**GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**24 JANUARY 2023**

Happy New Year to everyone, and I suspect that this year will be equally tough with lots going on.

1. **Special Delegate Conference:**

This is arranged for 27th June at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool. Information, delegate forms and other necessary documents will be circulated around 21 February. EC and NC members will receive copies for information to enable you to follow up and ensure deadlines are met. We apologise in advance if you receive more than one posting, better to ensure everyone gets a copy than find we have excluded someone.

1. **Annual Convention:**

The Annual Convention will take place on 28th and 29th June from 11.00 am until 4.00 pm each day at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool. We are waiting to receive a code for members to book a discounted accommodation rate for this event if they wish to stay at the hotel.

As this is a two-day event, the Finance Working Party decided not to increase the ticket price on the grounds that reducing the event to two days was already an increase. Therefore, tickets will be £10 for two days and £5 for those attending one day.

We will also canvass affiliates to get ideas on the format and content. Bringing all the issues into two days is not easy and we may have to prioritise or have a different format to enable us to cover the subjects important to members. Please make your views known. We will collate them and report back.

1. **NHS Data:**

A letter has been sent by the legal team representing the NPC and others in the campaign. It seems very likely that a case will be lodged in court as the government have chosen not to answer the critical questions asked in terms of security of data, sharing of data and sensitive data.

1. **Energy for All:**

After our participation in the Warm This Winter Event, we were invited to sign up to the Energy for All Campaign. This focuses on insulating homes, bringing homes up to decent standard, removing the subsidy for fossil fuels, having a certain level of energy free for everyone to be able to have the basic, heating, cooking, lighting and hot water in their home. It also looks at a windfall tax and how that is best used rather than the subsidy to energy companies from the taxpayer.

The NPC has signed as part of the coalition working on fuel poverty.

1. **National Federation for the Blind UK (NFBUK):**

As you may recall, the NPC signed the NFBUK petition on safety on trains and we have also worked with them on the issue of e-scooters. We have been asked to support their campaign regarding the changes to BBC local radio stations. Their petition calls for:

* + No changes to local radio schedules after 2.00pm on weekdays at the 39 local stations.
* Keep all afternoon shows, the drive time show and any local shows after drive time on air across all 39 local radio stations.
* Ensure all online news content gets broadcasted live on all relevant local BBC Radio Stations

The BBC proposes to introduce regional programmes on 39 local stations outside of the weekday 6am to 2pm slots; shift investment from live and local radio programmes to online news.

We wrote to BECTU asking if they were taking any action and no reply. However, NUJ have a campaign that we could support in terms of writing to MPs.

1. **Older People’s Commissioner:**

Following on from the Annual Convention in Birmingham, the NPC is now working with Independent Age, Ageing Better and Age UK on forwarding the campaign for a Commissioner for England.

We drew up a statement of consensus which NPC Officers agreed with a finite amendment and this has now been circulated to our affiliates and regions. This stage is asking organisations to sign up to the principle of an independent Commissioner to gauge how much support there will be. A copy of the statement is at the end of this report. This is not for individual members to sign – this comes later in the process. Please chase this up as the deadline for signing is 6 February (although we have said probably 13 February).

There are fortnightly meetings looking at what the next step would be, who to engage and the timing is crucial. At the moment the launch of the statement is key before we do the next circulation and eventually public interest work.

There is still a long way to go and we expect it will be a difficult one for government.

1. **People’s Assembly:**

We received an invitation to send delegates to their Conference which took place on 14 January. The Officers felt unable to do this as we have no mechanism for electing and mandating delegates. We have written to the People’s Assembly explaining why we would not be taking part and also clarifying where the NPC sits in their structure given that we only pay £50. We await their reply. In the meantime, EC members need to consider and discuss how we can take part, how we elect delegates, their role and accountability. Trade Unions and some regions are affiliated to the People’s Assembly and they will send their own delegates to Conferences.

1. **Recruitment:**

This was an item suggested for this agenda and EC members were asked to come with ideas on how we can run a proactive, positive recruitment campaign, both nationally and regionally.

Regional Secretaries will be undertaking the same exercise at their next meeting.

It is everyone’s responsibility to encourage new members, support them to understand the work of the NPC, bring new delegates through the internal bodies of the NPC as well as our Biennial Delegate Conference.

1. **Pensioner Poverty/Cost of Living:**

The Officers agree that this must remain a priority. The Warm This Winter event was very good, informative and lively. London Region held a small demonstration on 8 December when winter deaths figures should have been released. On 19 January we came together with Fuel Poverty Action; End Fuel Poverty; Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) and Don’t Pay UK to pay respect to those lost to cold-related illnesses. We held a minute’s silence at 12 noon and proceeded to Downing Street. We were not able to hand in our letter to the Prime Minister, but it has been posted and copies were available on the day. Further update at the meeting.

