



# Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

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## NPC Transport Conference will ask why buses and trains are failing older people



NPC Gen. Secretary Jan Shortt (above right) joined Better Buses Rally in Sunderland at the start of Better Buses National Week of Action (1-8 October).

### **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 UK campaign group run for and by older people. Contact us to find out how to get involved. Details above.

**T**he 2023 NPC National Transport Conference will hear how the decline in UK bus and rail services is creating a human rights crisis for older and vulnerable people. Experts at the event in London on 18th October will describe how changes and failures in our public transport system spell disaster for those who rely upon it most. They will also examine the dangers posed to

them by the increasing number of e-scooters on our roads. The conference follows the Better Buses National Week of Action (1st to 8th October) featuring events across the UK calling for increased funding for bus services. NPC Transport Conference co-organiser Fran Postlethwaite said: "This is an important event at a critical time for our bus and rail services. *Continued on Page 2*

### **International Older People's Day and Black History Month**

**U**N International Day of Older People on 1st October was celebrated with UK - wide events to raise awareness of the issues facing all ageing populations. For the NPC this included focusing on our campaigns for Commissioners for Older People in England and Scotland, as well as for Better Bus services. October is also Black History Month (BHM), a celebration of the achievements of African and Caribbean people in helping to shape UK history and the economy. Themes of *Before Windrush* and *Saluting Our Sisters* will feature in events across the country. Read more in our NPC Ethnic Minority Working Party BHM newsletter 'Speaking Out.' (online or request a print copy from our office).



### **Triple Lock long-term future under threat yet again**

**'H**ere we go again!' was the NPC quote headlining in the press as the government tried once more to tinker with the Triple Lock on April's state pension rise. Having already committed to the Triple Lock—which should match wage growth of 8.5% - the government are said to have toyed with the idea of excluding public sector worker bonuses from the next increase. This could reduce the rise to around 7.8% - a saving for the Treasury but a disaster for millions of hard pressed pensioners for whom every penny counts. The next attempt to reduce our rise was a rumour that they wanted to scrap Winter Fuel Allowance payments to help fund the Triple Lock (which they have since denied). *Read more on P. 2.*

## Poor public transport a breach of human rights

The NPC Transport Conference on 18th October will hear experts describe how changes and failures in our public transport system spell disaster for those who rely upon it most.

They will also examine the dangers posed to them by the increasing number of e-scooters on our roads. Our speakers include: Emily Yates, Association of British Commuters; Matthew Smith, Rail Accessibility Ltd; Fran Postlethwaite, NPC & Transport WP; Campaign for Better Buses; and Les McDowell, NPC WP on the dangers posed by e-scooters. The event chair will be Derrick Baker, the NPC Transport WP. NPC Transport Conference co-organiser Fran Postlethwaite said: "Our speakers and delegates will share evidence of the problems and the possible solutions. We hope to inspire and motivate people to press the government to introduce real improvements to the system." Disappear-

ing or less frequent bus services are leaving older, vulnerable people isolated, which the NPC believes is discriminatory under current UK human rights, accessibility and inclusivity legislation. Similar legal and rights breaches will apply to our rail services if government plans to close almost a thousand ticket offices go head. The closures will force travellers to book tickets online – requiring access to a computer or smartphone which many older people do not have - or to use vending machines, that are often out of order and do not offer the best deals. Worst

of all, closing rail ticket offices and removing station staff will be a huge blow for those with mobility issues who require assistance to safely board or



### TRANSPORT CONFERENCE Continued from Page 1.



Nearly 1,000 ticket offices to close.

