

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

AUTUMN2023



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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).

Regional Secretary:

Sandra Durkin: 07860576701

thedurk@btinternet.com

wmpcec@gmx.co.uk

Assistant Regional Secretary:

David Humphreys: 07906264335

dnhumphreys@gmail.com

Campaign and Press Officer:

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

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

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: Dave Lawrence: 07895979537

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

Individual Members: Brian Allbutt 07342264482

email: brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

Campaigning For Better Bus Services Across the West Midland Combined Authority



Campaigners for a better bus service at West Bromwich Bus Station the successful campaign to save the 45 Bus.

The Conservative Government deregulated bus services across the UK in the mid 1980's, resulting in State and Municipally owned bus operators being taken out of Local Authority control and handed over to the private sector. We were told by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that privatising our bus service would lead to lower fares, more bus routes and growing passenger numbers.

Forty years on bus users will regard those claims as being totally risible, with higher fares, routes and networks cut and withdrawn, constantly changing timetables, less frequent services and across our shire counties whole communities left without public transport. Across England bus fares have increased by 71% since 2025 with a loss of over 3,000 routes and it is estimated that today between 20-25% of commercially run bus services are under threat. And we know that across our own region it has only been the successful campaigning by local people, trade unions and transport users' groups that have stopped First Bus Worcester cutting the 144 Bus service from Catshill to Birmingham and Diamond from trashing the 45 Bus Service from Walsall to West Bromwich. The reasons given for cutting these bus services – they were not profitable.

So, who has benefitted from the deregulation Act of 1986 – well the 5 trans-national corporations who run 70% of our bus services certainly have. For example West Midland Travel (National Express Group) reported operating profits of £15million in 2021 and Stagecoach reported half yearly profits in 2022 of £65.2 million. Since privatisation hundreds of millions of pounds have gone to the shareholders of these trans -national corporations when that money should have gone to providing cheap, green, reliable bus services.

It's time to change all that. In fact, change is already happening: Trade Unions representing transport workers have been calling for some time now for Bus services to be brought back into public (municipal) ownership. While the 2017 Bus Act prevents local authorities from taking back bus services into full public ownership, in regions where there is an elected Mayor, such as here in the West Midlands, the Act does give the Mayor the power to move to a franchising model for the delivery of bus services. Giving our regions politicians much greater control over the delivery of bus services including ultimate control over the routes, timetables, and fares.

The West Midland Pensioners Convention along with our colleagues from the Midland TUC Pensioners Network and leading campaigners for Better Bus Services will be campaigning over the coming months, leading up to the WMCA Mayoral Elections, for the current and future Mayor to now accept that the current "Enhanced Partnership" for the delivery of bus services across the seven local authorities that make up the WMCA is "No Longer Fit For Purpose" and to move now to a "franchising model" similar to that which exists in London and has been recently adopted in Greater Manchester and Liverpool.

To be successful – we need your support. Sign the Petition- Join the Campaign For Better Buses.

Building the Campaign for Better Buses



We the undersigned believe that the provision of affordable, safe, reliable, accessible for all bus services – fully funded and democratically accountable should be a fundamental human right. And that the existing enhanced partnership between Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM) and private bus operators is no longer fit for purpose. We need far greater Public Control (franchising) of our bus services across the West Midlands.

We support the Campaign for Better Bus Services opposition to bus service cuts across the UK and highlighting the need for increased funding of our bus services and an end to privatisation where bus companies put profits before people

NAME	ADDRESS/POST CODE	COMMENTS

This petition to be sent to: Andy Street: Mayor of West Midland Combined Authority
 Supported by: Midland Trades Union Council and West Midland Pensioners Convention Please return the completed petition to : TUC Midlands, 47 Summer Lane, Birmingham B19 3TH For the online petition open this link
<https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.megaphone.org.uk%2Fpetitions%2Fcampaign-for-better-buses-services-in-west-midlands&data=05%7C01%7C%7C8280b681c50547ba5f5808dbca8a4b50%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C638326467533224272%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWl%2FjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=FJzTZNce6A5ub%2Fhl2G5QEdu2tEVaSpMijHTMXX3V8VL4%3D&reserved=0>

WILL PENSIONERS BACK THIS - from one old crock?

