

# THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

## **SPRING 2021**



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THIS IS THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION



## ABOUT US

The West Midlands Pensioners Convention is the Regional Organisation of the National Pensioners Convention.

Our main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of pensioners, both now and in the future; securing dignity, respect and financial security in retirement.

We have a number of very active committees, including a Transport Group which holds regular quarterly meetings with Transport for the Midlands (formerly CENTRO).

For more information about our local branches, trade union retired members sections and affiliated organisations: Contact Trevor Eames our Membership Secretary either by phone on: 0121 733 8081 or e mail: [solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk)

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WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION  
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AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to the severe restrictions of the current covid-19 pandemic the WMP Regional Council have accepted a recommendation from the E.C. to suspend the holding of the A.G.M. until such time as delegates can safely attend at a suitable venue. In the interim period existing officers and E.C. members will remain in situ.

## OUR ORGANISATION

We have local and Trade Union branches across our Region. Each Branch is entitled to send delegates to the Regional Council, which meets on the second Thursday of each month (except in January and August, when there are no meetings).

The Regional Council meetings are held at Birmingham UNISON Offices, 19<sup>th</sup> floor, The McLaren Building, 46 Priory Queensway, Birmingham B4 7LR. 11.00 A.M. TILL 1.00 P.M.

Although our Regional Council meetings are delegate based, visitors, friends and guests are very much welcome to attend.

We also welcome applications for membership from non-party political organisations of pensioners and retired people from across our Region. Pensioners can also become individual members.

### LOCAL BRANCHES

Walsall: Andrea Stanton: 01922448331

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Solihull: Alan Thomas: 0121 705 3342

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Valerie Hickenbottom: 0121 532 0970



Many of us can remember Boris Johnson's podium promise on the future of Social Care, in his first speech as Prime Minister on the steps of Downing Street, to "fix the crisis in Social Care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared to give every older person the dignity and security they deserve". That was on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2019, twenty-one months ago

On Tuesday we had the fourth State opening of Parliament since the General Election of 2019. It is widely acknowledged that the covid- 19 pandemic has exposed more than ever the failures of a Social Care, largely privatised and unfit for purpose. And yet once again there was the briefest of commitments in the Queens Speech: -

"Social Care reform will be brought forward."



## **Press Release**

**The National Pensioners' Convention is disappointed but not surprised by the Government's failure to outline its promised social care reforms in today's Queen's Speech.**

The NPC will be addressing the urgent need to transform the UK's broken care system through a new National Care Service with acclaimed health care reformer Professor Sir Michael Marmot at our Virtual Annual Convention on Tuesday, 21 June 2021. \*

**NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "The Government's repeated commitment to bring forward proposals by the end of 2021 to 'improve the adult social care system' is we feel, something of a smoke screen that allows it to introduce its potentially damaging 'Health and Care Bill' for the NHS.**

"The NPC believes in a fully funded National Care Service that runs alongside, and works in collaboration with the NHS, not a service, where the care sector is the poor relation, whose budgets can be swallowed up by the needs of an already struggling Health Service.

"It is time the government had an open and honest debate with the public on a National Care Service, funded by taxation, free at the point of need - and that they listened to the many voices of those organisations who have spoken out today on their fears over what will eventually be presented in place of what is actually needed. Yet another missed opportunity.



Old age can be a lottery. Some people are lucky and sail through it, but for others their later years can be a trial. Disability, illness, deaths of spouses and friends, family moving away – all these factors and more can lead to social isolation and loneliness in old age. According to AGE UK there are 1.4 million chronically lonely older people in England and more across the rest of the UK. More than 2million people in England over the age of 75 live alone and half a million older people go for five or six days a week without speaking or seeing anyone at all. About 3.9million older people say the television is their main company.

Today's Britain can be a soulless and frightening place in which to grow old and those in power must take a large part of the responsibility for that. The Covid -19 pandemic has made things worse but the underlying problems have growing for decades because of cutbacks and political decisions.

Some say we should go back to a past when families, friends and neighbours stepped in to look after people in their later years. It is debateable whether this golden age ever existed except in a few communities; but whatever your view on this, is this feasible today?

Is it practicable in many cases for families to “look after their own” these days? It has been the trend for years that family members do not stay in the areas they grew up in, often moving hundreds of miles away from their parents and grandparents. This and factors like low income, limited living space and divorce and separation can, make it impossible for the wider family to intervene. Some say that people should step and check on the vulnerable in their local area. But given shift patterns and the long hours many people work these days; you can go weeks without seeing yours neighbours.

