

## **In the News:**

Hi, I am Keith Albans, Acting Chair of Christians on Ageing. Here is my look back at some of stories which have made the news during the month of December and which seem relevant to the concerns of our members. Wherever possible I have included links to the original stories which will hopefully give you more information.

### **1. The Covid Enquiry**

The on-going enquiry into the Covid-19 pandemic continued to make headlines during December, and in particular the issue of discharging older people from hospital into care homes at the beginning of the crisis. Appearing early in the month was Jenny Harries, who was England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer back in 2020, and her evidence appeared to disprove the government's claim to have thrown a "protective ring" around Care Homes. In a message to Health officials in March 2020 she wrote, *"Whilst the prospect is perhaps what none of us would wish to plan for, I believe the reality will be that we will need to discharge Covid-19 positive patients into residential care settings for the reason you have noted,"* she wrote. *"This will be entirely clinically appropriate because the NHS will triage those to retain in acute settings who can benefit from that sector's care. The numbers of people with disease will rise sharply within a fairly short timeframe and I suspect make this fairly normal practice, and more acceptable, but I do recognise that families and care homes will not welcome this in the initial phase."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/02/she-sacrificed-care-home-residents-health-chief-jenny-harries-under-fire-after-uk-covid-inquiry-revelations>

### **2. Migration and Staffing Social Care settings**

Announcements from both the Treasury and the Home Office continue to reverberate around the world of Adult Social Care, with fears being raised in particular about an exacerbated staffing crisis. The decision to ban family dependents from accompanying new visa applicants, announced on 4<sup>th</sup> December, is seen as having a direct effect on those thinking of coming to the UK. Writing in the Guardian, Robert Booth suggests that Canada will be seen as a more attractive option, not just for new applicants but also from those already working in the UK

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/06/saudi-sunny-foreign-care-workers-could-quit-uk-after-clampdown>

Responding to the article in a letter Dominic Carter, Director of policy and public affairs at the Carers' Trust, suggested that the new rules could prove to be a knockout blow for the sector, adding that *"with less provision available, ever more pressure will be piled on the 7 million family carers who look after their loved ones at home. These unpaid carers are shouldering the burden of a care system that has been left to crumble. Meanwhile, the government looks on, content to let them pick up the state's work for free."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/10/is-this-the-knockout-blow-for-a-crumbling-social-care-system>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/dec/18/if-we-fail-the-nhs-will-fail-tories-drive-to-cut-migration-leaves-social-care-on-a-cliff-edge>

Elsewhere, *"Health unions have called the change "cruel" and said that it is likely to significantly reduce the availability of staff in the care sector, which already has more than 150,000 vacancies. The*

immigration minister Robert Jenrick conceded on Tuesday morning that we, “will see a reduction in the number of people coming to work in social care from overseas” – claiming that any vacancies “we hope and expect will be filled by British workers.” But unions said that was unlikely unless pay and conditions are significantly improved. “None of this is rocket science. Fund care properly and raise wages, and the sector becomes a more attractive place to work,” said the Unison general secretary, Christina McAnea.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/05/short-staffed-sectors-in-uk-respond-to-measures-to-cut-net-migration>

Finally in this section, Andrew Cozens writing in the Local Government Chronicle sums up the situation by suggesting a comparison with the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party!

<https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/lgc-briefing/social-care-ruing-a-surreal-end-to-2023-12-12-2023/>

### **3. Death in Older Age and Assisted Dying**

Irrespective of anyone’s individual position on the issue, it is hard to imagine that we will reach the end of 2024 without some significant proposal to change the laws around Assisted Dying being given, or at least promised, parliamentary time, with many surveys suggesting that the public would be generally in favour of a change being made.

Two significant public figures have lent weight to the discussion during the past month. First came the revelation that, before she died aged 82 in 2020, the actor Dame Diana Rigg pleaded for help and explored options for an assisted death. This was followed by Dame Esther Rantzen, who is 83 and living with lung cancer, saying in an interview that if her current treatment fails she will consider going to *Dignitas* in Switzerland. In the meantime she has called for a change in the law.

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1554/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1554/pub/1554/page/30/article/NaN>

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/dec/19/esther-rantzen-considering-assisted-dying-if-cancer-treatment-fails>

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1561/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1561/pub/1561/page/69/article/NaN>

The press coverage of the ensuing debate reflected a variety of views from individuals and organisations, and the letters to the editor columns were full of people’s testimonies. A sample can be seen here.

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1554/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1554/pub/1554/page/62/article/477972>

### **4. Ethnic Minority Elders**

The Centre for Ageing Better released their State of Ageing 2023 report which amongst other things reveals how the current older population in the UK is the most diverse ever in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and lifestyle.

<https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/The-State-of-Ageing-interactive-summary-2023-4.pdf>

In a blog post reflecting on these findings, Sarah Wilkinson who is Evidence Manager for the Centre for Ageing Better, explores a research project which highlights ways in which existing inequalities place older people with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds at increased risk from the impact of high inflation, food insecurity and spiralling energy prices.

[The voices behind the numbers | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/blog/the-voices-behind-the-numbers)

In another post in the run up to Christmas, the Centre for Ageing Better included a campaign against ageism amongst their Christmas wishes.

[Ageing Better's Santa Wish List | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/blog/ageing-better-santa-wish-list)

## 5. Older People and Society

The Office for National Statistics issued a statement during the month reflecting on the disproportionate burden borne by older people struggling to keep warm during winter.

[Who is most likely to live in homes that are harder to keep warm? - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/news-releases/2023/12/08/who-is-most-likely-to-live-in-homes-that-are-harder-to-keep-warm)

Elsewhere came news of concerns being raised with telecoms providers about the negative effects being experienced by some older people through the roll out of digital landlines. These make use of Wi-Fi technology which may not be compatible with some emergency aids and “telecare” devices.

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1559/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1559/pub/1559/page/4/article/NaN>

And finally... Christians on Ageing has recently introduced a series called “The Older Person who has inspired me” and in this article the actor Bertie Carvel effectively nominates his mother as just such a person.

[https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/dec/16/bertie-carvel-looks-back?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/dec/16/bertie-carvel-looks-back?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)



As we end one year and begin another I was delighted to come across references to hope – that precious and necessary commodity. First I found this quotation from Rowan Williams, “*To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.*” Secondly I came across this unattributed snippet, “*People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spiders webs. It’s not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go.*” And to

close the year this piece from Gordon Brown underlines the point, saying that Nelson Mandela taught him that hope survives wherever people come together. Happy New Year!

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/31/nelson-mandela-hope-despair-gordon-brown>