

## Comment from retired social worker and social care manager

I am writing to offer some comments to the Commission. I hope they are of use.

All the discussions about social care seem to be about if, and how, people needing services should pay for the service they receive. Whilst concerns about whether people should be required to sell their homes or raid their savings are legitimate issue for discussion, they are a bit of a red herring.

The real argument, it seems to me, should actually be about the services themselves. People have a right to maintain their independence at home whenever possible. In the past domiciliary care services were usually provided directly by local authorities. Personal care was offered by 'home helps' employed by local authorities. They had decent wages, proper working conditions and employment rights. Austerity and an obsession with cutting local council budgets led to much outsourcing of these services to home care agencies, often paying poor wages and offering little security to their staff. Local Authority adult care commissioners, forced to operate on a shoestring budget, have contributed to the decline of home-based services by reducing the numbers of calls and even restricting the length of those calls. The effect was to greatly reduce the ability of care workers to contribute to people's mental well being. If you only have 15 minutes to prepare a meal or help someone get ready for bed it's hard to offer comfort or a friendly chat.

A case example here: Whilst I was working for an ambulance service as a social work liaison advisor, I met an elderly and frail woman who lived alone. She needed help to mobilise, dress, undress, use the loo etc. She took to phoning 999 every evening because she would fall getting out of bed to go to the loo. Owing to the restrictions required by the local council, care workers were calling so early in the evening to 'put her to bed' that by late evening she needed to pee. An additional carer visit later in the evening would have saved her much distress and the Ambulance Service unnecessary calls taking paramedics away from dealing with life threatening emergencies. That extra call late in 'unsocial hours' would have been charged at a premium to the local social services.

Reducing home based social care is a false economy as it risks increasing demand for residential care.

Care homes have been affected by austerity, too. Local authorities and the NHS budgets have been squeezed so much that the amount that they can afford to pay to care homes is barely enough to cover their costs. If one bears in mind that the vast majority of care home operators are private sector, for profit companies (some of whom had property development backgrounds) whose business model is often based on developments financed by borrowing. These debts need servicing in addition to the requirement to provide care services to residents. It is easy, therefore, to see why so many care home operators are in trouble. In addition to their financial woes the quality of care provided in residential facilities varies greatly. Care workers are frequently poorly paid, and although many of them show great commitment to the resident they care for, their ability to earn a decent living from their job is severely tested. As I recall one carer say to me, 'why get paid minimum wage for wiping bums when I could be earning more on the till at Tesco'.

Some local authorities seem to have found the wherewithal to return some services, such as refuse collection, to direct 'in house' provision. I believe this should be the way forward for social care. The possibility of creating a well paid workforce with decent employment conditions should be explored by CWaC. Initial costs might well be offset in the longer term savings which could accrue from reducing the numbers of delayed discharges from hospital and shrinking demand for residential care.

[Name and Address supplied]