



Southern Region Retired Members Association

Annual Conference Thursday 19 June 2025, 11am, Chessington

Conference minutes

Welcome by the president

Megan Dobney, president for 2021 to 2025, welcomed delegates and noted thanks for the support of the office staff, particularly Debbie and Alice, over the years. We have a long list of apologies for today's conference – they will appear in the notes – but Derrick Baker had asked that he speak about retiring committee member John Powell.

He said neither John's, nor his wife's, health was very good but that John had been an activist for many years, a delegate to the South West Region TUC and its pensioners' committee, a branch president, a steward at Wessex Water and in addition to that a very good chauffeur – bringing Derrick to our meetings! But it was now time to retire.

This recognition was endorsed by the conference with thanks.

Guest speaker Gary Smith

The guest speaker was Gary Smith, GMB general secretary, who had agreed to attend for a Q&A with attendees. Unfortunately his office had emailed the regional office this morning saying he couldn't attend in person as he was in Scotland on holiday, but we welcomed him online.

Q: you've just had GMB Congress where policy is discussed and agreed. What topics were discussed that you think may be of particular interest to our RMA members?

A: Many are the same as for working members, ranging from international matters, care work, Sizewell nuclear power station, retired members' contributions (financial). Barbara Plant and Sonya Davis, both from the Southern Region, were elected as president and vice-president respectively. There was an equal pay march in Brighton during Congress. We have arrested the decline in membership numbers. We're not back to 2020 figures but we are positive (we lost 42,000 members during the Covid pandemic). We are more efficient and subscriptions have been frozen. The pension scheme is healthy. Congress agreed that retired members will pay a subscription of 25p a week.

Comment from Derrick Baker (recently retired from the national RMA committee): this was discussed at the March national RMA committee meeting. The support was 80% to 20% on the committee – some said we've paid all our lives and shouldn't pay now.

Q: it is wrong that members who retire abroad can be penalised and their state pension is not uplifted across the world – for instance in Australia. On another matter, being over the limit for Pension Credit means you also lose up to £5,000 a year with the loss of other benefits that come with it such as no Council Tax. A motion went from the 2023 and 2024 Southern Region RMA conferences but nothing was done?

Clarification from the president: we chased this on the national committee for 2 years. all that happened was that just before the 2024 conference a letter was written to Emma Reynolds MP. Nothing has been heard since and nothing yet on the 2024 conference motions.

A: I'm not here to defend the government. But you should have had feedback and I will chase. We made strong representations on the Winter Fuel Allowance etc, and discussed with Rachel Reeves' SPAD (special advisor).

Q: we've had a year of a Labour government – what kind of relationship do we have with Downing Street and how is it benefiting our members?

A: we are not the Labour Party and are not getting obsessed with Westminster. Previous leaderships spent a huge amount of time obsessed with Westminster, a huge amount of time obsessing with politics. We participate in the National Policy Forum and we got an Equal Pay body, and Sizewell, the New Deal for Working People progresses, saved 4 Harland & Wolff shipyards – there's no work there but at least they are open still, the Defence budget is good for us. So there's lots of good stuff but they've made huge mistakes on WFA and benefits.

Q: we've had a hokey cokey on Southern Regional Secretary. What will happen next now Gavin Davis has gone back to London Region?

A: It's not a good position. But there will be a meeting of both [Southern & London] regional committees to find a way forward.

The president thanked Gary for his attendance. He said he was sorry not to be in the room and thanked us for our contribution over the years.

President's report

Megan reported on the year's work. She said remember that last year we met just 2 weeks before the general election, optimistic that a Labour government would be elected after 14 years of Tory disasters. Well, we were correct to be optimistic and Labour was elected with 411 MPs (63.2%) although with only 33.7% of the votes.

Nonetheless, it's been a rocky road since and your committee continues to raise issues on your behalf.

So what have we done over the last year?

We have met, either online or in this building, 7 times since our last conference, and we've emailed you, our members, as necessary.

A key part of each Committee meeting is reports from delegates to various events and bodies, and we, in turn, report to the Regional Council.

Derrick Baker and I sat on the GMB's national RMA Committee until March, and since then we are represented by Gena Grant and Leila Kassam.

We have maintained our active involvement with the National Pensioners Convention and members represent us on some of its sub-groups.

Importantly, the NPC is in the middle of restructure that they hope will strengthen the organisation and improve its finances.

One of the things we're looking at is how members join, or even know about, the Retired Members Association, and how to increase activity amongst those that do join. I think you would agree that a conference this size, from a regional RMA membership of around 7,000 – of whom about half have email addresses and therefore are informed that it's happening, is a bit low...

I am happy to report that the national RMA agreed to give each regional RMA £1,000 and we shall be looking to spend that with this in mind.

Last year we discussed how retired members can support our working members, particularly when they are in dispute with their employers. Information on disputes in the region has stopped arriving so we admit to being in the dark! This has not been helped by the fact that we don't have a regional secretary – we have had a succession of temporary colleagues from the London Region but nothing at present. We will continue to strive for information to share with you about where support might be needed.

We were able to support Amazon workers in July, both at the Dartford depot and at the central London demo. The emergency motion supporting Amazon workers we carried last year was warmly received by the GMB regional officer responsible on behalf of the workforce. As you will know, the ballot for union recognition was defeated by a whisker following various shenanigans by the employer.

Of course the main issue we have faced as pensioners was the abolition of the Winter Fuel Allowance. This stupid and cruel decision by a Labour government has provoked a major backlash and a subsequent U-turn of sorts. Committee members attended the lobby of parliament against this cut in October and took our flags with them.

