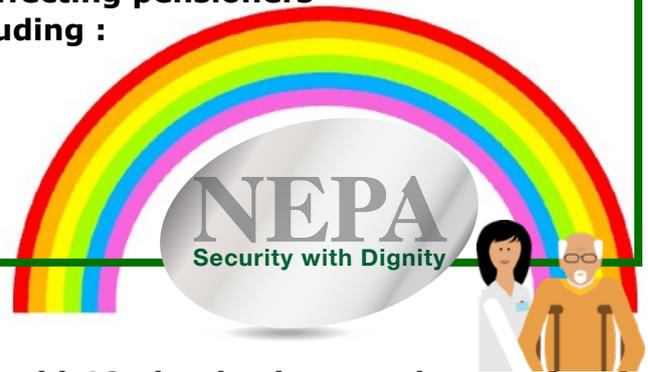


# North East Pensioners Association

Regional impact report on issues affecting pensioners wellbeing in SEPTEMBER 2021 including :

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



## 1. CARE HOMES & HOUSING

**Newcastle has experienced its first Covid-19 deaths in care homes for 6 months.** A public health chief has confirmed. City leaders were told that there have been at least 2 deaths in care homes in the past few weeks where coronavirus was mentioned on the death certificate ([Chronicle](#)).



**County Durham Care Connect Alarm System answers 46,000 calls.** Following a recent audit, the service retained its accreditation with the Telecare Services Association. In a recent customer satisfaction survey 100 per cent of customers said their support needs were met and staff were helpful and respectful ([N.Echo](#)).

**The first LGBTQ retirement community.** This is set to open in London 2021. The Mayor of London has confirmed a £5.7m Community Housing Fund loan for the purchase of 19 homes in a Vauxhall housing development ([attitude.co.uk](#)).

## 2. ECONOMY

**Inflation.** Bank of England says price rises to top 4% by year-end ([BBC](#)).

**Unemployment.** The figure between July - August fell to 5.3%, while the number of people claiming benefits was at 99,060. This still higher than the 76,000 people on benefits before the pandemic, but a drop from figures above 120,000 seen at the height of the economic crisis when the UK went into lockdown ([Chronicle](#)).

**BBC to invest £25m in North East.** This will see it make more programmes in the region, support independent production companies and create new jobs. ([Business live](#)).

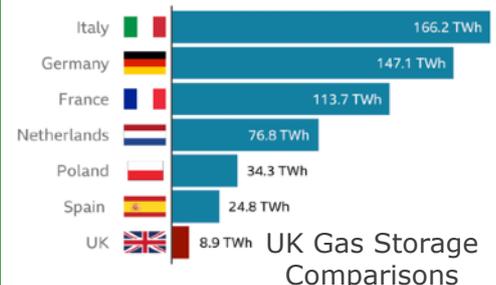
**Energy.** Firms have warned of a fight for survival amid rising wholesale prices. And North East energy company Green Supplier Ltd, which traded as [Green Energy](#) announced it was ceasing to trade.

**The collapse of Avro Energy and Green.** This brings the number of suppliers that have buckled under the pressure of record gas market prices to 7 in just over 6 weeks, affecting 1.5m households. Octopus to take over Avro customers ([Guardian](#)).

**Does the UK face a gas shortage this winter?** The Energy Secretary said it was alarmist and misguided to start talking about gas shortages. "There is no question of the lights going out, or people being unable to heat their homes" ([BBC](#)).

### There's been a worldwide squeeze on gas and energy supplies.

- A cold winter in Europe last year put pressure on supplies and, as a result, stored gas levels are much lower than normal.
- There's been increased demand from Asia (which also suffered a cold winter) for liquefied natural gas.
- This has helped push up gas prices in the UK, Europe and Asia. Since January, they've risen 250%. Prices have soared 70% from August alone ([BBC](#)).



