



Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter **March 2024**

Politics matter!

In this time of both London Mayoral and Assembly elections (2 May), Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) is very concerned about local democratic decision making.

Did you know that Ealing Council has decided to close Ealing Careline – the 24/7 emergency call-out system for several thousand elderly and disabled users? ERSCAG's February newsletter reported that the service "*looks set to be dropped*" and the Council – which vaunts its commitment to listening to the voice of residents and users and to concepts such as co-production - has indeed decided to close the service as of 1 April. The views of most current users of the service were not sought. ERSCAG wrote to all Councillors with its concerns – about the decision itself, about the transition process, and the lack of adequate consultation. Questions were submitted to two relevant Council committees; we attended a briefing organised by Cllr Wesson (27 March); and – at the time of writing – we hope, with other campaigners, to meet urgently with the Council Leader Mason and Cllr Mahfouz (candidate for the Ealing Hillingdon constituency for the London Assembly).

Regardless of the overall decision about closing Ealing's Careline - and in recent weeks ERSCAG has heard only good things from users - it is vital that any transition be paused and that users be offered truly 'like for like' service.

Given the vulnerability of many users of the service, ERSCAG is unconvinced that everyone affected knows or understands that the service is being ended imminently, still less that they have a clear route to an alternative provider offering the same response service. ERSCAG members are directly aware of failures in the transition phase and has brought these to the attention of the Council, but this is all happening too late. For media coverage see: <https://ealing.news/news/is-it-end-of-the-line-for-ealing-careline-ealing-council-conducts-review-of-in-house-service-and-its-future/>; [Loss of Careline Service Will 'Get People Killed'](#) Ealing Today newsletter; <https://www.mylondon.news/news/west-london-news/ealing-ends-emergency-support-line-28814099>; and <https://ealing.news/news/protest-by-vulnerable-ealing-residents-over-council-scraping-careline-service/>. Please support us in this work (it only takes a minute to send an email – see <https://acornuk.good.do/london/saveealingcareline/>

Latest developments locally & nationally

Disability

On 18 March, the UK government appeared before the United Nations to justify its record on upholding the human rights of disabled people – see, for example, : <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/uk-government-faces-un-violation-disability-rights>.

ERSCAG's September 2023 newsletter reported on earlier hearings held in Geneva at the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the various submissions made by a variety of disability activists. The video link can probably still be found online.

The *Movers and Shakers* podcast has won an award. The most recent episode is a good (if not comprehensive) discussion of applying for disability related benefits <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/movers-and-shakers-a-podcast-about-life-with-parkinsons/id1677410087>

Financing:

- The Spring Budget unfortunately appeared to make little or no reference to the needs of social care. If you are interested in its gender impact - [Read our full response to the Spring Budget](#) from the Women's Budget Group.
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001wq7t?partner=uk.co.bbc&origin=share-mobile> has a segment of the You and Yours radio programme (32 minutes in; dated 28 February) exploring the problem of funding social care and a warning issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to Councils who engage in cost-saving at the expense of the human rights of those concerned (see first item about Ealing Careline)
- [£20 million boost for adult social care and unpaid carers](#)

Reports/Research/Events

- If you did not see this ITV programme about the challenges faced by people negotiating the world of social care, check it out. Produced by TV and radio personality Kate Garraway about her experiences when her husband fell seriously ill during covid, it is both moving and mobilising – a 'campaign tool' in the fight to make social care more visible (see later also): <https://www.itv.com/watch/kate-garraway-dereks-story/10a1610/10a4482a0001>
- On 7 March, ITV broadcast a programme exploring the issue of digital exclusion – it is said that 40% of over 75s never use a computer or smart phone and ten million adults lack the basic skills to use the Internet. Also of possible relevance to the digitally excluded, see: - <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/telecoms-operators-agree-to-protect-telecare-users-during-digital-switchover/ar-BB1jGsXe?ocid=hpmnsn&cvid=e6903be3198444c5a7d9092af4cf1116&ei=23>
- A specific concern arises also over the risk of unregulated Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots being used to create social care plans. At a recent conference, thirty social care organisations, working with the Care Quality Commission and the Department of Health and Social Care, committed to a good-practice guide within six months www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/mar/10/warning-over-use-in-uk-of-unregulated-ai-chatbots-to-create-social-care-plans

Staffing

Some good news first of all: <https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gmb-wins-sick-pay-for-19000-care-workers/> Elsewhere, in the current – often highly politicised – debates about migration, see:

- The government's Adult Social Care update of 20 March 2024) that "*as of 11 March 2024 care workers and senior care workers are no longer able to bring dependants to the UK*". March seminars were organised for care providers about the new rules, plus a toolkit "*to support care providers in the ethical recruitment of staff from overseas.*"

- The Guardian reports: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/13/migrant-care-workers-uk-unable-work-tighter-permit-rules>;
- <https://leftfootforward.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=65b47e7ed535f89a2113322cd&id=34c7f0747d&e=367ea0174a>.

