

## **Key Issues Debate HM Government's Green Paper "Shaping the Future of Care Together"**

The County Council on 12 November held a cross-party Key Issues Debate on the Government's Green Paper "Shaping the Future of Care Together". No formal decisions were reached but the views of elected members were sought to inform this response.

In general the County Council welcomed the Green Paper as the basis for generating a debate on a care system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, acknowledging the pressing problem an ageing population presented especially as the working population there to support it grew proportionally smaller. However a number of reservations were expressed, particularly with regard to the limited detail, limited reference to the role of informal carers and what support would be available and the lack of concrete proposals.

It was acknowledged that people were living longer and wanted more from their lives and the County Council was happy to debate the challenges this presented. The County Council recognised that finding a way to fund any care system was not going to be easy, especially if any degree of consensus was to be reached. This was borne out by the variety of views expressed in the ensuing debate.

It was suggested that one of the omissions from the Green Paper was a clear and robust definition of what constituted social care. Differing views and ideas about what social care was, meant that the views expressed in response to the consultation might be more diverse. The Green Paper focused principally on care for older people but it was acknowledged that there would be implications for younger people with disabilities who would require a significant proportion of the funding.

### **Carers**

One of the main points of the debate was the role of carers. Some saw the role of informal carers as the bedrock of any future system ("support them not make them redundant") whilst others expressed severe reservations and were supportive of a care system which removed responsibility from family, friends and others. One view expressed was that the state should be responsible for all care and the costs met from general taxation, an option not being consulted upon. It was agreed that more informal and family carers would need support and that a national care system should recognise this.

### **A National Care Service**

One of the key potential benefits of a national care service that was identified centred around the removal of the uncertainty created by different eligibility criteria operating in different local authority areas – the so called 'postcode lottery'. However other views acknowledged the benefits of a local perspective.

Other elements which found some approval were the ideas of prevention, portable assessments, a care and support advisory service and personalisation. It was acknowledged that those who currently make private arrangements for the care of their relatives need additional support and advice from the state. However members queried whether a national care service was required to deliver them.

There was some scepticism about whether a fully national system could be realised. There was a wide belief that some form of national/local mix would probably result.

Concern was expressed that any national service might become unwieldy, bureaucratic and over expensive and care had to be exercised so that it did not suffer from some of the shortcomings identified with the National Health Service.

There was also a concern that a National Care Service would not give local authorities the flexibility they need to deliver local services and work with their local health care partners effectively.

There was a view that more alternative housing options, such as bungalows, warden accommodation needs to be provided.

## **Funding**

If there was any consensus it was that there would have to be some form of mixed funding.

There was some support for insurance schemes, but these had to be made attractive to people so they wanted to provide for their old age. On the whole it was felt that this should be voluntary.

Some concern was expressed that people might be put off an insurance system, even a voluntary one, by mis-selling "scandals" in other areas of the financial services sector. Any attempt by the Government to intervene, to provide reassurance might lead to a more bureaucratic system and ultimately a more expensive system.

Some people taking part in the debate worried about the affordability of insurance for the least well off. The same concerns were raised about the comprehensive system.

There was also concern that under any new system revisions to the benefits system might create greater hardships for some people. However it was acknowledged that currently benefits are not always spent on care or support needs and that this income could be harnessed more effectively. It is not clear however how this would work in practice.

Whatever system was finally adopted should be fair, transparent and not overly bureaucratic. Details of possible funding models were not totally clear in the Green Paper, nor were the implications of these for local authorities. It was felt that older people deserved high standards of care and that without additional funding local authorities would continue to struggle. It was noted that Worcestershire had a steep rise in the number of elderly and its funding situation was hampered by the unfair application of resource equalisation to county funds.