

# THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

## SPRING 2022



### IN THIS ISSUE

Contact Information

It's Time to Step Back

The West Midland Police  
and Crime Commissioner

Public Toilets

We Need New Legislation

“We Demand Better”

London Demonstration  
Saturday June 18th

Asbestos in Our Public  
Buildings

The Officers of the  
WMPC  
2022

Saying Goodbye

Whats On!



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).

Regional Secretary:

Sandra Durkin: 07860576701

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Campaign and Press Officer:

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## 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 OF THE PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Walsall: Andrea Stanton: 07809565454

Halesowen: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608

North Staffs: Owen Sloss 07582115742  
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East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

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Visit the WMPC website for up to date information on the issues facing pensioners including: the latest "Midland Pensioner" activities and campaigns across our Region.

National Pensioners Convention:

Press Releases/ Bulletins/Newsletters and more

**Go to:** <https://wmpc.org.uk>

**WMPC Facebook Group : You are welcome to join our facebook group and keep up-to-date with news and campaigns affecting older people**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/7125023377569919>

## **“ It’s Time To Stand Back” !**



The West Midland Pensioners Convention meeting April 2022 was in many ways a memorable event. Foremost it was the first meeting held face to face since pre-Covid days. It was such a pleasure seeing everyone and sharing a couple of hours together after the long-imposed shutdown. There were seventeen people present which was very encouraging after the long absence. Our guest speaker was Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands. He gave a very interesting presentation and invited a question-and-answer session afterwards.

This was followed by a short break for tea/coffee and biscuits. Everyone appeared to be quite happy catching up on the events of the past two years.

After this break it was time to deal with our AGM 2022.

When your Chairwoman Dorothy re-commenced the meeting, she was in for a shock about what happened next! There had obviously been a lot of plotting with your Executive Committee to make my stand down as Chair an occasion to be remembered. I was presented with a potted Rhododendron plant and a hand-crafted card with “Thank you Dorothy” on the cover and signed by every-one present. David Williams gave a speech recalling all my efforts over the years, (this did cause some laughter I don’t know why). I was completely overwhelmed it was so unexpected. A big “thank you” to everyone.

The AGM followed its usual form with new officers being elected. No new members came forward just a re-shuffle of the out-going Executive. We desperately need new blood within WMPC to help keep the continuity of all the work and effort that goes on. It was brought to the notice of the meeting that congratulations were in order for our Secretary Sandra Durkin, who had been elected Vice President of the NPC at the recent Bi-Annual Conference 2022, such an honour for WMPC we are proud of you Sandra.

I have enjoyed my years as Chair of your meetings; however, I feel the time is right to stand back. I thank you all for your support and valued friendship, it has all helped to enhance my retirement years. Looking ahead we must all be prepared to move on and deal with the changes that the future offers. There is sad news to report about the death of Neil Le Maitre who died in March. Neil was a Delegate from UNISON Retired Members Birmingham Branch and served on the Exec. Committee for a good many years. During that time, he was a loyal contributor to WMPC he will be sadly missed.

Dorothy Lamb.



# **The West Midland Police and Crime Commissioner**



We were privileged to have the West Midland Police and Crime Commissioner, Simon Foster, address the Annual General Meeting of the West Midland Pensioners Convention held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute on Thursday April 14<sup>th</sup>.

Few would doubt the enthusiasm with which Simon Foster has taken up the

challenge of what is clearly a very demanding and responsible position as the West Midland Police and Crime Commissioner. And I'm sure we all share his concern over the impact of more than ten years of economic austerity on the funding of our regions Police Force, with cuts in the number of front-line police officers, the closure of local police stations and the virtual axing of community Police Support Officers undermining the link between our communities and those we rely on to police our streets.

A major concern for the West Midland Pensioners Convention must be Elder Abuse across the West Midland Region and particularly the degree to which the abuse of our older more vulnerable citizens has increased during the covid pandemic. A concern certainly shared by Caroline Abrahams, the Director of AGE UK who said "The Coronavirus only makes the situation worse for many at risk older people and as created another barrier to them leaving an abusive situation."

Hourglass, the older peoples Safe Guarding charity, raised their concerns in November of last year; when they reported on new analysis which revealed the "shocking" scale of the abuse of over 65s. With 1 in 5 of those surveyed (22%) either having personally experienced abuse as an older person or know someone who has been abused. Abuse and neglect, according to AGE UK, has thrived behind closed doors throughout the period of "lockdown", contributing to a sharp rise in the number of reported concerns about Elder Abuse recorded by local councils between April 2020 and March this year. In our own region, NHS Digital have released figures showing the extent of the increase in safe guarding concerns about adults with care and support needs compared to pre- covid levels; with Wolverhampton Council recording an increase of 26% from 2,670 to 3,365, Sandwell recorded a similar increase for the same period, with an increase of 11% in the number of incidents of concern reported to Walsall Council.

