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Howe

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 February 1982

Third National Pensioners' Convention: 18 February

The Prime Minister has agreed to receive a small delegation from the National Pensioners' Convention Steering Committee on 18 February. This meeting will be held at 1545 in her room at the House. The Prime Minister has expressed the hope that the delegation can be kept to half a dozen or so and I have passed on this message to the Chairman of the Steering Committee (my letter attached).

The Prime Minister would be very grateful if Mr. Fowler could join her at this meeting. I should also be grateful if you could provide a suitable brief by Tuesday 16 February.

W. F. S. RICKETT

Brendan O'Gorman, Esq.,  
Department of Health and Social Security.

Jur

National PENSIONERS' Convention

5/3  
10/3  
Mr Rozzi's letter is with the pm. hm 7/3



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 February 1982

Willie ✓ OK ww 5/3  
D/Ind. have asked for extension to Wednesday next, 10 March. O.K.?  
Key 5/3

The Prime Minister was very grateful for the briefing that you provided for her meeting with the National Pensioners' Convention Steering Committee, which took place at 1545 yesterday in her room at the House of Commons. She said that the brief was excellent, and was particularly pleased with the supplementary briefing provided on the increases in the national insurance contributions that would be necessary to finance the proposals in the pensioners' "Declaration of Intent". I hope you will pass on the Prime Minister's thanks to all the officials concerned, and to your Minister.

I attach a record of the meeting. You will see that the Prime Minister agreed to write to Mr. Willis, Chairman of the Steering Committee, setting out the Government's estimate of the cost of implementing the proposals in the "Declaration of Intent". I should be grateful if you could provide a suitable draft by Monday 1 March.

Hugh Rozzi with send this. in pm's behalf.

Richard Riley will see that the Prime Minister also agreed to ask his Secretary of State for a report on whether there was anything that could be done to meet the delegation's criticisms of standing charges for telephone services. I should be grateful if he could let me have this report by Friday 5 March.

D/IND. ||

I am copying this to Richard Riley (Department of Industry), David Lumley (Department of Energy), Jill Rutter (HM Treasury), and to Brendan O'Gorman in your Secretary of State's office.

W. F. S. RICKETT

SW

Ms Melanie Smith  
Department of Health and Social Security.

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION: MEETING WITH PM AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
SOCIAL SE [REDACTED] 18 FEBRUARY 1982

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## THE NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION (NPC)

### Origins

The NPC was set up in 1979, not long before the last General Election, at the instigation of the TUC.

### Composition

The NPC brings together the TUC and all the major national organisations representing elderly people. These include the National Federation of Old Age Pensions' Associations, the British Pensioners and Trade Union Action Association, Age Concern and Help the Aged. The TUC provides the secretariat for the organisation. Jack Jones, ex leader of the TGWU is one of the leading lights in the organisation.

### Aims and Activities

The Convention's first organised event was a national convention held in June 1979 at Central Hall, Westminster, attended by 2000 people who approved the 'declaration of intent' which had been drawn up by the TUC. Since then a second convention has been held and the third is planned for the morning prior to the lobby of Parliament on 18 February. Other activities have included lobbies of party conferences, town hall and gas board showrooms. The previous Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr Jenkin) met a deputation from the NPC on two occasions. The aim of the NPC's activities has always been the implementation of the declaration of intent.

## National Pensioners' Convention

# Declaration of Intent

This Convention declares that every pensioner has the right to choice, dignity, independence and security as an integral and valued member of society.

These rights require an adequate State retirement pension. There must be an immediate commitment to a pension level of not less than one half of average gross earnings for a married couple and not less than one third of average gross earnings for a single person, uprated at six monthly intervals.

