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Able!



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The newsletter for Liberal Democrat Disability Association members and supporters.

Welcome to the future!

Tim Farron - *"I'm really excited to have the opportunity to work and campaign alongside the LDDA in the coming months and years."*



It is one of my priorities to make sure the party is as diverse as it should be and listening to the voices of people with disabilities has to be a key part of that.

Thank you in advance for everything I know you will all do, the campaigning, the fundraising, the volunteering and the rest. You have a massively important part of the fightback.

Congratulations to our Chair, Phil Stevens, who won a second term at the AGM. Full details of the new executive can be found on our website.

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As your executive we will be working hard to ensure that the membership of the LDDA continues to grow, so that we are able to help and support more people, and ensure the needs of disabled people and their carers are listened to within both the party and government.

Phil Stevens, (Chair LDDA)

One example of LDDA activity is the work of our Phil Stevens with Lord Addington & others on challenging the governments proposed changes to the disabled student allowance.

We have been successful in getting the government to reopen the consultation on the proposals:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/disabled-students-in-higher-education-funding-proposals

- ❖ **Inside, on page 2, is a fascinating article by David Warren about caring. (David Warren is a Lib Dem campaigner, blogger and carer)**
- ❖ **Page 4 & 5 provide a summary of key points in the "Assisted Dying" debate.**
- ❖ **Pages 6 & 7 highlight some campaigning issues & things we achieved in Government.**
- ❖ **Page 8 is something for you to use or pass to someone else - a membership form! (LDDA needs to double its membership to gain additional status and power within the party - you can help!)**

Who Cares?

Our social care system desperately needs an overhaul. It is fragmented, poorly resourced and often the so called 'professionals' seem more concerned with form filling than people.



As an unpaid carer for someone who was living with me, but had to move into a full time residential home, I have learnt a lot about the reality of 'care' in our country.

The Liberal Democrats in government were able to play a key role in piloting some much needed reforms through Parliament.

As the Care Minister, Norman Lamb, was responsible for the 2014 Act which introduced new rights for carers and notably a cap on how much people should have to pay for their care. his cap was due to be introduced in April 2016, but the new Tory government recently announced they are delaying its introduction until 2020, using supposed objections from local authorities as their excuse.

Norman has launched a petition opposing this delay and I really hope the party gets behind him on this and we achieve thousands of signatures. **[link on page 3]**

This is just one of the areas where the Lib Dems have a real opportunity to both campaign and develop policy on social care.

The integration of care into the NHS; the scandal of low paid, poorly trained care staff; the myriad of private companies making huge profits from council contracts, but failing to provide an adequate service, are just three big ticket issues.

Then there is the scandal of NHS funded care which is being denied to thousands, because elderly and disabled people are not being assessed properly.

Liberals are at their best when they are fighting for the people who need help the most.

I hope in the coming years we can do just that.

David Warren
(David Warren is a Lib Dem
campaigner, blogger and carer)

Find out more about carers: <http://www.carersuk.org>

- ❖ Over 2 million people have given up work to care and many more have reduced their hours.
- ❖ The unpaid care provided to older, disabled and ill loved ones is worth £119 billion.

As Care Minister I secured a commitment to deliver reform of our unfair care funding system. The reforms would have made sure people didn't have to sell their house in their lifetime to pay for care, and that far more people would get some financial help towards their care. The Tories have now said the reforms will not be introduced next year as planned. Will you sign my petition to demand they honour their commitment?



<http://www.normanlamb.org.uk/care>

The item below clearly shows what the Country is missing because Norman and the Liberal Democrats are not in Government!

Families of people with learning disabilities say care is a 'national scandal'

The full discussion was first broadcast on Radio 4's You and Yours. Families got in touch (with the BBC) to give their opinions on the situation. Here is a selection of their views:

"Finding appropriate care and having this paid for by your local authority is an arduous battle that will challenge the most determined and committed parent, and this battle is on top of the ongoing difficulties of caring for my adult son with autism."

"This battle is now reaching its fourth year. It is only with free legal aid, which our son has qualified for, that we are nearing reaching our goal of care in the community."

"We have spent the past 20 years visiting my daughter in care homes all over the country. It takes over your life as a parent. It is so stressful for all the family. There seems to be no good quality specialised care. It is too upsetting to discuss. What I am hearing is very familiar. She is currently in a temporary care home where the local mental health team refuse to support her. We are waiting for a placement near us, but there is nothing specialised, so it's a case of Social Services finding a flat and then there will be the difficulty of sourcing staff to support her who can communicate with her via sign language."

"It is a national scandal. Taxpayers money is being wasted by the billions on inappropriate placements, treatment and assessment private hospitals, and clients lives are being wasted away for years in such places, even after The Winterbourne View scandal.

