

“Fairer charging” not fair enough

A new report from Age Concern England into charging for home care finds that the Government's attempts to make the system fairer have backfired. Whilst a lot of people are better off, thousands of older people have faced increases which average £71 a week for services essential to independent living. Charges vary widely across the country.

It is a year since the introduction of the Department of Health's guidance *Fairer charging policies for home care and other non-residential social services*. It was intended to ensure that local authorities' home care charges were reasonable and consistent across the country, and has implications for the 501,000 older people who receive local authority help with essential services including bathing, dressing and going to the toilet.

Fair Enough? a report produced by Age Concern from research commissioned from

the Age Concern Institute of Gerontology at King's College London, finds that the amount paid for home care is a “postcode lottery”, with some local authorities charging nothing at all for home care, while elsewhere rates vary from £3.50 to £15.50 an hour. Maximum weekly charges also varied from £23.50 to £400 per week.

Pauline Thompson, Age Concern England's Community Care Finance Officer, said: “Our report found that, once again the amount you pay is a case of where you live. Responding to a hypothetical case study, local authorities' calculations of what they would charge ranged from nothing per week to £103 per week for 10 hours' care.

“On a positive note, the research, which was based on responses from 57 per cent of English local authorities, found that many people are better off. Everyone with less than



Photo: Crispin Hughes/Photofusion

Home care costs vary hugely across the country

£127.63 a week in 2003 is now exempt from paying for their home care. However, councils, many of which introduced charges for home care services during the 1990s, are still able to use their discretion in setting the level of the hourly charge and the maximum charge for these services. There is evidence to show that councils are attempting to “claw back” money they can no longer charge poorer service users by charging others much higher rates since *Fairer Charging* was introduced.”

The report found that some had suffered a dramatic increase in costs. In the worst case, one home care user was reportedly paying an extra £261 a week.

There was also evidence that some of those most in need of greater hours of home care to sustain their quality of life, and prevent them requiring more expensive residential care, were particularly vulnerable to high charges because of the way policies were designed.

Ms Thompson said: “Age Concern England believes that the best way to achieve fairness is to abolish charges for personal care and carer's services, as is already the case in Scotland, and is planned in Wales. In the meantime, the research gives 38 specific recommendations, reflecting the complexity of the problem and the wide range of issues that need to be addressed to improve the current system. Some will require additional funding from Government, others can be achieved without this. There needs to be swift and positive action if *Fairer charging* isn't going to remain a lot fairer for some than others.”

Fair Enough? Research on the Implementation of the Department of Health Guidance *Fairer charging policies for home care and other non-residential social services is available, price £10, from Donna Pearce on 020 8765 7429 or email policy@ace.org.uk*

Fair Enough? Key findings from the report

- Seventy-one per cent of councils set a maximum charge for home care ranging from £23.50 to £400 a week
- Only a third of councils provided transitional support to deal with large price hikes
- Service users with severe disabilities who needed two home carers at once reported paying double rates
- In some authorities those who needed help at anti-social times of the day were expected to pay higher rates
- Older people are being discriminated against in that, while younger disabled people's earnings are not counted as income, occupational pensions are
- Only 15 of 86 councils exercised their right not to take disability benefits such as attendance allowance and the severe disability premium into account as income
- There were wide variations in what local authorities allowed as disability related costs

Inside this issue...

- Calls for study loans for older people • New women's clause in pensions bill • Scandal of elder abuse
- MP lives on state pension for Your Rights Week

Lords urged to scrap student loan age limit

The Government was urged to end discrimination against older students who want to take out loans when the Lords gave the Higher Education Bill its Second Reading. Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Liberal Democrat speaker on education made the case for older students during the debate on April 19.

The Baroness said: "I would make a plea for part time and older students. As I have indicated, we believe that the future in this country lies in offering students a much wider choice as to when and how they study."

Campaigners including Age Concern England and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) are lobbying for the introduction of a new Clause in the Bill that would remove the current rules preventing students over 54 from receiving student loans. Age Concern England has written to the Secretary of State for Education proposing this addition to the Bill.

Michelle Mitchell, Head of Public Affairs at Age Concern England, said: "The higher education funding reforms provide an important opportunity to ensure the system works for older students."

The Government justifies its present policy on the basis that loans are currently written off at the age of 65. However,

under the proposed reforms student debt would be written off after 25 years, removing the need to set an upper-age limit for taking out new student loans.

Ms Mitchell added: "Age Concern frequently hears from people who have been unable to take out students loans

because of their age. It is one of the most blatant pieces of age discrimination in any area of public policy and is certain to be challenged in the courts when age discrimination legislation, which covers higher and further education and vocational training, is introduced in October 2006."

