

Scrapping of NCS a tragedy for carers in West Lothian

The scrapping of the controversial plans for a National Care Service has been branded a “tragedy” at this month’s meeting of the body which oversees social care in West Lothian.

Speaking in her role as the rep for unpaid carers on West Lothian’s Integration Joint Board, Ann Pike told councillors and other board members that unpaid carers, and those that are cared for in Scotland felt left down at the Scottish Government decisions desert a national scheme.

Almost £28m has been spent since 2021 as the SNP government has tried to develop a National Care Service. It has faced controversy from the start for proposals which would have centralised care management and excluded local authority oversight and input.

Mrs Pike told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that only national regulation would put an end to “a postcode lottery” of care standards across Scotland and improve lives for both those in care, and those unpaid carers who provide a service valued at millions of pounds for free.

The value of unpaid care in Scotland is around £15 billion per annum. The value of West Lothian’s share is over £572m. These figures are set to rise as national and local budgets face greater constraint and more reliance is placed on families and

friends as well as volunteers in the Third Sector to provide care services.

She said carers had invested a huge amount of "time, energy and emotion" so that the needs of unpaid carers were accurately reflected in national legislation.

Mrs Pike said: "It's beyond tragic for those that need help. As a population of carer reps we are also concerned about the money which has been ploughed into this plan for it to not go anywhere.

"We have put hours and hours into trying to get something that was fit for purpose, that had a bit of teeth, and that people could be held responsible when national requirements were not met."

"We don't want all that effort to go to waste. We hoped that an NCS would have some independence, there would be a level of accountability because across Scotland those who most need help have very varied life experience."

Mrs Pike said the West Lothian experience for carers and those in need of care was better than others. She sits of CoSLA committees which examine care and said she left many meetings depressed at the poor levels of service in other parts of the country.

Those in need of care are among the most vulnerable and deserve the same standards of care wherever they live. A National Care service could have set these standards and monitored them Mrs Pike asserted.

She told the LDRS : "As the unpaid carer rep on the IJB what I was trying to say whilst most round the table are happy with the decision for the NCS not to go ahead, I felt the need to speak up on behalf of unpaid carers and reps across Scotland."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “A revised approach to the National Care Service, including amended proposals for the Bill, has been put forward to parliament.

“The concept of a National Care Service was recommended by the Feeley Review and has been passionately supported by people who receive social care.

“As the Minister for Social Care made clear, these proposals will deliver a National Care Service that improves the experience of everyone who relies on social care, social work and community health in Scotland.

“Social care reform is needed urgently, the thousands of people we have spoken to have told us that, and there will be costs associated with delivering that change. Collectively, £5 billion a year is spent on social care, so the money invested in vital reform, over a period of three years, is less than 0.2% of the annual spend on social care.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter