

OLD GREY MATTER ARTICLE

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Debating Pensioners Issues

After nine months of requests, the NPC has finally met the Minister of Pensions, Baroness Ros Altmann. The Convention raised the call for existing pensioners to be included in the new state pension scheme if they would be better off by doing so. The minister said this would cost too much, and would not be fair because existing pensioners had already been drawing their state pensions for a number of years and effectively were better off. When asked to produce the evidence of how much such a scheme would cost, the minister said she would consider releasing the figures to the NPC. The unfairness of the different indexation arrangements affecting the old and new state pensions was also raised, and whilst Ms Altmann understood the concern, she said it was for a future government to decide how to resolve the problem. Interestingly, she supported the idea that older people's benefits should be protected and that pensioners generally had made a huge contribution to society and should not therefore be portrayed as a burden. However, she was less sympathetic towards the 500,000 pensioners who lived abroad and had their state pensions frozen at the level they were when they left the UK. The Baroness said it was their choice to leave, and their was no legal obligation on the government to act. When asked if there was a moral obligation to unfreeze these pensions, the minister repeated her previous answer. Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary said: "It's vitally important that ministers meet the representatives of the country's older population and I hope the minister will not take so long next time." A report of the meeting is available on the NPC website www.npcuk.org

Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell is expected to announce details of Labour's Older People's Commission when he addresses the opening rally at this year's Pensioners' Parliament at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool. A contingent of East Anglian members will be travelling by minibus from Suffolk and Norfolk for this. The Commission will be looking at all aspects of older people's lives, from pensions and housing, to social care and public transport. At this year's event, delegates will also hear from John Hilary, head of War on Want and an active campaigner against TTIP, Judy Downey from the Relatives and Residents Association who specialises in promoting dignified social care and James MacColl from the Campaign for Better Transport. Ron Douglas, NPC president said: "It's important to recognise that the NPC has a unique position in helping to shape older people's policy over the next few years." The NPC Pensioners' Parliament runs from 14-16 June and all are welcome to attend on paying the entrance accreditation fee of £10 for the sessions at the Winter Gardens.

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