STOP Metro expansion.

Instead:

Use the hundreds of millions for Fare-Free Public Transport (FFPT) for all and all day and to finish the electrification of buses and trains.

Bus/business lanes to reward car commuters who will be incentivised and not enraged to free up road space for essential vehicle users.

MORE DETAIL:

- I'm suggesting a virtuous circle by more reward than penalty to educate and appeal to car commuters that they must free up the limited road space for essential business vehicle users, like buses, HGV drivers, district nurses, midwives etc who **have** to use their vehicles.
- These drivers must register to have the right to drive in daytime, Mon to Fri, because of their work.
- The car commuters who do not register are then picked up by CCTV and fined.
- The money goes to Fare-Free Public Transport for all and the phasing out of diesel buses for electric.
- Essential vehicles use the nearside and overtaking lane with traffic light priority for them.
- Car commuters who pay the penalty every day are only allowed to use the overtaking lane.
- This encourages more people to leave their cars at home and jump on a free bus, train, tram throughout the region.
- Thus healthier, safer communities that are doing more to slow the climate crisis/breakdown and resource depletion.

Protect our future and improve our prospects by ...

No more duplication and replacement of buses and trains with trams

- This saves finite reserves of oil and gas and slows climate breakdown
- Saves 1,000 trees, shrubs and front gardens on the south side of Hagley Road, Edgbaston if tram expansion was stopped and bus use boosted instead.

Many thanks to Better Transport Campaigner: Tim Weller

IN MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE TREVOR EAMES



Trevor has been a leading member of the West Midland Pensioners Convention and the longstanding Secretary of our Transport Group- something he was quite rightly so proud of.

Trevor was a practical politician, a pragmatist; always looking for positive outcomes, with a warm infectious smile and gentle sense of humour. We have a lost a true friend and colleague.

Our condolences go to Marcella and all of Trevor's Family.

Sandra Durkin Regional Secretary
West Midland Pensioners Convention

Trevor Eames who died on 14 October had been a member of our EC for around 10 years. His wide knowledge and experience of business practice was clearly going to be an asset for the WMPC. This was borne out by Trevor's organisation and enhancement of the Transport Committee.

Trevor's death has robbed us of a good friend and outstanding colleague.

Will shall miss his quiet humour and his wisdom.

David Williams
Treasurer
West Midland Pensioners Convention

I am saddened to write this message of the sad loss of Trevor Eames a well-loved colleague and friend of the West Midlands Pensioners Convention.

Trevor worked tirelessly for the Pensioners Convention, both as the secretary of the West Midland Pensioners Convention Transport Group and a valued member of the National Pensioners Convention Pensions/Income and Transport Working Parties.

Trevor will be sadly missed by all of us as a dear friend on colleague.

Owen Sloss
Regional Chair
West Midland Pensioners Convention

It was sad news to hear about the death of Trevor Eames. Trevor has been a member of WMPC delegate to the Executive Committee for a good may year.

His contribution about Transport within the West Midlands has been invaluable. He was our delegate, Chairman and minute taker at all the meetings arranged by Transport West Midlands and National Express. The meetings were held at Summer Row, Birmingham and surrounding Bus Stations and continued with Trevor's perseverance, all through the Covid pandemic restrictions via Video link TEAMS. Trevor was very enthusiastic about encouraging delegates to attend these meetings, he always wanted as many bums on seats as possible. After all meetings Trevor produced very detailed reports about the business discussed to the Exec. Com. and the monthly Regional Council. His input was one hundred percent. Sadly, we have lost another friend and colleague without doubt he will be greatly missed.

Dorothy Lamb: Former Regional Chair and Life Time member of the West Midland Pensioners Convention

Black History Month 2023



Black History month is a celebration and recognition of the achievements of African and Caribbean people and their role in helping shape UK history and the economy.

It is the month when we revisit our past and include the missing chapters overlooked across the history of the UK. One of this year's key themes – **'Before Windrush'** shines a light on those individuals not featured in the mainstream and whose contributions would be forgotten without Black History Month. People like: Ignatius Sancho (1729 -1780), writer, composer, and Britain's first black voter; Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), best-selling African writer and abolitionist and Mary Seacole (1805-1881), pioneering nurse and heroine of the Crimea War.

