

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

WINTER 2022



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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

Regional Secretary:
Sandra Durkin: 07860576701
thedurk@btinternet.com
wmpcec@gmx.co.uk

FOR GENERAL ENQUIRIES ABOUT THE WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION
E MAIL: wmpconvention@gmx.com
OR CALL: 07342264482

Important information about our A.G.M.
As we come out of the Covid-19 Pandemic, in a spirit of optimism. It is the intention of the Executive Committee to hold the 2022 A.G.M. at a suitable venue. Can we also remind Branches and Affiliates that the deadline for receiving nominations and motions is Friday 26th.

Please Visit Our Official Website
West Midland Pensioners Convention

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).

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: 07809565454

Halesowen: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608

North Staffs: Owen Sloss 07582115742
David Hampton 01782 201724

kingstanding:

East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

B'ham South Central: 07342264482

Solihull: Alan Thomas: 0121 705 3342

Sandwell & West Birmingham:

Valerie Hickinbottom: 0121 532 0970

Coventry and Warwickshire BTUAA :

Sandra Durkin :07860576701

email: covbptuaa@gmail.com

Individual Members : Brian Allbutt 07342264482
email: brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk



wmpc.org.uk



For the past two years we have all had to live by the rules set down for the Covid virus however, in spite of all the difficulties WMPC have continued to hold monthly meetings for the Executive Committee and Regional Council via Zoom.

January 2022 has brought change; the Government has told us that outdoor events and all aspects of hospitality will operate as normal. We will still be expected to wear face masks and observe social distancing in crowded places. It is the news we have all been waiting to hear but – it is an uncertain future because Covid is still with us. We have lived through difficult times the likes we have never experienced before and getting back to normal will take time.

WMPC has aimed to be as active as possible continuing to carry on our campaigns Virtually. The closure of National Express Transport shops has caused concern. We have been told that travel tickets can be purchased at local Post Offices. This is not a satisfactory response for WMPC and we are still pursuing the matter. The impact of the Covid virus on the NHS, Care Homes, getting an appointment to see a GP have all made headline news with the media. The good news is it has given us more publicity than we could have hoped for.

Your nominated Delegates to the NPC Biennial Conference, Sandra Durkin, Owen Sloss, Maureen Wade and Malcolm Swann, are preparing themselves for the event which takes place in March. The Motions for this event will be on the Agenda at a future Regional Council meeting.

There is sad news to report about the death of Reg Jones 91 years old and Bob Mitchell our past Regional Secretary who retired when the family moved to Leicester. It must also be recorded of the sudden death of Dave Kippest also a dedicated member of our group who gave many years to WMPC.

So another year begins fighting the many injustices that the Government inflicts on older people and the general public. Hopefully as the year progresses our Regional Council meetings will be able to meet face to face, we must look forward to that time. It will be interesting to find out how our Regions have coped with all the difficulties of the past couple of years. I am looking forward to meeting everyone in person and not on Zoom, although where would we be if that facility had not been possible?.

A Healthy and Happy New Year to all our readers.

Dorothy Lamb

Regional Chair



We Must Save Our Meals on Wheels Service



Stoke-on-Trent Meals on Wheels, an organisation that brings hot food to older and vulnerable people, is again threatened with closure by the council. When it faced a similar threat back in 2015 Grey Power members took to the street to join the campaign to defend the service.

Why is the Service So Important

When people become isolated in the community, particularly if they suffer from depression, they will often skip meals and just eat biscuits or other snacks instead. It will only be when they hit a crisis that it will become apparent that they have not been eating properly- and this is often too late. The Meals on Wheels Service ensures that a nutritious is available to people five days a week and help avert a crisis.

According to AGE UK half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to another human being. They have become the invisible people, out of sight and out of mind to us all. At least those receiving the Meals on Wheels Service can look forward to seeing a friendly face five days a week; however brief the visit is and a visit from someone who cares.

Because they drop in five days a week, the volunteers delivering the meals get to know the client and can recognise if something has changed-are they looking weaker, struggling on their feet and at risk of a fall, or not looking after themselves as well as before? If so they can alert the authorities.



“End of the Road for Meals on Wheels?”

In a report in the Stoke-on-Trent newspaper The Sentinel (Monday Jan 17) the council leader is quoted as saying at a city council committee that “ the decline in numbers of people using Meals on Wheels is due to older people being more independent than they were in the past. The council leader, A.L. Brown also made the staggering claim that some of the current Meals on Wheels users may be more capable of cooking for themselves than they were when they first started using the service!

