

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

AUTUMN 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).

Regional Secretary:

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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
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

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Individual Members: Brian Allbutt 07342264482
email: 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

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

It's Official

The State of Health and Adult Social Care in England 2021/22

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) Annual Statement of Health and Care in England is being widely reported as a “honest assessment of the severe pressures facing England’s NHS and Social Care services and will make “a difficult read and reality check for the Government”. NHS Confederation.

Some of the key points raised in the report by the CQC include

- The report highlights the gridlock experienced by some patients trying to access the care they need due to patient flow challenges in acute settings. While the reasons for this situation are complex, the CQC is right to highlight that the main challenge is workforce shortages across the NHS and social care.
- A reported 500,000 PEOPLE ARE WAITING FOR A SOCIAL CARE ASSESSMENT. The failure of successive governments to adequately stabilise social care and address huge vacancies is bringing the whole NHS to a standstill.
- One of the key challenges facing the health and social care system is the backlog of elective appointments, with 7 million people now waiting to receive care. However, the CQC acknowledges that staff across the system are working hard to deliver care more flexibly in order to overcome backlogs and cope with demand.
- Primary care demand currently outstrips capacity to deliver appointments. The CQC reports variation in people’s access to primary care services, as well as low satisfaction. The government should manage expectations for the public and support Primary Care by highlighting that General Practices have, for the past eight months, been operating at 20 per cent above pre- pandemic levels of activity.
- We are encouraged to see the CQC highlighting the deepening inequalities in our society, in particular the lack of access in areas with high levels of deprivation, for people with disabilities and from ethnic minority backgrounds. This needs to be addressed by government as a matter of urgency.
- The report’s findings are an indictment of years of underfunding and political neglect of the health and social care system. The examples are manifold. The number of GP’s has fallen despite the government’s manifesto promise of 5,000 extra GP’s. Nine in ten registered NHS dentists are not taking new adult patients. NHS leaders are unable to renovate and repurpose NHS buildings and estates due to the £10 million maintenance backlog, despite the Government’s manifesto promise to build 40 new hospitals.

Source: NHS Confederation/ Care Quality Commission



In 2019 this man said
“We will fix the crisis in social care ONCE AND FOR ALL with a clear plan to give every old person the dignity and security they deserve.”



Stop Train Ticket Offices Closing Down & Ensure Safe Access On All Trains & All Stations.

The National Federation of the Blind UK(NFBUK) are extremely worried about the Governments proposed changes to the staffing at railway stations and on train services including:

*Closing all ticket offices down, reducing staff and removing guards on trains.

The National Federation of the Blind are passionate about independent accessibility for all. It is essential that train users have someone to speak to at our train stations, to be able to purchase a ticket manually from the ticket office, to have the peace of mind that there will always be somebody present at all stations to ensure safe access on and off a train and for all people that need it, for a ramp to be deployed quickly and efficiently. Not everyone has access to the internet and not everyone has access to a smart phone. Is essential therefore that the option to purchase a ticket at a train station from a human at a ticket office is protected at all staffed stations and for all unstaffed stations to be staffed to ensure access for everyone who wants to travel independently.

It is essential that all trains have guards on them for safety, security and accessibility. Removing staff from rail stations and removing guards from trains will make all train journeys unsafe and very stressful for blind, visually impaired, disabled and vulnerable train passengers. The proposed changes will create significant barriers for blind, visually impaired, disabled and vulnerable train passengers from being able to travel independently. Many will not be able to travel and will be barred from using a relatively green and efficient form of transport due to the proposed changes. Leading to greater isolation in the disabled community and the inability to travel by train. This cannot be allowed to happen.

The National Federation of the Blind are petitioning the Prime Minister demanding that:

- All unstaffed rail stations to become staffed at all times.
- For all ticket offices to remain open and all staffed stations to remain staffed at all times with safe level of staffing.
- For all trains to have guards (also known as train managers or conductors) at all times.
- For all unstaffed stations to become staffed at all times with safe levels of staffing.



