

The unsung heroes of the blizzards

HOME support workers have battled through the worst weather for more than 30 years to care for frail and elderly people across the UK.

Many care workers have braved the blizzards to get to clients – in some cases walking for miles to provide much needed help in remote areas.

The United Kingdom Home Care Association praised the 300,000-strong home care workforce for its dedication and determination to get to service users in the snow.

Imelda and Margaret from Active Assistance used sleighs to pull shopping to a service user with spinal injuries in Derbyshire, while in North Devon care worker Lorraine Adams of Phoenix Care At Home abandoned her car and got on her bike to reach people in Braunton.

In County Durham, staff from Applejack Home Care walked miles in the North Pennines to look after clients, and even followed snow ploughs to reach remote places.

Manager Venita Pattinson, said: 'We take pride in taking care of vulnerable people in all weathers and are used to terrible conditions in winter. Our carers are out, taking weather conditions in their stride, and making sure our service users are safe and warm.'

UKHCA's Chair Mike Padgham said: 'Home care workers across the UK are once again defying the weather and getting to clients using whatever means they can – a tribute to the vital work that our sector does all year round.'

'We also owe a huge thank you to home care managers and supervisors for the fantastic work they do to keep services running, often providing transport to staff, or covering gaps in schedules when care workers are stranded. I am immensely proud of all of them'.

Have your say

Do you know of someone who worked tirelessly through the blizzards to provide care services?

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this issue

Latest social care news P.1

Comment on reform P.2

Paul's view on social care P.3

How we can help you P.4

It's crunch-time for care shake-up

THE New Year could herald the greatest ever shake-up of long-term care in England and Scotland.

Key recommendations on how social care for millions of elderly people in England should be funded are due to be unveiled in the summer of 2011.

The proposals will be tabled by the Commission for the Funding of Care and Support whose chairman, Andrew Dilnot, says the status quo is 'not an option'.

In Scotland, the Labour Party is planning to create a National Care Service (NCS) for Scotland – if it wins power in the Holyrood elections in May.

An independent panel, chaired by Sir John Arbuthnott, will consider controversial funding options for merging health and social care budgets.

Labour believes a NCS would help Scotland's elderly to stay at home longer and end the 'postcode lottery of care' for people served by 32 local authorities.

Sir John, a former chairman of Greater Glasgow Health Board, said Scotland's over-60s population was likely to increase by 70% over the next 25 years.

His panel – which will look at increasing early intervention measures to help reduce the number of people being admitted to hospital – is due to report to Labour leader Iain Gray by April 2011.

Earlier this year, the party's plans for a National Care Service for England – guaranteeing free home care for people with the highest needs – was abandoned after it lost the General Election.

Hundreds of millions of pounds of public spending cuts are taking their toll on care in Scotland.

Many local authorities are closing care homes, axing day centres and cutting back on respite care, meals on wheels and preventative services.

They have been accused of making 'knee-jerk' reactions which will ultimately force many elderly people into far more costly acute care services.

In England, many councils have warned that hundreds of thousands of older and disabled people could lose home care in the next four years as spending cuts force them to restrict services to those with 'critical' needs.

An influential think-tank last August questioned whether fundamental social care reform is necessary. The Policy Exchange recommended that the Commission for Funding of Care and Support investigate the possibility of merging health and social care budgets – with the NHS taking over responsibility for social care funding from local authorities.

It suggested in *Careless: Funding long-term care for the Elderly* that the controversial proposal be considered with three other potential funding models:

- A partnership scheme where the State funds 50% of everyone's care and then matches £2 of contributions from the individual with £1 from the State
- A compulsory social insurance scheme which would require everyone over a certain retirement age to make either a one-off payment or regular contributions
- A hybrid model under which the State would guarantee some level of care but people would be required to top-up for their long-term care through insurance or annuity backed products



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CFYB comment on reform

Fasten your seatbelts for the bumpy ride ahead

ARE you punch drunk from the Coalition Government's seemingly endless announcements of 'radical reform' to the NHS, social care, the welfare system and Uncle Tom Cobley and all?

