



Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter October 2024

Update on our latest activities

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) had a very useful meeting with local Ealing MP - James Murray - and his team. As a member of the government's Treasury team, James could not speak about financial issues – so we restrained ourselves to merely saying “social care needs proper funding”! We were, however, unrestricted in the issues we could raise with him as a constituency MP and he willingly undertook to follow up concerns around: attitudes to disability, people in debt for social care charges, and establishing contact with the Minister for Social Care.

Continuing at the parliamentary level, we also wrote to newly elected Ealing MP, Deirdre Costigan, who has now been made a member of the Health and Social Care Select Committee. We wrote to congratulate her and express the hope that we could meet her soon. She has already indicated that she hopes to attend the parliamentary meeting being organised on 18th November(see on).

The closure of Ealing Careline saga continues. The Campaign for Action in Sheltered Housing (CASH) met with the relevant Councillor – Deputy Leader Cllr Louise Brett. CASH was told that Careline would not be re-instituted, and there was no clarity on a responder service, but the team promised to chase up if there are any former Careline users still awaiting social care assessments.

ERSCAG is also pursuing both at London Assembly and local level our concerns about thefts of Blue Badges and what alternative measures can be put in place.

Last but not least, ERSCAG has been active with national colleagues at End Social Care Disgrace (ESCaD) in organising a parliamentary meeting on 18th November hosted by John McDonald MP. ESCaD writes of the meeting “*We hope that we can campaign together for the urgent establishment of a National Care, Support and Independent Living Service, while also trying to ensure that current injustices with regard to disabled and older people, carers and care/support workers are addressed.*”

Campaigns – current or upcoming national campaigns

Care Rights offers campaigning help – “*We want to help people earlier in their care journey to [understand their rights](#) and feel empowered to advocate for themselves and their loved ones.*”

Change.org is organising a petition wherein they repeat Age UK statistics to the effect that over a million older people in the UK go without the care they need. “*Please sign this petition and help us fight for justice*” [Sign now with a click](#) And they also have a petition to establish an independent complaints commission for social care – link is:

<https://www.change.org/p/establish-an-independent-complaints-commission-for-social-care-health-education>

Latest developments locally & nationally

Carers:

- <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/social-care-in-england-current-situation-case-for-a-strategy-and-further-support-for-unpaid-carers/> This House of Lords report brings together important statistics about people awaiting care assessments (400-500,000 nationally); 13% of NHS beds occupied by people awaiting discharge; workforce turnover at 25.4%; and at least 4.7m people providing unpaid care with 1.9m of them providing 35hours+ care weekly.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/15/labour-to-set-up-review-after-carers-allowance-overpayments-scandal>

Careworkers:

- London Living Wage - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8dmp949r1qo> – rates have increased to £13.85 per hour, and Ealing Council offers support to LLW employers
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/oct/10/record-numbers-men-working-social-care-england-immigration> - interesting evolving demographic change amongst care-workers facilitated by addressing staff vacancies with help from immigrant labour.

Disability:

- West London reports (27/9) that “*a series of nine money and rule changes for DWP claimants have been unveiled, set to impact UK households from October*”. The Independent (12th October) reports “*disability claimants in limbo as reforms pushed back to Spring*”. And in answer to the question about why so many people are off sick, the Guardian comment claims the answer is more complex than you might think - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/sep/27/britain-sick-answer-benefits-crackdown>
- As noted above, James Murray MP pursued ERSCAG concerns about the language being used by government around disability benefits. The desire to encourage people to join or rejoin the job market should not imply that people are ‘scroungers’. Government statistics show that fraud in disability benefits lies between 0.1% and 0.5%.
- There is much debate around the Private Members’ Bill on Assisted Suicide currently going through parliament. Some disabled people fear the impact such a move could have on their lives – see ‘Better off Dead?’ with brilliant actress Liz Carr on BBC I player <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001z8wc>. As one might expect, the constituency is however far from unanimous, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwylpvjp78jo>

Funding

- Perhaps in preparation for Budget discussions, there have been several pieces about the pressure on Councils’ financing: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjd5y455dm3o>; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/10/03/reeves-urged-let-councils-tax-raid-millions-households/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/oct/03/rising-cost-of-social-services-in-england-putting-arts-and-youth-services-at-risk-say-councils>
- This financial squeeze is being experienced here in Ealing with social care self-funders having the admin fees they are charged jumping fourfold. In response to ERSCAG, Council staff explained that it might be a challenging message for people but the Council had been subsidising full cost payers for years, and fees had not increased since 2018.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/15/private-healthcare-nhs-labour-public-wes-streeting>

Media articles and Reports

- Policy Exchange, a conservative think-tank, issued a report (9/10) entitled: The Care Dilemma: Caring Enough in the Age of Sex Equality

