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February 2022 Newsletter

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Monday 21st February 2022

Room 16 (First Floor)

12pm-2.30pm

NHS and Health Delivery in LAMBETH

Speakers: tba from Keep Our NHS Public. We may have a GP join the speakers.

Sarah Lyons: To talk about Healthwatch Lambeth

At some time of our lives each one of us has had, or is having some kind of intervention by a GP or some department in the NHS. Our experiences of the health care delivery are generally different in terms of the level and quality of care within and outside the system. Since its foundation in 1948 (post war), successive governments have struggled to deal with the pressures that confront a system of this size and nature. As a result, the NHS continues to be under severe pressure for a number of reasons. The NHS as it stands today, is grossly underfunded to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population. There are record demands on urgent and emergency care, rising bed occupancy and increasing numbers of elective referrals. There are major problem of staff shortages of doctors, nurses and support staff that are under enormous stress. Jeremy Hunt, the former Health Secretary has said that the NHS was short of 93,000 staff. Staff shortages have been exacerbated not only Covid, but by the numbers who have left the service as a result of Brexit and limitations of support from the government. There are round 6m people on waiting lists with some waiting for more than 2 years for essential treatment. Around 500 suspected cancer patients are waiting for longer than the 3 week target to see a specialist.

At the start of the pandemic the Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that the NHS would have all money it needed. At the same time he said that the life saving booster would inevitably lead to cuts elsewhere. Funding and support to ensure that medical fit patients can safely be discharged in the community thus freeing up beds in the NHS has stalled as a result of the lack of sufficient care in the community. There have been reports that patients discharged from hospital have not always received continuing medical care. There are increasing complaints about the difficulties of accessing face to face appointments. This is particularly so if you are telephoning a surgery with strictly applied times. However, if you use an App, you can book. This system clearly discriminates against people who do not have the technology and this includes many older people. Inability to see a GP increases the anxiety of people who need to be seen urgently and in some cases prolongs their health condition and impacts on their mental health.

I have only touched the tip of the iceberg with regard to the crisis in the NHS. The privatisation of the NHS and the Funding of Care are two big issues which need serious attention. This is an opportunity for you to join the debate on the current problems in the NHS delivered by KNOP and to contribute your own experiences of your health care in the borough. Your stories will help to inform the kinds of changes that should happen nationally and locally in the NHS to ensure quality care. Do come along and bring a friend.

Teas, Coffee, Biscuits.

Energy and food price raises protest

On Monday 7 February, LAMPAG joined pensioners' groups of the NPC, members of Fuel Poverty Action, TUC, Trade Unions affiliated to the NPC across the southeast outside Downing Street to protest against the horrendous energy price rises announced by OFGEM which will deal a massive body blow to pensioners already languishing in Fuel Poverty. The increases will hit 63m households hard. OFGEM has confirmed that gas prices will rise 54%. From April it will cost up to £700 more to heat the average home and by October it will rise by a further £300.

UK pensions are among the lowest in the developed world and over 2m live in pensioner poverty, Many have to choose between heating their homes and eating. This is a scandal in one of the richest economies in the world. At the same time that gas prices are going up, food and retail prices are soaring, Universal credit has been lowered, the fuel allowance remains stagnant, and the Triple lock on pensions has been suspended. Every year older people die miserable, lonely deaths of respiratory illnesses brought about by cold, poorly insulated homes that they can ill afford to heat.

The government's response has been poor – handing out a loan of £200 that will have to be paid back over the next 5 years, a council tax rebate to those living in bands A-D leaving out those who live in properties rated E and above. The government's £150m to local authorities for discretionary payments to poorer families is a pittance when you consider the numbers living in fuel poverty. Over the last 10 years £120bn was paid out in profits to British based fuel companies. British Gas has reported to have raked in a mouth watering profit of £9.5bn.

The NPC is calling for the government to put a halt to the energy price rises by OFGEM, to put in place a programme of insulating homes and for new builds that meet the ageing needs of pensioners. Warm Homes are not a luxury. The Government closed the Green Homes Grant which was meant to insulate homes. There is also a call for the introduction of new, more efficient, safe heating systems. More importantly there are demands for a Windfall Tax on soaring profits made by energy giants. Jan Short, General Secretary of the National Pensioner Convention said, "The huge profits of private companies and fuel providers over the years must be investigated and a contribution made to offset future hikes in fuel costs and ensure that everyone has the ability to stay warm without taking income away from their daily needs."

Social housing rent increases.

Social rent in Lambeth are going up by 4.1% in April. Councillor Maria Kay, Cabinet member for Housing and Homelessness announced this at a meeting of the Cabinet recently. In her report she highlighted the fact that all of the Council's tenants rent were paid with the HRA (Housing Revenue Account which was for the management of housing properties as well as maintenance, repairs and major works. Much investment was needed in the housing stock to get it to a standard that residents deserve and expect. Government housing restrictions over the last four years had resulted in a cumulative loss of £28.5 million to the HRA. The fact that housing was funded by the government meant that rent increases to fund improvements were imperative and so was ensuring balanced budgets. She indicated that the council was aware that rent increases would place some families into financial hardship. There were a number of tools available to support those in need including benefits and debt management...

This is troubling news to the 23,000 people including poor pensioners living with pensioner and fuel poverty. This news comes alongside the proposed 54% increases in energy prices, rising food and retail prices, cuts to Universal benefits, National insurance and rent increases. This will add to the despair that many poor and vulnerable people experience at present. Putting the rent increases down to Government underfunding without challenging government underfunding of public service is wholly unacceptable. Furthermore to say that there are a number tools and initiatives i.e. benefits and debt management to support those in need is unacceptable. We believe that Universal Benefits are human rights and debt should not be managed but eliminated.

LAMPAG AGM

The AGM will take place on Monday on Monday 21 MARCH. This AGM is important not only because of the number of challenges we face as pensioners but because as a pensioners action group we are committed to confronting the challenges, bringing about change and reaching our goal of being treated with dignity and respect in our later years. We need a strong committee to drive forward our agenda. Membership of the committee goes beyond attending Open and Committee meetings. It's about spreading the word and involvement in the actions that will help us achieve our objectives. We all have different skills, aptitudes and experiences we can bring to the committee. Please consider joining the committee. We need you to help build the group for the future. Enclosed find the relevant documents, Nomination form and Roles and Responsibilities. Kindly submit Nomination forms by Monday 14th March. Thank you.

