



What's the future of social care?

Chair: Victoria Macdonald, Health and Social Care Correspondent, Channel 4 News

Speakers:

- Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director Age UK, co-chair of the Care and Support Alliance, Expert Adviser to the Social Care Green Paper
- Sally Burlington, Head of Policy, Local Government Association
- Dr Eileen Burns, President of the British Geriatrics Society, Expert Adviser to the Social Care Green Paper
- Barbara Keeley MP, Shadow Cabinet Member for Mental Health and Social Care, Labour Party
- The Rt Hon. Lord Norman Warner, House of Lords, member of the Dilnot Commission

Session description:

What do a range of external experts think about where social care is now, and the prospects for improvement in the short, medium and longer term? What do they think are the areas which the Green Paper should focus on, and what do they think it actually will focus on – assuming, that is, the Paper ever comes out at all?

Overview of session:

The morning plenary of the 2018 For Later Life conference began with a welcome from the Chair, Victoria McDonald, who introduced the theme for the day: 'What's the future of social care?' Before introducing the speakers, she posed the question, "The Government has pledged to 'succeed where others have failed' in social care, but how confident are we that this will happen?" Broadly, responses from panellists expressed optimism in the long term, but emphasized the urgent need for substantial funding immediately, the problem of cuts to local authorities, the necessity of both the integration of health and social care and of sustainable recruitment and retention of workforce. All speakers stated that there is a case to further reform the system, but that its current crisis is due to lack of funding rather than organisation, and these two problems should not be confused. Speakers suggested investment and focus on workforce, government and leadership. Almost universally, panellists were not confident that the Green Paper would sufficiently address the crisis by providing an ambitious strategy.



Norman Warner addressed current issues faced by the sector including inadequate funding, the collateral damage of neglect of ASC in destabilised local government and the rerouting of care for older people to acute hospitals, which he described as expensive and inappropriate. Lord Warner pointed to the examples of Germany and Japan as countries that have suggested long-term solutions, preparing for the economic impact of long-term care via social insurance contributions, among other policies. He noted that a big challenge for the future of care is finding a solution the public “will buy into”, pointing to a “toxic” political climate in which Brexit negotiations dominate governmental activity and the competing pressures of struggling transport, housing and prison sectors.

Barbara Castle MP stated the urgent need for funding reform, citing the “continued decline in quality of care”, an “unstable provider market” and the “number of councils in imminent danger of bankruptcy”, thrown into sharp relief by increased demand for round-the-clock and daytime care. She too highlighted how little progress the United Kingdom has made in comparison to other developed nations. She was not optimistic about the forthcoming Green Paper, addressing its delay and the minimal action the Government has taken thus far to address the funding crisis, despite numerous official reviews on social reform that had been published since 1999. Clear that she did not anticipate a Green Paper would “herald desperately needed funding”. She laid out Labour Party pledges to conference including 8 billion in funding for social care in the short term, raising asset levels, and reforming how councils commission social care – currently, she argued, a process impeded by budget cuts - to enable them to commission “ethically”

Dr Eileen Burns spoke next, beginning by contending that a key issue we face as a sector is that the public don’t know how social care is funded. Therefore, successive governments’ proposed payment models can be poorly received. Suggested that the way we fund our system isn’t sensible or equitable, and its inefficiency “may even increase social care needs”. She noted the underfunding of the NHS, and that social care is so short of money that it can only meet requirements of those with critical needs, with preventative care services being stripped away.

LGA’s Sally Burlington immediately introduced the issue of funding from the local council perspective. She informed conference that 16 million per year has been taken from local council funding and candidly discussed the crisis point for local authorities, saying “we are not in a place we can sustain, and the problems are only going to get significantly worse”. She also urged conference to celebrate the value of carers, a conversation she argued was not happening enough publicly. She expressed her disappointment in the delay of the Green Paper, adding that a plan,



not a consultation, was essential now. Sally Burlington concluded by restating that public awareness of the importance of this agenda was vital, and called for attendees to contribute to LGA's own 'Green Paper'.

Caroline Abrahams described Age UK perspective on what we want to see for the future of social care: "Money from Treasury in the short term and Govt to produce a bold and ambitious Green Paper, not just "tinkering around the edges" but offers to capture public attention". Cited NHS England findings that "if hospital admissions do not reduce by 25% over the next 5-10 years, hospitals will grind to a halt". She noted the huge questions the crisis raises for councils as preventative services either from lack of funding. She characterised the line drawn between health and social care as "wrong, out of date and unfair". CA stated she was optimistic for the future in the longer term but in the immediate term would be "surprised" if the Government delivered what was asked.

Statements from floor:

Q: "Find the title of this section ridiculous; 95% of social care has disappeared. There is no control over care except finance due to incompetence of Government"

A:(Lord Warner) "It is bizarre we have a system where NHS cannot provide step-down care for many people...a joint workforce strategy for care and NHS so staff can move around the sector is necessary."

Q: "Homecare was once free but the system has changed massively. In Manchester there have been pilots of closer working between health and social care. Would be lovely to see that kind of training for elder people elsewhere."

A: (Barbara Castle) "Think referring to the Salford pilot, which experimented with entirely integrated care. Recently been disappointing news that integration isn't producing great changes in reducing the need for admission to hospital, but perhaps it needs more time"

A: (Lord Warner) "Been tracking Manchester since the beginning. It's a system that's been driven by local authority. Demands were increasing, but the money wasn't. Believe Manchester is the direction we should be thinking of going, but we've got to fund it. It will take the sector a long time to recover from the damage done".