leave trains. NPC Transport Working Party and rail safety expert Peter Rayner said: "It is an accepted and well-researched fact that older, vulnerable people value the presence of staff above all else for their safety and confidence to travel. The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies (which include train operating companies) to ensure existing or proposed policies, practices or decisions do not discriminate. The moves to de-staff stations, close ticket offices, close toilets, remove access to ticket purchase options other than online or through touch screen machines all clearly fall under the heading of policies that discriminate. There is no evidence that the legally required assessments into the impact of these policies on older and disabled people has been undertaken or that 'reasonable adjustments' to overcome the damaging effects of such policies have been considered." The NPC has responded to the government's Transport Committee Inquiry on Accessible Transport: Legal Obligations. *The Transport Conference is on Wednesday, 18th October, 10.30am - 3pm, St Aloysius Church Hall, 20 Phoenix Street, London, NW1 1TA. Tickets are £10 - contact NPC Office by 12th October.*

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### AUGUST 31st RALLIES

The last day for submissions to the Transport Focus consultation on whether rail ticket offices should close was busy for NPC members who joined rallies in London and across the UK. General Secretary Jan Shortt addressed an RMT demo and supported the National Federation of the Blind UK at Downing Street.

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Commenting on the latest Triple Lock threat, Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary said: "The failure of both the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader to respond to questions on the future of the triple lock, shows how little respect they have for older people still struggling with highly inflated energy and food costs. The triple lock is a real lifeline for those pension-

### Triple Lock a real lifeline

ers reliant on the basic state pension as their sole income. The rhetoric about 'wealthy pensioners' is something the government 'think tanks' rely on to drive a wedge between young and old. But the NPC stands for the pensioners of today and tomorrow because whatever happens to the triple lock now has an impact on future retirees because it is cumulative."

# **NPC warns Ofgem over rise in standing charges as older people fear energy bills**



**E**nergy regulator Ofgem must investigate why power companies are imposing ‘stealth’ increases on customer standing charges just as fuel prices finally show a slight drop.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt has written to urge Ofgem chief executive Jonathan Brierley to raise the practice with the government following numerous reports of people seeing marked increases in their energy bill standing charges – including her own. Jan says standing charges now make up two thirds of her energy bill.

She commented: “The energy cap reduction for October to December 2023 is only a small respite for consumers. Yet, while the unit cost of energy has slightly reduced, the standing charges (for supply of services) have increased. Older people and others are still struggling to deal with energy costs, yet it seems the providers are ensuring their profits are paid for by other means – standing charges. This is unacceptable and un-



necessary. Why are power companies increasing standing charges just as the price and cost of fuel shows a slight drop?” Jan also raised the spectre of older, vulnerable people continuing to be pressured into accept ‘smart meters’ even though there is no legal requirement for consumers to accept them. Jan said “We urge you to take up these matters so there is a genuine attempt to reduce bills and monitor ‘stealth’ increases such as standing charges.” She added that the NPC wrote to the regulator earlier in the year regarding the imposition of

5% VAT on energy bills. She said: “Energy is not a luxury and therefore should not attract VAT. Whilst the government tell us that inflation is falling, energy and food costs are still high. The inflation figures for July are: RPI 9.1% (up from 9%) while Food inflation sits at 11.5% Energy will fall slightly from October, but then rise again in January 2024 – to a level still unknown.”

## **Fuel poverty protests planned this Winter**

**M**Ps on the House of Commons Energy Security Committee have warned that another winter energy crisis is “inevitable” without further Government support for households. The cross-party Committee took evidence from organisations, including the End Fuel Poverty Coalition which includes NPC, along with energy firms and regulators. The final report acknowledges that more support for energy bills will be needed this winter. NPC members are again planning protests against fuel poverty. NPC London Region will coordinate an event to coincide with the release of the Winter deaths—details will be notified soon.

