



Southern Region Retired Members Association

Annual Conference Thursday 18 June 2026, 11am, Chessington

Conference minutes

Welcome by the president

Megan Dobney, president, welcomed attendees and expressed sincere thanks to Debbie and Alice in the office for their ongoing support with the work of the Committee and preparation of the Conference. She said apologies received would be listed on the minutes of the Conference.

She then went into the **President's Report** and said there'll be a chance to ask questions or comments on it when I've done...

President's report

Membership: Almost exactly a year ago the GMB annual Congress decided that retired members must pay a subscription to be a member of the RMA if they hadn't already paid a lump sum to join on retirement. This is set at £13.05 a year, payable by Direct Debit direct to the union.

Things are settling down now as retired members pay up so I can report that before the change we had 6 or 7 thousand people on the regional list. Last month it was 4,201. But of course it's more complicated than that!

Of that number 1,421 have given permission to be contacted by email, so in reality that is the membership figure we are working on. So again, a very warm welcome to all of you here!

Last year's activities

On **pensions** – the government has kept the triple lock on our state pension ensuring an increase either of 2.5%, or in line with inflation or wages growth. This means that pensions have increased in line with inflation – but !!! ...

Before we get all crack happy about it, remember that almost 2 million pensioners live in poverty (that's 1 in 6) and 1.1 million live in deep poverty. And women are, of course, disproportionately affected.

That's not good news, but what, to me is extremely dangerous, is the building commentary about the poor position that young people are in, and how we should lose the triple lock to pay for it!

On this, I just want to say one thing:

- Single state pension: £230.25 per week
- House of Lords attendance £361 per day

We know that the wealth in the country is not sent to our pockets, whether young or old!

What else?

A time consuming and very annoying thing has been to get answers on what happened to motions from our 2023 and 2024 conferences. We have now partially succeeded!

On the 2023 motion on overseas pensions – some people claiming their UK pension overseas don't get the increases – the reply is that the government has no plans to review the policy – increases are only actioned where there is a bilateral agreement, and it would cost too much to act outside of such an agreement. So, it's not the answer we wanted from government, but it is an answer...

On the 2023 motion on Pension Credit – the cliff edge between receiving Pension Credit and not, is too steep and those over that edge are disadvantaged to the tune of several thousands of pounds – the reply is that this is the nature of the thresholds in means tested benefits, some people fall outside of them. We have another motion on the subject later in the day.

On the 2024 motion for a national care service free to use and a fully funded and publicly owned NHS, and the 2025 motion on the two tier nature of the State Pension – I am not aware of any action on this but perhaps Gena or Leila – or Kevan – can help us?

An ongoing topic for our meetings has been the future of the **National Pensioners Convention** (NPC). The GMB is involved nationally, but we also have regional members who contribute. The NPC was established nearly 50 years ago by Jack Jones and has now changed from a voluntary organisation to a Company Limited by Guarantee. They hoped that this would enable some financial stability but it is still in the birthing process, so we will see.

During the year the national RMA committee decided to give £1,000 to each regional RMA – we bought a cheap **laptop** to enable our committee meetings to include a couple of members unable to travel – as indeed it is doing today. We didn't advertise this facility as it's imperfect to say the least. This room is not equipped with cameras etc to enable the whole meeting to be shared but it enables some participation.

In September we organised a meeting open to all members with the GMB's national pensions officer George Georgiou.

This year, on 3 September, we will have one with the Socialist Health Association and will send out invitations in due course.

Committee members also supported our working members on strike during their dispute at APCOA in Bromley. We are told that we should receive timely information about disputes across the region in the future so RMA members can be asked to support.

We were pleased to welcome Kevan at one of our meetings. He attended online but was able to answer a lot of the Committee's questions

We've been following the progress, or lack of it, of the WASPI women in their claim for equality and noted that the government decided not to follow the advice of the Parliamentary Ombudsman and pay compensation.

I can't finish without mentioning an area of concern not specifically related to older people. And that is the growing threat of the far right, in all its shades, in our political life. The thuggery and violence in Belfast last week is an example of their intentions and methods. They attacked people in the streets, including the police, and burnt out houses lived in either by immigrants or black citizens.

Whether it's the leadership of Reform, Restore Britain, Advance UK, For Britain, Homeland Party, Patriotic Alternative, English Democrats, National Rebirth Party, or any of the other more or less fascist parties, we can be sure that their aim is not the well-being of the working class, trade unionists or women. I fervently hope that they don't win the by-election today in Makerfield.

