

Adjusting the Manifesto

The lack of a majority has confirmed a rethink on some of the Conservative party's Manifesto policies. That would have happened anyway, as many Conservative candidates in the election disliked the policies themselves, or came to dislike them when they heard the public reaction. I did not want to remove the triple lock or leave many pensioners fearing the loss of the winter fuel allowance. I certainly did not welcome the social care proposals. That was why I did not include any of these in my personal election address, and did treat these policies as consultations, encouraging people to write in with their views.

There is no mention of legislating for changes to social care or winter fuel payments or the triple lock on pensions in the Queen's speech. The Conservative party in Parliament assumes these have been dropped and is happier for their disappearance. It was strange during the election that our cries for more information and for sensible changes to these policies went unheeded. Many of us said if they insisted on removing the winter fuel allowance from some, would they please tell us what the income cut off would be to put the minds at rest of the many who would presumably still receive it. Some thought it should be removed from higher rate taxpayers, others thought it should be made taxable. I was in favour of no change. We also urged them to tell us what the cap on social care costs would be, an important part of their draft policy. Again there was no figure given, leaving many worried about how much they would have to pay.

I spent considerable time during the election explaining by email and in conversation to electors in Wokingham what the current social care system entails. Many did not know that if an elderly person has to move into a care home then the home they are leaving is taken into account in their assets. If they have money then they have to pay themselves for the care home. There was also some confusion over the need to pay social care costs if you carry on living in your own home. The boundary between healthcare, delivered free, and social care that you pay for is a difficult one to define. The public tends to the view that social care is healthcare.