

# THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

## Summer 2022



### IN THIS ISSUE

Contact Information  
Save Our Railway Ticket  
Offices

Poverty in Later Life

The Extra Benefits of the  
Attendance Allowance

The NHS Under Siege  
“Reminiscing”

“In My Park”  
A Poem by Robbie  
Harper

Lickey Hills  
Fire Warning

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

[thedurk@btinternet.com](mailto:thedurk@btinternet.com)

[wmpcec@gmx.co.uk](mailto:wmpcec@gmx.co.uk)

Assistant Regional Secretary:

David Humphreys: 07906264335

[dnhumphreys@gmail.com](mailto:dnhumphreys@gmail.com)

Campaign and Press Officer:

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

[brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk)

## 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  
David Hampton 01782 201724

East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

Solihull: Alan Thomas: 0121 705 3342

Sandwell & West Birmingham:

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

Coventry and Warwickshire BTUAA:

Sandra Durkin :07860576701

email: [covbptuaa@gmail.com](mailto:covbptuaa@gmail.com)

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

Visit the WMPCC 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://wmpcc.org.uk>

**WMPCC Facebook Group**



## “Somewhere Along the Line”

Many older people will be shocked and dismayed to hear that the rail industry intends to close every ticket office in the UK. This is aside from the other issues that underline the current rail dispute. According to the Sunday Times, the rail industry has drawn up a strategy to phase out physical tickets, closing its 980 ticket offices in England as early as September. Grant

Shapps, the Transport Secretary, has for a long-time suggested paper tickets on trains should be phased out. He recently cited an example of a ticket office that sold just 17 tickets in three months. He then leapt to conclude that “Any sensible plan would remove staff away from where they are not needed, like ticket offices.” He is, ofcourse being disingenuous. As he well knows, not all ticket offices are underused.

I regularly visit Stoke station’s ticket office and it is always busy. The friendly and professional staff go out of their way to advise me of the cheapest and easiest route and help make my journey simple and trouble free. I much prefer to buy my tickets over the counter than from a machine.

According to AGE UK there are around 3 million older people who do not have access to the internet and I suspect there are many more, myself included, who do not have expensive mobile phones. Caroline Abrahams, the Director of AGE UK, told The Times “Many older people lack an up-to-date smartphone or tablet, or live in a place with unreliable broadband. These older people have relied on buying tickets face-to-face at a ticket office or over the phone. What are they expected to do if everything goes online?”

The strategy to close ticket offices would save £500 million a year at the expense of a much valued and essential person centered public service. At the same time senior managers in the rail industry continue to enjoy huge rewards. The Guardian newspaper has researched the pay of the top earners on the railways. Network Rail’s Chief Executive, Andrew Haines earns £588,000. The Financial Officer, Jeremy Westlake is the second highest earner on £415,000 and Tim Shoveller, Network Rail’s chief negotiator in the current talks with the RMT union earns £335,000 a year.

The planned ticket office closures will be labelled as “Modernisation”. Throughout my 37 years at the North Staffs Pensioners Convention, I have come across that word over and over again. It is always used to justify cutbacks. Hardly ever as “modernisation” resulted in more money being spent to improve and expand services.

This is an edited version of Andy Day’s monthly “Personally Speaking” column in the Stoke-on-Trent Sentinel



## **POVERTY IN LATER LIFE A REPORT BY INDEPENDENT AGE**

Older people are often presented as the classic “babyboomer” stereotype, with large private pensions and substantial property wealth. But people in later life are a wide and varied group, and not everyone is enjoying a financially secure retirement. Since 2012 there has been a slow but steady rise in income poverty among older people, with now almost 1 in 5 older people (18%) in relative income poverty after housing costs. Source: A report in March 2021 by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

### **The Key Messages**

- \* Poverty in later life is growing in the UK.
- \* There are stark inequalities in later life that greatly increase the chances of entering poverty past retirement age for some groups, including private and social renters, black and Asian older people and single women.
- \* Though older people’s income fluctuates less than younger groups, there is still movement in and out of poverty, with 40% of pensioners spending at least one year in poverty in a nine-year period.
- \* Changes in social benefit income are the biggest single cause for older people entering and exiting poverty.
- \* Three in five pensioners (61%) who enter poverty in later life have experienced a reduction in social benefit income.
- \* Tackling poverty in later life requires an ambitious strategy to tackle poverty at all ages.

Research from the Pensions Policy Institute has also found that scrapping the triple lock could double the amount that a low-paid young worker has to save in order to avoid poverty in old age.

### **Older people who spend at least one year in poverty are.**

- \* Twice as likely to have a damp home.
- \* Three times as likely to have a cold home.
- \* Twice as likely not to have a filling meal every day.
- \* Four times as likely not to have services in working order.
- \* Twice as likely not to see friends and family regularly.

