

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

SUMMER2023



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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 several very active committees, including a Transport Group which holds regular quarterly meetings with Transport for the Midlands (formerly CENTRO).

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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

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Individual Members: Brian Allbutt 07342264482
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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

FIGHTING FOR TODAY'S AND TOMORROW'S OLDER PEOPLE



Delegates at the Imperial Hotel, representing the NPC's million-plus members, heard experts discuss the many issues affecting older people, such as the huge crisis in health and social care, the rocketing cost of living and our inadequate and unequal state pension, as well as the decline in services such as transport and housing, and the drive towards a digital-only public and private sector. With more than two million older people now living in poverty in Britain, the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) is campaigning for the generations to unite to ensure today's and tomorrow's older people enjoy a better later life. That is a view echoed by three generations of one family who were shocked to learn how bleak life is for the older generation at last week's NPC annual convention in Blackpool.

Nanas Against Fracking campaigner Tina Rothery, her daughter Stephanie, and 18-year-old granddaughter Amelia were stunned to hear the distressing testimonials of many older people and expert speakers when they joined 300 delegates at the convention. Rothery, 61, an environmental campaigner from Blackpool, said: "The convention was eye-opening and not necessarily in a good way. "There are things that I had not realised about what is going to happen as I continue to age. "My eye has been on the environment, and you cannot fight everything. But you realise that everything really emanates from a poor system of government, and today really enraged me. Especially hearing about the problems in the care system."

Stephanie said: "It was terrifying, listening to what older people are going through; it is scary. Discrimination — ageism — makes no sense because everybody ages. So why doesn't everybody care about their future? "And Amelia, 18 said "I probably will not be able to retire until I am 80. We are all going to get older, if we are lucky, but it is not looking good right now. You should not have to wait years, just working and working to get a pension, a sum of money that is not really going to give you any quality of life. "We shouldn't have to be young to live our lives, we should be able to live how we choose to, at every age."

Convention speakers included Simon Francis from End Fuel Poverty, John Lister from Keep Our NHS Public, Lord Davies of Brixton on the state pension, and Tom Lowe from the Digital Poverty Alliance, plus leaders from national organisations including Age UK, Independent Age, Ageing Better, as well as the TUC, Unite and Unison.

This is an edited article that first appeared in the Morning Star

NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE PENSIONERS CONVENTION



Just when you think things cannot get worse the government comes up with something else.

On the 5th of July under the direction of the Transport Secretary Mark Harper, the Rail Delivery Group which represents train operators announced a ridiculous short- blink and you miss it- three week “consultation” over the closure of nearly 1,000 ticket offices at stations across the UK.

What is the matter with this government?

It is essential that more people use the railways. This would reduce car use which would in turn, cut emissions and help avoid catastrophic climate warming. The economy of the north and midlands desperately needs a railway system fit for purpose, not another kick in the teeth.

The closure of ticket offices will cut passenger numbers and further damage an already failing rail network. And what about the impact on passengers? If it goes ahead, the closure of ticket offices will disproportionately affect older, disabled, and vulnerable people.

Caroline Abrahams, Director of AGE UK said: “Millions of older people are not online and therefore relying on the traditional methods, including face to face, for everyday transactions such as buying train tickets. It is unfair if they are excluded from accessing the cheapest prices, just because they do not own a smartphone or other digital device.” My fear is that the closure of ticket offices would cause vulnerable people anxiety and distress and will mean that many may decide not to travel at all. And, as many studies have shown, isolation can be a killer.

The Government say that things must change because only 12% of tickets are bought at ticket offices. But, according to the Office of Rail and Road (the industry regulator), 12% equates roughly to 170 million tickets a year, which is a huge number. Nor does this figure include those who visit ticket offices to seek advice or reassurance about their journey without buying a ticket. And make no mistake- this is not about freeing up staff to allow them to move about the stations to help customers, as the government claims- it is about job cuts.

Last year, when the closure of ticket offices was first mooted, North Staffs Pensioners Convention held a protest at Stoke station attended by over 60 people. Now the Convention is writing to local MPs and others to object to the proposals and is asking members and the public to make their views on the matter known to the powers that be.

This is an edited version of “Personally Speaking,” the regular column in the Stoke Sentinel by the President of North Staffs Pensioners Convention Andy Day.

