

Government's social care funding plans in crisis – Norman Lamb

Ministers are to consult on reforming the system of social care funding in England after Conservative plans were slammed as a Dementia Tax during the election.

Commenting, Shadow Health Secretary Norman Lamb said: "Social care is in a state of total crisis. A million older people are missing out on care they need and services face a funding black hole of billions in this year alone.

"In Coalition we commissioned the Dilnot report – an independent, expert led review of social care funding -yet the Conservatives have chosen to ignore the recommendations.

"Now they are simply kicking the issue into the long grass again with more consultation, after their deeply unfair Dementia Tax was clearly rejected by voters".

Repeal Bill must not be a bonfire of health and safety and environmental standards

The Liberal Democrats have vowed to oppose any attempts to weaken workplace rights, health and safety standards and environmental protections as part of the government's Repeal Bill.

The party is also calling for proper oversight and transparency over the Repeal Bill, after the government's White Paper hinted at a power grab by ministers through the use of so-called Henry VIII powers.

Liberal Democrat Brexit Spokesperson Tom Brake commented:

"Many Conservatives have made it clear they want to use Brexit to scrap our hard-won workplace rights and environmental standards.

"But protections for workers and our environment are not just red tape to be tossed on a bonfire.

"Nobody voted to diminish their rights, make themselves poorer or to make our country less safe.

"The Liberal Democrats will strongly oppose any weakening of existing

standards and fight to ensure proper oversight and transparency.

“We cannot allow this minority Conservative government to use Henry VIII powers to steamroller the democratic process.”

Speech: Prison reform: open letter from the Justice Secretary

The work to make our prisons true places of reform and rehabilitation is already under way – and it will continue unabated.

When someone is convicted of a serious crime, they are rightly handed down a custodial sentence by our courts. They are punished by being sent to prison and losing what we cherish most as citizens – liberty and freedom.

Most will, at some point, be released back into society. So, as well as depriving people of liberty, our prisons must also be places of reform and rehabilitation to support offenders to turn their lives around.

Prisons have been going through a particularly turbulent time and we need to create calm and ordered environments for that effective rehabilitation. That means giving offenders the help they need to get off drugs, and the education, training and support to help them find employment when they leave prison.

In doing this, prisons don't work in isolation. They work within their local communities and with other services – with Probation, Jobcentres, housing, health and drug services, local businesses and charities to provide innovative schemes and initiatives to prepare prisoners for a life after release. We now have more private sector companies employing ex-offenders than ever before. Timpson, Halfords and The Clink Charity are just 3 examples of organisations which do great work with prisons and offenders.

Only by building on this work to reform offenders and support ex-offenders will we stop the vicious and costly cycle of reoffending.

This is my priority and as the new Secretary of State, I am committed to building on the essential reforms that are already under way to make prisons places of safety and reform.

That has to start with the numbers of prison officers available to support offenders. More staff will provide the capacity for them to give more time to directly supervising offenders, through one-to-one support from a key worker. This engagement will be a key measure in reducing the currently unacceptable levels of assaults, self-harm and suicides.

My predecessor has already secured a £100 million a year investment for an extra 2,500 prison officers. The most recent figures show the number of prison officers in post has increased by 515 compared with the previous quarter and we are on track to deliver all 2,500 prison officers by December 2018. They will join thousands of dedicated and hard-working prison officers who undertake such important work, day in day out, to keep our prisons and the public safe.

We are also tackling key issues to improve security and create the opportunity for reform and rehabilitation.

On drugs, we have introduced testing for psychoactive substances across the estate, the first jurisdiction in the world to do so. We have also trained more than 300 dogs to detect these substances, and have introduced tough new laws to deal with people smuggling the substances into prison.

On drones, we are working with the police to catch and convict criminals using drones to smuggle contraband into prisons. We have also established a new team of prison and police officers to directly tackle the threat posed by drones.

On mobile phones, we are working with mobile network operators to tackle illicit use of phones. We have now fitted out every single prison across the estate with hand-held mobile phone detectors and detection poles to step up the detection of illegal phones on the landings. More than 150 mobile phones have been cut off since the introduction of new powers through the Serious Crime Act.

We are continuing to transform our prison estate to close old and dilapidated prisons and create up to 10,000 new places through a £1.3 billion investment.

We know where the problems lie in our prisons, and we know what is needed to fix them. We are continuing with, and building on, these reforms to ensure prisons are safe and secure and are able to transform the lives of those sent to custody by our courts.

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The changes will deliver a career which is as flexible as possible by allowing service personnel to work part time for short periods, as long as the operational effectiveness of the military is maintained.

The measures, which are due to come into effect in 2019, are part of the Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill. They will also limit the amount of time that personnel will need to spend away from their home-base and their

families.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

To compete for the best people in society our Armed Forces must offer a career that better reflects the realities of modern life. Allowing greater flexibility over how long and where people work will help attract and keep the talent we need to keep Britain safe.

The Bill will amend parts of the Armed Forces Act 2006, and the new arrangements were developed after a consultation with the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. Personnel said they wanted more choice over the way they serve for when their circumstances change; such as starting a family, or undertaking caring commitments.

Applications for part time working will be assessed against the needs of the individual and the need of the Armed Forces to maintain operational effectiveness. Personnel would still be required to deploy on operations, at any time, should the need arise.

This will lead to more balanced lifestyles with opportunities for Service personnel to serve in a way that better suits their personal aspirations and family circumstances. Reserve personnel will benefit from these changes, as we continue to seek to increase opportunities for them to serve in a greater range of roles alongside Regular personnel.

These reforms are part of the modern offer to personnel and the government's commitment to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant, which was enshrined in law in 2011 to ensure Service personnel are not disadvantaged through their work.

The government also reaffirmed its NATO commitment to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence in the Queen's speech.

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