### **Independent Age Recommendations**

- \* The Government must fulfil its commitment to restore the State Pension triple lock from April 2023.
  - \* The DWP should conduct a wider review of the adequacy of the State Pension, with the Government setting out at what level it wants the State Pension to be valued relative to average earnings.
  - \* The Government should commit to protecting vital benefits for older people that are currently under threat.
  - \* The DWP must release a written action plan to increase the uptake of Pension Credit.
  - \* The Government must keep its promise to introduce the Renters Reform Bill. The Bill must include commitments to scrap Section 21 “no fault” evictions.
  - \* The Department’s for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should build on the Renters Reform Bill by publishing a Green Paper on affordable, secure tenancies. This should include consultation on the popular and effective local rent controls in place in countries like Germany, and longer tenancy agreements.
  - \* The Government should take up the recommendations made by the Good Home Inquiry, set up by the Centre for Ageing Better.
  - \* The role of an Older People’s Commissioner should be established in both England and Scotland.
- This is an abridged version of the Independent Age Report into “Poverty in Old Age”.



## The Extra Benefits of the Attendance Allowance

If you make a successful claim for Attendance Allowance it is often worth checking to see if you qualify for any other benefits or a higher rate of something you already receive. Mean tested benefits, like Pension Credit, often assume a person getting the Attendance Allowance needs more to live on than someone in better health.

The Government say that a single person over the State Pension Age should have a minimum of £182.60 per week to live on, not including any rent they are due to pay, but this increases if:

- You get Attendance Allowance (or some other disabled benefits).
- Are classed as living alone.
- Nobody is paid Carer's Allowance or a care element in their Universal Credit for looking after you.

If all three of those things apply to you, a severe disability premium (currently worth £69.40 a week) is added to the amount the Government say you need to live on. For example, someone getting the full New State Pension of £185.15 per week would not usually get any Pension Credit, because their income is already over £182.60 per week. But if this person makes a successful claim for Attendance Allowance; they are now assumed to need not £182.60 per week to live on but £252 a week. Their Attendance Allowance is not counted as part of their income. If they had no other income and capital worth less than £10,000, they would qualify for £66.85 Guaranteed Pension Credit.

You are treated as "living alone" if any other adults living in your home also get certain disability benefits, including Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment for "daily living", Disability Living Allowance at the middle or higher rate for care, or Armed Forces Independent Payment or are Registered Blind.

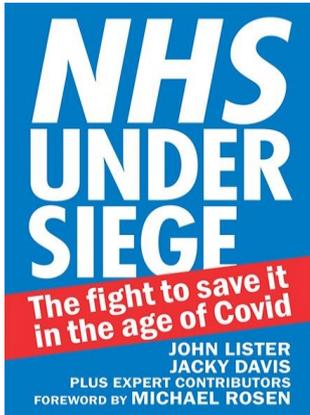
If you are part of a couple and your spouse or partner does not get disability benefit you will not have a severe disability premium included in your Pension Credit calculation, even if you get Attendance Allowance, because you are not living alone. If your spouse/partner does get Attendance Allowance (or another of the disability benefits mentioned above) you are both treated as "living alone" and both qualify for severe disability premiums. This changes your Guarantee Pension Credit rate as a couple- the minimum amount the Government says you need to live on – from £278.70 per week to £417.50 per week.

Pension Credit should top your weekly income up to at least this much- and remember, your Attendance Allowance is disregarded!

If you get help with your rent or Council Tax from the Council, via Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, make sure you tell them if you or your spouse/partner start getting Attendance Allowance, as these benefits are worked out in a similar fashion to Pension Credit. If you do not get either and make a successful Attendance Allowance claim, check if you now qualify.

If you get Attendance Allowance, another option would be to claim for Carer's Allowance. Carer's Allowance is now £69.70 per week. To qualify, your carer needs to spend at least 35 hours per week looking after you. Carers who earn more than £132 per week cannot qualify for Carer's Allowance. If your carer claims Carer's Allowance, you will not usually have the severe disability premium included in your Pension Credit calculations.

This is an edited article by Sarah Honeysett that first appeared in the excellent quarterly magazine of the North Staffs Pensioners Convention "Grey Power". Sarah is a lead advisor for Potteries Gold, a project of Citizens Advice Staffordshire North and Stoke-on-Trent.



“My parents generation created a beautiful and wonderful thing.”  
“After centuries where access to treatment was a matter of how much money you had, a majority of British people put a government in power which said that everyone should be able to get treatment and care from the cradle to the grave on the basis of need”

Michael Rosen: Children’s Author, Poet Laureate

The NHS is under siege. It’s under siege from over a decade of underfunding, it’s under siege because of a chronic shortage of health care workers and an existing workforce that is exhausted and under paid, it’s under siege from private sector providers and their equity capitalist backers and it’s under ideological siege from those who do not believe in a National Health Service that is free at the point of need for everyone regardless of status or ability to pay.

