The Church of England's opposition to a change in the law on assisted suicide remains "absolutely clear", the Bishop of Carlisle says today, as peers prepare to debate Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords.
Writing in a blog for The Huffington Post, James Newcome, the Church of England's lead bishop on health care issues, said there is a “fundamental responsibility” to care for and protect the most vulnerable, including elderly people at risk of abuse. He added that many disability charities are "deeply concerned" about the potential implications of the Bill.

In his blog Bishop James commented:

"A huge number of amendments have been proposed for the Bill. Some have already been debated, and it has been agreed that assisted suicide should be a matter for the courts rather than the medical profession to determine. This helps - but from the Church of England's point of view does not make assisted suicide itself more acceptable.

"Our position remains absolutely clear. As a matter of principle we are opposed to assisted suicide, and in favour of retaining the current law together with the guidelines issued by a former DPP."

The Rev Dr Brendan McCarthy, the Church of England's national adviser on medical ethics, said serious misgivings had been raised in the House of Lords about the impact of the proposed legislation on the vulnerable.

"The progress of the Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords has revealed deep divisions and no consensus amongst peers over the principle of legalising assisted suicide," he said.

"Serious doubts over the impact of a change in the law on the vulnerable, voiced in the House of Lords, have been reinforced by a vote in the Welsh Assembly before Christmas against the principle of the Falconer Bill.

"To argue that legalising assisted suicide is a "done deal" and it is now simply a matter of providing Government time for such legislation could not be further from the truth."

Also writing for The Huffington Post, author and blogger Michael Wenham, who has Motor Neurone Disease, argues against the Bill.

"Assisted dying is not a private matter, because it affects the doctors, nurses and pharmacists who are expected to perform semantic contortions and pretend that killing is a synonym for curing, and to desert their vocations as healers. That changes the doctor/patient relationship," he said.

Lord Falconer's Private Member's Bill on Assisted Dying will be debated by a committee of the House of Lords today.

Notes to editors:

James Newcome: Why the Church of England, as a matter of principle, is opposed to assisted suicide http://huff.to/1AjEZzh

Michael Wenham - Our right to choose when we die is widely curtailed for very good reasons  http://huff.to/1AjF4my

To hear an interview with Dr McCarthy: https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england/podcast-15th-jan-2015