

# nipsa Reports

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**GENERAL  
COUNCIL  
ELECTIONS**

**POST  
YOUR  
VOTE**

February 2026

NIPSA has called on members to help build a stronger and more representative union - a democracy that delivers for workers - by making sure they use their vote in this year's General Council election.

The ballot is open and the union's 47,000 members should all have received a postal vote with a pre-paid return envelope through Civica, formerly Electoral Reform Services (ERS). **Closing date for receipt of ballots is 2pm on Wednesday, 18th February.**

General Secretary Carmel Gates urged members to make their voices heard: "This is an important election - the General Council is NIPSA's beating heart. It is the focus of our democracy ensuring accountability, overseeing finances, and, most importantly, representing members' interests.

"Your participation matters and every member's vote counts. It is vital the union reflects the will and meets the needs of its members. Use your vote to shape the makeup of the next General Council. By



voting you play an active part in the democratic processes of this union."

The 25-member General Council is NIPSA's governing body and as such shapes policies, oversees committees, takes decisions and runs the union between delegate conferences.

Over many years, branches have put motions to conferences to ask the General Council to address the turnout in elections. However, it should be noted, ballot returns from NIPSA members are generally higher than many other unions.

Nonetheless, the General Council agreed that anti-union legislation, which requires ballots by post, is a significant barrier to participation and decided more should be done.

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**2026** GENERAL  
COUNCIL  
ELECTION

**USE YOUR**

**X**  
**VOTE**

**→ Ballot Closes 2:00 p.m. Wednesday 18 February**

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Protecting Public Services  
Supporting Public Servants

Ag Cosaint Seirbhísí Poiblí  
Ag Tacú le Seirbhísigh Phoiblí

# Use your vote! Post your vote!

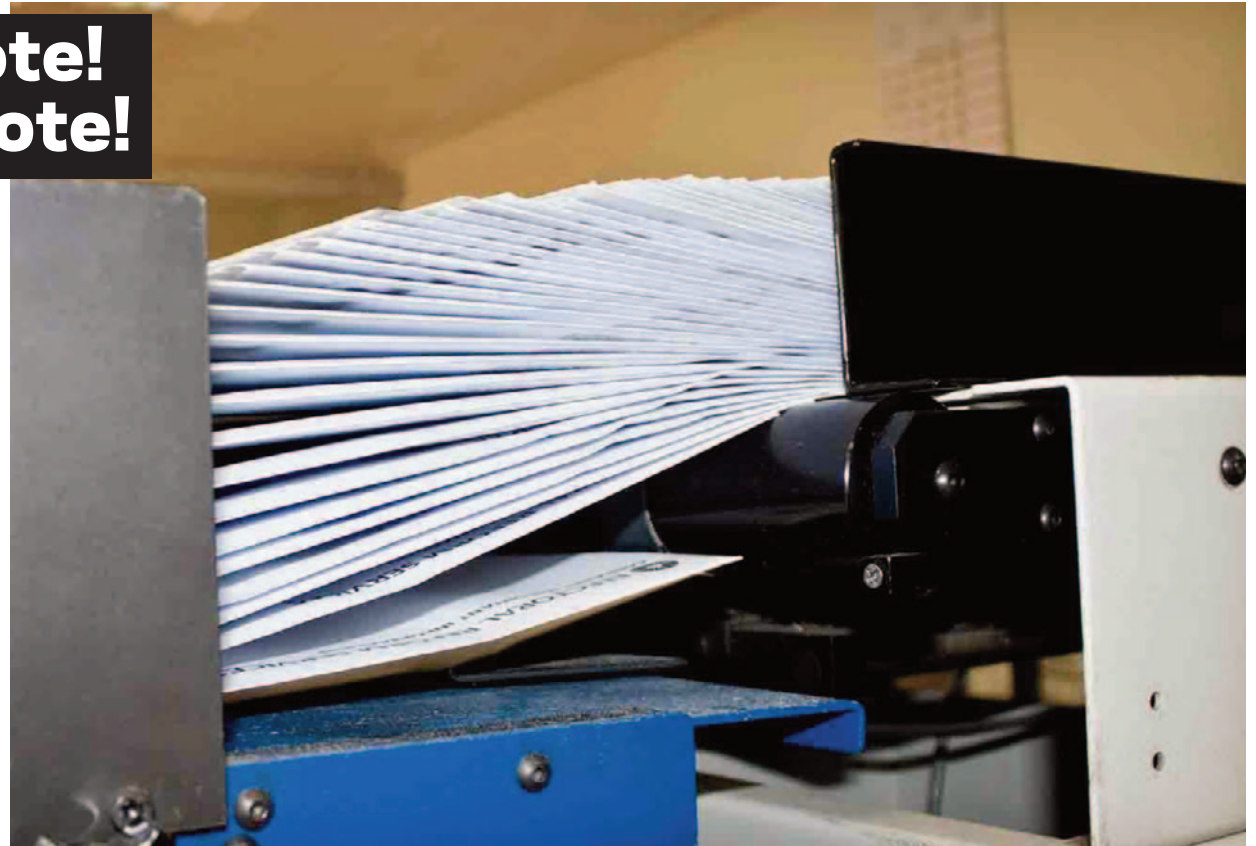
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The steps taken by the General Council to improve participation have included:

- having ballots papers sent to home addresses;
- sending ballot papers in red envelopes to make them stand out;
- having strap lines encouraging votes on all NIPSA communication; and
- increasing promotional activity on social media and on the website.

