



## **Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group Newsletter** **April 2024**

**ERSCAG's Annual General Meeting will be held virtually  
on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2-3.30**

**If you would like to attend or be involved, contact ERSCAG Secretary (p. 4)**

### **Update on our latest activities**

Ealing Reclaim Social Care Action Group (ERSCAG) has had a busy few weeks' campaigning against the decision taken by Ealing Council to close Ealing Careline. As reported in the March newsletter, we attended a variety of Council meetings (Health & Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel & the Health and Well Being Board) to try and learn more about the background to the decision to close down this 24/7 emergency responder service.

Despite several requests, we have been unable to secure a meeting with the Council Leader, but Cllr Mahfouz did meet with members of ERSCAG and CASH (Campaign for Action in Sheltered Housing) and ACORN (the Community Union) and heard about the problems they foresaw with this decision. Unconvinced that the Council would reverse their decision, or slow down the transition to allow Ealing Careline users to ensure a like-for-like service, a delegation attended the full Council meeting and, alongside several Councillors, asked searching questions: <https://www.youtube.com/live/mTcYDY74Cvs?si=gmwTD9MRQ8nu1aWf>. See also local media coverage -<https://x.com/EalingNews/status/1783420309174915179>; And <https://ealing.news/news/residents-meet-councillors-to-raise-concern-over-ealing-council-scraping-of-in-house-careline-service/> and <https://ealing.news/news/libdems-challenge-ealing-council-over-scraping-of-in-house-careline-service/>

Despite Ealing Council's frequent claim to be listening to local residents, some six (out of 70) Councillors attended a public meeting to hear directly from users of the Careline service. It was particularly disappointing that the key Council decision makers – Council Leader Peter Mason, Cllr Blacker and Cllr Mahfouz – did not attend. The Councillors who did attend were able to hear the testimony of the 50 or so people present, many of whom are seriously disadvantaged by the decision to close the service, and the way in which it has been done.

Given the vulnerability of many users of the service (by definition the users are elderly, frail, or disabled), ERSCAG is unconvinced that everyone affected yet knows or understands that the service has ended, still less that they know how to replace the old responder service. If you haven't already, please support us in this work (it only takes a minute to send an email – see <https://acornuk.good.do/london/saveealingcareline/> We will continue to monitor the situation closely and lobby the Council to urgently develop an effective responder service so as to ensure that no-one falls through the cracks. Forthcoming Council meetings can expect to be faced with more questions about this decision that ERSCAG believes leaves vulnerable users in a very dangerous situation.

## Campaigns – current or upcoming national campaigns

UNISON is campaigning for a National Care Service –see <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2024/02/prospective-mps-urged-to-back-new-national-care-service/> and sign their petition at:

▶ [Sign the petition for a national care service](#)

Care Rights UK has a regular newsletter ([www.carerightsuk.org](http://www.carerightsuk.org)) & campaigns for the rights of carers. Their 10 April newsletter reports on a success story: *“visiting is now protected as a new 'fundamental standard' for health and care services across England. Access to family and friends now sits alongside things like food and drink, and safety as a minimum standard for health and care services”*. They still want to push further for a *“legal right to a Care Supporter (Gloria's Law). This is not about visiting, it is about the right to support from someone we choose as our eyes, ears or voice when we need them. And, importantly, whenever we need them, regardless of what is happening. No-one should ever be isolated from this vital support again”* If you haven't written to your MP, please use the template letter on their [website](#). And finally they explain that a roundtable is being organised by Skills for Care and Care Rights UK supporters have been invited to take part – so if you have recent experience of using care services (either yourself or via a loved one), feel free to share your concerns at: [contact us](#).

## Latest developments locally & nationally

### Carers:

There have been a series of articles on the problem of carers falling into debt because of over-payment mistakes caused in part by the complexity and lack of generosity in the rules. A piece in The Guardian (27 April) reported that there are now *“156,000 unpaid carers in the UK who are now repaying several penalties after they were overpaid”* and talked of government ministers being asked *“to immediately fix the issues cause by unpaid carers incurring enormous accidental over-payments”*:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/09/calls-to-end-persecution-of-carers-over-uk-benefits-rule-breaches#> and a Twitter post refers The Guardian to local Ealing experiences <https://x.com/OCharging/status/1778716005021220985?s=09>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/12/how-one-woman-fell-victim-carers-allowance-trap-karina-moon>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/dwp-accused-cruel-tactics-unpaid-carers-appealing-fines>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/22/mps-call-for-carers-allowance-review-as-numbers-overpaid-soars>

At the same time, Ealing Council hoping to extend its Direct Payment offer, reports (5 April): *“looking after a loved one can sometimes leave little space for the carer's own needs. To make their lives more flexible, and to provide families with more choice, a Council initiative is offering an alternative way of arranging support”*. For more information on signing up for Direct Payments - see

[CARE](#)

### Cost of Living:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/mar/18/record-numbers-of-uk-people-in-debt-warns-charity> A record 6.7 million people in Britain are in financial difficulty, a campaign group has claimed, as the [cost of living crisis](#) pushes more households into

[debt](#). Crosslight Advice ([www.crosslightadvice.org](http://www.crosslightadvice.org)) - a charity providing debt and money advice in London and the south-east of England – reports that inquiries were up by a fifth in the first two months of 2024 compared with the same period last year.

