



## **Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter** **November 2023**

### **Update on latest activities**

Ealing Council is exploring how to increase the quantity and quality of provision of its Direct Payment service to social care users in the Borough and has prioritised talking to those who already use, or have previously used, Direct Payments. Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) held two meetings in November to this effect: Cllr Ben Wesson (chair of the Health and Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel) had an excellent session with ERSCAG's Direct Payment User Group (DPUG), and a meeting with staff on the same topic is planned for the 29<sup>th</sup>. Direct Payment users wanted to urge that the system remain voluntary and be extended with a view to meeting the needs of care users, and not as a cost-cutting measure; that DP users need advocacy and practical support in making the packages work to best effect; and raised issues such as trust, care charging, assessments and digital exclusion at the sessions. DPUG members also used the meetings to express concern about the need for improved communications with the staff working with both DP and Continuing Healthcare users, and the importance of disability equality training for staff.

Other meetings planned for this month with Councillors, senior staff, and local MP, James Murray, had to be deferred until December and will be reported on subsequently. The next Ealing Health and Care Residents Forum is being held on 4 December.

ERSCAG attended (virtually) the Health and Well Being Board (22 November) and asked a question in the public session about digital exclusion, noting that "*A recent piece in New Statesman estimated that there are 5 million adults in UK who cannot send an email, access information on websites or book an appointment with GP by computer or other device*". Noting that digital exclusion can affect both older residents and disabled people with specific access needs, we asked for statistics about what this means for the Borough of Ealing and what steps are being taken to address any problems recorded. We will report back in due course.

Another concern being explored with the Council (and our elected reps on the London Assembly) is the rise in thefts of Blue Badges locally and London-wide.

### **Campaigns – current or upcoming**

First, a 'good news' story: disability rights activists and others succeeded in opposing the closure of ticket offices: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/01/u-turn-rail-ticket-office-closures-public-opinion>

This year, UK Disability History Month is celebrated between 16 November-16 December, <https://ukdhm.org/> and 3 December is the UN's International Day of Disabled Persons, so you

may want to support various Disabled Peoples Organisations - [Tell Rishi Sunak: respond to the UN inquiry on disabled people's rights!](#)

Our sister organisation – Ealing Save Our NHS (ESON) – is gathering signatures nationally for a petition - “We call for a People’s NHS” calling for a return to the founding principles of the NHS <https://keepournhspublic.com/petition-we-call-for-a-peoples-nhs/> Their early November newsletter also campaigned about data privacy issues and Palantir – but since then the Guardian reports: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/21/patient-privacy-fears-us-spy-tech-firm-palantir-wins-nhs-contract>

Care Rights UK report (bulletin 8 November - [website](#)) met with Care Minister Helen Whately to urge a Care Supporters Bill be included in the Kings Speech. Whilst they report being “*given a sympathetic hearing*” they were told there was insufficient parliamentary time. Accordingly, the group writes that: “*in coming months our campaign focus will be to push the main political parties to commit to the Care Supporters Bill (Gloria’s Law) in their election manifestos*”.

Recent Cabinet changes send out different signals about whether or not the Human Rights Act (HRA) – a key safeguard for everyone’s human rights - will become a campaign focus, with the conservative think-tank Policy Exchange reporting positively on an article in The Spectator, which *concludes that “the best and simplest option would be simply to repeal the HRA ..”*.

Social Care Future campaigns for a future which recognises that: “*We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things we love, in communities where we look out for each other, doing the things that matter to us.*” [sign up to our brand-new newsletter.](#)

## Latest developments locally & nationally

### Autumn Statement

Presumably everyone has studied the Autumn Statement from their own perspective, so just one or two items of possible interest: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/21/disabled-people-work-from-home-laura-trott-benefits>; <https://dpac.uk.net/2023/11/disability-news-service-23rd-november/>; and the Women’s Budget Group (see [www.wbg.org.uk](http://www.wbg.org.uk)) “*Women are the shock absorbers of poverty and continue to bear the brunt of the cost of living crisis.....At the same time our public services are in urgent need of investment..(and) our research has shown that women rely on, and benefit from public services much more than men. But the chancellor has chosen to spend over £9bn on tax cuts which will benefit men more than women.*”