For further information about the NFBUK petition and campaign to “Stop Train Ticket Offices Closing Down & Ensure Safe Access On All Trains & All Stations.” Contact:

NFBUK, Sir John Wilson House, 215 Kirkgate, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 1JG or...

Sarah Gayton, Street Access Campaign Coordinator: email sarahgayton@yahoo.co.uk call 01827 714673



Fighting For Older People UNISON Retired Members Conference 2022

THE trade union Unison was forced to abandon its annual retired members' conference in 2020 and last year — it was held on a virtual platform, all thanks to Covid. Much has changed in the fast-moving arena of politics since then, including a new Prime Minister who clearly has little respect for ordinary people or the needs of pensioners.

Unison represents nearly 170,000 retired members and the conference will be attended by approximately 500 delegates looking forward to workshops, a panel debate on the cost-of-living crisis, making policy decisions and showing solidarity.

Retired trade union members can be a formidable force in the fight for change to ensure a fairer society especially at a time when they are recovering from the isolation and despair of the pandemic. Recent Tory governments have a lot to answer for and we have constant worries about the future. Who would have guessed that the Tory Party might elect an even worse, more incompetent and uncaring leader than Boris Johnson? Liz Truss is taking a massive gamble with the economy and our lives. She has said that she is listening but she clearly isn't.

Unison will resist government attacks on our pensions and other benefits in any attempt to help recover the costs of dealing with the pandemic and the disastrous impact of current government policies on the stability of the economy and resilience of pension funds.

A regime that also fails to respect those working in the health service and in social care or those receiving care. Unison is calling for a national care service as the only way to ensure change.



Pensioners aged over 75 were dealt a cruel blow with the withdrawal of free TV licences. We will continue to fight for the Triple Lock on the state pension that ensures increases in line with inflation, and retention of other benefits introduced to boost our low state pension, the worst in any developed country. The cumulative effect of the loss of benefits would have a massive impact on pensioner finances especially for those who are already on low incomes.

Motions also include opposition to the privatisation of the NHS by stealth and concerns about the long waiting lists given the reliance that older people place on quality healthcare free at the point of delivery. There are calls too for a Commissioner for Older People in England, independent of government, who would safeguard and act as advocate for the concern of older people. It is inexcusable that such a role exists in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but not England.



Rosie MacGregor is chair of Unison National Retired Members Committee and president of the National Pensioners Convention.

OTHERS LIKE

In Celebration of the Life of our Dear Friend

Colin Wilkinson



Colin has been an integral part of the West Midland Pensioners Convention family for as long as I remember.

Always prepared to speak his mind. You always knew when Colin was going to come out with one of his little gems because he would say “Don’t get me wrong” and very often what followed would have absolutely nothing to do with what was being discussed at the time or what you were doing at the time.

We never agreed all the time- Colin and me- in fact I think we hardly ever agreed!

I remember one occasion we were outside the Symphony Hall in Birmingham. We were lobbying delegates to the Tory Party Conference. When Colin started off “Don’t get me wrong” – and then launched into a scathing attack on Jeremy Corbyn “You can’t trust Jeremy Corbyn”- “The Labour Party will never win with Jeremy Corbyn as leader.” Much to the delight of delegates going into Symphony Hall.

Colin knew I was a supporter of Corbyn and the Labour Left. You just got the impression he just liked to get you going with his “Don’t get me wrong”.

Having said that- Colin could always be relied on – he was always there for us.

The last time we saw Colin was at the West Midland Pensioners Convention Annual General Meeting. The meeting was held in the Birmingham and Midland Institute in Margaret Street. This was at the time when the Metro wasn’t running, so a good walk from New Street Station. Although when I spoke to Colin on the phone, and we talked quite often, he was adamant he would be there. True to his word, around half way through the meeting, Colin joined us. It was clear he was in considerable pain and discomfort; I really don’t know how he managed the walk from New Street Station to the BMI -but he did- that was Colin.

Sadly, we have lost a number of friends and colleagues over the past twelve months- all will be missed. But I must admit when I heard of the death of Colin, I shed a few tears.