I will finish by quoting Paul Nowak, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress: "The essence of trade unionism is solidarity, fairness and equality – for all workers – from all backgrounds. That's why our fight against the far-right has always been part of our movement's DNA."

Thankyou.

Comments from attendees

- One of the issues facing the NPC was the withdrawal by AgeUK of their substantial annual grant. Kevan is now a director of NPC and will be working to continue its good work – such as was done on the organised opposition to the government's proposal to abolish the Winter Fuel payments.
- Alexandra Findlay, GMB Workplace Representative at APCOA Bromley, won the 2026 Eleanor Marx award for her organising and fighting for better pay and conditions for outsourced parking staff. It was presented to her at Congress.
- We must work with NPC but also more widely on pensions. Government is looking at budgets and to squeeze pensions. The demand for armaments is growing so we must be more involved politically. The wealthy must be taxed for public need.
- Agreed and we must be on at Torsten Bell MP, Under-Secretary of State for Pensions.
- Pensions should be at Living Wage level and the triple lock protected. Government committed to protecting it for the duration of this parliament but will they maintain that? More scared of Farage in the wings...
- We can use GMB people on the Labour Party NEC: Keiran O'Neill and Sonya Davis.
- Regarding racism – it makes me mad – 62 countries were involved in the war for freedom from Nazism but are children taught about this? Lots of talk about foreigners getting this, that and the

other – the union has to push education to teach children the important role of these foreigners in the war against the Nazis.

Guest speaker Nadine Houghton

Megan welcomed Nadine as Regional Secretary. She has been employed by the GMB for nearly 16 years – before this role she was a national officer and before that a regional organiser. So she knows the union inside out!

Nadine began by thanking those attending for their decades of contribution to the GMB. We have inherited what others have built. She said I spent the first few months listening and learning and want to combine experience and renewal, to have strong branches and vibrant campaigns. Retired members have a large part to play. The region faces significant challenges – poor accountability, low staff morale etc and won't be solved overnight. I also want an education programme tailored to reality. There will be new policies and refreshed old ones – including identifying workplace leaders. We must maximise every issue into an organising opportunity. I led my first strike in the Southern Region and it's a privilege to see the legacy of that work.

I have had my first Regional Council meeting. We discussed the derecognition of GMB at Bidfoods. I was informed of this by telephone when I was still a National Officer. We started getting back into the workplace and then last Tuesday we won the ballot via the CAC for recognition. This shows the power we can win.

On the new Employment Rights Act – it's not perfect but there are some good things in it and we are planning to make the most of it. One issue of concern is access to workplaces. This is being discussed with government and proposed fines are massively worrying and we may need to walk away from the proposal as possibly delivering more harm than good.

The past we inherit, the future we build. We are building a confident region capable of facing the challenges ahead. So thanks for what you have done and what you will do.

Comments from attendees and Nadine's responses

- We used to be expected to join the union when we started work, now it is very difficult to recruit young people. Did this happen in Bidfood? *Membership was down to 36% so we had to build it up. It's important to focus on low density where we have recognition.*
- I worked at DHL – I talked to people but they were scared. When we brought in a GMB rep from outside the company to support members they were shocked and encouraged.
- I'm very pleased you got the job! *Many thanks and for your past work for the region.*
- What is the union view on freemasons? I believe it's a class issue. *I don't know if there are any GMB policies on this.*
- How can the RMA help in the region? *Megan's approached us to get info on disputes circulated so you can support working members and we will do this. Also, many RMA members are Accompanying Reps.*
- I am concerned about the lack of transparency – we don't know who is on the committees or when they meet, and don't receive any information. *We put up press releases on our website.*

Information on the Regional Council and Committee is only for the membership of these committees.