While The West Midland Police and Crime Plan for 2021- 2025 does identify Domestic Abuse as a Priority objective for policing across the region "Domestic abuse means that for far too many homes is not a safe place". and Simon Foster, has the West Midland Police and Crime Commissioner, to "ensure the West Midland Police priorities combating domestic abuse", - an objective I'm sure we all support, particularly in response to the high numbers of women and girls across the West Midlands facing Domestic Abuse on an almost daily basis. We have to be concerned that Elder Abuse is not, or does not appear to be an area of concern for the West Midland Police and Crime Commissioner. There is certainly no mention of Elder Abuse anywhere in the West Midland Police and Crime Plan and Simon Foster sought to reassure the delegates at our Annual General Meeting. I quote "As an older person you are less likely to be a victim of crime"

The reality is more likely to be that older victim of Domestic Abuse, whether that abuse is carried out by family members or those providing their health and care needs, are less likely to report that abuse to the Police.

Brian Allbutt: WMPC Campaign and Press Officer



## **The Crisis in the Provision of Public Toilets in the UK**



Over 600 Public Toilets across the UK have ceased being maintained by local authorities since 2010, and in 37 areas major councils no longer run any facilities. Under the provisions of Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936, there is no Statutory Requirement for local authorities to provide public toilet facilities.

Relentless Government cuts to local authority budgets for more than ten years have resulted in the increasing closures of public toilet facilities across the UK. The reliance of local authorities on commercial and retail outlets enabling public use of their in-store toilet facilities have become severely restricted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic should have given all of us a stark reminder of the importance of personal hygiene in keeping ourselves and our communities safe and healthy. The provision of clean and well-maintained Public Toilets should no longer be seen as an optional extra by local authorities and by the Government as we all learn the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We call on the National Pensioners Convention to:

1). Campaign for Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 to be updated to make it a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide adequate public toilet facilities that are:

- Publicly owned
- Free at the point of need
- Accessible to all
- Meet statutory hygiene standards
- Protect people's safety and dignity
- Staffed by a reputable organisation or as a minimum are inspected on a regular basis.
- Signposted clearly in the local area

2). Publicise and support the British Toilet Association's call for a National Toilet Map

3). Publicise and support the campaign for "Changing Places" toilets to be installed in all public venues, so that everyone, regardless of their access needs or disability or reliance on the assistance of carers or specialist equipment, can use a hygienic toilet facility with dignity

3). All local authorities to ensure that public toilets are taken into account in need assessments of older and disabled people and in supporting their independence.

4). Campaign for local authorities to ensure that public toilets are considered in their needs assessments of older and disabled people in supporting their independence.

5). Insist that Central Government provide adequate and preferably ring-fenced funding to local authorities for the provision of public toilets

**This Resolution was moved by Sandra Durkin at the 2022 NPC Biennial Delegate Conference on behalf of the West Midland Pensioners Convention.**

# WE DEMAND BETTER



## TUC CALL TO ACTION

The TUC has called for a national march and rally to be held in London on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, organised under the banner of “We demand Better”. The aim of the march is to highlight and protest at the financial hardships and misery that working people are now facing on a daily basis.

The NPC Nationally has called for full support for this march, and are urging all its members across the country to attend this event, they are asking where possible for NPC branches to organise coaches but if this is not possible, to link in with local Trades Councils and Trade Union branches to secure spaces on coaches that may have been organised. This is a battle that unites both young and old, those in work and those without work, and those who are simply unable to work because of illness or disability.

We are all currently seeing a massive increase in the cost of living, with energy prices going through the roof with predicted 7% yearly rises. This means people now having to make a conscious decision about heating their home, and being able to feed themselves. We know that wages and pensions have not kept up with these increases in living costs, we have seen an attack on the triple lock for pensioners, we have seen the removal of the £20 top in universal credit for those who are living on benefits or those in lower paid jobs.

This has pushed more of our people into poverty. The Trussell Trust one of the country’s leading food charities estimate that they alone have distributed 2.1 million food parcels between April 2021 to March 2022, and a lot of these parcels are going to people in work where their wages can no longer cover living costs.

It appears that we are heading for a recession with rising levels of inflation, and that working people are going to have to pay for this crisis, the Government has already announced that they intend to get rid of 90,000 civil service jobs, they have ditched the Employment bill, which sought to improve employment rights and protection for those in low paid and zero-hour contract jobs. They have failed to protect the jobs of 800 P&O workers, opening the door for further fire and hire practices.