According to NIACE, removing the upper age limit is unlikely to open the floodgates of older people demanding finance for their studies. The institute has calculated that students aged 50 and over in higher education in the UK make up less than one per cent of the total number of students, although part-timers number more than 10 per cent.

A spokesperson for NIACE said removing the age limit was a "matter of social justice":

"It would give a powerful symbolic signal that the Government is serious about making opportunities for higher education more accessible for older people, most [of whom] completed their initial education at a time when fewer than 15 per cent of 18 to 30-year-olds went on to higher education. They will have paid income tax for more than 30 years and most will have made little, if any, call on the public purse to meet their learning goals. To exclude them from being able to access state support when they wish to learn later in life simply appears unjust."



Registration time, but no loans for older students

Photo: Lisa Woollett/Photofusion

Older people and student loans

- Almost one million adults choose or need to continue in paid employment beyond state pension age
- In the future fewer adults will be able to consider early retirement, and more will want to develop their careers into later life than previously
- Many older graduates have fewer commitments than their younger counterparts and may be able to afford greater repayments

Peston to talk on economics of ageing

Lord Peston, who chairs the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, is to meet the All Party Group on Ageing and Older People (APPG) to talk about *Aspects of the economics of an ageing population*, the report published by his committee in January.

The report was critical of the Government's "heavy and

growing reliance on means testing" and said it should consider replacing the basic state pension with a non-means tested citizenship pension, based on the number of years of residence in the country, rather than National Insurance contributions.

The committee was strongly in favour of abolishing

mandatory retirement ages for most occupations.

The APPG has also invited Andrew Harrop, Age Concern England's Employment Policy Officer, to talk to the group about the charity's research *The Economic Contribution of Older People*, and his accompanying report *The Economy and Older People*.

This found that the over-50s currently create a quarter of the UK's wealth, and that there is the potential for a million older people not currently in paid work to contribute a further £30 billion to annual economic output.

See page six for details of this meeting.

MPs want annual check-up for women's pensions

Five MPs have tabled a clause to the new Pensions Bill to ensure that the Secretary of State prepares an annual report on changes made to the pension position of women.

The clause, put forward by Vera Baird, Janet Dean, Sally Keeble, Jim Cunningham and Kevan Jones, would mean that the gap in incomes in retirement between men and women would be examined on a yearly basis to ensure that Government policies were successfully countering present inequalities. For every £1 that a man in a pensioner couple receives today, a woman gets 32 pence.

Age Concern England, which is running a joint campaign with the gender equality organisation, the Fawcett Society, to improve the lot of the country's women pensioners, has welcomed the proposed clause.

Helen Simpson, Age Concern England's Senior Parliamentary Officer, said: "This is a move towards addressing one of the most

serious issues facing women today. The Government's own Green Paper on pensions forecast that retired women's income would "lag behind that of men for some years to come". We need to see that concern over pensions translated into action."

Older women face this situation for a number of different reasons, including lower paid jobs, jobs without occupational pensions and fewer years of National Insurance (NI) contributions because of time spent bringing up children or looking after relatives.

Age Concern England and the Fawcett Society's campaign *Let's Make Pensions Work for Women* calls on the Government to redesign the current state pension to deliver a secure, adequate income to all women and men. The campaign also demands a robust state second pension for people unable to join occupational pension schemes or contribute significant amounts to personal pension schemes.

More recently the two organisations, along with the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Women's National Commission, sent a letter to Gordon Brown MP, outlining the four key elements of the campaign and asking for a commitment from the Government to improve the situation of women's income in retirement.



Kevan Jones MP: annual check

Let's Make Pensions Work for Women

- **Reduce the Lower Earnings Limit to bring more low-paid workers into the National Insurance system** – under the current system around 1.4m women make no contribution because they are paid too little
- **Pay pensions to everyone who pays National Insurance** – around 100,000 people (88% of whom are women) with fewer than 10 years contributions fail to get anything back
- **Introduce a fairer system of credits for parents and carers** – unpaid caring saves society billions, but women too often pay the price for years out of the workplace with poverty in retirement
- **Make the second state pension work for women** – as a first step tax credits should be counted towards second state pension entitlement

New face at Department for Work and Pensions

Des Browne MP has left his post at the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to replace Beverly Hughes MP as Home Office Minister with responsibility for immigration.



New job: Jane Kennedy MP

His replacement is the Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP, who moves from the Northern Ireland Office.

Ms Kennedy represents Liverpool's Wavertree constituency. She attended Liverpool University and worked for the city's social service department as a residential child care officer and later as a care assistant in the 1980s. She was a member of the Social Security Select Committee from 1992 to 1994 and the Administration Select Committee from 1997 to 1999.