During the debate at conference in 2025, Tina Creaney, General Council's speaker to Motion 30, informed delegates the despite the downward trend in election participation, union membership was at the same time multiplying because of NIPSA's "successful campaigning and strategic action".

She said members were taking pride in their union and encouraging others to join but that this energy at grassroots level wasn't being reflected in turnout at General Council elections. "We need to



Your vote counts! Machine collating election ballot forms. Remember to post back ballots in the pre-paid envelopes Picture: Civica Election Services

understand why our members have disengaged when it comes to elections," she added.

Another delegate speculated that the low turnout might reflect

members' satisfaction with the union and that if members were unhappy, they might be turning out to vote in higher numbers.

Whatever the reason for the

turnout, the General Secretary is urging members to exercise their democratic right to define the direction of the union and return their ballot paper before the deadline.

## 6 reasons why you should vote...

**1. Accountability and transparency - ensure NIPSA operates under the most scrupulous of standards, particularly in managing union finances, and that those at the helm answer, through a democratic forum, to you, the member.**

**2. Influencing policy and shaping strategy - elect members who share your views on what path NIPSA should take in the year ahead. The General Council also has the power to authorise industrial action or work-to-rule campaigns. Remember, if you want a campaigning union, vote for one!**

**3. Exercising your democratic rights - as a paid-up member of the union, your voice deserves to be heard. It took a long time and many hard-fought battles to secure those rights, use them!**

**4. Protecting and augmenting members' benefits and services - legal advice, representation in grievances, health and safety: these vital workplace supports affect you day in and day out - that is why your vote counts.**

**5. Help to shape the leadership of the union - remember that only those elected to General Council can stand for the key offices of president, vice-president and honorary treasurer at conference. Your vote does matter.**

**6. Promoting equality and diversity - your vote can help elect a Council that is reflective of its membership and is committed to promoting equal opportunities and anti-sectarian, cross-community trade unionism.**

- If you have not yet received a ballot paper, please contact NIPSA Membership between 9am and 5pm on **028 90661831**
- All other queries regarding this election should be raised with: **Civica Election Services, 33 Clarendon Road, London N8 0NW**

# A fighter for his class

**NIPSA stalwart, and former Treasurer, John Toal died peacefully at his home in Belfast on 14th January.**

A proud native son of Culloville, South Armagh, John – simply known as ‘Toal’ to his friends – was a “larger than life character” who made an impression on everyone he met.

Described by his colleagues in DfC as “a fighter to the end”, he was also a fighter from the start – joining NIPSA in his first week as a civil servant in 1989.

And he remained steadfast in his activism until his early retirement through ill health in March 2023.

John held many positions including secretary for Branch 4 (CBB/IBB) and Branch 5 (Disability & Carers Service) before moving as a Seconded Officer to the DSD/DfC Section Office where, colleagues said, he represented members with a “passion and drive” that was “second to none”.

A DfC Committee colleague said: “John has left a massive mark on many DfC reps and members. Management had a great respect for his insights and candour, even if some of them often dreaded to see him on the other side of the table!

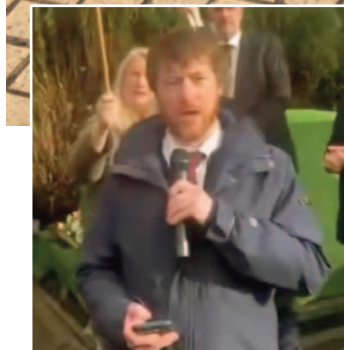
“He was always ready to give an opinion or advice – he was a fighter to the end.”

John, a member of NIPSA Broad Left and an able negotiator, was first elected to General Council in 2007 and served on the Civil Service Group Executive for more than a decade. In 2011, he was elected honorary treasurer, serving in that role for three years.

Describing him as a “wonderful class fighter”, Carmel Gates, NIPSA General Secretary, said: “With John in your corner, whether in collective bargaining negotiations or on personal cases, you knew the odds were stacked in your favour. He was highly intelligent and was a linchpin in the negotiations on Equal Pay in 2009.

“He was also great craic on a night out and loved to belt out a song or two. One of his favourites was *Ordinary Man* but he was never comfortable singing the line that he never went on strike for better pay – there was no better man on a picket line.