A staggering series of proposals for change that will have a fundamental impact on every one of us has been revealed in White Papers, Commons debates, Whitehall briefings and documents leaked to the Press.

One political wag has joked that we have been bombarded with so many 'important reforms' in recent weeks you probably can see them from outer space!

The Government says the changes planned are vital to bringing about the shift of power from Whitehall and local government to the people – the much vaunted but incredibly vague 'Big Society'.

Many good ideas have emerged from proposals to revamp social care, the welfare system and the NHS. But are we suffering from severe information overload?

Is too much change being sought too quickly? Is the Government being over-ambitious and does it really have the ability – and support of the people of England – to make it all happen?

The signs are not encouraging, particularly if we look at the events of the past few months and the dire warnings from many key figures of the doom and gloom to come.

The message to local authorities, facing huge upheaval and re-organisation, is quite clear – they will have to do far more for much less money. The same may well apply to the NHS, social care and all small and medium-sized businesses facing substantial rises in VAT, fuel and other costs in the New Year.

Unemployment has risen to 2.5 million, with local governments warning of 140,000 job losses in the next year. Up to 100,000 public sector workers were due to be given redundancy notices by Christmas 2010. With up to half a million public sector jobs due to go in the next four years – plus 500,000 in the private sector – we need to be asking how those people facing redundancy will find new employment.

Inflation – critical to economic recovery – is far from under control, with petrol, food and textile prices soaring and VAT increasing to 20% in early 2011.

Many people can't buy a house because of the increasing difficulty in securing a mortgage – and many can't sell because they are in negative equity or can't borrow enough to move on. New car sales are plunging, savings accounts are virtually worthless because of low interest rates and many people are living hand to mouth because of pay freezes and the fear of losing their job.

The government and banks want us all to spend more to get us out of this financial hole – but they don't seem to realise that many people can't dig deeper into their pockets because there's nothing there.

It is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to encourage people in the middle of this giant financial squeeze to embrace great change, however good it may be.

They will be more interested in self-survival and where their next meal, mortgage or rent payment comes from than radical reform of the NHS, social care or their local council.

The difficulty for the Government is that if it doesn't get people on its side, its grand plans will fail – and spectacularly so.

How will David Cameron and his ministers encourage us to back their bold vision for change in such enormously difficult circumstances?



Again, having told us that, in these tough times, we are 'all in this together', they could not have got off to a worse start. Lord Young, the Prime Minister's enterprise adviser, stepped down after claiming Britons had 'never had it so good' after the 'so-called recession'. Tory Peer Howard Flight was forced to make a humiliating apology after claiming that the welfare cuts would encourage the poor to breed and put the middle classes off having children.

Later, potentially damaging diplomatic documents revealed that Bank of England Governor Mervyn King had private doubts about whether Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne had the experience to deal with Britain's financial deficit. In the run-up to the General Election in April 2010, Mr King apparently had concerns about their lack of experience and their tendency to think about issues in terms of their electoral impact, according to papers leaked by WikiLeaks.

The government's finance settlement with local governments, described as the toughest in living memory, has left 36 local authorities – including many in London and the North of England's poorest areas – facing spending reductions of 8.9% in the next year.

The majority of the hardest hit councils are Labour-controlled, with many Conservative-run local authorities in wealthier areas escaping with much smaller cutbacks. Inevitable cries of 'looking after their own' and 'one rule for the Tories, one for everyone else' have followed.

Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's claim that councils will be able to maintain existing levels of adult social care without raising thresholds has been dismissed as 'unrealistic'. A report by MPs sitting on the Health Select Committee argues that many councils will be forced to look at restricting eligibility for care services because they will be under great financial pressure.

Baroness Margaret Eaton, Chairman of the Local Government Association, said: 'We have been clear that the levels of spending reduction that councils are going to have to make goes way beyond anything that conventional efficiency drives, such as shared services, can achieve. We have to face the fact that this level of grant reduction will inevitably lead to cuts in services.'

'The Government has recognised the impact the cuts will have on those areas of the country that rely most heavily on the public sector and has provided a limited amount of new money (£85 million) to help those areas cope. However, it still remains the case that the cuts are frontloaded rather than spread evenly across the four years. Councils now face incredibly tough choices about the services they continue to provide and those they will have to cut.'