It can be dangerous to assume that such help can be relied upon. For instance, through my work at the North Staffs Pensioners Convention I have known of cases where vulnerable people have been discharged from hospital back into their home without any support, because the authorities believed that family, friends or neighbours would be able to help out. Individual actions by family, friends and neighbours can make a difference when circumstances allow, but they are certainly not the whole solution. I believe we need to act collectively to help ease loneliness and isolation in old age. However, many institutions and activities that provide opportunities for social interaction have been lost over the years.

Post Offices were relied upon by older people, but due to cuts in Government support and changes in the business model the number go branches has gone from 25,000 in the mid-sixties to 11,600 today with thousands more under threat of closure. Cuts in police numbers have led people to become more fearful alone in their own homes. The Government decision to end the free TV Licence for millions of people will mean that many pensioners will not have television for company. The best thing any recent government has done to end isolation for older people has been the free bus pass. But in recent years whole areas have been but off because of reduction in bus services. What is the use of the free bus pass when there are no buses.

As we come out of the Covid-19 pandemic we must begin the debate in earnest about how we can undo the damage and build a genuinely age friendly society.

This is an edited article by Andy Day, the Co-Ordinator of the North Staffordshire Pensioners Convention, first published in the May 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of the regional newspaper “The Sentinel



## A TRIBUTE TO OUR FRIEND AND COMRADE - REG JONES



We are very saddened to report the death of Reg. Jones one of our longest serving members of the West Midlands Pensioners Convention (WMPC) and the Wolverhampton Branch on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021 aged 91

Photo - Reg received his Honorary Life Membership Certificate from WMPC Chair Dorothy Lamb in February 2020 which also celebrated his 90 Birthday.

Reg. led an interesting life born in Manchester in 1930 he witnessed growing up in those hard inter-war years and leaving school at just 14 with no formal qualifications. His father ran a small garage business and he worked for his dad for a short while but proved to have no aptitude as a mechanic and went on to train and spend his working life in “Children’s Social Services” in Cardiff, Manchester & Liverpool. In the days when children aged 9 were charged with criminal offences. Called-up for National Service at 18. Reg. was invalided out after a training accident with an honourable discharge. Finally moving to Wolverhampton Social Services where he was an active member of NALGO and working with children until taking retirement in 1989.

The Wolverhampton Pensioners Branch was founded at that time and Reg. played an active part with that and representing them on the WMPC and taking an active interest in public transport issues campaigning actively in support of the “Ring & Ride” service.

Reg also supported setting up the Walsall Branch and has been actively involved in the movement for over 30 years. He led an active social life and much liked to travel and although never married had a close friendship in later life with Iris who he much missed – He was a regular attender at his Catholic Church St. Michaels and enjoyed his Friday evening classical music groups. Reg. has seen many changes in his 90 years and we in the WMPC have much valued his contribution and friendship – he will be much missed. Trevor Eames – Secretary WMPC Transport Group.

A Tribute to Reg Jones from Dorothy Lamb - WMPC Regional Chair

Reg. Jones was a long serving Delegate from the Wolverhampton Branch Pensioners’ Convention. The report of his death was sad news for West Midlands Pensioners’ Convention. He was a long-time campaigner and attended our Monthly Regional Council meeting on a regular basis. He was a willing contributor to discussion and had a special interest in the Ring and Ride Service. Although his mobility became very poor, he made every effort to attend the Transport meetings as well as Regional Council.

He was getting very frail but well enough in 2020 to celebrate and enjoy his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday with WMPC members. A good time was enjoyed by everyone present.

Reg was a very modest person and a Gentleman to one and all, he will be sadly miss

## The 2021 Census highlights growing concerns over Digital Exclusion

The National Pensioners Convention, Age UK, Centre for Ageing Better and the GMB trade union have all expressed real concern that older pensioners are becoming increasingly excluded by a society that is increasingly reliant on our citizens to be able, willing and can afford to access the essential services we all rely on in our daily lives using the internet.

Anyone who questions the extent to which the internet is influencing our lives need look no further than the 2021 Census. Ten years ago, every household in England and Wales received a Census Questionnaire through the post. Households could complete and return the Questionnaire by post or they could choose to complete the Questionnaire online. Ten years on every household in England and Wales will have received information through the post about the 2021 Census, but it won't contain the Questionnaire. Ten years on there is an assumption by the Office for National Statistics that the majority of households will complete the 2021 Census online. There is also an assumption that there will be some members of our society who will not be able to complete their 2021 Census on line and will therefore require a paper copy of the Census Questionnaire.