Welcoming Ms Kennedy's appointment, Gordon Lishman, Age Concern England's Director General said: "We

look forward to building on and strengthening our existing relationship with Ministers at the department. There are many positive initiatives now in place working to ensure that older people will have the opportunity to play a full role in the future economic prosperity of our country. These include the Age Positive campaign, which is to be extended following the Chancellor's budget announcement."

He said the introduction of the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights and the successful implementation of the Extending Working Life strategy would both have a

huge impact on the status of older people in the workplace and society in general:

"The Government must honour its Green Paper commitment to scrap mandatory retirement ages as a clear sign that it values older people's contribution."

Mr Lishman also looked forward to talking to the Minister about getting the work/life balance right for older people, reflecting the huge contribution many make as carers, grandparents and volunteers in the community.

The development of skills and training opportunities for older people would also be high on his agenda, he said.

Immediate action needed to prevent elder abuse



Gordon Lishman, Age Concern England's Director-General, looks at the recent report on elder abuse from the Health Select Committee

People are generally at their most vulnerable at the beginning and towards the end of their lives. Child abuse has rightly received a lot of attention from the Government and the media over the past few years, and as a result the general population is now much more aware of the pain and suffering experienced by many children. Much less has been said about elder abuse, but that does not mean it is any less of a problem in our society.

The Health Select Committee's report, *Elder Abuse*, published last month, is a welcome sign that awareness is growing. The absence of a national recording system and lack of research means that the facts are thin on the ground, but the available evidence is deeply shocking. In its report the committee estimated that half a million older people in this country are victims of physical, sexual, verbal and other forms

of abuse. David Hinchliffe MP, who chairs the committee, rightly described it as: "A hidden and often ignored problem in society."

The committee was given evidence that abuse is inflicted by care staff, relatives, "friends" and strangers, and takes many forms, including financial abuse, neglect and behaviour designed to degrade and humiliate.

Of particular concern is the misuse of medication, and its role in making life easier for care homes, who use it to "manage" residents. Age Concern England welcomes the committee's recommendation that the Government should vigorously pursue the National Service Framework target that all people over 75 should have their medicines reviewed annually, and those taking four or more medicines should have a review every six months.

It is clear that the current care

protection standards for older people do not go far enough and there is inadequate research into the problem of elder abuse. Without action now it is a problem that is likely to grow: ours is an ageing population and there is likely to be a significant increase in the number of older people reliant on care from others in the future.

Age Concern England is heartened that the Department of Health is funding our sister charity Action on Elder Abuse to establish a national recording system for incidents of abuse and provide an accurate picture of the problem. Given the sheer scale of work involved in identifying and tackling the problem of elder abuse, it is clear that this is the start of a long process. However, the report is a positive indication that tackling elder abuse is now, at last, firmly on the political agenda.

Other People's Viewpoints:

"We welcome this report. We are also very pleased at the recommendations, particularly the training and registration mechanisms. However we will be monitoring them very closely and intend to see that these recommendations are acted upon and implemented effectively."

Gary Fitzgerald, Chief Executive, Action on Elder Abuse

"The report shows that although most abuse takes place in the home, it is less likely to be the main carer who is the perpetrator. In most cases people are looked after at home by loving relatives without any signs of abuse. It is important that we understand this if we are to tackle this serious issue effectively."

Imelda Redmond, Chief Executive, Carers UK

"No-one should have to live in fear of those people who should be caring for them. We have strong powers to tackle abuse whenever and wherever we find it. If we have any doubts about a care service, our inspectors will go in and investigate – and are doing this at any time of the day or night as required. Additionally in our assessment of council services we will ensure they are properly tackling elder abuse in their work."

David Behan, Chief Inspector, Commission for Social Care Inspection



Elder abuse: a hidden and often ignored problem in our society

Photo: David Gibson/Photofusion

MP on basic state pension gives up car and makes his own sandwiches

Liberal Democrat MP Evan Harris lived on the basic state pension as part of Age Concern Oxfordshire's campaign to promote Your Rights Week in April.

During the week Mr Harris, who was given just over £102 to spend, reflecting the income of a basic state pensioner in receipt of housing benefit and council tax relief, was forced to give up using his car and made packed lunches rather than eating out.

"It was hard to organise, especially since I was doing my job at the same time, but I realised pretty early on that I could not run a car or put money aside for treats, gifts and holidays. Specific events create a challenge. I knew that I wouldn't starve, but living on such a tight budget you have to make choices all the time. And at least I was receiving all the money I could – many pensioners are even worse off because they don't claim all the money to which they are entitled."

