

OLD GREY MATTER ARTICLE
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Health and Social Care Matters

Continuing the focus on integrated health and care, the September issue of Campaign, the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) monthly bulletin stated that those facing the prospect of needing to go into a care home now face average fees of £30,000, according to a study by one of the UK's biggest care agencies. Prestige Nursing claimed the fees were rising ten times faster than pensioner incomes, and even the wealthiest fifth of pensioners with an income of nearly £20,000 a year were unable to pay care home costs without also relying on their savings. Under the current system, anyone with savings will have to spend all their money before getting any support from their local authority, and many will end up having to sell their homes in order to pay their care bills.

In an interesting development, former Conservative health minister, Dr Dan Poulter has called for a new health and care tax to be introduced - perhaps through raising national insurance - as the most effective way of putting badly needed funds into the care system. The well respected health charity, the King's Fund has also backed the idea of a new approach to care funding. Jan Shortt, NPC vice president said: "Tax-funded health and social care is the only way to ensure everyone gets the support they need, free at the point of delivery."

With the outsourcing of Suffolk's local authority residential care homes to the private sector in the form of Care UK, they are now one of many private concerns delivering residential care in the county. A review of CQC's inspections of local care homes reveal they are not working to the former local authority standards in several respects. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection reports for Suffolk in January 2016 brought the total number of homes receiving the lowest rating in 2015 to seven with a further 40 deemed to "require improvement". Although one care home was rated "outstanding" and a further 70 deemed "good" throughout the year, 47 of those inspected were classed as failing to meet government standards, representing 40% of the total. That percentage remained unchanged since October 2015 though the number of inadequate homes had risen, prompting concerns in the Labour opposition at Suffolk County Council (SCC).

Sarah Adams, health and adult care spokesman for the council's Labour group, said the latest inspections show the county council's continued failure to fulfil its responsibilities. "Since 2010, the availability of home care has been slashed, and more and more care homes have needed to rely on private patients for funds – with the result that vulnerable people are being forced to pay ever more for a service that is only getting worse", she added... "By taking yet more money out of the system – £6million in the coming year (2016) and £12m the year after (2017) for home care alone – the Conservative county council is ensuring that the social care sector in Suffolk can only get worse." The recent £2 million a year precept is ludicrous in comparison. Meanwhile, the other side of the coin is a telling sign of the times – a revamped former social service office block in central Lowestoft is now the brand new HQ of the Kingsley Health Care Group. The firm has grown hugely in recent years, owning 23 homes – and is embarking on an ambitious £200m expansion, with the aim of becoming a well-known national brand in five years, acquiring land to build new care homes in well populated areas. The HQ has 14,000sq ft of space to employ a further 100 jobs in state of the art surroundings. This is what some of the average resident's £30,000 a year care home fees will finance - apart from the salary of the CEO and gross profit for the proprietors of course – whatever happened to public service?

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