

Policy News from MHA: Mid-May Special 2015

Post General Election 2015 update

Welcome to a special edition of MHA's policy bulletin, which highlights what we can expect from the incoming Conservative government.

Highlights for MHA:

- We are looking forward to hearing how the new government plans to tackle the issue of funding for social care. The election campaign and most of the manifestos were disappointingly silent on this major policy challenge.
- We will continue to plan and prepare for the Care Act funding changes due in April 2016 as the Conservatives have pledged to continue with the Care Act implementation.
- We will keep a watching brief on the pledge to introduce the Right to Buy for housing association tenants and the potential implications for MHA.
- We await the detail on continued austerity measures and reduction in government spending, alongside the funding plans for the pledges made on the NHS.
- We await with interest the plans to bring in the right for employees in large companies and the public sector to do 3 days of volunteering per year.

Date for your diary - The Queen's Speech on 27 May

The Queen's Speech sets out the government's agenda for the year 2015/16, outlining proposed policies and legislation that will progress over the year. We will bring you headlines from the Queen's Speech in our next policy news.

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Who's who in the new government?

Department of Health

- [Jeremy Hunt MP](#) remains as Secretary of State for Health. He is MP for South West Surrey. He said, *"My biggest priority now is to transform care outside hospitals - just as we have dramatically improved the quality of care inside*

hospitals in the last few years. All of us want every single older and vulnerable person to be treated with the highest standards of care - so we need a step change in services offered through GP surgeries, community care and social care. That is my mission, and I know it is the mission of the whole NHS too."

- [Alistair Burt MP](#) has been newly appointed as Care Minister. He will be responsible for older people, dementia, adult social care, carers, end of life care, mental health services and care in prisons. He will also be in charge of seeing the Care Act through, with the cap on care costs due to take effect in April 2016. He is MP for North West Bedfordshire. MHA care home Anjulita Court and Ladyslaude Court retirement living scheme are in his constituency.
- [Ben Gummer MP](#) has been newly appointed as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, with the expectation that he will take responsibility for nursing. He is MP for Ipswich. The MHA Norwood care home is in his constituency.

Department for Communities and Local Government

- [Greg Clark MP](#) has been newly appointed as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, with responsibilities for local government, communities and neighbourhoods, local economic growth, housing, planning and building, and integration and faith. He is MP for Tunbridge Wells.
- [Brandon Lewis MP](#) continues as Minister of State for Housing and Planning. He is the MP for Great Yarmouth.
- [Mark Francois MP](#) has been appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, with an expectation his responsibility will include housing and planning development. He is MP for Rayleigh and Wickstead.

Cabinet Office

- [Rob Wilson MP](#) has been reappointed as the Minister for Civil Society in the Cabinet Office and has responsibility for the National Citizen Service and youth volunteering, social action, civil society sector support, social enterprise and social investment. This post is also responsible for UK statistics and public sector efficiency and reform. He is MP for Reading East.

Department of Work and Pensions

- [Dr Ros Altmann](#) has become Minister for Pensions. Dr Altmann has been an independent expert and government adviser on issues such as pensions and retirement policy, investment, savings, annuities and social care funding. She was awarded a CBE in recognition of services to pensioners and pension provision. She served as director-general for the Saga Group between 2010 and 2013 and was also involved in a government campaign to encourage the employment of people aged over 50. Whilst not an MP, she will become a Conservative peer in the House of Lords.

The new Secretary of State for Scotland is [David Mundell MP](#), who takes a keen interest in Auchlochan Garden Village.

For information on other appointments in the new government, [click here](#).

Quick reminder of the Conservative manifesto pledges

1. Health and Social Care

Social care plans

- They will continue with current policy to join up health and social care, through the Better Care Fund and devolution of health budgets in Greater Manchester, and continue the implementation of the Care Act 2014.

The NHS and healthcare pledges

- 7 day access to GPs by 2020 across the country, a named GP for every patient and a guarantee for same-day GP appointment for all over 75s.
- to widen patient choice and implement the NHS' 5 year Forward View.
- greater parity for mental health services with a commitment on the need to address mental health provision, with pledges to increase parity, funding and access.

And on the money....

They have:

- indicated they will invest more in primary care, to prevent health problems before they start.
- committed to increase NHS spending in England by a minimum of £8bn over the next 5 years.
- not identified social care as an area for protection from further cuts.

[Professor Martin Green, Chief Executive of Care England](#) said "We welcome the new Government but, given the precarious state of health and social care, it needs to remember that we will judge them on their performance. There has been too much of a chasm between the rhetoric of integrated care and the reality of a social care system that is undervalued and underfunded. The social care sector has borne the brunt of much negativity and is too often seen as the poor relation to health care... Let's hope that the energy we saw in the election campaign extends to the reforms in social care, thereby allowing each citizen to have the dignity, care and attention that they deserve and need".

