

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group

Annual Report 2020-2021

Introduction

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) began informally in 2018. A first annual meeting (with committee elections) was to occur in Spring 2020, but Covid 19 intervened. Accordingly, its first ever annual meeting is being held on 17 May 2021 and this first annual report covers activities undertaken since January 2020.

Committee

The following people acted as members of ERSCAG's committee for much of the 2020/21 period: Maggie Beirne (secretary), Mike Geoghegan, Pat Maclean, Janet Mearns, John O'Sullivan, David Scully, Mark Tilston (treasurer) and Roy Willis (chair). John decided to stand down (in early 2021) having brought a lot of insights into ERSCAG's work on those in residential care; Dave Scully moved to Wales but has remained very active (thanks in part to zoom); but very sadly Sian Vasey, ERSCAG's vice-chair, died in October 2020. Sian brought both dynamism and know-how to ERSCAG's work and is sorely missed – a memorial newsletter was circulated in October 2020 conveying the respect and affection in which she was held. In the wake of Sian's death, Alex Cowan joined the ERSCAG committee in January 2021 to bring directly to bear the experiences and concerns of its Direct Payment User Group. Committee meetings have been held every month (by zoom during covid) at which policy decisions and priorities are decided upon.

Local Ealing interventions

Prior to covid, ERSCAG held several face-to-face meetings with senior Ealing Council staff, but since then our interventions have been largely virtual. ERSCAG has raised concerns (by asking questions in the public sessions, or by way of follow up correspondence) at all the meetings of the Health & Adult Social Services Standing Scrutiny Panel and the Health and Wellbeing Board (the two Council committees concerned with social care). Issues of concern include: emergency hot-lines for Direct Payment users in need of urgent help; access to residential homes; infection control in residential homes and early NHS discharge to same; the provision of PPE to care workers and social care users; the vaccination roll-out (especially to people who could not leave their homes to access vaccinations); the need for tenders to insist upon the London Living Wage for care workers working in Ealing; the resilience of the day care sector; the need to assess the options for ending charging for social care. Social care concerns were also raised in correspondence with all the candidates standing in (May 2021) ward/mayoral and Assembly elections. In the absence of a national inquiry being established, ERSCAG drew up a Review of Covid Learning (August 2020) which it submitted to the Council to encourage reflection on the local learning around social care. A short note was also submitted to Ealing's Racial Equality Commission (May 2021) about tackling racial inequalities in social care across the Borough.

National interventions

ERSCAG has been in touch with all three Ealing MPs on a regular basis, and Rupa Huq (Ealing Central & Acton) and Virendra Sharma (Ealing Southall) have both been responsive and shown interest in our work. James Murray, MP for Ealing North was on the Health & Social Care Select Committee, so a meeting was organised with him during a visit to the House of Commons (February 2020). With Covid, and despite him standing down from that committee and moving to become Shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Mr Murray proposed meeting roughly every two months to alert him to local and national developments in relation to social care. In addition, ERSCAG has made a number of submissions to parliamentary inquiries – one on the equality implications of Covid (April 2020), one on social care funding and workforce (June 2020) and one on the organisation and long term funding of social care (April 2021). We regularly monitor parliamentary debates and reports to determine when and how best to intervene in debates about the long term future of social care. ERSCAG is affiliated to Reclaim Social Care and has regularly attended their meetings to learn about the experiences of other groups around the country and national efforts. A campaign to create a National Care and Independent Living Service was launched at the end of 2020 and we hope to engage in that fully once the momentum builds up nationally. Numerous other national campaigns (for the most part online) have been brought to the attention of people by way of ERSCAG's monthly newsletters (started in February 2020). National media and think-tank debates about social care are also routinely monitored for campaign opportunities.

Individual interventions

ERSCAG has neither the skills nor the capacity to act on behalf of individual recipients of social care. However, it is vital that all our work is informed by lived experiences. We submitted to the Council and others a series of case-studies (Social Care System in Crisis: the human story in Ealing) in February 2020, and we intend to update this post-covid, when we fear the situation might well have worsened. Sian Vasey had brought together a user group of people in receipt of Direct Payments, and this group now meets every couple of months to exchange their experiences and – on occasion – to listen to invited speakers. General topics such as – good practice in employing Personal Assistants, co-production etc. – have been discussed alongside issues of concern raised by individuals. The latter issues (eg care package assessments; vaccination roll-out; changes to contingency payments etc) have been pursued directly with Council staff/Councillors/MPs as appropriate. The same lived experience (around residential homes, or the opening up of day care centres for example) has also ensured that ERSCAG's local and national interventions noted above are rooted in the concerns of people in receipt of social care and those working with them.

Future plans

Work is currently underway for more campaigning around – a National Care and Independent Living Service; an end to charging for domiciliary social care; the London Living Wage for all care-workers – and for the development of a website and improved social media efforts to underpin these efforts. Other initiatives in the pipeline include – a Best Practice Guide (for employing Personal Assistants) and updates to our case-study work and Review of Learning from covid-19 – and these will be complemented by our regular newsletters, engaging with the local Council and parliamentary debates on social care, and working closely with other local campaigners.