



Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter December 2023 – Festive edition



Looking back over ERSCAG newsletters in 2023

Campaigning: Locally, ERSCAG met with, and asked questions of, both elected Councillors and senior staff to pursue our concerns around the needs of those in receipt of social care, carers and care-workers. Throughout the year, the newsletters reported on meetings with one of our local MPs (James Murray), the chairs of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Council's Scrutiny Panel, and the newly constituted Ealing Health and Social Care Residents Forum, at all of which we pursued concerns such as: cost-of-living; changes to and extension of the Direct Payment arrangements; care charging; assessments; Blue Badge thefts; digital exclusion; recruitment retention and payrates for care-workers; support for carers; accessible venues and Disabled Facilities Grants; the all age disability strategy; and the quality of care in residential homes. In a desire to raise the profile of social care, ERSCAG engaged with the new director of Ealing Healthwatch, and encouraged Ealing Citizens Tribunal to add social care to its agenda when examining racial equality in the Borough. In all of these efforts, ERSCAG sought to promote the ideals of co-production and listening to the voice of those directly concerned.

In addition to our own efforts, ERSCAG monthly newsletters reported on the campaigning of many national organisations – for example, the Relatives & Residents Association (now Care Rights UK) and their campaign for the right to visit relatives in care homes; the Marie Curie campaign addressing poverty at the end of life; Age UK asking the Chancellor to use the budget to stop families waiting too long for social care; the National Pensioners Convention campaign for a National Care Service; the work of MENCAP and other disability groups to have benefits increase in line with inflation; the Campaign for Real Care's Charter for the Right to Wellbeing; Change.org's petition "*to align care and support worker pay to NHS pay bands*"; and the campaign by more than 70 national groups arguing the need for a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing. In April, the newsletter announced that UNISON had launched a campaign for a National Care Service, and in September, Amnesty International (UK section) established a Disabled People's Human Rights Network. In other instances, we reported on events to mark particular dates: for example, Dignity Day (1 February), International Women's Day (8 March), Carers Week (5-11 June), the NHS 75th anniversary events (5 July), World Mental Health Day (10 October), End Digital Poverty Day (12 October), the first UN International Day for Care and Support (29 October), Black History Month (October), the UN's International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December), and UK Disability History Month (16 November to 16 December).

Opportunities for party political campaigning and lobbying – both nationally and locally – were routinely mentioned in the newsletters, whether at the time of the Spring Budget, the Autumn Financial Statement, or the party-political conferences which took place in September and October.

Public meetings and events: The ERSCAG monthly newsletter reported on a range of public meetings and events – both locally and nationally – addressing social care. A webinar was organised by the University of Bristol (31 May) "how can we make social care reform happen"; and there was live-streaming (28 August) from Geneva of the UN's examination of the UK government's record on

disability rights. ERSCAG forms part of the national campaign End Social Care Disgrace that organised three very successful public meetings over the course of the year on the topics of carers (20 March), disabled people (10 July), and care and support workers (23 October). ERSCAG newsletters reported on the NHS's 75th anniversary events including the SoS NHS march on 11 March and provided a platform to disseminate media coverage of social care events and issues - on topics such as austerity, care-homes, carers, covid-19 (and the inquiry), staffing etc.

Reports: Our monthly newsletters keep readers informed of the growing number of major reports and studies that relate to social care. In December 2022, the House of Lords published a report "A gloriously ordinary life: a spotlight on social care"; the Church of England issued a final report from its commission on "Re-imagining care" (January); the IPPR Commission on Health and Prosperity produced an interim report in April; the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) issued "A Roadmap for reforming care and support" (April 2023); the Fabian Society published a report – "A National Care Service for All" (8 June); the Women's Budget Group spoke out about "The chasm of care" (28 August); and the newsletters referred regularly to the research of specialist groups like The King's Fund and the Health Foundation. ERSCAG itself made a submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UNCRPD) in July. In response to the fear that the public debate around social care seems to imply that social care is a 'problem' or too 'expensive' to address, ERSCAG published a paper entitled "Adult Social Care: some economic considerations" (May), and this was taken up in a further report from the End Social Care Disgrace campaign which argued that "we cannot afford NOT to tackle social care". And, in the same vein, Future Social Care Coalition issued (September) a report entitled "Carenomics: Unlocking the economic power of social care".

Signposting: ERSCAG does not have the expertise to offer specialist advice on individual cases, but our newsletters offer signposting to local and national organisations, events, advice lines etc. that readers might find useful. The meetings of our Direct Payment Advice Group inform us regularly of the kinds of issues facing people using social care and it is these issues that we pursue at the various Council events attended and reported upon in the newsletter. We regularly encourage those unhappy about some aspect of social care to consider redress via the relevant complaint mechanisms and/or to contact their local elected representatives. We also have a regular "Your Help is needed" slot on the newsletter, to help promote Council efforts to secure input from social care experts in the community.

So, when looking forward positively into 2024, what is to be done?

Having established a very positive relationship with Councillors and senior Council staff through the past year, where ERSCAG seeks to act as a "critical friend" and hopes to facilitate engagement with care users, ERSCAG must build on this even more in the coming year. In December last year we committed to the following priorities: the cost-of-living crisis, the London Living Wage, learning from the Covid-19 experience, following up on various policy issues, and increased efforts at outreach to increase the profile of social care. These issues have been pursued actively throughout 2023, but 2024 offers us exciting new opportunities to step up our efforts: there will be several political openings offered by the London mayoral and Assembly elections in May, and possibly also, a general election?

ERSCAG, and all those committed to bringing about positive change to the provision of social care, will want to make the need for social care reform much more visible than it is currently. We must loudly argue that care-users, carers and care-workers all deserve better than is the situation currently. We should also argue – in the face of challenges to our national economy, productivity, and well-being – that investment in social care provides the UK economy with "*a vital lever for the long-term security, resilience and growth of all parts of the country*" (Carenomics report). The silence about the needs of social care in the budget discussions this year (in April and September) was deafening – this must change! If you can do anything to help ERSCAG improve on its outreach and its message to our elected representatives in 2024, please get in touch. In the meantime, season's greetings!