The Grey Power Response



Andy Day, on behalf of the North Staffordshire Pensioners Convention (Grey Power), calling for the retention of the Meals on Wheels explains that the council alone assesses who needs the service and it has become clear that it is dramatically cutting the number of people it is referring to Meals on Wheels. The real reason for the decline in numbers using Meals on Wheels Service is that the council is effectively Pulling The Plug On It. Instead of cutting the funding , the council should be seeking ways to expand the Meals on Wheels service and make it more sustainable in the long run.



ENERGY SOS

The Government response to the energy crisis is demonstrably inadequate. That is the view of not only AGE UK and the National Pensioners Convention (N.P.C.), our concerns and anger at the Government's poor response to an energy crisis, that will result in up to £700 more on the cost of heating the average home by April, are shared by the TUC, Fuel Poverty Action, Resolution Foundation, Alzheimer's Society, and many

others.

What is so appalling in the failure to deal with this energy crisis, is the disregard by this Government of the consequences for older, vulnerable and less well-off people; already facing a cost-of-living crisis. There can be no excuses for Johnson and Sunak, if they had any doubt about the impact of older people being unable to heat their own homes and feed themselves, they need look no further than their own statisticians and Public Health England.

The Government's own Office for National Statistics (O.N.S.) reported over 50,000 Excess Winter Deaths for 2017-18, this was the highest recorded number of Excess Winter Deaths since 1975-76. Over one third of those Excess Winter Deaths were attributed to respiratory disease, with the vast majority (nearly 70%) being people over the age of 64 with even higher numbers of Excess Winter Deaths among women over the age of 84. In that same report the O.N.S. identified another major contributory factor resulting in the high number of Excess Winter Deaths was "poor home insulation- lack of cladding-double glazing. Public Health England have identified Cold homes as being associated with high blood pressure in older people and weak immune systems resulting in respiratory infection.

The General Secretary of the NPC Jan Shortt, said of the Government proposals to deal with the energy crisis " This is disastrous for millions of older people who are already living in poverty, struggling with huge rises in fuel prices and inflation rocketing this will cause indescribable hardship for older people."

Tony O'Brien, the Chair of the NPC Housing Working Party addressing a Protest Outside Downing Street on February 7th said "We know that from April it will cost up to £700 more to heat the average home and by October it will rise again to a further £300. With OFGEM now saying they they will review gas prices every three months this price hike may even be sooner than October. Experts have found that these price increases are likely to continue over the next three years. Yet the Government response has been poor- handing out a loan of £200 in October that will be paid back over the next five years ; and giving a council tax rebate of £150 with no arrangements for the 25% of households who do not pay the council tax by direct debit, or renters and sharers whose bills are included."

How do we avoid this "Perfect Storm"

- A Windfall tax on the major energy providers
- Increase the Winter Fuel allowance to £500- backdated to 2021 -increased each year in line with energy price rises.
- Re-instate the £20 Universal Credit
- End 5% vat on energy bills
- Nationalise the Energy Industry
- Introduce a ring fenced 1% tax increase on the wealthiest 1%
- Increase the Warm Homes Discount – with an annual increase in line with energy price rises.

Brian Allbutt

Campaign To Save Free Prescriptions For Over 60s

The introduction of Prescription charges has long been an issue of contention for politicians, health professionals and those of us who believe in a NHS that is publicly owned, publicly funded and free to all at the point of need. Opposition to the introduction of Prescription charges in the NHS Amendment Act in 1949, subsequently led to the resignation of Aneurin Bevan from the Labour Government in 1951.

It was the Conservative government led by John Major that introduced free prescription charges for anyone over the age of 60 effectively equalising prescription exemptions for men in line with the State Retirement Age for Women. In 2014 Coalition Government's Baker Commission "New settlement for health and Social Care" recommended a review of Prescription charges bringing them in line with current and future State Retirement Age for men and women. It is only now, with a parliamentary majority of 79 seats, that a Conservative Government could implement the recommendations of the Baker Commission and end free prescriptions for over 60s living in England. - WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN.

In the summer of 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care ran a consultation on "Aligning the upper age for NHS Prescriptions Charge Exemption with the State Pension Age"; which we know is due to increase under the present governments proposals to 68 by 2046. According to AGE UK over 40,000 have responded to the consultation with more than 23 organisations writing to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, expressing their concern at these proposals. But there is no room for complacency THIS IS AN ATTACK ON TOMORROWS PENSIONERS.

According to the Department of Health and Social Care "Over half of the 3.7 million adults aged 60 -65 in the UK have long-term health conditions, under the proposals, two thirds of that age group will become ineligible for free prescriptions."

