

North East Pensioners Association

Regional impact report on issues affecting pensioners wellbeing in October 2020 including the following:

1. Care Homes & Housing, 2. Economy, 3. Health & Welfare, 4. NHS, 5. Politics, 6. Poverty 7. Security and 8. Transport.

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Security with Dignity

1. CARE HOMES & HOUSING

Criminally listed staff hired. A care provider says it is now working with authorities after it emerged the firm had hired a blacklisted worker who stole from elderly South Tyneside residents. The thief was disqualified by the Data Prosecution Service earlier this year ([S/Gazette](#)). Checks should have raised red flags? So, how did this happen?

Carers are to be banned from working in more than one home. This is under legislation being drawn up by the Government which could come into force within weeks. Experts say homes employing bank staff, who work at more than one facility, were more at risk from the coronavirus because it provided an opportunity for the disease to jump from an infected home into others ([D/Mail](#)). Will fewer staff help?

Care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. An Amnesty International report states that the UK government's response to the pandemic violated the human rights of older people in care homes in England. The National Pensioners Convention have helpfully published a brief. A three page version can be found by [clicking here](#).

Equality and human rights Commission. Residential care during coronavirus, 20 October 2020 report and recommendations. See Parliamentary Covid [briefing](#) 20/10/20 and also "Human rights at risk" [briefing](#).

"Hot Homes". The DHSC has instructed councils to identify homes in their areas that could be used and to have them checked by inspectors to assure infection prevention controls are in place. As many as 500 facilities – sometimes known as "hot homes" – could be designated by the end of November, the equivalent of one or two in each council area. ([Guardian](#)).

Sheltered housing questions answered? See the [short guide](#) from [Independent Age](#) that addresses the key questions including, what is it, choosing a scheme, should I move, should I rent or buy etc? Worth a look or a listen as it is also in audio.

2. ECONOMY



The good news. The Chancellor has announced that working people in the north-east and Teesside will be eligible for extra government funding if the employers are affected by local lockdown rules. This is too late for some as he is told 100's of jobs already lost ([Chronicle](#)).

Regional Unemployment. Across countries and regions of the UK in June-August, the unemployment rate was highest in the North East (6.6%) and lowest in Northern Ireland (3.7%). Figures obtained from the [House of Commons library](#).

Levelling up agenda - A letter to the Prime Minister: [The North East England Chamber of Commerce](#), Voluntary Organisations' Network North East and the North East Child Poverty Commission state there is an urgent need to address growing levels of child poverty.

The joint letter said: "If Government is serious about its levelling up agenda, this requires concerted action to make sure children and young people in our region can access opportunities and have the same life chances as anyone else."

3. HEALTH & WELFARE.

New Covid Restrictions. These are effective from 05/11/20 and include:

- Requiring people to stay at home, except for specific purposes.
- Preventing gathering with people you do not live with, except for specific purposes.
- Closing certain businesses and venues.

English lockdown open-ended? This may last beyond 2 Dec 2020 says cabinet minister (BBC).

October was breast cancer month. "Breast Cancer Now" has a helpline whereby anyone affected can speak to a Breast Cancer Nurse – 0808 800 6000. They also run a telephone support line whereby anyone affected can speak to a volunteer who has been there for support. [Complete the webform](#) (you should get a reply within 3 days), or if urgent ring 0114 263 6490.



How Fit Today. In response to sedentary lives during the pandemic, households in Gateshead, Newcastle and North Tyneside have been sent a free copy of the leaflet "[Small Steps to Feeling Good](#)" covering 3 levels of daily exercises from chair based to those able to manage a push up.

Domestic abuse. Cases reported have soared during the pandemic. Help and advice is available from several agencies and charities. These include the Domestic Abuse helpline (24/7) on 08082000247 (or visit their [website](#)) your local council's Adult Social Services, your GP, [Hourglass helpline](#) 0808 808 8141 (9-5 Mon-Fri), the Police (101 non emergency number or 999 in an emergency – if unable to speak cough or tap your phone or press 55. This lets the operator know if you fear being heard by the abuser), [Age UK](#) advice line 0800 678 1602 (24/7), or The Silver Line 0800 470 8090 (The Silver Line is a confidential helpline for older people).

Advice on anxiety – if you are feeling more anxious than usual, and this has gone on for a while, Independent Age has a [free guide](#) that may help you. You can order a copy on their [website](#) or call 0800 319 6789.

Remembrance Sunday November 2020. The [Royal British Legion](#) is encouraging people to mark Remembrance Day safely or by heading to their doorsteps to take part in a two-minute silence ([Chronicle](#)).



4. THE NHS

DHSC Review of NHS hospital food. It concluded: scope for improvement. It made 8 recommendations for system-level change covering: catering staff support, nutrition and hydration, food safety, facilities, technology, enforcing standards, sustainability, waste and going forward with an expert group to monitor progress.

Long Covid? For most people, Covid is a brief and mild disease but some are left struggling with symptoms including lasting fatigue, persistent pain and breathlessness for months. This is known as "Long Covid" for which the [NHS has a recovery plan](#) (BBC).



Appeal from Northumbria emergency department manager. She reminds us all in this [short video](#) of visiting restrictions and only to use A&E for life-threatening emergencies. To make sure we are complying to social distancing, face coverings and hand washing whilst in the hospital. Thank you to all our key workers. They are helping us all. We need to ensure we do our bit to help them when ever possible.

The head of 'Test and Trace' under fire. A former government chief whip urged the HSCD to ensure more of the contact tracing is done by local directors of public health, rather than centrally ([Inde](#)). A senior government MP has said the head of [NHS Test and Trace](#) should be sacked ([H/post](#)). Do the former and the latter is unnecessary.

