

RCN Policy Unit

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Social Care reform in England –

Where are we now?

April 2010



Introduction

On the 30th March 2010 the White Paper *Building the National Care Service (NCS)* was unveiled. Described as “an historic reform”¹ and “the biggest change to the welfare state since 1948”², the White Paper is the current Government’s blueprint for fundamental reform of the social care system in England.

It follows the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together* and builds on the consultation responses that a wide range of stakeholders - including the RCN - and the general public were involved in.

In recent years, the issue of social care reform has gathered momentum and a clear **consensus has emerged that reform is both necessary and urgent**, with the case for reform clearly acknowledged in the White Paper. The White Paper’s vision is to establish a comprehensive NCS that is ‘for all adults in England with an eligible care need, free when they need it, whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever condition leads to their need for care’.

Following consultation with its members, the RCN has welcomed the White Paper. Nursing has a critical relationship with social care, in delivering frontline care and providing healthcare for unmet social care needs, and social care reform is crucial for high quality care provision. However, in light of the current changing political and challenging economic context the future of the White Paper is uncertain, and so too its vision.

To view the ***Building the National Care Service*** White Paper, please see http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_114923.pdf

Significant developments to date

The Green Paper: *Shaping the Future of Care together* (July 2009)

Shaping the future of care together, the Green Paper on social care reform aimed to uncover the views of the public and key stakeholders about how the existing social care and support system should be reformed. The Government called the overarching consultation process on social care reform the *Big Care Debate* (see here for more: <http://careandsupport.direct.gov.uk/>)

A broad consensus emerged throughout the course of the consultation around building a high quality, fair and comprehensive NCS. Many respondents asked that the Government reconsiders the general taxation funding option.

Personal Care at Home Bill (September 2009)

A commitment to the Personal Care at Home Bill - a right to free care at home, starting in October 2010, for service users with ‘critical’ care needs - came as a surprise for many people and stakeholders, who had not expected a piecemeal approach to reform.

¹ Foreword of *Building the National Care Service* White Paper

² Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Health, launching *Building the National Care Service*




Although the principle of free care was supported, many concerns were raised - including



NCS Principles

Firstly, the White Paper sets out key principles on which the NCS would be founded including **universality** (equal care entitlement for all adults with an eligible need), **free at the point of use** (based on need, not the ability to pay) and **working in partnership**. Working in partnership seeks to improve the delivery of integrated service provision,



for in their own homes. The White Paper does commit to helping people regain their independence, by making **reablement free for everyone who could benefit from it when they need home care**. It is not clear what reablement means here (i.e. what is and is not included). The RCN would seek to have an input into defining what reablement means, to ensure that the reformed system reflects best practice in preventative care.

6. **Fair funding, with collective, shared responsibility for paying for care and support.** Whilst the White Paper commits the Government to putting in place a comprehensive system, it **has not answered how individuals will contribute to the system**. This would be explored and decided by a Commission.

Accommodation costs in residential care (defined as costs not associated with the care individuals receive, but accommodation costs such as food and utilities) - **would continue to be paid for by individuals in residential care**. However, where accommodation costs threaten people's savings, there will be the option of a universal deferred payment system.

High Quality services

Finally, although absent from the NCS principles and pillars, ensuring high quality care is a key theme of the White Paper. Like RCN members, respondents of the Green Paper consultation identified quality as a chief concern for system reform. The aim in the White Paper, therefore, is for people to 'experience high quality services every time they come into contact with the NCS'.

The White Paper proposes to meet this ambition by better integrating services and ensuring that the NCS can maintain and attract sufficient numbers of staff with the right skills. It introduces a quality framework for care and support, to be designed by a panel of experts at a later date. The White Paper also outlines plans for a **voluntary licensing scheme for all social care workers**, in residential care, homecare or as personal assistants. The White Paper proposes that a regional pilot should be carried out by the Health Professions Council. The RCN has called for regulation of Health Care Support Workers on the basis of patient safety and public protection, and believes the Nursing and Midwifery Council is the appropriate body to regulate this role.

The NCS Timeline

The White Paper outlines a three-staged approach to system reform. The timeline is not fixed, perhaps reflecting the White Paper's political context and providing some flexibility.

The Personal Care at Home Bill is seen as the first of these transitional stages, to be introduced in 2011.

From 2014, the second stage - **free care after two years of residential care** - would be introduced. In this stage, many of the unanswered questions or detail would be fleshed out by expert panels and a Commission would decide how to fund the new system.

The final stage of reform would be **after 2015**, when a comprehensive system would be established for '*all adults in England with an eligible care need, free when they need it, wherever they are, wherever they live and whatever condition leads to their need for care*'.



Political party proposals (April 2010)

The three main political parties' manifestos include the following on social care reform:

Labour Party Manifesto:

- Commits to a **comprehensive system** as set out in *Building the National Care Service* White Paper.

Conservative Party Manifesto:

- Would create a system "based on choice and which rewards the hundreds of thousands of people who care for an elderly relative full-time."

- **Voluntary**