IMPORTANT UPDATE - KEEP TICKET OFFICES OPEN

I am writing to let you know that it has been announced this morning that the ticket office closure consultations, which were due to close today after just a 21-day consultation period, will now be extended until 1st September.

Campaigning by RMT members and activists in conjunction with disabled peoples' groups, passenger groups, politicians and others has undoubtedly forced the Government and train companies' hand. Under the original timescales they wanted this process completed by the end of August.

Transport Focus have confirmed that over 170,000 consultation responses have already been received. That so many responses have been submitted is undoubtedly as a result of the amazing efforts of RMT members, reps, and activists to mobilise around this vital campaign and get the message out to as many passengers as possible and I would like to thank each one of you for your work. We now need to ramp up our campaign over the coming weeks and maximise public opposition to these proposals. Get the message out to the public that their opposition is working, and they need to keep up the pressure on the train companies and Government to ensure the whole closure programme is abandoned.

When the consultations close on 1st September, there will be a 35-day period during which Transport for London and Travelwatch review the consultation responses. At the end of this period, they can either object to or accept the operators' proposals. Where Transport Focus and London Travelwatch object to closures, and the train company still wishes to proceed, it will then be referred to the Secretary of State for a decision. As we know, the Government has been vocal in its support for ticket office closures, but if this happens, we will be taking our campaign directly to the Government.

Campaign postcards which are already printed can continue to be used, and we will be ordering more materials and announcing more days of action and campaigning events very soon. If you have run out of campaign materials and would like to request more, please email saveourticketoffices@rmt.org.uk and these will be distributed to you once more materials have been printed.

Regarding the staff consultations it is likely that this process will continue but may be delayed and the union will be seeking formal clarification on this point from the train companies, and I will advise you of the position as soon as possible.

We are aware of two legal challenges being taken in relation to the consultation process, one by a group of Labour metro mayors and one by disabled passengers. We are monitoring these developments closely and will continue to remain in contact with these organisations and the union will also be considering all options, including legal measures, to halt the ticket office closures.

I will keep you updated on developments and in the meantime if you have any questions about our campaign, email saveourticketoffices@rmt.org.uk

Michael Lynch General Secretary: Rail, Maritime and Transport Union.

Support the Fight to Save BBC Radio



Members of the National Union of Journalists have been taking industrial action to stop BBC management plans to cut BBC local radio in England, which will result in afternoon and weekend shows becoming regional, with many presenters losing their shows and jobs. BBC management say the move will allow stronger local online services – for ‘stronger’ read ‘cheaper because we can employ less people.’

The NUJ has taken strike action on key days in June and July, and has received huge support from local radio’s 5.4 million listeners, M.P.s and councillors from all parties, a huge range of charities, football fans and community groups.

‘Regionalising’ local radio will mark the beginning of its end, which many fear is the reasoning by BBC management as it looks to cut costs. The whole point of local radio is to get local news- not the news from a different town or city.

There has been a taste of what it could be like during the NUJ strike in June. BBC in the Midlands had to drop the BBC regional TV programme *Midlands Today* because of strikes- instead they broadcast the *London & the South East News*, much to the puzzlement of us Midlanders.

BBC local radio is not just about entertainment-it makes an important contribution to local democracy, which is why many politicians from all parties are backing the fight. Most areas have already lost their local newspapers, so where will we get the debate and campaigning about local issues, that the local radio talk-shows provide?

BBC local radio plays a very important Public Service Broadcasting role. It has proved essential during times of localised emergencies, such as flooding. During COVID they were the backbone of support to their communities by making sure people were signposted to the right places for help- that is not something you can do on national broadcasts.

Once again, like the closures of train station offices or cutbacks in the health services, it is the older age group- who make up the mainstay of BBC local radio listeners- who will be affected, in yet another example of digital exclusion. The BBC’s focus on more on-line services comes when current reports show that one million broadband connections have been cancelled due to the cost-of-living crisis.

As the NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet, said: “The NUJ supports digital expansion of local news, but this should not be at the expense of local radio and its 5.4 million loyal listeners.” The cuts will also disproportionately affect disabled people who – like the older age group- are a key demographic of local radio.

That is why the National Pensioners Convention is backing the campaign. In May, the NPC went to Downing Street and BBC Headquarters supporting a petition hand-in by the National Federation of the Blind UK and signed by the NPC, opposing the proposed cuts. Jan Short, NPC General Secretary said “The rationale for imposing national programmes onto local radio stations does not make sense. It is a cost cutting exercise and nothing to do with providing a comprehensive service to local people.”