- Why does the GMB continue to support the Labour Party? *The union is affiliated to the Labour Party as the members voted for it. But there is no obvious ideology in Keir Starmer so there are issues in the leadership. However a change of leadership won't necessarily change that. I think their large majority has been squandered. There is no other political party that can work with us and shares our history.*
- We met when you sought nomination for parliament in south east London in 2019! Regarding the freemasons – they are contrary to our equality policies. That's why they operate more or less clandestinely. The right wing activity Megan raised earlier will be linked to freemasonry. What's your view on the proposals for another Employment Bill being led by Lord John Hendy? *I'm glad I wasn't successful in that application! The amount of consultations the government had on the Employment Rights Bill was ridiculous. So a second one is a good thing but it's ridiculous we are having to discuss it and it should have been sorted in the first one.*
- We used to have a system to recruit members to the RMA – the office would contact members when they approached retirement. *That's no longer possible, but we do contact people who leave the union to discuss it with them.*
- My employer clapped when I left work!
- It was by a chance remark that I found out that there was an RMA.
- It is more difficult now that we operate by email only – the cost of postage is enormous.
- Yes, this creates an issue with Digital Inclusion.

Nadine was thanked for her time and contribution and closed the session by saying it had been really lovely to see you all and she will work to ensure the regions strengthens day by day.

National RMA Committee

Leila Kassam reported on the national RMA committee meetings during the past year:

- The committee has met 4 times plus the conference held last October.
- The subscription changes doesn't apply to those who retired prior to 2015.
- We welcomed the Congress decision on 2 seats for retired members on the CEC, but it's not coming in until 2028. We have been seeking to have observers in the meantime.
- The NPC is now a Company Limited by Guarantee
- £1,000 was granted to each region's RMA – they want to know how it has been used.
- We held our first fringe meeting at the 2026 Congress
- We are challenging the exclusion of retired members from the Equality Forum
- The stall at Congress was very successful but no final figure yet
- Many thanks to the national staff for their support to Committee members

Kevan added that the Committee put forward a motion to Congress on Water ownership and this was carried.

Megan thanked Leila for her report and the conference broke for lunch.

Guest speaker David McMullen

Megan introduced the next speaker **David McMullen** saying that our region has the honour and responsibility for the GMB for organising the union's participation in one of the premier trade union events in the calendar – the Tolpuddle Martyrs festival. David has this role as Regional Organiser and we are really pleased that he is here to remind us of the legacy of these trade union pioneers and tell us what has happened, what is going on, and how you can get along to the Festival.

David said that Tolpuddle is where British trade unionism started. Six farm hands established a friendship group in Dorset. The farmer wasn't happy, the police were involved and they were deported to Australia. One is buried in Tolpuddle. Every year there is a festival celebrating their principles.

It is a very conservative village so it's good for them to see us there! We set up a camping site there – there was some criticism at the time but now we work with the TUC and the site is renamed Solidarity Site. Camping is free for GMB members and there are very good showers! It's a really good weekend surrounded by like-minded people. There's a radical history school during the preceding week, a children's area, music in the evenings. The paid for festival ends Saturday, and Sunday is free to attend for all, with a march through the village. Minibuses can take you from Dorchester station. There was a motion at the 2019 Congress for more support, disrupted by Covid, and I am now looking into how that can be moved forward.

Comments from attendees

- Is there funding through branches? *Yes, for the museum*
- Is there a bus going from the regional office? *No. There used to be a minibus but that's gone. I'm looking into that for the future. Note that you can't leave the GMB site until 6pm because of the march. RMT put on coaches from London which cost about £10.*

Guest speaker Kevan Hensby

Megan introduced **Kevan Hensby**. Kevan is the national President of the GMB's Retired Members Association. I know he's got lots of plans and also that they organised their first fringe meeting at Congress – so let's hear how that went please Kevan. So thanks for making the journey from Yorkshire and welcome!

Kevan said he has been a member for 37 years. He emphasised the vast knowledge and experience retired members have and this needs more recognition. He was very pleased that our fringe meeting at Congress attracted 32 people and he emphasised the importance of communication.

We have put out booklets on the benefits members get from the RMA – we need to let organisers and regional secretaries know what we do. The booklet is suitable for all regions. Various benefits have been agreed including health plans. A newsletter has also been produced and I will let Megan have an electronic copy.

I plan to move a motion next year to get 2 people on all regional councils and committees. There have often been older people, but not representing the RMA.

Comments from attendees

- You must pay full subscriptions to sit on Regional Council and Committee
- There is nothing on disabled people and this often goes together with increased age
- I attended last year's RMA national conference and was surprised that there were only 8 delegates plus the Committee, and that the Committee members couldn't speak so there was little participation. *Each region can send 2 delegates*
- What are your plans for the remaining funds of about £70,000? *We have sent the £1,000 to each region and may do the same again this year. We also spent some on an RMA banner. There is also a question on where the subs (£13.05pa) paid by RMA members goes. We will be asking.*
- I am a former RMA President – things have moved forward and I congratulate Kevan on his success.
- I attended the national conference some years ago and was surprised that there was no get together organised for the night before conference – this makes it unwelcoming to people who don't know anyone. *We will look at this for the future*

Megan thanked Kevan for his contribution and said it was particularly pleasing he had been able to stay for the whole day's event.