**WE NEED TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD, JOIN THE MARCH’**

DETAILS FOR THE MARCH: - ASSEMBLY POINT PORTLAND PLACE, LONDON, W1B 1PR FROM 10.30am the march will move off at 12pm the destination being Parliament Square for a rally from 1-2.30pm’ The route is 1.7 miles, a shorter march for those who may have mobility issues will form up at Whitehall at 11am, if you prefer you can go straight to rally point for 1pm.

Birmingham Unison Branch have booked a coach, details to released, but free places are available for Unison members and their family and friends. We understand that the union Unite is also booking a coach, which will also offer spaces to members and their friends.

Maureen Wade, WMPC Executive Member.

Chair, Birmingham Unison Retired Branch.



## **Thousands of Local Authority Buildings Still Contain Asbestos**

The TUC is calling for new legislation requiring the removal of all asbestos from public buildings following new research by the Labour Research Department, found thousands of local authority buildings including town halls, libraries and leisure centres still contains asbestos. The survey of 31 local authorities found a total of 2,690 local authority buildings, excluding schools, were found to contain asbestos; it's clear from the survey that the presents of asbestos in local authority buildings across the UK presents a substantial health and safety risk with only 10% of local authorities included in the survey.

A Freedom of Information Request has revealed that of the 191 schools Birmingham City Council is responsible for, the 161 schools constructed before the year 2,000 "have the potential" to contain asbestos. The National Education Union has reported that since 1980 at least 319 school teachers have died from mesothelioma, with 205 of those coming since 2001.

Between 1950 and 1985 asbestos was used in millions of homes, workplaces and public buildings. It is estimated that as late as 1997 there were over 3,000 asbestos products on the market, ranging from paints and tiles to brake pads and resin toilet cisterns, but the main use was either as insulation or in the form of concrete cement, which was made into products such as corrugated roofing sheets and pipes. Asbestos containing materials can still be found in around 500,000 workplaces including factories, warehouses, homes, schools, universities shops, hospitals and offices.

In 1999 legislation, The Asbestos Prohibition (Amendment) Regulations, was introduced banning the use of asbestos, with additional laws subsequently passed to regulate the safe handling of asbestos; mainly involving the safe removal of asbestos and asbestos related products; with those contracted to undertake that work required to be licenced and regulated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Even so, according to the HSE own statistics, asbestos related diseases kill more people in the UK than any other single work-related cause; with more than 5,000 deaths each year. Given that it may be many years or even decades from someone being exposed to and breathing in air contaminated with asbestos dust to receiving a life-threatening diagnosis of mesothelioma; many of those now struggling with this and other diseases of the lungs and chest will now be pensioners or soon to be retirees. The Asbestos Victims Support Forum are concerned that the "current occupational data is inadequate and does not reflect the working lives of those diagnosed with Mesothelioma. The average age of someone diagnosed with Mesothelioma is 74 and sadly, following death, occupational background is not recorded for over 75s"

"It is crucial to remember Asbestos is still killing people, more than die on our roads. Asbestos Support Central England (ASCE) continues to support victims and their families and campaign to remove asbestos from public buildings."

Yvonne Washbourne ASCE Trustee Asbestos Support Central England: 0121 678 8853 emails: [info@asbestossupportce.org](mailto:info@asbestossupportce.org) Please also check out the website.

Source material: Asbestos Victims Support Forum, TUC, Local Democracy Reporting Service

Brian Allbutt: WMPC Campaign and Press Officer



### **Regional Chair: Owen Sloss**

Family of transferred miners from Scotland to Stoke in the 1950s. I spent a short time down the pit, but didn't like it and went on to work for over 40 years in the Pottery Industry and became active in the Potters Trade Union, in which I held many trade union positions. I have also been a County Councillor in Staffordshire. For the last 10 years I have been an active member of North Staffs Pensioners Convention, holding the positions of Membership and Treasurer.



**Regional Secretary: Sandra Durkin** Regional Secretary of the WMPC, I was elected as a vice-president of the NPC at the 2022 Biennial Delegate Conference. I am the national treasurer of the Associate and Retired Members section of my trade union (PCS). I have just been elected to the executive committee of the Public Sector Pensions Committee



**Assistant Regional Secretary: David Humphreys** I'm a 73-year-old, former Civil and Public Servant based mainly in London; where I was brought up. I came to Kidderminster, for reasons of love, twenty years ago, where I worked for West Mercia Police. I am a Crystal Palace fan and a Steward at Kidderminster Harriers.