Many thanks to Bob Wade, the Birmingham, and Coventry NUJ Branch Secretary for this article.



Saving Dudley Libraries

On 6 March 2023, Dudley Council passed its medium-term financial strategy including £1.44m planned reductions to the libraries budget, amounting to 30% of the libraries budget.¹

UNISON members agreed to organise a petition and hold a lobby of the Council on 18 May.

The campaign brought together library staff, library users, the Friends' groups, trade unionists, student unions, Labour councillors, local authors, and celebrities including Lenny Henry and the Black Country Singers.

Friends of the Libraries groups began organising. Gornal was an early starter, with the Friends placing posters and petitions in shops, a precedent that was followed around the borough. Dudley TUC and Dudley NEU offered financial and administrative support, including two campaign banners. Dudley Students Union placed posters in prominent locations and requested the College governors to sign the petition.

The lobby

Over 100 people came to the lobby, of all ages and walks of life, united by their love for libraries. Alongside many library workers and users, Alan Wylie, Workforce Representative on the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport for Libraries came up from London to give a rousing speech.

Individuals provided a PA, designed hand-made signs and printed placards, stickers, and flyers – as well as bringing musical instruments! Supporting organisations brought their banners to support the lobby, which received extensive, sympathetic local press coverage and support from Labour councillors.

Street stalls and community forums

The Socialist Party carried our petition on their regular Dudley stall. In terms of campaign stalls, Stourbridge was first, attracting over 200 signatures and well supported with 12 individuals, in attendance. Halesowen and Wordsley were next, both attracting over 200 signatures and press coverage. Campaigners also attended community forums in Cradley and Stourbridge, putting questions to the councillors responsible and gaining support from residents.

Resolution On 28 June, nearly three months after the budget reductions were first announced, the Leader of the Council announced that the Council had found extra funds and carried out research on the social value of libraries, so the planned budget cuts would no longer take place.

The decision was ratified at the Council meeting on 10 July.

Why were we successful? We were successful because we made our voices heard, through extensive, sympathetic coverage online and in the printed press. The lobby attracted many supporters, including celebrities, and crucially, we spoke passionately about the campaign to the press. We stayed in the local public eye, gaining support from a wide cross-section of the public.

Many thanks for this article to the Secretary of Dudley Trades Council: Jessica Stoll



NHS at 75: facing its greatest danger

When David Cameron's Conservative-led coalition took office in 2010 the NHS was reaching a peak of performance with record low waiting times for elective and emergency care, and record high levels of performance and public satisfaction. These are now a distant memory.

The target for 95% of people in A&E to wait no more than 4 hours has not been met since 2015: the 92% target for patients to wait no more than 18 weeks was last achieved in 2016. Cancer services have been missing targets since 2015.

13 years of austerity and cuts in public health and prevention have undermined the health of communities, while real terms spending cuts, bed closures, soaring numbers of vacant posts and a continuing crisis in privatised social care have limited NHS capacity.

While so-called "reforms" in England's NHS in 2012 were focused on forcing more services to be contracted out to profit-seeking private providers. It's massive and costly reorganisation fragmented services, undermined the finances of NHS trusts, boosted spending on private contractors. Subsequent "reforms" have carved England's NHS into 42 "Integrated Care Systems", established in July 2022 and led by "Integrated Care Boards" that have remained locked in financial crisis, seeking impossible levels of "savings" and answerable only to government ministers and not to the local communities they are supposed to serve.

While the Sunak government has ignored stark warnings from emergency specialists, cancer specialists, mental health specialists and many more that NHS services are in a dire state and in need of investment. It's time for a clear alternative as we move towards a General Election Based on * An emergency injection of £20 billion.* A commitment to a decade of real term spending increases to repair the damage that has been done.* STOP squandering cash on outsourcing.* Bring private contracts back in-house.* Build back the capacity for the NHS to once again match and exceed the performance it delivered in 2010.* Recruiting and training more staff* Improving working conditions for existing NHS Staff and restoring the full value of the salary scales established back in the 2000's.

Health Campaigns Together, Keep Our NHS Public and SOS NHS stand ready to fight for these policies and support politicians bold enough to put them forward.



"Illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay, nor an offence for which they should be penalised, but a misfortune the cost of which should be shared by the community."