Another main theme in 2023 **"Saluting Our Sisters"** honours the achievements of women like Dame Jocelyn Barrow (1924-2020), the educationalist, community activist, Windrush pioneer and first black governor at the BBC -alongside those black women making history right now.

Black History month is an excellent opportunity for people from all backgrounds to learn about how relationships between Britain, Africa, the Caribbean, and the USA helped to create culturally diverse Britain today.

This year's celebration also makes October a month of hope and determination.

It is the hope that the scandal of the shameful treatment and victimisation of the Windrush Generation will continue to be highlighted and pursued, and that the determination of the descendants will ensure that they get the justice they deserve.



"Campaigning for our rights in tough times"
Ellen Lebethe - "Speaking Out" Autumn 2023

Eleanors Story



When I left Barbados I wanted to do Nursing . I was able to get into Summerfield Hospital Western Road Birmingham. The Nursing home was home to many Nurses who were undertaking their Training and most of them were from the Caribbean i.e. Trinidad and Grenada Jamaica and Guyana It was like a family and that gave me support because of our similar Cultures. We supported each other. I did go home to my Dad on my days off . When I Qualified as a Nurse I went to work at Good Hope Hospital in Sutton Coldfield.

Eleanor Dixon with the Grand Kids : A day out on the Severn Valley Railway

In 1986 the people of the Caribbean who were living in the UK were asked to apply for British Citizenship.

This was a worrying time because I did not understand why I needed British citizenship. When I entered the Country with a Passport that stated British.

In 2018 it was 70 years since the Windrush ship arrived in England bringing people from the Caribbean to work in England in the National health service On the Buses and other industries. Those people were the Windrush generation. Every year in June the Windrush generation is Celebrated. We must not forget the hard work the Windrush generation has contributed to this Country

Eleanor is the Birmingham UNISON Retired Members Welfare Officer

Personally Speaking

“Over decades the needs of unpaid carers have been neglected by UK governments.”



There are 5 million unpaid carers in England Wales- husbands, wives or partners, other family members including children and friends. About 1.5million of those spend more than 50 hours a week caring for relatives. For many, with little help or support from government, life becomes a constant struggle to keep afloat.

A survey from the Carer’s Trust includes testimony from those with caring responsibilities.

Here are just a few of those testimonies.

“I feel incredible trapped, isolated, and alone. I have severe mental health issues of my own to deal with and virtually no support for myself. I have no friends or family who can help as they don’t live locally and the mental health services and respite service in my area are beyond dire. My husband gets incredible medical support for his condition, yet I’m expected to provide 24-hour care 365 days a year alone.”

“Hopeless. Constantly stressed and exhausted trying to balance full time work with caring responsibilities, and honestly buckling (mentally) under the emotional blackmail (guilt-tripping) of the elderly parent I care for.”

“Many people (quite rightly) focus on the difficulties my wife has in life usually, she is the only one who asked about how I am or what I would like or need. Trying to juggle with working full time, looking after the dog and having time to my self is difficult. My “me time” is usually from around midnight to 3.a.m. which is not conducive to resting properly and being able to cope with everything.”

84% of respondents to the survey disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement “I have confidence in the governments ability to improve the lives of unpaid carers” and only 1% of respondents (that’s just 12 of more than 1500 who completed the survey) that politicians understand unpaid carers.

Things will only get worse unless government takes decisive action . With the number of dementia sufferers in the UK expected to increase to 1.6million by 2040, it is essential that the needs of unpaid carers are considered. Most unpaid carers will continue to look after their loved ones until the strain gets so much that they become unable to cope. But should we exploit that good will? We need action to ensure that unpaid carers can live a life rather than just surviving day to day. Governments must improve support for unpaid carers themselves, including regular breaks and quality respite. Carers Allowance must be dramatically improved from the current £76.75 a week and made more widely accessible so that unpaid carers are better protected against financial hardship.

When unpaid carers look for professional care support for them or their loved ones it is often inadequate or difficult to access. Social Care needs fixing. There are currently 152,000 vacancies for paid care workers in the UK. The failure of governments over decades to grasp the nettle and properly fund and organise social care means the whole care system is failing leaving unpaid carers to fill the gap.

