

# Building the pensioners' movement



**How to set up and run  
a local pensioner group**

*A National Pensioners Convention Handbook*

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### **Introduction**

The history of the pensioners' movement in Britain is based on the engagement and participation of older people in the campaign to improve their dignity, welfare and financial security within the wider society.

Experience has shown that this is best achieved through the creation of local groups which are able to encourage all pensioners within their area to become involved in the issues that affect their everyday lives – from the availability and cost of home care services and the rate of Council Tax to the need for free nationwide travel and a higher basic state pension.

There is no doubt that the over-60s' lobby is now growing in strength and the need to have an active pensioner group in every major town and city has been part of the Convention's "Operation Grey Power" initiative – through which we now have in excess of 500 affiliated bodies.

By forming and being part of a group you can also begin to help ensure that the needs and aspirations of older people are heard and acted upon at all levels of government. The Convention was formed nearly 25 years ago to give pensioners a voice – now is the time to take that message throughout the country.

### **Getting started**

Many groups start as a result of a few people wishing to get together to campaign on important issues – and having a number of enthusiastic organizers is essential to getting things done. This small group will be responsible for organizing the first meeting of the organization.

To get started, you will need:

- A small venue where you can meet (eg. A local community centre, library, trade union office, Age Concern etc). Make sure this venue is easily reached by public transport and has suitable access for those with mobility problems.
- Make contact with the NPC so that we can offer advice and guidance. It may also be helpful for us to send someone along to talk to your small group of organizers.

The main purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Draw up a list of potential supporters (individuals/groups) that you could invite to an inaugural meeting (look in the Yellow Pages/local libraries for details of branches of retired trade unionists, Royal British Legion, lunch clubs, day centres etc where people might be interested in joining a pensioners' group).

- Discuss how to set up the group (see Appendix A for a model constitution).
- Consider the role and activities of the group (see overleaf). The NPC can also offer advice.

### **What is the role of a local group?**

It is often the case that those with responsibility for deciding policies which affect the lives of older people, seldom ask them first for their opinions. One of the key roles of local groups is to therefore put forward the views of pensioners on a range of issues to MPs, MEPs, local authorities and other statutory bodies. Whilst these views might be on local issues, groups should also raise national issues at a local level.

It is also useful to promote these views and issues to the wider public by gaining publicity through the local media (see the NPC's briefing paper on *How to work with the media* for advice). This in turn will enable you to recruit, raise funds and campaign – activities that are all essential to the life of a local group.

### **Being part of the pensioners' movement**

The NPC's federal structure promotes the principle of delegatory democracy, so that the widest possible number of pensioners can have their views represented and discussed, and in turn, receive information and material, through the structures of their own organisations.

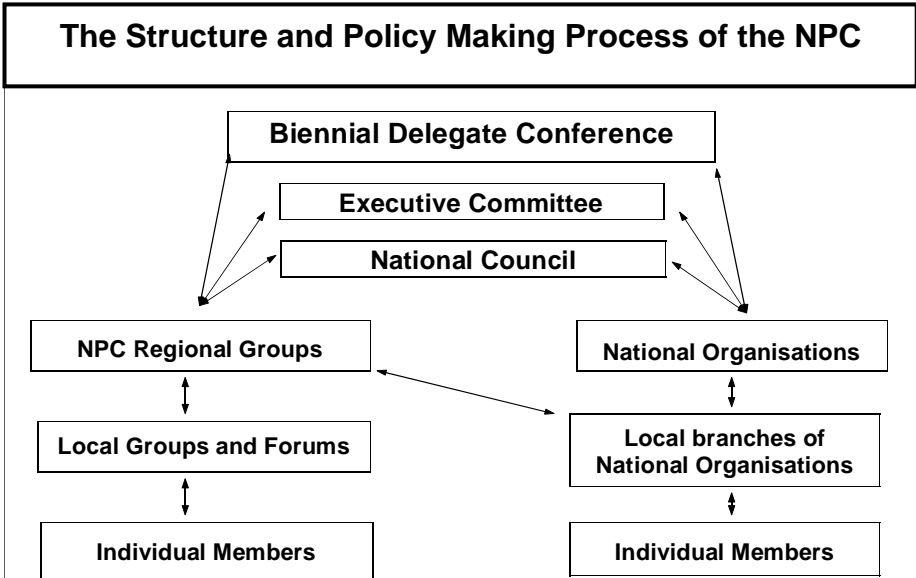
Local pensioner groups and forums are therefore encouraged to affiliate to their NPC regional body and that body has representation on both the NPC Executive Committee (EC) and National Council

(NC). They can also join the NPC directly, so as to ensure that they receive all the important information, publications and newsletters.

Likewise, local branches of retired trade unionists and federations can have their views promoted via their national body's delegates to the EC and NC.

In addition, major policy issues, changes to the constitution and the election of the NPC's officers are dealt with at the Biennial Delegate Conference open to all recognised national affiliates and regional groups.

How a local group fits into the NPC's structure:



Your group can affiliate to the Convention for just £12.50 a year. In return you will receive regular pamphlets, briefing papers, general campaign information and bulk copies of the NPC's newspaper – *The Message*. Most importantly, your group will also have the opportunity to join the NPC's regional group covering your area and through that body, elect the leadership of the NPC, determine its policy and have a say on the Convention's National Council and Executive Committee.

### **What's in a name?**

Over the years, pensioners have decided to call their groups any number of names – which meet their local needs. However, the most common tend to be Action Groups, Associations or Forums. This decision is entirely down to those involved – the important thing is that the group becomes part of the Convention's wider structure.

