**REGIONAL SECRETARIES MEETING ON ZOOM**

**Notes of meeting held on 10 December 2020**

**In attendance:** Ron Douglas (Chair), Chris Brooks (Anglia), Tony Garner (Eastern), Keith Evans (GAS), Barry Todman (London), Martin Dent (Northern), Ralph Moses (North West), John Martin (Northern Ireland), John Paine (Thames Valley), Brian Albutt (West Midlands), Fran Griffiths (NPC Wales), Alan Jeyes (Home Counties North), Dot Gibson, Marion Wilson, Norman Jemison, Jan Shortt, Bev Morrison, Jonathan Saffir.

David Briggs (Digital Working Party) presentation

**Apologies:** Mick Newton (East Midlands), Pat Turner (Wessex), Peter Rayner, John Lean (South East)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and spoke about the ongoing pandemic and its impact on older people in particular but on everyone across the world.

1. **Minutes of meeting 8 October 2020:**

Agreed.

1. **Matters arising:**

John Paine asked if there was an update on any meeting with the TUC. Ron and Jan have a meeting on 11 December with Jack Jones (TUC Pensions Policy Officer) to discuss issues to raise with Frances O’Grady when we meet in January 2021. Jan will be raising a formal request to meet with the TUC General Council.

1. **Update from General Secretary:**

It has certainly been a difficult year and will continue into 2021 without doubt. How far in will depend on government strategies in dealing with infections, the roll out of vaccines and the restrictions that will remain in place.

If this was an Annual Report, it would say that the NPC has managed to give a good service to our members in spite of changing work practices, closures of office, furlough of staff. That is down to the team of officers and staff.

What’s in the diary for next year?

* More meetings with the BBC (their editorial team, equality and diversity unit) with more on pensions and the triple lock.
* Meetings with the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, Amnesty and the Centre for Ageing Better. Ageism and human rights now high on the agenda.
* Campaign for Digital Inclusion/Exclusion on 1 February (David to do his presentation shortly).
* Continuing campaigns on a National Care Service, Pensions/Triple Lock/Universal Entitlements and for a Commissioner for Older People in England.
* Response to the Law Commission Consultation on Hate Crime
* Response to NHS England Consultation on Integrated Care Services.

Annual Convention, Southport: Jan contacted the organiser in Sefton Council and has replies to questions asked.

The date of 8-10 June 2021 is pencilled in the events diary. Sefton Council cabinet meets in January to discuss re-opening of venues (dependent on government guidelines at the time).

It will take several months to get the venue ready to accept events and therefore uncertainty around what can actually go ahead, particularly if further restrictions are in place in the run up to the summer.

On the question of availability of hotels and small accommodation providers, they have weathered the storm so far with grants and local support initiatives.

Depending on whether social distancing and a restriction on numbers is in place if the venue re-opens, that will have an impact on the numbers we are able to have attending and ultimately on income from ticket sales.

We will be working on the premise that the venue will be open and we can hold our event – with reduced numbers if need be. However, we will also have alternative plans should things not work out.

We will stay in contact with them, but there is a difficulty for everyone concerned in timing for booking accommodation etc. We are reliant on government decisions which often don’t fit with the timescales we need.

**Questions/Comments:**

* No commitment by government to review care anytime soon. *Response: The PM’s promise to ‘fix care for good’ hasn’t moved much. We know that they are still looking at some form of cap – so more of the same disguised as new.*
* Cinderella – Trade Unions and TUC have like policy documents on a National Care Service. *Response: Mary Roberts the TUC Policy Officer currently looking after care issues attended our webinar and spoke in favour of a National Care Service. Other Trade Unions were invited, but didn’t sign up. Hence the request to meet the TUC General Council – they need to get the idea in their head that this and pensions etc is about future pensioners not just us now.*
* Deadline for decision on Southport. *Response: It is difficult. Officers will discuss at their next meeting in January.*
* Wales have responded positively to the consultation. Working with SHA Wales. *Response: NPC policy is against Integrated Care Services in England. Wales has a different way of allocating funding and services are publicly delivered/accountable. This is not the case in England where privatisation is still prevalent. Please send any useful documents that NPC can use to advocate a model on the lines of Wales.*
* England is not a devolved government.
* The TUC bailed out on the state pension and occupational pensions in favour of auto-enrolment. *Response: Exactly why we need to be talking to the General Council members who are charged with protecting and representing their members’ best interests – and that includes retirement when it comes along.*
* Trades Councils can put resolutions and have delegates to conference. NPC should write to Trade Councils to get them to affiliate. *Response: Ron said there is a directory of Trades Councils we can use.*
* Any response from letters to MPs on care. *Response: only a few and those mainly talk about funding not a whole radical reform of a broken system.*
* The Irish TUC – we are able to put motions forward. Look for friendly Trades Councils.
1. **Presentation by David Briggs:**

David gave an insight into the work of the Digital Inclusion/Exclusion Working Party so far and what is known, although evidence moves all the time. Currently, 4.2million over 55’s are not online. The older you are, the less likely to be online. This has important impacts on access to health services and other necessary services that are more and more digitally driven.

There will be two parts to the campaign to be launched on 1 February:

* Encourage, empower people online
* Reaching out to politicians, other stakeholders on societal changes and Regional Secretaries on local issues.