This is an edited version of an article in The Sentinel “Personally Speaking” by Andy Day -October2nd 2023. Andy was for many years the Coordinator of North Staffordshire Pensioners Convention.

Production Editor: Violet Rook
 Editor: Jenny Sims
 Deputy Editor: David Briggs
CONTACT US DIRECTLY

We would love to hear from you

Email: npcdigitalnews@gmail.com
 Or write to:

The National Pensioners Convention, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1N 1AB
 Telephone: 02078376622
 Email: info@npc.org.uk

Members of the NPC Digital Working Party: Jenny Sims (Chair), Verena Beane, David Briggs, Maureen Chilli, Sandra Durkin, Alan Edgar, Luke Howard, David Luxton, Violet Rook, Alan Sidaway, Lawrence Huston.

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ON THE MARCH



(Thanks to Alan Edgar for the photograph.) Digital Working Party member Alan Edgar joined Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary and NPC staff in the march to 10 Downing Street for the RMT's rally against widespread rail ticket office closures in England.

On the eve of the closure of the government's consultation on the planned closure of 1,000 ticket offices, Mick Lynch, RMT General Secretary, told the rally in Downing Street the union's petition had reached almost 500,000 signatures.

Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary, one of a panel of speakers addressing the rally alongside the National Federation of the Blind and others, said the government-driven proposals represent serious breaches of the equality laws and must be abandoned. She said: "The ticket office closures programme breaches every known aspect of equality under the UK laws that we all abide by – that is why the NPC submission demands that this proposal is completely abandoned."

Since the rally, the RMT has asked the NPC how it can support its digital campaign, *Connections for All*, and the Digital Poverty Alliance's campaign to end digital poverty by 2030. This is as a result of a successful motion presented by Ron Douglas, former NPC President, to an RMT's Retired Members Association conference earlier this year. Paul Norris, the RMT's pensions officer has this month met with Jan Shortt, Jenny Sims, Digital Working Party chair, and Bev Morrison NPC project officer, to ask for specific ideas on what form of support they could offer.

A list including the proposal for a conference on digital exclusion and inclusion issues with the NPC and the DPA has been taken back to the RMT's National Executive for approval.

NPC Campaign!
 NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION



Fighting for the rights of older people
NPC Transport Conference will ask why buses and trains are failing older people
 NPC Gen. Secretary Jan Shortt (above right) joined Better Buses Rally in Sunderland at the start of Better Buses National Week of Action (1-8 October).
 NORTH EAST & CUMBRIA

International Older People's Day and Black History Month **Triple Lock long-term future under threat yet again**

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.

UN International Day of Older People on 1st October was celebrated with UK-wide events to raise awareness of the issues facing all aged populations. For the NPC this included focusing on our campaigns for Commissioners for Older People in England and Scotland, as well as for Better Bus services. October is also Black History Month (BHM), a celebration of the achievements of African and Caribbean people in helping to shape UK history and the economy. Themes of *Before Windrush* and *Saluting Our Sisters* will feature in events across the country. Read more in our NPC Ethnic Minority Working Party BHM newsletter "Speaking Out." (online or request a print copy from our office).

them by the increasing number of e-scooters on our roads. The conference follows the Better Buses National Week of Action (1st to 8th October) featuring events across the UK calling for increased funding for bus services. NPC Transport Conference co-organiser Fran Postlethwaite said: "This is an important event at a critical time for our bus and rail services. Continued on Page 2"

'Here we go again!' was the NPC quote headlining in the press as the government tried once more to tinker with the Triple Lock on April's state pension rise. Having already committed to the Triple Lock—which should match wage growth of 8.5% - the government are said to have toyed with the idea of excluding public sector worker bonuses from the next increase. This could reduce the rise to around 7.8% - a saving for the Treasury but a disaster for millions of hard pressed pensioners for whom every penny counts. The next attempt to reduce our rise was a rumour that they wanted to scrap Winter Fuel Allowance payments to help fund the Triple Lock (which they have since denied). Read more on P. 2.

SPEAKING OUT!
 Newsletter of the National Pensioners' Convention
Ethnic Minority Working Party
 Autumn 2023

Black History Month 2023 celebrates lives and hope!

