**GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT**

**NATIONAL COUNCIL**

**25 APRIL 2023**

1. **Office/Staff:**

The Officers are recommending a 6% increase on all staff salaries for 2023/2024 with a review at the end of the year depending on financial status. There are health and safety issues with the office accommodation which we are looking to resolve.

1. **Commissioner for Older People & Ageing:**

There are now around 100 organisations signed up to the consensus statement. Those organisations yet to sign can still do so. Send an email to Jonathan stating the name of the organisation and the fact you wish to sign.

A press release launching the statement was made on 21 March and is on our website. Clicking the ‘further information’ link takes you to another page where you can sign up as an individual or another organisation. There is a ‘drop in’ event for MPs and Lords in the House of Commons on 17th April. A report will be given at the meeting.

1. **Uniting the Generations:**

We expected that the government would announce the bringing forward of the retirement age to 68 at the beginning of May, but this appears to have been delayed until after the next election. The NPC has a long standing campaign (68 Too Late) against any increase to the retirement age; campaigning for it to be restored to 65 for everyone with a view to reducing over time.

It is important that the pensioners of the future (workers today) voice their opinions on the increase in their retirement age. The NPC has been offered an opportunity through Unite Retired Members to join their campaign. The campaign will still go ahead despite the delay as we need to get a strong message out to parliament.

Please sign the petition and share widely with your groups, friends and family. <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/don-t-raise-the-state-pension-age-68-is-too-late>

The petition will be delivered on 2 May at 2.00 pm at College Green (also known as Abingdon Street Gardens) 5 Great College Street, London, England, SW1P 3JY

Age UK produced a report on the impact of increasing retirement age: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/publications/reports-and-briefings/>

1. **Spring Budget:**

The Spring budget held nothing for ordinary pensioners. Once again it is those with the wealth who benefit through the abolition of the Life Time Allowance. This helps a small minority, whereas 90% of people will not have enough to retire on, let alone put money into a pension.

There is nothing for ordinary workers who will, by stealth, be paying more tax due to the freezing of the tax threshold until 2027/2028. Similarly, there will be an increase in pensioners paying tax for the first time. 1.3 million have already found themselves in that position.

The proposal to get 50+ back into work is riddled with problems – the major one being ageism in employment and the workplace. Many have retired through ill health. Others are working and struggling with their health. Yet not one word about investment in health or social care, no vision or plan.

The move to extend the energy cap until the end of July is welcome, although it completely misses the fact that older people often need their heating on all year round. They live in cold, damp houses with health conditions that mean they need to keep warm. Charging those on prepayment meters the same for their energy as those on direct debit is a start. However, we are still insistent on compensation being paid to those whose homes were broken into to fit a prepayment meter. The suspension of court warrants to fit prepayment meters was to end on 31 March, but the Regulator extended it. It has since been reported that energy providers must not put prepayment meters into the homes of those over 85 years of age; those with no one to help with capacity; those with certain health conditions. We need to get the deeper detail of this report, but will be asking for anyone over 65 to be included in the prepayment meter solution as a start.

If you are a British Gas customer with a prepayment meter that has been fitted either without your permission or you are unhappy with, they will negotiate to remove it. But, because traditional meters are not being manufactured any more, it will more than likely be replaced by a smart meter.

The Regulator is interested in any bad experiences of those on prepayment meters. There is a form to complete at <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/check-prepayment-meter-rules> or you can phone them on:  0800 464 3374 Closing date 4 May 2023.

The Regulator should now work to protect all customers, in particular those who are faced with imposed debt through prepayment meters.

1. **Cost of Living:**

The Chancellor announced that the price cap for energy would remain at £2,500 until July, putting the rise on the back-burner. However, we will still see some price increases in our energy bills due to what is called ‘re-balancing’ unit prices and standing charges.

The detail is yet to be seen on the following measures of support:

* UK households on means-tested benefits will receive a further £900 Cost of Living Payment
* Pensioner households across the UK will receive an additional £300 Cost of Living payment
* People across the UK on non-means-tested disability benefits will receive a further £150

Disability Cost of Living payment, to help with the additional costs they face

Currently inflation sits at 10.4% for CPI; 13.8% for RPI and 9.2% for CPI(H). Goods and services that we pay for like food, train tickets etc. are all subject to RPI. Food inflation stands at 18.3%. CPI(H) is an index which takes into account owner occupied housing costs.

Older people continue to struggle and even the 10.1% increase in the state pension this month still leaves the majority of those on the old state pension scheme far behind those on the post-2016 scheme. Both, however, are less than half the average wage.

Independent Age have issued a toolkit for local authorities on how to increase access to pension credit locally. [https://www.independentage.org/policy-and-research/research-reports/local-activity-pension-credit-toolkit](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.independentage.org%2Fpolicy-and-research%2Fresearch-reports%2Flocal-activity-pension-credit-toolkit&data=05%7C01%7CMorgan.Vine%40independentage.org%7Ca8eb085e6a584d35076908db26086cc2%7C61191ab0dcb3464cbaf495ae4e245da4%7C0%7C0%7C638145589847959783%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=enh5GvoIYM7P5gJ9v3bpDPxOeyvPYjMVK4AMx%2FcDCHA%3D&reserved=0)

1. **NHS Federated Data Platform:**

Foxglove have entered a request for a Judicial Review as we knew the pilot being run for this £480 million project was with Palantir. However, thanks to openDemocracy and the Times co-publishing an investigation showing that the 'faster data flows' pilot - about sharing hospital data into Palantir Foundry - has now become policy rather than a pilot. Every hospital in England has been told to put patient data into Palantir Foundry by the end of March.