### **Regional Vice Chair: Ingrid Caras-Altas**

I worked all my life in the NHS as a Psychiatric Nurse. After my retirement in 1996 I joined the Halesowen Pensioners Convention and became a delegate to the WMPC, becoming the Minutes Secretary and more recently the Vice Chair and Executive Committee member of the NPC.



### **Regional Treasurer: David Williams**

I became a delegate to the WMPC in 1996 and in 2001 was elected as treasurer. I have a strong sense of justice and remember well Gordon Brown's promise 'to take pensioners out of poverty'. Well, we are still waiting and in the current climate of high inflation, that promise seems more hollow than ever. My outside interests include music, gardening, cricket and antique clocks.



### **Women's Officer: Maureen Wade**

Worked for 41 years in Local Government, initially for Solihull Social Services, later with Hackney and Warwickshire. The last 25 years on the Social Work Team at the Q.E. Hospital. Throughout my working life I have been an active in the Labour Party and the Trade Union Movement, retiring in 2017, and am currently Chair of Birmingham UNISON Retired Members.



**Transport Group Secretary: Trevor Eames WMPC Public** Transport Group Lead from Solihull. Retired Accountant in Industry and Special Needs Education in Oxford. Serves on the NPC Pensions & Incomes Working Party.



**Press and Campaign Officer: Brian Allbutt Former** Print Worker and Home Care Assistant. Active Trade Unionist in both GPMU and UNISON, WMPC Campaign and Press Officer, Joint Chair NPC LGBT Working Group. Life long Socialist and member of the Communist Party of Britain. And Animal Lover.



# SAYING GOODBYE TO OLD FRIENDS



## NEIL LE MAITRE

Sadly we have to say goodbye to Neil Le Maitre who, well into his ninties, passed away after a short illness in March of this year. Neil was for many years a stalwart of both the West Midland Pensioners Convention and the Birmingham UNISON Retired Members Branch. Neil will always be remembered for his unassuming and witty sense of humour, an often quite surprising, breadth of knowledge and intellect and his great love of the English Language. Our thoughts go out to Neill's many friends and family and particularly to Iris Taylor; for many years his close companion.

## In memory of Teresa Cullen, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942 – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022



Teresa at Love the Bus Pass petition delivery to 10 Downing Street

Teresa was a very longstanding member of Walsall Pensioners Convention. She was a bright woman, many of the slogans on our banners and T shirts came from her suggestions. She could always be seen at every demonstration with Walsall Pensioners, carrying banners and placards.

She was a devout Catholic and worked hard for her local church, arranging flowers and making buffets. She also helped to run a charity shop linked to the church. Her faith made her very aware of the inequalities in society and she wasn't afraid to campaign to address these

She will be sadly missed by her family and friends. She was truly a force of nature.

# WHAT'S ON

## Walsall Pensioners Convention

Life is slowly returning to normal for members of the Walsall Pensioners Convention.

We started up our in person meetings at the end of 2021 and have been holding our regular monthly meetings on the first Friday every month.

Our Ladies group has also restarted and meets on the last Friday of every month.

All meetings take place at TMO Offices meeting room, Richards House, Burrows Street WS2 8NN and start at 10.30 a.m.

New members are always welcome to join us.

## Sandwell and West Birmingham Pensioners Convention

We have now resumed our monthly branch meetings at the Central Library, West Bromwich on the first Tuesday of the month 11.00 to 12.30

Each Month we organise a social event for members/friends and family members.

New members are always very welcome:

Secretary: Brian Allbutt 07342264482  
email: [brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk)

## Halesowen Pensioners Convention

We have started our monthly meetings again.

They are every third Thursday of the month in the Shenston Theatre in Halesowen Library from 10.30 to 12.30. Although we usually have a speaker, there is always time for up to date discussions concerning pensioners issues and tea and biscuits and a chat.

**The June 2022 meeting will be on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> of June. the speaker will be Mrs Jill Gosling on "Life as a Magistrate"**

Every two months we organise social events. The next one will be on Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> of June to the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham. We shall meet 9.30 at Halesowen Bus Station.

Everyone is very welcome to join us.

For more information or to join Halesowen Pensioners Convention call or e mail:

Tony Whitehouse : 07715314608  
email: [whitehousea970@gmail.com](mailto:whitehousea970@gmail.com)

## East Birmingham Pensioners Convention

A very successful local branch of the Pensioners Convention with regular attendance at the monthly branch meetings, before the Covid -19 pandemic, of over 30 and well supported social activities. We have now resumed our monthly meetings and welcome new members.

The Branch meets on the second Tuesday of the month at Ward End Library, Washwood Heath Road. To join us or for more information contact Stan Simpson on 07930182269 or 0121 788 0734  
email: [simpsogs@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:simpsogs@yahoo.co.uk)

