

Careless words

One of the key commitments in the government's election manifesto was to reform the Care Act. First implemented in 2015 this law provides support and protection for adults, ensures carers are properly provided for and crucially for care to be integrated with health services. Boris Johnson said in July 2019 'I am announcing now on the steps of Downing Street that we will fix the crisis of social care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared to give every older person the dignity and security they deserve.' But since then not much has happened to the plan. Shortcomings in the legislation and a lack of funding to councils for implementation make reform urgent. Your choices in the County Council elections, whenever they happen, could make a difference when it comes to getting this issue higher on the government's agenda.

Covid-19 provides the government with a convenient shield for its cavalier attitude to other problems. The debate on social care scheduled for the 21st October 2020 was replaced and still hasn't happened. In the Spending Review 2020 published last November the government declared it is "committed to sustainable improvement of the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals next year." And yet instead of the £4 billion estimated to be needed to fund whatever fantastical plan Mr Johnson was talking about, the Chancellor offered a mere £300 million. The rest of the money is expected to be paid by local councils, who would then be funding its manifesto commitment. Is that really what people voted for? Social care reform has to get more of a look in. Covid-19 strains the NHS and communities and we can no longer rely on established social norms to fill in the gaps.

The government has options: plans for social care reform could be devolved to local government; funding could be provided to county councils to implement the Care Act properly; district councils could be invited to develop local initiatives that match local needs and to qualify for central government funding. Such ideas depend on good sense and decision-making, so perhaps it's too much to expect any immediate action. Even so, consultation with other parties and with local government figures would be a sensible start for developing a plan. MPs might want to take the lead in getting social care reform higher up the agenda. Older constituents and their families throughout the land would certainly appreciate it.