Mr Harris' week was documented by the region's independent TV station, which

featured his progress each day during the evening news. He said the week had highlighted the need for a good public transport system with travel concessions for pensioners, and he reiterated his party's call for a better state pension:

"Anyone who thinks that the current situation for the poorest pensioners is satisfactory could do with a reality check and might like to try the same exercise. It is very important in this era of means tested benefits that pensioners are encouraged and helped to claim the benefits and allowances that are their right. It's very sad that older people struggle to get by while millions of pounds go unclaimed. Age Concern Oxfordshire's 'Your Rights Week' and the excellent work being carried out in Oxfordshire throughout the year is a huge help."

Mr Harris, who is MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, was one of three Oxfordshire MPs who took part in Your Rights Week. Conservative MPs Tony Baldry, who represents Banbury, and Robert Jackson, whose constituency is



Photo: Derek Evans

Evan Harris MP with Ros Waghorn, an Age Concern Oxfordshire volunteer for more than 40 years

Wantage, also helped to publicise the fact that more than £1 billion-worth of benefits goes unclaimed every year. Of the 4.9 million pensioners eligible to claim the new Pension Credit, only 2.6 million had taken it up by February.

Mary Evans, Senior Manager at Age Concern Oxfordshire, said: "Although the

Department of Work and Pensions says it is on track to meet its target of take-up by three million households by April there are still an awful lot of pensioners continuing to miss out. We've been delighted by the support these three MPs have given us, and hope it has helped to raise awareness of pensioners' entitlements throughout the county."



Photo: Steve Heritage/University of Surrey

Baroness Sharp of Guildford with Professor Patrick Dowling, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey. The Baroness chaired Age Concern South East's regional debate on the importance of Europe to older people, when panel members included MEPs Chris Huhne from the Liberal Democrats, Caroline Lucas of the Green Party and Peter Skinner of the Labour Party. The Conservative Party was represented by its candidate Richard Ashworth.

More than 60 delegates attended the debate, held at the University of Surrey at the end of March. A member of the faculty, Professor Sara Arber, was on the panel. She described Europe as "Britain's social conscience."

Richard Baker of Age Concern England spoke about the work of AGE, the European older people's platform and the charity's own European work. Questions from the audience, which included representatives from the South East England Development Agency, local government, trades unions and older people's organisations throughout the South East, covered issues including older voters, pensions, training, employment rights and age discrimination.

The audience heard about the pensions situation in other European countries, including Denmark, which provides a flat rate pension for everyone, providing a better standard of living, but where people have to work longer to be entitled to more state benefit.

Information

Diary Dates

May

27 Houses of Parliament Whitsun recess

June

7 Houses of Parliament return from Whitsun recess

Reports

When I Get Older – What People Want from Social Care Services and Inspections as They Get Older. Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report based on a MORI survey of 1,000 people.

<http://www.csci.org.uk>

Increasing the Employment of Older Workers and Delaying the Exit from the Labour Market. European Commission report on progress towards EU targets for older people's participation in work.

<http://www.europa.eu.int>

Retirement Realities: Shocked and Struggling: Attitudes of Older Consumers for Financial Choices in Retirement. Report of research commissioned by the National Consumer Council.

<http://www.ncc.org.uk>

APPG Meeting



The All Party Parliamentary Group on Ageing's meeting with Lord Peston, Chairman of the Lord Economic Affairs Committee, will take place in Committee Room 6 of the House of Commons on May 5 from 5 to 6pm.

Early Day Motions

Vera Baird's Early Day Motion (EDM) on Women and Pensions has now received support from more than a quarter of all MPs. The EDM's text reads:

"That this House welcomes the launch of Age Concern and the Fawcett Society's report *One in Four*; expresses concern that one in four single pensioner women lives in poverty and that only 13 per cent of all women pensioners have managed to build up entitlement to a full basic state pension; recognises that this is a problem which will continue in the future with one in five women currently aged between 25 and 34 relying on their partner for a pension; and supports the report's call on the Government to take action to reduce poverty for today and tomorrow's older women pensioners."



One of more than 50 runners who braved the rain to take part in the 24th London Marathon on April 18 to raise money for Age Concern. Those supporting the charity included a team of ten from the *Oldie* magazine. While the final figure is still unknown, the event raised more than £60k for Age Concern. At 93, Fauja Singh was the race's oldest runner. He was raising money for Bliss, a charity that helps premature babies, and passed the finishing line in a very creditable six hours and seven minutes.

Photo: John Brown

www.epolitix.com/forum/age-concern

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