“A few weeks before his death when I visited him along with Maria Morgan, NIPSA Deputy General Secretary, he was still full of the craic, devilment and banter. He never lay down to his illness but confronted it head on and lived his best life to the



John (above) at last year's May Day parade

Eoin Dawson (inset left) sings *The Red Flag* at John's graveside in Crossmaglen

very end.” Carmel added: “John was an ordinary man but was also more extraordinary than he knew and I was lucky enough to call him my comrade and my friend.”

Despite being retired, John continued to take part in NIPSA protests and rallies and continued to attend May Day.

Speaking to *NIPSA Reports* at last year's May Day parade, John remarked that, though retired, “once you get involved with NIPSA and get involved with workers' rights, it never leaves you.”

And it never left John. He died as he lived, with his NIPSA badge and NIPSA Distinguished Service Medal pinned to his lapel.

John was buried in Crossmaglen on 17th January. His family draped

his coffin with the red flag and walked with it proudly through the streets to the church. At John's request, *The Red Flag* was sung at his graveside.

John is survived by his partner Sinead, his father Jackie, sisters Fiona, Ann, Marie, Orla, and brother PJ.

All who knew and cherished John's comradeship at NIPSA extend their deepest condolences to the Toal family.

## The John we knew... 'Unwavering support'

Personal reflection from **Maria Morgan**, NIPSA Deputy General Secretary...

“John was an activist from the Civil Service side of NIPSA but he could always be relied on to support comrades across all parts of the union. I have been asked by Classroom Assistants to mention specifically his unwavering support for them.

“During their long-running dispute he stood with them in picket lines and marched with them in solidarity to make sure they knew they were supported by the wider union membership in their struggle.”

## 'A great mentor'

Personal reflection from **Tina Creaney**, who worked alongside John as a Seconded Officer...

“John was a great mentor and encouraged me to put myself forward for positions in NIPSA that I would never have considered on my own because he believed in me and supported me throughout.

“He was also selfless in helping my husband when he needed his support. I am forever grateful for that support – it made me realise what it was to be a trade unionist and part of the NIPSA family. It was thanks to John that I became a NIPSA rep and I haven't looked back since – it's all his fault.”

## 'Above all, John loved people..!'

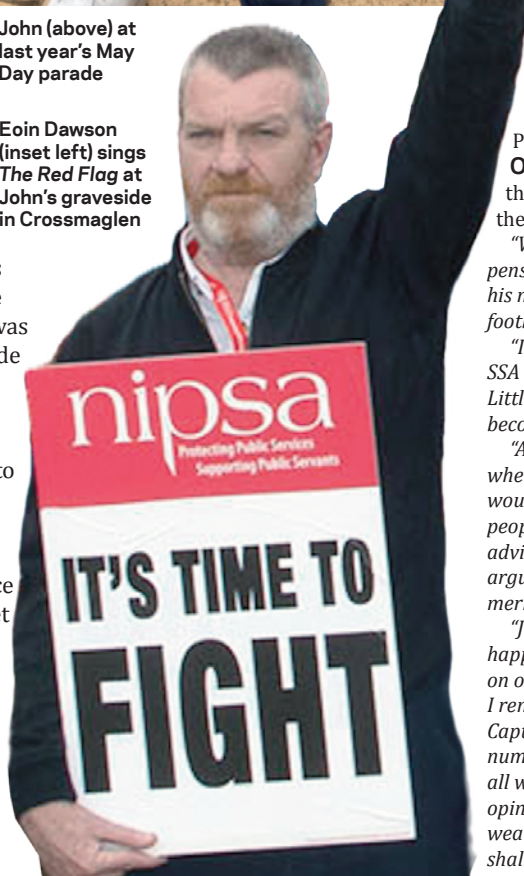
Personal reflection from **Ruaidhri O'Sandair**, his friend and colleague in the Seconded Office, who travelled round the world with him...

“When John medically retired and got his pension, he decided to spend his time and all his money on his great passion – going to football matches around the globe.

“I recall my first meeting with John at a SSA Conference in Derry 20-odd years ago. Little did I know that day that John would become a good friend.

“Above all John loved people, no matter where we went following Ireland. John would be chatting, getting to know the people. Always ready for a chat, to give advice or get into a heated debate or argument, whichever the circumstances merited.

“John was always interested in what was happening in the many countries we visited on our travels. John always spoke his mind. I remember one encounter with a US Army Captain in Tbilisi. Undeterred by the number of army personnel in his company, all were left in no doubt about John's opinion of the MAGA hat the Captain was wearing. *Ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís (We shall not see his likes again).*”



# 2026 Use Your Vote

## GENERAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

If you have not received a ballot paper by Thursday 5 February please contact NIPSA Membership between the hours of 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. on: 028 9066 1831

Any other queries on this election should be raised with:

Civica Election Services,

33 Clarendon Road, London. N8 0NW

Alternatively call Civica on: 020 8365 8909

**Closing date for receipt of Ballot:**

**2:00 p.m. on Wednesday 18 February**

Ballot papers must be completed and returned in the prepaid envelope to:

Civica Election Services, London, N81 1ER.

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