

Scottish Pensioners' Forum Response to the Ofgem Price Cap

Ofgem, announcing an increase of 4% on the energy price cap from 1st October, has attributed this to higher wholesale gas prices due to the Iran war. A household using a typical amount of gas and electricity will pay £60 a year more. Though the government claims its cut to VAT on electricity bills will save households £45, this still means that those most vulnerable, who already face proportionately higher bills and unfair standing charges, will as usual bear the brunt at a time, particularly in Scotland, when the need to keep warm is a priority for older people.

At the same time Ofgem is consulting on relaxing the regulations for new suppliers to enter the field in the interests of so-called competition. This is a policy doomed to failure, based on unproven, and indeed clearly counter-productive claims about the free market where consumers have in fact no real choice. Since 2016, no fewer than 51 energy supply companies have gone bust affecting more than 6 million customers (<https://www.businessenergyuk.com/failed-energy-companies/>). Vulnerable consumers are sometimes persuaded by attractive opening offers to change to new entrant suppliers, only to face additional stress and worry when these all too often collapse. The SPF urges Ofgem to address the needs of vulnerable energy users rather than bolstering the profits of the already cash rich energy giants.



Colin Wakeling writes Britain is facing a very real cost of living crisis when a significant proportion of the population, especially those on fixed incomes such as pensioners, have to make real choices, not between competing discretionary spends, but between necessities

such as eating and heating. Is competition really in the best interest of the consumer? Light touch regulation aimed at encouraging suppliers to enter the market and create competition, led to more than 30 going out of business because of under-capitalisation, flawed business models and an inability to secure adequate supplies of energy to cope with market price fluctuations. Consumers have been collectively billed the costs of the resultant bailouts. Notional benefits from competitive pricing must be mitigated by the costs of establishing separate back-office functions, billing and marketing systems.

Consumer credit balances, totalling £3.17 billion, are still not fully secured / protected. In the interests of maintaining supplier viability, and in the interests of 'competition', they are still allowed to use elements of these balances, built up because direct debits have more than covered actual energy use, to shore up balance sheets and profitability. Suppliers claim this enables them to reduce their prices to benefit consumers generally!

Is there any real scope for innovation when suppliers essentially only source energy supplies and retail them to consumers? Attempts at cross-selling other products and services such as telecommunications, boiler maintenance, have largely fallen by the wayside, so they basically compete on marginal cost and customer service – an area most subject to customer complaints.

Until the establishment of an Energy Price Cap – the maximum price suppliers can charge domestic consumers – a proliferation of domestic energy tariffs created a minefield for consumers who wanted to reduce their energy bills. With a reduction in the number of registered suppliers, the range of tariff variations has been cut back. Even so, consumers wanting to get better deals face difficulty making informed choices. Price Cap changes headline a 'typical' household, whatever that means. The only realistic way to evaluate energy contracts is to identify your own annual consumption and then make comparisons using unit prices and standing charges. The marketplace is still a minefield with many consumers deterred from actually making switching contracts to benefit from any better deals available.

In short, energy supply in the UK is a total mess. It's neither a free market – more a bureaucratically regulated one. The time for tinkering or short-term fixes is past. A radical root and branch re-set is needed to sweep aside a broken system to transform Britain's energy landscape for the benefit of all consumers.

Colin Wakeling.

Scottish Pensioners' Forum Speakers and Campaigning Issues from Annual Conference

The Annual Conference of the SPF was held in the City Chambers, Glasgow on 16th June. It was a lively event, with more than sixty in attendance and often vigorous debate. Two keynote addresses were given by **Gary Christie** (Policy and Campaigns Manager, The Poverty Alliance) and **Ellie Harrison** (Better Buses Campaign).

Our Guest Speakers – Gary Christie

Gary began by asking What is poverty? What does it mean for Scotland? and What can we do about it? While the basic definition of poverty includes inability to meet the bills arising from the essentials of life and being forced to make impossible choices between equally pressing claims, the wider context includes reasonable comfort and freedom from incessant crises. There are 1 million people in Scotland at poverty level, including 150,000 older people, many of them women living on their own and deprived of social interaction. Too many fail to claim even those benefits they are entitled to, partly through reluctance, partly through the unnecessary complexity of the application process, and partly through lack of information about their rights.



