

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.

REGISTER NOW for 2022 NPC Annual Convention

Birmingham, 21st September

The NPC's first 'live' Annual Convention since before the pandemic will be held at the Birmingham Council House (right) on Wednesday, 21st September.

Thanks to Birmingham City Council, our much-missed annual get-together will be staged in the beautifully refurbished Council House Banqueting Suite—just weeks after the city hosts the Commonwealth Games. Covid-19 forced our usual summer conferences to be held as webinars.

Pensioner Rights

But the event returns for one-day to host a series of topical, expert-led discussions before an audience of up to 200 NPC members. General Secretary Jan Shortt said, "The NPC is delighted to once again be able to welcome our members, in-person, to our famous 'pensioners' parliament.' There are so many issues for us to discuss after what has been a desperate period for older people — and sadly our problems are far from over. We hope as many members as possible join us." Taking as our overall theme, ***Pensioner Poverty & Human Rights***, the Convention will consider the rapid rise in pensioners struggling to make ends meet as the Cost of Living Crisis hikes up food, energy and transport



costs. We'll also discuss the decreasing real-term value of state pensions; the huge pressures on the NHS and social care; the digital exclusion and social isolation of so many pensioners; along with the problems of reduced and more costly public transport. "Jan said: "The pandemic took a terrible toll on pensioners, and highlighted how much our rights are being undermined as ageism tries to silence our voices. The Convention will debate the issues and solutions, such as our campaigns for a National Care Service, and a Commissioner for Older People in England, as they have in Wales and Northern Ireland."

BOOK: Places will go fast, so email or write to us (see addresses top left) asap to register. Tickets (including teas, coffees, juice and a lunch) are £5 per head. The event will run from 10am to 4.30pm on Wednesday, 21st September 2022.

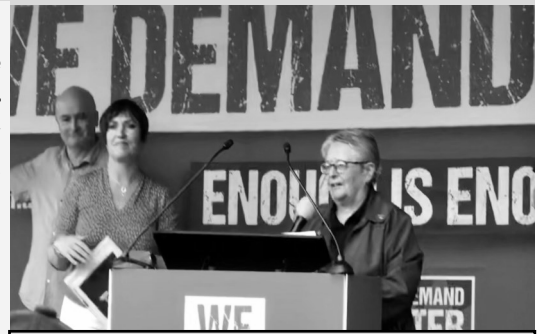
Energy bills set to soar to nearly £4,000 by New Year

NPC members are reeling from news that energy bills are now expected to triple within months plunging more of us into poverty. Utilities consultancy BFY Group say the average household energy bill will hit £500 for the month of January 2023 alone, with the annual price cap predicted to rise to £3,850. Meanwhile energy giants Centrica, owner of British Gas, have announced a £1.3bn profit in six months, while Shell made £9.4bn in just three months. NPC General Secretary

Jan Shortt condemned the bill hike and the 'obscene profits' of the utility firms. She said: "It is obscene that big companies can rake in billions during an unprecedented cost of living crisis while millions suffer. The Chancellor's measures are not enough—he must do more to rein in these gross profits and help those facing a grim winter ahead." The gas companies blame the price hikes on Russia for cutting world supplies during the Ukraine war.

Rally brings generations together to demand better lives for all

NPC members joined tens of thousands of people at a mass TUC 'We Demand Better' march and rally outside Parliament in London (Saturday, 18th June.) Our General Secretary Jan Shortt was invited to speak in support of a 'a new deal' for ordinary people, including pay and pension rises to help the millions now struggling with the cost of living crisis. Jan said: "Everyone – pensioners and younger people alike – are tired of being asked to pay more for basics such as food and energy, while our incomes are worth less and less. We must ensure we all have a decent standard of living, so no one is forced to choose between eating and heating their homes."



Jan addresses the TUC We Demand Better Rally in Parliament Square.

UK must end injustice of half million 'frozen' pensioners

The End Frozen Pensions campaign wants to hear from the more of the 520,000 UK pensioners whose state pension increases were stopped because they moved abroad.

