



# Campaign!

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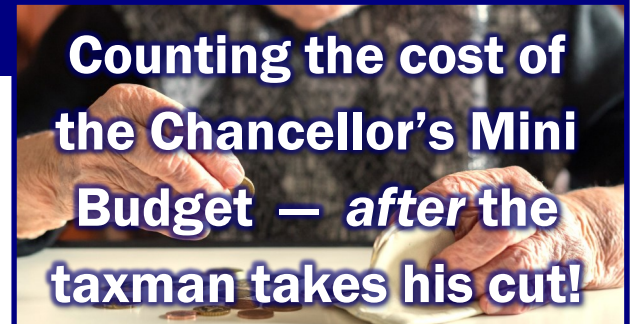
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Details  
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*Fighting for the rights of older people*

## **Autumn Statement 2023**

**C**hancellor Jeremy Hunt told Parliament he was keeping his promise to maintain the Triple Lock guaranteeing the state pension would rise by 8.5% next April. But financial commentators reveal that, in practice the increase will work out at just 6.8% after HM Revenue & Customs take their share. It seems that the government's six-year tax threshold freeze is to blame, as it means that more retirees will now start paying the HMRC as their income becomes taxable. The day after the Chancellor unveiled his mini Budget, the energy industry regulator Ofgem announced the price cap on bills that gas and energy suppliers can charge will increase by 5% in January. **NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt has written to the Chancellor to outline our concerns and request a meeting.** Jan commented: "By the time you add in the tax grab, and the energy bills rise in January, plus the inevitable increases are applied in April on things like council tax, rent and other utilities, that 8.5% pension increase will already be spent!" From 8th April the full basic state pension will rise in line with average earnings by £13.30 a week

### **Are we really any better off?**



**Counting the cost of  
the Chancellor's Mini  
Budget — after the  
taxman takes his cut!**

to £169.50. The full new state pension will rise by £17.35 a week to £221.20. Thanks to the government's failure to increase the tax thresholds, many older people will soon have to pay income tax as their earnings exceed the tax threshold. Jan said: "The Chancellor appears to give with one hand, while stealthily taking away with the other. He gave away tax concessions, but failed to invest in our crisis hit health, care and public services." He also announced controversial measures to force the disabled or long term sick to find work or lose benefits. **More on Page 4.**

**BREAKING:** A global economic think-tank has fuelled the call from some Conservatives to scrap the Triple Lock from 2025. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) is urging the UK government to reform the 'costly' triple lock to improve UK finances.

## **Fears as NHS award £480m data contract to US giant Palantir**

**N**HS England is set to hand a share of a £480m contract for managing UK patient data to US spy technology firm Palantir. After years of lobbying, Palantir and Accenture have won a joint bid to operate the new NHS 'federated data platform' (FDP). There has already been fierce debate over Palantir's suitability for the role and the security of data. The FDP platform aims to allow hospital trusts and NHS integrated care systems to share information easily. NPC along with others, fear the award gives considerable cause for concern.

**More on Page 3.**

## **Ticket Office closures scrapped — but the threat is not over**

**T**he NPC has given a 'cautious welcome' to news that plans to close hundreds of UK rail ticket offices have been scrapped. Transport Secretary Mark Harper has asked the rail companies to withdraw their proposals after a consultation by public watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch received 750,000, mainly critical responses. The train companies planned to close ticket offices and change staffing levels. NPC's Jan Shortt warned that we must 'stay vigilant' as the train operators may still try to reduce services by 'stealth.' **More on Page 2.**

## Rail ticket office closures by 'stealth' still a threat



**N**PC is celebrating the news that train company plans to close hundreds of ticket offices have been rejected. But we warn that we must remain 'vigilant' to any new moves to introduce them by 'stealth.'

The NPC and other campaigners were relieved when travel watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch formally objected to the closure plans after a public consultation this summer. Transport Secretary Mark Harper has since asked the nine rail operators to involved to withdraw their proposals. The consultation received more than 750,000, mainly objections to the plans before it closed on 1<sup>st</sup> September.

**NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said:** "NPC thanks Transport Focus and London Travelwatch for listening to the detailed concerns expressed by us,

### Plans breach our human rights

and so many other individuals and organisations. Concerns around access for older passengers and those with a variety of disabilities were at the heart of our objections. It is now time for a passenger-led focus on the best delivery of rail services not a government-led dictat to rail companies."

**But Jan warned:** "Although rail companies may appeal the decision, we hope common sense prevails and results in a better understanding of passenger needs and how these can be met."