### Carers

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/22/third-of-uk-carers-with-bad-mental-health-have-considered-self-harm-survey-finds>
- The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) invite people to “The Carers’ Challenge 2023” sharing -[Inspiring ways to provide better support for unpaid carers](#)
- The Guardian ‘Money’ sections devoted pieces to “*How to manage as an unpaid carer*” (18 November) and “*How to manage (care home) fees without going broke*” (14 October).

### Direct Payments

Think Local Act Personal organised a summit on Direct Payment provision (1 November) and produces regular newsletters ([www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk))

### Future care needs?

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/27/dementia-could-affect-17m-people-in-england-and-wales-by-2040-data-finds>

## National Covid 19 Inquiry

The national Covid 19 Inquiry is underway and is regularly on our TV screens. Unfortunately, it (or at least the media coverage of the same) seems to revel in the Westminster gossip. ERSCAG made a submission to the Inquiry (see [www.erscag.org.uk](http://www.erscag.org.uk)) arguing that decisions must be made as close as possible to those directly affected, which also requires adequate resourcing for local authorities – we look forward to those discussions. In the meantime, for a flavour of some of the media coverage, see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/31/natures-way-of-dealing-with-old-people-the-damning-messages-revealed-to-covid-inquiry>; and a Spectator piece (4 November) headlined “We needed a Covid Inquiry but this isn’t it” – reminds us of the care-home tragedies: “*In the first covid wave, nearly half of the deaths occurred in care homes....a study (in France) showed that deaths were mainly caused by fluid loss – confined to their rooms, with staff absences running at 40%, residents were forgetting to drink and dying of dehydration*”. The conclusion: “*It took a pandemic to reveal what has been going on for years in Britain’s chronically underfunded and understaffed care homes. Rather than isolating and abandoning residents, we should have been identifying the most vulnerable and giving them greater support. Staffing levels should have been increased sharply and movement of staff between care homes stopped (those who moved between homes were three times as likely to have Covid)*”.

## Reports/Research/Events

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/01/loneliness-charity-the-cares-family-goes-bust-warning-others-will-follow>
- The University of Glasgow carried out a study relevant to Spectator piece mentioned above - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/10/people-never-visited-by-loved-ones-more-likely-to-die-earlier-study-finds>

## Staffing

- Ealing Council reports that it has started a new staff learning programme to help recruit and retain the social care workforce:
- According to a BBC report (16 November) Ealing Council pays the lowest pay rate for home care workers – see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67414940> - which will certainly require some follow up from ERSCAG and others to check for accuracy and explanations.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/28/foreign-care-workers-invited-to-uk-exploited-on-grand-scale-says-union>

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## Sources of advice and help

As mentioned in last month’s newsletter, Ealing Council has started a new quarterly newsletter addressed to service users and carers – the first issue included important information about carers’ grants, the new LLW for staff, etc. If you want to go on their mailing list directly, contact [DanielT@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:DanielT@ealing.gov.uk)

ERSCAG was recently sent this link to a useful guide for people with disabilities and the safe use of social media - [Safety Guide for people with disabilities](#)

For cost of living advice for Ealing see

[https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201320/cost\\_of\\_living\\_support\\_and\\_advice](https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201320/cost_of_living_support_and_advice)

and Which magazine (end October) gave information about [second Cost of Living payment](#)

Regarding Blue Badges, Ealing Council magazine- <https://www.aroundealing.com/news/blue-badge-fraud-2/> - advises what to do about the fraudulent use of a blue badge or if you want to report your blue badge as lost/stolen (tel: 020 8825 8161). It also gives links to check if you are [eligible for a blue badge](#) or wish to [apply for one on the council’s website](#).

