

# **ENFIELD OVER 50's FORUM**

**THE CAMPAIGNS, WORK AND POLICIES  
OF THE NATIONAL PENSIONERS  
CONVENTION**

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this very special event. Monty was a force to be reckoned with and we had some interesting and, as you would expect, fiery but respectful exchanges whenever we met. He is much missed.

Today, I have been asked to talk about our campaigns (which reflect our policies) and the work we have in the pipeline.

Since the pandemic, the NPC has been driving forward our policies wherever we can and we have had some successes even though the government ignore our letters – or if they respond at all, it is months after the event!

- **Pensions:** Our policy is for a decent state pension for all set above poverty level at 70% of the National Living Wage (outside London) and uprated annually by the triple lock.
- In September last year, despite our strong representation to the government, the triple lock was suspended on the grounds that wages were an ‘anomaly’ caused by the pandemic!
- At the time, we know that the government already knew an energy crisis was afoot when they set the state pension increase for 2022 at 3.1%. Indeed, the day after inflation was already 4.2%

- It now stands at 9.1% with predictions of reaching 11% by the autumn.
- Income dictates how we live, stay healthy and active, physically and mentally.
- A cut in state pension (for that is what it is) means more critical decisions have to be made on how we spend our income and when.
- Pensioners already make stark decisions on whether to heat or eat, but those are no longer working with the huge inflationary rises. (more on the cost of living later)
- **Health & Care:** Along with many others the NPC challenged the new Health and Care Act that will be implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> July.
- Integrated Care System Boards (ICB's) will have control over financial spending and delivering services to their allocated areas. We already know that the budgets they will receive will be less than the CCG would have had.
- It is therefore very clear that services in localities will be cut.
- We are now concentrating on the Chairs of ICB's asking them to ensure that no private company is given a place on the board or committees.
- We also want them to be open and transparent – the Act says nothing about public scrutiny or involvement.

- The powers of the Secretary of State are such that he or she can over-ride decisions made, take away services and/or disband any of the ICBs
- Private companies can be given contracts without regulation or scrutiny and local councils will not have the power to prioritise services or introduce new ones.
- NHS England will be overseen by the Secretary of State with power to change direction – effectively closing hospitals and other health and care services at a stroke without warning.
- Our webinar last week was excellent in that it raised a lot of questions. In general, the public are unaware that behind the NHS logo lurks a profit-making company.
- The NPC will be looking at how we work with our partners in bringing together communities to argue for equality of access and local services prioritised to need not to the funding given.
- Our policy on a National Care Service free at the point of need is an important campaign. There is nothing in the Act that will improve recruitment, training, pay and conditions for either NHS or care staff. In fact, we are sure there is no funding for what the government says will be a ‘quality’ care service.

- **Digital Exclusion:** It seems that just about every day there is a new App, a new online service. The NPC backs the RMT in its efforts to save ticket offices, staff on stations and trains. Without these facilities it is much more difficult for older people to travel.
- Older people and those without access to technology and devices are being excluded from carrying out every day tasks. We have met with the Equalities Commission and whilst there may not be a case on age, they are collecting lots of evidence of exclusion. We keep them up to date.
- We have written to Ofcom, Department for Culture, Media & Sport and the Local Government Association as the three main public bodies responsible for delivering public services.
- BT digital switch has caused many of our members a great deal of stress, particularly during Storm Arwen and others that followed. We met with BT and it was clear they had no understanding of the impact on older people who do not have broadband and/or a mobile phone and have no wish for them.

- The roll out was paused but will be starting again as the delivery date for this new digital system is 2025.
- Major issues are that the system does not work in power cuts; is not compatible with personal alarms in care homes/sheltered accommodation or own homes; with particular concerns over areas that have no mobile signal at all.
- There are hundreds of other providers that seem not to be engaging with BT.
- We have a place on the BT Steering Group to ensure older people are taken into account.
- Our first issue is back up batteries – these are intended to enable you to charge your mobile phone or other devices. Currently these are around 6.5 kg in weight and last an hour before they have to be charged themselves!
- Our second issue is about those older people who do not understand or want a mobile phone.
- Our third issue is cost – given the hike in energy prices, who will be able to afford to charge a 6.5kg battery.
- As is normal in large corporations, the left and right hand do not talk, so we need to make sure this is taken on board.

- We have responded to the consultation on further digitalising the NHS. Both the NPC Health & Social Care and Digital Working Parties made contributions.
- **Commissioner for Older People in England:** Unite the Union motion passed at a BDC. I have met with Sharon Graham, General Secretary and we will be talking to see how we can forward this campaign.
- We have support from the Equalities Commission, Independent Age, Ageing Better and the two Commissioners (Wales & Northern Ireland).
- **Transport:** The main work of the Transport Working Party is the consultation on bus transformation – which in effect means buses and timetables being cut post-pandemic. Other major concerns brought to the Minister attention are the menace of e-scooters; closure of National Express ticket offices; online only options for renewing bus and rail passes.
- **Housing:** We are part of the Renters Reform Coalition arguing for Section 21 – no fault evictions – to become law immediately. The government are dragging their feet.

- We also support Shelter and their cost of living crisis warning to government in regard to homelessness through inability to pay rent and bills.
- Our arguments are made for more affordable and appropriate housing for older people.
- **Review of NPC:** The Structure Working Party is currently working on reviewing the structure and the way we work to enable the NPC to be fit for the future. National and Regional affiliates have had questionnaires and responses made.
- There will be changes to the Constitution and our NPC Guidelines booklet will be the last to be updated with all the changes.
- **Cost of Living:** The NPC has written to Ofgem, the Chancellor and Kwasi Kwarteng with suggestions on supporting people through this unprecedented period of high inflation. Literally everything is increasing and pensioners will be suffering. There is the potential for more cases of malnutrition and an increase in winter deaths as a result of increased costs for everything.
- We support Fuel Poverty Action and End Fuel Poverty Campaign – signing their letter with similar suggestions for cutting bills



- We have circulated a list of the different types of support being given by the government and when they kick in.
- A written question has been sent to the Minister for Energy asking for clarity around access to £150 Council Tax rebate for those not paying by direct debit. It appears some councils are not operating according to the government website.
- I was present at the TUC March 'Demand Better' and spoke on the platform (a first for NPC)
- All Working Parties are participating in the officer-led Poverty Project. Poverty impacts across all working parties and each will provide a briefing for circulation.
- **Press Releases:** We appear in most of the daily newspapers; the comments box in Daily Express, local BBC radio station interviews; some local newspapers.
- **Website/Social Media:** Our new website has received very positive feedback. It is possible now for individuals to subscribe to particular areas of information which means updates will automatically be sent out.
- Social media interest is increasing and we re-tweet information relevant to our members.

- **For the Future:**

- a) Conclude the restructuring of NPC; recruitment campaign; sponsorship
- b) Hopefully to hold a Lobby of Parliament in November. This very much relies on the ability to book a Committee Room in the House of Commons – which has not been possible since the pandemic.
- c) Planning a ‘live’ one-day Annual Convention session in September.
- d) Hoping for the return of ‘live’ meetings, although these are reliant on our free access to offices, which are currently not receiving visitors.
- e) Build on our relationship with the TUC and link with the NPC Trade Union Working Party for more effective working.
- f) Continue to campaign for the rights of older people and on all the issues relevant to them.

The documents mentioned in this presentation have been supplied to Diane.

Thank you for listening and I hope you found it interesting.

*Every pensioner has the right to choice, dignity,  
independence and security as an integral and  
valued member of society*



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