

Senior Reporter

News from the 60+ Council

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

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NUJ campaigns by the seaside



Jenny Sims (right), NUJ 60+ chair, was a panellist alongside policy experts from Age UK and Digital Poverty Alliance, at the NPC Convention's breakaway session on digital exclusion. Photo: © Bev Morrison

She brought to members' attention a House of Lords committee report, Digital Exclusion, published that morning which found the government had "no credible strategy to tackle digital exclusion". <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ld-comm/219/21902.htm>

NUJ member John Lister – secretary of the *Keep Our NHS Public* campaign – spoke on *The Health Care Crisis* along with Gavin Edwards, Unison's senior national officer for social care. Both described the appalling state of the current system, and the hope that a Labour government would tackle this. However, John Lister spoke against the party's plans for further involvement of the private sector.

A lunchtime fringe meeting on housing was addressed by Tony O'Brien, chair of NPC's Housing Working Party. The meeting was told that research by the Centre for Ageing Better shows that between 2010 and 2020, the number of rented households for those aged over 65 increased from 258,000 to 403,000 – 56 per cent.

The convention was preceded by a Special Delegate Conference to amend the NPC's constitution. Proposals for amendments, based on four years of research and consultation, were approved.

NUJ delegates to the Special Delegate Conference and the Annual Convention: Jenny Sims (60+ chair), Mary Brodwin, Jenny Vaughan and Alan Gibson (to the Annual Convention only).

JENNY VAUGHAN

THE NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION met for its annual gathering over two days between 28–9 June in a chilly and windswept Blackpool. The NUJ's four delegates all contributed to this report.

Debate ranged over the areas of concern for older people and, ideally, everyone else.

Will our children ever be able to retire? addressed issues around pensions, now and in the future. This included the inadequacy of the state pension, while Labour peer Bryn Davies was concerned to develop a scheme that would meet the needs of today's workers, whose employment is likely to be more insecure than in the past. But he, like other speakers (two representatives from Unite, and Brian Sturtevant, NPC Pensions and Income Working Party chair)

seemed to overlook the self-employed – a growing sector, not least in our union.

The Convention was updated on the NPC's campaign for an independent Older People's Commissioner for England (following Wales, which has had one since 2008, and Northern Ireland since 2012) to champion, among other issues, digital inclusion.

The NPC has been campaigning on this as the result of a successful NUJ motion at the NPC's Biennial Delegate Conference, in 2019. And for the first time the Convention held a breakaway session on digital inclusion, *The Future is Digital: Making it Work for Us*. Jenny Sims, chair, NUJ 60+ Council and chair of the NPC's Digital Working Party, was a panellist alongside speakers from Age UK and the Digital Poverty Alliance.

Rail ticket offices

THE DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES to plans to close hundreds of railway station ticket offices in England has been extended until September 1. (See: <https://www.transport-focus.org.uk/train-station-ticket-office-consultation/>)

Consultation organisers say train companies did not provide accessible formats, stopping people from being able to respond. By the end of July, well over 170,000 had made their feelings known.

The rail industry claims that only 12 per cent of tickets were sold at ticket offices

last year, but disability groups and unions have voiced concerns over accessibility and jobs cuts respectively.

More time to cross the road

The Guardian on 24 July reported that the government agency Active Travel England (ATE) is recommending that pedestrians are given more time to cross the road. "A big part (of walking safely) ... is being able to give enough time for everyone to cross the road." their spokesperson said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/24/extend-green-man-crossing-times-cities-older-people>

FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Welcome to the latest edition of the Senior Reporter, which has an addition to the team in the person of former 60+ Council chair and then co-chair, Jim Symons. Jim, from Dundee, has been a well-known face in NUJ circles for many years. He joins Jenny Sims, Jenny Vaughan and Derek Forrest in producing this newsletter.

The Senior Reporter welcomes articles (250 words max.) and letters (150 words max.) for publication. They should be sent to dereckforrest@gmail.com

About the NUJ 60+ Council: <https://bit.ly/3021u5o>



Jim rides again. Jim Symons shows off his mobility scooter, and (right) gives advice on travel for older and disabled people.

Gendered ageism study

THE STUDY, *Gendered ageism in the media industry: Disavowal, discrimination and the pushback*, by Prof. Karen Ross, who led the NUJ 60+ Council's workshop on ageism in the media, has now been published online in the *Journal of Women and Aging*.