Amid the rancour and concerns over the Government's approach to spending cutbacks, Ministers have unveiled a

challenging programme of reform for many key areas of our daily lives – from social care to the NHS and shifting state power to the people.

The timetable for change is daunting to say the least. For instance:

- Government publishes Vision for Adult Care and outcomes consultation documents (November 2010)
- Government publishes Public Health White Paper (December 15, 2010)
- Law Commission publishes its review of adult social care legislation (Spring 2011)
- Commission on the Funding of Care and Support publishes its report (Summer 2011)
- Government publishes Care and Support White Paper (end 2011)
- Government publishes Social Care Reform Bill (Spring 2012)

The Public Health White Paper outlines plans for the biggest re-organisation of the NHS in England since it was established in 1948. Proposals include abolishing primary care trusts and giving responsibility for their £80 billion budgets to the country's 35,000 GPs.

Support for the restructuring the NHS is far from convincing. Four in ten doctors are believed to be against the plans with 'deep concerns' over the timetable for change expressed by the British Medical Association, the Royal College of GPs and health unions.

The PCTs, as commissioning bodies, have their critics. They are seen as top-heavy, bureaucratic 'buffers' between the doctors and hospitals that are bogged down by administration and less than efficient in organising hospital treatment.

The GPs are better placed to bring about improvements and innovation. But commissioning is a bureaucratic process, driven by financial targets. Are GPs really equipped to take on this role without it compromising their roles as doctors?

On top of all this, Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has unveiled a 'landmark Bill' heralding a 'ground-breaking shift in power to councils and communities in England to overturn decades of central government control.

Mr Pickles says the Localism Bill will put an end to the 'hoarding of power' within central government and top-down control of communities, allowing local people the freedom to run their lives and neighbourhoods in their own way.

The Bill contains a controversial package of reforms designed to devolve greater power and freedoms to councils and neighbourhoods, establish powerful new rights for communities, revolutionise the planning system, and give communities control over housing decisions.

The Government keep proclaiming that its reforms are for the good of us all. But, with independent financial experts warning that the spending cutbacks will hurt the most needy hardest of all, why should we accept these assertions?

How much more can we take? The massive programme of reform is in danger of grinding us down, rather than inspiring us to hope for a better future.

It's time to fasten our safety belts – and prepare for the bumpiest ride of our lives.



Paul's view on social care

Snow chaos: facing up to the harsh realities

WHY is it in 21st Century Britain that we seem totally incapable of dealing with snow?

Just a few inches of the white stuff brings chaos to our roads, schools, airports and shops. Hundreds of thousands of people fail to turn up for work, costing our economy billions of pounds. People panic buy – clearing supermarkets of milk, bread, vegetables, tinned and frozen foods.

The blizzards and cold snaps of the past few weeks again brought us to our knees. Many businesses, large and small, reported that up to a third of their employees didn't get to work for at least three days. Thousands of primary and secondary schools were shut, even though most pupils and teachers could get to them. Buildings and streets had to be sealed off – because of the threat of avalanches from high pitched roofs.

Even Scotland, usually so efficient at keeping roads clear, was caught cold by the December blizzards. Traffic was brought to a standstill on the M8 near Glasgow for two days with lorries jack-knifing in icy conditions. Motorists were trapped in cars for up to 12 hours in a drama that led to the resignation of Scotland's Transport Minister.

Of course it all ended with the cry 'never again' – but we know that this will happen again and again.

In the hundreds of television, radio and newspaper interviews about the blizzards, politicians, business leaders and others called for:

- More investment in gritters, snow ploughs and other equipment to keep Britain moving in Arctic conditions
- Lorries, coaches and most cars to be fitted with snow tyres or chains during the winter
- Greater community support in clearing roads, pavements, retail and other car parks
- More people to make the effort to get to work in bad weather

Those calls have been repeated many times in the past 25 years. So why are they followed by inaction?

First of all no-one will want to pick up the huge bill for more gritters and snow ploughs, particularly in these hard times. The cost of having these vehicles on standby for all but a few weeks of the year would cause uproar among many tax payers.

