



# Norfolk Federation of WIs

Charity Number: 227411

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## **On the anniversary of 100 years of WI campaigning**

Can you remember the smell of the top deck of a bus when smoking was allowed? Or perhaps the office where you worked? Or even the smell in your living room when people smoked in their homes and the carpets and curtains reeked of smoke? We look now with amazement at television footage of events in the 70s when politicians were smoking as they were interviewed, or old films when it was almost obligatory to look cool by smoking – do you remember Lauren Bacall looking at Humphrey Bogart in the classic film “To Have and Have Not”, cigarette in hand? In Norwich some of the members of Hellesdon WI were not so sure that this was a good idea and in June 1964 they proposed a resolution that:

*In order that people be discouraged from smoking, the National Federation of Women's Institutes urges that strong measures be taken to restrict the amount of smoking in public places such as tops of buses, places of entertainment, cafes and restaurants and also on television.*

Think what has happened in the subsequent half century! How many people are alive now who might have succumbed to smoking related diseases if the issue had not been raised – and think how much better it is without the smell of smoke everywhere! We owe a lot to the WI members in Hellesdon.

Let us now go back a full century to October 1918 – a year which the world cannot forget. The First World War was in its final stages but many young men were still being killed and the women at home were working to keep their families alive. The National Federation of Women's Institutes had been formed during the course of the war and members had worked hard to help keep the country running while the men were in the trenches. Then in October 1918 came the passing of the first WI mandate and the beginning of a century of campaigning. The first campaign, proposed by Epping WI in Essex, was about housing

*That the provision of a sufficient supply of convenient and sanitary houses, being of vital importance to women in the country, County Federations and Women's Institutes are urged to bring pressure to bear upon their Local Councils ... to ensure that full advantage is taken in their districts of the Government scheme for State-aided Housing.*

Provision of housing is still topical, although the emphasis has changed to affordable housing and over the years the WI has passed many resolutions which have reflected contemporary concerns, many of which remain relevant. In the 100 years of WI campaigning, the Norfolk Federation has had eight resolutions passed to become national mandates for action. During the Second World War, in 1943, Norfolk



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proposed two resolutions. One reflected the fear of mass unemployment with ensuing hardships and urged the Government to give precedence to the problem *“to secure and ordered opportunity of service and earning for all”*. The other 1943 resolution is still topical noting that despite progress in the School Meals Scheme *“there are still many schools without canteens and urges: 1. Local Education Authorities to accelerate their arrangements (which should not be wholly dependent on voluntary effort) so that all schools may be served. 2. Parents to take full advantage of such provision where it exists.”*

Yes, these issues are still relevant today, as is a resolution from Sheringham WI in 2003 that the Government should *“take urgent action in order to ensure that the necessary facilities and services are provided to enable older people, irrespective of their means, to spend their remaining years in comfort and dignity, whether this be in their own home, or in a nursing or residential home of their choice.”* Like many WI campaigns this mandate is not time restricted. The WI can and do still campaign on many issues passed in previous years and we do make a difference!

**653 words**