2. Older People pledges

- to keep a 'triple-lock' on pensions to raise pensions each year by the highest of earnings growth, prices growth or 2.5%.
- would also continue the new single-tier pension (planned for April 2016) and give people the freedom to invest and spend their pension however they like.
- protection of key pensioner benefits; free bus pass, prescriptions, TV licence and universal Winter Fuel Payments.

3. Housing commitments

- extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants.
- to build 200,000 Starter Homes, to be sold at a 20% discount, for first time buyers under 40.
- extend the Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme and introduce a new Help to Buy ISA.
- create a Brownfield Fund for additional housing.
- create a new London Land Commission, to identify and release all surplus brownfield land owned by the public sector.

Guy Gratten, The Bow Group (a Conservative think tank) *"Forcing housing associations to sell stock at all is a form of state interference in private enterprise, while forcing them to sell stock below market value will prevent, not support, the creation of low cost housing."*

Key measures to cut fuel bills

- install Smart Meters by 2020 in every home and business.
- insulate a million homes over the next 5 years.

4. Third Sector and Volunteering

- introduce a right for employees in large companies and the public sector, to undertake 3 days of volunteering per year.

Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive of NCVO said *"There are substantial challenges ahead: public service reform, a fragile recovery, and calls for democratic renewal. Charities and voluntary groups are part of the solution to these problems, and we look forward to working with the new government to realise the sector's potential. We also look forward to working with the new government on the issues that relate specifically to charities and volunteering. These include: a sensible resolution to the problems brought about by the lobbying act, a shift of gear on our involvement in public services, taking forward the draft protection of charities bill, and implementing manifesto proposals for increasing employee volunteering."*

5. Employment, wages and tax

Employment and wages pledges

- raise Minimum Wage to £8 per hour by 2019 and raise the tax-free Personal Allowance so that those working 30 hours on the Minimum Wage pay no Income Tax.
- promote the Living Wage.
- take steps to eradicate abuses of workers, such as non-payment of the Minimum Wage, exclusivity in zero-hours contracts and exploitation of migrant workers.
- will require sectors regularly using the Shortage Occupation List to bring skilled foreign workers into the UK to provide long-term plans for training UK workers.
- provide 30 hours of free childcare to working parents of 3-4 year-olds and an extra 600,000 free childcare places.
- restraint for public sector wages.
- 5 million apprenticeships over next 3 years.
- tougher controls for strikes and trade union subscriptions.

Tax

- introduce a law guaranteeing no rise in income tax rates, VAT or national insurance before 2020.
- raise personal allowance to £12.5k.
- pass a law so that the Personal Allowance automatically rises in line with the National Minimum Wage.
- raise starting point of 40% tax rate to £50k.
- abolish upper earnings limit on NI contributions for apprentices under 25.
- increase Inheritance Tax threshold to £1m for married couples/civil partners.
- review business rates.
- crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance and would ensure global companies pay fair share in tax.

6. UK Economy

The Conservatives priority is to continue austerity measures to pay down the national debts, with significant savings through a reduction of government departmental spending by 1% each year for the first two full financial years of the next Parliament, through a reduction in welfare spending, cutting red tape and through increased income from tax avoidance.

7. Is there anything else of interest?

The Conservatives will:

- hold an EU in/out referendum by 2017.
- support further devolution to Scotland, Wales and local areas in England, although the latter is preferred through the establishment of elected Mayors.
- pledge to reduce the number of MPs and reform the Civil Service.
- implement the boundary reforms that Parliament has already approved and make them apply automatically once the Boundary Commission reports in 2018.

- aim to repeal the Human Rights Act and introduce a British Bill of Rights.

Follow this link to read the [Conservative Party Manifesto](#).

The Local Government Chronicle ([LGC](#)), suggests that despite their victory, the Conservatives may struggle with their controversial policies, *"The Conservative's astonishing victory last week makes clear that their manifesto is the only one in play but given its vague wording, and tricky parliamentary arithmetic, there is still a lot of fog around...The Conservative plans are ambitious but although it was a famous victory for the party, it is still a very narrow majority – particularly if whittled away by by-elections and defections, it may be hard for the government to get some bills through the house."*

The narrow majority referenced above is illustrated as follows:

- the Conservatives have 331 seats in the House of Commons.
- Labour has 232 seats.
- Scottish National Party (SNP) - 56 seats.
- Liberal Democrats - 8 seats.
- Green - 1 seat.
- UKIP - 1 seat.

Whilst the SNP made gains in the House of Commons, there is a commitment to introduce "English MP votes for English laws", which will reduce their influence on plans relating to England.

Local Elections

Elections were also held in 279 metropolitan, unitary and borough councils and for six mayors, on the 7 May. The headlines are:

- the Conservatives increased the number of councils under their control.
- 36 councils do not have a majority party lead ('No Overall Control').
- Labour lead 74 councils, a slight reduction of three.
- the Liberal Democrats so the councils they control halved to four councils.
- UKIP took control of their first Council in Thanet.

[Click here](#) for more information on the results.