In addition to an adequate income a pensioner should, as of right:

- live in accommodation which is appropriate to personal need and circumstance with a reasonable degree of choice including sheltered housing;
- be able to call on the full range of community and personal social services to give full support as need arises, including, for example, home helps, meals on wheels, chiropody, television and telephone;
- be able to use a National Scheme of substantial concessionary facilities on all public transport in all parts of the country;
- have ready access to comprehensive free health care on demand;
- be able to maintain a warm and well lit home with adequate heating allowances covering all fuels;
- have full access to a varied and extensive range of education and leisure facilities;
- be paid a regular tax-free Christmas bonus of £20, adjusted in future in line with inflation;
- be eligible for an adequate retirement pension on ceasing work at any time of his or her choice after the age of 60 years, without being subject to an earnings rule;
- be entitled to an adequate death grant irrespective of age.

## COST OF IMPLEMENTING THE DECLARATION OF INTENT

Some of the proposals made in the declaration are insufficiently specific for any costing to be made. However, it is likely that full implementation of all the proposals would cost in the region of £15 to 20 billion annually.

PROPOSAL	COMMENT	ANNUAL COST
1. PENSION OF $\frac{1}{2}$ AND $\frac{1}{3}$ GROSS AVERAGE EARNINGS FOR COUPLE AND SINGLE PERSON RESPECTIVELY	Cost also includes other linked long-term benefits	£11,500 million
2. SIX MONTHLY UP-RATING	each 1% increase in pension and other long-term benefits brought forward to May would cost £80 million in 1982/3; say 5%	£400 million
3. ADEQUATE HEATING ALLOWANCE COVERING ALL FUEL	Examples a) abolition of gas and electricity standing charges for pensioners b) Extending supp ben lower rate of heating addition to all pensioners households (minimum estimate)	£250 million OR £380 million
4. INDEX LINKED CHRISTMAS BONUS OF £20	Each additional £1 on the bonus costs £10 million	£104 million
5. REDUCING PENSION AGE TO 60 AND ABOLITION OF EARNINGS RULE	Cost of lowering male pension age rises in longer terms with new pension scheme and lower levels of unemployment. Estimate on earnings rule in respect of present pension age	£2,500 million  £45 million

PROPOSAL	COMMENT	ANNUAL COST
6. ADEQUATE DEATH GRANT FOR EVERYONE	Estimate for restoring death grant to original value, in respect of all deaths. (£190)	£112 million
7. FREE HEALTH CARE ON DEMAND	Unquantifiable	?
8. AVAILABILITY OF COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES	Unquantifiable	?
9. APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION INCLUDING CHOICE	Unquantifiable	?
10. NATIONAL SCHEME OF TRAVEL CONCESSIONS	Estimate is the minimum	£100 million
11. ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND LEISURE FACILITIES	Unquantifiable	?
		TOTAL £15,000 MILLION (Absolute minimum)

SUMMARY OF BRIEFING ON DECLARATION OF INTENT

PROPOSAL

1. Pension of  $\frac{1}{2}$  average earnings for couple  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  for single person
  
2. Six monthly upratings
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Adequate heating allowance covering all fuels

MAIN POINTS

1. £11 $\frac{1}{2}$  billion cost
2. Government already committed to substantial extra costs of new pensions scheme which will come to provide pensions of this order in longer term
  
1. Would add £150 million to cost in financial year for each 1 per cent brought forward.
2. Pattern of November upratings set by previous government in 1975, and maintained through periods of high and low inflation
3. In 1980 the forecasting error was in favour of pensioners but the adjustment only made a year later
4. The 2 per cent shortfall in 1981 to be made good in November 1982
  
1. All supplementary pensioner householders over 70 qualify for basic rate heating additions on top of normal scale rates. (Basic rate £1.65; higher rate £4.05). Others qualify in cases of poor health or where the accommodation is difficult to heat.
2. These heating additions increased in 1980 to their highest ever real value and the further increase in 1981 more than maintained that improvement
3. Of £250 million special help to poor fuel consumers £180 million goes to pensioners. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  million get supplementary benefit heating additions.

PROPOSAL

MAIN POINTS

3. (Contd.)