5. POLITICS

Over 75's TV licenses talks between BBC & National Pensioners Convention. NPC said, the meeting with the BBC was robust on both sides – there are still about 1.4m over 75s who have not paid their licence, because they are perhaps financially struggling to do so. However, we welcome the BBC's willingness to continue a dialogue with us, particularly on the poverty, isolation and loneliness faced by so many ([NPC](#)).



State Pension Increase. The Covid-19 crisis has hit wages, making it all but certain that the state pension triple lock guaranteeing a 2.5 per cent rise in state pension will kick in. It means from next year, pensioners are set to get an extra £4.40 a week to the 'new' state pension introduced in April 2016 - from £175.20 to £179.60. Those on an 'old' basic-rate state pension will get an extra £3.40 a week - from £134.25 to £137.65 ([This is money](#)).

Northumberland County Council CEO Returns to work. Following a clash with the leader of the Council the CEO was put on extended leave. The leader lost a vote of confidence and was replaced by a new leader Councillor Glen Sanderson ([News Post](#)).

Devolution - Is there any prospect?. North East MPs have called for an end to the divide between the "North of Tyne" and the rest of the region. The Government has encouraged the 7 authorities to form one combined body, led by a mayor. Speaking at a meeting of the Northern Powerhouse All-Party Parliamentary Group, a number of North East MPs expressed similar views ([Chronicle](#)). We note the 7 authorities work well together and they jointly pleaded the case not to be forced into Covid tier 3.

North East council chief executives' pay - latest published figures:

- Durham County Council - £196,343 (2020/21)
- Newcastle City Council - £188,948 (2021/22)
- Sunderland City Council - £186,471 (2020/21)
- Northumberland CC. - £184,999 (shared with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust).
- Gateshead Council - £168,014 (2020/21)
- South Tyneside Council, - £161,921 post vacant (2019/20)
- North Tyneside Council - £153,890 (2020/21)

The pay award of 2.75% which took effect from 1st April 2020 was set by the National Joint Council - local government employers and agreed by the trade unions. It applies to all council chief executives across the country ([Chronicle](#)).

6. POVERTY

Free school meals row rumbles on. We give the reported opposing views below from 2 of the regions key protagonists who both represent areas of high child poverty:

Blyth MP - Against. "The Government has already increased universal credit by £20 a week, funded councils to provide emergency food assistance to families, and allocated £63 million to councils for families in hardship. The Treasury has also supported families through this difficult period with almost £53 billion worth of income protection schemes, and £9.3 billion of additional welfare payments."([Chronicle](#)).

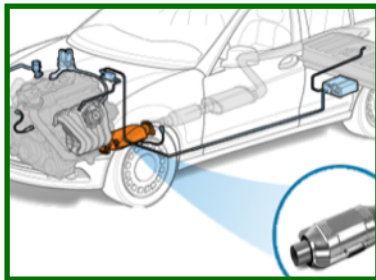
Newcastle City Council Leader - For "The £63m hardship fund that the government announced in June and that Health secretary now claims to have been a secret plan to feed children was never anything to do with free school meals – and has been spent many times over on emergency support since then anyway" ([inde](#)).

- Grandparents often mitigate family financial and care needs. What do you think about these views? Click the newspaper links for the full articles.

7. SECURITY

North East Police get £1.6m Covid support. Ministers say the cash will be used partly to increase patrols in town centres and ensure that people are complying with restrictions. They will also provide more support to Local Authorities and NHS Test & Trace, to enforce self-isolation requirements. Northumbria receive £924,096, Durham receive £338,058 and Cleveland receive £359,802 ([Chronicle](#)).

What are Christmas Covid rules? Too early to say, says Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He warned people "may not be able to get together in the larger groups that they normally would". Opposition parties have called for coronavirus rules to be the same across all four UK nations this Christmas ([BBC](#)).



Car owners beware - look after your cats. Did you know a thief can take the catalytic converter from your car in a matter of minutes and leave you to foot the bill? Those with hybrid models, are being urged to take steps to protect themselves from organised gangs stealing catalytic converters. Thefts of the essential exhaust components rocketed 600 % last year to 13,000 ([twnews](#)). See the very useful theft prevention advice from [West Yorkshire Police](#).

8. TRANSPORT

Newcastle clean air zones tolls - now set for 'later in 2021'. It was finally confirmed in October that the Clean Air Zone charges that were supposed to be imposed in January will be delayed – with no new target date set. ([Chronicle](#)).

Improving local bus services in England outside London. This report was compiled by the National Audit Office and makes 5 clear recommendations to the Department of Transport. This report examines the effectiveness of Government's national strategy for buses. The recommendations are well worth a peek for those that recognise that the older we get the more we depend on good bus services:

- 1) A clear, consistent vision of the future of bus travel, that encourages and supports local authorities to make long-term plans for their own local needs.
- 2) A detailed, transparent delivery plan with clear objectives, responsibilities and accountabilities for the Department and others.
- 3) Good quality data and measures of success.
- 4) An active role in supporting local authorities to access evidence and experience to support improvement.
- 5) The amount and form of funding, for both local authorities and operators, that is necessary to achieve the objectives of the bus strategy.



Bus routes overhaul. "There are going to be some tough challenges ahead, in terms of service provision versus funding versus changing public need," said Martijn Gilbert. As managing director of Go North East he was speaking at a meeting of the North East Joint Transport Committee's Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the future ([S/Echo](#)).

Sean Fahey
NEPA Secretary.

**STAY SAFE
HANDS FACE AND SPACE**

The NEPA Website can be accessed by [clicking here](#) or google "**NEPA Pensioners**"
(Please note that underlined script in this document serve as links to web pages).