

State Pension Triple Lock: Boris Warned OAPs Face Poverty As Fresh Crisis Looms | Politics | News

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Boris Johnson (Image: getty)

Dame Esther Rantzen said senior citizens face choosing between heating and eating as they battle against rocketing energy bills and pensions that lag behind inflation.

Campaigners called for a rise in the state pension to be brought forward from April to January or an emergency cash payment of £250 to help millions struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Charities warned of an impending “national emergency” without urgent

intervention.

Silver Voices said the older generation “feels betrayed” and warned “our votes can no longer be taken for granted by any political party”.

Director Dennis Reed said the government must introduce the 3.1 percent increase in the state pension within weeks instead of months.

In an open letter to the Prime Minister, he wrote: “The final straw for many of our members was the decision to suspend the triple lock on state pensions for 2022, despite firm and high-profile manifesto promises to the contrary,” “This short-sighted and mean-spirited decision has left millions of struggling pensioners at the mercy of soaring energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis.

“Our promised 3.1 percent state pension increase in April may only be half the prevailing rate of inflation.”

The organisation also warned the government it must take action in a raft of other areas to win back the trust of older voters.

It is opposed to plans to raise the age senior citizens start receiving free prescriptions to 66 from 60 and said the Winter Fuel Payment is being allowed to “wither on the vine” because it will not keep pace with inflation.

Silver Voices also raised concerns about the difficulties older people are having trying to secure a face-to-face appointment with a GP and criticised social care reforms for failing to put an end to people having to sell their homes to pay for care.

Mr Reed added: “We need urgent action on pensions and benefits to support senior citizens through the cost-of-living crisis, and a genuine national rescue plan for health and social care.

“Promises, sound-bites and ‘strategies’ are no longer enough. Trust has to be earned, through action, to address all the issues identified in this open letter.”

The government suspended the triple lock to save the Treasury £5 billion.

Payments were set to rise by up to £14 a week because the pandemic skewed the figures used to calculate the rise.

Instead of the 8.1 percent hike, the state pension will rise by 3.1 percent in April.

But inflation is expected to top six percent in the spring and the energy price cap is also tipped to go up by around £500 at the same time.

Leading campaigner Lord Foulkes, who co-chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Older People, said the government should make a one-off cash booster payment of £250 to help pensioners.

“Many older people face a bleak new year in 2022,” he said.

“Instead of the relative security of the triple lock they face the misery of a triple whammy.

“First, prices of food and heating, two of the main items of an older person’s budget, are set to rocket.

“Second, their income will be reduced in real terms because the triple lock has been scrapped.

“Third, they will now need to pay for the TV Licence they used to get for free.

“On top of that there is the continuing isolation caused by Covid, the uncertainty of how they will be able to pay for any social care they may need and the growing feeling of being left behind in an increasingly digital age.

“Meanwhile those in power seem intent on increasing their wealth and power and ignoring the needs of older people.

“The time is right for older people to remind those in power that we live in a democracy and mobilise to use their votes to greater effect.”

Dame Esther, who founded The Silver Line, said: “If the cost of living increases in the way that has been predicted there will be older people who are forced to choose between heating and eating.

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“I know it’s going to be tough for everybody but older people on fixed incomes are going to be particularly vulnerable.”

Conservative peer Baroness Ros Altmann said older voters have traditionally trusted the Tory party to look after them but that could change if they “start feeling abandoned in the eye of an inflation storm”.

The former pensions minister said the planned “miserly” 3.1 percent rise in state pensions next April is “nowhere near enough”.

“Urgent action to protect the poorest is vital, particularly as the UK State Pension is the lowest in the developed world,” she said.

“Having spent almost unimaginable sums to help protect people’s jobs, and rightly so, the Chancellor must also look after those who rely on state support after a lifetime of hard work and contributions to building Britain.”

Age UK warned of an impending “national emergency” unless the government acts now.

Charity director Caroline Abrahams said: “If as the experts predict, energy bills effectively double for most consumers this spring, compared to a year ago, it will precipitate a national emergency impacting millions of older people. Inflation is already eating into their pensions, but this unprecedented hike in wholesale energy prices will be totally unsustainable for those living

on low fixed incomes, many of whom have few if any savings to fall back on.

“We know that winter usually saves its worst for January and February, and I dread to think how older people will manage to stay warm then as the cold really bites, unless Government intervenes.”

The charity wrote to Cabinet ministers in November warning of “grave concerns” about the impact of rising energy costs and was told the Government was “monitoring and assessing” the impact of prices increases on vulnerable consumers.

“Surely this situation has now gone beyond a need for ‘monitoring and assessment’, Ms Abrahams added. “Concrete Government action is urgently required. Ministers must act fast and do enough to give older people living on low fixed incomes the confidence to keep their heating turned up high, when low temperatures demand it.”

COMMENT BY BARONESS ROS ALTMANN

With heating and fuel prices going through the roof, pensioners, particularly the poorest and oldest, are really feeling the pinch.

After two years of health worries, isolation and family disruption, they now face a frightening cost of living crisis.

As two million older people were already living in poverty in 2019 – and over a million were in extreme fuel poverty – the numbers struggling to make ends meet will be even higher now.

Clearly, the miserly 3.1 percent rise in state pensions next April is nowhere near enough.

Urgent action to protect the poorest is vital, particularly as the UK State

Pension is the lowest in the developed world.

Having spent almost unimaginable sums to help protect people's jobs, and rightly so, the Chancellor must also look after those who rely on state support after a lifetime of hard work and contributions to building Britain.

A majority of older voters have traditionally trusted the Conservatives to look after them, recognising their huge contribution to our country, but this could change if they start feeling abandoned in the eye of an inflation storm.

The most vulnerable older people also face a crisis in elderly care, with staff shortages, funding shortfalls, strict rationing, unfair financing rules and stark inequalities across the UK.

Therefore, pensioners who cannot live independently, need the Government to live up to its promises of radical care reforms.

We need an emergency plan for pensioners.

Rising energy costs hit them hardest, as the cold affects their health, but policymakers did not recognise this.

Cold Weather Payments, Warm Home Discounts, Winter Fuel Payments have not increased as fuel bills soar.

Disappointingly, compromise House of Lords proposals for larger pension increases were rejected by MPs, so even Pension Credit – which tops up State Pensions for the poorest pensioners – will rise by just 3.1 percent.

And worryingly, for over ten years, four in ten of those entitled, do not claim.

This is not good enough.

The Government must take meaningful action to increase Pension Credit take-up, help pensioners afford to heat their homes and introduce comprehensive care reforms that treat older citizens with the dignity and

respect they deserve.

- **Baroness Ros Altmann – Former Pensions Minister**

A Government spokesman said: “We recognise people are facing pressures with the cost of living – which is why we’re taking £4.2bn of decisive action to help.

“This includes the Energy Price Cap, which protects millions of customers and ensures they pay a fair price for their energy, and winter fuel payments which are supporting over 11 million pensioners with their energy bills.

“Our £500m Household Support Fund is also providing vulnerable households with essentials over winter.

“We have also protected pensioners’ incomes by introducing a 3.1% increase to pensions next year. We’re increasing pension credit by 3.1% in April to support pensioners on low incomes with living costs.”

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