

Council Matters

As we approach Remembrance Day I am mindful of the thousands of service men and women who have lost their lives in all the many conflicts over the past century. I also cannot help but think of the surviving veterans. Not just for their service, valour and commitment but also for the fact that many of them are facing real hardship in their later years. Data from the European Commission, shows that the UK has the fourth highest levels of Pension Poverty amongst over-65s in Europe. Official figures show that a higher proportion of older people in the UK are living on incomes far below the national average compared to those in countries considered less developed, such as Poland and Romania and that almost one in three UK over-65s are living in poverty , the same proportion as in Lithuania, at 30%.

In most leading European economies, pensioner poverty levels are either below or slightly above the EU average of 19%. Just Cyprus, at 51%, Latvia, at 33% and Estonia, with 33%, have it worse than the UK. And this position has gradually become worse in the past eleven years. Millions of older people in the UK also have lower incomes compared to the national EEC average, **more than two million are so poor they find it hard to afford to heat their houses, eat nutritious food or replace household equipment.**

What this means in real terms is that one in five people aged 60 and over are skipping meals to save money on food, while two fifths are struggling to afford essential items. A recent survey conducted by Help the Aged showed that seven in ten over-65s are resorting to thrifty skills picked up during the war and post-war years to help them survive from day to day.

What a terrible legacy this is for all those who gave their lives for a better future

It's time to lift the State pension to a level that enables older people to live, rather than just survive. Millions of women lack full entitlement to the Basic State pension Even as recently as 2004-05 only 30 per cent of women were retiring with a full Basic State Pension,

Pensioner poverty could easily be reduced if the Government introduced new policies, for example:

- Invest in a system to pay means-tested benefits to pensioners automatically. This could take 500,000 pensioners out of poverty immediately in England alone.
- Commit to linking the Basic State Pension to average earnings straight away. This would take an extra 100,000 pensioners out of poverty now, rather than waiting until 2012.
- Provide justice to women pensioners by paying the Basic State Pension universally. This would help nearly four million older women in England who are not entitled to a full pension because they have been penalised for time spent caring for children or in low-paid part-time jobs.

The Council has introduced an Older Persons Working Group which I chair and we will be using this as a means of lobbying on behalf of pensioners who really need help. It is high time that this issue was addressed properly by government.

The Borough Council are currently collecting information for the Register of Electors 2010 which will be published on 1 December 2009. Yellow voter registration forms have been delivered to every household in the Village. Please respond to this form as soon as possible or you may not appear on the register and you might lose your right to vote. Please remember that registering for other services or paying Council Tax does not register you to vote.

- You can register until 22 November by telephone on 0800 197 8602 or by internet at www.registerbyinternet.com/wellingborough or by text. Please see the yellow form for more details. You can use the form to register if you prefer.
- If there are no security codes printed on your form you will not be able to register by phone, internet or text. Please complete and return the yellow form instead.

If the Council do not receive a reply from your address

- Any names on the current register may be removed
- If you are not registered as an elector you will not be able to vote at any elections
- It is likely that you may have difficulties in opening bank accounts or getting credit....

The law requires you to give the information requested in the form.

If you have not received a form or if you need any help filling it in please email [the Elections Office](mailto:theElectionsOffice) or phone 01933 231513.

Can I remind residents that if they have any questions or issues relating to Borough Council matters they can contact me on 01933 224790 or e-mail barry.graves@virgin.net.

Barry Graves
Councillor
Great Doddington & Wilby Ward.