This is a big deal, and is definitely creating facts on the ground to favour Palantir for the FDP bid. It also flies in the face of government policy after being taken to court by openDemocracy, not to use Palantir in the NHS without first consulting the public. Not only have the government not consulted on the use of Palantir, they have not consulted patients on having their data moved onto the Palantir Foundry, nor are they willing to tell us how the data will be used and who will have access.

In addition, the head of the UK Palantir operation pulled out of a face to face debate with Cori Crider (Foxglove) on the future of NHS data and the Federated Data Platform. Also, there is a question as to why OpenSafe have been excluded from the programme. They are a UK firm that would provide better quality data processing, safely and securely at much less cost.

1. **Digital Exclusion:**

The NPC supported the National Federation of the Blind UK (NFBUK) in presenting their petition to 10 Downing Street on keeping ticket offices open, staff on stations and guards on trains. Jonathan can give more detail.

We also responded to the call for evidence on digital exclusion from the House of Lords. This can be accessed on the website. It is very evident that if you are digitally excluded, then you are also economically and socially excluded.

Digital first/digital only isolates everyone without the capacity to be online – whatever that reason is.

Michael Gove has intervened in the row over making parking digital. He has warned local councils that they must keep the cash option. We ask members to keep any eye on any changes that have already been proposed and whether the cash option is still available. Let us know and Michael Gove will hear about those areas who have ignored his warning.

1. **Marie Curie:**

We met with Marie Curie and there is work that we can do together, particularly on the issue of carers and access to pensions for those who are terminally ill.

1. **Voter ID:**

We wrote to the Electoral Commission explaining how older people can easily be excluded from the voting process because they are not online or may not have photo ID. Since the inclusion of the Concessionary Pass this may help the majority. However, in places where there is no broadband, no access to devices etc. it remains the case that some older people will still have difficulty.

Attached to this report, a list of acceptable methods of identification. If you do not have one of the accepted forms of identification, then you should apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), enclosed with this report which you can ask your local council to supply to you. You should then post the completed form with a passport-style photo to your Local Authority who will then post out to you the relevant document to take to the polling station.

If you have a difficulty with your photo, then you should contact your local authority who are responsible for assisting you.

The deadline for receipt of a VAC is 5.00 pm on 25 April 2023.

If you have a postal vote, no photo ID is required. Need help – 0800 328 0280

The Electoral Commission has issued guidance to staff at polling stations on how to deal with issues with identification, safety and security of voters.

We have asked the Commission to give us feedback on the ‘security’ of ID voting and also statistics relating to those who may have been excluded from voting – particularly the over 65 age range.

1. **Special Delegate Conference:**

The deadline for registration, questions and amendments was 21 April. For those booking with NPC, invoices are being sent and prompt payment is appreciated as we need to pay the hotel prior to the event. It will aid our cash flow problems if invoices can be paid immediately.

A floor plan is available and will be sent out with the final papers.

1. **Manifesto Energy For All:**

The EC agreed that NPC should sign the Manifesto (attached) and gain clarification of certain points (response attached).

1. **Annual Convention:**

A site visit has taken place. Stewards will be in place for the Annual Convention. Everything is on the one corridor (apart from the Gents toilets which are to the left of the reception area).

1. **GS Activities: (since last Council meeting)**
* Peterborough TUC
* CSPA 70th birthday, House of Commons
* Age Sector Forum (Age UK); November
* East Midlands Region
* ASLEF Conference, Scarborough
* Lewisham Pensioners Forum AGM
* Good Law Project Cost of Living Panel Debate
* Warm this Winter Demo, London
* DPAC on Tyneside
* Winter Deaths Demo
* Fuel Poverty Coalition
* SOS NHS
* Digital Poverty Webinar
* Interview/video Newcastle Central Station (NFBUK)
* Attendance at various picket lines
* Right to Strike event in Newcastle
* Tax Justice
* Age Sector Forum (Age UK); February
* Commission for Social Security Webinar
* RMT round table
* Unite Campaign Meeting 68 Too Late
* Meeting South East Region
* Marie Curie
* Rail Delivery Group meeting with NFBUK
* Blackpool site visit
* House of Commons; MPs/Lords drop in Commission for Older People & Ageing
* Retired Workers Seminar, Wexford, Ireland
* 68 Too Late Campaign – presentation of petition
* Just Treatment – Health Data session
* Media stuff: BBC, Express, local radio stations, press releases, quotes and comments for a variety of newspapers.

**Jan Shortt**

**April 2023**

**Accepted forms of photo ID**

**You can use any of the following accepted forms of photo ID when voting at a polling station.**

**International travel**

* **Passport issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, an EEA state or a Commonwealth country**

**Driving and Parking**

* **Driving licence issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state (this includes a provisional driving licence)**
* **A Blue Badge**

**Local travel**

* **Older Person’s Bus Pass funded by the Government of the United Kingdom**
* **Disabled Person’s Bus Pass funded by the Government of the United Kingdom**
* **Oyster 60+ Card funded by the Government of the United Kingdom**
* **Freedom Pass**
* **Scottish National Entitlement Card**
* **60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card**
* **Disabled Person’s Welsh Concessionary Travel Card**
* **Senior SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland**
* **Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person’s SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland**
* **War Disablement SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland**
* **60+ SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland**
* **Half Fare SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland**

**Proof of age**

* **Identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)**

**Other government issued documents**

* **Biometric immigration document**
* **Ministry of Defence Form 90 (Defence Identity Card)**
* **National identity card issued by an EEA state**
* **Electoral Identity Card issued in Northern Ireland**