4. Extending the basic heating addition to rent and rate rebate recipients would cost an extra £170 million. Extension to all pensioners would cost at least £380 million.

5. Pensioners on rent/rate rebates qualify for 90 per cent grant (up to £90) under Homes Insulation scheme introduced in 1980. Other pensioners qualify for 66 per cent.

4. £20 Index linked  
Christmas Bonus

1. Cannot be a priority at present
2. £20 bonus would cost extra £104 million
3. This Government made bonus a regular feature.

5. Retirement pension from  
60 with no earnings rule

1. Cost of lowering male pension age to 60 is £2.5 billion, therefore too expensive
2. Government favours flexible retirement as long term objective
3. Government has promised to phase out earnings rule (in respect of present pension age) as soon as resources permit.

6. Adequate death grant  
for everyone

1. Unchanged for 15 years.
2. Would cost over £100 million to pay £190 for all deaths (ie to pay at the real value of the standard grant in 1949)
3. Seeing if the limited resources could be used more effectively to concentrate help on the families most in need of it - but recognise the need to avoid further means-testing at the time of bereavement. Statement to follow as soon as consideration completed.

## PROPOSAL

7. Free health care on demand

8. Availability of community and social services

9. Appropriate accommodation including choice

10. National scheme of travel concessions

11. Access to education and leisure facilities

## MAIN POINTS

1. the full range of National Health Service provision is available to everyone, irrespective of age

2. All people of pensionable age are exempt from prescription charges.

1. local authorities have been asked to protect these services and develop them wherever possible.

2. Every authority should be able to provide basic services (such as home helps, meals on wheels and day care) where they deem there is a need.

1. measures have been taken to help people remain in own homes eg more flexible improvement grant system.

2. Encouragement is being given to wide range of housing options - including part private part public financing of shared ownership sheltered schemes.

1. National scheme is not the answer. Decisions whether to provide concessions should remain with individual local authorities to determine in the light of local circumstances and priorities.

1. Government hopes that local authorities will continue to secure access to educational and leisure facilities for adults of all ages, and take full account of the needs of elderly people in planning provision.

## NOTE 1

## BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION OF HALF AVERAGE GROSS EARNINGS FOR A COUPLE, AND ONE THIRD FOR A SINGLE PERSON

## LINE TO TAKE

1. To increase retirement pensions and associated long term benefits to half average gross earnings for a couple and one third for a single person would cost about £11 $\frac{1}{2}$  billion a year and is therefore totally out of the question in the present economic climate. The necessary additional resources would have to be paid for through substantially increased national insurance contributions and income tax. To place an extra burden of this magnitude on the working population would simply delay and even jeopardise the recovery of the economy and would result in pensioners suffering along with the rest of the country.
  
2. The level of pensions can only be improved over a period of time and in fact this is what the new pensions scheme, in partnership with the occupational pension schemes, is doing. But this gradual improvement is as much as can be afforded in the present economic difficulties. Nevertheless, the Government has promised to price protect retirement pensions and other long term benefits over the lifetime of this Parliament and this means making good the shortfall in last year's uprating at the next uprating, that is in November 1982. The Government has also made it clear that, as the economy improves, pensioners will share in the rising living standards.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. When the new pension scheme reaches maturity at the end of this century, pension levels for people reaching retirement age should be in the region of the levels requested by the Convention. Indeed the new pensions scheme is already having a significant effect on pension levels for people currently reaching retirement age. Thus it is already possible for someone to have £5.86 weekly in additional earnings-related component on top of their basic pension.
  
4. This meeting could prove a useful opportunity to stress the Government's commitment to the new pensions scheme which came into operation in 1978 with all party agreement. In pointing out the advantages of the new scheme it is however necessary to bear in mind that most of the current generation of pensioners will have had little or no opportunity to contribute to the scheme and so will not receive the higher pensions levels paid to people now reaching retirement age.