- **Wider determinants of health** – October 2024 government update of a paper on the “*individual, social and environmental factors influencing the health of the population and the impact on health inequalities*”.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/07/the-guardian-view-on-privatised-care-failures-a-service-crying-out-for-change>
- [Review into the operational effectiveness of the Care Quality Commission: interim report](#)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/24/social-care-review-may-work-this-time-realistic-plan> – article by Polly Toynbee.
- A report by the excellent Women’s Budget Group - [Making Care Visible and Valued](#)
- Carnegie UK published (October 2024) its Life in the UK Index and one of the conclusions reads: “*People on lower incomes, people living in social housing, disabled people, and people living in the UK’s most deprived areas continue to experience the lowest levels of wellbeing. This week’s UK Government Budget is an important opportunity for ministers to prioritise policies and investment to help address these issues.*”
- Rethink...Care – check out Radio 4: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0024cp8>

Your Help Needed:

- Government has launched a public consultation on health – with a view to informing a Ten-Year Plan for health – See [Change NHS](#)
- More locally, NHS North West London has launched a review of the community services that are in place to support people given that ‘frailty prevalence’ is a growing concern. NHS England defines the term “*Frailty is where someone is less able to cope and recover from accidents, physical illness, or other stressful events.*” NHS North West London will lead a community engagement programme which runs until 8th December 2024. “*We would like to hear from you about what’s currently working well, and what needs to improve. To do so [Please complete the online resident online survey.](#)*”

Sources of advice and help

The British Institute for Human Rights has noted that increasingly people are using the language of co-production, but what is it? [Find out more about co-production at BIHR.](#)

In Ealing, café sessions are being organised on the first Monday of the month to anyone who has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s, and their families and friends, to come along for a drink and chat from 6-8:30pm. [CAFE SESSION](#)

If you want advice on internet safety for those with disabilities – check out: [Safety Guide for people with disabilities](#)

Are you a Direct Payment user? Workshops (free online zoom sessions) are being offered by ‘Being the Boss’ : Care planning for main carer/guardian – Thursday 28th November 2024; Personal Health Budgets – Wednesday 29th January 2025; Better working with the local authority – building confidence for meetings and reviews (the ‘care net’) – Wednesday 26th February 2025; and Staying Well Whilst Being the Boss – Wednesday 26th March 2025. Contact karen@bringingustogether.org.uk. All the workshops are being recorded.

Your local MP can be a very useful source of support if you are facing problems not being addressed properly locally. In our regular ERSCAG meetings with James Murray MP, he has frequently indicated that he would be happy to follow up individual cases brought to his attention. This is true for all our MPs and if you sign up to They

Work for You website (<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>) you can get regular feedback on what your MP is doing. Just recently Rupa Huq MP for Ealing Central and Acton followed her party's stance - [Opposition day: Carer's allowance](#)

And if you find no solution to your problem, you can make a formal complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – their weekly report dated 3rd October on complaints mentions an Ealing example - [London Borough of Ealing \(24 000 008\)](#)

Social care over the longer term

The September ERSCAG newsletter ended with the following comment: *“Let us hope that the Autumn Budget (due on 30th October) will reveal some positive messages about government’s determination both to reform and effectively fund social care provision?”* It is probably too soon to say much yet, but our November newsletter will be able to give some more coverage to the debates that followed the Budget statement: was social care change seriously addressed, or again ignored, or – almost as bad – pushed off into the long-distant future.

Signals about the future of social care are mixed. There is clearly a very distinctive focus by the current government on reforming the NHS (see our comments in last newsletter about study by Lord Darzi: Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England). Increasingly, voices are being raised to say that the NHS cannot be ‘saved’ without a very clear focus on social care also, but social care is valuable in its own right - not merely as an adjunct to the NHS. Indeed Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, told the New Statesman (18th September) *“If I look back on my time in this office not having grasped the nettle of social care reform, I will have considered my time here a failure, and I’m not prepared to fail”*. Maybe the parliamentary discussion on 18th November (see page 1) will kick off the debate?

Moreover, whilst Councils have limited potential for determining national policies, social care campaigners need to keep an eye on their local authorities. Particularly given the serious financial squeeze they face, the rationing of social care can creep up almost unremarked. In Ealing we have a very large Labour Party majority amongst our Councillors and we can at least hope that this will give them better access to the current government than its predecessors. Moreover, we also have an increasingly strong Liberal Democrat contingent after the recent by-elections ([Lib Dems Consolidate Role as Main Opposition in Ealing](#)) – and that is a party that has put social care front and centre of their public commitments.

Let’s hope that this makes for a relatively sympathetic audience.....and now to see what the Budget has delivered in the way of hope for the future!

[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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