local press, TV and radio. This has allowed our Public Relations Coordinator, Pamela Judge, to focus our own Public Relations activity on liaising with MPs and increasing the reach of our social media.



During the run-up to the General Election in July we provided a poster for WASPI supporters to use in their windows, a briefing on the Ombudsman's report for our local Coordinators, and an analysis of the political parties' positions for our website; we also ensured that the website had a strong focus on key issues and important current developments.

Our biggest innovation this year has been the launch of the BUZZ, a monthly email bulletin specifically for MPs, and the recruitment of over 600 people to the SWARM, a network of supporters who

send a copy of the BUZZ directly to their constituency MP. Over 50% of MPs now get a copy of the BUZZ directly from one or more of their constituents and the number continues to grow.

During the run-up to the General Election copies of the BUZZ were also produced for parliamentary candidates to ensure that they were properly briefed on the campaign.

The content of the BUZZ is kept concise and straightforward to counter the misinformation which proliferates around the campaign. It has been well-received by MPs and we have seen evidence of their being informed by it when they have spoken in parliament or in their local press. It also enables WASPI supporters all over the country to play an important role in the campaign by keeping their MPs informed.

Website

Carla O'Hara (West Lothian) is responsible for our website, which had 18,000 visitors over the past year - an increase of almost 30% on the previous year. The website achieved a performance score - comparing its performance with the websites of other similar organisations - of 99%.

Social Media

Another target for us during the last twelve months was to increase our presence on social media. Our social media team of Liz Daly (West Dunbartonshire), Janet Blackman (Lewes) and Carla O'Hara (West Lothian) is responsible for our Facebook page, which now has 13,000 followers (an increase of almost 20% from last year) and reaches over 340,000 people, and our X (Twitter) account which has over 1,300 followers.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would once again like to thank all the members of the Steering Group who have given their time and energy selflessly and unstintingly to the work of the campaign over the past year to secure justice for the 3.8 million women born in the 1950s.

Hilary Simpson
Chair, WASPI (Women Against State Pension Injustice) Campaign 2018
November 2024

