

The Bishop of Carlisle's speech in the House of Lords on Adult Social Care

Thursday 30th March 2023

My Lords, I have had the great privilege of sitting on both the Adult Social Care Committee and the Archbishops' Commission on Reimagining Care. I also pay tribute to the outstanding work of their respective chairs, the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, and Dr Anna Dixon.

When the two reports were published, it came as no great surprise that there were huge areas of overlap. In fact, a careful analysis has revealed at least 17 different points of congruence, ranging from providing everyone with the opportunity to lead a full life, through to appointing a commissioner for care and support and properly implementing the Care Act 2014—all of which have already been mentioned.

As we have heard, the role of unpaid carers, including children, was highlighted in particular by both reports. Because that became such a central feature of the Select Committee's investigation and report, it is being fully addressed by many noble Lords speaking in this important debate. Rather than repeating their valuable contributions, I, like the noble Lord, Lord Polak, and the noble Baroness, Lady Shephard, want to focus on another area of concern raised by both reports, namely the current difficulty experienced by those who try to navigate the statutory care and support system. Phrases such as a "baffling range of organisations" and a "fog of confusion" abound. As we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, whose long-term contribution to this debate we so value, dealing with the complex and circular bureaucracy is time-consuming and frustrating.

As we heard from the Most Reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Commission's central recommendation is the development of a national care covenant. This covenant would emerge from a major programme of public engagement with cross-party support and significant co-production, as with the NHS constitution. It would reflect four main themes. The first is the empowering of communities, which have a vital role to play in all this, not only in addressing practical needs but in combating loneliness and social isolation and fostering physical and mental well-being. Both the committee and the Commission witnessed many good examples of that happening in practice, but we all know that supportive and inclusive communities do not just happen by accident; they need investment and nurturing. They also need local authorities to work in partnership with them, to provide a network of community-based support for everyone.

The second theme is a new deal for carers that includes recognition of their value. We applaud that recognition in the White Paper, *People at the Heart of Care*. As we have heard, as well as respite and, where necessary, financial support for unpaid carers, care for carers is essential to the future of social care.

The third theme is a universal entitlement to care and support, including the pooling of risk, to ensure that everyone is able to lead what the committee calls a "gloriously ordinary" life.

The fourth theme is the acceptance of our mutual responsibility as citizens. A covenant of this kind would make it abundantly clear that social care is not just the state's responsibility. As citizens, our rights come with corresponding responsibilities; the principle of interdependence, mentioned by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, emphasises the simple fact that, in this arena, all of us have a vital part to play.

The Commission began its report with a call to rethink attitudes and values, several of which have already been mentioned. It concluded that, ultimately, the whole care system needs to be redesigned rather than merely adjusted. However, a national care covenant that would rebalance roles and responsibilities was its key proposal. I very much hope that His Majesty's Government might consider this alongside their other plans for implementing the recommendations in *People at the Heart of Care*, which we all look forward to seeing in the very near future.