Caroline Abrahams, Director of AGR UK said "We are already having some older people on multiple medicines saying they will have to choose which ones to drop, and others are expecting to ration how much they take. The problem is that treatments don't work like that." adding "people will be particularly affected if their income is modest but takes them just above the benefit line. It also penalises people in poor health and in need of multiple medicines because they are managing several serious long-term, health conditions like heart disease and hypertension- one of a number of conditions which are more prevalent among Black Africans and Black Caribbean people.

Members of the Prescription Charge Coalition, an alliance of more than twenty organisations campaigning to abolish unfair prescription charges for people with long-term health conditions, have also been critical of the proposals. Paul Day Director of the Pharmacists Defence Association called the proposals Counter - intuitive "The introduction of this government policy in England will impact some of the most vulnerable members of society "adding " Any measure that reduces access to medicines which help people to effectively self- manage their long-term conditions, will increase the risk of people needing more support."

Speaking to the Daily Express shortly after the Government announced the launch of their consultation on proposals to end the Free Prescription for over 60s, The General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, Jan Shortt said "This will have a massive negative effect on the health of pensioners" adding "Prescription charges are not affordable if you are on a low income without financial help of any kind."

The Prescription Charge Coalition are asking people to write to our M.P.s asking them to sign Early Day Motion 406 opposing the Governments proposal to align prescription charges in England with the State Pension Age.

Brian Allbutt

IN MEMORY OF OUR COMRADE AND FRIEND BOB MITCHELL



It was with great sadness that we announced the death in December last year of our former West Midland Pensioners Convention Regional Secretary and Life Member Bob Mitchell. As Regional Secretary Bob was instrumental in developing our Campaigning work at a crucial time for the National Pensioners Convention and the wider pensioners movement. A proud Scot and staunch Socialist with an obvious love of people and a great warmth of spirit and character.

DAVID KIPPEST

Sadly, we have to announce the passing of our colleague and friend David Kippest who died of a heart attack on January 17th after a prolonged period of illness.

David will be remembered by many as a leading member of both UNISON and the National Pensioners Convention, both nationally and here in the West Midlands.



Trade Union colleagues and those of us who had the privilege of campaigning alongside David in the pensioners movement will remember him as a person of great integrity and quiet steely determination. Always willing to share his immense knowledge and experience, gathered from a life time of commitment to the Trade Union and Labour Movement. Our thoughts and condolences are with David's wife and soulmate Ann.

We Also Celebrate the Life of Jack Dromey M.P.

A good friend of the West Midland Pensioners Convention and champion of pensioners rights who will be greatly missed. Here is Jack supporting the WASPI womens



campaign and Speaking to a debate in the House of Commons on the Over 75s TV Licence "The great pensioner champion Jack Jones once made a speech in which he said that one in five of the over 70s never see anyone from one week to the next; the television is their friend. Jack Jones thought that a generation of progress would never be reversed. Does my honorable friend agree that those great pioneers of the Pensioners Movement would be turning in their graves at the thought that the free TV License might be taken away from them?"

R.I.P. JACK DROMEY

Whats on!

HALEOWEN PENSIONERS CONVENTION

March 17th Branch Meeting
Speakers from the LAPAL Canal
Trust on "Increasing accessibility
for disabled and older walkers."

10.30 till 12.30
Shenstone Theatre:
Halesowen Library,
Everyone Welcome

March 24th Visit Grand Theatre
Wolverhampton

CALENDER GIRLS

For further details of Branch
Activities and to get involved:
Contact
Tony Whitehouse
07715314608

WALSALL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Branch Meetings are held on the First
Friday of each month

10.30 till 12.30
TMO Office
Richards House
Burrows Street
Walsall
WS2 8NN

Up Coming Meetings

March 4th Annual General Meeting

April 1st General Branch Meeting

Speaker: Mike Bird
Leader Walsall Council
New Members Always very
Welcome
Contact
Andrea Stanton
07809565454

DAVID KIPPEST FUNERAL ARRANGMENTS

Tuesday March 1st
1.30 p.m.

Gornal Wood Crematorium
7 Chase Road, Gornal Wood
Dudley
DY3 2RL

SOS NHS

National Day of Action
Saturday February 26th
Regional Rallies

Birmingham

Erdington High Street- 12 till 2.00
opposite St Barnabas Church.
organised by Birmingham KONP

Solihull

Solihull Hospital 10.30 a.m.
Followed by leafletting
in Solihull Town Centre
organised by Solihull KONP

