

Old Grey Matter article for publication Saturday 22nd July in the EADT

We need a proper Health and Care Service

The Conservative party's failure to get an overall majority in the general election, means that a number of proposals in their election manifesto are likely to be dropped. For example, the plan to remove the triple lock from the state pension in 2020 and to means-test and remove the winter fuel allowance from up to 10 million pensioners did not appear in the Queen's Speech. Despite this, David Gauke MP, the new head of the Department for Work and Pensions said the government will look again at indexation in 2020.

However, government announced another consultation on the long-term funding of social care. The NPC says this will be the tenth consultation on this issue in 12 years and highlights how successive governments have been reluctant to tackle the crisis in the service. This, the NPC suggests, will mean even more delay before the crisis is settled to the satisfaction of all. Damian Green MP, the deputy Prime Minister told the media there would be a cap on the amount of money that people would have to pay for their care – but declined to say what that might be. Most political commentators point to the bungled Conservative manifesto pledge on social care and the fact that minister were only told of the plans 24 hours before they were published, as one of the main reasons the party lost support. Nevertheless, campaigners are concerned that this consultation must not allow the government to introduce its discredited and unpopular policy through the backdoor. Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: "Either a consultation is open – or the government has already made up its mind what it wants to do, and is simply going through the motions. Whatever happens, the NPC will continue to campaign for a tax-funded care system, as the only fair and realistic solution to the problems."

Guy Opperman, the MP for Hexham has been appointed as the new Pensions' Minister replacing Richard Harrington. The NPC has already requested a meeting with him and will report back shortly. The situation in social care is more complicated, as the former care minister, David Mowat (who suggested families needed to do more to provide care for their loved ones) lost his seat in the election, and the government has yet to appoint his successor. Moreover, in Theresa May's first period as Prime Minister she downgraded the role from Minister of State to Under Secretary of State. Given the crisis in social care, the issue should really now be dealt with at Cabinet level as it is at the top of families', political and media agenda.. A copy of the NPC's Post-Election Analysis briefing paper is available on www.npcuk.org

Disturbing figures released on UN World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 14 June show that just 0.7% of all crimes against older people in the UK end in a conviction. The charity, Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) said the figures pointed to clear institutional ageism, with too many crimes being seen as a social problem instead of a criminal one. Gary Fitzgerald, AEA Director said: "Commit a crime against someone because of their age and you will probably get little more than a slap on the wrist. This needs to change and the impact of the crime can in some instances lead to admission into care or even death and needs to be recognised in law as a hate crime." Also, for the record, every instance of financial abuse that comes to light, 24 cases are thought to go unreported. See more on: www.elderabuse.org.uk

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