## SIX MONTHLY BENEFIT UPDATINGS

## LINE TO TAKE

Six monthly updatings of benefit are ruled out on the grounds of cost. For example a full updating in April additional to the normal November updating would add £150 million to updating costs in 1982/83 for each one per cent brought forward. In general terms, with a steady rate of inflation, six monthly updatings are 25 per cent more costly each year than a single updating. There would also be administrative problems and an increase in administrative costs. Social Security updatings represent a very considerable administrative task and the time needed to implement an updating has necessarily to be geared to those benefits which operationally take the longest. It takes almost six months to carry out an updating of supplementary benefit and until payment of benefit is eventually computerised there is no real possibility of reducing this time scale. Six monthly updatings would thus involve staff in updating work virtually the whole year round. Foreign schemes are able to update more frequently because they do not allow weekly payments by order book, but issue their payments at monthly intervals.

Background Note

Cost A full updating of all benefits in April additional to the normal updating would add some £150 million to updating costs in 1982-83 for each one per cent of updating brought forward to April.

The equivalent costs for an additional updating of pensions and long term benefits only is £100 million.

As a further illustration the net extra benefit cost of updating retirement pension only by five per cent in May and November, over the cost of a single 10 per cent increase in November, would be about £250 million, after taking account of savings in supplementary pension.

The pattern of annual updatings in November was established by the last government in 1975, and has operated on that basis ever since. In 1978 the Labour government declined to make good a 1.9 per cent shortfall at the updating until the following November.

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## ADEQUATE HEATING ALLOWANCE COVERING ALL FORMS OF FUEL

## LINE TO TAKE

1. Our policy has been to concentrate help with heating costs on those in greatest need in order to provide a worthwhile level of assistance. We have made heating additions payable automatically to supplementary benefit householders who are severely disabled, elderly (over 70) or have young children. Over 2 million families are now getting extra help in this way and this can of course be used to help pay for any kind of fuel. In 1980 heating additions were increased well ahead of fuel price rises to their highest ever real value. Last November's increase more than maintained this advance. The Homes Insulation Scheme has also been extended to provide enhanced grants for the elderly and severely disabled on low incomes. Altogether we are now spending over £250 million a year to help poor fuel consumers and this does not include the special measures which have recently been operated because of the severe weather.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The standard rate of heating addition is £1.65 weekly; the higher rate, £4.05.

## COST OF EXTENDING SPECIAL HELP WITH FUEL BILLS TO OTHER GROUPS

Cost of every £1 of help towards a fuel bill

Pensioner households (not on supplementary pension) £6 million

Pensioner householders on housing rebates £2 million

Cost of extending supplementary benefit lower rate heating addition to

(a) all pensioner households £380 million extra.

(b) housing rebate recipients £170 million extra.

## FUEL HELP IN SEVERE WEATHER

3. The Chief Supplementary Benefits Officer recently issued guidance on application of Regulation 26 of Single Payment Regulations. This enables payments to be made to meet the extra cost of additional fuel consumption incurred by supplementary benefits claimants during exceptionally severe weather. Eligible claimants are entitled to the full cost of their excess consumption. The guidance has been issued to local offices in time to deal with the quarterly winter bills and includes instructions on how to deal with claimants on pay-as-you-go heating systems.

## THE CHRISTMAS BONUS

## LINE TO TAKE

1. An indication of the Government's concern for pensioners is our early action to legislate to make the Christmas Bonus a permanent feature of the Social Security scheme. Of course we would have wished to increase the amount of the bonus from £10, but in the present economic climate this cannot be a priority.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Christmas bonus is paid to nearly 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  million people who are, broadly speaking, pensioners, widows and disabled people.

To increase the bonus to £20 would cost an extra £104 million.

3. The bonus was first introduced by a Conservative government in 1972. The previous Labour administration did not pay a bonus in either 1975 or 1976.

The bonus is tax free.