Black History month is a celebration and recognition of the achievements of African and Caribbean people and their role in helping shape UK history and the economy. It is the month when we revisit our past and include the missing chapters overlooked across the history of the UK. One of this year's key themes – 'Before Windrush' - shines a light on those individuals not featured in the mainstream and whose contributions would be forgotten without Black History month. People like: Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), writer, composer and Britain's first black voter; Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), best-selling African writer and abolitionist; and Mary Seacole (1805-1881), pioneering nurse and heroine of the Crimea War. One of the other main themes in 2023, 'Saluting Our Sisters', honours the achievements of women like Joyce. More about Black History Month: Pages 3/4



Find BHM Events: www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk

Make Your Voice Heard - Join the NPC Today!

If you've got something to say about tackling the issues facing older people in Black, Asian, and ethnic minoritised communities, we want to hear from you! President Rosie McGregor said: "The NPC is totally committed to equality and diversity in our organisation and across society. We must work to break down barriers and highlight the issues facing minoritised ethnic communities. Join our campaigns, and let's make the UK a better place to grow older." More details from info@npcuk.org, or write to us below.

Unique financial challenges of ethnic minority elders

New research reveals that older people from minoritised ethnic communities are facing considerable and unique financial challenges. Analysis of the study by Independent Age found that 29% of older Asian/Asian British and 25% of older Black/Black British/Black Welsh African people live in poverty. Both figures are much larger than the overall pensioner poverty rate of 18%. The study also revealed that older people from minoritised communities are less likely to own their homes and more likely to rent in the social and private sectors, with almost half (49%) renting social housing. This much higher than the national average for older people which is currently 13%. The study also showed that one in five (21%) older people from an Arab background rent in the private sector. People who rent in later life are at more risk of poverty in older age and face higher costs and insecurity. *Continued on Page 2.

Like a FREE COPY? Contact: NPC, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1N 1AB

Housing Matters
 The newsletter by the NPC Housing Working Party



Welcome

A warm welcome to readers of the first edition of Housing Matters, brought to you by the NPC Housing Working Party; whose members are Tony O'Brien (Chair), David Vickers, Mary Brodwin, Meg McDonald, Frank Tyas, Kevin Hilson, Peter Nowland, Roy Rix.

It aims to inform on all matters housing and to expand and spread the word on the work the NPC Housing Working Party is currently doing.

Leasehold reform

It has been announced that plans by Michael Gove, the Housing Secretary to abolish the "feudal" system of leaseholds across England and Wales have been dropped.

It is also expected that there will be a cap on ground rents, more powers for tenants to choose their own property management companies and a ban on building owners forcing leaseholders to pay any legal costs incurred as part of a dispute. But Gove will stop short of abolishing leaseholds altogether, despite a pledge made to do so by Government ministers over the last four years.

The most recent poll by YouGov shows that fewer than 15% of under-50s would vote Conservative if the election were held tomorrow. A separate YouGov poll showed just under half of voters backed the idea of ending leaseholds, while just 10% oppose it.

IN THIS ISSUE

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- Private rentals
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- Council repairs
- Homelessness
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Post: NPC Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB
 Tel: 020-7837-6622
 Web: www.npcuk.org
 Email: info@npcuk.org
 Social: @NPCUK

WHAT'S ON



West Midland Pensioners Convention

WMPC Regional Council Meeting

Thursday November 9th
11.00 till 1.00p.m

Guest Speaker
Carol Bowsher
Dementia Support Officer
Alzheimer's Society

Thursday December 14th
Xmas Social & Buffet
11.00 a.m. till 3.00pm

Birmingham UNISON Local Government Office
19th Floor the McLaren Building Dale End B4 7LN

Visitors and guests 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.

Future Meetings

Thursday November 16th
John Jones
The Hawne Basin

Xmas Social
Thursday December 14th
Special Guests

Deputy Mayor of Dudley Council
Peter Lee and Gloria Lee

Gaslon Hall Shenston Theatre

New members always very welcome

Contact: Tony Whitehouse 07715314608 or

email: whitehouse970@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

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

For further information contact:

David Lawrence: email djlaw211@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