



Ageing – at last coming to the top of the political Agenda?

Increasing longevity has been probably the greatest success story for our society of the last fifty years. But our approach to dealing with the financial and societal pressures produced by an ageing population perhaps has not been as clear sighted as we might have hoped. In fact for many years the topic seemed not to exercise politicians greatly.

Now however you sense things are changing, and fast. No longer is it safe for any politician to let the problems of our ageing society languish in the long grass somewhere. The problems are just too big and too imminent.

Three recent publications added to this growing national debate. The Office for National Statistics confirmed estimates produced by Carers UK of the number of carers in England and Wales. In the ten years to 2011 the number of carers in the UK rose by 25% to the astonishing number of 5.8 million. This must mean huge numbers of families are already feeling the pressure of an ageing family member. So this is a problem probably of now not just the future.

In London we had the UK government announcing a cap on personal care costs in England and Wales. The principle of a cap seems to have been widely welcomed. But with the cap to be set at £75,000 and coming into force only by 2017 – most commentators felt this was not going to be effective for many families.

Then in Scotland we had the quiet publication of the Parliament's Finance Committee "2nd Report, 2013 (Session 4)" This was on the impact of future demographic change and the planning of the Scottish Government and public bodies to mitigate any impacts of this change. A main issue being considered is financial sustainability. Not normal bedside reading for me and as you might expect pretty hard going.

This document is written in entirely matter of fact language avoiding all forms of rhetoric. The views expressed, however, should cause any dispassionate observer to be worried for our future. In fact if this were a school report – the result in each subject (roughly - housing, health and social care, and pensions) would be "FAIL". More worryingly the committee's views translated into a teachers report commentary might read "Needs to do much better but no signs of that happening yet".

Perhaps I am being unfair – but then I am not writing from a political standpoint. The report suggests that massive funding gaps are identified but not met; new approaches and new strategies are instructed but never happen. Change seems to be impossible to deliver - at least that is what I read into most of the evidence in this

report. Yet it must be delivered if our older people are to live in comfort and dignity future decades. At least the scary facts are getting out in the open now and this debate is at last in the spotlight. It remains to be seen what our political leaders are able to do about the massive issues facing us.

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