

# THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

**August/SEPTEMBER2021**



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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

## 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

Halesowen: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608

North Staffs: Owen Sloss 07582115742

David Hampton 01782 201724

kingstanding: Ken Smith: 0121 624 6981

East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

B'ham South Central: 07342264482

Northfield: Richard Phillips: 0121 477 3594

Solihull: Alan Thomas: 0121 705 3342

Sandwell & West Birmingham:

Valerie Hickenbottom: 0121 532 0970

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The National Pensioners Convention will be holding the 2022 Biennial Delegate Conference on 15/16 March at the Yarnfield Park Conference Centre. NPC Regional Councils and National Affiliates have been notified that the deadline for receipt of the following is November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

(i) Nominations for Officers: (President. Vice President: 4 to be elected. General Secretary. Deputy General Secretary. Treasurer and Standing Orders Committee: 6

(ii) Motions: Regional Councils and National Affiliates may submit one Policy Motion and one Constitutional Motion.

(iii) Names of Delegates attending the 2022 Biennial Delegate Conference.

The West Midland Pensioners Convention is now inviting all affiliated branches and organisations to submit nominations for Officers of the NPC/Standing Orders Committee, Motions and delegate nominations. To be received by the WMPC Regional Secretary by no later than Wednesday October 27<sup>th</sup>. For consideration by delegates at the meeting of the WMPC Regional Council on Thursday November 11<sup>th</sup>.



### ZOOM 1T.

New technology is not always welcomed by older people however, where would we be without it?

The pandemic altered our world in many ways and brought our West Midlands Regional meetings and Committee meeting to an abrupt halt. But thanks to modern technology and a programme called Zoom it changed everything. It made it possible to keep in touch with many of our regional members on a little screen.

Your committee experimented with Zoom for their monthly Committee meetings and then as confidence grew invited our Regions delegates to sign in for their monthly meetings. It was a welcome sight seeing, plus being able to hold conversations with everyone. There have been a few problems along the way, but it has seen us through difficult times. Over the months we have presented a full Agenda and invited speakers. Nothing has changed, the Government is still intent on attacking the Welfare State.

Unfortunately face to face meeting are doubtful for the immediate meetings. There are difficulties in the McLaren building, the number of people allowed in is very low, there is no fresh air only air conditioning which is not ideal. Other options are being investigated and your committee will keep you updated. So, for the present Zoom is the safe option. It has helped us survive the pandemic in the safety of our own homes while maintaining contact with each other. So, after our summer break we welcome as many as possible to join together for our monthly meeting on Zoom. Modern technology – where would we be without it?

Dorothy Lamb

Regional Chair

West Midland Pensioners Convention

# **The 2021 Health & Care Bill**



## **What it means for Keeping Our NHS Public**

Action is needed to limit the power of the **Health and Care Bill** currently going through Parliament. The Bill sets up new **Integrated Care Systems** Boards. These replace the GP-led 'Commissioning Groups, which let health contracts to 'Any Qualified Provider' (often meaning the private sector). So, a less than perfect system is going to be replaced by something potentially worse!

## **The 2012 Lansley Health and Care Bill opened up the NHS to further Privatisation leaving the citizens of Birmingham with: -**

- Restricted availability of treatments (rationing). E.g., try getting ear wax removal now on the NHS
- As availability limitations start to apply to bigger procedures (due to cuts and the pandemic backlog), private hospitals are mushrooming e.g., at Pebble Mill and one currently being built on the QE site
- Support services such as maintenance of estates (Children's, City, the QE hospitals) and weekend imaging contracted out, weakening the "critical mass" of the NHS.
- Virgin Care running two of the City's Walk-In centres
- GP surgeries run by private outfits like Centene, Virgin and Modality but still branded as NHS

## **Nationally, during the Covid crisis, we've seen:**

- Testing handed to new private laboratories bypassing existing NHS facilities!
- Tracing handed to SERCO when public health systems already existed in local authorities!
- Private hospitals given large sums of money as an NHS 'standby' system - paid for but hardly ever used!

The new Bill limits wasteful competitive tendering processes in the NHS, BUT also removes scrutiny of awarding contracts to Government friends' private sector crony companies - an unregulated 'market' in the NHS. Also, a seat on the new 'ICS Boards' may be reserved for the private sector – this will be a first!

