



Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

Here's a good yarn – knitted bus brings cheer to care homes!

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Picture: We Are Wire

The People's Friend Bus has been taking a colourful message of support and fun to older people across the country. The UK's longest running women's magazine partnered with friendship charity, Re-engage, and bus and coach operator, Stagecoach, to tour the 40 foot 'yarn-bombed' bus around care homes and elderly communities. **They want to show our oldest and most vulnerable they haven't been forgotten about during the pandemic.** Urban knitter and crochetier Emma Leith is behind the design with its crocheted faces, pom poms, and rows of bright bunting submitted by the public. The bus has been delivering magazines and knitting to care homes, as well as collecting funds for Re-engage's new telephone befriending service 'Call Companions' launched in response to Covid-19 to offer free, friendly, and regular calls to help isolate people remain connected to the outside world. **If you would like to find out how you can contact Call Companions, just ring 0800 716543 (calls are free).**

Calls grows for National Care Service as NPC webinar learns how neglected sector was devastated by Covid

Leading health and care experts told how the Covid-19 pandemic has 'accelerated' the multiple problems facing the UK's ailing care system at a special NPC webinar summit for International Older People's Day.

The NPC event on 1st October 2020 brought them together to discuss the NPC report, 'Goodbye Cinderella: Time for A New Settlement for Care Services' which calls for a fully funded, and free at the point of need National Care Service.

Many expressed concerns that the government's promised reform of the care sector is now on the back burner until next year, despite fresh demands on the system from the new spike in Covid-19—a delay the NPC fears could lead to even more people losing



their lives this winter. In a full and frank debate, which was streamed live on YouTube, the main webinar panel of NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt, **Professor David Oliver (above)**, Visiting Fellow at the King's Fund and NHS consultant in Geriatrics and Acute General Medicine, and Dr Jean Hardiman-Smith, Chair of the NPC Health and Social Care Committee, led an impassioned discussion of the issues facing the care sector. Professor Oliver, a working physician on the frontline of the fight against Covid, who wrote the Introduction to the NPC report, Goodbye Cinderella, summed up the

views of many speakers on the impact of years of neglect suffered by the system.

He said: "The coronavirus pandemic has definitely accelerated some of the structural problems (in the care service), but it has also brought social care into sharp relief. It has tended to be out of sight out of mind, unless you find yourself having to use the service. So while most of the public have a decent understanding of what their GP does, it's often a surprise to them to discover what social care does. And their shock often comes at times of great stress, when they are navigating the complexity and disjointedness between health and social care, and the fact that it is means tested and the fact that it is eligibility based and rationed, as opposed to free at point (of delivery) and based on need."

Speakers

He added: "Social care is in fact a Cinderella service – and (the neglect) goes well beyond care homes, which have been the biggest focus of media coverage recently."

The webinar discussed the damage being done to NHS by privatisation through stealth, and the lack of public awareness of the neglect of the care sector. Delegates also heard about the differences in test and trace between England and Wales from Professor Dame June Clark of RCN Wales, where the devolved government seemed to have more success with the programme.

Webinar speakers also called for more honesty from the government across the board on the state of the care sector, with more and consistent funding and support for care homes and their local authorities.

The distinguished speakers at this first NPC webinar summit included: Nadra Ahmed OBE, Chair, National Care Association; Dr Crystal Oldman CBE, Chief Executive, Queen's Nursing Institute; **Sharon Hodgson MP, Shadow Minister for Veterans (below right)**; Professor Dame June Clark, Professor Emeritus of Community Nursing, Swansea University & Board Member RCN Wales; Mary Robertson, Senior Policy Officer, TUC; Councillor Karen Kilgour, Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Newcastle City Council; and Dr Arun Bakshi, Emeritus Consultant Physician, St Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight. Paying tribute to all of those taking party, Jan Shortt said: "I would sincerely like to thank them for their excellent contributions in laying bare the problems facing the care sector at a time of pandemic and with a growing and aging population. We invited the government's health ministers – including Matt Hancock to attend – but only Helen Whitley, the Care Minister sent her apologies after the event." **Following the success of the NPC's first webinar the NPC now plans to hold further online events. Details of these will be announced soon.**



It's just not good enough to have clapped for them during the worst days of the crisis

More information on the NPC Care Crisis Summit for Older People's Day—plus a link to the full video of the event—can be found on the NPC website. Transcripts from the speeches will be added shortly. www.npcuk.org

Pensions triple lock is safe says Chancellor

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak has confirmed the 'triple lock' mechanism to safeguard and raise the state pension each year will not be scrapped.

Speaking on LBC Radio (6th October) Mr Sunak gave an assurance that the triple lock would be retained in line with the Conservative's 2019 election manifesto (at least apparently, for now). The statement comes after months of speculation that ministers are considering amending the policy as the cost of increasing pensions could soar in 2022 due to a spike in earnings after the furlough scheme for jobs ends. Speaking to LBC host Nick Ferrari, who asked if he would be "protecting the triple lock on pensions" and whether it is "safe", Mr Sunak said: "Yes, our manifesto commitments are there and that is very much the legislative position."

Treasury officials are understood to have looked at potential savings from scrapping the "triple lock" that guarantees payments to pensioners rise each year in line with either wages, inflation or 2.5%, depending which figure increases the most. But the Chancellor is said to have ruled out the move following talks with Boris Johnson.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt, said: "The Government's proposal to leave the triple lock in place for pensioners is welcome news. The National Pensioners Convention and other organisations working with older people did make a submission to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Therese Coffey on the damaging impact of changing or suspending the triple lock for 2021.