Jane Cummings, Chief Nursing Officer for England and Chair of the Transforming Care Delivery Board, said: "All the agencies involved in this work are clear that while a great deal of progress has been made we still have lots to do to transform and improve care for people with learning disabilities.

The Ultimate Debate



On the next two pages are comments and information from both sides of the debate.

First, the case **for**, provided by Greg Judge. Greg is one of our members and works as Co-ordinator of Disabled Activists for Dignity in Dying.

- Assisted dying is a choice only for terminally ill, mentally competent dying adults who have less than six months left to live.
- Having a disability is NOT an eligible criteria. Terminally ill people with a pre-existing disability would be eligible to choose an assisted death because they're terminally ill, not because they also happen to be disabled.
- Assisted dying would involve a mentally competent dying person self-administering life ending medication, they have to fulfil the last action, no one else can do this for them.
- The 'assistance' comes in the form of checking their eligibility, fully informing them of all end-of-life care options including palliative care, providing the life ending medication and working with the patient for the death they want in terms of location and who is with them.
- To have the choice of an assisted death, a terminally ill person's prognosis must be verified by two independent doctors and a high court judge, these steps are mandatory.
- Some disabled opponents say the law does not need to be changed, terminally ill people can kill themselves in the UK. They grossly overlook the facts of the situation:
 - Refusing food and water is not a quick process, it can take many weeks and will often lead to a long and protracted death, when they would rather have an immediate death.
 - Attempting suicide themselves can go awfully wrong, it has left some people in worse conditions but still alive.
 - Under the current law, anybody who ends the life of another can be convicted of murder and receive a life sentence – even if the act is a compassionate response to a dying persons' request for help to die (a 'mercy killing').
 - Dying people can only go to somewhere like Dignitas in Switzerland if they are well enough to travel and have £1000's needed to pay the clinic. The current law discriminates against the poor and those who want to die at home with their family around them.
- The current law is broken and needs fixing.
- Legalising assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent dying adults will not devalue disabled people. In fact, it firmly places disabled people into the non-dying category along with the vast majority of people in the country. It makes clear for the first time that being assisted to die is a choice for dying people to take control of their deaths. For the living, disabled or not, they do not have this right because life is precious and they will be supported to be equal, have independence and live life to its fullest.

- Assisted Dying!

The case **against** is taken from the website of the organisation “**NotDeadYet**” with one additional comment from me, Robert Adamson.

- We're concerned that people who are sick or disabled may feel pressured to make decisions about their lives based on concerns about being a burden, rather than an objective decision about whether they want to live or die.
- We'd like to see the law changed so there's a right to live a full and active life, rather than a right to ask a doctor for assisted suicide.
- The objective research on this is very limited. Most disability organisations and charities have said they don't want the law to change because they're concerned about the dangers it would bring.
- It looks like the general public is in favour of a change in the law but the general public also has said it wants to bring back hanging. This is a complicated debate, and it's important not to be swayed by sensationalist headlines or simplistic opinion surveys. In the meantime, a change in the law would put disabled people directly in the firing line – the risks are huge.
- People should certainly have more choice about how they live. If we lived in a society that fully supported disabled people's choice and control, then having an informed debate on assisted suicide would be more straightforward. But we don't. Instead, we're seeing swinging cuts to disability benefits and social care, and an increase in disability hate crime. Being disabled in the current climate is challenging enough, without putting assisted suicide on the table.
- We have one of the best health services in the world, and medical support around end of life care is improving all the time. If palliative care services are prioritised and fully funded, people would get the care and support they need at the end of their lives.
- In the meantime, the law we have has a stern face, but an understanding heart. It holds serious penalties in reserve to deter abuse and manipulation. It combines deterrence with compassion: it gives us the best of both worlds.
- Campaigners say this isn't about disabled people, it's about people who are terminally ill. Why are you worrying about it? Because it **is** about disabled people. Being terminally ill isn't an exact science, and we all know examples of people who have been labelled as terminally ill and since recovered. Disabled people are often considered, in our society, to have lives which are not worth living. It's not a big step for people to conclude 'Well, they don't have a great life so isn't it better for everyone if they have the right to kill themselves.'
- Campaigners have said there will be powerful safeguards in place; you don't need to worry but the law is an imperfect thing. Safeguards are also imperfect. Coercion is rarely obvious, and the current law protects us from malicious manipulation.
- My **personal** additional point is simple. I do not trust all future politicians! We are seeing now that laws can be changed, safeguards removed and policies hardened. I fear that a future cuts-driven government could easily tweak legislation to provide “assumed consent” or go further to categorise whole groups of people as having a low potential quality of life.

On the move ... or not!

Transport is a big issue for most disabled people so here are a collection of items to think about and then get action on in your area:

"I don't use public transport anymore, my previous experiences have been too stressful, from missing the bus, getting on the wrong bus, missing bus stops, getting off at unfamiliar places, and even having a driver tell me to "open your eyes" when I asked for information..."

