

NPC Campaign!

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

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.

NPC General Secretary to address mass protest at Parliament on June 18th

The NPC will join thousands of workers and members of the public from across the UK at a mass 'We Demand Better' march and rally in London on Saturday, 18th June. Organised by the Trades Union Congress, the event is being staged to call for 'a new deal for working people, real help with our energy bills and a pay rise' to help everyone cope with the disastrous cost of living crisis. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt has been invited to address the rally outside Parliament to outline our support for government action to end the desperate economic situation which is plunging

while we earn less. NPC members will be out in force in London and across the country to support the call for long term help to ensure we all have a decent stand-



NPC members will join 'We Demand Better' demos across the UK

ard of living, so no one is forced to choose between eating and heating." The TUC is inviting people to join rallies at UK town halls throughout June



Jan Shortt, NPC

(www.tuc.org.uk/join-our-town-hall-rallies). NPC members will be staging their own events, such as Yorkshire & Humber Region in Leeds on 15th June. To find out what your local NPC group is doing, check www.npcuk.org or contact our office. Assemble for the London rally from 10.30am at Portland Place, London. The March departs at 12pm, with the rally at 1pm.

Annual Convention opening with Health & Care Act debate

The NPC Annual Convention is being held in two stages this year with online sessions in June and a live, one-day conference in September. The opening event will be an interactive webinar on the controversial Health & Care Act now coming into effect. The free-to-attend session, from 11am to 1pm on Thursday, 16th June will hear from Sharon Graham, General Secretary of Unite which represents 100,000 health workers and Dr John Puntis, Co-Chair of Keep Our NHS Public (KONP). Like the NPC, both speakers are concerned at the implications of the new legislation, which they believe

threatens the independence and accountability of the new Integrated Health Boards which oversee NHS contracts.



Sharon Graham, Unite.

The webinar will give attendees the chance to join breakout sessions to discuss ways of maintaining local accountability for health services. To reserve your free place, visit www.npcuk.org or contact our office. Details of our next June event and the live September event are continued on Page 2.

Plans underway to stage live members' conference in September

The first live NPC Annual Convention for more than two years will be held this September. The pandemic has forced cancellation of our usual summer conferences. But possible locations are now under consideration for a one day event, with details announced shortly. By postponing the face-to-face conference until later in the year, Officers believe members will feel more confident about attending public events, while the number of suitable venues that are available to us is likely

to be higher. The General Secretary and Officers are in favour of an umbrella theme based around Poverty and Pensioner Rights for the 2022 sessions, with subjects including: Housing, Communications, Travel and the case for a Commissioner for Older People in England.

2022 Annual Convention Dates

June 16 –11am
Health & Care Act—
What It Means
June 21–11.45am
Assisted Dying Bill
—A Briefing
September Dates TBC

Second June event: NPC members' briefing on Assisted Dying Bill

The second Annual Convention webinar on Tuesday, 21st June is a members' briefing about the Assisted Dying Bill. This is an emotive and divisive issue across society, which evokes strong arguments on both sides as to whether it should ever become law. At the moment, Baroness Meacher's Private Members' Assisted Dying Bill is going through the committee stages of the House of Lords. At the request of many NPC members we have invited the organisation Dignity in Dy-



*Dr Jacky Davis,
Dying with Dignity*

ing, chaired by the Baroness, to explain the case for assisted dying. As the Baroness is unwell, Dr Jacky Davis will give a presentation on what the Bill actually intends. The NPC holds no position or opinion either way on the debate – we are simply offering a briefing. We have not, at the request of Officers, invited anyone opposed to assisted dying to take part to avoid a distressing debate. However, session chair General Secretary Jan Shortt will put the views of opponents to the Bill, and questions from members to Dr Davis. Jan will also stress that the NPC does not support one argument over the other. *Webinar: 11.45am, Tuesday, 21st June. Details: at www.npcuk.org*

NPC calls on Ofgem to work with government on energy price hikes

The NPC has written urging Ofgem to work with the government to look at immediate and long term measures to help those struggling with fast rising energy bills. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt has asked Ofgem boss Jonathan Brearley to take action after he said the energy price cap, which limits how much providers can raise prices, is due to increase again to an average of **£2,800 a year in October**. Coming on top of an unprecedented £700 average rise in April, the increase is pushing our oldest and poorest into poverty. The NPC doesn't believe the Chancellor's new emergency measures are enough to deal with the ongoing hikes in energy prices and believes we need a long term strategy from the government and energy industry regulator Ofgem. In response to Mr Brearley's recent letter to Chancellor Rishi Sunak, and Business & Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, the General Secretary said Ofgem appears to be 'resigned to capping energy

NPC's 'logical & reasonable measures' will help

costs in the same old way.' She added: 'The systems applied by energy companies are excluding those with the least income at a time when the need is greater. We make some suggestions and ask questions that would seem to pensioners to be logical and reasonable as a way of rationalising costs and prevent discrimination.' The NPC is asking for:

- Standing charges:** Reducing or removing these would help every household.
- Winter Fuel Allowance:** a permanent increase in the winter fuel allowance for pensioners to £500.
- End Pricing Discrimination** against those without the option to use Direct Debit and those who monitor their spending through key/card meters.
- Removal of 5% VAT on energy:** this would make bills more affordable,
- Invest in Insulation:** of cold, damp housing to bring properties up to a decent standard, to mitigate against rising energy bills.