This is an edited head-line article that first appeared in the Health Campaign Together Summer issue 2023.

Health & Social Care News

National Pensioners Convention Health & Social Care Working Party

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Issue : June 2023

SPECIAL UPDATE EDITION FOR THE ANNUAL CONVENTION, BLACKPOOL

Members of the Health & Social Care Working Party:

- June Clark
- Mary Cousins
- Barrie Finch
- Martin Gallagher
- Jean Hardiman-Smith
- Valerie Johnston
- Pat Roche
- Christine Sanders
- David Vickers
- Maureen Wade

We hope you continue to enjoy our newsletter and that you will share your stories with us.

The Health and Social Care Working Party is working with a number of different organisations including University College London, with our Committee Member Patricia Roche.

Mental Health: UCU is meeting at the end of May where this will be discussed via motions. The same is evident in the area of Health and Social Care. It seems that pension uncertainty, workload, fragmented income and increasing breakdown of the NHS has now become an example of generations United.

The issue of learning difficulties was also discussed. Our member from Northern Ireland said that lack of government has left people to fend for themselves in both Mental Health and Learning difficulties. This was exemplified in students and the effects of COVID. Anecdotal evidence shows the effects of COVID still pervade in the UK. This is also a feature of motions to be debated in the National Congress.

The variation across the UK, region by region, and the devolved nations is clear. Various members offered to write and compile information to assist with this large piece of work.

End of life care across the four nations. The policies sound good but the reality is far from it. A huge range of agencies have done research with some examples of good practice and some not. Timely Care planning is needed. Key arguments say that all should have access to end of life and supporting patient choice. More research is needed with the help of our LGBT+ members.

Integrated Care: Integrated Care Systems (ICS) are comprised of Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs); Integrated Care Boards (ICBs); Local Authorities; Place-Based Partnerships; and Provider Collaboratives.

The ICP is responsible for producing an integrated care strategy on how to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the population in the ICS area.

Following the publication of the NHS Long Term Plan in January 2019 and the introduction of the Health and Care Act, 2020, ICPs formally set up 42 statutory ICBs across England on 1st July, 2022.

Within each ICS, place-based partnerships lead the detailed design and delivery of integrated services across their localities and neighbourhoods. The partnerships involve the NHS Trusts, local councils, community and voluntary organisations, local residents, people who use services, their carers and representatives and other community partners with a role in supporting the health and wellbeing of the population.

Summer 2023

Issue 177

NPC Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

NPC Annual Convention Blackpool 2023 – SPECIAL ISSUE

Back Stronger Than Ever!

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WANT TO JOIN THE NPC?

Do you care about issues affecting older people? Want to do something about them? Then join us as an individual, or as an affiliate group. We are the biggest UK campaign group run for and by older people. Contact us to find out how to get involved. Details above.

NPC members have returned from the 2023 Annual Convention in Blackpool with a renewed determination to campaign for the rights of today's and tomorrow's older people.

More than 300 delegates gathered at The Imperial Hotel, Blackpool for our first Convention since before the pandemic. Over two days (28th & 29th June) they heard 23 guest experts address eight panel sessions on key issues. But the final session confirmed that uniting the generations to fight for a better retirement is most im-

portant - a view echoed by three generations of Nana's Against Fracking campaigner Tina Rothery, who brought her daughter Stephanie, and 18-year-old granddaughter Amelia to the Convention (see page 2). NPC General Secretary, Jan Shortt said, "This was a very important Annual Convention given the many serious problems facing older people. But it was heartening to see so many people - young and old alike - asking questions and encouraged to fight for real change and reform across all our broken systems."

More pictures & reports: P. 2/3



Closures consultation deadline delayed — but we fight on!

NPC welcomes news that the deadline for a consultation on plans to close 970 railway ticket offices has been extended until 1st September. But, we will continue to press for the proposals to be thrown out, and are urging members and affiliates to make their views known - as NPC has already done - to the consultation leads at Transport Focus and London Travelwatch.

NPC's Jan Shortt said: "We have won a battle, but we need to keep campaigning until the plans are completely scrapped. If the closures go ahead, they will have huge consequences for older and disabled people, many of whom can't go online to buy tickets. It discriminates against people's right to travel, and to obtain discounted tickets online."

Continued on Page 4



CONNECTIONS FOR ALL

Issue 5
May 2023

The Newsletter of the NPC Digital Working Party

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Rook, Janet Shapiro, Alan
Stidaway.