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association would like to raise the issue of the lack of audio-visual (AV) announcements on board buses and the problem this causes to those with sight loss when travelling. Buses are essential in enabling people, especially those with disabilities, to live more independent lives. People rely on public transport to access employment, community and family life on a daily basis.

But the lack of AV on board can leave blind and partially sighted people feeling anxious, vulnerable and dependent on the help of other passengers or the bus drivers. This can put many people off using bus services.

AV will improve the experience of bus travel for all passengers, including tourists, elderly people, people new to the area and children.

Well Done, National Express!

The group, Transport for All report two bits of good news about National Express:

National Express is bringing in a wheelchair priority policy on its buses after a disability rights campaigner raised a question on the issues at its Annual General Meeting in May.

Until now, National Express had had a "first come, first served" policy of wheelchair boarding on its buses, where passengers with pushchairs were entitled to occupy the wheelchair bays on their buses, even if they were needed by a wheelchair user looking to board

The second good news story is that National Express have plans to introduce a 'turn up and go' service on its c2c train services in Essex from September, meaning disabled people needing assistance can simply arrive at stations and have staff help them without having to book in advance. It will be the first private train company to offer this service in the UK and has also pledged to be the first train operator to make their route completely accessible.

On the other hand ... Disabled campaigners were left "appalled" in December when three court of appeal judges found in favour of First Bus.

That judgement over-turned a county court ruling that wheelchair-users should have priority in the use of dedicated wheelchair spaces over parents with pushchairs, and that the "first come, first served" policy of First Bus breached the Equality Act.

Instead, the court of appeal said that a bus driver needs only to request - and not demand - that a buggy-user vacates the space if it is needed by a wheelchair-user. Doug Paulley has won permission for his appeal to be heard by the Supreme Court.

COMMENT: These two stories show that one of the biggest barriers for disabled people is other people! Shame on companies that need the law to enforce change!

Guide Dogs for the Blind, amongst others, are concerned about Pavement Parking.

Here there is some good news (and a local campaigning issue) thanks to our friend and colleague, Norman Baker. When he was Transport Minister he wrote to councils prompting them to use their powers to prevent parking on the pavement.

He also gave all councils in England permission to use signs to indicate a local pavement parking ban. Until then councils had to gain special signs authorisation from government each time they want to put a pavement parking ban in place.

Local authorities can use physical measures such as high kerbs or bollards to prevent vehicles mounting the footway where footway parking is a particular problem. Such measures have the advantage of being largely self-enforcing.

Another transport issue concerns trains, should wheelchair users be able to simply turn up at the station and expect to travel without pre-booking assistance? Many campaigners say, **“YES!”**. Morally, in terms of equality, they must be right but there is also a practical point. We need to redevelop the infrastructure.

WE SAY: As more disabled people travel (gain the self-confidence to travel?) then more suitable spaces will be needed in buses & trains. This is either a problem or an opportunity for the British transport industry.

Looking to the future

David Buxton our Vice-Chair points out that LDDA's aim must be to develop new policies and position statements, and work with the Leader of the Party, Tim Farron MP, and the Party's policy process to have them adopted.

He feels that we should have clear aims and objectives whilst acknowledging the limits on public expenditure in the next ten years.

We will need to provide alternative solutions and ideas based on current priorities then present these as motions to be decided by Party members at Conferences or as clear and relevant amendments to other Conference motions.

Please email him (BuxtonDC@aol.com) or our Chair Phil Stevens (phil_stevens@me.com or phone 074157 23572) as they are looking for experts to be part of a number of small working groups:

1. INDEPENDENT LIVING – housing, benefits and support
2. INDEPENDENT WORKING – Access to Work, support and inclusion
3. INDEPENDENT LEARNING – primary, secondary and adult education
4. INDEPENDENT PARTICIPATING – politics, community and decision-making

The working groups will work towards a paper that will include evidence, case studies, statistics and proposed party policies and recommendations.

These will help the LDDA to produce new position statements based on what we believe in – liberalism, social values, equality, access and diversity!



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Representing those with disabilities within and outside the Liberal Democrats

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Vision
A world where everyone affected by disability can live life to their full potential and secure the care and support they need to gain independence and empowerment

Mission
1) To work towards the election of Liberal Democrats to all levels of Local, regional, devolved and national governments in the UK and to the European Parliament.

2) To promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities within the Liberal Democrats.

3) To scrutinise Liberal Democrat policies to ensure they reflect the rights and needs of people with disabilities, their carers and their families and make appropriate recommendations for future policies and seek amendments to current policy.

4) To promote the Liberal Democrat message to disabled people who are not currently members.

Do you share our vision?
Do you agree with our mission?
...If so, then please join us!
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