## LOWERING PENSION AGE AND FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT

## LINE TO TAKE

1. Earlier retirement on full pensions has been ruled out on the grounds of the formidable costs involved. To reduce pension age for men to 60, for example, would add some £2.5 billions each year to central government costs. The Government recognises however that, notwithstanding the very considerable problems, a more flexible approach to retirement age is a socially desirable longer term objective. We would like individuals to have a greater freedom of choice in deciding when they wish to retire. The Social Services Committee is currently examining "The Age of Retirement" and the Government is hopeful that this opportunity for a constructive all-party examination of the issues will lead to agreement as to the best future direction for change.

2. The Government has promised to phase out the earnings rule (in respect of the present pension ages) as soon as resources permit.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The White Paper 'Growing Older' (March 1981) stated the Government position in the following terms :-

".... a scheme, combining a common pension age with effective and worthwhile provisions for flexible retirement, has attractions as a long term aim, and seems to offer the best prospects of an acceptable solution. Current constraints on spending preclude early changes. Nevertheless, the Government intends to keep such an arrangement in view as a long term objective".

4. Progress towards flexible retirement will almost certainly have to wait until the new earnings-related pension scheme builds towards maturity at the end of this century. Given time, it should increasingly be possible to convert the higher entitlement of those approaching pension age into an actuarially reduced but still adequate early pension.

## DEATH GRANT

## LINE TO TAKE

1. We are very much aware of the widespread concern about the present level of the Death Grant which has remained unchanged for 14 years, particularly in the light of the ever increasing cost of funerals. We appreciate that for some people the responsibility for paying a funeral account or of receiving a decent burial is a source of acute anxiety. For some months now, we have been looking at ways in which greater help might be given in such cases.

2. The problem is that we have to look at the grant in the context of other competing demands for resources in the social security field and against the background of the current difficult economic situation. It is often advocated that the grant should be increased in cash terms to what it was in 1949 when it was introduced. This would mean a grant of about £190 at a total cost of about £110 million if paid in respect of all deaths. We cannot contemplate extra expenditure of this level at the present time; especially as this would mean giving money in many cases where it was not needed. Our promised announcement on the future of the death grant will be made as soon as possible.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The study "Families, Funerals and Finance" which was published in 1980 found that relatively few of those interviewed said that they had had any difficulty in finding the money to meet the funeral costs. The fieldwork which led to those findings is some years old and we estimate that the number of people in difficulty with payments for funerals is now higher but the same argument applies. The Government has therefore been directing its efforts to determining whether existing resources can be used to give better help in the small number of cases in which funeral costs give rise to serious hardship.

4. If the deputation refer to the delay in making the announcement about the future of the death grant (which had been promised before Christmas) reference can be made to the difficulty of setting up any new scheme at a time when resources are severely limited and of identifying those who need the grant without the intrusion of a new means test at what is always a very stressful time.

Pensioners should, as of right, have ready access to comprehensive free health care on demand.

Line to Take

The full range of National Health Service provision is available to everyone, irrespective of age. Clear evidence of the fact that services are readily available to those over retirement age is that a high proportion of the work of the community health services is devoted to the care of elderly people and that elderly patients occupy nearly half of all National Health Service beds. Moreover, over 40 per cent of current spending on the National Health Service is related to services for elderly people.

The Government's White Paper on elderly people "Growing Older" stresses the importance of the right kind of health services to meet the special needs of those over retirement age, especially as they grow older. The policies and priorities handbook "Care in Action", issued by the Department of Health and Social Security at the same time, asks health authorities to give priority to the development of services for elderly people, particularly the most vulnerable and frail.

All people of pensionable age are exempt from prescription charges. Those in hospital or in receipt of a supplementary pension qualify for free dental and optical treatment under the National Health Service; others with low income may also be eligible for help towards the cost of such treatment. In connection with the increase in the prescription charge in April, the Government has confirmed that the exemption arrangements will continue unchanged.

Pensioners should, as of right, be able to call on the full range of community and personal social services to give full support as need arises, including, for example, home helps, meals on wheels, chiropody, television and telephone.