It draws on the testimonies of 24 women media professionals including NUJ members. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08952841.2023.2238580>

Food train update

AN OLDER PEOPLE'S CHARITY has been thrown a lifeline after being plunged into crisis when councillors withdrew financial support from April 1 this year.

The plight of Food Train Glasgow, which supports hundreds of over-65s across the city, has featured in the past two issues of Senior Reporter. Now the National Lottery Community Fund has stepped in with a £75,000 grant to secure the charity's shopping and delivery services, as well as offering other support, for the next 12 months.

Since local authority funding dried up, Food Train Glasgow continued to operate via a crowdfunding campaign. A petition calling for the charity to be saved attracted more than 5,000 signatures.

The organisation's chief executive, Michelle Carruthers, told Third Force News: "We're all relieved to know that we can continue to be there for the next year, our focus now is to secure a way of being there for the longer term, too ..."

Waspi in Scotland

COUNCILLORS IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS have unanimously backed a motion calling for an immediate compensation package for women who have been financially hit by changes to the state pension age.

Lynne Craighead, co-ordinator of the local Waspi (women against state pension inequality) group, who attended the council meeting, said councillors praised the campaigners' perseverance.

She told local press: "Interestingly, it was exactly seven years to the day that the first protest rally took place outside Westminster when thousands of 1950s-born women gathered from all corners of the UK and abroad to protest about the lack of notice of up to a six-year increase in their state pension age."

Fears for the triple lock

SILVER VOICES – a web-based membership organisation for the over sixties, reports a significant rise in membership "largely as a result of growing concern over the future of the triple lock".

It believes both the Labour and Conservative parties seem equivocal about the issue – making campaigning to keep the system and so retain the pension's value all the more important. For arguments for and against the system see: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-big-question-should-the-pension-triple-lock-be-scraped-cjhwxcvfr>

And for the history and background of the triple lock, see <https://www.npcuk.org/post/the-history-of-the-triple-lock>

Rail travel made easy

AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, we travel to our various holiday destinations. It can be daunting, but train travel does not need to be a strenuous task. All railway companies operate a scheme called Travel Assist. It is available to older and disabled people at no cost. I have been using it for a number of years now, and cannot fault it.

All that is required is to request the service when booking tickets, either online or at a ticket office. Once booked, the porters will see you and your luggage on and off all trains. Should you need to change platforms, they will take you there in time for your connections. Whether using several trains, or just one, they will assist you.

At your destination, they will escort you and your luggage to a taxi rank. You won't have to touch your luggage from outset until arrival. I hope many more of our members will use this facility, as we don't want to lose it.

Happy travelling!

JIM SYMONS

Harnessing older workers' power

THE UK IS PLAYING CATCH-UP in harnessing the power of older workers, according to Dr Emily Andrews, Deputy Director for Work, the Centre for Ageing Better. She writes on the CAB website: "The UK ranks 21st out of 38 OECD countries in PwC's Golden Age Index measuring how well countries are harnessing the power of their older workers. The 244,000 more older workers in the UK who are economically inactive now compared to before the pandemic is the highest figure for any country in the G7 except Italy. While a similar pattern of older workers leaving the labour market occurred in other major economies during the pandemic, other countries have made far more progress in returning to prepandemic levels of older worker employment." bit.ly/430Kyum

On your bike?

WORK AND PENSIONS SECRETARY Mel Stride has suggested that older workers should work in the 'gig' economy because of the flexibility it offers.

But Luke Price, Senior Research and Policy Manager for Work at the Centre for Ageing Better (CAB), points out that 'flexibility' tends to favour the employer, and the work is insecure.

'And for older workers ... being able to plan for the future and build up their savings for retirement is particularly important,' he said. See: '*Ageing Better responds to suggestion over 50s should look for jobs in the 'gig economy'*': <https://ageing-better.org.uk/news>

Inspiration!

BBC presenter Samira Ahmed has written in the Daily Telegraph about how, when she decided to sue the BBC for sex discrimination (successfully) she was inspired by the singer Madonna's courage and elegance during a court case in Los Angeles.

She spoke of "the relentless vitriol and misogyny from certain sections of the British media. What young woman wanted that vitriol to be turned on them?"

Having overcome this reluctance, perhaps she too can become an inspiration.

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