

RETIRED MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

STAYING ACTIVE UNISON

NATIONAL RETIRED MEMBERS CONFERENCE LLANDUDNO 8th & 9th OCTOBER 2024



DAY 1 - DEBATE - CLIMATE CHANGE AND OLDER PEOPLE

Self Organised Group meetings took place; also a pre-conference panel debate. Roger Bannister, N.W. Region, said that UNISON was the first UK trade union to endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty which reinforces the Paris Agreement and aims for a fast but fair wind down of coal and gas production with global support to ensure that no worker, community or country is left behind. This is supported by an increasing number of countries and international organisations including the World Health Organisation.

Sam Young, Policy and Campaigns Officer, (Age Cymru) spoke of an ageing population vulnerable to illness and death by overheating, increased risk of disease, pollution, hospital overcrowding, sleep loss, and poorly insulated homes. Individuals can collectively act with UNISON's help to challenge

government inaction on these issues. In Switzerland pensioners successfully took the government to the European courts over the lack of action on harmful emissions.

Michelle Singleton, UNISON Climate Change Policy Officer, said that UNISON opposes nuclear power and carbon capture. She recommended designated branch officers to press employers on saving money with green procurement.

DAY 2 - MOTIONS TO CONFERENCE - DIGITAL EXCLUSION

John Dick, Derbyshire, East Midlands, described how voluntary services offered advice on understanding new technologies via Derbyshire Libraries. Liz Payne-Amadi said that bank closures, smartphones, apps, and government departments offered limited alternatives. Card payments only can be difficult such as paying for parking in the rain. These exclusions undermine confidence.

MISERY OF TROLLEY PATIENTS IN CORRIDORS

The consequences of hospital discharge delays were expressed by Jim Porter, Norfolk and Norwich. A relative with dementia and no capacity to be alone at home couldn't be placed in a care home until a suitable one was allocated. Jim expressed frustration with the CQC assessments, suggesting that 'Outstanding' should be corrected to 'Outstandingly Awful'. Furthermore, 'Requires Improvement' didn't show any information of enforcement. Jim expressed disbelief that one care home wanted to do a phone assessment with his relative.

Carol Chick, University of Brighton, described her horrifying A&E experience on a trolley in a corridor for 36 hours. crammed with other patients, no pillows, nowhere to change or shower and one toilet between 100 people. the staff were run off their feet, with nothing they could do, as though this had become normal procedure. Maureen Wade, Birmingham said that indignity and trauma on admission has to stop.

WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE CUT

This attracted several contributions. Parmodh Sharma, Barnet, London Region, said that whilst it's often difficult to criticise friends we had to make the strongest case on behalf of those affected who also faced high energy prices. The Tories had left a financial hole but maybe Labour should stop digging and instead target those with the deepest pockets. Rosie McGregor, Chair of the Retired Members National Committee described the decision as despicable. Those just above the limit for Pension Credit would be most harmed.

ADDITIONAL MOTIONS FOR CAMPAIGNING

These included retention of retired members and maximising their contribution to branches, pensioner poverty, equal pensions for surviving spouses and partners, ending the male and

female state pension disparity, compensation for the WASPI women, public toilet provision, and the need for an ethical care charter.

Some speakers suggested that every pensioner should receive the Winter Fuel Allowance. Maggie Ferncombe, Director of Political Strategy and Transformation, stated that UNISON opposes means testing.

Northwest Region's motion on the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) warned that changing to a fully digital service will affect vital personal fall alarms, lifts, and traffic lights. BT's response that all devices must conform to a digital system is dangerous, for example, digital phone lines will not work in a power cut.

Over 300 delegates plus visitors attended Conference.

DOES YOUR LOCAL UNISON BRANCH HAVE A RETIRED MEMBERS' SECRETARY?

No? Are you interested?

The role involves organising the retired members in your branch to continue to be active in the union through the branch's retired members' section. Amongst other things the role involves:

- ensuring that those members approaching retirement have the opportunity to become retired members
- making sure your members get regular communications from us
- encouraging the participation of retired members in branch activities
- establishing links with other retirement organisations in the area

To be a branch retired members' secretary, you must be eligible for retired membership.

Get in touch with your branch committee in the first instance to find out more, or email m.rowley@unison.co.uk

REGIONAL RETIRED MEMBERS' ACTIVIST WORKSHOPS

WEDNESDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2025 @ UNISON CENTRE, 130 EUSTON RD

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL RETIRED MEMBERS ACTIVISTS TO LEARN HOW THEY CAN

BETTER HELP ORGANISE THEIR LOCAL UNISON BRANCH RETIRED MEMBERS SECTION

DO WE HAVE AN UP TO DATE EMAIL ADDRESS FOR YOU? - IF NOT, SPEAK TO YOUR BRANCH

RETIRED MEMBERS ACTIVIST TRAINING MORNING

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2024



COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR BRANCH RETIRED MEMBERS

We were given an overview of UNISON's retired members in Greater London. We have over 16,000 retired members in the region, but we only have 37 out of 125 branches with a Branch Retired Members Secretary (BRMS). This means that we have 88 branches in the region, with a total of almost 8,000 unsupported retired members. We urgently need more of our retired members volunteering to become BRMS's.