Figures are for 18 September 2021  
One terawatt-hour is equal to an output of one trillion watts for one hour

Source: Gas Infrastructure Europe



### 3. HEALTH & WELFARE.

**Post Office card accounts closure extended - November 2022.** "This extra time means we can support our most vulnerable customers to move to the payment method that will suit them best – even if that means making sure they can still get cash via the Post Office using a card from the new Payment Exception Service" ([Pensions Minister](#)).

**Governments walks back building plans.** The government is poised to abandon key elements of its "radical and necessary" overhaul of England's planning laws – which ministers argued would "help us build the homes our country desperately needs". This following a backlash from its own MPs ([Independent](#)).

**North Tyneside zero carbon target introduced.** This 20 years ahead of the national target, it was agreed at Full Council (23 September 21) that the Authority will work towards being a carbon net zero borough by 2030 ([N/Tyneside Council](#)).

**Greta Thunberg.** She mocked Boris Johnson as she opened a youth climate summit in Italy - accusing the PM and other world leaders of making 'empty promises' over global warming ([D.Mail](#)).



**We can do this together.**

### 4. THE NHS

**NHS - Pensioners living abroad be aware.** UK rules mean that citizens who have moved to the European Union since December 31, 2020 will not be able to receive free NHS healthcare if and when they return to the UK on visits. The reason behind the change, aside from the exit of the trading bloc, is that the NHS has a residence-based qualification system ([Express](#)).

**NHS launches world first trial for new cancer test.** The Galleri (tm) blood test checks for the earliest signs of up to 50 cancers in the blood. The NHS-Galleri trial, the first of its kind, aims to recruit 140,000 volunteers in eight areas of England to see how well the test works. The North East will be included in the trial ([NHS](#)).

**Artificial intelligence (AI).** This is helping Addenbrooke's hospital to rapidly diagnose early signs of dementia. Doctors now hope AI can be used to provide a one-stop diagnosis. This will enable patients to begin treatment to reduce the effects of the disease more quickly and give families and friends more time to put preparations in place for the longer term ([NHS](#)).

**What to expect when waiting for care?** Waiting for planned medical care can be a frustrating time. It's important while you wait, you get regular, clear and accessible updates so that you can plan your next steps. If you are you one of the 5m people waiting for NHS hospital treatment, Healthwatch wants to know if you're getting, advice, information and support needed while you wait. Just [click here](#) for the Healthwatch survey.



**healthwatch**

**The NHS in England is short around 50,000 doctors.** The BMA warned numbers had fallen behind comparable EU countries. It found there were 2.8 doctors per 1,000 people compared to the 3.7 EU average ([D/Mail](#)).

**GP Face to Face appointments.** It's said the PM supports the campaign for GPs appointments. If so he needs to take account of a GP who notes that: in Sept 2015 there were 28,100 fully qualified FTE GPs in England. In June 2021, there were 27,700 - (a 1.3% decrease). In Feb 2019, there were 25m GP appointments in England. In July 2021, there were 28m, (a 12% increase - source [Pulse](#)). It is important that this problem is addressed but clearly the facts need to be taken into account in achieving its resolution i.e. appointments up, GP numbers down.



## Social care reform - Some key points:

1. The cost of social care will be capped at £86,000 over a person's lifetime.

2. Under the measures, the Government has introduced a floor of £20,000 in assets, meaning those who own assets worth less than that will not be forced to pay towards their cost.

3. The PM spelt out sweeping changes to social care that will see the Treasury raise UK-wide National Insurance Contributions (NIC's) by 1.25 % points a year, raising an initial £36bn for the NHS in the next three years.

4. Under the plans from April 2023 the rise in NICs will be separate into an additional 1.25% surcharge, called the "Health and Social Care Levy", which will be



legally ring fenced to help fund social care.

5. The changes will mean those earning £24,100 a year will pay £180 per annum, under the changes while those earning £67,100 will contribute £715 a year.

6. As part of the reforms, working pensioners will be asked to pay NIC's for the first time (about 1m pensioners involved).

7. However, there are concerns within the care sector that just a fraction of the £12bn a year raised will go towards social care, with the lion's share paying to increase NHS capacity ([inews](#)).