1. **Pre-payment meters:**

The scandal of energy providers moving customers onto pre-payment meters without their consent through bulk signing of warrants to forcibly enter homes to install meters is disgraceful. Those with smart meters have also found themselves cut off without notice. There is a basic human right to heat, light, food and water and many have been without a combination of these because they are not able to put money on their meter. Even if they are able to pay for some energy, the provider will take an amount off for debt and the standing charge still accrues every day.

Grant Shapps has said that he wants to look into stopping forced transfers. We give a cautious welcome to his wishes, but will monitor what actually happens, especially if some of the energy companies decide not to do it.

Currently Ovo has stopped recovering debt from prepayment meters until March and are offering customers support packages including heated throws that have minimal running costs. British Gas have agreed not to remotely transfer customers onto pre-payment schemes, but has not acted on the forced transfer of other customers. They are now putting in place extra vulnerability checks and a £10 million fund to help customers, particularly those who are disconnected because they cannot afford to top up their meter.

Energy UK, which represents energy firms, said: "Suppliers are required to have exhausted all other options before installing a prepayment meter by warrant - only after repeated unsuccessful attempts to contact the customer to discuss repayment options and checks to ensure they do not go ahead when customers are in the most vulnerable situations."

The regulator advises customers with concerns to speak to their supplier. Under Ofgem rules they must offer payment plans you can afford and you can ask for emergency credit if you use a prepay meter and can't top up.

1. **Voter ID:**

We sent a letter of support to Baroness Pinnock who submitted a motion to the House of Lords which, if passed, would have stopped the government legislation. Unfortunately, the motion was lost. We will continue to argue that the legislation discriminates against those who are unable to produce identification for whatever reason. Even though there is a free card available for those without other forms of identification, they are online and the route to accessing one has many barriers.

We have now got a list of those documents that are acceptable identification. This now includes various freedom and concessionary passes across the UK. We will put the list into a more readable format and circulate.

1. **Marie Curie letter to DWP:**

Marie Curie have a campaign to ask the government to provide extra support to those on end of life care. Their letter is on the website and the NPC have signed it. However, it would be really helpful if everyone could access it and sign. The more signatures the bigger the pressure.

We wrote to Marie Curie and explained our structure and got a really lovely letter back to thank us, but also to ask if they could meet us. We will look at what we can do. So, please take a little time to sign up for those who may not be with us in the near future.

<https://campaigns.mariecurie.org.uk/page/119555/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=ce1&ea.url.id=6232259&forwarded=true>

1. **GS Activities:**

Since November:

* A member of the panel debating the cost of living for the Good Law Project
* Warm This Winter Demo, London – interviews with Sky TV; numerous journalists
* Attendance on picket lines
* Meetings re: Older People’s Commissioner
* Meetings on Winter Deaths Demo
* Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) Tyneside
* Winter Deaths Demo – numerous interviews

**Jan Shortt**

**General Secretary**

**Consensus Statement on an Older People and Ageing Commissioner**

We call on the UK government to establish an Older People and Ageing Commissioner for England to act as an independent champion for older people and ensure that policy and practice across government considers the long-term needs of people in later life and the implications of our ageing population on society.

Our society is ageing, and policymakers should embrace this demographic shift. Currently 11 million people are aged 65 or over, and in less than 20 years over 17 million (1 in 4) of us will be over 65. Growing older is a privilege, but an ageing population will require collaboration and joined-up thinking to deliver innovative policy solutions and meet the needs of the future, including alternatives to accessing information and services other than online.

The support people need in later life from institutions like the NHS and social care, and social security systems are critical, but no single government department can respond to these issues alone. A commissioner would facilitate the long-term planning that is needed to ensure our economy and public services are adapting to demographic shifts, while also enabling more people to age well. This would not just benefit older people, but our country as a whole.

A sharper focus on the range of experiences in later life is required. Not everyone enjoys a financially secure retirement - indeed an alarming proportion are struggling to make ends meet - and too often, older people’s rights and interests are forgotten by decision-makers, particularly as we face unprecedented crises.

But there is an opportunity to fix this. Older people want to be part of the country’s vision, now, and in the future. As our older population becomes increasingly diverse, we believe that older people urgently need a champion at the heart of the government, working alongside the Older People’s Commissioners for Wales and Northern Ireland, to help make the UK the best place in the world to grow old.