

Dilnot Report on Adult Social Care Published

With our growing elderly population the Government commissioned Sir Andrew Dilnot to make recommendations for the future of the social care system in England. The report was published this week. This also comes at a time when local authorities are slashing their own social care budgets, and the private care sector has had to accept lower fees, although the true cost of care is steadily rising. With a population that is growing at a rapid pace, social care funding needs a radical overhaul so that it will be fit for purpose in the future. Many people find themselves struggling or unable to pay for their own care or that of a relative, more support is needed to ensure the welfare of the aging population and that nobody is left vulnerable and alone in old age.

It has been established through the report that funding has not kept pace with demand. The current funding system for social care is widely perceived as unfair. Some individuals lose most of their assets when care packages are being considered. The current system is under-resourced, and many people are not receiving the care and support they need. The system is highly variable across the country and within local authorities. It is currently based on the needs assessments of individuals undertaken by Multi disciplinary services, some of which do not work well together causing shortfalls in care provision for the most vulnerable people in society.

The reforms outlined in the proposal would reduce the costs individuals face in old age, by calling for a national eligibility threshold with portable assessments.

However this would involve the current Government agreeing to develop a new more objective assessment scale, which is more coherent and aligned to care and support, with integration between health and social care, which in turn should produce a better alignment of the assessment processes between social care, disability benefits and health.

The outline proposal of this report put to Government by Sir Andrew Dilnot in his report is that each individual would fund their own care costs up to a maximum of £35,000 which would be capped, once this amount had been reached, the Government should take over the responsibility of funding future care, and that the threshold at which individuals start paying for their own care should be raised from the current £23,000 to £100,000.

Sir Andrew Dilnot since publication of the report has conducted various interviews regarding his report, speaking on Radio 4, Sir Andrew Dilnot said 'I think the system is broken and at the moment people are frightened about something they ought to celebrate. We should be delighted that we are expected to live longer and longer. The risk of high care costs is the one big risk that all of us face where we have no way of preventing the extreme risk. If we have a healthcare problem, the NHS looks after us. If our house burns down or you have a car crash, then we will have taken out private insurance. In England the state does not cover you and the private sector will not. So at the moment people face an uncertain risk and it makes them very, very frightened and they feel powerless. What we are proposing is that we set a cap of £35,000. If your costs are more than £35,000, the state will kick in.'

The proposals set out above would cost around £1.7 billion a year to implement, rising again by about a half as England's population ages. The treasury has released figures suggesting the true cost could be as much as £5 billion a year. This has already caused some problems for the Government,

by paying for this could mean raising taxes or making cuts in other areas. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, admitted that the report had been kicked into the “medium high grass” while the party tried to build a cross party consensus on the next steps.

Leading charities which include Age UK and the Alzheimer’s Society and other experts signed a letter last week to the Daily Telegraph warning that any dilution of the recommendations could be disastrous. They said “It would be catastrophic if the forthcoming report from the Dilnot Commission resulted in no action at all. We are reaching crisis point. We know there is no perfect solution. Care will always cost money and someone had to pay for it.” They have also called on the Government to accept the proposals, fearing that political wrangling would mean that the proposals may be watered down or even ignored.

The recommendations laid out in the Dilnot report have already started to strain the relationships within Government. Although they have been quick to deny this and Andrew Lansley the Secretary of State for Health has emphasised that the issue of how to pay for social care must be cleared up before any action is taken. John Healey the Shadow Secretary of State for Health stated that this is “a once in a generation” chance to reform the care system and “end the fear of ageing”. He called on the Government to work with the other parties to make sure that real reform to care services can happen. “The Dilnot report is a good start, what matters now is what the Government does.

There will be a long political battle ahead to bring any reforms through Parliament, given the fact that the deficit the country is currently facing.

It is agreed by all that reform of social care and funding is needed, and it will be in the long term in every aging persons interests, that there is a commitment from all to make the changes necessary and not allow politics to get in the way and improving the social care system.

This in turn will assist providers of social care in both the public and private sectors to maintain the essential standards of quality and safety that are part of the health and social care act. With a sustainable resource and funds needed for a good quality of life wherever we may be in our twilight years, we will have to see what happens over the coming months.

For More details on the full version of the Dilnot Report visit:

<http://www.dilnotcommission.dh.gov.uk/2011/07/04/commission-report/>