

Hornsey Pensioners Action Group article due Jan 7th 2022

Hornsey Pensioners Action Group continued to struggle against separation and exclusion throughout Covid-19. The public meeting in March 2020 was cancelled and we only resumed live meetings - with caution - in September 2021. However, our bulletins were sent out each month, augmented by contributions from members. Nearly a quarter of our membership cannot access email and receive printed copies by post. Nine bulletins were distributed in 2020 and twelve in 2021, all of which can be downloaded from www.hornseypensionersactiongroup.org.uk. These are worth reading for the stories written by members.

Some members make use of available IT communications, but many of us do not even have smart phones. This has prevented our conducting meetings using Zoom. Our group persists in demanding that the whole range of communication methods are retained to ensure that no one is excluded. To reduce costs, companies push the use of online services. Even government organisations often omit telephone and postal contacts. We protest when important consultations are held with little publicity in the form of documentation, entirely dependent on websites. We demand both postal addresses and telephone numbers alongside the online communication.

My personal view is that the current reliance upon IT communications is not wise. In the mid-1960s I worked with computers when it was good practice to keep back up records when a business undertook computerisation.

Communications are an important public service and need to be resilient, but public services are now fragmented, with different strands becoming privately owned. Even for energy services, delivered with competition rather than cooperation, we have no national strategy to ensure that the service is resilient to unexpected challenge. Note the loss of government control over communications – postal services, telephone, mobile phones - all now privately owned. This is risky - the recent storm that brought flooding in the north disrupted both power and communications. Mobile phones need charging and satellites themselves are not immune to damage.

Those without access to IT need traditional means of communicating, but for everyone's sake, it is wise that the government takes responsibility to maintain a robust range of communication services.

349 words.

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