Very few of us would be prepared to pay for expensive snow tyres or chains, particularly HGV and coach operators already struggling to make ends meet.

Many people did help to clear roads and pavements to enable children to get to school and people to walk safely to work or shops.

But health and safety and legal experts (what would we do without them?) have put the dampener on this community spirit by warning that people clearing snow from pavements and walkways risk being sued if someone slips or falls.



Forecasters have warned that Britain could face harsher winters over the next decade. Are we prepared to do what it takes to prepare for them?

Of those who failed to get to work, many could not do so without putting themselves in jeopardy. However, some who could have got to their office, factory etc were not prepared to 'go the extra mile'.

There are many reasons why. A lack of loyalty, perhaps – on both sides. Many firms have admitted having no contingency plan to ensure key workers can get to work in any conditions.

In the 1970s, when I lived in Cornwall, I walked to work – three miles away from my home – when I had to. Because I valued my job, I was respected by my employers and I respected them.

They had in place an emergency plan to continue operating in all situations, including heavy snowfall, and it never let them down.

For many, loyalty became just another word from the 1980s onwards with the dawn of the computer age. The relationship between employer and employee suffered – and we suffer the consequences today.

I have always believed that a business is only as good as its employees. If more employers understood and accepted this, perhaps they wouldn't be complaining about having so many staff absent in bad weather.

More companies need to do more to ensure key employees can always get to work – and equip and encourage people to work from home when they can't get to the office, shop or factory.

We also have to overcome the 'can't do' attitude that blights so much of British society and adopt a 'can do' approach.

But amid all the doom and gloom of the blizzards, let us not forget the heroics of one band of workers who beat the blizzards to get to work.

Home care workers, many earning little more than the minimum wage, walked miles in appalling weather to reach their clients.

They showed the kind of devotion and loyalty all of us should strive for – and proved that these qualities are not based on how much they earn.

Devotion and loyalty are earned through valuing employees and what they do. The home care workers deserve our highest praise. We must also find ways of giving them greater financial reward.

Axing of ILF may be a cut too far

ONE more piece of the care jigsaw has fallen into place with the Coalition Government announcing that the Independent Living Fund is to be phased out by 2015.

It's a bizarre decision to say the least, particularly as David Cameron and his ministers have pledged to put person-centred care at the heart of their health and social care policies.

The fund provides more than £300 million a year to enable 21,000 people in the UK with severe disabilities to live at home and stay out of residential care.

There is no clear indication how the funding will be replaced – or whether it will be protected at existing levels after 2015.

Maria Miller, minister for disabled people, says the Government will look at integrating existing users into a 'social care system based on personalised budgets'.

It is likely that responsibility for any payments after 2015 will be transferred from the Department of Work and Pensions to local authorities. And therein lies the problem.

With council budgets facing unprecedented cuts, it is difficult to see how they will be able to maintain existing payments – currently averaging £300 a week – through Personal Budgets.

Labour Peer Lord Morris, the former minister for the disabled, has disputed Maria Miller's claim that continuation of the ILF is 'financially unsustainable'. He told the BBC: 'This will not save money. If you make it harder for disabled people to live at home, it will cost more because more of them will have to be in hospitals and other places of full-time care. It will mean far more of them having to be in institutional care at far greater cost to the taxpayer.'

Richard Hawkes, chief executive of disability charity Scope, said the decision to phase out the fund was 'bemusing'. He added: 'It's hard to see how phasing out this fund will do anything but narrow down options and push people towards greater dependence on the state.'

He is right. This crass decision on the ILF will alienate the disabled and fuel strong suspicions that Government change is more about saving money than benefiting those most in need.

CFYB how we can help you

Dementia update . . .

'Shockingly low' diagnosis figures revealed

THE huge task in diagnosing and providing care for people with dementia is demonstrated in new statistics released by the NHS and Royal College of Psychiatrists.

A report published early in 2010 by the Alzheimer's Research Trust revealed that there are 820,000 people living with dementia in the UK.

