

Baroness Tyler to move that this House takes note of Her Majesty's Government's Social Justice Strategy: Thursday 16th October 2014, House of Lords

Introduction

My Lords, it is a great privilege to open today's debate on social justice for the most disadvantaged of our fellow citizens. I very much look forward to hearing from the other noble Lords who have between them such huge expertise and personal commitment on the subject and am delighted that the Right Reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ely has chosen to make his maiden speech in this debate. At this point in the parliamentary cycle it is very timely that we have this opportunity to consider the Government's Social Justice Strategy, explore the progress that is being made and consider what more needs to be done. I declare an interest as Chair of the "*Making Every Adult Matter*" coalition of charities working collaboratively to find more effective ways of tackling multiple disadvantage.

To set the context, over the last twenty years, governments of all colours have sought to improve approaches to social justice using different approaches. To their credit the previous Labour administration put tackling social exclusion at the heart of its early political programme and maintained a strong focus on the issue throughout its term. Indeed I presume I should also declare a past interest here as one time Head of the then Social Exclusion Unit.

In 2010, just prior to the election, Iain Duncan Smith set out his vision for a new Government. He called for a joined-up approach; buy-in from Secretaries of State; a coordinating body; and a cross-departmental approach at the local level - a familiar call to those steeped in this area. Over the last four years, some of that ambition has indeed come into being. The Social Justice Cabinet Committee has been set up and the

government published its Social Justice Strategy in March 2012 followed by an Outcomes Framework, a One Year On progress report and a regular update for each key indicator.

My Lords for a balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches I would commend the recent Lankelly Chase report “The Politics of Disadvantage” which reflects also on the political difficulty of publicly articulating the case for more support for the most socially disadvantaged in the face of an often antagonistic public and press.

Why is Social Justice important?

But before we debate the specific issues, let us briefly consider why Social Justice is so important and what it actually means. In preparing for this debate I looked up various definitions used by political thinkers, commentators and interested organisations and they were pretty wide ranging. That said, where most people agree is that social justice is about the distribution of income, wealth, opportunities and privileges within a society so that everyone can reach their full potential, be active contributors to their own community and have an equal chance to succeed in life.

For many - and I count myself among their number - the term social justice also implies fairness and mutual obligation, that we have a responsibility for each other and most particularly towards those who are least able to fend for themselves. It is an issue that cuts across the life-course and across generations. It is important for children, for families and for individual adults. And it demonstrates the inter-connections between so many government policies and public services: on welfare, education, health, housing, justice, the labour market- I could go on.

One of the biggest challenges for Social Justice in our country is presented by those individuals - whether they are children, family units, or single adults - **who face multiple and complex needs**. These individuals are routinely failed by our public services and fall through the gaps to live chaotic lives at the extreme margins of our communities: lives that are often characterised by some combination of homelessness, worklessness, substance misuse, mental ill health, stigma, debt, repeat contact with the criminal justice system, family breakdown and domestic violence. I would contend that this group are the embodiment of social **injustice** in our society. And it is for this group that a coordinated approach across both government policy and local services is so vital.

Let me try and bring this to life at a human level. I recently heard from the charities I work with about a young woman who we will call Lucy. At just 24 years old, Lucy carries the mental and physical scars of a troubled life. Sexually abused as a young child, she was placed in local authority care. As a teenager she started using drugs and drinking heavily to 'blank out' her bad memories and by the age of 17 she was using heroin and crack. She is well known to the police and magistrates. She needs mental health support, but falls below the thresholds for secondary care. She is constantly ricocheting between rough sleeping, hostels and prison.

The ambition of the strategy

The Social Justice Strategy has not been shy about its ambitions. It makes a clear commitment to coordinated local services, saying that, and I quote:

“We recognise that more can be done to support those who are least well served by current approaches. Through this strategy and the work that follows, we want to encourage local areas to design and commission interventions that are better coordinated and that deliver multiple outcomes.”