The statistics are shocking:

- Over 6 million patients and rising are on the biggest ever waiting list in England.
- There are chronic failures in performance in A&E and growing numbers of 12-hour trolley waits.
- Performance on cancer care is disastrous and still deteriorating.
- Mental health is desperately under resourced, with 1.5 million people needing mental health care and not getting it.
- There are huge delays in assessments of patients need for social care.

The Covid pandemic as deepened the crisis of morale amongst NHS staff who had already been ground down by constant pressure and dwindling real terms pay. There are currently 110,000 vacancies, an unknown number of staff suffering from long covid and growing numbers leaving to escape the stress and frustration of not being able to deliver quality care.

Despite all the rhetoric and promises from this Government on their unwavering commitment to the NHS, the reality is that successive Conservative governments have consistently failed to adequately fund the NHS; and that continues to be the case. From 1979 to 1997 the NHS had endured outright spending cuts. The former Nat West Banker Derek Wanless, in a report to the then Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown, had shown that successive governments in the 25 years to 1998 had underinvested in the NHS by up to £267billion. Conservative Chancellor George Osborne’s own Office of Budget Responsibility (OBS) showed that the share of national wealth (GDP) spent on the NHS was set to decline to 6% or less by 2021; wiping out the extra investment under the previous Labour Government.

The private sector share of NHS spending on clinical care has risen in cash terms from almost nothing in 1997 when the New Labour Government took office, to over 25% in 2021- worth £12billion. Andrew Lansley’s massive reorganisation within the NHS entrenched competition and introduced a market system driven by ideology. The health and Care Bill 2022, introducing 42 new Integrated Care Systems is a further ideological attack on the founding principles of our NHS.



NHS UNDER SEIGE is intended to be used as a weapon to inform and strengthen the fight for our NHS. Dr. John Lister will be the guest speaker at the September meeting of Birmingham UNISON Retired Members. West Midland Pensioners Convention members are very welcome to attend. For more information call 07342264482

or email: [brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk)

# REMENISING



I joined UNISON Retired Members in January 2002 and was very soon elected onto the Committee, this involved monthly meetings as well as the coffee morning. At this time, the elected Delegates to West Midlands Pensioners' Convention were Iris Taylor and Mary Molloy. Within a very short time Mary stood down from this position and I (Dorothy Lamb) was elected and agreed to take her place. Iris and Dorothy became the new team representing Birmingham UNISON Branch R.M.

There were two monthly meetings to attend.

1 Regional Council – at this meeting delegates from across the West Midlands were present on behalf of their Branches. 2 The Executive Committee - this meeting was made up of elected members from the Regional Council.

Both meetings were held at the Unite Union building in Broad Street, Birmingham and were very well supported by many local branches and affiliates to the Region. What a difference now. 2022 unfortunately Covid has just wiped out the majority of our membership and it is a real struggle getting them back into the fold.

Iris was already established within the WMPC and made every effort to introduce me to all the delegates. Iris was blessed with a quick wit and outgoing personality and was well thought of within the group. As well as attending meetings there were Road Shows and Campaigns held through-out the West Midlands plus the annual Pensioners' Parliament held in Blackpool. We were faithful to the cause and did not renege on many meetings. Over time, supporting the Blackpool Parliament we became firm friends with Neil Le Maitre the Walsall delegate this led to him transferring his membership from Walsall to UNISON Birmingham Retired Members. He was welcomed and immediately elected to be a delegate to WMPC – so the team became a threesome and we contributed in many ways to forward the cause of Pensioners rights. This continued for about a decade, until age and mobility forced Iris and Neil to stand back from their duties. In March Of this year, we received the sad news that Neil had passed away. About four years ago Iris became unsafe living on her own and was moved into a Care Home, so ends an Era. They were my associates for many years and I miss them. Losing our delegates for what-ever reason is sad, but we must continue to remember their valued time and effort freely given to WMPC. Iris and Neil are only two of many who have dedicated their time and effort to bring us through the years and we thank them.

We thank you Dorothy for sharing your poignant and moving memories with us and the two decades of commitment to the pensioner movement including as the recently retired Regional Chair of the West Midland Pensioners Convention.



