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Fighting for the rights of older people

Chancellor’s Budget Box empty of help for pensioners facing bleak winter of higher bills

The Autumn Budget dismally failed the UK’s oldest and most vulnerable people who face a bitter winter of rising prices.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Budget speech (27 October) contained no help for retired people who rely on a state pension to pay their bills. With the cost of everything from heating to food set to sky rocket, the NPC fears hundreds of thousands will be plunged further into poverty.

Mr Sunak also made no mention of his earlier decision to suspend the Triple Lock, ditching the element of annual wage rises which would have seen state pensions rise by 8%. Indeed, next April’s state pension rise of 3.1% will in no way make up for rising costs. **Jan Shortt, General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention said:** “This Budget

shamefully does absolutely nothing for our oldest and most vulnerable who will struggle to cope with a bleak winter of prices rising way faster than their meagre incomes. **The Chancellor was so busy giving tax cuts to the banks that he managed to avoid mentioning his undermining of the Pensions Triple Lock.**

Social care is on its knees, but the money announced for Local Government – spread over the term of parliament - is nothing like the losses to over the years and will not provide the help that is desperately needed right now. The money raised by the increase in National Insurance – a tax hitting those on the lowest incomes – is clearly not all going to social care and will still not be enough to fix the crisis in the NHS.

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Whilst we applaud the increase in the National Living Wage it is still below a decent income. We all want to see working people’s earnings rise but this will widen the gap between earnings and pensions even further. Without the triple lock, more pensioners will fall into poverty. Rewarding work is commendable, but where does that leave the older generation who have already worked and contributed all their lives? Nowhere, thank you Mr. Sunak. The Chancellor keeps referring to Covid-19 for many of his decisions, yet he wilfully neglects those who suffered most during the pandemic – older people, tens of thousands of whom paid with their lives. It begs the question, what have the older generation done so wrong that this government consistently ignores and side-lines them.”



October Budget: Key Points

The Chancellor said his Budget will pave the way for the “Prime Minister’s post-Covid economy of higher wages, higher skills, and rising productivity.” His announcements followed the decision of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to, firstly scale down its forecast for the effect of Covid-19 on the economy from 3% to 2%, and secondly, downgrade its unemployment forecast from 12% to 5.2%.

Here are some of the key points:

- The National Living Wage will increase to £9.50 an hour next year, up from the current £8.91.
- The Universal Credit taper rate will be cut by 8% from no later than December 1, bringing it down from 63% to 55%.
- A £6 billion package of funding will help tackle NHS backlogs and invest in technology (this was trailed ahead of Budget Day). *Continued over page...*

The Budget - Key Points *Cont. from P1...*

- Alcohol duty is being simplified” by introducing a system based on the principle of “the stronger the drink, the higher the rate”.
- The price of a pint goes down by 3p due to “draught relief” applying a lower rate of duty on draught beer & cider, cutting tax by 5% on drinks served from barrels over 40 litres.
- A planned rise in fuel duty will be cancelled because of pump prices being at their highest level in eight years.
- Air Passenger Duty on flights between airports in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland will be subject to a new lower rate from April 2023.

- Government departments will receive a “real terms rise in overall spending” as part of the Spending Review, amounting to £150 billion.
- A levy will be placed on property developer with profits over £25 million to help create a £5 billion fund to remove unsafe cladding.
- Devolved administrations will be given the “largest block grants” since 1998.
- An extra £2.2 billion has been announced for courts, prisons and probation services, including £500,000 to reduce backlogs.

Digital Exclusion Webinar – Shadow Secretary to raise our concerns

The Shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said she is ‘not surprised’ older people are afraid to use the internet over scam fears.

Jo Stevens MP told the NPC’s webinar on digital exclusion on 1 October that urgent action is needed to tackle online fraud, starting with ‘meaningful’ measures to be added to the government’s Online Safety Bill.

The Shadow Secretary said: “The Government promised world leading legislation on online safety. Unfortunately, all we have currently, is a weak and watered-down Bill that doesn’t even satisfy the basic duty of government – to keep its citizens safe.”

Ms Stevens said she agreed with the NPC’s call for choice when it came to digital communication when so many people were still not online. She told the webinar she would raise the issue when she meets the new DCMS Secretary of State, Nadine Dorries MP. She said: “The absolutely important word in all of this is choice – we shouldn’t be saying to people you have to have use

online services, there should always be a choice as to whether you do or you don’t.” The Connections for All: Digital & the Right to Choose” webinar marking UN International Day of Older Persons, also heard from Age UK Charity Director Caroline Abrahams CBE; retired GP Dr Jennifer Bute; and Jenny Sims, Chair, NPC Digital Working Party.

Policymakers

Chair Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary, said the consensus was that policymakers need to take account of the fact that not everyone is online, for whatever reason, despite the rapid race towards digitalisation.

Nearly two million over 75s (Age UK) still don’t use the internet, and many cite fears of scams as much as lack of knowledge, confidence and money as reasons for not going online. But some older people simply don’t want to use the internet, even if they could, and indeed had training.

The NHS Reform Bill - will go for a 3rd reading in November and the NPC will keep you up to date with any further developments.

OFCOM acts to block overseas scam callers

Major phone networks have agreed to block almost all internet calls coming from abroad if they pretend to be from UK numbers, Ofcom has confirmed. Criminals have been using internet-based technology to make it look like a call or text is coming from a real phone number. Almost 45 million consumers were targeted by phone scams this summer. Ofcom said it expected the measures to be introduced at pace as a “priority”.

True cost of scams

The impact of scams on victim wellbeing costs £9.3bn a year - or 2,509 per person. Which? research found being a scam victim is related to lower life satisfaction compared to being threatened or targeted by thieves. For online fraud, the cost is even higher at £3,684. Which? wants the government to include scam adverts in the Online Safety Bill as a first step towards ensuring new laws make online platforms take responsibility for consumer harms like fraud,