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Londoners
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NPC CONVENTION
June 28 & 29th, Blackpool.
The Digital Working Party will
have a stand.
Come and say hello.
We will also be carrying out
a survey. Please come and
pick up a copy.

Left Behind Londoners Travel Alert



More than 7.8 million are being left behind by a digital-first approach to transport, says a London TravelWatch report

The independent watchdog, London TravelWatch (LTW), is calling on all transport authorities and operators to maintain non-digital options to allow freedom of travel for digitally excluded and disadvantaged Londoners, following its survey and resulting report.

Left Behind Londoners Digital Exclusion and Disadvantage in London's Transport is also calling on the transport industry to take steps to tackle the issues "as a priority". The report defines a digitally excluded person as "Someone who either is unable to, or chooses not to ever go online, whether using mobile data, WiFi or cabled internet, or any device" And a digitally disadvantaged person as "somebody who does fewer than five activities online and uses mobile data once a week or less: they may use some online services but be excluded from others".

It says "Compared to Londoners overall, disadvantaged or excluded people are more likely to be older(55+),white, disabled and have a lower income"

One in six say they are unable to buy a ticket because they can't use or don't have access to a smartphone or internet connection. One in five say they have paid more for travel because they are not able to buy tickets online or by using mobile apps

It concludes: "Given the scale of digital exclusion and disadvantage, and the serious impact it can have on the people affected, the transport industry should take steps to tackle it as a priority"
<https://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/campaign/digital-exclusion/>

THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE UK

The COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis have exacerbated existing inequalities, intensifying the socioeconomic, environmental, health and climate related impacts on the lives of older persons, especially older women and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

POVERTY	RIGHTS	SERVICES
Pensioner poverty is rising. People are having to choose between eating or heating.	Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, so why are we not being listened to?	Services are disappearing and many that do exist are not accessible or working well.

- a UN survey found one in every two people held moderately or highly ageist attitudes
- there are almost 11 million people aged 65 and over in the UK - 19% of the total population.
- there has been a reduction in our life expectancy (of 0.3 years for women and 0.4 years for men)
- the number of years we can expect to spend in good health, without a disabling illness, continues to decline
- in the most deprived areas, people can expect to live more than 17 years with disabling health conditions
- around 1 in 5 older people are living in poverty. That's some 2.1 million people and the figure is only rising
- the number of older people renting rather than owning their homes has reached an all-time high
- the oldest renters - those aged 75 and over, spend almost half of their incomes on rent
- the UK state pension is one of the worst in Europe and below the OECD average
- the number of people aged between 50 to 64 who are not engaged in the labour market has risen

For electronic copies of the latest Newsletters from the National Pensioners Convention Open the link below

www.npcuk.org

WHAT'S ON



West Midland Pensioners Convention

WMPC Regional Council Meeting

Notice to Delegates

The next Regional Council Meeting will be held on Thursday September 14th.
At which the draw will take place for this year's Summer Raffle.

All WMPC Regional Council Meetings are held at the Birmingham UNISON Branch Office:

11.00 a.m. till 1.00 p.m.

19th Floor, McClaren Building, Priory Queensway

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.

Future Meetings

Thursday August 17th

Officers from Dudley Council

Modern Day Slavery

Thursday September 21st

The Blood Bikers

New members are always very welcome

Contact: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608 or email whitehousea970@gmail.com

Walsall Pensioners Convention

The Branch meets at 10.30 a.m. on the first Friday of each month at TMO Offices meeting room- Richards House, Burrows Street, WS2 8NN

Friday September 1st

Speaker

ARFAN ZARMAN

NHS OUTREACH

We also have a very active ladies' group and new members are always welcome.

For further information contact:

David Lawrence: email djjlaw211@gmail.com or

Call: 07895979537

Sandwell and West Birmingham

Pensioners Convention

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at West Bromwich Central Library from 11.00 a.m. till 12.45. New members are always very welcome to join our friendly and diverse group of pensioners. We also hold monthly social events.

Contact: Brian Allbutt 07342264482 or email brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

East Birmingham Pensioners Convention

The Branch meets on the second Tuesday of each month between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. at:

Ward End Library

Washwood Heath Road, B8 2HF

New Members Always Welcome

Contact: Branch Secretary: Stan Simpson

Email: simpsogs@yahoo.co.uk

Or call: 0121 783 0734 / 07930182269