**Reclaim Social Care Conference Birmingham 17th November 2018**



On the 17th November I attended a Conference on the theme of Reclaiming Social Care.

Drastic underfunding and wholesale privatisation of the so called Social Care is condemning many people to a life of indignity, Isolation, neglect and even maltreatment. Social Care services are close to collapse. The aim of the Conference was to explore the current situation, the policy issues and campaigning opportunities.

The First speaker to address the Conference was John Lister, (Editor of Health Campaigns Together.) He told the Conference we want a force for change, slogans are insufficient to change social care. What we need is a combined campaign to achieve a change to social care. Social care has been starved of finances for many years and is still facing cuts from local authorities. Many Care Homes are near to collapse due to the lack of funds from the local councils. He said the Griffiths Report of 1998 was all about the privatisation of the Social Care, (paying for Care); if this was applied to the NHS there would be uproar. Social Care should be free at the source just like the NHS. The fifteen minutes provided is useless in that it ensures that people do not get the care they need, thus saving the local council money.

Eleanor Smith (MP for Wolverhampton South West), told the Conference that there needs to be a separate Tax to pay for Social Care that is ring fenced. This is what many people have told her in her constituency. She said she would organise a meeting with other M.Ps to discuss the outcome of the Conference. We need to influence the Labour Party on what we want for social care so that we can have a Social Care Bill that includes social support as well as Social Care. We need to look at what we had before and build on that scheme, private nursing homes are being built , but they are only for those who can pay for their care.

Connor McGurran from Unison North West gave a report on the plight of social care workers who are employed by Councils and Care homes. Care staff are often too overworked to have time to take elderly people to the toilet, give them a wash or console those in distress. The findings based on a survey of nearly 3,000 care staff across England looking after people in need show there is even more urgency for reforms, The union says the long-awaited green paper on social care must include plans for real investment in the care system. The survey highlights how intolerable working conditions are pushing care workers to the brink. Nearly half (49%) are thinking of leaving their job, with low pay given by those who responded as the main reason (73%), followed by not having enough time to deliver care (53%). Others (15%) said lack of training was a factor for them wanting to quit, with nearly a quarter (24%) believing they do not get enough specialist development to care for people properly. More than one in ten (14%) said they were carrying out medical tasks they had not been trained for, such as giving injections.

Care employers need to do more to support staff and listen to their concerns,. More than a third (36%) of the care employees surveyed who raised a problem about care standards with their boss said the issue was ignored and some (7%) even got into trouble as a result. More than half (55%) do not feel respected and valued by their employer, and more than two in five (41%) say they are not treated fairly. There is a clear need for care workers to be recognised properly as trained professionals. An overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents want an official register for care workers to be set up similar to those that exist for doctors and nurses. He gave an example where they had found a care worker employed on Zero Hours contract who was working more than 15 hours a day, she was afraid that if she did not work these hours she would not be continued in employment.

Simon Duffy Director of the centre for Welfare Reform. NHS Must Get Behind Personalised Support. How we work with health and social care services can make a big difference. However, putting aside the most acute kinds of healthcare, once we are on the path to recovery, managing a chronic illness or even coming to the end of life, then how we control our life, and direct any support that we receive, is critical. This is something disabled people have communicated clearly for decades: people do not want placements, care homes, respite or day centres. People want to be part of the community, living a life of meaning, free to do things that make most sense to them. This is not just right, it is a human right, as set out in the UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities.

The ultimate goal of a good social and health care system is to enable our citizenship. Health is far too narrow a measure of success: it is not just that we live, it is how we live that matters. People with disabilities, mental health problems or chronic illnesses can live rich and fulfilling lives, lives of contribution and creativity, if they are given the opportunity to live as equal citizens. This is where personalised support comes in. Just because you need assistance or some kind of on-going care doesn’t mean you can’t lead a full life, but that assistance needs to focus on your life, not just your disability or your illness. If we fail to provide personalised support then we will not only reduce the quality of someone’s life we can easily drive people into self-injurious or dangerous behaviour.

There were a number of other speakers, however I have highlighted those who concentrated on Social care. The afternoon consisted on Four Workshops covering the following items:

•How can we start bringing services back into public control?

•How can we win the argument for services to be free at the point of use?

•How can we get users voices to the heart of service design and delivery?

•How can we get carers voices to the heart of service design and delivery?

All the top three suggestions from all of the group discussions were taken away and will be subject to a further conference for discussion on a way forward to reclaim Social Care.

**Rod Downing Retired Members Secretary SE No.5**