

North Devon Conservatives

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Labour is letting down the poorest pensioners

PHILIP MILTON, Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for North Devon has expressed his concern following a new report published by the Office for National Statistics which has revealed that there are two million pensioners living in poverty in the UK and fuel poverty for pensioner households is growing.

According to the Government's preferred measure of pensioner poverty, 2 million pensioners, almost one in five pensioners, are living below the poverty line. However, statistics not included in today's report, which use the same measure of poverty as the Government uses to assess its child poverty targets, show pensioner poverty to be as high as 2.5 million pensioners.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics have also revealed that over 30 per cent of households of single people aged 60 or over in England were in fuel poverty – this type of household being most affected by fuel poverty. Almost a million single pensioner households were in fuel poverty in 2007, up from around 460,000 in 2003. The number in fuel poverty will have risen further since 2007 due to higher energy bills.

Says Philip:

“This is yet more evidence that Labour are letting down some of the most vulnerable in our society. We can't go on like this; Gordon Brown has destroyed our pensions system and failed to tackle fuel poverty. Conservatives will stand up for Britain's pensioners and increase the value of the state pension for all by re-linking the state pension to earnings. Our plans to give every household an entitlement to £6,500 worth of energy efficiency improvements will help pensioners struggling with their fuel bills.”

ENDS

Published and promoted by Sir Richard Peek on behalf of the NDCA, The Strand, Barnstaple, N. Devon
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Notes to editors:

2 million Pensioners in Poverty

A new report by the Office for National Statistics published today has revealed:

In 2007/08 2 million pensioners were living in poverty (assessed as living below 60 per cent of median income after housing costs are taken into account).

In 2007 the Government estimates that almost 1 million households of single people aged 60 or over in England were in fuel poverty – this type of household being most affected by fuel poverty. The number of single pensioner households in fuel poverty has more than doubled since 2003 from 463,000 to 967,000.

Figures are taken from ONS, Pension Trends, Chapter 13: Inequalities and poverty in retirement, 27 January 2009

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/pensiontrends/Pension_Trends_ch13.pdf

Pensioner poverty as high as 2.5 million

If pensioner poverty levels are calculated using the Government's official poverty measure for assessing their own child poverty target, then pensioner poverty stands at 2.5 million pensioners, 100,000 more than in 1996/97 (DWP, Households Below Average Income, May 2009 <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2008/chapters.asp>).

Government failing to meet fuel poverty pledge

The Government has a target to end to fuel poverty in vulnerable households in England by 2010, with a vulnerable household deemed to be one containing children, or those who are elderly, sick or disabled (DEFRA, *Fuel Poverty in England: The Government's Plan for Action*, 2004, p. 3). It is clear that the Government will massively fail to achieve this target.

Fuel Poverty Deaths

Last winter there were an estimated 36,700 excess winter deaths in England and Wales, an increase of 49 per cent on the previous year. This was way above other European countries with more severe climates than our own. Of these deaths, 33,300 were aged 65 and over, compared to 22,320 in 2007–08, also a 49 per cent increase (ONS, *Health Statistics Quarterly*, 24 November 2009).

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Conservative Approach

Raising the value of the State Pension. Conservatives are committed to re linking the State Pension to average earnings within the next parliament.

More Help with Fuel Bills. In his 2009 conference speech George Osborne pledged that the Winter Fuel Payment would be safe under a Conservative government. We have also published a four-point plan to help cut fuel bills and tackle fuel poverty:

- We will give every household in Britain a Green Deal – the right to have home energy efficiency improvements worth up to £6,500. The upfront costs will be privately financed by banks and investment funds; and repaid over a period of up to 25 years through the savings on energy bills. A typical home could see around £20 a month knocked off its bill.
- We will require energy companies to provide information on energy bills that shows customers clearly whether they are on the cheapest tariff offered by that company – and if they are not, shows them exactly how much they would save if they switched to the cheapest tariff, and how they can do so.
- A Conservative government would expand the role of the Post Office Card Account (basic cash accounts run by the DWP for receipt of welfare, pension and tax credit deposits) so it could be used to make direct debit payments on utility bills. This could cut the energy bills of up to 4 million POCA holders by up to £100 a year.
- And we will require complete transparency in the energy market so that when energy prices fall in the world market they fall for customers too.

ENDS