## **Remembering colleague, friend and campaigner Janet Shapiro (1939-2003)**

**N**PC members were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Janet Shapiro – a lifelong campaigner who continued fighting for the rights of others until her final days. Fiercely intelligent, Janet was an academic and committed trade unionist, Born in Kent, she was the youngest of four children, and grew up in a council house, with her father, brothers and other family working at Sheerness Dockyard. After qualifying as a teacher at 21, Janet studied mathematics at Stockwell College, Bromley, where she met her husband Ray. Continuing her studies, she eventually became a maths lecturer and campaigner for the rights of pension-

ers and devoted much of her time to the NPC, as well as to the Hornsey Pensioners Action Group. Her life was celebrated by family and friends at Lauderdale House in August. NPC President Rosie MacGregor writes: “Janet was an inspiration to us all. A great campaigner for the rights of women and older people. She was caring and compassionate as well as a fierce a defender of all that is right and good. Her commitment and contribution to the NPC. and to both the Women’s WP and the Digital WP has been immense.” Janet is survived by her daughter Laura and son Ian.



## Ageism inquiry to receive evidence from NPC



Caroline Nokes MP

**N**PC working parties will submit evidence to a new Parliamentary inquiry into whether ageism and discrimination is preventing older people from fully participating in society.

The Government's Women and Equalities Committee public consultation wants to hear from older people, as well as expert witnesses and advocacy organisations. The aim is to find out if there is sufficient Government focus on issues faced by older people. and whether there is an adequate framework to champion

our rights. Not only will our Women's Working Party, Digital Working Party and others provide evidence to the consultation, the NPC and our campaign partners on the Older People's Commissioner for England—Independent Age, Age UK, and Ageing Better—will also submit our joint call for a voice for our generation to be appointed.

The 2021 census confirmed that 11 million people - 18.6% of the population—are now 65 or older (up from 16.4% from 2011). Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Rt Hon Caroline Nokes

MP said: "Older people often face barriers in their day-to-day lives. The (consultation) will focus on the impacts of ageist stereotypes and discrimination on older people's participation in society and consider the mechanisms and governance structures in place to protect and champion older people's rights."

*It will focus on discrimination against older people in society*

The Committee invites written submissions by Tuesday, 31st October 2023 addressing the following questions: *\*Digital exclusion \*Championing older people's rights—are they sufficiently protected in equality law? \*Are older people's needs and rights given adequately considered in Government policy-making? \*How does "intersectionality" among older people - for example gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability status - impact on policy responses. \*How prevalent is ageist stereotyping and discrimination and how can it be challenged? \*What more needs to be done to support older people who want to stay in work longer?*

## Inquiry hears how lockdown hit older people's mental health

**L**ockdown exacted a serious toll on the mental health and wellbeing of older people the Covid Inquiry has been told – and the effects are still ongoing.

In a witness statement to the public inquiry into government decision-making during the pandemic, Age UK said lockdown had caused "much higher rates of depression and self-harming and suicide" among elderly people.

### *Particular fear*

Charity Director Caroline Abrahams told the hearing: "We've had to provide new training for some of our helpline staff on how to cope with people who are waking up in great distress - and that only happened during and after the pandemic. It has undoubtedly exacted a toll on many older people." The organisation has created a service to encourage older people to get out of their homes and to use public transport, which Ms Abrahams said is a "particular fear" for some. She said: "I'm afraid there are many older people who lead much, much more constrained lives now than before the pandemic."

## Improve your internet skills with Get Online Week (16th-22nd Oct)

**G**et Online Week - the annual campaign to help people to get online safely and affordably - is happening from 16th-22nd October this year.

Digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation and their network of community partners will be hosting hundreds of free events to help people get online for the first time and to improve their digital skills. To find out more visit <https://uk.getonlineweek.com/>

More than 10 million people in the UK lack the basic digital skills needed to use the internet, with millions still living without access to a device or data to get connected. The Online Centres Network have thousands of Digital Inclusion Hubs across the UK. These provide digital skills advice and support, as well as access to public computers and the internet. Ask at your local library, or call Age UK's Advice Line on 0800 678 1602 to inquire about training near you. Online Centres Network have thousands of Digital Inclusion Hubs across the UK. You can find them here: [www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/ournetwork/find-centre#/map](http://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/ournetwork/find-centre#/map)