

Personal Budgets and Social Care for Frail Older People in the United Kingdom

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Opinion

This 2 page opinion explores do we need more personal budgets for older people in England as is advocated by the Conservative government led by Prime Minister Theresa May? What are the implications for frail older people? Does it really give them more choice of the type of services needed to address their social care and health needs?

Ironically, it was under former PM Tony Blair that personalisation services developed in England as a social policy response to user demands for more tailored and flexible forms of health and social care support. Further, this process is also seen as a vehicle for promoting service user rights through increasing participation, empowerment and control while also promoting self-restraint by having (important to note) 'users' or their carers manage the costs of their own health and social care.

Self-assessment is a cornerstone of personalisation that gives service users the opportunity to assess their own care and support needs and decide how their Personal Budgets are spent that is a process transforming social care. This was piloted around a number of local authorities and subsequently is advocated by current Prime Minister of Great Britain, Theresa May as an important policy issue for every local authority.

The question to ask is: why is Theresa May advocating personal budgets for personal care for frail older people to be managed by older people or their carers themselves? The important point to note, if care needs are not met,

or not affordable, or not monitored, then for Cameron, does not look at the Government. Instead, look at the self-constructed 'individual choice or community empowerment' – a euphemism for individuals and communities to manage their own affairs. Putting the emphasis onto older people is a form of 'buck passing' which radically changes the British State's role as provider as advocated by the architects of the welfare state in the UK some 72 years ago.

If money is not spent accordingly, then the buck passing will be framed as an individualised problem by older people and their carers rather than the policies and destructive lack of resources taken out of local authorities by the central State. Equally, questions of accountability are frequently dodged by Government as the emphasis is put onto frail older people rather than to elected representatives.

Personal care is important for frail older people but for the Government the most important aspect is care policy which "devolves power and budgets" to individuals and local communities which masks wider questions of accountability of the State to provide a care system that is fully funded, addresses safeguarding against potential financial 'elder abuse' by external control of resources and ultimately provides clear lines of accountability for carers, local authorities and also the Central State. Frail older people deserve no less; so that their human rights and opportunities for personalised self-governance are fully facilitated and crucially, resourced.



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