

NPC

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

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WANT TO JOIN THE NPC?

Do you care about issues affecting older people? Want to do something about them? Then why not join us, as an individual or as an affiliate group. We are the biggest campaign group run for and by older people. So contact us today and find out how to get involved. Details above.

BDC 2022 – Ron hands over the mantle to Rosie

Retiring NPC President Ron Douglas warmly welcomed his newly elected successor Rosie MacGregor at the 2022 Biennial Delegate Conference last month. Congratulating Rosie, our first female President, Ron wished her every success in continuing the NPC’s fight for a better deal for the UK’s older people. Rosie thanked Ron for his long and distinguished service and dedication to the NPC. Ron, who received a standing ovation from delegates, paid tribute to all NPC members and Officers, for their hard work and support over the years. *For a report on this year’s BDC, please turn to pages 3 and 4.*



Retiring President Ron Douglas congratulates new NPC President Rosie MacGregor.

NPC WIN: BT pauses digital phone lines switchover after we raise major issues

The NPC welcomes BT’s decision to suspend the roll out of their new Digital Voice home phone service which has already caused many problems for older people. The NPC met with BT executives last month to outline serious flaws in the new system, which is scheduled to replace the old analogue phone lines by 2025. But the switchover has already had serious consequences for many of our members, who were left without any phone for emergencies. In a subsequent announcement, BT apologised for having “underestimated the disruptive impact this upgrade would have on some of our customers” while they work on improvements to the new system. **General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “The NPC has been at the forefront of confronting BT about our members issues with the new Digital Voice system. Suspend-**

Ofcom must now press other phone providers to do the same

ing the roll out should be an opportunity for BT to look further into the needs of older people who have difficulty understanding the digital phones that take the place of their beloved landline phones that they are well versed in using.” She added that the NPC will be seeking a further consultation meeting with BT and communications regulator Ofcom. She said “We must have clarification on the full implications of the pause in the Digital Voice phone line switchover. There are many other phone providers in the UK who are involved in this work - they have still to say what their plans are, if they intend suspending work or notifying customers.” The cases flagged to BT by the NPC included a lady of 85 years of age who was switched to the new Digital Voice service in December but didn’t realise her old...

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BT say ‘with hindsight’ they went too early with change

...landline no longer worked so was left without a phone to call her family over Christmas. Another case involved a man in his 70s whose electricity and digital phone - was cut off for days by Storm Arwen. His phone provider’s solution was to send two gigantic batteries to charge his mobile phone – but they only had power for a couple of hours. Jan praised Scottish councillor Geva Blackett who sent a 1,500-name petition to Ofcom after

“We got this part wrong and for that, we’re sorry.” BT

storms cut off power and phone lines to thousands in her area who had recently been switched over. In a statement BT said: “With hindsight we went too early (on the switch-over), before many customers, particularly those who rely more heavily on landlines understood why this change is necessary. We recognise we have more work to do on getting better back-up solutions in place... We got this part.. wrong and for that, we’re sorry.”

Ofcom has just published a review of recent research on Digital Exclusion across the

Ofcom Digital Exclusion Review on Access, Ability & Affordability

UK to better inform their work. While the industry regulator focuses on helping consumers get online and navigate the digital sphere, this new report: ‘accept(s) that there are some consumers for whom digital access will never be a priority, whether due to lack of interest, a limiting condition, or being part of an older generation. Digital exclusion is therefore a challenge to be tackled on three fronts: supporting those who want to get online; providing less confident users with essential digital skills; and ensuring that those who remain offline are not left behind. Access, Ability

and Affordability were seen as the three main obstacles to getting online, particularly

among the over 70s. Other key findings included: • 6% of households did not have internet access in December 2021. • Those most likely to be digitally excluded were: older, financially vulnerable, unemployed, living alone, or with a limiting condition, like hearing or sight loss.