Progress: So key questions for today's debate will include: How far have we progressed against these ambitions? And what more needs to be done?

The government should be congratulated for its early bold ambition because we know that better coordinated local interventions can have a significant impact on this most vulnerable group. I am particularly aware of this through my involvement with the Making Every Adult Matter coalition of charities who are working across the country to support local areas as they design and deliver better coordinated interventions to help transform the lives of the estimated 60,000 adults with the most severe multiple problems. An independent evaluation of local pilots recently found that this more coordinated approach from local agencies led to both statistically significant increases in wellbeing for clients and a reduction in wider service use costs of up to 26.4% over two years. And now in areas such as Blackburn and Sunderland we see fantastic cross agency work being championed at the highest level by local partners.

My Lords there is no substitute for seeing things with your own eyes. When I visited the St Mungo's Broadway Women's Hostel in North London I was really struck by what can be done to provide joined up help and support under one roof. Homeless women there had easy access to resources such as counsellors and social workers trained to help them address their myriad problems crucially able to provide emotional support to women, many of whose children had often been taken into care as well as complex care case workers who could understand the intricacies of the benefit system.

The Social Justice Strategy also has a national-level ambition, calling for "national leadership and a change in the way policy is created and evaluated in central government." This gives us a chance to reflect on the wide-ranging systemic reforms that

are needed if we are to transform the life chances of the most disadvantaged **AND** to provide answers to the growing number of critics who argue that we now have a commissioning system which encourages silo-based working, risk management at the expense of action, and excessive gatekeeping and prohibitive access thresholds to reduce short term costs. Too often this approach is excluding those who most need help, mitigating against long term savings and making coordinated action in local areas more difficult than it should be.

In March, the Fabian Society, in collaboration with CentreForum and the Centre for Social Justice, produced a report entitled *Within Reach: The New Politics of Multiple Needs and Exclusions*. The report highlighted that helping people with multiple needs will require **BOTH** more collaborative working across Government departments **AND** more devolution of power to the local level. **Key point here is that it's BOTH/AND - not EITHER/OR.** Recommendations included the need for pooled budgets, allowing local areas to keep the savings made through co-ordinated action and raising new sources of funding through social investment.

So what needs to be done to translate these ideas into real action? For me, three main issues which stand out:

- The **first** is that we need to listen to the voices of people with multiple needs.
- **Second**, we need to give more support to local areas in taking forward the Social Justice agenda
- and **finally** we need to address the impact of wider government policies

1. Voice

On voice, it is crystal clear that we will not move forward on social justice without getting better at listening to the voices of those that are most affected. We must accept that their expertise is sorely lacking from the Westminster debate and commit to changing this. The new “*Voices from the Frontline*” research programme is working to bring the voices of people with multiple needs into the heart of the policy debate. It will soon be challenging every Member of Parliament, every Member of this House and every Prospective Parliamentary Candidate to commit to listening to the voices of people with multiple needs and offering practical ways of doing this. **I urge the government and the noble Lords here today to attend the launch in November and to support that campaign.**

2. Supporting local areas

Turning to support for local areas, the Social Justice Strategy is - quite rightly - clear that solutions must be driven at the local level and that commissioners and local leaders have a vital role to play. I pay tribute to the work of the Big Lottery Fund and its £100m investment in multiple needs that is helping to take this forward. However, there is a strong argument that government needs to do more to support local areas in tackling multiple needs.

This is not to say that government should be prescriptive - far from it. But it is critical that the national policy environment incentivises action on multiple needs and sets the framework in which local areas should act.

My Lords, there are two things that the government could do:

First, it should close the accountability gap that exists around individuals with multiple needs. To do this it should ensure that a named senior official and elected member in each local area are accountable for effective, coordinated services and require them and their partners to set out a strategy for how this will be achieved. This strategic focus on the most vulnerable is much needed. Only last week, Homeless Link and St Mungo's Broadway published research showing that two-thirds of Health and Wellbeing Boards fail to mention single homeless people in their joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs). And these assessments are supposed to be the process by which local areas address the health inequalities in their localities!