The Poverty Alliance has been working for thirty years with Trade Unions and a variety of organisations to tackle poverty not as a problem for individuals per se but as a structural failing in society as a whole. We want a Scotland where everyone lives free from poverty, a country of fair work, affordable living costs and social security fit for purpose. To achieve this, we believe that a guaranteed basic income for everyone would have clear advantages for society as a whole. We appeal to all interested parties to work together on this campaign.

Our Guest Speakers - Ellie Harrison

Ellie Harrison is chair of the Get Glasgow Moving public transport campaign, a volunteer-run group founded in 2016 to campaign for a world-class, fully integrated and accessible public transport system for Strathclyde. She explained that the aim is to achieve a system where buses, trains and subway are planned and coordinated, by a public body to work together as part of one network, with one simple, affordable ticket for use across all transport modes. This is how transport is run in most other big city regions around Europe (in Germany, France, The Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and elsewhere).

One of Get Glasgow Moving's main focusses over the last 10 years has been on getting the bus network back under public control. It is a coalition of civil society organisations, including the Scottish Pensioners' Forum (who have been a key supporter since the beginning), trade unions, environmental campaigns, the Poverty Alliance, students' groups, parents' groups and now 18 Community Councils across the region too.

Thanks to Better Buses' campaigning, SPT has now committed to a franchise system. However, since the law in Scotland is overly complex and favours the companies who currently operate, it is necessary to exert pressure on the Scottish Government to revise the process so that change can be more quickly put in place. Ellie informed the Conference that franchise operations were being rolled out in England, with the most striking example that of Manchester under the aegis of Mayor (no Prime Minister!) Andy Burnham. Campaigns in other parts of Scotland, including Fife, Grampian and Dundee, are now under way.

Information about these various campaigns can be accessed here:

[Campaign for Better Buses](#) (Main Campaign Page)

[The Journey to the Bee Network](#) (Greater Manchester)

[Weaver Network](#) (West Yorkshire)

[People's Network](#) (South Yorkshire)

[Why are we still waiting for Better Buses?](#) (Strathclyde Campaign)



SPF Join the Campaign for Better Buses

Our Buses have been back in the news recently with the Scottish Government announcement of the £2 cap on fares within the West of Scotland. This follows from the initiative in the Highlands. The £2 cap hopefully will be extended to throughout Scotland at a later date. While this is welcome news in combating the cost-of-living crisis, Strathclyde Better Buses Campaigners are clear in stating this does nothing to address the problems of accessibility and integration of our bus services with public transport across Scotland. It also increases the public subsidy to private bus contractors who continue to prioritise profits over service to our communities. The Better Buses Campaign, supported by the SPF, have long campaigned to bring Buses back under public control, to create an integrated bus service to meet the needs of all people of Scotland. While gaining the support of influential organisations such as Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT), the legal complexities of gaining the required legislation is causing huge delays in Scotland, while the less complex process in England has allowed great progress.



This week, Liverpool Region will roll out its publicly controlled integrated bus service, the second region to do so, following Greater Manchester in 2023. Ironically in the same week, the Strathclyde Better Buses Campaigners reach the 10th anniversary of fighting for the same thing! On the 2nd September, I along with Pauline Hill represented SPF at the Better Buses for Scotland Rally held outside the Scottish Parliament, where Campaigners called for MSP's and Stephen Flynn (Minister for Transport) in particular to, as matter of urgency, seek ways to establish the necessary legislation, to literally get our buses on the road!

Following the Rally, MSPs were invited to attend a drop-in session to hear the Campaigners concerns. There was a healthy and attentive attendance – let's hope we now see some progress! Better Buses are so important to Scottish Pensioners to ensure an active life and SPF will continue to support this Campaign in any way we can. Please show your support by signing the Better Buses Petition below.

Andy Locke, SPF Executive Committee Member.