The campaign is appealing to people to sign a petition calling on the Government to end the practice of 'freezing' overseas pensions, which has hit tens of thousands, often in Commonwealth countries like Canada and Australia. They are also urging NPC members to write to their MPs for help. Run by the International Consortium of British Pensioners, the campaign advocates on behalf of

those pensioners, many of whom now live in poverty, despite paying their National Insurance contributions in full. Most moved overseas to be near family, but their pension is 'frozen' at the level it was at when they left the UK. They include people like Patricia Coulthard, a 100-year-old veteran, who served as a nurse in World War II. After moving to Australia to be closer to her children, her UK pension was frozen at just £46-a-week. To contact the campaign, email: campaign@endfrozenpensions.org You can sign the petition at www.endfrozenpensions.org

Ofcom & Ofgem replies paying 'lip service' to older people's problems

The Chief Executives of the UK's energy and media regulators have sent detailed but 'largely disappointing' replies to NPC letters outlining problems raised by members. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt wrote to the head of Ofgem Jonathan Brierley, and the head of Ofcom Dame Melanie Dawes about older people's concerns with among other things, rocketing fuel costs, the Digital Voice phone line wwitchover, and digital exclusion of those not online. Jan commented: "We appreciate their replies, but they are largely disappointing and appear to have missed the point—we need direct help for older people during this unprecedented cost of living crisis. Their letters express their empathy, but they pay lip service to the issues by repeating government policy, which clearly isn't working." **NPC Officers will consider their responses. To read Jan's letter and the Ofgem and Ofcom replies in full visit www.npcuk.org or call/write to the office (*see Info column on the front page for details).**

NHS staffing crisis poses safety risk' to patient safety warn MPs

The NHS is facing the worst workforce crisis in its history which is posing a serious risk to patient safety, MPs have warned. The cross-party health & social care select committee saw evidence that, on current projections, almost a million new NHS and care jobs will need to be filled by 2030 onwards. Calling this the worst workforce crisis in NHS history, the committee found England is now short of 12,000 hospital doctors and more than 50,000 nurses and midwives. It said a reluctance to decisively plug the staffing gap could threaten plans to tackle the Covid treatment backlog. The government said the workforce is growing and NHS England is drawing up long-term plans to recruit more staff. Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who chairs the select committee said tackling the shortage must be top priority" for the new prime minister: "Persistent understaffing in the NHS poses a serious risk to staff and patient safety."

NHS waiting lists push more to borrow for private care



More people are being ‘pushed’ into paying thousands of pounds for private treatment due to long NHS waiting lists. There were 69,000 self-funded treatments in the UK in the final three months of last year - a 39% rise on the same period before the pandemic. A BBC investigation saw evidence of people taking out loans and resorting to crowdfunding to pay for private treatment. The figures from the Private Healthcare Information Network (PHIN) do not include those with private insurance - just those people paying the full cost of treatment themselves. Patient groups warn there is a

risk of a two-tier system being created. Healthwatch England cited waits for treatment as among patients’ most common concerns. Chief executive Louise Ansari said for most people going private "simply isn't an option", especially with the cost-of-living crisis and people on the lowest incomes the most likely to wait the longest for NHS treatment. The numbers paying for private treatment topped 250,000 last year, with common operations like hip and knee replacements costing £15,000.

Petition bid to save closure of 1,000 rail ticket offices

NPC members are invited to sign a petition opposing government and train companies’ plans to close 1,000 UK railway ticket offices. If the closures go ahead they will hit pensioners, disabled people, and those on low incomes hardest, especially those who are less likely to have access to the internet and are excluded by the push to online and electronic ticketing. The Government and rail industry say that ticket office staff will be ‘repurposed’, but have failed to give any commitment that staffing levels will be maintained. The rail union RMT, believes the move is about protecting rail company profits



and say ticket offices and station staffing must be protected in order to maintain passenger service, safety, security and accessibility. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “We know closing ticket offices will worsen the passenger experience and safety, security and accessibility. It will be particularly hard for older passengers and those requiring support. The ticket office provides a point of security, and often, access to facilities such as toilets and waiting rooms.” www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/cut-their-profits-not-our-ticket-offices (Or contact your union or rail ticket office for details on how to sign).

NPC complains to the BBC over ageism on R4 shows

The NPC has written to complain to the BBC about two recent BBC programmes which we believe displayed bias against older people.

