**Social care narrative should flip from siege to surge**

Headline writers had a field day reporting the record lows in public satisfaction with the NHS in 2022 and 2023 identified by the King’s Fund in their analysis of the British Social Attitudes survey. It stood at 25% in 2023, a drop of 29 points since 2020. The biggest concerns were GP services and dentistry. Strikingly these views are held by supporters of both the main parties.

For councils, the collapse in satisfaction with adult social care, to an all-time low of 13%, caught the eye, coinciding with higher council tax bills landing on most English doorsteps. It adds to the challenges candidates in May’s local elections in some unitary and metropolitan councils face promoting better outcomes.

There was little change from 2022, when the figure was 14%. While dissatisfaction was greatest from those receiving or waiting for assessment or services, the disquiet was generalised across those surveyed. Those in the highest income bracket were more likely to be dissatisfied than those in the lowest, crudely those likely to pay the most tax.

The most common reason given for dissatisfaction with social care services was pay, conditions and training for staff. This was followed closely by people not getting all the care they need, and not enough support for unpaid carers. These findings suggest campaigning about social care was reaching the public’s consciousness, if not that of the government.

Around a third of respondents felt social care was not affordable to those who need it, and that health and social care services do not work well together.

There are some crumbs of comfort. The small proportion that was satisfied felt people were treated with dignity and respect by care staff, had a good range of services and support, and thought health and social care services did work well together. These would feature highly in any council’s ambition for their service.

How can councils turn this public mood around and celebrate what they are getting from the investment taxpayers are making in social care? How do directors pitch their achievements to an incoming administration which, if polls are to be believed, have not recently led their councils.

The answer may be to flip the narrative from siege to surge. Many have great stories to tell about progress in preventing, reducing, or delaying the need for social care support for their population. Refreshed social work practice models emphasise the dignity, respect, choice, and control valued by people needing care and support.

Waiting lists for assessment, reviews, and setting up support arrangements are being tackled successfully. There are many examples of creativity in addressing workforce shortages, through apprenticeships and in-service training opportunities.

Despite its bad press, social care is not a lost cause.

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