

OLD GREY MATTER ARTICLE
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Does Government care enough?

Do enough MPs really care about the growing problem of ‘care for the elderly’ that confronts this country? Recent reports make sad but predictable reading about how MPs are being urged by the Prime Minister to accept their independently assessed pay rise of 10% (the effect of which will also boost their retirement pensions), whilst all workers in the public sector have been held to a 1% rise for several years and for another four to come. This, from a man whose mantra at the outset of his austerity measures was ‘we are all in this together!’ makes a mockery of that position and lowers the stock of all MPs, tarnishing them with the same brush. It is completely within the PMs power to continue MPs pay within his public sector remit of rising by 1% a year without first hiking in an extra 10% which all public sector workers would also dearly love to achieve – and remember 1% of a large salary is much more than 1% of a nurse’s or teacher’s pay. This would retain a semblance of moral authority in the people’s eyes to undergo the course he has mapped out for the country. I respect the many MPs who have publicly declared they will not personally accept the increase they will be paid but as one member of our Lowestoft group says, why should they have to resort to diverting hard-earned taxpayers money to their favourite charity, when all along it should be devoted to the pressing matters of our time such as reinforcing the NHS and sorting out the social health care system which they are elected to do. Just before MPs rise for their long summer vacation, there comes further depressing news that the Government has reneged on its manifesto commitment to introduce a maximum lifetime cap on the contribution an individual needs to make towards their residential care (proposed to be set at £72,000). Within a matter of weeks from the General Election the implementation of the cap has been delayed from April 2016 until at least 2020 in order to divert funds to prop up the present care service. The whole issue has been kicked into the long grass and East Anglia’s only Lib/Dem MP Norman Lamb, who assisted the passing of the Act as a minister in the coalition government, has gone on record that it makes no sense to delay as there will be even less resources around in four years time than now to implement the measure – in other words I say it is a dead duck! Let’s be clear about this. The reason that social care is in crisis is not because of the introduction of the Care Act but because of the £4.6 billion Government cuts to adult social care budgets since 2011 and the fact that the funding gap is growing all the time as the result of an ageing population. It is not just the cap that has apparently been deferred. The eligibility criteria for some help with residential care were going to be widened significantly, benefiting an estimated 35,000 people immediately. Also some of the provisions for care assessments by local authorities appear to have been weakened. Finally, facts from the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Age Audit 2015 speak for themselves: There are approximately 5.8 million people providing unpaid care, many of them pensioners themselves. Although 1.3 million people receive state support for care in England, a greater number, 1.5 million older people have care and support needs that the state does not provide. Doesn’t the government know we are sleepwalking into a humanitarian disaster with one million frail elderly already denied help they need – where is care in that?

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