

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Annual Report 2021-2022

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) began informally in 2018; its first AGM was held on 17 May 2021. This second annual report covers May 2021-June 2022.

Committee: The following people served as ERSCAG's committee throughout this period: Maggie Beirne (secretary), Alex Cowan (chair of Direct Payment User Group), Mike Geoghegan, Pat Maclean, Janet Mearns, David Scully, Mark Tilston (treasurer) and Roy Willis (chair). Committee meetings have been held monthly (by zoom).

Local Ealing interventions

Council: Covid has meant that ERSCAG has not yet re-instituted face-to-face meetings with senior Ealing Council staff, but it has (virtually) attended all the meetings of the Health & Adult Social Services Standing Scrutiny Panel and the Health and Wellbeing Board (the two Council committees directly concerned with social care). At most meetings, ERSCAG questions have been raised in the public session, and occasionally this has led to follow-up correspondence and/or virtual meetings with Councillors and/or staff. In January 2022 we met Council Leader Peter Mason and Cllr Josh Blacker, chair of the Health and Well-Being Board. Issues of concern raised in all these interventions included: workforce shortages, the provision of PPE to care workers & social care users; the vaccination roll-out; the need for systems to require the London Living Wage (and automatic uplifts) be paid to all care workers working in Ealing; the resilience of the day care sector; the need to assess the options for ending charging for social care; reliable statistics about Council provision etc.

Local government elections: Social care concerns were raised in correspondence with all the candidates standing for election (5 May 2022), and those on the ERSCAG mailing list were encouraged to write to candidates in their wards. An Election Special was issued (April 2022) to set out our five demands and report on early responses from different candidates and political parties, and some hustings were attended. Emails were sent (30 May) to all the incoming Councillors to introduce ERSCAG and its work.

General: Awaiting a national inquiry into the response to Covid, ERSCAG updated its Review of Covid Learning carried out in August 2020, with an update a year later (July 2021). Hopefully these reflections will be of use to Ealing Council, and in due course to the national inquiry. Relatively little public engagement took place through the year but - thanks to a close working relationship with Ealing Save Our NHS (ESON) - ERSCAG attended (and distributed leaflets) at the Hanwell Carnival, spoke at an ESON meeting, and addressed demonstrators on the Day of Action (26 February) outside Ealing Hospital. We are working on increasing our mailing lists and have commissioned work on developing a website.

National interventions

ERSCAG has been in touch with all three Ealing MPs on a regular basis ie Rupa Huq (Ealing Central & Acton), Virendra Sharma (Ealing Southall) and James Murray (Ealing North and Shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury). The latter initiated in 2020 a series of regular meetings with ERSCAG to alert him to local and national developments in relation to social care and these have proved very useful to us too. In addition, ERSCAG has made a number of submissions to parliamentary or other official inquiries – 'Have Your Say on the Health

and Care Bill' (September 2021); an Inquiry into social care complaints systems carried out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (September 2021); an inquiry by the Joint Committee on Human Rights into "Human Rights in care settings" (November 2021); a consultation on the Terms of Reference for the national inquiry into covid (March 2022); and a House of Lords Inquiry into the invisibility of social care (May 2022). We regularly monitor parliamentary debates and reports to determine when and how best to intervene in debates about the long-term future of social care. ERSCAG is also affiliated to Act4Inclusion (previously Reclaim Social Care), and we are very active in the campaign to create a National Care and Independent Living Service. Exchanges with Inclusion London, WinVisible, Action on Disability, Citizens London and frequent meetings with other groups around the country, allow us to better direct our energies, and the NaCSILS campaign produced useful promotional material for ERSCAG to use in local lobbying efforts. Numerous other national campaigns (for the most part online) have been brought to the attention of people by way of ERSCAG's monthly newsletters. National media and think-tank debates about social care are also routinely monitored for campaign opportunities.

Individual queries

ERSCAG has neither the skills nor the capacity to act on behalf of individual social care users, though we have on occasion been able to signpost people onwards. However, it is vital that all our work is informed by lived experiences and some ERSCAG members have found our interventions of help. As early as February 2020, we submitted to the Council and others a series of case-studies (Social Care System in Crisis: the human story in Ealing). Whilst we still intend to update this material, we have found that many of the problems set out there remain the same or have been exacerbated by covid. We use these testimonies to educate the general public to the kinds of needs faced by people in receipt of social care. We are particularly helped in this work by the existence of ERSCAG supporters who have created a user group of people in receipt of Direct Payments. The Direct Payment Users Group meets every couple of months to exchange their experiences and – on occasion – to listen to invited speakers. General topics such as – good practice in employing Personal Assistants, co-production etc. – have been discussed alongside issues of concern raised by individuals. This past year, the group invited speakers such as Sham Baig (Direct Payment lead at Ealing Council), the Independent Living Group, and the nascent Ealing Care Coop group. The issues raised at these meetings form the evidence that ERSCAG has then pursued directly with Council staff/Councillors/ MPs/ parliamentary inquiries as outlined elsewhere in this report.

Future plans

Campaigning continues around the creation of a National Care and Independent Living Service; an end to charging for domiciliary social care; and the London Living Wage for all care-workers. Many commitments were made by our Councillors in the context of recent local government elections which will need to be pursued. To improve our outreach, we will be launching a website, increasing our social media efforts, and seeking more creative ways for getting into local media inc. radio. We have some research projects still due to be completed: a Best Practice Guide (for employing Personal Assistants); an update to our pre-covid case study paper; submissions to the Council and/or parliamentary debates; and these will continue to be complemented by our regular newsletters and our efforts as part of other local and national campaigns.