## IN MY PARK (Ward End Park 1904 to date)

IN MY PARK there's a tree cut down ten years ago  
Lying there where it fell what a tale it now does tell  
When it opened its eyes and looked down on the stream  
Running North to the Tame, the Trent and the North Sea

Looking south sights and sounds of iron, fire and steam  
To the West a row of houses running down to the stream  
Down the hill runs a giant with feet like wheels of steel  
To the north there's a factory making carts without steeds

Ten years came and went and the sounds disappeared  
All that came from the factory were beasts made of steel  
The men gone forever to strange foreign lands  
No-one left in the valley where our feet spread and stand

After four summers passed, the clouds clear the sky  
And the steel covered beasts cease their journey to die  
Many men returned with time on their hands  
No money, no pride, all they had given for their land

Then shaken by the movement of earth 'neath our feet  
Came men, carts and horses and the sound of cheerful speech  
For months these fine men dug a lake by our side  
Now water could flow like the incoming tide



Fed by that water we reached for the sky  
Branches and leaves grew strong at our side  
We heard laughter and joy from the craft on the pool



Bright flowers at our side gave us hope for renewal

Many summers we stood growing tall growing strong  
But the air ceased to buzz surely something was wrong  
The pool became dry as it filled full of waste  
The flowers ceased to grow and weeds filled the space

I used to stand; feel so grand, so proud to be alive  
Now cut down for profit and left here to die  
The world I see has changed, the search for profit never ends  
Nature's gifts left to die by the deeds of powerful men

# **Lickey Hills Fire Warning**

Last month a large portion of the wonderful Lickey Hills caught fire destroying hundreds of trees, many acres of vegetation and countless animals, birds and insects. Human lives were at risk and houses were destroyed. The exact cause is still unknown but no doubt a combination of drought, high temperatures, dry vegetation and human negligence were responsible.

This is not an isolated incident. There have been numerous incidents of woodland and heathland fires across the UK this summer. This is not just a local or national problem, for similar fires have destroyed thousands of acres across Europe and millions of acres across the world.

Scientists are united in their view that this is a result of decades of burning fossil fuels, causing global warming which in turn impacts upon the environment. Locally that means woodland fires in the Lickey Hills.

There is no doubt this is getting worse year on year, even allowing for the normal cycle of weather extremes. Does that mean we are all doomed?

No, it does not, because there are many things that can be done on a personal, a local and a national level to slow down the warming and even reverse it. However, to be effective there has to be international cooperation, reduction targets and action.

There are some great examples of green energy initiatives on a local and national level. I have just returned from the Shetlands where Scottish Government initiatives are growing huge wind turbine schemes to harness wind power to the National Grid. The huge oilfields off the West Coast of Shetland remains undeveloped and UK coal is mostly staying in the ground. Additionally, enormous funding schemes to develop further solar, wave, wind and nuclear power schemes are progressing.

All good stuff, however this is insignificant compared to the amount of fossil fuel being used internationally and the number of natural habitats being destroyed for commercial gain. The world powers need to stop their perpetual imperialist actions of gain and greed and for once realise that they must unite in a global programme of carbon reduction and green energy production.

This has to be linked to a world that takes meaningful action on social justice and fairness for all. They need to stop the war mongering and build a greener world.

Until then the Lickey Hills will continue to burn.

Many thanks to Donald McCombie for this article.

# WHAT'S ON

## Birmingham 21<sup>st</sup> September



The NPS's first 'live' Annual Convention since before the pandemic will be held at the Birmingham Council House on Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> September.

The event returns for one day to host a series of topical expert led discussions before an audience of 200 NPC members with an overall theme of *Pensioner Poverty and Human Rights*. Including consideration of the rapid rise in pensioners struggling to make ends meet as the Cost of Living Crisis hikes up food, energy and transport costs, the decreasing real-term value of State Pensions, the huge pressure on the NHS and Social Care, the digital exclusion and social isolation of so many pensioners and the on going crisis in the provision of public transport.

General Secretary Jan Shortt said "The pandemic took a terrible toll on pensioners and highlighted how much our rights are being undermined as ageism tries to silence our voices. The Convention will debate the issues and solutions, such as our campaigns for a National Care Service and for a Commissioner for Older People in England as they have in Wales and Northern Ireland."

The event will run from 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Tickets are £5.00 per head (including teas, coffees, juice and a lunch).

To Book a Place: email [info@npcuk.org](mailto:info@npcuk.org)

Or write to:

NPC, Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London, **WC1N 1AB**

## Halesowen Pensioners Convention

We are gradually coming up to speed again and continue to meet on the 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 next meeting will be on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> of September. the speaker will be from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

Apart from our monthly meetings we also have organised trips and outings. Our destinations are mainly reached by bus. Our next social occasion will be the beginning of October to the Carpet Museum in Kidderminster. We will also be organising a publicity event to coincide with UN Older Peoples Day. 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)

## Sandwell and West Birmingham Pensioners Convention

We meet on the first Tuesday of the month at the Central Library, High Street, West Bromwich from 10.45 till 12.30. Followed by refreshments kindly provided by The Friends of the Library.

Each month we also invite members/family and friends to join us for a social/meal.

New members are always very welcome.

For further information about our pensioner group call Brian on 07342264482 or email [brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk)