

ADASS SPRING SEMINAR APRIL 2023
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It's so good to join you in person, at your annual spring event.

I want to start by thanking you for your hard work, not just over the last year but the last decade.

When I think about everything you've faced – the repeated Government cuts to council budgets, the horrors of Covid19, the endless restructuring of the NHS and u-turns on social care reform - I sometimes wonder how you keep going.

But then I look at my own city, and Leicester's Director of Adult Social Services Martin Samuels and his team, and I see that it's your passion for improving the lives of older and disabled people, your commitment to making our communities better places to live, and your leadership on social care that has helped keep the show on the road. And I for one am very grateful for that.

Just a fortnight ago you faced yet another broken promise from the Government on social care.

Their White Paper pledged £500m to improve the care workforce – but we now know this has been cut in half.

£300m was pledged to better join up housing and care – but this has been slashed by two thirds.

And £600m of other White Paper commitments are now indefinitely postponed – supposedly earmarked for tackling delayed discharges at some future unspecified date, when that money is desperately needed now.

But I'm afraid these broken promises come as no surprise.

For the last decade the Conservative's flagship policy has been their cap on care costs.

First promised in 2013, postponed indefinitely in 2017, re-promised by Boris Johnson on the steps of Downing St in 2019, saying he would "fix the crisis in social care once and for all", but finally buried by the Chancellor in 2021 - ironically the very same Jeremy Hunt who said his biggest regret when he was Health Secretary was failing to deliver long term reforms to social care.

And the results of this decade of failure are there for all to see.

A record 165,000 staff vacancies, dwarfing even those in the NHS.

One and a half million older people who need help with the basics of daily living going without, and half a million older and disabled people waiting for a care assessment or review.

And millions of unpaid family carers forced to give up work or reduce their hours because they can't get the help they need to look after their loved ones.

You understand a central duty of the Opposition is to hold the Government to account, and that is what we will continue to do.

But you also – rightly – want to know what Labour will do if we win the next General Election.

So today I want to set out five commitments on social care that you can expect from an incoming Labour Government.

The first commitment is our vision for social care.

At this event two years ago, I argued social care is about far more than helping people get up, washed, dressed and fed, vital though this is.

At its best, social care is about enabling all older and disabled people to live the life they choose and do the same everyday things as everyone else.

As the movement Social Care Future so eloquently puts it: “We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing what matters to us most”.

That’s the vision for social care that Labour backs, alongside ADASS and a growing number of other organisations, and it will be the driving force of our work in Government.

Our second commitment is to end the last-minute sticking plaster approach that has been the hallmark of this Government and instead deliver a long-term, 10 year plan.

There can be no better example of the failure of short termism than the Government’s recent attempt to tackle delayed discharges.

A programme that has resulted in a mere 472 fewer people stuck in hospital at the end of March compared to when the first tranche of funding was announced in November.

A reduction of only 3.5% at a cost of £750m.

Why? Because the money came too late to enable proper planning; it focused on buying care home beds not home care or NHS services in the community; and because it failed to sort out the root causes of the problem namely staff shortages and preventing people from ending up in hospital in the first place.

In contrast Labour's 10 year plan of investment and reform will provide stability and certainty, support long term planning and address the fundamental challenges in the system.

Perhaps the biggest of these is the need to shift the focus of care and support towards prevention and early intervention.

People will always need residential and nursing care but most of us want to stay living in our own homes for as long as possible.

So Labour will enshrine a new principle of 'home first' to ensure people get the joined up health and care services they need early on, with the right home adaptations, more housing options, greater use of technology to support independent living, and help from voluntary and community groups to tackle issues like loneliness and isolation.

This leads me to our third commitment which is a relentless focus on reform.

Labour's leader Keir Starmer and Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves are absolutely right to make economic growth a central mission of the next Labour government. Had the economy grown at the same rate under the Conservatives as it did under the last Labour government, we would have £40 billion a year extra to invest in public services like social care and the NHS.

But as our Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting said last week, after 13 years of at best anaemic growth an incoming Labour government is going to find the cupboard is pretty bare.

So whilst investment is essential, the state of the public finances means that reform will have to do more of the heavy lifting. Your excellent report "Time to act: a roadmap for reforming care and support in England" sets out some inspiring examples of the changes that are already taking place.

Like using technology to better support and co-ordinate the care workforce, joining up local NHS and social care teams to speed up hospital discharge, and introducing leave and flexible working so unpaid carers can better balance work and family life.

That's what Labour means by reform – not yet another structural reorganisation, but reforming services and support around the needs of individuals and their families. Something we can only do by working in partnership with users and families.

Labour will remove the barriers to making this happen, and ensure users have more choice, say and control at every level of the system.

Of course none of this will be possible without tackling the record staff shortages in social care.

So our fourth commitment – and our immediate priority – will be a new deal for care workers to recruit and retain staff, ensure fair pay, terms and conditions and improve training and career progression.

I'm delighted that our deputy leader Angela Rayner has said adult social care will be the first sector to benefit from Labour's new Fair Pay Agreements.

These will bring together worker and employer representatives to agree minimum pay, terms and conditions, binding throughout the sector, and acting as a 'floor' to prevent exploitative employers from undercutting the many good employers who already know that what is good for their workforce is good for quality and the bottom line.

Last but by no means least, is our commitment to social care being locally led and locally accountable.

As you know Wes Streeting has asked the Fabians to produce a roadmap for delivering Labour's National Care Service, and this will be published shortly.

For me, this has always been about ensuring social care is treated as equally important to the NHS, with clearer national standards for services, rights for users and families, and pay, terms and conditions for staff.

It is never been about setting up a new national organisation, let alone having social care run by the NHS.

Because the man (and it usually is a man) in Whitehall will never know what's best for Watford, Walsall or Worthing. The kind of in depth knowledge about local needs and local assets that is essential to delivering our vision of social care, can only come from the bottom up.

And that is what Labour will deliver.

I know there are many more details about our plans you will want to know, and many more questions you will have about the future, some of which I may be able to answer today.

But my personal commitment to you is that I will always work with you to achieve our common goals. Because my experience from 25 years of working in health and social care has taught me this is the only way to get change right, and the only way to make change last.

Which is what I know we all want to do.

Thank you for listening, and I look forward to your questions.