While the pandemic enabled more adults to gain new digital skills, for others the digital divide widened as more services moved online. NPC’s Digital Working Party will be launching the next stage of our Connections For All campaign after BDC Motion made tackling digital exclusion a priority.

Chancellor’s failure to help is financial disaster for pensioners

Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Spring Statement in the House of Commons failed to deliver any tangible relief in the current cost of living crisis for the UK’s oldest and poorest. With prices rising at the fastest rate for 30 years, plus huge energy price hikes this April—and more to come in October - it was hoped he would offer further help for those who are struggling. The NPC and others have been calling for the reinstatement of the triple lock increase on this year’s state pension—but he has chosen to ignore this.

April Fool’s Day price hikes were no joke

NPC General Secretary, Jan Shortt commented: “April Fool’s Day 2022 was no joke as it marked the start of a tough 12 months for our oldest and poorest with eye-watering energy price hikes. Pensioners on low and fixed incomes are already having to choose between eating and heating. Now the Chancellor expects them to find several hundred pounds more to pay their energy bills, and offers meagre amounts to help. He is so

wrong if he thinks we accept that we are all suffering equally in this horrendous cost of living crisis. His decision to suspend the ‘triple lock’ means from April 11, pensioners will receive just a 3.1% extra. Yet inflation is currently at 6.2% with predictions it will rise to more than 8%. **The Chancellor has promised to reinstate the triple lock from April 2023, with some predicting a £200 a week state pension from 2024. But this is totally misleading - ‘jam’ next year does absolutely nothing**

to help older people pay their bills in the grim year ahead. The UK state pension perpetuates inequality by having two different schemes. Not all retirees receive the full £179.60 per week if you retired after 2016 (£185.15 from 11 April) or £137.60 per week (£141.85 from 11 April) if you retired earlier. Many others, mainly women, receive much less. So even if the Chancellor keeps his 2023 triple lock promise, not all of us will get his magic £200 a week.”

BDC looks to the future

The 11th Biennial Delegates Conference returned for 2022 with a packed agenda, passionate debate and a fervent re-commitment to campaigning for the rights of older people. The event was forced to skip last year due to pandemic restrictions. But the more than 100 delegates from affiliates were clearly back together how best the tackle the challenges currently facing older people. In his opening address, retiring President Ron Douglas thanked delegates for continuing their campaign

BDC 2022
Yarnfield Centre
Staffordshire
15-16 March

across the UK eager to be to discuss NPC can many chal-



Newly elected Vice Presidents, Norman Jamieson, Ellen Lebeth, Sandra Durkin & Barry Todman.

work, despite the Covid-19 restrictions that prevented NPC groups meeting in person for much of the last two years. He welcomed their adoption of Zoom for online meetings and webinars to continue our work. He also praised the ongoing Review of the organisation by the Structure Working Party. Standing Orders Committee Chair Joel Kominsky presented an Interim Report, on the Review, outlining its aims to stabilise NPC finances, remain relevant to current and future pensioners, retain NPC core principles, aims and objectives, while increasing equality, diversity, inclusion and participation. The Review is examining the way the NPC operates and communicates, with an emphasis on the need to adapt, streamline and improve where necessary. This includes a proposal to merge the National Council and Executive Committee, which was agreed to be enacted along with elections to the combined body in due course. The final recommendations of the Review, due in 2023, will be considered at a special BDC.