Second, government could help change the national finance and outcomes structures that so often pull services apart rather than push them together. The Troubled Families programme has shown how incorporating new approaches to finance, outcomes and accountability in one national programme have made a real difference to action in local areas. But not all of the most disadvantaged live in family units- indeed far from it. By taking the best bits of the Troubled Families Programme and combining it with strong input from the voluntary sector a new **“Troubled Families for Individuals”** programme could make significant cost savings over the course of the next parliament - an idea backed by several leading think tanks. Accepting that budgets are tight, funding should be pooled from existing departmental budgets according to the projected savings they could make. I strongly urge the government to consider a **“Troubled families for Individuals”** programme - developed with local commissioners and the voluntary sector - for roll out in the next parliament and would ask MNF the Minister to commit to considering this further in his closing remarks.

3. Wider government policies

Finally My Lords we do have to accept that wider government policies have an impact on Social Justice.

Recent research has shown us that frontline services are hopeful about the impact of new structures such as **Health and Wellbeing Boards** as an I. The £25m commitment to **Liaison and Diversion** schemes - as championed by the noble Lord, Lord Bradley - will have a significant positive impact on people with multiple problems in contact with the criminal justice system. And the recent very strong focus on **mental health - backed up by money** - in particular the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement on waiting times and access standards to mental health services- is to be strongly welcomed.

However, we do need to listen to what frontline agencies are telling us about the impact of some government policies - in particular recent welfare reforms - on social justice outcomes even if they make for uncomfortable reading. Now I understand the need for welfare reform, the need to contain the benefits bill during a period of austerity and the critical importance of work as a key route out of poverty. But it's got to feel fair to everyone - and yes that includes the taxpayer - but above all we shouldn't be asking the most vulnerable, some of whom are a long way off being able to get and hold down a job, to take a disproportionate share of the pain.

A recent survey of frontline providers found that **88% of services believe welfare changes are having a negative effect on the overall well-being of people with multiple needs, and 86% on their mental health.** Only 2% of services believe reforms are having a positive effect on the ability of people with multiple needs to engage with the job market, while 55% say they have had a negative effect.

The new **sanctions regime** is also hitting hard. Official research from the Department of Work and Pensions shows that sanctions on Employment & Support Allowance claimants have gone up a whopping 346% in a year. Sanctions for those on Job Seekers Allowance in 2013 stood at over 900,000 - a 12% year-on-year increase. Worse still, research from Homeless Link found that during a three-month period in 2013 around a third of homeless people claiming JSA and 18% of those claiming ESA were sanctioned, suggesting that these changes are disproportionately affecting vulnerable people.

Changes to **Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants** are also a matter for serious concern. National provision of these vital schemes has been replaced by a patchwork of local provision, each with their own qualifying rules. Most, if not all, apply local connection rules so that people leaving prison or substance misuse treatment and trying to make a 'new start' may find it impossible to access this vital support. The government was also set to withdraw the £178 million Local Welfare Fund which has been resourcing these local schemes. **I'm pleased to note that the government has now committed to reviewing this decision and I urge them to protect this vital lifeline for people being resettled from homelessness accommodation and prison.**

Mitigating the impact of wider policies must be one part of better coordination on social justice across government. As I understand it the Social Justice Cabinet Committee currently holds this role. **So could MNF the Minister also say what work the Committee undertakes to consider the impact of wider government policies on those with multiple needs, how regularly it meets and whether this Cabinet Committee has any plans to refresh and strengthen its vision for helping the most needy and vulnerable in society. Andy finally if the Social Justice Cabinet Committee doesn't in fact have this co-ordinating role then who does?**

Conclusion

My Lords, I hope I have demonstrated that it is time for the government to take further action on these issues so that together we can move a step closer to Social Justice for everyone in our communities. I thank the honourable Lords for your attendance today and look forward to hearing your contributions.