"The triple lock indexation provides the most adequate basic level of income for pensioners in the short term and longer term for those on the new pension scheme. Pensioner poverty is increasing, particularly for the over 75s. If the triple lock had been off the table, then we would see poverty in the pensioner population increase even more."

**Thérèse Coffey the Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, recently introduced a technical Bill in the House of Commons that will give the Government the ability to increase the State Pension next year. This makes technical changes which allow ministers to deliver on their commitment to the Pensions Triple Lock next year, even if there is no growth in earnings in the relevant period, ensuring that State Pensions can still be up-rated.*

A Cruel Fiasco—Pensioners DLA to PIP

Special Report by an NPC Member

Seven years ago the Government announced on their Gov.UK website that they were introducing "a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP) from 8 April 2013. They said "it will eventually replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people aged 16 to 64. " and added "it is designed to be a more sustainable benefit." They claimed "We have created a "bright line" rule in that those DLA recipients aged below 65 on 8 April 2013 will be within scope for PIP, and those aged 65 or over on this date will remain on DLA where they continue to satisfy the eligibility rules.

By 2019, the Government's Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) 2019 said the introduction of PIP had cost £4 billion more than estimated.

In a letter to GP's, the Government said: "DLA for working-age people is being replaced by PIP and must be aged 16 or over and usually have not reached State Pension age to claim. You'll carry on getting DLA if you were 65 or over on 8 April 2013. State Pension age is now 66 years. Currently pensioners who are ages 66 to 72 years old, and rising are still going to be forced off DLA and over to PIP. The Government has said it is 'inviting' people onto PIP, a working age benefit.

But it is not an invitation, as older disabled pensioners are involuntarily being forced off from DLA having no choice to stay on DLA or to having to undergo the "assessments" and more. What they call the delayed rollout "migration" from DLA to PIP, the OBR have called slow, and said it had been delayed four times, with a completion date now moved to 2023 - a ten-year gestation. This is stressful and unnecessary for these older pensioners. The Governments own chart shows 90% of persons on DLA now ages 65 to 72 already have a mobility component from their lifetime/indefinite awards. Despite having to go through a flawed, lengthy, complex application process—an appeal and then a Tribunal which can take up to 18 months - they have no guarantees of a positive outcome. It is highly unlikely that these disabled pensioners are going to have health improvements from long term chronic health conditions and are in receipt of (lifetime)/indefinite awards.

Liverpool MP Stephen McPartland said (Hansard, 2019) that: "More than 750,000 pensioners are in receipt of disability living allowance, and those who turned 65 after April 2013 are being kicked off DLA and are forced to apply for personal independence payments. Many of them are not applying, and of those who do, some are not receiving PIP. Why are we not transferring these pensioners across automatically?" Why indeed? They need to stay on DLA. A detailed answer is required and outstanding from the Minister of State for DWP. The supposed "bright line" rule is completely rusted and tarnished and does not exist " for these pensioners needing to stay on DLA.

Amnesty calls for Covid public inquiry

Amnesty International UK is campaigning for a full independent public inquiry into the pandemic over "shockingly irresponsible" Government decisions put tens of thousands of older people's lives at risk. The human rights group wants an interim phase of the inquiry to start immediately, focusing on older people in care homes.

Amnesty's 50-page report—As If Expendable: The UK Government's Failure to Protect Older People in Care Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic - shows that care home residents were effectively abandoned in the early stages of the pandemic with 28,186 "excess deaths" recorded in care homes in England, between 2 March and 12 June alone.

"The appalling death toll was entirely avoidable - it is a scandal of monumental proportions," said Amnesty Director, Kate Allen. "As the country faces a second wave of coronavirus, we urgently need a full independent public inquiry." *Read more at: www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news

No Railcard refund blow

The government has ruled out giving refunds or extensions to people holding railcards they have been unable to use as a result of the Covid pandemic.

The scheme, which offers discounts of about a third on travel, is available to a wide range of groups across Britain including senior citizens and disabled people. The Guardian Money section says it has been deluged with letters from readers - including older people who have been shielding - asking why they were not entitled to refunds. Most cards cost £30 for a year, meaning that refunding the 5.1 million customers who hold them could cost £150m. The Rail Delivery Group, which manages the Railcard scheme, said: "After careful consideration, the government has confirmed to us that railcards will remain non-refundable and will not be extended. We understand that this decision may not be the news our customers had been hoping for." NPC Vice President Peter Rayner commented, "The NPC is firmly of the view that a decision should be made to extend the validity of current or renewed cards by four months. That would be, if implemented a fair and simple solution."

Goodbye Cinderella Order Form

"The set of recommendations for reform set out by the NPC in this report and supported by well referenced arguments and data are a fantastic road map for the future which I wish politicians and public alike would get behind.

"Let us move towards a national care service with national standards of care and registration for staff, tax funded, working with the NHS, with the capacity to provide services to all those with needs and fully integrated with housing and preventative services."

Professor David Oliver

"GOODBYE CINDERELLA" ORDER FORM

Name:.....

Address:.....

No. of copies required:.....

Cost: 1 booklet £2 plus p&p (£0.75)
5 booklets £8 plus p&p (£1.75)

Please make cheques payable to NPC and return to:
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