On the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme with presenters Nick Robinson and Amol Rajan in June, Lord Jim O’Neill, was asked about ‘pitching pensioners against young workers’ and ‘workers suffering a real terms pay cut, while pensioners were being given 10%’ rise’ in their state pensions. Lord O’Neill replied that ‘constant protection of pensioners is ludicrous and in these circumstances particularly crazy’. He was not asked to justify the remark. Later, on BBC Radio 4’s *World at One*, a question was again framed to infer that workers’ pay was being held down to give pensioners a big rise. This time Lord Clark stated that he owned two houses, so he didn’t need the pension rise. There was no statement

‘Constant protection of pensioners is ludicrous’ - Lord Jim O’Neill.

made in defence of pensioners without such means, nor did the interviewers challenge these opinions, explore state pension rates and the triple lock suspension, or the rise in poverty among pensioners. The NPC acknowledges journalists must raise issues and that individuals are entitled to opinions, But we believe these programmes were not balanced and perpetuated ageist attitudes. They also drew poor comparisons between pensioners’ and workers’ basic incomes. The National Living Wage of £9.50 per hour gives an income of £322.50pw (£17,290pa). A 5% rise will take this to £17,608.80pa, compared with just £7,376.20pa for those on the old state pension. **Around 600,000 pensioners out of 12 million in the UK qualify as ‘wealthy.’ However, 5.5 million pay no tax because their income is so low it doesn’t reach the basic rate tax threshold.**

More work to be done after first Digital Voice Steering Group meeting

The NPC attended the first meeting of a new steering group to advise and inform the next phase of the BT Digital Voice upgrade.

Our members have already experienced huge problems as BT and other landline providers start the switchover from analogue to digital. After a meeting between NPC and BT executives, we welcomed their decision to suspend the roll out of their new Digital Voice home phone service until the issues were resolved. We 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. NPC Information National Administration & Information Manager Jonathan Safir, who attended the first meeting said: "It was a fair start with stakeholders like NPC outlining the issues for older people. However there is clearly much more work to be done and we will be interested in hearing what BT come back with at our next meeting."

Online-first approach to Commons consultation slammed by NPC

The NPC has criticised a House of Commons consultation on Digital Transformation in the NHS for sending people online for submission materials.

This digital-first approach to the consultation ironically excludes millions who might benefit from giving their views, such as those who do not have internet access, or online skills, or who choose not to use the internet. The House of Commons Health & Social Care Committee wants to examine the current use of digital technologies in the NHS, and what changes might deliver improved services, patient outcomes and experiences. The NPC's detailed response, to the consultation, compiled by our Health & Social Care Work-



ing Party and Digital Working Party, concentrated on the experiences and concerns of our members. Through our 'Connections For All' campaign the NPC aims to help those who want the skills, access, and training required to get online. But we firmly believe that traditional forms of communication and services, such as face to face, over the telephone and post, must remain in place. This will ensure large numbers—including those who are priced out by equipment and broadband costs—are not digitally excluded. **You can request a copy of the NPC's full submission by writing us to our address (see front of newsletter) or online at www.npcuk.org**

Opening Annual Convention webinars tackled Health & Care Act

The first two sessions of the NPC's 2022 Annual Convention were held as webinars in June.

The interactive opening event on 16th June discussed the detrimental impact of the controversial new Health & Care Act. Sharon Graham, General Secretary of Unite which represents 100,000 health workers and Dr John Puntis, Co-Chair of Keep Our NHS Public



(KONP) outlined their belief that the legislation will end the independence and accountability of the new Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) which oversee NHS contracts. The webinar gave attendees the chance to join breakout sessions to discuss ways of maintaining local accountability, and ended with a pledge from all sides to work with the NPC to oppose any moves that will allow

local ICBs to approve private health care contracts unchallenged. The second June webinar was on the emotive issue of Assisted Dying, which evokes strong arguments on both sides as to whether it should ever become law. Baroness Meacher's Private Members' Assisted Dying Bill is currently going through the committee stages in the House of Lords. At the request of many NPC members we invited the organisation Dignity in Dying, chaired by the Baroness, to explain their case. Dr Jacky Davis gave the presentation. The NPC holds no position or opinion either way on the debate. General Secretary Jan Shortt told webinar delegates that the "NPC acknowledges that it is a deeply personal consideration by each individual."