

Cold Comfort Budget for Seniors?

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) December bulletin reports that millions of older people would have been dismayed at the lack of any announcements from the Chancellor in his Autumn Budget statement on 22 November, that would benefit older people. Like many, the NPC was hoping for some further details on plans to tackle the growing crisis in social care, a programme for dealing with fuel poverty and proposals for more suitable senior housing. Instead, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies the economy is set for lower productivity, earnings and growth until 2022. Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: “The social care system has suffered over £5bn worth of cuts since 2010 – and over one million older people no longer get the help they need, staff turnover is high, the quality of care is sometimes questionable and there is a distinct lack of dignity in the system for both staff and residents.” “A Green Paper that’s been promised next summer is simply too little, too late for hundreds of thousands of older people and their families and the Chancellor should have offered something now.” A detailed briefing on the Budget and older people is available on the NPC’s website at www.npcuk.org.

Also highlighted is the fact that the NPC has called on the government to launch a new fuel poverty commission to urgently address the scale of annual winter deaths among the country’s older population. The call comes as official figures revealed an estimated 34,300 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales in 2016/17; the second highest number in the last five years. Whilst the data does not break down the figures by age, the vast majority of these deaths were among people over 65. This equates to 9720 more people dying this winter than in 2015/16 and represents a 39.5% increase. In total, the figures represent 285 deaths a day or 11 deaths an hour. Ron Douglas, NPC president said: “Successive governments have simply ignored the problem of winter deaths amongst the older population and seem to have a policy of crossing their fingers and hoping things will improve.” “These figures show that this policy simply doesn’t work – in fact things are getting worse.” Using the government’s official definition of fuel poverty, around 1.4 million older people in England are at risk and almost one in three older people live in homes with inadequate heating or insulation. This accounts for around 3.5 million older people at risk or suffering from fuel poverty. Suffolk and Anglia Region Pensioners highlighted this with their skeleton crew in a Lowestoft photocall.