**Pension Triple Lock.** A former pensions minister said: "The Government committed less than 2 years ago to keep to the triple lock for the whole parliament. But the current mood music from them is very different. "Talk of keeping figures 'under review' suggests that the Treasury is preparing the ground, either to abandon the pledge altogether or to fudge the numbers to keep the cost under control." ([Express](#)).

**PM's social care fix meant he had to break promises.** The government was expecting criticism and duly got it. Unions said poorly paid workers were being asked to pay for the care costs of the better off. Labour said the plan was unfit for purpose. Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies thinktank, welcomed the end of a quarter of a century of "dithering" but said it would have been preferable to find the extra money through income tax rather than NICs ([Guardian](#)).

**Catalogue of errors led to £1bn of state pension underpayments.** The National Audit Office said 134,000 pensioners, mostly women, were underpaid pensions because outdated computer systems led to mistakes. The DWP is expecting to pay the pensioners it can trace a total of £1.05bn, at an average of £8,900 per pensioner. That exercise will cost the taxpayer £25m in staff costs and will not be completed until the end of 2023. An estimated 40,000 affected women have already died ([BBC](#)).

## 6. POVERTY

**Inequalities among poorest pensioners.** More than 2m retired people live in poverty with minorities more at risk. DWP estimated this figure in 2019/20. They were living in a household with income below 60% of the median income £24,750. In the lower income White 16%, and black, African, Caribbean or black British 30% and Asian or Asian British 33%. As the triple lock component of earnings has been suspended these pensioners will feel the loss most ([Chronicle](#)).

**Perfect Poverty storm.** Benefit cuts, furlough stops, food prices going up, energy price up, inflation on the rise and Tax and NIC's on top. We hope the poorest are not dismissed as collateral damage. The vulnerable will need lots of help. The big question is will they get it?



## SECURITY

**HMRC Scams on the increase.** HMRC has detected more than 450 Covid financial support scams, responded to more than one million reports of suspicious contact and reported more than 13,000 malicious web pages in the past year.

**How to protect yourself from tax scams.** Criminals usually design scams to steal your money or your personal information, which they then sell on to others.

**If you're not sure whether an email, phone call, text or website is genuinely from HMRC, ask yourself the following questions:**



- Is the contact unexpected?
- Have you been offered a refund, rebate or financial support?
- Have you been asked to provide personal information?
- Is the correspondence threatening?
- Have you been asked to transfer money?



### Which?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions, stop what you're doing and either hang up the phone, delete the text message or close the website (Which).

If you want to check whether HMRC has been in touch with you, you can call the helpline directly on 0300 200 3300 or go directly to gov.uk (not via a search engine).

## 7. TRANSPORT

**The DVLA is set to trial a new driving licence for UK drivers.** This could see traditional plastic driving licences phased out in the next few years. Digital driving licences will be introduced as part of post-Brexit measures to make transport "fairer, greener and more efficient", a Cabinet minister has announced (N.Echo).

**Metro back on track.** A Tyne and Wear Metro boss says he is "confident" that long-standing problems with train driver shortages are now a thing of the past. Metro have recently been forced to regularly cancel services due to the impact of drivers having to self-isolate, the network has faced issues for years with its staff being lured away by rival operators offering higher salaries. They've had an intake of 30 drivers (S.Gazette).

**A new rail service from Newcastle to Edinburgh.** This to begin in December by TransPennine Express and will operate 5 times each weekday in each direction. In most journeys it will call at Newcastle, Cramlington, Morpeth, Widdrington, Alnmouth and Berwick-upon-Tweed. In Scotland it will serve a new station at Reston when it opens in the coming months, Dunbar, and Edinburgh Waverley (Chronicle).

**Where has all the petrol gone?** The industry has said it will be back again some time soon. We hope they are right. The South seems worst off but we have come across £30 fill up limits in our region.

Sean Fahey  
NEPA Secretary



**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).

