**GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**MAY 2022**

1. **Office/Staff:**

The recommendation from the Finance Working Party (FWP) for a 3% salary increase for all staff for this year was agreed and implemented on 4 April.

Our Finance Assistant has changed his working hours from Friday morning to Thursday morning, and is still working all day Monday.

Staff are dividing their time between home and office. Visits to the office are dictated by what is expected in terms of post, cheques and other accesses.

Venues that are free for us to use for meetings are still closed to ourselves

1. **NHS Bill/Social Care:**

Not unsurprisingly parliament turned down every single amendment from the House of Lords which means social care is subsumed into the NHS with no agreed funding mechanism. There is still no governing document and we are now working with other organisations in preparing our members and the public for the implementation of the Integrated Services Boards/Committees.

The other very concerning issue is the power of the Secretary of State and how that will impact on local services, local councils and the overall contracting of services to the private sector.

The campaign is ongoing and we will update you after our meeting with other organisations.

1. **NHS Digital Data:**

My last report showed we had not had a reply from the Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health and we have reported that to the Equalities Commission who will be following up with their own concerns around AI and the progress of digitalisation of health. We will respond to the current MPs call for evidence on progressing digital health through the Health & Social Care Working Party with a contribution from the Digital Working Party.

There has been silence from the government since the pause of the NHS Digital Data collection. But, true to form, in April a notice published by NHS England to procure a new system – NHS Federated Data Platform (FDP) was sent to prospective suppliers. Once again, patients have not been consulted or even informed of this huge new data collection that will cost around £240,000,000. It also excludes any assessment of the rights of patients and the impact of data sharing. The procurement process starts in June.

We met with Foxglove (lawyers for the consortium) and agreed to a letter of claim being sent on our behalf to NHS England. NHS Digital and the Secretary of State for Health & Care. This comes at no cost to the NPC and is asking for further and deeper information on GDPR, Industrial procurement and lots more. It still remains the case that the NPC can withdraw from the case at the point at which costs become an issue.

In the meantime, we will be discussing with other members of the consortium what kind of campaign we should be running with the public around this new initiative.

1. **Triple Lock:**

The NPC is still regularly in the press in regard to the suspension of the triple lock for this year and the impact of raging inflation on pensioner poverty. This is going to be an ongoing issue as inflation starts to bite and we ask that members let us know what is happening for them.

We have also had the treasured ‘comment box’ in the Daily Express on the reinstatement of the triple lock; the false statement that pensioners will all be on £200 a week when the triple lock is reinstated for 2023; the glaring inequality between the two pension schemes, the continuation of the gender pension gap and some councils saying that the £150 off council tax bands A-D may take until October to be paid.

Even though the triple lock is pledged for 2023, there is still the outcome of the State Pension Review on age. The NPC response to this review is on the website, please share with everyone.

1. **Warm Homes Discount (WHD):**

We urge every member to contact their energy provider in order to ask if they run the Warm Homes Discount Scheme (not every provider does). For those that do, then please see if you are eligible and register for the £140 discount. Also, contact your local council’s welfare team to see if you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to. This is an unprecedented time for inflation and 3.1% on our state pension is not going to help us.

It has come to our notice that there is the threat of removing the Warm Homes Discount payment from those individuals receiving Personal Independent Payments (PIP) and widening the number of people eligible. The government is not being clear what ‘access to other benefits’ to replace it means. The NPC will produce a briefing on the most up to date information on PIP and the potential impact that removing WHD will have on those affected.

1. **Equalities Commission:**

The meeting with the Director of Regulation, Director or Compliance and Director of Implementation was extremely useful. The issues raised by our members have been passed on and the Commission is also concerned about the exclusion of those not connected with technology. Other areas of concern raised were the increased use of AI in health; the closure of cash points and banks, online only consultations, websites with no contact details, digital phone switch, closure of ticket offices and much more. Please continue to send us your concerns and we will pass them on as the Commission is keen to collect evidence from all sources to help them in their work.

The Commission was very positive in supporting our policy for a Commissioner for Older People in England, independent and with judicial powers backed by legislation.

The Commissions Strategic Plan for 2022-25 is published and on the website. We will be meeting again to update them and ourselves in line with the plan.

1. **BT Digital Switch:**

We remind members that there are hundreds of phone providers other than BT. If you are a customer of one of them, please be aware they may have a different approach to BT and pausing the digital switch.

You may get a phone call or a visit from a provider (BT included) telling you they want to change your phone system. Politely decline unless you are in favour.

1. **Structure Working Party:**

Regional responses have been received in significant numbers and include submissions from smaller groups. The content is positive and illuminating, so thank you to everyone who took the time to make a submission. We really appreciate it.

1. **Biennial Delegate Conference:**

Motions passed at the BDC have been circulated with recommendations and the minutes are available now on the website.

1. **Annual Convention:**

Bev will update with arrangements so far.

1. **General Secretary Activities:**

* Meeting on Frozen Pensions – continue to support campaign – no resource issues.
* Meeting with Independent Age
* Meeting with Sharon Graham, Unite – several areas of support for NPC
* People Before Profit, Norfolk – excellent group
* Presentation to Lewisham Pensioners Forum AGM on a Recovery Plan (25.5.22)
* Keep Our NHS Public – NHS What Next (25.5.22)
* Foxglove on NHS FDP
* Meeting Regional Secretaries
* Various comments, quotes and interviews with national newspapers and local BBC radio stations.

**Jan Shortt**

**May 2022**