### **Launching the group**

Before you officially launch the new group make sure you have:

- Publicised the meeting in local libraries, post offices, shops etc and informed the local media
- Organised a guest speaker to talk about the importance of having an active pensioners' group in your area. The NPC will be able to provide someone if required.
- Booked a decent venue which is easily accessed by all concerned. You should also consider providing light refreshments for those who attend.
- Worked out who is going to pay for this work (see section on how to raise funds).
- Produced an agenda for the meeting that will cover all the business. You will also need someone experienced to chair the meeting, a draft constitution to propose to the meeting, a minute taker and someone to take the names and addresses

of those who attend. Having people who can write letters, with access to a computer or photocopying facilities will also be useful.

At the meeting you will need to:

- Approve a constitution (see Appendix A for details).
- Elect a chair, secretary and treasurer and a small executive committee.
- Set the date of the next meeting.

### **Involving everyone**

One of the main aims of the group will be to recruit members. One of the best ways of doing this is to recruit both individual members as well as local groups, such as branches of retired trade unionists. You should also ensure that the group does not end up being full of white men! Women, ethnic elders and disabled older people should also be encouraged to get involved. Remember, the more diverse and representative the group – the greater its strength when challenging those in power. Above all, it is important that the group is run by pensioners for pensioners.

### **Getting and staying active**

It is important that groups have something useful to do in order to generate interest, recruit new members and raise funds.

Some of the activities you could try include:

- Public meetings – get a guest speaker to talk about an interesting issue and let the media know. Holding regular meetings of members with discussions/socials will also help maintain interest.
- Petitions – these provide a great opportunity for getting out on the street and raising your profile with the public.
- Newsletters – these can be as simple or as complicated as you are able, but whatever their style they are an important way of keeping people informed of what the group is doing.
- Lobbying – most groups regularly set up meetings with the local council/MPs to discuss issues of concern.
- Letters – writing to the local papers is a good way of advertising the group and raising public awareness. Letters can also be sent to local authorities and MPs as part of your general campaigning.

### **How do you raise funds?**

Local groups need money to survive and in order to pay for printing, postage, meeting rooms etc. The main sources of funding can include:

- Membership – fees from your members and affiliated organizations will bring in much needed funds and the more members, the more money the group will have.
- Donations – these can be sought from local trade unions and businesses.
- Grants – the local authority should be approached to see if they will offer your group a small grant for running expenses. The Community Fund can also be a useful source of funding for small groups (see Appendix B for details).

- Speaking Up for Our Age – this programme run by Help the Aged often gives grants to groups to help them get started (see Appendix B for details).
- Fundraising – many groups run raffles and other events to raise funds.

### **What happens now?**

There may of course already be an active group in your area that you can join – but if not talk to syour friends and neighbours. Ask them if they'd be interested in forming a pensioner group in your area. If you can identify a few committed individuals you can begin. The information in this handbook is far from comprehensive but it will help you to start. Use it to guide you through the process and remember that as part of the NPC, we will always be available to offer advice and guidance on any issue you may be facing. We can arrange for activists from other groups to come and talk to your group if you need it or offer advice over the telephone or in correspondence. Remember to keep in touch and good luck.

## Appendix

### A: Model Constitution

1. Name

The name of the organisation shall be the [to be completed].  
Hereafter referred to as the organisation.

2. Aims and Objectives

- (a) To promote the welfare and interests of older people within the [area covered by the group to be completed].
- (b) To provide a platform where matters of concern to older people can be raised with statutory bodies and others.
- (c) To act as an umbrella body for all pensioners and their organisations when making representations to MPs, MEPs, the local authority and other statutory bodies.
- (d) To be a campaigning but non-party political body that is linked to the National Pensioners Convention and supportive of its policies.

3. Membership

Membership of the organisation shall be open to:

- (a) All older people resident within [area to be completed]. The fee shall be [amount to be completed] a year.
- (b) Any organisation within [area to be completed] that is interested in the concerns of older people. The fee shall be [amount to be completed] a year.

4. Finances

- (a) A bank/building society account shall be opened in the name of the organisation.
- (b) Two signatories shall be required to sign any cheques.

- (c) Audited accounts shall be presented by the treasurer to every Annual General Meeting for approval.

#### 5. Meetings

- (a) An Annual General Meeting open to all members and affiliates will be held in [month to be completed] each year at which a chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer and [number to be completed] committee members shall be elected. These posts shall constitute the Executive Committee.
- (b) There will be at least a further [number to be completed] general meetings of all the membership a year. In between such times the Executive Committee shall meet as appropriate.
- (c) A quorum for general meetings shall be 10 and for Executive Committee meetings shall be 5.
- (d) Voting will be by a simple majority unless when seeking to change the constitution, which shall require at least two thirds of those present voting in favour.

#### 6. Dissolution

- (a) At a properly convened special general meeting, the organisation can be dissolved on a two thirds majority of those members present.
- (b) The meeting shall also determine how to dispose of any financial balances within the organisation's account.
- (c) The outgoing secretary will notify the National Pensioners Convention of the decision.

## **B: Useful addresses**

National Pensioners Convention  
19-23 Ironmonger Row, London EC1V 3QP  
Tel: 0207-553-6510  
Fax: 0207-553-6511  
Email: [admin@natpencon.org.uk](mailto:admin@natpencon.org.uk)  
[www.natpencon.org.uk](http://www.natpencon.org.uk)

Speaking Up for Our Age c/o Help the Aged  
207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ  
Tel: 0207-78-1114  
Email: [info@helptheaged.org.uk](mailto:info@helptheaged.org.uk)  
[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

## **C: Contacts book**

(Fill in yourself and keep for future reference)

Local Authority:

Local trade unions:

Churches:

Age Concern groups:

Regional NPC group:

Others: