

RETIRED LIFE

SPRING 2025



Spring time is upon us once more

Liz Payne-Ahmadi

Welcome to all our readers to the first issue of Retired Life in 2025.

It's great to be wishing all UNISON retired members springtime greetings on a day of warm sunshine, with the daffodils flowering and the magnolia in blossom.

You can see from the brief pieces included here that UNISON's retired members in this part of the world are in fact far from "retired". This was very obvious when our new committee met in January with reports of your activities across the region.

We really love to hear what you've all been up to, so please keep your stories coming in, whether it's activities your retired members section has been organising or campaigns you've got engaged with.

Finally, please don't forget to start preparing some motions for our national retired members conference later in the year, and getting some branch delegates lined up to go.

Dates for your diary

Retired disabled members network meeting

11am, Tuesday 6 May 2025

Retired LGBT+ members network meeting

2pm, Tuesday 6 May 2025

Retired Black members network meeting

11am, Wednesday 7 May 2025

Retired women members network meeting

2pm, Wednesday 7 May 2025



Cuts to public services

Liz Payne-Ahmadi



UNISON South West is keenly promoting throughout our region that a key role of retired members is to provide support to working members. Now working members in local government need that support more than ever as council budgets are slashed and huge job losses planned while £billions are channelled into militarism and war.

Somerset, my home county, is a case in point. The council faces bankruptcy. £thousands are being stripped off budgets and hundreds of UNISON jobs, together with those of Unite and GMB workers, are under the cosh. Public services are being stripped away.

Because of the sheer scale of the cuts, everyone is affected but it is inevitably the most vulnerable that are disproportionately hurt. This includes retired people who are reliant on health services, social care and public transport which provide lifelines.

As retired members we must act now. Our branches will tell us where lobbies of councils will take place and we should join if at all possible. Solidarity means so much to those whose jobs are on the line. We must write to MPs, councillors, and the media and do everything possible to raise awareness in our family circles and with friends and neighbours. All of us can do something to fight for full funding of local democracy, jobs and services.

We repeat our urgent call for welfare not warfare.

Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) into mega funds?

Roberto Franceschini

The UK has eight LGPS Regional Pools, owned by local authorities. They are already capable of meeting the government's aim of reducing costs without the need for mergers, as their current structure delivers best value for investment.

Worth over £350 billion, the LGPS is the only fully funded public pension scheme. It will continue paying out until the last pensioner dies.

The funds are not owned by the state – they are our money. In the South West, the funds are managed by the 'Administering Authorities' (AAs): Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Avon – plus Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and the Environment Agency.

To give a sense of the scale, the Devon Fund alone is now worth over £6 billion. It supports 139,000 members and over 195 employers. UNISON members are active in these funds too.

The local authorities listed above choose the types of investments used in the Brunel Pool portfolios. These AAs have already transferred most assets to Brunel, which now holds £35 billion, well ahead of the government's March 2026 deadline.

The government now wants to guide us, as local trustees, to invest in particular ways. But we have a fiduciary duty to make investment decisions that meet the long-term needs of our members.

Following a recent government consultation, new legislation is expected this year. There is real concern that the law could require even more of our funds to be invested in speculative venture capital or questionable UK-only investments. This risks diverting us from our aim as shareholders to prioritise environmental, social, and governance (ESG) choices. Worse still, it could force investments into armament financing – a responsibility that should sit with government, not pension funds.

We want to retain local control of our funds, as we have now. We are the real owners of these assets, that means you.

We are concerned that new legislation could take decision-making away from us and hand it to central government.

National Pensioners Convention – our role as UNISON

Rosie MacGregor

UNISON has worked closely for many years with the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) as an effective campaigning partner. The NPC is undoubtedly one of the most successful campaigning organisations representing pensioners and older people. It speaks on behalf of more than one million older and retired individuals across the UK through a wide network of local, regional, and national affiliated organisations.

Recently, the NPC leadership proposed significant changes to the organisation's structure – a move that has not been without controversy or disagreement among many of its affiliated bodies, including UNISON.

Since its founding in 1979, the NPC has operated as an “unincorporated association.” It will now become a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLBG). This change is intended to:

- Provide legal protection against liabilities if ongoing financial challenges were ever to force it to cease operating
- Safeguard the NPC's heritage and legacy from takeover by a hostile organisation
- Improve its chances of securing grant funding from charitable foundations

David Humphreys, from UNISON's National Retired Members Committee, has worked closely with the NPC Treasurer to ensure the new Articles of Association – required under company law – properly reflect the NPC's existing constitution. It hasn't been an easy task!

Following extensive debate, the Articles were amended and clarified to address concerns raised by UNISON and other affiliates. As David put it, “We have to get it right from the start.” Solicitors then reviewed the Articles in detail before submitting them to Companies House – the government agency that decides whether a company meets the legal criteria for registration.

The NPC was successfully incorporated as a CLBG on 17 February, with Registered Number 16257217. At present, the company exists solely as the custodian of the NPC. A comprehensive consultation with all affiliates, including UNISON, will follow.

However, registering as a CLBG is only the first step. In the coming months, much discussion will be needed on how to integrate the NPC's democratic and operational structures into the new company framework — starting with the complex task of defining its membership.

In the meantime, the NPC's vital campaigning work must continue, alongside efforts to secure new funding opportunities through grant applications.

Bringing skills back to the branch

Colin Parkinson-Hill

When I retired, I was genuinely shocked, and very frustrated, to realise that after 25 years of working and a wealth of experience, I had no clear route to offer those skills to either my UNISON branch or the Police Service.

But at last year's UNISON National Delegate Conference, it was agreed that the Deputy Treasurer position could be offered as a volunteer role. As a result, I'm now fulfilling that function — and it feels wonderful to be actively involved in the branch again. UNISON has given me a renewed sense of purpose.

I can't encourage you enough to explore opportunities like this within your own branch. It's a great way to bring your valuable skills and experience back into meaningful use — while also helping to ease the pressure on your Branch Treasurer.



Retired members tea party in Bristol

Jackie Haskins



On 16 January, Central Bristol Health Branch hosted a post-Christmas get-together for retired members. We invited attendees through a postal mailing and were delighted to welcome a group of our valued retirees.

The group included retired nurses, cleaners, healthcare assistants, and administrators, along with the two job-share Retired Members Officers, our current branch secretary, and two former branch secretaries.

There were plenty of opportunities to reminisce, share stories, and reflect on years of organising. Many of those campaigns had resulted in real wins for members.

The event took place in the Level 9 staff restaurant at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, where many of the retirees enjoyed the spectacular views over the city for the first time.

We treated everyone to customised NHS cupcakes and used the South West Retired Members Committee's presentation 'Making Full Use of Our Retired Members' as the basis for a short talk. This encouraged attendees to get involved in supporting branch activities such as helping with meetings and lobbying for pensioners' rights.

We also shared information about the support UNISON offers to retired members, including will writing services and help through the There for You charity.

This includes advice on financial planning, benefit entitlement (such as Pension Credit), and Winter Fuel Payments. Many attendees expressed frustration about the recent withdrawal of this support.

The event sparked some great conversations and plenty of laughter.

We asked attendees to share ideas for future activities. We're now looking forward to holding another meeting for retired members later this year.

Meet your retired members committee

Liz Payne-Ahmadi (Chair)
Somerset

Rosie Macgregor (Vice-Chair
and Lay Secretary)
Wiltshire Local Government

Derek Double (Treasurer)
Dorset Police

Christopher Curtis and
Jacqueline Jones
Cornwall Local Government

Roberto Franceschini
Devon County

Honey Foskett
South West Devon

Jackie Haskins
Central Bristol Health

Helen Hopwood
UWE Branch

Sue Lucas
Dorset County

Colin Parkinson-Hill
Wiltshire Police

We are really pleased to welcome new members Jackie Haskins, Jacqueline Jones and Sue Lucas.

Jackie Haskins

I've been a UNISON member (previously NUPE) since starting nurse training in 1980. I retired from the NHS in 2022 after 42 years as a nurse, midwife, and health visitor.

Elected a steward in 1983, I later served as Deputy Chair of Central Bristol Health Branch. Since retiring, I've stayed active in UNISON, supporting Branch Officers, and was elected Retired Members Officer (jobshare) in 2022. I've attended the last two Retired Members Conferences.

Sue Lucas

I worked in local government for 38 years, first joining NALGO, then UNISON. After retiring in May 2024, I joined the regional Retired Members Committee and attended my first National RM Conference in Llandudno, which left me feeling inspired.

I now job share the role of Retired Members Officer in my branch and am keen to offer support. Being part of the regional committee strengthens my branch role and connects me to wider union networks.