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UNISON Charter for Older People

UNISON believes that retired and working members have a shared interest in the provision of decent incomes in old age, a universal health service, quality public services and a fairer society for all.

As well as having over 1.3 million members who work to provide the essential public services that society depends on, UNISON also organises 100,000 retired members.

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis has a clear message for UNISON's retired members: "Your agenda is at the heart of the union's agenda". This is illustrated by the demands which make up UNISON's Charter for Older People.

State pension

It is now over 100 years since Lloyd George introduced state pensions in August 1908 with the passing of the Old Age Pensions Act. The first state pensions paid up to five shillings to people with minimum income over the age of 70, and entitlement was means-tested.

Since then, state pensions have changed a great deal and they now provide income for many. But is this income sufficient and do enough people qualify for it? Over 2.5 million older people now live below the official poverty line of £165 per week. The reason for this is that successive governments have allowed the real value of the state pension to fall since the breaking of the link with earnings in 1980. In addition, means-tested benefits are not claimed by 1.8 million of the poorest pensioners as the system is too complicated and very invasive.

UNISON supports the concept of a state pension, but continues to lobby for improvements so that state pensions reflect fair value, provide enough income for the least well off, and make a real difference to people's lives in retirement.

UNISON wants

- **An immediate substantial increase in the basic state pension to at least £165 for a single pensioner.**
- **An immediate restoration of the link to male average earnings or RPI whichever is the greater.**

Calculating pension increases

Around 5 million older people who have modest savings of around £10,000 have lost between £10 and £20 a week (up to as much as £1,000 a year) as a result of the drop in interest rates.

Older people face annual inflation rates around ten times higher than the rest of the population, according to a recent report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies. Pensioners spend a larger proportion of their income on those items whose prices are rising fastest e.g. fuel, food and council tax.

UNISON wants

- **Consideration to be given to the establishment of a pensioner's index for use in calculating pensions increases.**

Fuel poverty and winter fuel payments

The latest excess winter death figures show that 37,313 older people died from cold related illnesses last year – a 50% increase on the previous figure and the highest level of deaths for nearly a decade.

One in three pensioners is estimated to be spending more than 10% of their income on energy bills, placing them in fuel poverty, and the winter fuel allowance now covers just a fifth of the average bill, compared to a third when it was first introduced.

At present, all gas and electricity customers pay most for the initial units that they use and less for subsequent units. But this means that the least well off, most modest users pay a higher average price for their gas and electricity than someone in a large house who uses loads of energy. The introduction of a rising block tariff system would reverse this trend by providing all customers with an entitlement to a basic threshold level of gas and electricity fuel at a discount price.

UNISON wants

- **A rise in winter fuel payments to reflect the increase in fuel prices.**
- **No means-testing of winter fuel payments.**
- **A windfall tax on energy companies to fund measures to help those in fuel poverty.**
- **The Government to commit to its own target of eradicating fuel poverty by 2016.**
- **A social tariff for fuel bills, e.g. a rising block tariff.**

Personalisation of social care

As the population ages, more and more people will need care – in residential and supported homes, at day centres or through home visits. Currently there are almost 2 million adults across the UK who rely on social care services and over the next 30 years it is expected that we will see a 180% increase in people over 85 and the number of people with dementia will double.

Councils are faced with squaring an impossible circle. They must deliver personalised care and support to a growing population with existing funding levels and generate continuing efficiency savings. This has led to a focus on trying to use “cash for care” schemes (direct payments, personal budgets, individual budgets).

UNISON supports the principle that everyone should have as much independence, choice and control over their own care and support arrangements as is right for them. But UNISON also believes that the current funding gap is likely to mean that personalisation promises more than it can deliver.

UNISON workers in social care have in recent years seen their jobs and roles change, mass privatisation, closing down of local services and ever tighter rationing of care.

As a result of underfunding personalisation is becoming synonymous with less choice, increased privatisation and growth of an unregulated care service. We fear that the replacement of direct provision with “personal budgets” runs the risk of exposing users and staff to greater exploitation and abuse.

UNISON wants

- **Real independence, control and choice for service users.** One size does not fit all as some people may not wish to have a direct payment or personal budget e.g. most frail elderly people just want a service arranging.
- **A valued, well-paid, trained and skilled social care workforce.**
- **Advice on and protection of the employment rights of personal assistants.** Councils should ensure that prospective employers are aware of their responsibilities as employers; that funding packages include provision to meet these responsibilities; that reviews include assessments of compliance with employment legislation and that employers are able to either undertake training or access professional advice on employment law.
- **Services which are well funded through public provision.** We need a fair funding system that ensures high quality care is accessible to all on the basis of need, not ability to pay.
- **A standardised employment and regulatory framework for all personalisation care workers.** Without this there will be increased casualisation.

Transport – concessionary travel schemes

91% of single pensioners and 53% of pensioner couples do not own a car and are dependent on public transport.

Concessionary travel schemes are vital as they enable older people to continue to lead independent lives and participate in the communities in which they live. They also have other benefits for society as a whole: reduction in car usage with environmental benefits; social inclusion of older people with a reduced demand on health care and social services; additional custom and income for local economies; and additional demand which can ensure routes are maintained which might otherwise be shut due to under-use.

In 2008 the local entitlement for free bus travel was extended to allow bus travel throughout England. It means that whether using the bus locally, or when visiting other parts of the country, older and disabled people will be able to travel for free. Similar schemes operate in the other parts of the UK. However the statutory minimum requirements mean that many local schemes exclude non-bus forms of transport, e.g. trams and apply time restrictions e.g. only valid after 9.30am.

UNISON wants

- **Free UK wide travel on all public transport without time restrictions.**

Age discrimination in health and social care

The Equality Bill currently going through Parliament bans age discrimination in the provision of services and will ultimately include the engagement of older people in the design of new policies and practices. The Government is currently considering how to end age discrimination and promote age equality in the provision of health and social care. Health and social care should act as a beacon for good practice in age equality, especially as older people usually access them when most vulnerable.

UNISON wants

- **Decisions concerning the health and social care of older people to be taken on the basis of need.**

Add your voice

We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign:

- talk to your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours about these issues
- raise these issues with your employer, local media, and political candidates
- take the campaign to workplace or community meetings – or organise your own – we can help with materials and speakers
- visit our website for more information, more campaign ideas and to tell us what you've been doing

We have a million voices for public services – to add yours go to unison.org.uk/million or call 0845 355 0845