The Government claims that 'Integration' is at the heart of the proposals, but in practice **there will be no more 'real' integration between health and social care than exists already** e.g., social care is still in private hands and funding has still not been addressed. The new Bill will further entrench the private sector in our NHS unless we can get the Government to do a U-turn on some of its proposals.



## AN APPALLING LACK OF PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION



I'M DYING FOR A P\*\*! OR,  
MORE POLITELY, WHERE CAN I  
GO?

Andy Day and members of North Staffs Pensioners Convention campaigning to stop the demolition of the public toilets in Hanley

Why do we need more and better public toilets? Everyone needs to use the toilet several times each day when away from our homes, at work, on holiday or simply commuting from place to place. This becomes even more urgent if you suffer from certain medical conditions that necessitate immediate access to the toilet. Just having access to clean, hygienic toilets when we need one is simply about our basic human rights and it fulfils a basic requirement for our:

- Health & Well-being
- Equality
- Social Inclusion
- Privacy & Public Decency

There are an increasing number of people whose lives are affected by the state of Britain's public toilets. These include people with mental or physical disabilities and their carers; the infirm or elderly; people with babies or young children, and people of all ages who are coping with a range of medical conditions.



Pre-pandemic, residents travelled more within the country, and the number of visitors to Britain increased each year, placing added pressure on our existing toilet facilities.

The pandemic has heightened the importance of public health and hygiene, Public toilets are the 'shop window' for any area or establishment – where first and lasting impressions of levels of customer care are made

In June 2020, Local Government Minister Simon Clarke and Environment Minister Rebecca Pow wrote to local council chiefs urging them to reopen their public toilets. They said: "Councils should consider the harm to public health and the local environment caused by people relieving themselves in public." The Ministers warned that the situation had got worse as the weather improved. They added: "Public hygiene is of the upmost importance, especially during the Coronavirus pandemic, and enabling residents to access toilets safely is vital. Handwashing is an extremely important activity to help prevent the continued spread of the virus. Handwashing is important.

Closed toilets may also impact disproportionately on certain groups who for health reasons rely on access to public toilets to be able to leave their homes. They can also make life difficult for young families and people who work outside. If you have toilets that are still shut, then we strongly urge you to refer to advice on measures that can be taken to open toilets in a safe way.”

## **Fine words. But how can Ministers ask local authorities to put their time and resources into something that the Government fails to support or fund?**

Local authorities have no statutory duty to provide public toilets. Without primary legislation making this a statutory duty, and the budget to encourage proper clean, hygienic, publicly accessible toilets, then these are just hollow words.



The West Midlands Pensioners Convention (WMPC) heard recently from Andy Day of the North Staffs Pensioners Convention about the various lessons they had learned from their local campaigns about public toilets, including their successful “Free to Pee” campaign in Hanley in 2015 when the council sought to impose a 30p entry charge for their toilets.

We are now looking to make this one of our WMPC campaigns in the coming months. If you are interested in helping us develop the campaign, please let us know:

- Any good news – when a new public toilet opens, or an existing one is refurbished or upgraded
- If you know when a public toilet is closed or under threat of closure
- About any interesting news items, you come across concerning local public toilet provision.

Helpful information sources include:

- The British Toilet Association is a not-for-profit organisation working to promote the highest standards of hygiene and overall provision in all “away from home” toilet facilities across the UK. Its helpful website is <http://www.btalooos.co.uk>
- The “Use our Loos!” Campaign - a national campaign mobilising local business to make their loos accessible to the community they serve. [http://www.btalooos.co.uk/?page\\_id=1961](http://www.btalooos.co.uk/?page_id=1961)
- Changing Places - the consortium which campaigns for the installation of accessible toilets for people with profound disabilities. A map of over 1300 CP toilets is at <http://www.btalooos.co.uk/www.uktoiletmap.org>

- The Great British Toilet

David Humphreys

## **YOU CAN'T TRUST THE GOVERNMENT WITH THE PENSIONS TRIPLE LOCK**

There has been much discussion within and between sections of the media, commentators, and campaigning groups representing pensioners such as the National Pensioners Convention and AGE UK on the future of the State Pension Triple Lock. What has not taken place is a honest and frank discourse by Boris Johnson or his Chancellor Rishi Sunak on whether they will honour the Conservative Party 2019 Manifesto commitment to retain the State Pension Triple Lock.