"However, we must remain vigilant for any moves to close stations and cut staffing by stealth, such as unannounced reductions in opening hours. We are not against modernisation. But equality of access has to be at the heart of any programme of change, and clearly this has not been the case."

In a 4,000-word submission to the consultation, the NPC's Transport working party of retired industry experts listed the devastating threats posed to travellers' safety, security and ease of access that discriminates against older and disabled people, and breaches both the Equality Act 2010, and article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The NPC will continue to monitor the situation.

## NPC Transport Working Party Conference 2023

**T**he NPC Transport Conference in October was told how public transport system changes and failures have been disastrous for those who rely upon it most, such as our oldest and disabled. Transport WP and event chair Derrick Baker introduced speakers including: Emily Yates, Association of British Commuters (ABC); Matthew Smith, Rail Accessibility Ltd; Fran Postlethwaite, NPC and Better Buses Campaign; as well as the NPC's Les McDowell and Peter Rayner, along with Charles King to delegates at St Aloysius Hall, near Euston in London.

**The NPC believes our declining public transport system is discriminatory under current UK human rights, accessibility and inclusivity legislation.**

Emily Yates of ABC told conference that with a General Election approaching, it is vital that the public demand a new national, whole-system transport strategy from the government. **She said: "Britain's public transport policies are causing an escalating human rights crisis.** The government has been rightfully disgraced over ticket office closures, but there are bigger dangers ahead, including plans to cut rail staffing by stealth, and the decimation of rural bus services." Matthew Smith, a transport accessibility expert, said the planned rail closures would be a



*Panellists, top left to right: Les McDowell, NPC; Emily Yates, Assoc. British Commuters; Fran Postlethwaite, NPC; Matthew Smith, Rail Accessibility; Peter Rayner, NPC; Jan Shortt, Gen Sec.; & Conference Chair, Derrick Baker NPC.*

'national scandal.' **He said "The ticket office closures would discriminate against and exclude disabled and older people from work, education, leisure, health, and social life.** Fran Postlewaite told Conference about the 'Better Bus' campaign to fight the decline in bus services. She said that since 2010 England has lost 50% of all services, and fares have risen above the cost of living.. Charles King spoke on regulated bus services in England, and Les McDowell outlined the threat posed by e-scooters on our streets.



## Intergenerational Solidarity – Dispelling Myths and Finding Reality

**N**PC President Rosie Macgregor (centre) chaired a workshop and quiz on Intergenerational Solidarity at the recent UNISON National Retired Members Conference in Newcastle. The young UNISON members proved to be well informed and supportive of pensioners.



## New study finds 50 years of progress to cut rate of pensioner poverty is being lost

**A**n important new study warns that half a century of progress in reducing pensioner poverty is under serious threat of going into reverse. The Centre for Ageing Better's fourth annual State of Ageing report brings together data and analysis to paint a detailed picture of the UK's older population and how it is changing - and the news is not good. **Relative pensioner poverty is at one of its highest rates (18%) this century and is more than four percentage points higher than a decade ago.**

This means that 2.1 million pensioners in the UK have an income that is less than 60% of the national average.

Those who are retired and those approaching retirement, are experiencing 'significant and growing financial difficulties' and people aged 60-64—just under retirement age—were found to have the highest rate of relative poverty (25%). Almost half of those aged 50-69 ate less than they felt they should have because they didn't have enough money for food. **The average annual income of the poorest 20% of retirees is below the minimum needed to live on.** Including those solely reliant on the state pension, they have an annual income that leaves just £41 for a weekly food shop and insufficient funds to say, run their car or service their boiler. Two in five of the

poorest pensioners have no occupational or personal pension and 250,000 people aged 50-64 are not working compared to before the pandemic. Poverty is even higher among older people from ethnic minority backgrounds with more than one in three

from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds over 50 living in relative poverty. Dr Carole Easton, Chief Executive at the Centre for Ageing Better, said: "The story of pensioner poverty over the last 50 years has been broadly positive. But the trends from our new report show it is very much under threat now. Not only is the cost-of-living crisis causing many current pensioners to cut back on food, heating, showers and going to the dentist; it is significantly limiting the ability of the next generations of pensioners from paying into their pensions and savings, potentially creating greater pensioner poverty in future." Along with NPC, Ageing Better is calling for a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing to ensure policymakers plan for our ageing population and the needs of disadvantaged older people.