Election of delegates to the SWTUC & TUC LESE pensioners committees

Megan described how these committees work saying they are a great opportunity to meet retired activists from all the other unions. We share nominations for these committees with the GMB's Wales & South West Region and the London Region, but there are several places available. The region will pay your travel expenses if required.

SWTUC covers west of Bournemouth, and TUC London, East, and South East covers, for us, everything south of the Thames. Nominations made here today will be for next April onwards.

The following were elected:

- SWTUC Mike Goff
- TUCLESE Gena Grant, Stephen Jackaman, Leila Kassam, Munir Malik

Election of delegates to the National RMA Conference

Megan described the responsibilities of delegates to the National RMA conference on Tuesday 20 October 2026 in London. Hotel accommodation will be provided for delegates for 19 October if required:

- Attend the conference
- Speak to the motions submitted by the Region
- Produce a written report for circulation to the Committee – in a timely manner

As the GMB's membership is more or less half and half men and women, our delegates should reflect this.

Gena Grant and Leila Kassam will attend automatically as they are on the national committee.

The following were elected:

- Munir Malik
- Paulette Steeves

Observers may also attend, funded by their branches. There were no applications for this.

Consideration of motions submitted

Megan outlined the procedure and dealt with the 4 motions one by one.

Motion 1: The Labour government and retired members

*In Barry Wren's absence, the motion was moved formally by the President and seconded by Jeremy Cross. **The motion was carried.***

Retired members of the GMB, along with other trade unions, have financed and fully supported the Labour Party. We, like all trade unions, have fought with a financial burden during our working life to be financially stable and accountable in retirement. This has always been a directive of many previous governments, who have encouraged us to save with company pensions, shares when sell offs within our place of work, along with a promise of a better life when we retire.

So what is my point? Well, it is that we, the retired, are an easy target for the Labour Party whilst in power, a party that we subsidise with our membership subscriptions, a party that was formed for the working classes, a party that now does not support the working class or those who are prepared to challenge for better working conditions. Labour has become the pillaging party, knowing that we, the retired, have no means of fighting back, unable to strike, unable to work to rule.

What are the unions doing, including the GMB, staying silent, not rocking the boat, and letting us retired suffer in silence, when you all should be supporting your continuing loyal members?

So are we alone, are we now the forgotten members, are we to suffer in silence, and watch our savings and income dwindle in the hands of our present government, until we are like others on the streets with our begging bowls?

Please tell the Labour Party that we, the unions/GMB, are its backbone, and that we will not have our retired members serve as financial scapegoats to solve the country's financial problems.

I, like thousands of others, have had this winter's fuel allowance taken back via taxation coding. I have, for the last couple of years, been on a high-tax K coding. All this because I followed advice on savings, etc., and a yearly company pension with my state pension.

It all boils down to, I shouldn't have worked all those hours, or even worked, should not have saved, should not have taken out a company pension, should not have passed my driving test, should not have struggled to buy my house, should not have been a senior shop steward involved in negotiating pay rises and better working conditions, etc. If I had not done all of these things, I am sure I would have been better off now under this anti-retirement Labour government, which my union continues to support.

Barry Wren E091658

Motion 2: **Ex-Prime Ministers and protection costs**

*In Jack Ryan's absence, the motion was moved formally by the President and seconded by Gena Grant. **The motion was carried and the Committee was asked to make an amendment reflecting the unusual number of recent prime ministers and therefore the varying nature of risk.***

All ex-Prime Ministers should pay for their own protection, the 8 at the moment cost nearly £10 million a year, money that could be better spent.

Jack Ryan 081279E

Motion 3: **Representation of Retired Members on Regional Council**

The motion was moved on behalf of the Committee by the President and seconded severally. **The motion was carried**

This conference believes that the Southern Region should follow the lead of the national union in making arrangements for the representation of members of the Retired Members Association of the Region on the Regional Council

Hence the Regional Council is requested to adopt the appropriate rule and/or policy changes to enable 2 members of the region's RMA to be elected, by members of the RMA, to sit on the Regional Council, and, if it is the will of the Regional Council, for representation on the Regional Committee.