Sources of advice and help

Ealing Council produces a quarterly newsletter – the Spring 2004 contains contact details for all local Councillors and has a number of interesting articles such as a piece entitled “Free to choose care” and the extension of the Direct Payment scheme – for more information about the latter, visit www.ealingdirectpaymentguide.co.uk

Ealing Health and Care Residents Forum is holding a meeting on 9 April online and in person (venue to be determined). For more information email: judith.george1@nhs.net

Social care over the longer term

Normally, this section of the newsletter focuses on the national picture of social care, and the long-term direction. However, many readers of this newsletter are gearing up for the 2 May London Mayoral and Assembly elections, and so may have questions about what these two bodies have to do with social care?

Directly, the London-level authorities have limited roles, in that social care is largely provided by local Councils, with the direction of travel set by national government. Nevertheless, these elections do provide an opportunity to move social care up the political agenda, in advance of what will be national elections later this year. So, please consider how you can play your part?

Firstly, there is some useful material provided in Ealing Council literature – see for example:

[Get ready to have your say in the upcoming election](#)

On 2 May, London will be voting on who you want to be the Mayor of London, and the London Assembly members. This election is important, but also different in a few ways because of recent changes to how voting works...

LONDON ELECTIONS

Secondly, please note the new rules about photo ID for elections – there can be little more frustrating than turning up to a polling booth and being turned away because you have not got the right documentation! Details about the forms of photo ID that are acceptable, registering to vote (if you haven’t already), and registering for a postal vote (deadline 5pm 17 April) are all in the information link given above.

Thirdly, start thinking about how to make your voice heard. Maybe –

- Contact the candidates for London Mayor and/or the Assembly member for Ealing and Hillingdon constituency. For the latter, on 27 March, it was formally announced that

the following have been duly nominated: Anthony Michael Goodwin (Reform UK); Henry Higgins (Conservative); Jess Lee (Greens); Bassam Mahfouz (Labour Party) and Kuldev Singh Sehra (Lib Dems).

- Are you involved with any residents' or campaign groups who are organising 'hustings' to talk to candidates and ask questions of them in advance of election day?
- ERSCAG's February newsletter cited work by **Age UK** on their planned manifesto "*outlining what we'd like to see from the next Government. Fixing social care will be a big area of focus for us, and we plan to campaign on social care alongside other charities who are members of the [Care and Support Alliance](#) in the run up to the election*". **Disability Rights UK** collaborating with others have developed a manifesto: <https://www.disabledpeoplesmanifesto.com/manifesto> **London Citizens** have also issued a manifesto, drawing on their local groups and members to develop several 'asks' of the future Mayor - see [here](#). One of their requests relates to decent wages and working conditions and cites the experiences of a care-worker. London Citizens will be exploring their demands with leading mayoral candidates on 25 April.
- **Inclusion London**, for example, has produced a useful toolkit, and is preparing a list of demands for all candidates: [London Mayoral election 2024 toolkit - Inclusion London](#).

And be ready for candidates and their teams 'door-stepping' you. ERSCAG occasionally hears from elected politicians that they do not hear many social care concerns on the doorsteps when they go knocking – so MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD when and if you get the opportunity. Are you in receipt of social care; are you a care-worker; are you a carer for a family member? There are millions of us in total, but often quite isolated, and working hard to make the system work for us and our loved ones, without the energy for wider campaigning (see the Kate Garraway programme referred to earlier). So, talk to anyone coming to the door asking for your vote about care - maybe you are not happy with the quality and nature of social care provision by the local Council? or are you concerned about the financing arrangements for social care wanting it to be treated like medical care, and free at the point of need? Ask candidates what is their (or their party's) vision for the future of social care.

As noted, social care is primarily a responsibility for local Councils and national government – but the London Mayor and the London Assembly can help. They have no statutory powers but do have a lot of soft power: can they lobby government for more funding; can they encourage good practice across Boroughs (such as the decision by some London Councils to end charging for social care); can they encourage London-wide initiatives such as a Carers' Charter, or the promotion of Independent Living, or systematic disability equality training for staff? One of their statutory roles is to promote economic development – and investing in care would promote economic development at a very local level – see Kings Fund et al: https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/7d5ad2d2f2/value_investing_social_care_briefing_2021.pdf ERSCAG argues that London cannot afford NOT to invest in social care!

The main purpose of any engagement you manage to have should be to alert candidates from all parties that social care is an important issue for you, and your vote counts.

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