### Call for a Commissioner

**T**he NPC is part of the challenge to

### Let's stop Palantir's NHS data takeover

Palantir obtaining the NHS patient data contract and is urging members to sign a petition and share it widely amongst friends, family and colleagues. We are calling on the government to cancel the plan to hand a £480 million, multi-year contract to US spy tech corporation Palantir, and to back to the drawing board – design an NHS data platform we can trust, which keeps the NHS public, respects patient choice, and protects privacy. The government wants to hand US spy tech firm Palantir a

£480 million contract to run the database

that will likely include huge amounts of our health data held by the NHS. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt says: "Doctors, patients, and other organisations have been raising concerns about the plan and what it would mean for the future of the NHS. Let's press the government to cancel the deal and go back to the drawing board. If we stop Palantir we have an opportunity for something better." Sign the petition: [www.foxglove.org.uk/campaigns/palantir-last-chance-petition/](http://www.foxglove.org.uk/campaigns/palantir-last-chance-petition/)



## **Ofgem Standing Charges review must protect vulnerable**

**T**he NPC applauds Ofgem's decision to review Standing Charges applied to people's energy bills to cover the cost of connecting to a supply. But we expect that any alternative scheme considered by Ofgem and the government must include extra protections for customers struggling to pay, or those who have high energy use needed for medical reasons. **You can submit comments to the Review until 19th January 2024 – details below.** The NPC has been campaigning for an end to the much-criticised charges, which have doubled over the last two years. **Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary said:** "We welcome the Ofgem plans to look at the impact of Standing Charges. In many cases, the Standing Charge together with the VAT make up around two-thirds of consumer bills. This is unacceptable in the light of the current cost of living crisis. The government may wish to cite the



fall in inflation to try and maintain the Standing Charges system. **But energy and food prices are still high, and the increase in these Charges only serves to add to the already inflated profits for suppliers.** There has to be a balance for those who need energy most to keep warm, healthy and safe, and those consumers who have cut back on energy because they cannot afford the bills." How much you pay in Standing Charges, which are capped by Ofgem varies depending on where you live – the amount of energy that you use is irrelevant for this segment of your energy bill. In most areas the typical household pays 53p a day for electricity and 30p a day for gas, which can add an extra £300 to the annual bill. **Send your comments to Ofgem at: [StandingCharges@ofgem.gov.uk](mailto:StandingCharges@ofgem.gov.uk) by 19th January. OR Write to—Standing Charges Review, Ofgem, 10 South Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU**

## **Meals on Wheels on brink of collapse**

**T**he UK's Meals on Wheels service is 'heading for collapse' without Government intervention according to damning new report. Service organisers, The National Association of Care Catering (NACC) fear many thousands of lonely, frail or sick pensioners will be left without a crucial service. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "Meals on wheels are a lifeline for those isolated in their homes for whatever reason. It is concerning that this service has been



reduced so much, particularly at a time when older people are struggling with the cost of living. The NPC supports the need for statutory responsibility for this provision with ring fenced funding to ensure that this essential service can be accessed by all those who need it." The NACC is calling for urgent Governmental action in the wake of a report by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), which shows only 29% Meals and Wheels are still in operation.

## ***In tribute to those members we have lost***

**T**he NPC wishes to express our condolences to the families of all members who passed away in 2023. In recent weeks we lost Trevor Eames, of West Midlands Pensioners' Convention and NPC Pensions & Incomes WP; Tony Hall who held several key offices in Thames Valley and at NPC national level; and Daryl Collins from Gloucestershire, Avon and Somerset. All will be sadly missed.

## **Continued from Page 1 — Autumn Statement 2023 — Key Points**

**\*State Pension to rise by 8.5% in line with inflation from April 2024. The rates will be:**

*\*£221.20 a week for the new full state pension, or £11,502 a year.*

*\*£169.50 a week for the old basic state pension, or £8,814 a year.*

**\*Universal Credit and other working-age benefits to increase by 6.7% from April.**

**\*Local Housing Allowance** - which determines the level of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit people receive for rent — to be unfrozen and increased to 30%.

**\*Claimants deemed able to work but refusing to seek employment will lose their benefits. Un-**

**der plans that need Parliamentary approval, those who fail to find work for 18 months will have to do work experience, or lose your benefits.**

*\*National Insurance - cut from 12% to 10% from 6th January, affecting 27 million people.*

**\*National Living Wage - up £10.42 to £11.44 an hour.**

*\*No increase in the tax on alcohol.*

**\*The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expects the economy to grow by 0.6% this year/ 0.7% next year. Living standards are forecast to be 3½ per cent lower in 2024-25 than pre-pandemic—the largest reduction since records began in the 1950s.**