We found out that the majority of our members don't have email addresses so how do we communicate with them? The UNISON BRMS handbook is being updated to take into account GDPR regulations. BRMS's should liaise with their branch officers on how best to communicate with their members and work on a communications strategy to improve and update members contact details.

WRITING MOTIONS

Allan Hawley presented valuable motion drafting advice. A motion is a formal proposal put forward by members, asking the union to take a specific action or adopt a particular policy, usually to be debated and voted on at a union meeting or conference; it's a way for members to express their wishes and influence the union's direction on an issue.

Keep your motion short, to the point and accurate to avoid rejection. Don't commit to spending which only the NEC can commit to.

Existing rules must be adhered to and legal jeopardy avoided. At the 2024 conference 30 out of 50 motions were rejected by the Legal Team. Issues must be in the public domain, not about UNISON staffing issues. A motion isn't a statement but a request for action to be taken. There is no point in selecting two RM conference passed motions for submission to the National conference when they have no chance of being adopted, such as the idea of RMs representation on the National Executive Council. Better to write to Branches or the Regional Council on rule changes to seek their support.

LIVING WITH HIV

Kevin Perkins presented a fascinating and moving account of AIDS and the fight for it to be recognised as an illness with treatment, and as a disability. The Human Immune Deficiency Virus probably jumped from monkeys to humans during a 1950s polio vaccination campaign. It spread primarily but not exclusively through the gay community, accelerated by intravenous drugs, unsafe sex and infected blood donations. In Ireland donors were screened unlike in the UK. As the campaign continued, resistance from several local councils to negotiating equal opportunity policies to include gay people, press hostility, and NHS failure to respond, blocked progress.

Mrs. Thatcher wasn't interested, but Norman Fowler, Health Secretary, did distribute and raise awareness with the AIDS Tombstone leaflet.

Health Minister Edwina Curry publicised the necessity of condom safe sex. Mildmay Hospital led the way for other hospitals to deal with AIDS and look after these patients. Princess Diana helped to change attitudes towards AIDS. Drug development advanced with the ACT wonder drug. Kevin's late partner, Eamon O'Farrell, was allergic to it and needed to take 19 different pills a day. Kevin was infected in 2000, losing weight and suffering pneumonia, but thankfully recovered; the drugs do work. Since Eamon's death in 2007 there have been only two recorded UK deaths from the virus. The Terence Higgins Trust, named after the first UK person to die of AIDS in 1983, aims to campaign for the total elimination of AIDS in the UK by 2030.

INSPIRATIONAL EALING GROUP

The idea of having all the time in the world in retirement isn't my experience. I am busier than I ever was working a 35 hour week! Unison Ealing Retired Members Group is vibrant, meeting every month. We have joyful cakes and coffee, activities and outings. Our speakers have included Heartlink, Friends of Grove Farm, Mind Foods, Age UK, Lager Can, Befriend, Black History and Will Writing. We visited Ealing Wildlife Group who have introduced beavers to improve biodiversity in Paradise Fields. Events include photography exhibitions, natural wonder weekends, harvest mouse nest and bird walk surveys and screenings. Member Amar Kelsi knits poppies which our knitting group has transformed into poppy brooches, raising £100 for the Royal British Legion. Members donate items to local food banks, children's services and hospitals. Several members have joined voluntary groups helping those in need. This togetherness keeps our mind ticking and sustains our mental health. We support each other, particularly during illness. Birthdays are always remembered. Our star member Vera Norman is 103! She has so many stories to share. The Mayor has invited us to tea for International Women's Day on March 8th.

If any branch would like to see how we do things at Ealing, feel free to contact me. amarjitjammu@yahoo.co.uk



Amarjit Jammu, Chair Ealing UNISON Retired Members, Centenarian Vera Norman & Mayor of Ealing, Yvonne Johnson.

BECOME A UNISON RETIRED MEMBER

Are you close to retirement? If you are retiring soon, or you know someone who is, remember that membership is open to all UNISON members with a minimum of two years working membership for a one-off payment of £15.

UNISON's retired members play an active role in creating a fairer society. They have a wealth of experience and knowledge that make them a valuable part of UNISON campaigns.

Members can maintain contact with their branch and continue to receive UNISON discounts, legal advice and support from the UNISON charity 'There For You' via their Branch Welfare Officer.

Application forms are available from your branch or UNISON Direct phone 0800 0 857 857.

PENSIONER ON HUNGER STRIKE FOR SON'S RELEASE

London resident, Laila Soueif, recently ended a 150-day hunger strike for the release of her son, Alaa Abdel Fattah, a UK citizen, imprisoned in Egypt since 2019 on trumped up charges of spreading false news about the Egyptian Government. Kier Starmer has met her and contacted President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi about Alaa's release.

UNISON is a major supporter of Amnesty International, which is pressing the government for urgent action.

While Alaa remains in prison, you can write to your MP to keep up the pressure for his release

Find out more at www.amnesty.org.uk

Editor - Paul Duployen

Subeditors - Carole Alexander, Richard Mann & Matt Rowley