**Old Grey Matter Article for the EADT - Saturday 10th December

Eat or Heat

“It is well documented that older people spend a larger percentage of their fixed income on energy and therefore have to cut spending on other essentials such as food.

Jan Shortt, general secretary of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), made this prediction in the lead up to the Autumn Financial statement, “Over two million older people are living in poverty and as this crisis gathers pace, with bankers having bonuses restored and higher mortgage rates doing nothing to relieve the worry of those on fixed and low incomes, we will see more poverty and an increase in winter deaths.”

“The value of the state pension has eroded over decades despite the overtures of the Pensions’ Minister that we are protected. Our spending power has decreased and the 3.1% rise in pensions in April 2022 was immediately swallowed up by energy prices and inflation across a range of essentials.”

I would add that this was a mean government decision by the then Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, to ditch the conservative manifesto triple lock promise that if it had been applied, would have meant an 8.1% increase last April but was considered ‘Unaffordable’ at the time. This of course has put millions of pensioners into worsened financial circumstances this winter when costs that were already rising, have risen still more! Now, those with little savings find they cannot afford much themselves, whilst voluntary food banks have seen many more customers and the government has had to seek other limited means to assist them.

The cumulative effect of losing out one year is very evident on any increase the next year - as it cannot be made up. Indeed the widening gap between the two classes of state pensioners also shows this to be true. Those who receive the old pension until 2016 are falling further behind those who receive the newer pension introduced then rolling all allowable benefits into it. The NPC says there should be just the one state pension for all those entitled to it as a matter of equity and justice as all have paid into the National Insurance scheme through their working lifetime.

Christopher Brooks, Chair,
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