What is not being seriously addressed by the Office of National Statistics and the Government is what we, as a society, are going to do to ensure that those who do not have access to the internet are not excluded from what is becoming an increasingly digitalised society.

The Centre for Ageing Better has estimated that more than 1.5million over 50s do not have access to a computer, figures from the Good Things Foundation charity show that 77% of over 70s have low digital engagement, while 51% of people aged 75 + do not use the internet at all and the Birmingham Mail's own staff reporter Zoe Chamberlain highlighted in a recent article (February 15<sup>th</sup>) that here in the West Midlands one in five people (20%) do not use the internet.

The GMB trade union have also launched their campaign on the dangers of allowing ourselves to "sleepwalk" into a cashless society; as more and more people conduct their financial transactions online, high street banks close and ATMs disappear.

Speaking at a recently held seminar on Digital Exclusion, organised by the National Pensioners Convention, the Older Peoples Commissioner for Wales, Helena Herklots, said "Digital inclusion is an issue of human rights. We need to recognise that being digitally connected is part of a necessary infrastructure, in the same way that it is to be able to get electricity or gas - it is that important."

The General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, Jan Shortt, opening the seminar said "The Covid -19 pandemic has shown how valuable the internet and online video apps are in helping older people to stay in touch with family and essential services while they shield at home; but many are getting left behind in the "digital first age"."

The National Pensioners Convention have now launched our "Connections for All" campaign which aims to end digital poverty and exclusion, with access to free broadband and digital services and much wider opportunities for training and support for those who remain Digitally Excluded.

Brian Allbutt: Assistant Regional Secretary WMPC: - Talk Back: Birmingham Mail: April 2021



## **‘The union makes us strong’ – and active!**

Just because you have retired, it doesn't mean you stop being a trade unionist. Many unions have retired members sections, and our one which is part of the Birmingham UNISON branch shows what an important role they can play.

We have three main objectives. Firstly, we carry on as trade unionists continuing the fight for social justice. We have supported NPC campaigns such as the fight for free TV licences for the over 75s, and support UNISON members in their industrial battles such as the Birmingham care workers and the Birmingham hospital porters. More recently, with the help of the main Birmingham UNISON branch, we held a survey of our retired members, after hearing anecdotal evidence of the difficulties people of our age group were having in accessing health services during the pandemic, and GPs in particular.

The survey – in which over 80 UNISON retired members responded - uncovered very useful information, and we have been thanked for it by both Birmingham City Council and the Healthwatch organisation, chaired by former Birmingham MP Richard Burden.

Our second role is to continue our members' social and educational development, working closely with the main UNISON branch's 'lifelong learning' co-ordinator (sadly now lost after the Government cut the Union Learning Fund on 31 March 2021), which funded a Birmingham Retired Members brochure, *learning together, campaigning together*. It will be used nationally by UNISON to recruit retired members, is being placed in libraries in Birmingham, and our branch has 200 copies that we can use as a recruitment tool at stalls and events.

We also hold 'coffee mornings' each month where we have a diverse range of speakers. This can be on issues of the day – we have had Justin Varney, Director of Public Health for Birmingham who gave an inciteful look at the effect of the pandemic to Birmingham, and dispelled some myths that have circulated about the disease. But we also invite speakers on a wide range of topics, whether authors talking about their books, local history, or interesting life-stories through to travel and visits abroad.

In addition, we produce a quarterly newsletter – the *BRUM* (Birmingham Retired UNISON Members) – which keeps everyone in touch with the latest issues facing our age group, and articles from members on their life experiences, visits abroad, stories from the 'Quite Interesting' genre plus quizzes to keep the brain cells active.

Finally, we have a social role too. After decades of working in shop floor, office or hospital environments, retirement can bring sudden isolation. We have 'Out and About' and 'Rambles' organisers, who organise regular country walks and visits to places of interest, such as Edgbaston cricket ground or the National Arboretum. We've even tried our hand at Tai Chi! Of course, all our outdoor activities came to a shuddering halt when the pandemic hit. We have had to do it 'virtually', and many of us – myself included – had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the digital age,

- **The Birmingham Retired Members Section is open to any retired UNISON member living in the \* Birmingham area, for an annual subscription fee**

Many thanks to the Chair of Birmingham UNISON Retired Members Section, Maureen Wade, for this article.

## The Midlands TUC Back Better Buses Campaign



Since the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the concessionary Bus Pass for older and disabled people in 2018 the TUC MTUC Pensioners Network Has put buses as a key campaigning issue.

With other organisations including WMPC we have tried to highlight the need for a bus service that serves communities better, provides good jobs, supports a green economy, and ofcourse protects and enhances the concessionary Bus Pass.

In 2018 and 2019 the focus was on street campaigning. We travelled the Midlands getting the public to sign postcards to their M.P.

The four key demands: -

- Reverse the cuts.
- Regulate with more green buses
- Stop attacking bus workers' pay and conditions.
- Keep the concessionary pass and extend to young people.

In 2020 outside campaigning was not possible therefore the MTUC needed to focus differently on the Bus Campaign.

It was agreed to focus at a more local level and leave the Post Card Campaign for the future. It was also agreed a broad base campaign, bringing in many organisations would be essential in taking this forward: Following discussions with some Midland Pensioner groups the MTUC has published a “Bus Activist Campaign Pack” to be formally launched in June.

The campaign pack gives guidance on coalition building, media and political campaigning and much more. It is hoped it will enable local people who care about their bus services to start campaigning together.

The “Bus Activist Campaign Pack” is on the TUC website now.

The strong links between the WMPC and the MTUC Pensioners Network will, I’m sure bring us together to set up local groups needed to campaign for “Better Bus

Yvonne Washbourne

Midland TUC Pensioners Network



## YOU KNOW YOUR OLD WHEN.....



When you run out of breath walking **DOWN** the stairs.

Your knees buckle but your belt won't.

The waiter asks how you'd like your steak and you say "Pureed".

You can't get your rocking-chair started.

"Getting lucky" means finding your car in the Tesco car park.

The Rolling Stones still look young to you.

You enjoy hearing about other people's operations.

The names in your little black book all belong to doctors.

You need two attempts to drive over a speed-bump.

Your friends compliment you on your new alligator shoes when you're barefoot.

You'd like to be nostalgic but you can't remember anything.

Your easy chair has more controls than your car.

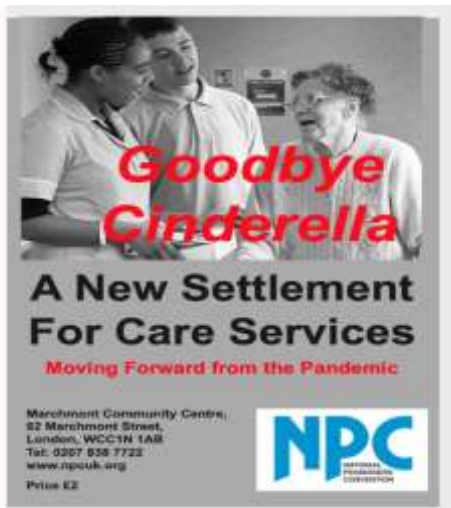
You look both ways before before crossing a room.

You need your false teeth and your hearing aid before you can ask where you left your glasses

Your actions creak louder than your words.

You and your teeth no longer sleep together.

Everything hurts. And what doesn't hurt doesn't work.



The National Pensioners Convention have published this important contribution to the, now vital debate, on the need for fundamental reform of the way we fund and deliver social care. Hard copies of “Goodbye Cinderella” can be ordered from the NPC at £2.00 + postage. The WMPC have a limited number of copies. e mail: - [wmpconvention@gmx.com](mailto:wmpconvention@gmx.com)

## WMPC REGIONAL COUNCIL

Thursday May 13<sup>th</sup> 2021

The guest speaker is Rob Johnson, Midland TUC Regional Policy and Campaign Officer.

We are continuing to hold our Regional Council meetings virtual, facilitated by Zoom; and will ofcourse be keeping the situation under review as we hopefully move on from the covid- 19 crisis. If you are not an existing delegate, or Individual member, you are very welcome to join us as a guest. Details of this Thursdays Zoom meeting can be obtained by e mailing [wmpconvention@gmx.com](mailto:wmpconvention@gmx.com) or calling: - 07342264482

For information about our branches/affiliates/individual membership

Trevor Eames our Membership Secretary either by phone on: 0121 733 8081 or e mail: [solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk)

Regional Secretary:  
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PLEASE ALSO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:  
at: [wmpc.org.uk](http://wmpc.org.uk)  
We also welcome new friends on our WMPC Facebook site.

### LOCAL BRANCHES

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