

Debates from the retired members' group annual delegate conference 2020

Health and social care – motions 1 and 2

Motion 1 – Asbestos claims service

The first motion on the agenda said the national committee had failed to provide information that delegates at the RMG's 2018 annual delegate conference had called for. It also questioned the effectiveness of Prospect's monitoring of the asbestos claims service.

The national committee argued that most of the information was provided in the annual report and the missing information could not be provided without excessive cost.

At the end of the debate, Mike Cobb (Avon Valley) suggested that there were cost problems with carrying the motion and a risk of changing policy adversely if it was lost.

He suggested that delegates might like to move to next business, effectively deleting the motion from the agenda. A motion to this effect was moved by another delegate and next business was carried with the required two thirds majority.

Motion 2 – guillotined

Pensions – motions 3 to 7

Motion 3 – Protected Persons Regulations

Delegates backed a motion calling on Prospect's national executive committee to ask the House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee to consider government plans to amend the Protected Persons Regulations set out in the Electricity (Protected Persons) England and Wales Pension Regulations 1990.

The motion from South East area expressed concern that the government intends to amend the Protected Persons Regulations – even though a government consultation showed a majority of responses were against such an amendment.

The motion had originally been marked as existing policy but this was removed and the motion debated, a motion to remit the motion was lost before the motion was carried.

Motion 4 – EU employment and pension law

Employees and pensioners could be disadvantaged compared to their European counterparts if the government tries to eliminate or reduce European Union legal protections.

Delegates backed a call from South West Midlands area for Prospect to lobby the Trades Union Congress to co-ordinate action by all unions to lobby the government so that all EU employment and pension law is carried over into UK law unchanged if Brexit occurs. Brexit occurred on the day after the conference, but the issues it raised still persist.

Motion 5 – State pensions and lack of awareness about National Insurance contribution rates

A motion from Scotland South highlighted the damage done by shortfalls in National Insurance contributions – and that women are worst affected.

The motion said at least 60% of workers have no knowledge of the rate of their NI contributions, nor do they realise that underpaying NI can have consequences for their state pensions entitlements on retirement.

Delegates backed a call for the NEC to lobby the government to provide a full State Pension statement, including NI contributions, to every worker over 50 years old.

The statement should be issued well before retirement so that employees who have not paid full NI contributions have the choice of making voluntary contributions.

Motion 6 – Defined contribution pension schemes

Delegates backed a motion from Southern area instructing the NEC to review Prospect's guidance to members and representatives on the contributions that should go into defined contribution pension schemes to ensure that members receive adequate pensions in retirement.

It also called on the national executive committee to make any appropriate improvements to the guidance.

Motion 7 – Pension scheme trustees

Delegates were concerned that Prospect wasn't doing enough to educate members who are pension scheme trustees.

The motion said attendance at Prospect events for such members was going down. Delegates also flagged that there were barriers to members participating in the online pension resources, namely webinars, because the minimum operating system requirement was Windows 10.

Delegates backed the motion which called on the national committee to submit a motion to the union's 2020 national conference instructing the NEC to promote these briefing and training events as widely as possible to increase attendance by Prospect members who are pension scheme trustees.

Communications – motions 8 to 12

Motions 8 and 9 – Increasing membership of the RMG

Delegates discussed two motions from Wales that are aimed at recruiting more members to the RMG. Motion 8, which instructed the national committee and Prospect HQ to investigate the possibility of extending the present 6-month time period to join the RMG to 12 months, was carried.

Motion 9, which instructed the national committee to take the relevant action to make RMG membership continuous on retirement, with automatic transfer in to the Retired Members' Group unless the members chose to opt out, was lost

Motion 10 – Information about joining the RMG

All call for the NEC to ensure that information about joining the RMG is included in every edition of Profile and in all all-member e-mails was remitted.

Delegates agreed with the sentiment behind the motion, but felt the instruction was too prescriptive and the national committee could find a more effective way of getting the message about retired membership across.

Motions 11 and 12 – guillotined

Climate change – motions 13 and 14

Motion 13

The climate crisis provoked heated and passionate debate.

