

Older People and Pastoral care. What is changing in the Welsh Assembly Government and what are some of the issues?

Briefing notes based on the 'Independent care and living in Wales' Conference, organised by the Bevan Foundation May 2009.

Although no clerics from the Church in Wales were there, it was obvious from this conference that

- Clerics have much to contribute to the issues from their experience of pastoral care of older people, complementing the work done by other agencies.
- They see the effects of confusing information given by different agencies or lack of access to appropriate services.
- They may be aware of the pressures on service providers and in some cases are working closely with them.
- Churches already provide considerable support to the 'independent' living challenge for older people in situations of need and isolation.
- Some parishes have the resources and leadership to provide organised pastoral domiciliary care.

The vision would be for the Church in Wales

- to comment on the quality of existing agency care and the needs of older people living independently or in care homes.
- to develop its working relationships with other organisations at a time of change, not least because of cuts in public spending. They need support. The church can gain from other professional experience.
- to turn practical pastoral concern into a more organised deanery or parish team response. Funding and advice might be available to help with the setting up of church based social enterprises which provide personal support for vulnerable older people in their homes.

The Aim of the Welsh Assembly Government and the conference – to fund and resource more independent living and choices.

Gwenda Thomas AM Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services highlighted WAG's roles and responsibilities.

She pointed out that:

there is a higher proportion of older people in Wales than any other country in UK;

Wales is the only country in the world to appoint an Older People's Commissioner (Ruth Marks);

Existing strategies are committed to valuing older people, maintaining effective and supportive engagement in their lives, changing people's attitudes to and stereotypes of older people, improving their economic status and promoting their health, wellbeing and independence.

She admitted that much was left to be done. Charging arrangements in Wales, she said, are dependent on English legislation. Change requires primary legislation. LCO for charging in Wales is being supported by the Welsh Affairs committee. A Green Paper for Wales is to be published in Summer 2009. Any new system must promote:

- independence, choice and control for every service user;
- quality affordable care (to government, users and families);
- more equitable treatment of older people;
- a more consistent charging system between Local Authorities. A Measure is being drafted to achieve this (June 2009).

The commissioning role of Local Authorities is being reviewed.

In October of 2009, a bi-annual publication – 'Monitor' - will report on the wellbeing of older people based on UN principles and WAG strategies.

Sue Collins of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation - author of 'Options for care funding', expressed concern that with demographic change globally and the economic downturn there is a great risk that older people will become more vulnerable. Above all, entitlement needs to be clearer. The cost of long-term care should be shared between government and individuals. A 2% increase in GDP spend is needed to maintain present levels of care. As most care is provided by carers, this is vulnerable to changing work patterns and pressures. Many now see savings as a disadvantage in older age. There are continuing tensions between informal social care (variety of providers) and formal health care (NHS).

Findings and recommendations:

- Means testing is not popular
- Better preventative services are needed
- Greater simplicity in all the processes and information
- Don't penalise thrifty
- Home owners in benefit trap
- Equity release for home owners
- Higher capital limits needed for care fees
- Extend free personal care in nursing homes
- Double personal expenses allowance

Total cost - £750 million per annum.

Other proposals of Joseph Rowntree Report:

- More creative models for housing provision of all kinds with care provider for older people included;
- Improve advice and information if choice and personalisation of services approach continues;
- Address risk to benefits in equity release and improve confidence in private sector and stimulate market;
- Reduce the number of new government initiatives.

Faith communities and churches could play a stronger role as advocates of the needs of older people to better quality social care on the political agenda.

Ruth Marks Older Person's Commissioner Wales (April 2008)

Role based on UN principles for Older Persons. Legally constituted through primary legislation. Appointed by First Minister.

'We need better 'made in Wales' fit for purpose solutions and we need them now.'

Comments already made to her:

- I worked hard and saved – not fair I now have to pay for care which I thought was entitlement;
- I have lived in same house all my life. Don't want to have to move;
- New Tele care is great – but would like more visits from real people;
- Hard for carers to navigate care system, support and rights.

UN principles as criteria to judge quality of care provided

- Independence
- Participation
- Self fulfilment
- Dignity – respect for faith and other rights and right to make decisions about care.

Functions of Commissioner's role to

- promote awareness of interests
- challenge age discrimination
- encourage good practice
- review the law

Activities

Conduct review of most public bodies in Wales, research individual cases with wider implications.

Vision

- *A Wales where respect for rights and dignity of older people is practical reality in all areas of life, where age discrimination is a thing of the past and where a positive view of ageing and of older people prevails;*
- *We will be a world-class commission utilising our powers to further the interests of older people in Wales and make a lasting difference;*
- *Values – focused on older people and customer needs.*

Already concerned about

- Older people's confusion over services and how to know where to go and for what;
- Problems of surviving on benefits, pensions, incomes.

Achievements

- Energy summit over fuel poverty;
- Care and repair of houses partnership;
- Including UN principles in WAG single equality scheme and equality bill.
- Information resolution. Not an advice service but to facilitate better information provision

Emerging themes and plans

- Provision of better information, advice and advocacy. The church could be part of this.
- Better protection of vulnerable adults.
- Care home closure consultation. Are procedures being followed?

The NHS re-organisation should create better links with care and housing and focus on dignity and equality matters.

Ongoing financial pressures must not be allowed to diminish standards.

Summary of some of the issues

- Better information won't be solved by more information or tweaking presentation and language alone. There is too much organisational complexity and even provider self interest. Systems must fit customer need, not the other way round. Even professional people with caring roles are reporting that they cannot steer their way through the bureaucracy.
- Reduce top down strategies or initiatives – more space, trust and freedom for professionals and carers to do the right thing.
- Huge gap between good strategic intentions on the one hand and local delivery on the other. This leaves many professionals and carers de-motivated and frustrated. Increasingly, professionals and carers are calling for more common sense as the route to better service delivery.
- How is it that the 'personalisation' agenda in the broadest sense (not direct payments) is appearing as something new in public services as late as 2009, whereas it is the norm in the private sector and has always been right at the heart of our churches and faith communities?
- Cultural attitudes. The private sector is forced into better quality performance and delivery around customer need because the customer pays them. In the public sector the customer pays, but via taxation, the state and public sector organisations. Has this indirect relationship between customer and payment reduced expectations of quality, flexibility and effective quick responses to the needs of older people?
- Evidence based policies. This has been the understandable mantra of government policy. But there is also the need to take risks which change paradigms and performance. Don't just monitor performance; change performance.

- Equal opportunities and other virtues like scrutiny and accountability have unintended negative consequences creating blocks to good things happening and increasing the accumulating levels of regulatory complexity.
- Does new equality legislation categorise older people and other groups too narrowly? Isn't what the churches would call the 'unique personality of every individual' more important than their equality category?
- Will a restructured NHS in Wales deliver better community services for the elderly and more joined up relationships with Social Services and independent providers? There may well be a rocky road ahead.
- Funding. What will have to change for Local Authorities and Health to get smarter? Innovative practice is often the first to go, either because of regulatory culture or funding. Huge need for brave leaders to challenge this and another issue for the churches to address.

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