We will miss Colin. As a Friend Colleague and Comrade. RIP

Brian Allbutt



Black History Month - Eleanor's Story

Eleanor Dixon was just seventeen when she followed her father's footsteps and left Barbados to join him in Birmingham and train as a nurse. This was 1964, by which time her dad had been living in England for nine years, after finding a job in the City's refuse department; where he was to work for the rest of his life.

Ever since she was a child at school, Eleanor had dreamt of becoming a nurse. Too young to start training immediately when she arrived, Eleanor began training as a cadet nurse in 1964. This was at Summerfield Hospital in Birmingham which had become had become a centre for Geriatric care.

When Eleanor reached her 18th birthday, she began training to become a State Enrolled nurse (SEN) in January 1965 and moved into the nurse's home on site.

Eleanor and grand kids on Seven Valley Railway.

Even though she was embarking on her dream career, leaving her mother sister and brother in Barbados had been a real wrench (and the way both Conservative and Labour Government of the 1960s tightened restrictions on the free movement of Commonwealth Citizens made it impossible for the rest of the family to join Eleanor and her dad). Eleanor recalls "I used to cry on a Sunday for a long long time, because that was the day you went to church, had your dinner at home together and then went to Sunday school" But it did help that many of the pupil nurses shared her Caribbean heritage. "The nurse's home was a happy place because I saw a mixture of people from similar backgrounds to me – from Jamaica, Ghana, St Kitts and Barbados." Eleanor recalls that they all looked after each other.

After completing her training, getting married and moving to Erdington, Eleanor got a new job at Good Hope Hospital in Sutton Coldfield. That was where she met her close friend, pupil nurse Loretta Paris "I Remember the first day we met in the canteen at Good Hope Hospital, we were chatting away and have remained friends to this day".

Eleanor left Good Hope hospital when she started a family (her son was born in 1972 her daughter in 1975). But she began looking to returning to work as the children got a little older towards the end of the 70s. "I was looking for something that had the hours where I could be near home and near the school. There was a care home near where I was living; which was Annie Wood House which was just over the road from where I was living, the school wasn't far away, the child minder wasn't far away and the church wasn't far away."

While working as a senior care assistant Eleanor completed her Certificate in Social Services, during this time she assisted in the write a booklet for Birmingham City Councils Social Services Department. Eleanor Explains "Going all the way back to 1979/80 we had people from African-Caribbean backgrounds living in residential care and I thought it was very important they kept in touch with their dietary needs."

After several years at Annie Wood House Eleanor secured a new job as the manager of a residential care home and day centre; While there she completed a level 5 qualification as a registered manager and trained as a NVQ Assessor. At around this time Eleanor's mother came to live with her from Barbados, having become increasingly confused and unable to continue living by herself.

Eleanor has been a member of UNISON since it's launch in 1993 and is now an active member of the Birmingham Branch of UNISON Retired Members Committee.

Mixed Age Misfortunes

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) describe couples where only one is over State Pension Age (SPA) as a "mixed - age" couple.

Until May 15th 2019, a mixed-age couple could claim means tested Social Security Benefits- those that are meant to top up your income to a minimum amount, or help you meet your rent or council tax costs- as if both were over SPA. This meant that if their income and savings were low enough, they could get financial help through Pension Credit (PC) or Housing Benefit (HB).

A mixed-aged couple, lets call them Kate and Sam, aged 59 and 75 where Sam has an old state pension of £150 a week and Kate has no income could claim Pension Credit which for couples is £278.70 a week before the DWP changed the benefit rules in 2019. The same mixed-age couple after May 15th 2019 would be treated not as if both were over the SPA but as a working-age couple and could therefore not claim Pension Credit but Universal Credit for a couple which is £121.05 a week- £157.72 a week less than Pension Credit for couples over SPA.

If you are part of a mixed-aged couple who claimed PC or HB before the rules changed in 2019, you stay on these benefits as long as you remain eligible for them.