Ever since the Triple Lock was introduced in 2010 by the then Coalition Government, creating a two-tier State Pension system, there has been a relentless campaign of opposition by right wing media commentators and organisations such as the Tax Payers Alliance and the Intergenerational Foundation; as part of a much wider attack on pensioners. We are all familiar with the headlines “how the Baby Boomers took their child’s futures” (David Willets-2010) or more recently “oldies should cough up to fund the recovery” (Mathew Parris 2020), to the attempt to marginalise pensioners by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak with the divisive claim that he “needs to be fair to pensioners and taxpayers”.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee have warned the UK will be paying “the cost of Covid for decades with spending on the pandemic now at £372 billion.” The question and worry are “who is going to pay”. The Government have frozen public sector pay, apart from the meagre 3% pay offer the NHS Workers, arguing that it’s only fair because of those working in the private sector and then perversely argues that we cannot honour next year’s Triple Lock State Pension increases because of the knock-on effect of a huge increase in private sector pay has workers come out of the Covid Furlough schemes.

The General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention makes the point well in the latest issue of the NPC’s Campaign Bulletin- “Even an 8% rise in the State Pension next April will not recoup the losses to pensioners as a result the Conservative Government of 1980 cutting the link to earnings.” It was a Labour Chancellor, Gordon Brown, who attempted to alleviate some of those losses to the State Pension by making a commitment to increase the Basic State Pension by a minimum of 2.5% or prices (Retail Price Index -RPI) in 2001. When the Coalition Government introduced the Triple Lock in 2010, with average earnings now being a factor, they crucially used the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than RPI to determine price inflation. Ironically, it has been the 2.5% guaranteed minimum increase introduced in 2001 rather than the other two elements that those opposed to the triple lock have sought to “expose as being unfair to those in work. and far too generous and unaffordable.” Now, pensioners are being told the triple lock is unaffordable because of a potential increase in average earnings as a consequence of working people coming out of furlough schemes and back onto the wages they should have been on anyway. - “You Can’t Trust the Government with the Pensions Triple Lock.”

Brian Allbutt

# **Are We Doing Enough to Combat Climate Change?**

The GLASGOW COP26 in November is fast approaching and the eyes of the world will be watching intently.

What is COP26? It is the 25<sup>th</sup> “Conference of the Parties”, which is the United Nations summit. It is the place where the United Nations will discuss the effects of Climate Change upon the world. COP26 is intending to secure Net Zero emissions by 2050, by phasing out the use of fossil fuels, stopping deforestation and speeding up investment in renewable energy sources and electric vehicles. It will also be the place where Nations will report on what they have done to control carbon emissions over the past 5 years.

Almost all scientific evidence shows that the rise in carbon emissions is having significant damaging effects upon global warming. This in turn is creating an exponential growth in climate disasters such as floods, wildfires, increased temperature, melting ice caps. This has a devastating effect upon the environment and human and animal communities. IN SHORT, THE WHOLE PLANET IS AT RISK AS A RESULT OF HUMAN ACTIVITY.

Is this a young person’s issue?

Young people internationally have taken a decisive role in addressing climate change. They should be applauded and supported in their actions. Climate change is an issue for everyone and the whole planet.

Are we in the broad labour movement doing enough?

No, we need to step up to the mark through our local, national and international links to achieve the agreed political and social actions. Isolated actions of civil disobedience will achieve nothing. There will be a number of Trade Union initiatives in the lead up to COP26 and a Global Day of Action on November 6<sup>th</sup>, involving demonstrations in Glasgow, London and elsewhere.

IS IT ALL TOO LATE? NO.

But scientists are agreed that urgent international action needs to be taken NOW. In 1987 the first UN treaty was agreed to stop the use of CFC’s (chlorofluorocarbon) in aerosols and refrigerators, which was destroying the ozone layer. The United Nations action stopped the decay and the ozone layer is recovering. This must be replicated on carbon emissions.

**One World, One Solution and as Bob Marley wrote...One Love**

Donald MacCombie

UNISON Birmingham Branch