#### Line to Take

The Government recognises the importance of services such as these for elderly people in need - especially those who are frail and live alone. We have kept our promise to maintain and develop the National Health Service which is of such vital importance for elderly people. And we have asked local authorities to protect and strengthen their services for those most in need. The figures show they are doing so. We accept that more could be done but first we must get the economy right and that will benefit everyone.

Every authority should be able to provide basic services such as home helps, meals-on-wheels and day care where needed. There are also encouraging signs that authorities are actively looking for ways to supplement these traditional services with imaginative schemes involving care attendants and day and night sitting - often drawing on the rich diversity of voluntary service available in the community.

#### Defensive Briefing

##### HOME HELP CHARGES

We are aware that a number of local authorities have raised their charges for home help. Local authorities are empowered to charge for home helps and other personal social services, and it is our view that they should seek to recover some of the costs of providing these services in this way when they can do so without creating undue hardship.

##### CHIROPODY

There is a shortage of chiropodists, which will persist for several years, notwithstanding a considerable increase in the output of trained people. The vast majority of registered chiropodists already work within the health service, and some authorities have recruited unqualified staff as foot care assistants to undertake routine tasks so that chiropodists can use their skills to best advantage.

## PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES: BACKGROUND NOTE

### POLICY

The Government's handbook for health and local authorities 'Care in Action', published in 1981, sets out the main policies and priorities that local authorities should follow in running the services for which they are responsible. 'Care in Action' asks health and local authorities to strengthen the primary and community care services together with neighbourhood and voluntary support to enable elderly people to live at home, and to encourage an active approach to treatment and rehabilitation to enable elderly people to return to the community from hospital whenever possible. 'Care in Action' does not attempt to prescribe in detail how the services are to be developed; it is a matter for health and local authorities to decide how to pursue these policies and priorities in their own locality.

### POWERS

Under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, where a local authority have accepted that it is necessary for them to make one or all of the specified arrangements to meet the needs of a disabled person, they have a duty to do so. These arrangements include home helps, adaptations to the home, assistance with television, holidays, travel and with the installation and rental of a telephone. Local authorities also have (discretionary) powers under Section 45 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to promote the welfare of elderly people by providing services such as meals and recreation in the home and elsewhere, practical assistance in the home, visiting and advisory services and social work support.

### EXPENDITURE

There is some variation in the types and levels of service offered by local authorities. Local judgement has led some authorities to put more of their resources into the development of domiciliary services while others have chosen to develop their residential provision.

In the context of reductions in public expenditure, local authorities have been asked to protect services for the most vulnerable, including the very elderly and the disabled. Evidence suggests that collectively they have done so - expenditure on personal social services increased by 7 per cent in constant terms from 1979/79 to 1980/81. Nevertheless there has been a reduction on some Section 2 items (eg no. of telephone installations provided for disabled and elderly people fell by 50 per cent between 1978/79 and 1980/81).

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Pensioners should, as of right, live in accommodation which is appropriate to personal need and circumstance with a reasonable degree of choice including sheltered housing.

Line to Take

The Government believes that most elderly people want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. We have taken measures to help. The Home Improvement grant system has been made more flexible so that local authorities can for example give grants for small improvements such as a more effective heating appliance. The rates of grant have been increased; repairs grants have been introduced for older dwellings - many of which are occupied by elderly people; and priority rates have been introduced for old people to insulate their homes.

We want to encourage a wide range of options for elderly people who wish to, or have no alternative but to move. At the same time it is essential to make the best use of public resources. Support continues for the traditional schemes of sheltered housing for rent by local authorities and housing associations and other schemes specifically for the elderly. The Housing Corporation's programme for 1982/83 for example, will provide £26 million for new schemes for elderly people built by housing associations. But we are particularly looking to part-public and part-private financing of shared ownership sheltered schemes. This is why, in the Housing Corporation's programme a specific allocation has been made for Leasehold for the Elderly schemes.

## HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY: BACKGROUND NOTE

1. The detailed administration of a local authority's housing programme is a matter for local decision. However the Secretary of State for the Environment has asked local authorities to concentrate their available resources on those in special need such as the elderly and disabled. The need for sheltered housing is one of the factors taken into account in determining the allocation to local authorities.
2. The housing capital expenditure for 1982/83 in England and Wales announced recently includes an allocation of £556m (no change in real terms from the previous two years) for Housing Corporation loans to housing associations. Increases in individual parts of the 1982/83 programme include that for new schemes for the elderly £26m (a substantial increase in real terms) will be available for new projects for rented homes for the elderly next year.
3. The Department of Environment's measures aimed at helping elderly people to stay in their own homes include the introduction of more flexibility into the Home Improvement Grant system, the introduction of repairs grants for older property and increases in the rate of home insulation grants for elderly people. As well as the traditional sheltered housing for rent (specially designed housing with a warden and alarm system) one option being developed for people who need to move is shared ownership schemes. Housing Associations are operating Leasehold for the Elderly schemes in which elderly people buy an equity in a sheltered unit and Central Government funds the rest.

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A pensioner should, as of right, be able to use a National Scheme of substantial concessionary facilities on all public transport in all parts of the country.

### Line to Take

A national scheme is not the answer. Decisions whether to provide concessions should remain with individual local authorities who are familiar with local needs and priorities and can decide how scarce resources should be spent. A half fare national scheme would not solve the problem of variations between areas unless the existing more generous schemes, such as London's, were reduced to half fares. This would be unpopular with pensioners who would lose their free travel, and with the authorities who operate the schemes. To bring all the schemes up to the level of London's could cost somewhere in the order of £400m.

### Background

All local authorities have powers under S138 of the Transport Act 1968 to provide concessionary bus fares for people of pensionable age. Most local authorities operate schemes but there are wide variations in the value of concessions offered (from free travel in a number of metropolitan areas to £2 or £3 of tokens a year in some rural areas), in the areas and times they are valid, and the charges made to the concessionaires. These variations reflect local choice and the fact that there are other ways of helping elderly people which also make demands on scarce resources. About 10 per cent of elderly people live too far from a bus route to use concessions and another 10 per cent are too frail to board a bus.

GLC There is to be no special grant to the GLC to finance its concessionary fares scheme despite press reports that £65m is to be provided. All that is being done is to give the GLC legal powers similar to those available to other local authorities to provide concessionary travel for elderly and disabled people.

British Rail's Senior Citizen Railcard, which provides half fare for those who buy a card, is operated as a commercial venture and pays for itself.

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Pensioners should, as of right, have full access to a varied and extensive range of education and leisure facilities.

Line to Take

The Government's White Paper on elderly people 'Growing Older' discusses ways in which they might be enabled to... enjoy a full and active retirement and suggests that more should be done to improve their access to educational and leisure facilities. The Government hopes that local authorities will continue to secure access to educational facilities for adults of all ages, and take full account of the needs of elderly people in planning their provision. There is a growing recognition that elderly people may have particular needs in terms of the timing, location and cost of courses. Similarly, arrangements at sports and leisure centres - especially those with swimming pools and gymnasia - could frequently be modified, in small ways and at no extra cost, to take greater account of the needs of older people.

BACKGROUND NOTES

a. Education With the exception of specifically vocational courses, there is no age limit for entry to educational provision for adults at any level. Many retired people prefer to participate in provision open to all ages as it provides an opportunity to mix with younger people, but courses are sometimes run specifically to meet the needs of older people. Most authorities offer concessionary fees to retirement pensioners and, recognising that retired people may need day-time provision close to their homes, attempt, subject to resources, to make such provision.

b. Sport The Sports Council is actively looking at ways of increasing provision for older people. In 1983, it will be running a campaign aimed at people in late middle age to try and ensure that as people reach retirement they are aware of the opportunities that exist. If any groups of older people consider that facilities are lacking in their area, they can approach the Regional Offices of the Sports Council.