

According to Age UK, 900,000 older people between the ages of 65 and 89 have social care needs that are not met. Residential care, nursing care, home care, day care and equipment budgets have been cut. Meals on Wheels services have been scrapped in some areas, or frozen ready-meals have replaced freshly cooked hot food.

These cuts impact on the NHS: one million hospital bed days are lost every year when patients cannot be discharged because there is no after-care available for them. Operations are cancelled for the same reason.

How we look after our older people and others who are vulnerable in society because of ill health is a mark of how civilised we are as a society. It is scandalous that the current care system is failing those who most need our help. We believe putting back the investment that was taken away by the current government is more than expedient: it is our duty.

The £1.2 billion UKIP will invest every year by the end of the next parliament will fund social care directly and ease the path through a change we want to make to the way the current system is financed.

INTEGRATING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

While local authorities manage social care, the NHS manages health. This makes for a complex, inefficient and fragmented approach. While attempts to integrate the two, while keeping funding and responsibilities separate, have been commendable, the common sense, long-term solution is simply to fully integrate health and social care.

UKIP will bring health and social care together, under the control of the NHS.

FUNDING OLDER PEOPLE'S CARE

In 2010, the Commission on Funding of Care and Support, chaired by Andrew Dilnot, was tasked by Government with reviewing the funding system for care and support in England. It concluded that an individual's contribution to social care costs should be capped at £35,000.

We agree in principle: easing the burden on the growing numbers of families who face ever-increasing elderly care costs is clearly desirable, if currently unaffordable.

We propose a possible future solution: the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund from any tax revenue received from shale oil and gas exploration, with investment returns ring-fenced to fully implement the Commission's recommendations.

The viability of this proposal clearly depends on several unknowns, not least getting the go-ahead for shale exploration and unpredictable market forces, but we feel it is important to state this policy as an intention. Should fracking in the UK prove to be possible and profitable, we want to see the nation's income from it spent on looking after older people.

Establishing a Sovereign Wealth Fund from the tax profits of fracking, and ring-fencing the income it generates for a social care fund, will potentially release older people from the distress of having to sell their homes to pay for care and give them and their families peace of mind.

IMPROVING STANDARDS IN CARE

UKIP believes the elderly and vulnerable must be treated with compassion and dignity. We will:

- Introduce a legally-binding 'Dignity Code' to improve standards of professional care
- Pledge to protect services such as day care, home care and Meals on Wheels
- Abolish the practice of arranging home care visits in fifteen-minute windows

- Abolish the annual assessment process for continuing healthcare funding in respect of those suffering from degenerative, terminal illnesses
- Keep free bus passes, winter fuel allowances, free TV licenses for the over 75s and free prescriptions and eye tests for the over-60s, without means testing.

We will also fund a co-ordinating service for older people in every county, combining resources from across the NHS, social services, community agents and the voluntary sector. No vulnerable person should feel isolated or alone and this service will be proactive in identifying and assisting those suffering from loneliness.

A BETTER DEAL FOR HOME CARE WORKERS

Good home care starts with good home care workers, who provide a lifeline to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Theirs is a difficult enough job to do at the best of times and long hours and low pay make an already challenging role even more onerous.

We cannot expect workers to give the best care if they themselves are not being cared for.

This is a serious issue UKIP will tackle head-on. We will not allow the NHS or third parties under contract to employ home care workers on zero hour contracts of any kind.

Neither will we allow them to end up being paid less than the minimum wage because they are expected to travel between appointments in 'their own time.' We will insist they are paid for the entire time they are on duty.

We believe that as Britain's largest employer, the NHS should set an example.