BDC 2022 Election of Officers

RESULTS

(Votes in brackets)

President

- Rosie MacGregor (73) - Elected
- Norman Jemison (44)

General Secretary

- Jan Shortt - Elected unopposed

Deputy Gen. Secretary

- Linda Richards - Elected unopposed

Treasurer

- Steve Whitehead - Elected unopposed

Vice Presidents (4 Posts)

- Sandra Durkin (74) - Elected
- Norman Jemison (72) - Elected
- Ellen Lebeth (98) - Elected
- Barry Todman (87) - Elected
- Allan Jeyes (15)
- Les McDowell (15)
- Tony O'Brien (46)
- Fran Postlethwaite (43)
- Owen Sloss (4)

Honorary Officers (Appointed)

- Ron Douglas
- Dot Gibson
- Peter Rayner
- Marion Wilson

Standing Orders Committee (6 Posts)

- Tony Hall - Automatically Elected
- Joel Kosminsky - Automatically Elected
- Alan Sidaway - Automatically Elected
- Malcolm Swann - Automatically Elected
- Andy Warnock-Smith (92) Elected
- Louisa St Bartholomew-Brown
- Morgan (69) - Elected
- Tom James (57) - Reserve

Honorary Officers Appointed



The 2022 BDC unanimously appointed four of our longest serving Officers—retiring Deputy Gen. Secretary Dot Gibson (who could not attend BDC), Vice-Presidents Peter Rayner & Marion Wilson, & President Ron Douglas—as Honorary Officers. Gen Secretary Jan Shortt said she's delighted they will remain an integral part of the NPC.

BDC 2022
continued

Delegates raise funds for Ukraine

BDC delegates raised £295.56 for the DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee) Appeal for those affected by the war in Ukraine. A Raffle also raised £317 for NPC funds. Thanks to all who donated & provided raffle prizes.



Motions and Amendments stir debate and support

The three years since BDC was last able to meet have been some of the most difficult for older people since the NPC was set up in 1979. The Constitutional and Policy Motions and Amendments discussed at conference covered many of the issues. Full Minutes, including details of emergency motions, will be distributed soon. Here are just some of the Motions carried: Commitments by NPC to campaign for greater awareness of NI contribution rules; the urgent need to keep Post Office Card Accounts; and for an increase in the paltry Winter Fuel Allowance and Christmas Bonus this November to help pensioners meet rocketing energy bills. There was also a call for a fairer tax system and an end to tax avoidance loopholes. In response to the huge rise in energy prices, a call to campaign for all private and social hous-

ing—new and old—to be properly insulated, and the establishment of public ownership of the energy sector. Other Motions and Amendments which won conference backing were calls on the NPC to campaign to halt the assault on older people’s living standards to ensure services they rely upon are not only maintained but improved. There were successful calls to campaign to improve failing bus services by bringing them back under local authority control. Similarly calls were carried to take steps to secure rail services, including reinstatement of services and retention of paper ticketing and booking offices. The need to provide more public toilets was also approved. The next phase of Connections for All to campaign for digital inclusion was approved. A motion against the introduction of Voter ID was also successful.

Out-of-work benefits see biggest drop in value in 50 years

New analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights that 11 April marked the greatest fall in the value of the basic rate of out-of-work benefit in fifty years. A decade of cuts and freezes mean this benefit has lost value in eight of the last ten years.

New analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows this is the greatest fall in the value of the basic rate of unemployment benefit since 1972. The 3.1% increase which comes into effect on Monday—and mirrors the rate of rise in the state pension—is based on inflation as of last September, whereas inflation is expected to hit 7.7% this month. This means households in receipt of benefits will experience a real-terms cut to their incomes which are already at historically low levels. Recent JRF analysis highlights that this decision

**Increase mirrors low
3.1% state pension rise**

will pull 600,000 people into poverty, around a quarter of whom are children. Since 1972, ministers have decided how much to increase benefit levels by each year based on an assessment of inflation. Since 1987, they have typically considered the rate of inflation the previous September to decide benefit levels each April. While ministers consider inflation when setting unemployment benefit levels, they may choose a higher or lower rate. The new analysis highlights that for eight of the ten benefit level changes between 2013 & 2022, the basic rate of unemployment benefits lost value, leaving it at a 35-year low in real terms. From 2013-2019, ministers chose to reduce real term benefits by freezing their value or increasing them by lower than inflation (at the same time as introducing other cuts).