## Social care over the longer term

The ERSCAG October newsletter reported from local elected politicians about their different party conferences, and we concluded *“We need to make social care an issue that ALL our elected politicians hear about regularly on the doorsteps ...only then might we secure the changes to social care that are urgently needed”*.

In that regard, a very interesting policy briefing posted by the Women’s Budget Group (WBG) on 25 October discussed polling conducted by YouGov about women’s voting intentions, which found: *“that 25% of women are currently undecided on how they will vote compared to only 11% of men; while women who provide unpaid care are more than twice as likely to name childcare or social care as a priority”*. WBG brought this data to the Conservative and Labour party conferences asserting that: *“Together with our expert panellists, we explored the pressing issues informing women’s voting intentions and how political parties could significantly influence the outcome of the next general election by shifting their focus on women’s policy priorities.”* These are findings worth bringing to the attention of all our elected representatives – particularly in the build up to Mayoral/London Assembly and (eventually) national elections.

The two larger parties are still struggling with their stance on social care. Conservatives point positively to the fact that the government has boosted *“innovation projects in adult social care”* by £42.6m. *The Accelerating Reform Fund is aimed at focusing on “trialling and expanding new approaches to providing care and improving services for unpaid carers...this fund includes the government’s commitment to invest up to an additional £25 million to support unpaid carers. Local authorities are invited to register their interest in partnership with others in their integrated care systems to fund local innovation projects”*. At the same time there is little news of the long term reform that is needed, and even short term efforts are being hampered - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/10/tory-turmoil-hits-efforts-to-fix-staffing-crisis-in-adult-social-care>

Local reports on the Labour Party conference (see ERSCAG October newsletter) indicated a lot of positive statements about social care, but in the wake of the conference, the Guardian suggested that this commitment to change might not reach the party’s election manifesto: [https://ablink.editorial.theguardian.com/ss/c/TBI-IE0k4WbTIFRn6v-IQXxTpTslqnvUsR2ofAkC00u2Zc1utP-XYRsgRe6QwKgkFPT0fhYqyeQnSdFd7A35mbUfaKa3crOspN8lPOKb6isCxc3QXJmrtDOwZgTziXKffcq3uWxTnMDK35LC7Yk-CAtBJlh4uHwHvZkHL3zKicLaSonrzjvzMZwMfkhyyJdIPuKsvZluLgFuKktZ0k694099xnUwjjjOIF9lavj\\_YGw6FFcwqiallcZcon1updFTD0521llyFz7oXeN8eJZRCe81kHFC2LsOZNJcE\\_FDxd8gJ2t2IfqOYzvKR2YCzNyKKQANQiTQ10AtmK5uFep\\_A/40g/bDQ7tSrSR0OFdQo3J4bgAw/h64/Eom6KZ-IC-zlJae8f4vefgMfbY98HTXBqd9S0B5fyhU](https://ablink.editorial.theguardian.com/ss/c/TBI-IE0k4WbTIFRn6v-IQXxTpTslqnvUsR2ofAkC00u2Zc1utP-XYRsgRe6QwKgkFPT0fhYqyeQnSdFd7A35mbUfaKa3crOspN8lPOKb6isCxc3QXJmrtDOwZgTziXKffcq3uWxTnMDK35LC7Yk-CAtBJlh4uHwHvZkHL3zKicLaSonrzjvzMZwMfkhyyJdIPuKsvZluLgFuKktZ0k694099xnUwjjjOIF9lavj_YGw6FFcwqiallcZcon1updFTD0521llyFz7oXeN8eJZRCe81kHFC2LsOZNJcE_FDxd8gJ2t2IfqOYzvKR2YCzNyKKQANQiTQ10AtmK5uFep_A/40g/bDQ7tSrSR0OFdQo3J4bgAw/h64/Eom6KZ-IC-zlJae8f4vefgMfbY98HTXBqd9S0B5fyhU)

Check out our website - [www.erscag.org.uk](http://www.erscag.org.uk)  
and join our Facebook group [Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group](#).  
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