



Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter March 2022

Update on recent developments

Ealing has local government elections on 5 May 2022: the deadline for registering to vote is midnight 14 April - [Are you registered to vote?](#) Once registered, if you want to vote by postal or proxy vote, the deadline is midnight 19 April. Several of the ward boundaries are changing and all election candidates have to be named by 6 April, so to check who is standing in your area see: www.whocanivotefor.co.uk

In March, Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) has attended (virtual) meetings of the Council's Adult Social Care Standing Scrutiny Panel (2 March) and of the Health and Well Being Board (16 March) and has been in correspondence with senior staff and relevant Councillors on a range of topics: provision of Lateral Flow Tests to social care users when their free supplies run out; payment of the London Living Wage to all care workers along with automatic annual uplifts; workforce shortages; the Healthwatch report into the needs of housebound residents; & the statistics underpinning decision making on social care provision.

A meeting of ERSCAG's Direct Payment User Group was organised (16 March) and Sham Baig (Ealing Direct) was the invited guest to discuss a range of issues including: the current difficulty of Direct Payment users in finding Personal Assistants; the importance of disability equality training for Council staff; and the financial worries created by care charging. She also confirmed the good news that the Council will continue to provide Personal Protective Equipment free for social care users until 2023, but the situation regarding the provision of free Lateral Flow Tests remains unclear (see news items later on).

ERSCAG joined in the Day of Action (26 February) with a local demo organised by Ealing Save Our NHS outside Ealing Hospital. Whilst the main focus was on proper funding for the NHS, we raised concerns around social care, and put the politicians present on notice that at the forthcoming local government elections they will be asked to scrap domiciliary care charges.

Campaigns – current or upcoming

Local government elections are a key moment to alert the general public, political parties, and individual candidates to the concerns of people using social care. Local authorities have primary responsibility in this area, and despite the reduction in central government funding, should be encouraged to live up fully to their responsibilities. In the lead up to 5 May, ERSCAG will work locally and nationally on this agenda.

Locally, we have developed a number of demands to raise at any hustings that are arranged, and we will be writing to all the declared candidates once their details have been confirmed. We will be asking all candidates if they support an end to charging for domiciliary care (or a freeze/moratorium in the meantime); will promote a policy of Independent Living where the

social care user is involved in the design and delivery of the service; improve pay and conditions for care staff; and argue for better financing of this whole sector from central government. If you are attending any local hustings, please raise these questions, or get in touch with ERSCAG for some more guidance, or alternatively check out: [Local Election Toolkit 2022 - Inclusion London](#) Ealing Council is currently Labour-controlled so we will ask those candidates what they will do, if elected, to comply with the local Labour Party manifesto to “fix social care”. And what are the other local political parties saying about this topic?

At the national level we will be working as part of the campaign for a National Care Support and Independent Living Service (NaCSILS) and the Scrap Social Care Charging campaigns to publicise similar concerns via postcards/lobbying MPs etc.

Most of you will have followed the Chancellor’s Spring Statement, and **Age UK** organised more than 1000 interventions in advance. While many older people and others on benefits will see their financial situation worsen in the coming period, the Age UK update noted that the organisation intended: “to keep up the pressure on the Government to make sure older people can keep their heads above water” (see www.ageuk.org.uk)

On 22 March, a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Disability met with four umbrella disability groups to hear of their submissions to the **United Nations Committee** for the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Inclusion Scotland, Disability Wales and Disability Action Northern Ireland all raised concerns and spoke of some legal advances; but the English contributors noted that they had little positive to report – there was a feeling that covid had seen a real regression in attitudes to, and treatment of, disabled people.

Campaigning for the London Living Wage for Personal Assistants and care workers, **Citizens UK** has called for a tea party on 30th March outside parliament to support care workers, reporting that “across the South East of England, over a fifth of all care industry jobs pay less than a real Living Wage? That’s 34,000 workers barely earning enough to get by”.

Information and latest developments nationally

Covid & Vaccinations:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/government-has-abandoned-its-own-covid-health-advice-leak-reveals>
- [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02796-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02796-3/fulltext) - a fascinating (if statistically complex) study about ‘excess’ deaths globally
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/18/covid-immunity-declines-steeply-in-care-home-residents-study>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/23/nhs-covid-desperate-conditions>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/28/end-of-free-covid-testing-could-put-vulnerable-at-risk-say-uk-experts> (discussion still underway locally, see earlier).

