

Community Care Market News

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Good Times, Bad Times, you know I had my share

With the leaders of the world agreeing to a \$1trillion bail-out deal to rescue our drowning economies this month, it's hardly surprising that care professionals still have a Green Paper sized hole in their in-trays. Try to get a straight answer from any of the myriad of people involved in the forthcoming paper and it's incredible the number who say that it will be with us 'at any moment now'. Whether in reality this means we should be collectively holding our breath for an imminent arrival or collectively assuming that the recession will continue to hog the limelight for some time to come is anyone's bet.

However, it's not all been global economic meltdown: A year after care service star ratings started to sparkle, the awarding body is no more. That hasn't stopped CSCI from passing more than a final two cents worth in the direction of the new order, however, pushing swansong reports in the direction of its replacement (the consumer-friendly titled Care Quality Commission) as a last opportunity to maintain its legacy as the body that began the biggest transformation of care since records began (e Ivan Lewis). While there's undoubtedly plenty to chew over in these reports, it does seem that bitter bickering between the old and new bodies has sadly made more of an impact on the national headlines so far.

Although the idea of a collective health and care watchdog is still not to everyone's taste, the promise of a joined up voice for social care providers, in the Care Providers Alliance, is one with much more of the promises of spring. If managed in the right way this could be one of those rare times where you'll be safe to count those Easter eggs before they hatch.

Editor, Justin Merritt

Birmingham care plans trashed by economic slump

Birmingham city council has taken a major hit as the first local authority care casualty of the economic crisis with the news that a massive multi-million pound extra care construction scheme, four years in the making, has been halted due to plummeting land values and ongoing financial uncertainties.

At a cabinet meeting held in mid-March, councillors waded through a reassessment of the commissioning strategy for older people's services which had laid out an ambitious vision which was to have seen 29 in-house care facilities closed with ten high-spec extra care developments built to replace them (CCMN April 2005). In the current climate, social services bosses said that the city's finances are such that it can no longer afford to progress with any further new build plans beyond the four completed sites. Furthermore, they said that some pipeline home closures should be put on hold for the foreseeable future so that the council can continue to use the facilities already there and that a major private finance initiative (PFI) award should be handed back to the Department of Health (DH).

The root causes of the decision were identified as a significant delay in the decommissioning of closures planned between 2006 and 2008 and, to a great extent the damaging affect of the current slump in the property and land market. According to the council, land which was originally estimated to value £22.3m - which was to have been ploughed into the scheme - would at today's value raise just £4m.

With nothing to give in the way of an optimistic outlook, the report said: 'In 2005 it was assumed that across all sites there would be net capital receipts totalling £22.3m, however, over recent months property prices have dramatically fallen and the current potential sales amount to just £4m. There is no guarantee that these values will not fall further. Against the backdrop of this financial risk, there is a clear need to reduce the potential for further financial risk, while at the same time delivering high quality services'

Birmingham's report reiterated that the first stage of the plan was scheduled to see 14 homes decommissioned by 2007/08 with four new care centres built and occupied within the same time period. The finances behind this assumed a small gap of £1.4m between the resources released by the closures and the running costs of the new extra care developments, but argued that that this shortfall would be made up by savings through the use of independent sector care placements and through cost-effective use of assistive technology, homecare and daycare options.

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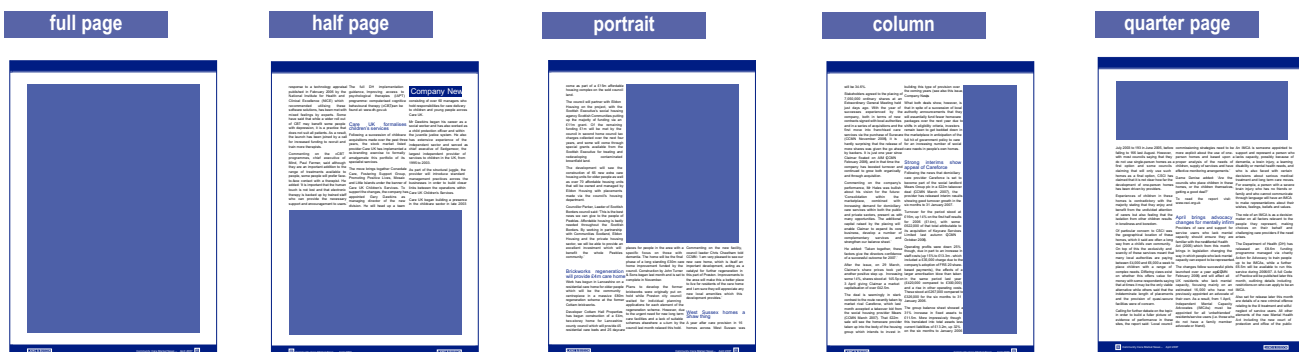
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David Jones
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Martin Green
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Anna Marshall-Day
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