A national committee motion noted that 64,000 early deaths each year in the UK are caused by air pollution.

It said that a dialogue with government that seeks to improve their manifesto climate change commitments would help to reduce these unnecessary deaths.

Such a dialogue should include encouraging the government to commit to:

- consult on the earliest date to phase out the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars
- invest in Superbus Networks with lower fares and increased frequency of service, and
- create a new £350M cycling infrastructure fund with mandatory design standards for new routes.

Appropriate levels of funding from national and local government for all areas of the UK would be required in order to achieve these aims.

The motion instructed the national committee to submit a motion to Prospect's 2020 national conference instructing the NEC to take appropriate action to tackle the concerns and issues raised in the motion.

But delegates were divided. They agreed that Prospect has members with the expertise to formulate policy.

Opponents said: the motion did not go far enough eg rail travel and building standards were not mentioned; was too prescriptive and was not science or evidence-based.

It was suggested that the specific examples given were either constrictive or restrictive depending on individual points of view, the motion would have been better without those examples.

Some delegates thought that opposing the motion would send the wrong message.

The motion was carried.

Motion 14 – guillotined

Legal – motion 15

Motion 15, which noted with concern that Northern Ireland does not have legislation in force to prohibit age discrimination against older people by the providers of goods, facilities and services, was withdrawn after agreement from the Northern Ireland area.

With the restoration of devolved government at Stormont, the action required by the motion had had been overtaken by events. The sentiment of the motion was carried forward into Emergency Motion 2.

RMG organisation – motions 16 to 24

Motion 16 – A motion calling on Prospect to seek changes to the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme to ensure that secondary beneficiaries would continue to receive the pension for life was lost.

Motions 17 and 18 – Two motions which aim to ensure that retired members are referred to as “retired” rather than “unemployed” in the rules were carried.

Motion 19, to amend the RMG rules to allow area committees to nominate candidates to the Standing Orders Committee, was withdrawn.

Motion 20 – Submitting motions and nominations

Delegates backed a motion moved by Andy Bye on behalf of national committee calling for greater flexibility on the submission of motions and nominations.

The motion would amend the rules to allow both area committees and area annual general meetings to approve motions and nominations to the group’s annual delegate conference.

Motions 21 and 22 – communicating conference decisions and action taken

Delegates backed two motions from Southern area calling for improved communication from the national committee to ensure that members, delegates and reps are properly informed about decisions made at the annual delegate conference and progress made on instructions throughout the year.

Motion 21 called for the result of each conference motion to be communicated to members within five working days.

Motion 22 instructed the national committee to provide an update on actions taken on each motion not later than July 31 following conference.

Motion 23 – National committee minutes

Robbie Ridoutt, Central Southern area, questioned whether members ever hear what happens at national committee meetings.

He suggested that it would improve transparency and engagement if, for example, the minutes of each meeting were forwarded to area secretaries who could then distribute them to members.

Arthur Bavister, speaking on behalf of the national committee, asked conference to reject the motion on the grounds that it placed an unnecessary extra burden on headquarters staff.

He suggested it should be up to area reps to provide the secretary and area committee with the relevant information. Delegates disagreed and backed the motion.

Motion 24 – Addressing anomalies in RMG rules

A motion to address anomalies in the RMG rules sparked considerable procedural debate but after a move to remit the motion was lost, the motion was carried.

The motion, from South East Midlands area, called on the national committee to prepare rule changes for next year's conference to address the anomalies.

Rule 13 says that in the case of any conflict or ambiguity, Prospect rules apply. This rules out any differences in timing for conferences, as well as other items. Sector rules have wording that address this.

The motion also pointed out that no deadlines are specified for:

- actions taken from previous conference
- issuing the draft annual report.
- reference back on actions taken
- the date for naming annual delegate conference delegates and deputies.

Prospect organisation – motions 25 and 26

Motion 25 – Political independence

A motion which claimed that Prospect had moved away from its historic position of being a non-political union was lost.