Inquiry:

The long-promised/delayed inquiry into the government handling of the covid pandemic is about to get going, and draft terms of reference are available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/cabinet-office-announces-terms-of->

[reference-for-covid-inquiry](#). ERSCAG will submit the papers it prepared about the “Review of Covid Learning” here in Ealing. The following articles might encourage you to engage: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/23/false-narratives-covid-millions-deaths-challenge>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/18/ministers-failed-to-allow-parliament-opportunity-to-scrutinise-uk-covid-laws>

Legislation:

- Regarding the Health and Social Care Bill (in its final parliamentary stages) see this important critique <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/28/patients-endangered-flaws-health-and-care-bill-nhs-ombudsman>
- A consultation is underway about reform of the Human Rights Act and its replacement with a British Bill of Rights: it has been thoroughly ‘panned’ by human rights activists.

Reports/reporting:

- A great disability campaign film was shown on BBC on 21 March: ***Then Barbara met Alan*** - <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/mar/21/then-barbara-met-alan-review-a-rollicking-fact-based-drama-with-a-rock-biographys-swagger>
- For a virtual book launch see <https://youtu.be/LH9-g1A3qqU> Organised by Inclusion London, author and public health expert Christopher Thomas argues that we must emerge from the pandemic on the offensive – with a bold, new vision for our health and social care. An ERSCAG member wrote “*It was an extremely interesting meeting, Christopher Thomas has a lot of really important and innovative and informative things to say. I would really recommend that people watch it*”.
- Or if you prefer a podcast: see WinVisible’s International Women’s Day podcast [here](#). Refugee and UK-born disabled women tell moving personal stories about discrimination in social care. Text version coming soon, check [here](#).
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/09/poor-cold-hunger-media-benefits-claimants> by Frances Ryan, author of *Crippled: Austerity and the demonisation of disabled people*.
- Or for a government perspective on it all, see speech by Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Health & Social Care (23 March) -

[Read his speech in full on GOV.UK](#)

Staffing:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/03/nhs-lack-geriatricians-ageing-england-royal-college-of-physicians-warns>
- Social Care Futures has a series of blogs on employing PAs/carers: see <https://socialcarefuture.org.uk/what-happens-after-an-offer-is-made-continuity-of-experience-matters/> all of the previous blogs [HERE](#)
- In the context of the support on offer to Ukrainian staff government provides a link to [support available to all frontline care and health workers](#)
- Local MP Rupa Huq (Ealing Central & Acton) asked government (15 March) to make an assessment of the merits of publishing an assessment of current and future care workforce needs, since it seems vital if we are to recruit and retain the necessary level of staffing. But the written answer does not seem to agree - [Written Answers - Department of Health and Social Care: Health Services and Social Services: Staff](#)

- The Council has introduced a social value policy so that its “*spending power is used to deliver real social, economic and environmental benefits*”. The policy includes requiring all council suppliers pay the London Living Wage.

**WATCH
MORE**

Users of social care – are you a pensioner?

- <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/older-londoners-missing-out-on-pension-credit>

Your Help Sought:

A variety of organisations have asked people to engage and feed in their lived experiences:

- Healthwatch Ealing is still looking for people with recent experience of using Medequip services to serve on a User Group Panel (see also January ERSCAG newsletter) – contact David on 07944391223 or email vip@yvpsc.org.uk
- Do you have views on the [Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care](#): the government consultation runs to 10 April iwpiimplementationquestions@dhsc.gov.uk
- A survey asks Ealing residents to shape “*decisions taken by the council, developers and others about homes, the use of physical space, tackling climate change, creating good jobs and how we can address any concerns around health and inequalities*”: https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201282/shaping_ealing/2884/help_us_shape_ealing/1
- Do you have views about travelling around Ealing: [Travel in Ealing charter - give your views](#) - no formal deadline; comments welcome over next few weeks.
- Do you have views about the provision of palliative and/or end-of-life care: [Please give your views and feedback by completing our online survey available here](#) this is the long survey for those with experience of community-based specialist palliative care OR alternatively [Please give your views and feedback by completing our short online survey here](#) for those with no experience of community based palliative care. This survey is very timely given the government promise to make end-of-life care a legal right (The ‘I’, 26 February) and comments from Hospice UK that nearly one in four people are still missing out on high quality care and “minority groups and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately affected”.

Sources of official advice/help

Current official guidance about covid can be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. The Department of Health & Social Care also issues regular updates about adult social care – to join their mailing list see news@dhsc-mail.co.uk At the Ealing level, the Council also offers a lot of guidance – see www.ealing.gov.uk/coronavirus and/or www.ealingtogether.org

Social care over the longer term

At the end of last month, government issued two important reports - [Social care reform: an independent review by Baroness Cavendish](#) and [Social care reform: government response to Lords Select Committee report](#). ERSCAG has yet to study them closely to understand better what government is planning to do about social care policy over the longer term.

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For more information, or copies of any of the ERSCAG papers mentioned here,
contact ERSCAG Secretary maggiebeirne@googlemail.com or erscaginfo@gmail.com