



A helping hand

✔ Talya Misiri speaks to National Federation of Occupational Pensioners CEO Malcolm Booth on the NFOP's influence on pensioners, schemes and trustees

Can you give us an overview of what the NFOP is and does?

The National Federation of Occupational Pensioners (NFOP) provides help and support to people in receipt of a company or private or pension via a number of member benefits and services. Founded in 1930, NFOP is the oldest and largest occupational pensioner organisation in the UK. It currently has just over 60,000 members with over 120 local groups across the country.

Groups meet on a regular basis and offer a social interaction, as well as an opportunity for members to voice their opinions or concerns on issues relating to older people in today's society.

Membership benefits include helplines on legal, tax, computer and financial issues, in addition to member discounts on a range of products and services such as electrical, private audiology, insurance and motor services.

Members receive a magazine six times a year, which provides lifestyle articles and updates on issues affecting pensions and the NFOP's interaction with government on wider pensioner matters.

What does the NFOP offer that pensions schemes' welfare services do not?

NFOP has a separate charity called the NFOP Welfare Fund, which provides support to members who find it difficult to replace household items that fail or who require specialist equipment or changes to their homes due to deteriorating health.

NFOP has developed a network of organisations to provide support to members and is independent from the scheme. It can assist in areas that a scheme welfare fund may not be able to do. As NFOP is funded by membership subscriptions, it is not as constrained in its activities as a scheme welfare fund may be.

Scheme welfare services are however more likely to be able to provide a one-to-one welfare officer service, which NFOP is not in a position to provide.

What kind of assistance does the NFOP provide for members of bigger schemes – for example for BT, Kingfisher and British Steel scheme members?

Over many years working with the pensions schemes, NFOP provides a supportive link to the administrators and trustees. The primary concern of scheme members is 'will I receive my next pension payment?' Any change or perceived threat to those payments automatically and understandably generates concern. NFOP strives to educate members on key issues, dismiss myths and reassure.

Where a member has a specific issue relating to their pension, NFOP will use its contacts with the scheme to facilitate a solution and avoid complaints.

What are the key pension areas that NFOP members seek help on?

The majority of our pensioner members, as with most of the population, don't have an understanding of how pensions work – their primary focus is the payment arriving in their account. Any suggestion that this may be at risk prompts concern. Commentary in the national media about any scheme sponsor often triggers calls asking if the pension is safe.

Sadly, when a member dies we are often contacted by their surviving partner unsure of what their pension entitlement will be. In some cases the expectation of a 'half pension' is not met because the arrangements to guarantee 'half pension' had not been taken at the time of the legislative change.

Pension Incentive Exercises and any other 'out of the ordinary' communication can also prompt contact from members, sometimes seeking 'advice' that we are unable to provide or, in other circumstances, simply reassurance that this is not a scam.

In general, we have found that our member's confidence in dealing with more complex matters declines the longer they are retired and NFOP believes that it can and does provide a source of reassurance and comfort for our members.

What impact did the introduction of the freedom and choice reform have on the federation?

There has been little direct impact on the federation as membership would not be affected should they choose to go down that route. NFOP is concerned there



is also becoming a more prominent issue. NFOP's experience over the past 80 years provides a valuable insight into how pensioners can react and identify possible unforeseen reactions.

NFOP can provide the 'caring face of the scheme', which may not be in the remit of the trustees.

Will the NFOP be introducing any new initiatives in 2018?

We are always looking for new services which could be attractive to our members and their families. We are working on some health and fitness benefits and making some of our existing benefits even more enticing by offering additional discounts and money-off incentives that are not available to non-members. We are also seeking to encourage smaller pensioner groups to join with NFOP, while maintaining their autonomy, so that they can access the benefits for their members and provide a stronger voice for their concerns.

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is a risk that members may choose to move from their defined benefit scheme without taking full account of the impact on survivor benefits and with the risk that they may fall victim to one of the many scams that are operating in this area.

How are services tailored to members?

We listen to our members' feedback and add new services and benefits based on what our members say to us. Feedback comes to us by phone or letter (either directly or via the editor of our magazine). We are also seeing an increase in email traffic as members are adopting this as a communication method, which is especially helpful when sending out our e-newsletter with updates on services and benefit discounts.

The AGM and annual conference provides the opportunity for local groups to voice the views of members and set the direction of NFOP's work and activities. We take feedback seriously and review our benefits and services on a regular basis.

How does the NFOP assist trustees? (Indirectly and/or directly)

Scheme trustees are facing a challenging time with increasing focus on their work by the regulator. As part of this, their interaction with scheme members

About the NFOP

The NFOP was created in the 1930s as an independent, not-for-profit organisation.

The organisation represents close to 70,000 people across the UK, with membership comprising of individuals who have saved for a pension, whether in receipt of or have a deferred pension.

NFOP's focus is on the pension scheme member, with a large number of its membership being from BT, Royal Mail, Kingfisher and British Steel, among smaller pension schemes.

The NFOP can present trustees with the ability to provide their scheme members with support post-work whilst reducing their own level of risk.

In addition to having access to a number of membership benefits, such as legal and tax advice, members can also be part of a local group, a 'branch' where they can meet and socialise with members.

The NFOP Welfare Fund is a charity that can provide financial support to members in need.

The founder of the NFOP was a retired member of the General Post Office who had the aim of establishing a friendly and social society that provided support to fellow ex-GPO staff during retirement.

As more GPO staff became members of the organisation, it grew into a national federation of GPO pensioners with thousands of members.

From this, a welfare fund was set up to provide financial support for members in need that was completely funded by fellow members and still exists today.

As GPO expanded into separate entities, the name evolved to become the National Federation of Royal Mail and BT Pensioners.

Following this, the Federation merged with the National Association of British Steel Pensioners.

As other occupational pensioners continued to show interest in the organisation, the name was changed to reflect the continued growth and then came to be known as the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners.

The NFOP was a founder in joint venture company the Retirement Income Alliance (RIA) last year.