Add to this the refusal to lift the 2-child benefit cap and the threatened changes to the Personal Independence Payment and we have a right shamash.

Note by the way on PIP that until now there has been a different (more light touch) process for pensioners than for working people and it is unclear whether this will remain. The NPC has written to Liz Kendall to try and find out.

One of the very annoying things this year – and indeed last year – was the lack of action on motions agreed at the national RMA conference – this was raised during the Q&A with the general secretary so I won't repeat it.

I am pleased to say that the last acting regional secretary asked the region's equality and political officer Michelle Gordon to support us and she attended our last meeting.

I am delighted to give you advance notice of a meeting in September – on the 4th to be precise – to which RMA members are invited. National Pensions Officer George Georgiou will update us on the activities of the national union on pensions. An email will go out after this conference with a formal invite to members.

So, you will know the expression “like a curate's egg” meaning partly bad and partly good. That certainly sums up the past year.

I'm happy to take any comments or questions on my report.

A member said he wanted to ask the general secretary what was being done about organising new members. Megan said, email her and she will send it to the GS.

Another member said she wanted to be an accompanying rep and was currently doing the part 2 rep's course – she particularly wanted to work on organisation in workplaces but got little support from her branch.

Report from RMA national committee

Derrick Baker said the last meeting he had attended (March this year) was the AGM and he, as president, had chaired up to the election of a new president (Kevan Hensby). The committee made a presentation to both Derrick and the former treasurer.

Leila Kassam said that it was reported that the RMA doesn't now have to get permission for the RMA banner to be included in the banner procession. A stall at Congress raised £861 for RMA funds.

Second guest speaker

Michelle Gordon, the region's political & equality officer, is the new supporting officer for the RMA. She sent her apologies for the conference as she is on holiday.

Elections

The 4 year term of office for the current officers and committee is up so new elections were held. Megan thanked Derrick Baker, John Powell and Gwyn Isaacs for their contribution to the committee's work as they weren't standing for a further term.

President – Megan Dobney elected unopposed

Secretary – Mike Goff elected unopposed

Eight nominations were received for the committee and were welcomed by the president: Gena Grant, Stephen Jackaman, Hilary James, Leila Kassam, Munir Malik, Jack Ryan, Christine Sanders, Steve Whitehead.

During this segment Richard House said he was a computing and comms specialist and offered his services to the RMA. Megan had a conversation with Richard and as a first stage he will email her with his comments and possibilities regarding a free website and our current webpage on the region's website.

Delegates to the TUC's pensioners committees

We are entitled to send reps to the pensioners committees of both the South West TUC and the TUC London, East, and South East. The following were agreed:

SWTUC: Mike Goff (to contact Tanya Parker at the SWTUC to see if the committee is still functioning)

TUC LESE: Gena Grant, Stephen Jackaman, Hilary James, Leila Kassam, Munir Malik (Munir to send Megan recent committee minutes for information)

Delegates to the GMB National RMA conference

The conference takes place on Tuesday 21 October in central London and hotel accommodation will be provided for 20 October if required. Our 2 committee members (Gena and Leila) attend as of right. The delegation should contain a minimum of one woman.

Three nominations were received: Hilary James, Mike Goff and Munir Malik. A vote was held between Mike and Munir and the delegation was agreed as Hilary and Munir.

Consideration of motions submitted

Two motions were received. *Motion 1 The State Pension* was moved formally by the president as Christine Sanders had previously given her apologies. It was seconded by Steve Whitehead. The motion was carried unanimously.

Motion 2 Disaffiliation from the Labour Party was moved by Hilary James and seconded by Stephen Jackaman. After discussion and a vote the motion was not carried.

It was agreed to submit Motion 1 to the national RMA conference.

Any other business

None had been submitted to the president before the conference but informal discussion elicited that at least 2 participants had sought to assist their branches and received little or no response. These examples of a lack of recognition of retired members and how we may help the union more widely is not a positive sign...

The president closed the meeting with heartfelt thanks to all who not only attended but contributed and shared their thoughts and knowledge throughout the day – and wished everyone a good journey home!

Attendees and apologies

In attendance

Smith	Gary	General Secretary of the GMB
Baker	Derrick	W27 Tolpuddle
Dobney	Megan	K19 South London General
Goff	Mike	B40 Bournemouth
Grant	Gena	L26 Richmond & Wandsworth
Kassam	Leila	X96 South London Universities
Ryan	Jack	K19 South London General
Whitehead	Steve	K19 South London General

House	Richard	K19 South London General
Jackaman	Steve	
James	Hilary	L09 LB Lambeth
Kowalewski	Julian	X96 South London Universities
Malik	Munir	L28 LB Bexley
Sethi	Parvin	B40 Bournemouth

Apologies

Barr	Douglas	S15 Securicor Apex 5
Carter	Alan	K19 South London General
Coomber	Chris	B50 Sussex
Coy	Diana	E41 East Sussex General
Cunningham	Bob	X21 Portsmouth General
Curran	Richard	G36 Security
Dixon	Esmilda	C65 Croydon NHS
Fitt	Peter	Z42 Southampton 1 641
Giles	Gary	E41 East Sussex General
Gordon	Michelle	Regional Equality & Political Officer
Hayton	Carol	K19 South London General
Isaac	Gwyn	M27 LB Merton
Patel	Margaret	W15 Three Shires
Powell	John	W27 Tolpuddle
Sanders	Christine	L17 LB Lewisham
Sidaway	John	L10 London Electricity Sth Thames
Sidher	Balraj	M27 LB Merton
Tooley	Thomas	G33 London Ambulance
Topliss	Dave	P29 South Coast Gas & Utility
Wood	Clive	G36 Security