We have already seen that the basic rate of UC for a couple is set £157.65 a week lower than PC for a couple. It is also £20.80 a week lower than the basic rate of the Old State Pension (£141.85 a week) and £64.10 a week below the full rate of the New State Pension (£185.15). So, under the new rules, a mixed-aged couple with no special circumstances and no rent to pay would usually be assessed to have enough to live on from the retired partners State Pension alone!

Worse than that, mixed-aged couples are often worse off in simple cash terms than the pensioner partner would be living alone! A single pensioner getting just a basic Old Age Pension of £141.85 a week would be eligible for £40.75 a week PC to top that up to "the amount the government says you need to live on, but would qualify for neither if they had a working-age partner.

With debate currently ongoing about the level to set benefit rates for the next financial year, we should remember that not all pensioners are currently being treated as pensioners by our Social Security system; and that real-term cuts for "working-age" claimants will mean poverty for many pensioners too.

This is an edited version of an article by Sarah Honeysett that first appeared in the North Staffordshire Pensioners Convention quarterly magazine "Grey Power".

For a pdf copy of "Grey Power" or "Benefits for Mixed-age Couples" contact the West Midland Pensioners Convention Campaign and Press Office: email brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk or call 0734226448

AS I GROW OLD I WILL MARCH NOT SHUFFLE

As I grow old

I will not shuffle to the beat

of self-interest

and make that slow retreat

to the right.

I will be a septuagenarian insurrectionist

marching with the kids. I shall sing

'La Marseillaise', whilst brandishing

homemade placards that proclaim

'DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING'.

I will be an octogenarian obstructionist,

and build unscalable barricades

from bottles of flat lemonade,

tartan blankets and chicken wire.

I will hurl prejudice upon the brazier's fire.

I will be a nonagenarian nonconformist,

armed with a ballpoint pen

and a hand that shakes with rage not age

at politicians' latest crimes,

in strongly-worded letters to The Times.

I will be a centenarian centurion

and allow injustice no admittance.

I will stage longstanding sit-ins.

My mobility scooter and I

will move for no-one.

And when I die

I will be the scattered ashes

that attach themselves to the lashes

and blind the eyes

of racists and fascists.

Brian Bilston. described by many has "the Poet Laureate of Twitter"

WHAT'S ON



West Midland Pensioners Convention

Regional Council Meetings

Throughout the covid-19 pandemic we have been holding our regional council meetings virtually. With the lifting of restrictions and a return to some kind of normality, our regional council meetings have finally returned to in-person meetings. Recognising that not everyone is comfortable with meeting face to face and some may actually prefer to continue to join us virtually- There will be a hybrid facility.

The Next Regional Council Meeting

Thursday November 10th 11.00a.m. till 1.00 p.m.
Having addressed the successful Annual Convention organised by the National Pensioners Convention in Birmingham Council House. We have invited the Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care- Mariam Khan as our main speaker.

XMAS SOCIAL

On December 8th we invite you to join us for our seasonal social event. Donald McCombie will be entertaining us with a song or two and another "Ripping Yarn. The buffet is £5

All Regional Council meetings will be at the Birmingham UNISON Branch Office.

Walsall Pensioners Convention

All our meetings take place on the first Friday of the month at TMO Offices meeting room- Richards House, Burrowes Street, WS2 8NN and start at 10.30 a.m.

The next meeting is Friday November 4th.

XMAS SOCIAL

Friday December 2nd.

We also have a very active ladies group.

New members are always very welcome.

Halesowen Pensioners Convention

The Branch meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month in the Shenston Theatre in Halesowen Library from 10.30 to 12.30.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, 17th of November. The main Speaker will be from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

*

Xmas Social

Thursday December 15th

There will be a Buffet and **seasonal songs with a local choir.**

Everyone is very welcome to join us.

Halesowen Remembrance Parade

Sunday November 13th

St John the Baptist Church

High Street

For more information: contact Tony Whitehouse

Call 07715314608 email 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: simpsons@yahoo.co.uk