***Read Jan's letter in full at: www.npcuk.org**

'How will we survive until then?' - Chancellor promises pensions & benefits to rise with inflation next year

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's emergency measures and promises to help pensioners with the cost of living crisis may come too late for many. While General Secretary Jan Shortt said the NPC welcomes any help that can be given to older people struggling to make ends meet as food and energy prices rocket to record levels, she fears it will not help those who cannot pay energy bills or buy food right now. Jan said: "How are people going to manage until October when the Chancellor's emergency budget measures start to come through—never mind weather another winter until next year? The NPC is pleased that at last the Chancellor has put together a package to support hard hit families and pensioners. But whilst we look forward to receiving our increased winter fuel allowance and £400 off our energy bills, even this will not cover all of this year's cost of living price rises. Also, none of these measures are for today or tomorrow - they are for October and beyond, when yet another energy price cap will arrive."

Prices are still rising across the board, with energy bills alone set to be on average £2,800 a year by the Autumn (almost double what it was in Janu-

ary). People are already in debt and need immediate assistance to survive. These measures will help... but the devil is in the detail... some pensioners will benefit, some will lose out. This is a one-off measure to help for this year – what happens after that? Older people need their incomes stabilised. They need a decent state pension - at the very least the reinstatement of the triple lock - instead of a succession of emergency handouts." Speaking on BBC Breakfast, Chancellor Rishi Sunak said pension and benefits payments are set to increase in 2023 in line with this year's inflation, which could be as high as 10%. He said: "Looking forward, what is likely to happen is that benefits and pensions next year will go up by this year's much higher inflation levels." If this happens, the Resolution Foundation, an independent think tank, has calculated that the move will cost the Treasury £15 billion. But this year, pensioners and benefit claimants are facing a real-terms cut in income after their payments only increased by 3.1 percent as the triple lock - which sees state pensions rise by the highest out of inflation, the average wage jump or 2.5 percent - was suspended for 2022.

'None of his measures are for today or tomorrow - they are for October and beyond'

Summary — Chancellor's Emergency Budget Measures

How will the £400 energy bill discount be paid?

All UK households will get a grant which will reduce energy bills by £400 from October. Previously, the Chancellor said £200 would be deducted off everyone's energy bills, but would have to be paid back in instalments—this repayment has been scrapped. The £400 discount will be made automatically by your energy supplier. There is no need to apply. Direct debit and credit customers will have the money credited to their account. Customers with pre-payment meters will have the money applied to their meter or via a voucher.

What additional help will people on benefits get?

A £650 payment will be made to more than eight million low-income households who receive Universal Credit, tax credits, pension credit and other means-tested benefits. This will be an automatic payment into bank accounts. It comes in two instalments - the first in July and the second some-

time in autumn. Payments for those on tax credits only, will follow shortly afterwards.

Those on disability benefits will receive £150 in September, which may be on top of the £650 payment, because in many cases they have higher energy use.

What help will pensioners get for winter fuel bills?

Households that receive the Winter Fuel Payment will receive an additional £300 in November or December. Lower-income pensioners, who claim pension credit, will receive the money in addition to the £650 support for those on benefits. A small group of pensioners with disabilities will receive a total of £1,500 when all the new payments and discounts they are eligible for are added up.

What payments are already being received?

About 80% of households are already receiving a £150 energy rebate, often through their council tax bill.

BT asks NPC to join Digital Voice Steering Group on phase two

The NPC has been invited to join a steering group that will advise and inform the next phase of the BT Digital Voice upgrade programme.

We welcomed 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 after meeting with BT executives. However we have expressed our concerns at BT's decision to restart the programme, which will see the UK's old analogue phone with a digital only system by 2025. 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" 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 Digital Voice system. We must have clarification on the full implications of the Digital Voice 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."

Renters' Forum writes to PM to call for reform of private rented sector

Too many people live in insecure, unaffordable and unsafe homes. Successive governments have failed to reform the private rented sector and give England's 11 million private renters a decent place to call home - this needs to change. The NPC has welcomed the Renters Reform Coalition's letter to the Prime Minister about the Renters' Reform Bill. To read the letter in full, visit our website: www.npcuk.org or contact our office if you are not online. You can find out more about the Renters Reform Coalition on: www.rentersreformcoalition.co.uk

NPC will submit evidence to new inquiry into digital transformation of NHS

NPC working parties are gathering evidence for a submission to an inquiry examining government progress on the digital transformation of the NHS. Both the Health & Social Care, and the Digital Working Parties will contribute to the NPC's feedback by 10th June. The inquiry is assessing Government progress on moving towards a digital approach to healthcare and what further steps need to be taken. MPs will also consider the need to develop public trust, with polls suggesting a third of people are unconvinced about the long-term use of digital in the NHS and data security.

Independent Age records poverty in later life experiences

More than two million older people are living in poverty in the UK. The Experiences of Poverty in Later Life project by Independent Age aims to amplify the voices of some of these older people, by highlighting the experiences of people facing financial hardship in later life. The project is based upon a series of interviews Independent Age conducted between November 2021 and January 2022. Around 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with older people who were experiencing financial hardship. They spoke to older people from a range of backgrounds and perspectives, including older people of different ages, different genders, different ethnicities, different family situations, and different housing tenures. From these interviews, they have created a series of concise, visual briefings. Each visual briefing addresses one of the key themes which emerged during Independent Age's research and includes stories and quotes from some of the older people they spoke to. Like the NPC, Independent Age believes the government should ensure everyone in later life receives the full range of benefits and entitlements they are eligible for, as part of a Department for Work and Pensions written strategy to increase the uptake of Pension Credit. This strategy should include realistic, measurable targets, and short term activities like targeted awareness-raising campaigns, including at local level, and new research on how best to target people missing out. It should also look at longer-term solutions such as automatic payment, better government data sharing to identify people missing out, and reviewing the name 'Pension Credit'. Independent Age also calls on the government to fulfil its commitment to restore the State Pension triple lock from April 2023. *Link to full report via: www.npcuk.org*