

Old Grey Matter article submitted to EADT for publication Saturday 3rd March 2018

State Pension Age

News from the February Campaign bulletin of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) indicates what many privately believe, that UK longevity is now starting to fall for some. The bulletin can be found at the NPC website: www.npcuk.org New figures from Public Health England have revealed that life expectancy in some parts of the country has fallen by more than a year since 2011. People in post-industrial towns and isolated rural areas are dying younger while longevity is rising in London and parts of the south east. Economic stagnation and cuts to services such as social care are among theories suggested for consistent falls in life expectancy of over half a decade in dozens of local authority areas. Nationally, female life expectancy at birth is static at 82.9 years and male life expectancy stands at 79.2 years, while people in other European countries live increasingly longer. The areas where people in Britain were dying sooner seemed to be the less “economically vibrant”, but they are not dying of new diseases. In rural areas the lack of social infrastructure is significant with a lack of community groups, poor public transport and a lack of family support. MPs have also recently suggested that 1.3 million pensioners are at risk of “withering away” in their own home because of malnutrition caused by loneliness. Only 29,000 people now receive meals on wheels, down from 155,000 a decade ago.

The findings cast doubt over the government’s plan to raise the state pension age (SPA) to 68, seven years earlier than planned — affecting all those aged between 39 and 47. This and plans thereafter to raise the SPA every five years or so are based on upward projections of longevity which now seems to have reached a plateau. Of course they are measures that would save the exchequer billions of pounds by the delay involved where the by product would be more people will not live that long anyway so will never receive a pension, and the shortening of the total amount actually paid to pensioners who do reach their SPA. To my mind this is a cynical way to reward the elderly who have made this country great through their service and their working lives!

So an honest appraisal is needed about longevity figures to substantiate the government's claim to raise the SPA because 'people are living longer' – patently not all people are! Those who can only manage a poor diet and the recent increase in consumption of fast foods, obesity and sedentary lifestyle for example, lead me to think that many more will not even reach the present lower age levels that life expectancy as an average, takes into account and some will not even reach SPA at all.

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