

Care system only for those at death's door, says ex-minister

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

THE NHS will not survive unless urgent steps are taken to shore up the crisis-hit elderly care system for the long term, Paul Burstow, the former care minister, warns today.

He admitted it was now a virtual shell in which help was available only for those "at death's door".

Although spending has been given special protection, constant cuts over the past five years to local council budgets that fund social care for elderly and disabled people have left the system "shrivelled" and nothing more than a "crisis care service", he said, adding that money needed to be shared more evenly with the NHS.

Writing for *The Telegraph* online, the Liberal Democrat former coalition minister also called into question whether the long-awaited cap on care bills would come into force as promised.

"Will the cap on lifetime care costs and more generous means tests due to start in April 2016 see the light of day?" he wrote.

He said plans to secure the NHS's future were good in many ways, but they contained a "big hole" for social care.

"It's do-or-die for care," he said. "No one should be under any illusions that the NHS can survive without it.

"Councils have borne the brunt of public spending cuts. Some have sheltered social care. Most have felt compelled to ration access to people who are either too fragile to do even the most basic of everyday tasks for themselves or are at death's door."

Last week, research by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services showed that a combination of cost savings and the effects of the rapidly ageing population had effectively wiped 31 per cent from care budgets in the past five years.

While almost half of care chiefs believe that they have been able to minimise the effects of cuts so far by making savings behind the scenes, only a tiny proportion believe they can continue doing so in the next few years.

"Social care has had it tough, but the next five years could make the last five years seem like the good days," said Mr Burstow.

He cited research showing that nine in 10 NHS chiefs now feel that social care cuts are having a direct impact on health-care – heaping extra pressure on GPs and A&E departments.

Paul Burstow: telegraph.co.uk

Daily Telegraph 27th Nov 2015

GETTY IMAGES/PA/AD