

## Opening address

*John Bowis*

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

I am delighted to be here at the second National Conference of the *Caring for People who Live at Home* Initiative. I am particularly pleased to see such a wide range of different interests – social services authorities, health authorities, private and voluntary organisations – represented here today. Your presence is a clear statement of the importance of establishing the broadest possible partnership to care for people living at home.

The principles that underlie this Initiative are at the heart of our wider policy for community care. Our community care reforms recognised that most people want to live at home wherever possible. They have given a higher profile to improving the services to support people living at home. The shift that these reforms represent is a dramatic one. It is the shift from thinking ‘What can we provide?’ to thinking ‘What do people want?’. It is the shift from seeing the local authority, and the local authority alone as the provider, towards a much wider range of provision.

Like all change of this magnitude, it is not an easy task. You have achieved a great deal in establishing a wider base of providers in the independent sector. But every one of us understands that there is still a gap between the aspiration of helping everyone who wants to live at home, and the reality of services.

We are committed to continuing to bridge this gap. Over the three years of this Initiative, we have spent almost £5 million. We very much hope that we will be able to extend this funding into the early part of 1995/96 in recognition of the later than intended start of the Initiative.

### **Developmental work**

The key to building up a genuinely wide range of provision is the developmental work that you are carrying out locally. We knew when we began that new independent sector providers need active support and

encouragement if they were to develop successfully. Experience so far has demonstrated just how important it is to spend time and effort working closely with new providers.

I pay tribute to the hard work that the authorities taking part in the Initiative have carried out. For example, I know that the staff of Shropshire's Enterprise Agency have spent nearly two thirds of their time providing business development advice. Newham has created a training programme for prospective providers. Camden is helping potential providers produce business plans. Many more of the participating authorities are mapping the market and producing directories. This is invaluable foundation work.

Another lesson of our experience so far is the importance of local commitment to innovation. Each authority taking part in the Initiative started with a different relationship with the independent sector. Many of those with well-established relationships, such as Cambridgeshire and Shropshire, have built them up still further. Others, like Barnsley, had further to make up, but have undergone a dramatic change of attitude to working with the independent sector.

Of course, in these early stages, ensuring the survival of independent providers can be as important as encouraging their entry to the market in the first place. Many of the participating authorities have helped the process of development and maturing with initial funding. Cambridgeshire, for example, has provided small amounts of initial funding right from the outset. Now, in this final year, their task is to ensure that providers are able and confident enough to flourish on their own.

### **Contracts**

Yet all the work you are doing to encourage new providers into the market will be frustrated if they are not used regularly, or if there are no purchasers for their service. New providers need to be quickly integrated into social services departments' purchasing strategies.

### **Quality**

As the relationship between local authorities and the independent sector develops, it is clear that a key issue is quality of service. Particularly for clients, quality of service is one of their first considerations. This is an important issue for us in central government, and also for local authorities and the independent sector working together locally.

One of the ways you can ensure your users get a decent standard of service is to build service specifications into your contract with providers. I know several project officers from participating authorities are helping to

work up contracts and service specifications. In addition, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities have been doing an excellent job coordinating the production of local authority association guidelines, which I understand will be published soon.

There is also intense interest, in Parliament and elsewhere, in the potential for introducing compulsory registration and inspection for domiciliary care agencies in the independent sector. This is something we will look at when we review all social services inspection arrangements next year.

We are already looking at the standard of individual practice in social services delivery. Sir Peter Barclay's working group on a possible Social Services Council reported last year, and as part of our response to their proposal, I recently announced the appointment of two teams to investigate what standards might be set. Both the National Institute for Social Work and Price Waterhouse will be reporting to me early next year.

### **Charters**

One of the most important quality issues for users is, of course, information. Too often in the past, social services in general, and community care in particular, have been seen as an obstacle course for the user. There was too little information, and too little emphasis on helping people find their way through the system.

Our community care reforms have addressed many of these problems. Social services departments are now involving users and carers in deciding on their own care, and providing more information about the system and what it provides. We are committed to taking this process further forward. As you know, we have recently produced a national framework for local community care charters, and by April 1996 we hope all local authorities will have produced their own charters. We believe that charters will be an important step in making services more accessible and responsive to local people.

### **Policy Studies Institute**

Finally, I want to touch briefly on the work of the Policy Studies Institute, our hosts today. I suspect that PSI did not quite realise what they were taking on when they took on the contract to manage and evaluate the Initiative. They have done a tremendous amount of work, both supporting the development of the projects and project officers and asking searching questions to monitor and evaluate progress. PSI has also had to deal with the potential conflict between its two roles – between supporting and

guiding on the one hand, and monitoring and evaluating on the other. I pay tribute to the PSI team for their hard work over the last two years.

Together, the PSI's work disseminating the results of the Initiative and the conferences held by individual authorities are providing valuable ideas and models which you can use to build local mixed economies of care. I look forward to the results of the final evaluation.

### **Conclusion**

As I said at the beginning, the task of establishing new alternatives to residential care is not an easy one. It will require effort and it will require commitment. But our commitment to pursuing more and better care for people in their own homes is unflagging. We have a duty to promote choice and diversity for users, and to make the best possible use of the resources we have to help vulnerable people. Our goal is a thriving and varied range of services, which give users, carers and authorities alike real and improved choice.