

Wednesday March 16, 2005

Age Concern's response to the BUDGET

Gordon Lishman, Director-General of Age Concern England, said:

"The Chancellor could not afford to ignore older people in today's Budget. Older voters are most likely to turn out and their votes have the power to determine the outcome of the General Election.

"Free local bus travel will be very popular with pensioners and will help many people to stay in contact with their friends and family more easily.

"Many pensioners will be hugely relieved by the Chancellor's announcement on Council Tax. Inflation-busting rises in recent years have been a major headache for many pensioners and the £200 payment will help to ease the strain in the short-term. But what is really needed is a fairer system of taxation in place of Council Tax, which is linked to people's ability to pay, so that older people don't have to rely on one-off payments.

"But the reality is that two million pensioners are still in poverty and these measures do not solve the root cause of the problem. The basic state pension is disgracefully low and small annual increases are not good enough. The Government must increase the basic state pension to at least £109 per week and move away from mass means-testing."