Given the mandate of the current Regional Council is until 2029, the Council is requested to put this in place by April 2027.

Southern Region RMA Committee

Motion 4: **Retired members and Pension Credit**

The motion was moved by Parvin Sethi and seconded by Gena Grant. **The motion was carried**

Pensioners that are not getting pension credit, only because they are getting a little over the Government pension, even by just as little as £10 a week above their Government pension, are being cruelly denied pension credit by the Government.

This is very unfair and unjust. I am fed up hearing the Government constantly boasting all of the time that they are helping the poorest people by giving them pension credit along with many other benefits such as an extra around £4,000 plus along with many other benefits, such as warm home discount, free dental care, help with service charge bills, and Council tax bills etc.

Therefore it is a LIE that they are helping the poorest, simply because there many pensioners getting much less than those receiving pension credit.

There are many pensioners getting much less than those on pension credit, only because they are getting a small private pension on top of their Government pension.

I believe that the Government should give any pensioners, extra benefits and extra money if the total they get in Government pension added to what they get in private pension is less than what those on pension credit get.

To put it simply if all of the benefits along with the extra cash, like warm home discount, Council tax relief, help with service charges etc etc if added up total to £17,000, then all of those pensioners that

are not getting pension credit, and are in total with their private pension only getting in total less than £17,000 for example getting £15,000 they should have at the very least have their money made up to £17,000 by the Government, that is if decency and fair play is to prevail.

If the Government truly want to help ALL of the poorest people as they continually and falsely boast, then the Government must match and give the total amount to those that are not getting pension credit, simply by making up the difference in cash and benefits for those pensioners that are getting less than those pensioners receiving pension credit.

In example, if a pensioner on pension credit receives in total £17,000 per annum, then the pensioners that are not getting pension credit, but are only receiving in total their Government pension plus their private pension a total of only £15,000. The Government if they want to actually live up to their statements that they actually help the poorest, they must do the right and honourable thing by actions not words, and do so by giving the actual poorest pensioners the ones that are not receiving pension credit at the very least what those pensioners on pension credit receive.

Parvin Sethi 255291E

Motions to RMA national Conference

Megan said that we are entitled to send up to 3 motions for the attention of the national conference. Motion 3 was not appropriate as it was directed to the Southern Region.

The conference agreed to send motions 1, 2 and 4 to the national conference.

Any other business

There was no other business and Megan closed the conference with thanks to all the speakers and with thanks particularly to all attendees and the high level of contribution and participation.

IN ATTENDANCE		
<i>Speakers</i>		
Hemsby	Kevan	National RMA President
Houghton	Nadine	Regional Secretary
McMullen	David	Regional Organiser
<i>Committee members</i>		
Dobney	Megan	K19 South London General
Goff	Mike	B40 Bournemouth
Grant	Gena	L26 Richmond & Wandsworth
Kassam	Leila	X96 South London Universities
Jackaman	Steve	L29 London & SE England Gas
James	Hilary	L09 LB Lambeth
Malik	Munir	L28 LB Bexley
Ryan	Jack	K19 South London General
Sanders	Christine	L17 LB Lewisham
Whitehead	Steve	K19 South London General
<i>Members</i>		
Abu Bakir	Kathy	M27 LB Merton
Baker	Derrick	W27 Tolpuddle
Cross	Jeremy	S68 SGN South East Gas
Kowalewski	Julian	X96 South London Universities
McAusland	William	L16 LB Greenwich
Purdue	Nicholas	M27 LB Merton
Sethi	Parvin	B40 Bournemouth
Steeves	Paulette	L25 LB Southwark
Sutch	Anthony	K19 South London General
Whittaker	Angela	C28 Political Education Trade Unionists
Whittaker	David	C28 Political Education Trade Unionists
APOLOGIES		
Brewerton	Rosemary	H43 Hampshire County Council
Brunt	Paula	R26 Reading & Berkshire
Herd	Richard	X21 Portsmouth General
Gordon	Michelle	GMB Senior Organiser
O'Donoghue	Francie	G36 Security
Topliss	Dave	P29 South Coast Gas & Utility
Watson	Caroline	L32 LB Sutton
Wren	Barry	S68 SGN South East Gas