**Social care prepares for gratuitous kicking**

The deflated adult social care football is being retrieved from its place in the long grass this summer for what looks like a bit of gratuitous kicking from right across the political spectrum.

First up was the government’s singling out of the sector for blame for the level of legal immigration linked to the surging number of visas granted to overseas care workers. Rather than acknowledging the chronic pay and recruitment challenges faced by employers, it was suggested that the sector was lazy in relying on international recruitment rather than reaching out to recruit and train those not in work already in the country. By doing so the government sidestepped any responsibility for the historic and acknowledged lack of adequate funding or a proper workforce strategy.

Next in line are the newly elected Reform councillors who now control of some of the biggest councils in England after the recent local elections. They are promising a series of Elon Musk inspired investigations into the bloated budgets of councils and their perceived waste, and a reorientation of them in line with the people’s priorities.

This will inevitably draw them to their largest controllable budget, adult social care. Here they will meet the irrational and complex cocktail of partially met legal responsibilities, the messy interface with the NHS, and a flawed and precarious market. They will also find it is a priority for their voters, but they are unwilling to use their own money to pay for it.

While a fresh look could be helpful, it will be tempting and expedient for them in the short-term to throw around blame for this to government, to greedy providers, even to users and carers themselves. The sector will need to be open, patient and persistent in response.

Following soon will be the Covid Inquiry which has got round, at last, to exploring the role of, and impact on, the care sector during the pandemic. We can expect to hear contrasting evidence. Some may seek to blame providers for not standing up to hospital managers who wanted to discharge patients into care homes to free up capacity without testing for the virus. Others may continue to express the view that agency care workers spread the virus. Bereaved relatives will relive the pain of saying goodbye online or through closed windows.

The inquiry will also hear that the sector was initially cast adrift without adequate protective clothing, and that heroic care staff left their families and moved into their workplaces to protect residents.

Just to wrap things up, the battered ball will be firmly back in the long grass as Baroness Casey has been pulled away from her social care review to revisit her work on grooming.

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