



Pensioners Manifesto Launch

On 21 November 2023, Later Life Ambitions held an event to launch *Standing by Pensions: A manifesto for later life*.

The manifesto represents the culmination of months of work by NARPO alongside partners the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance (CSPA) and the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners (NFOP). All three organisations work together under the Later Life Ambitions (LLA) umbrella.

In *Standing by Pensioners: A manifesto for later life*, LLA calls for:

- The UK Government to create an Older People and Ageing Commissioner for England and Scotland.
- A National Social Care Service integrated with a National Health Service that remains free at the point of delivery.
- The UK Government and the devolved administrations to combat digital technology's role in social exclusion and

access to services.

- All political parties to make manifesto commitments to guarantee the State Pension triple lock for at least the duration of the next Parliament.
- All new homes to meet the Lifetime Homes standard with a national strategy for more adaptable, accessible homes across all tenures.
- Investment in local bus and rail services for uprated concessions and for improved accessibility and assistance for older people on all new bus and railway stock and facilities.

The launch event was handily timed for the day before Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt MP delivered his Autumn Statement. Politicians of all persuasions

Pictured above

(left to right): Eamonn Donaghy CEO of the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners, Sally Tsoukaris General Secretary of the Civil Service Pensioner's Alliance, Richard Critchley President of the National Association of Retired Police Officers, David Luxton Deputy General Secretary of the Civil Service Pensioner's Alliance, Alan Lees CEO of the National Association of Retired Police Officers.

attended to hear about the issues that matter to pensioners and to learn what LLA will focus its campaigning on in this election year. They heard from LLA representatives and even a 1960s princess of pop who endorsed LLA's work and calls to action.

NARPO CEO Alan Lees kicked the event off with a welcome to MPs, peers and guests to the event and a special mention for '60s pop star and former Eurovision winner Sandie Shaw MBE, who had spoken out in support of the manifesto in media trailing the launch and who dropped by the parliamentary reception too. Alan then handed over to the event's parliamentary sponsor and host, Labour's Sir Stephen Timms MP.

Sir Stephen, who serves as chair of the influential Work and Pensions Select Committee, has shown himself to be a true parliamentary champion of pensioners' rights and issues in Parliament. So it was appropriate and unsurprising that he was keen to host – and hear from – Later Life Ambitions.

Next to speak was Sammy Wilson MP, the Democratic Unionist Party's Work and Pensions and Treasury spokesperson. Sammy highlighted how older people make an increasingly important segment of the UK population and he called for a greater focus on opportunities that would give people in later life happy, active lives with full social participation – something made easier in Northern Ireland by the existence of an Older People's Commissioner. He also touched on the importance of pension credits, and praised volunteers who help fight loneliness in his constituency.

Shadow Pensions Minister Gill Furniss MP spoke next, outlining the Labour Party's vision for older people. In a personal contribution, Gill began by noting that she is herself of State Pension age

and that her hopes and dreams are modest dreams shared by millions in later life, who hope for occasional holidays and a reasonable lifestyle – something made possible by the triple lock. Gill also discussed widows' pensions, the gender

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gap in pensions and the loss of physical banking and postal infrastructure. As a newcomer to her portfolio, Gill also highlighted that she is keen to listen and learn on later life issues. NARPO and our LLA partners are looking forward to meeting with Gill in 2024 to brief her further.

Other Labour parliamentarians in attendance included Baroness Blower and Rupa Huq MP.

Following Gill was David Linden MP, the Scottish National Party's Social Justice Spokesperson (a brief that covers Work and Pensions issues, amongst other community matters). David called for a rethink around Pension Credit take-up strategy; despite concerted advertising from the Government, he pointed out that to access the credit any would-be claimant has to answer 243 questions on a form. He also referred to issues around the gender gap in pensions.

David was joined at the event by his SNP colleagues Kirsten Oswald MP (SNP Equalities and Women's Spokesperson), Marion Fellowes MP



and Anne McLaughlin MP.

The last of the MPs to speak was Claire Hanna MP from the Social Democratic and Labour Party. In her contribution, she pointed to free all-Ireland travel, integrated health and social care, and the existence of an Older People's Commissioner as great successes in Northern Irish later life policy. She warned however that we live in an "age of decay," with a high

cost-of-living and burgeoning public expenditure and called for the triple lock to be protected amidst all this.

Adding a little celebrity stardust to the event, the audience was delighted to hear from three-time UK chart topper Sandie Shaw. Sandie embraced the spirit of the Pensioners' Manifesto, and rightly said that "all dreams deserve to come true". With Sandie's support, LLA are confident

that "there's always something there to remind..." MPs of our ambitious vision for later life.

Despite the Government failing to put forward a minister to speak, a strong contingent of backbench Conservative parliamentarians attended the event. Sir Gavin Williamson MP, Marco Longhi MP, Nigel Mills MP, Jonathan Lord MP, Ian Levy MP and Lord Naseby all kindly lent their support, as did Father of the House Sir Peter Bottomley MP and Jo Gideon MP – who aged 67 in 2019 embraced later life ambition and became the oldest-ever woman elected to Parliament for the time.

Whilst the Autumn Statement the day after the event brought welcome news with the Government's retention of the State Pension triple lock, there is still work to do. Since the Autumn Statement, debate around the future sustainability of the triple lock has featured increasingly hostile rhetoric. With a general election due by January 2025, it is crucial that LLA uses the next year to educate and inform all parties on the invaluable social merit of the triple lock.

LLA will be on the front foot too for other policies, not least the continuing digitalisation of society and its impact on pensioners and older people. Whatever 2024 brings, in the Pensioners' Manifesto, Later Life Ambitions and its 250,000 members have a valuable asset in making sure older people's voices are heard.



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¹www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/how-long-are-patients-waiting-for-a-gp-appointment-in-england
²www.nationalworld.com/health/england-hidden-mental-health-crisis-wait-months-nhs-therapy-sessions-3875434
³www.equipme.com/blog/up-to-four-months-to-see-a-physiotherapist/

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