### Disability

- ERSCAG members have written to question why the Ealing Book Festival is being held at a venue where there is limited disabled parking.
- [Broken Lift Traps Disabled Northolt Teenager in Flat for Weeks](#)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/19/sunak-disability-benefit-curbs-sicknote-culture-pip> In any attack on disability benefits, don't rely on media reports – accurate information can be found at - <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/contact-us>

### Financing:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/17/ambulances-nhs-crisis-kent-labour-health>
- It is difficult to understand some of the financial arguments made for the closure of the Ealing Careline service (see earlier) in light of other areas of financial mismanagement locally eg [https://www.ealingtimes.co.uk/news/24242493.equipment-taken-home-never-returned-staff-told-memo/?ref=ebln&nid=724&block=article\\_block\\_a&u=60d787a931362758191bbeat08cb9ec&date=120424](https://www.ealingtimes.co.uk/news/24242493.equipment-taken-home-never-returned-staff-told-memo/?ref=ebln&nid=724&block=article_block_a&u=60d787a931362758191bbeat08cb9ec&date=120424)

### Reports/Research/Events

Kings Fund report that they are holding a virtual event on 19-20 June 2024 to “*unravel the complexities of England's health and care system*”. Join our [Health and care explained](#) virtual event when policy and leadership experts will offer balanced insights into the system's complexities and shed light on both its current challenges and future prospects. “*As we approach a general election, gain valuable insights into the health and care topics shaping the political agenda.*”

### Staffing

Ealing Council (newsletter dated 25 April) reports “*average earnings in our Borough are some of the lowest in London. Our campaign to drive up the number of local firms paying staff the London Living Wage has helped to boost the pay of almost 800 residents.*” ERSCAG believes it is particularly important that social care workers are paid at least the London Living Wage and efforts are underway to ensure that this is true for all Ealing care workers, whoever employs them and/or wherever they are employed.

### Sources of advice and help

Some local residents are planning to go to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about individual cases of people left unprotected in the transition period after Ealing Careline was closed. The website can be found at ([www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)). See recent ruling from the Ombudsman relating to Ealing Council's delays in dealing with housing complaints: <https://ealing.news/news/housing-ombudsman-calls-out-ealing-council-over-delays-in-dealing-with-complaints/>

The next Ealing Health and Care Residents Forum is being held on 4 June (4-6pm) where residents are encouraged to raise questions/concerns. ERSCAG used this forum (and its April meeting) to ask for a discussion of the Careline closure and its potential impact on the NHS (with unnecessary or additional call-outs being diverted to the emergency ambulance

services). Several local groups have also been offering support to people worried about the closure of Ealing's Careline Service – see Age UK <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/ealing/> or Ealing Advice Service <https://ealingadvice.org/> or Ealing MENCAP [www.ealingmencap.org.uk](http://www.ealingmencap.org.uk). All three local MPs have been raising concerns brought to their attention by these groups, or directly in their surgeries. To check who is your local MP and how to contact them, check out <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>

Over the longer term, ERSCAG will also be trying to find out why the Council did not carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) before deciding to close the Careline service. Carrying out such an assessment in advance of crucial decisions like this allows policy makers to engage with users, hear their concerns, and – at very least – to mitigate any detrimental impact that the eventual decision will have on different users. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, when contacted by ERSCAG, explained that an EQIA is not a statutory requirement in England (unlike Scotland, Wales and NI), but did suggest that concerned users could contact [the Equality Advisory and Support Services](#): *“The EASS was set up to provide advice and assistance to individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, help people to identify options for informal resolution, conciliation or mediation services, to establish eligibility for legal aid (for those people who need or want to seek a legal solution), and to find an accessible legal service if they are not eligible. Freephone and Textphone: 0808 800 0082 Email: [eass@mailqb.custhelp.com](mailto:eass@mailqb.custhelp.com); Post: FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521*

## **Social care over the longer term**

Hopefully everyone has used the Mayoral and Assembly elections (2 May) to try and raise social care issues on the doorstep? If you got any commitments do let us know, so that we can pursue successful candidates in due course. Several groups – Age UK, Citizens London and Citizens UK, Disability Rights UK, Inclusion London and others – developed manifestos for these elections and are preparing the same for the General Election whenever that occurs. It is of particular importance to prepare to push the social care agenda in those elections since fundamental changes can only occur at governmental/parliamentary levels, and with our Local Authorities (the Mayor and Assembly members having a limited role in this domain).

However, one of the statutory roles that the London Mayor and Assembly do have – alongside national and local policy making - is to promote economic development. ERSCAG believes that investing in care would promote economic development and we are supported in this view by major specialist think-tanks like the Kings Fund et al: [https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/7d5ad2d2f2/value\\_investing\\_social\\_care\\_briefing\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/7d5ad2d2f2/value_investing_social_care_briefing_2021.pdf). ERSCAG argues that the country cannot afford NOT to invest in social care!

[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  
[maggiebeirne@googlemail.com](mailto:maggiebeirne@googlemail.com) or [erscaginfo@gmail.com](mailto:erscaginfo@gmail.com)