



Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

As Dignity Action Day marks the start of a month of protest we ask..

What Price Dignity?

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WANT TO JOIN THE NPC?

Do you care about issues affecting older people? Want to do something about them? Then join us as an individual, or as an affiliate group. We are the biggest campaign group run for and by older people. Contact us today and find out how to get involved. Details above.

This year's Dignity Action Day on 1st February marked one of the biggest national public sector protests in decades.

The NPC hopes this will be a turning point, not just in the amicable resolution of the disputes, but crucially in the UK's approach to improving the public services that we all rely upon. Dignity Action Day has always been an annual opportunity for health and social care workers, and members of the public to uphold people's rights to dignity, whether they receive care, or work in care. But this year, the Action Day is also about the need for dignity in work and dignity in retirement. Dignity is about having enough income to be able to look after yourself properly, a decent home, nutritious food, and making your own choices whatever your ability. That is why this month we are highlighting three key NPC campaigns.

Firstly, we believe there has never been a better time to legislate for an Older People's Commissioner for England—as in Wales and Northern Ireland—to give our generation a powerful voice at the highest levels.

Secondly, we want to have a National Care Service, providing high-quality, fully-funded care for all, free at the point of need, and working alongside the NHS.

Thirdly, we want to see better, easier and cheaper access to communications for our oldest and most vulnerable, with true digital inclusion, as well as alternative strategies for those who are not online.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "There has never been a more pressing time for the implementation of these key changes that could make such a significant differ-



Nurses will be among striking NHS workers on 6/7 Feb

'Dignity and quality of life matter at every age'

ence to the quality of all our lives—both old and young. Today's children are tomorrow's pensioners — so the best investment we can make is to plan for a society that strives to deliver a better quality of life for every generation. This includes, not just better health and care, but also all the other services we rely upon, such as better housing,



transport, and affordable energy and utilities. As the country endures one of the worst crises in the cost and quality of living, as well as in health, care and many other essential services, we face a month of action by everyone from nurses, and ambulance drivers, to teachers and civil servants, and bus and train drivers. **The 6th and 7th February will be the biggest action yet by NHS staff.** With inflation rocketing—food prices rose by 16+% in the last year—they are striking for better pay. But they are also raising awareness of critical shortfalls in investment, and staffing that affect not just conditions for patients, but also for hard pressed staff. Their struggle is to ensure that public services are there for all of us in the future.

For more info: www.npcuk.org, or write to us.

NEW PPM SCANDAL: Debt Collectors Force Install of PrePayMeters - P2

68 is too late!

The NPC is opposing newly revealed government plans to increase the state pension age to 68 much sooner than originally expected.

Reports suggest the Chancellor is set to announce details of the move in his March Budget in a bid to raise billions for The Treasury.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "The NPC is fundamentally against further increases in the age at which people can officially retire and take their state pension - it is a false economy. We respect and support the rights of those who are healthy enough, and who want or need to work



beyond retirement age. Employers ought to make it easier to retain and hire older workers. **But, with UK life expectancy stalling and a huge increase in**

the number of those over 50 not healthy enough to continue in work, the NPC believes the government is wrong to bring the retirement age forward to 68 earlier than planned. We will be writing to them and calling for a re-think."

Currently men and women can take their state

Retirement age increase to be brought forward in March Budget



pension—which they have contributed to throughout their lives - at 66. Plans were already in place to increase this to 67 between 2026-2028, and to 68 between 2044-2046.

But recent reports suggest the government is looking to bring in the rise to 68 much sooner - possibly by 2037.

Jan said: "Latest figures show that in Blackpool's Bloomfield ward the average life expectancy of men is 67.3 years. So as it stands most men there would never live to claim their state pension at 68. The retirement age was originally increased to reflect the fact that more of us are living longer. But that trend has dramatically paused, and in some areas started to reverse."

The age at which we can expect to live in good health, has also reduced.

Men in Richmond-on-Thames will on average, live healthily until 71, while in Blackpool* it is just 53.

Ill health often makes it impossible for many to work, yet they are unable to retire. (*JSNA Blackpool)

New forced PPMs Scandal

British Gas halts installs after Times exposé



British Gas has suspended the force-fitting of prepayment meters (PPMs) after a newspaper investigation found contractors broke into the homes of vulnerable customers to install them.

Industry regulator Ofgem has also now asked all energy firms to suspend the forced installation of prepayment meters, and review the use of court warrants to enter homes of customers in arrears.

Horrified

The moves follow a Times report alleging a firm employed by British Gas used Arvato Financial Solutions debt collectors to force their way into homes to fit the meters, despite signs children and disabled people lived there. In an undercover investigation, The Times reporter went with Arvato agents to the house of a single Dad with three children. After establishing the property was unoccupied, the reporter watched agents work with a locksmith to force their way in and install a prepayment meter. Other examples cited included

agents fitting a PPM by force at the home of a young Mum with a baby.

Business Secretary Grant Shapps has said he was "horrified" by the findings and would hold a meeting with British Gas to demand answers. British Gas owner Centrica said the actions were "unacceptable". They have suspended not only Arvato's warrant activity, but all PPM warrant activity until "after winter." The NPC has been campaigning for an end to all PPM installations after numerous reports of them being fitted by force in the homes of older people.

Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "The Times report revealed the horrifying extent of this scandal which is causing untold fear and worry at the height of winter, and in the midst of a cost of living crisis. As bills soar it is all too easy for those who are struggling to fall behind.

We want to know why customers were not offered help, rather than have their homes broken into."

National demos call for end to Winter Deaths

‘Shameful’ that people still die of cold today

NPC campaigners were out in force on a freezing January day to protest at the huge numbers of people dying from the cold. Members in London, Cardiff and other regions staged demonstrations to mark the announcement of the latest Excess Winter Deaths figures for England and Wales.

The National Pensioners’ Convention, was joined at Westminster by Fuel Poverty Action, the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) and many others to hold a minute’s silence outside Parliament at 12pm. Afterwards they marched to Downing Street with a coffin bearing the number of those who have died.



Lord Sikka (left) addresses demo

In Wales members led

by NPC Wales Chair Dereck Roberts protested in Cardiff Central Square, outside the office of the Welsh Secretary of State (pictures below).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced that 13,400 more deaths occurred in the winter period (December 2021 to March 2022) compared with the average of non-winter periods. Speakers including Lord Prem Sikka, Rt. Hon. John McDonnell MP and NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt condemned the figures and questioned their accuracy, given the announcement has twice been delayed since November. **Jan Shortt said:** “At a time of rocketing food and fuel prices,



NPC Wales took their protest to the Welsh Office in January.

NPC Wales Chair Dereck Roberts (right) said they receive a lot of support from people in Cardiff.



The protest march stretched along The Mall to Downing St

we will be calling for review of the accuracy of the figures, which given the recent national/UK stats for excess deaths seem rather low. That said, the numbers dying from cold related illness in the UK in this day and age is shameful.

The government needs a new vision and a new plan to show people across this country that they can have a living wage, and a living pension to enable them to pay their bills and have a decent standard of living.”



ITN interview John McDonnell

The groups are also collectively demanding the UK government ban all energy providers from forced pre-payment meter (PPMs) installation.



Charge the sick for being sick? Don't you dare!



The NHS may be in crisis – but the NPC is shocked that former Health Secretary Sajid Javid is suggesting patients should be charged a £20 fee if they ask for NHS treatment without seeing a GP first.

We view healthcare as a right for all of us who need it, not a privilege. Our NHS has always been free at the point of need, and we want to keep it that way. Charging sick people for being sick would end the NHS as we know it.

That is why the NPC is supporting a petition by the campaign group 38 Degrees and would invite all our members to sign their petition to stop any move by government to introduce such a charge.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “This isn’t the first time something so dangerous has been

floated. Rishi Sunak said patients should be charged £10 for missing appointments, and some other Conservative MPs have suggested the same. But, every time public pressure forced them to back down.

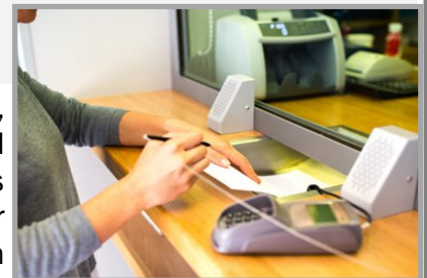
Petition

“Make no mistake, this is an attempt by the same people who have spent a decade underfunding and understaffing the NHS, bringing it to its knees, to make paying for healthcare seem a normal way out of this crisis. We must stop it here.” You can find the petition and further details about the campaign here:

<https://act.38degrees.org.uk/act/dont-you-dare-petition>

Thousands of High St banks close

Is your local branch among them?



The disappearance of bank and building society branches from our High Streets has been a major concern for NPC members in recent years.

However the online consumer affairs watchdog Which? has been keeping track on just how many have closed –and their findings are astounding. A total of 5,355 branches closed or have scheduled to close since January 2015. Banks say this is down to a rapid increase in online and mobile banking, and a drop in the use of local branches.

But NPC knows these closures are isolating thousands of older and vulnerable people who either can't, or don't want to bank online.

Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary said: “The scale and speed of High Street branch closures is even more shocking than we imagined. This is a huge blow for older people who rely on their local branches. We will be raising the issue with the Financial Ombudsman Service, and with the Digital Poverty Alliance to see what can be done to halt the pace of these closures.”

According to The Mirror, in one of its latest an-

nouncements, HSBC said it would shut 114 branches - around a quarter of its total sites - in 2023. Lloyds is

closing a further 36 banks this year, including 13 that have already shut in January. NatWest currently has 66 scheduled to close, with 16 shut already this month. Barclays will close 41 sites, Halifax will shut 23 branches, including three banks that already closed in January. Santander will close five banks, Nationwide will close two and TSB will shut nine sites. You can check if your branch is among them by logging onto Which? (behind a firewall) and using their tracker. Or you can view a list of proposed closures compiled by the Daily Mirror: www.mirror.co.uk/money/full-list-bank-closures-coming-28687071

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