However, fewer than one in three of that number has had a diagnosis, according to the Alzheimer's Society.

Figures released by the NHS Quality and Outcomes Framework show that 249,463 people in England have been formally diagnosed with dementia while about 600,000 people in the country are believed to have the condition.

Andrew Chidgey, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Alzheimer's Society, says: 'The shockingly low diagnosis rates in England highlight that people are not visiting their GPs and even if they do, diagnoses are not being made.'

'It is clear that there is a shortfall and we must increase understanding of dementia amongst the public and GPs to ensure a swift and timely diagnosis.'

Meanwhile, a report published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists says 95% of hospitals in England and Wales don't have mandatory training in dementia for all staff.

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive of Alzheimer's Society, says: 'When a quarter of hospital beds are occupied by people with dementia it is unacceptable that so many hospitals are failing to train their staff.'

'Assessing someone's nutritional status is also vital if we are to stop people getting worse in hospital rather than better. We know hospital staff want to do a good job but without training and support they are being prevented from providing good quality dementia care.'

He adds: 'With the right commitment we can reduce avoidable hospital visits, stop people deteriorating whilst there and allow them to return home rather than moving into care. In just 15 years a million people will be living with dementia. We need all hospitals to act now.'

The King's Fund says that £300million could be saved by doing better things for people with dementia in hospitals.

It is believed that as many as 80% of hospitals do not have a system in place to ensure ward staff are aware that a person has dementia.

How a business opportunity can emerge from adversity

HAS your business suffered because you have struggled to provide services in extremely difficult conditions or have you been hit by staff being unable to get to work?

The appalling weather has put many social care companies – and local authorities – under great pressure in the past few weeks.

Council, independent and charity providers have battled through the snow and ice to reach elderly and disabled clients.

There has been deserved praise for the many care workers – working in home care or in care homes – who have braved the conditions to do their job.

Many of you will have read or heard about the people who have walked or sledged their way to work in some of the most remote areas of Britain.

The United Kingdom Home Care Association has told of care workers who have 'gone the extra mile' to ensure the vulnerable have not been at risk.

There have been pictures galore of dedicated employees trudging through the snow on all forms of transport – and messages of thanks from grateful service users.

The publicity has provided a great boost for care workers nationwide – and kept their role in the public spotlight at an important time.

Unwittingly, those featuring in the myriad of news, radio, internet and television reports have marketed themselves and their employers quite brilliantly.

At a time when so many things are uncertain in our lives – from jobs and homes to fuel and food prices – people need safe bets to make them feel secure.

Seeing care workers getting to clients in all weathers lifted people's spirits and reminded so many of what an important role they have.

The following quotes from local newspapers sum up general feelings: '*They are an inspiration to us all – doing a job that is so vital*'... '*They deserve a medal for what they do*'... '*It's great to know that we can rely on care workers in all circumstances*'.

High praise indeed and the value of it should not be underestimated.

Imagine the power of those quotes being used in advertising campaigns by care providers – and the impact of pictures showing care workers battling Arctic conditions.

Think how influential they could be in new marketing campaigns to promote new services and the opening of new offices etc.



Jennifer Roberts: Seeing care workers getting to clients in all weathers lifted people's spirits

When I ask care workers, co-ordinators and managers who does the marketing for them in their business, they seldom say 'we do'.

Many believe that marketing is performed by a branch, general or marketing manager and not by general employees.

Without knowing it, care workers are marketing their company in every hour of every visit they make – by doing a good job.

The following example indicates how we can win business by just being ourselves – and being good neighbours.

When the blizzards arrived in Scotland, a family staying in a cottage behind us was stranded without food and support.

They all had medical problems and worries about getting home and 'surviving' the bad weather.

When they turned to me and my husband for help, we gave them food, helped them with fires and offered friendship and support.

When they arrived back at their home in England, they called to thank us – and sought our help in setting up a new business.

We had not looked or asked for anything in return, but secured this work by showing kindness, compassion – and giving up a little of our time to help people in need.

Jennifer Roberts

Caring for your Business can help you make the most of your marketing – through good promotion and business skills. To find out about our services, contact us today on 01877 386332