Andy Bye, on behalf of the national committee, said that no money from the political fund ever went to a political party, but was spent on political campaigns that were in members' interests. It was pointed out that Prospect and its predecessor unions have always been political, but never party political.

Motion 26 – Prospect's centenary

Prospect's national conference in 2020 should recognise and give thanks for the work done by all members past and present over the past 100 years, delegates agreed.

Finance – motions 27 to 30

Motions 27 and 28 – Indices

Two motions from the Southern and Thames Valley areas on the current use of price indices generated a lot of expert comment from delegates.

The Treasury is consulting on whether to align RPI and CPIH as the index to which pension rises are tied.

Motion 27 said the national committee should "use its best endeavours to ensure that Prospect's submissions to such consultation advocate that RPI or its successor should be an index that accurately reflects the cost of living experienced by households".

Motion 28 called for the national committee to submit a motion to the union's 2020 biennial national conference instructing the NEC to campaign for the inflation index used to uprate pensions and benefits to be based on the principles laid down in the paper, "Towards a Household Inflation Index", published in the Journal of The Royal Statistical Society in May 2015.

Both motions were carried.

Motion 29 – Intergenerational fairness

Delegates expressed concern that the government would implement the findings of an Intergenerational Fairness final report that was published in May 2018.

The report advocated:

- a 1% increase to Earnings-Related National Insurance Contributions (ERNIC) for over 50s
- the reintroduction of ERNIC at the highest rate for those choosing to work past pensionable age, including levying ERNIC on occupational pensions, and
- scraping the existing State Pension triple lock.

Speaking on behalf of the national committee, Andy Bye backed the motion but pointed out that the Conservative party manifesto had committed to retaining the triple lock.

The motion, instructing the national committee to ask the NEC seek assurances from the government that all other avenues will be explored before increasing the tax burden on workers and pensioners, was carried.

Motion 30 – Cost of closing low-value accounts

Closing down low value National Savings and Investment (NS&I) accounts when someone dies can cost more than the total value of the account due to for example having to provide a death certificate and certified copy of the will, delegates heard.

Motion 30 called for the NEC to lobby for it to be easier to close small NS&I/premium bonds accounts. Dave Robinson, speaking on behalf of the national committee, asked delegates to remit the motion. He said that thousands of accounts are available and people who have these accounts accepted the small print which is not something the union has influence over.

Robinson made a pledge that Wise Eye magazine would do an article about the pitfalls of these accounts so that members could make informed decisions.

Delegates agreed and remitted the motion.

Motions 31, 32 and 33 – ruled out of order and not debated

Emergency motions

Emergency motion 1 – Age discrimination in Northern Ireland

RMG secretary Andy Bye expressed concern that the Northern Ireland Assembly does not have legislation in place which outlaws age discrimination by the providers of goods, facilities and services.

Delegates backed the motion instructing the NEC to campaign through all relevant avenues to extend all current UK age discrimination legislation to Northern Ireland.

Emergency motion 2 – NHS privatisation

David Sim, speaking on behalf of the national committee, moved Emergency Motion 2 with a passionate speech outlining the various ways bits of the NHS were being privatised and sold off.

He highlighted a selection of articles and investigative programmes which showed that, despite government statements to the contrary, bits of the NHS including pharmaceuticals and patient data, would be on the table in US/UK trade talks.

It was suggested the aims of the motion were outside the NEC's remit. Delegates disagreed and carried the motion.

Emergency motion 3 generated a passionate debate. Delegates argued about what constituted an area representative and whether or not those representatives had been unfairly excluded from a national committee meeting in January 2020.

Arthur Bavister, speaking on behalf of the national committee (NC), said there was an unwritten NC ruling that, where a deputy attending the NC meeting was also a delegate to the group conference, they would be asked to leave the meeting while the NC discussed the motions for the conference.

Mike Cobb, Avon Valley, who had moved the motion, said there should not be an unwritten rule and that a motion to formally make it a rule was lost in 2019. The motion, which called for the national committee to be censured over this, was narrowly lost.