World Suicide Prevention Day

The theme of World Suicide Prevention Day 2026 is about changing the narrative on suicide. Changing the narrative means arguing for and implementing change. We need to campaign for suicide prevention and mental health to be a priority in Scottish Government policy to ensure that those in distress receive all the mental health services support they need. Suicide is a major public health issue that claims many thousands of lives each year throughout our world. Here in Scotland around 700 people take their lives each year and each life lost has profound consequences. Whilst suicide mainly affects young and middle-aged people there are many older persons who take their own lives. Each suicide deeply affects older persons, families, friends, workplaces, and entire communities in Scotland and elsewhere in our world.

In Aberdeen on Thursday 10th September retired Trade Union members, Trade Union Workplace Representatives and the Lord Provost gathered at the Choose Life Memorial Tree in Hazelhead Park to lay flowers and wreaths in memory of those who have lost their lives to suicide.

Whilst we remember all those lost to suicide, we should ensure there is a properly funded mental health service to support adults and children who are struggling with their mental health and well-being. We also need to ensure that employers have suicide prevention policies in place aimed at supporting employees who are suffering with poor mental health and at risk of suicide.



We need to promote open, friendly, and compassionate conversations about mental health and encourage people to reach out for help. We must recognise that every suicide affects older persons, employees, families, and friends and whilst the reasons behind each suicide are complex, with the right support for everyone's mental health and wellbeing lives can be saved.

Older and younger people need to work together to create awareness that suicide is preventable and by bringing people together we can show our support for all those affected by suicide. Each of us has a positive and helpful role to play in creating a society where everyone can be

supported and able to talk about their mental health.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum along with the STUC and other progressive campaigning organisations calls upon our Scottish Government to halt the funding cuts in mental health services. Our Scottish Government needs to start investing more financial and staffing resources which will help improve the lives of people suffering with their mental health and ultimately this will save lives by preventing suicide.

Tommy Campbell
Chair of Aberdeen & District Unite Retired Members Branch

Forthcoming Events

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum would like to make aware and invite all our members and newsletter readers to the following forthcoming events that will be taking place in the months ahead! We invite responses from members of the SPF to inform us of other dates of interest. You are also invited to offer your services in support of SPF's presence at particular events. Please contact our Administrator/Development Officer (Colin Macpherson) at SPF@stuc.org.uk to discuss further.

**STUC Black Workers Conference – Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Clydebank.
Saturday 10th October & Sunday 11th October.**

**UNISON Retired Members Annual Conference – Crowne Plaza, SEC, Glasgow.
Wednesday 14th October.**

**STUC Women's Conference – Caird Hall, Dundee. Wednesday 21st October &
Sunday 22nd October. This year marks the centenary of the foundation of the STUC
women's committee originally established in 1926.**

**STUC Disabled Workers Conference – Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel,
Clydebank. Saturday 21st November & Sunday 22nd November**

**The Scottish Pensioners' Forum have on the table proposals for outreach events in
two locations: Motherwell or Hamilton and the Highlands and Islands. Details
coming soon.**

**The 130th STUC Congress – Caird Hall Dundee. Monday 19th April 2027 –
Wednesday 21st April 2027.**

**The Scottish Pensioners' Forum Annual General Meeting – Dundee City Chambers,
Dundee. TBC**

Thank you to David Edwards!

The Forum would like to take this opportunity to extend a hand of gratitude to David Edwards and thank him for all the work he has contributed to the Scottish Pensioners' Forum. David has decided the time has come to stand down as Chairperson and after all of David's efforts for the Scottish Pensioners' Forum we wish to offer him our heartfelt thanks and all the very best for the future. Thank you, David!



And a Warm Hello to Rose Jackson

The Forum is happy to announce that our new Chairperson will be Rose Jackson. Rose will be no stranger to anyone here at the Scottish Pensioners' Forum and after our recent election to decide upon the role of Chairperson, Rose was duly elected. This is not the first time that Rose has held the role of Chairperson and rest assured Rose is determined to make sure that all of Scotland's older peoples voices are heard loud and clear.