We will circulate David’s presentation.

**Questions/Comments:**

* Regional resources. Trade Unions have facilities that can support our work and sign-posting to local groups that can help.
* People not able to involve themselves online because of the necessity to deal with codes, passwords etc.
* Computers are fickle – it can be frustrating and off-putting.
* Before lockdown, I had no knowledge of other platforms. Family gave me a tablet and I talk to them more now than I did before.
* An issue for the General Election: broadband should be free. Important to people who have not got the finances to purchase.
* Younger pensioners already online using Apps to access GPs, other health services.
* There is a free ‘dongle’ course – easy to use. Concern about offline provision for people without access to technology.
* Regional differences on what is available and where. Signposting locally is important. Goes beyond digital inclusion information. Need the right support and facilities
* Telephone systems in areas that are quite rural.
* Ofcom has regulations for providers to help older people.
* Computer failure – they are not infallible – internet not a simple issue.
* WhatsApp – expected to communicate in so many ways.

Ron thanked David as he had to leave the meeting.

1. **Update on Campaigns:**

Bev spoke on the ‘Connections for All’ webinar being organised which will follow two very successful webinars over the last two months. Each one brings with it follow ups and further work.

The main barriers for older people are access to broadband, security, scams and new packages coming out all the time. What we will be looking into is if any of the current providers could build a ‘plug and play’ option for older people who do not want the fuss of the whole internet.

Families have been the driver for older people going online during the pandemic with access to broadband and equipment. For those who don’t have that support we need something more simple and easy to manage.

Perhaps as has already been said, free broadband.

Training access is fragmented across the country. Even locally, the training courses can be miles away.

**Questions/Comments:**

* Plug and Play would be useful without getting too involved.
* How do you identify good trainers? *Response: Good question. Depends on where the individual is at.*
* Computers are increasingly complex. Plug and Play is a safe option.
* Promotion for webinar. *Response: Working on ideas to discuss with the working party on return to work in January.*
1. **Regional Reports:**

Ron asked for any additional points to regional reports already submitted.

* **London:** Apologies no written report. October spent on TfL proposals culminating in the region signing a joint letter by all the Transport Unions. Trades Councils are represented at the region. Executive Committee meetings held monthly on Zoom; emails; bulletins and circulation of NPC information. AGM 2021 being arranged. Chasing affiliations, particularly local groups and individuals. We must not forget those not on email, they are crucial to survival.
* **Northern:** Reaching out to our non-digital members by post. Able to offer events online. Concern about loss of membership. Involved in NHS privatisation and Trade Bill issues. Local RMA’s not met this year.
* **Wales:**  Written report submitted. A statement was made by the Regional Secretary for Wales that she felt uncomfortable as a woman taking part in this meeting. She declined to add any further detail to the report from Wales as she believed there was a feeling she spoke to much.

*Jan asked to comment on the statement. The Regional Secretaries meetings are an information sharing forum where everyone brings items forward from their own areas. Jan encouraged people to speak at all times. If there is a particular example, Jan needs to know in order to address the situation.*

*Ron also supported that line adding that women were always welcome at NPC meetings and other activities and felt that they were treated in the same manner as male representatives.*

* **East Midlands:** Inactive for a while due to COVID and the loss of key officers. Now focusing on building up membership; May Day events in Nottingham and Chesterfield. For the future we will invite a speaker from NPC nationally.
* **Northern Ireland:** First Zoom meeting held thanks to Jonathan and all his help to make it happen. We were pleased to welcome Jan as our speaker and found it extremely informative. *Jan thanked John for the region’s invitation and also for signposting her to Lord Dodds who has responded in a very positive way to working with the NPC on pensions issues.*
* **Anglia:** No group meetings. NPC information is on our website. Affiliated to Suffolk People’s Assembly.
* **Thames Valley:** Busy in Thames Valley and Oxford. Majority of members online and information is posted out to our list. Dealing with welfare issues as well as campaigns.
* **Eastern:** Not much happening. Had a few replies to invite to online meeting – not quorate. Phoning into Zoom – the cost depends on your package and can be expensive.
* **Home Counties:** We are not folding. Not very active at the moment, but we will be back. Still learning the wonderful ways of computers. We are in touch with each other.
* **West Midlands:** Executive Committee met virtually and Regional Council running too. Launched questionnaire with UNISON on NHS and Primary Care Trusts. Re-launch of website.
* **North West:** Nothing to add to written report.
* **Wessex:** Unable to hold Executive meetings but all members of the Committee have been consulted about decisions made. We circulate all information from NPC either by email or post. A wreath was made and placed adjacent to the War Memorial in West End, Southampton on 27 November in response to excess winter deaths numbers. Sent letter and photo to local paper. A Christmas message has been sent to all members appreciating their support and offer them support should they need it. Still seeking a Treasurer
1. **Information Officer:** Jonathan reported he was working on consultation submissions and generally backing up work with Bev and Jan. *Ron commented that it was more than that!*
2. **A.O.B:**
* There is an NPC Christmas Card which will be sent to all affiliates on email and post.
* The December Campaign News will be out next week.
1. **Next meeting:** 18 February 2021 at 10.30 a.m.