

Social care is something we all may need at some point in our lives. It might be support delivered in our own home, or it might mean us going into a care home.

We see the value of the care service every day, and we've seen it especially in the last 18 months. The staff deserve all our thanks and admiration for the way they've supported residents through Covid and the unprecedented challenges they've worked hard to overcome.

While most of us would agree it's an essential public service which should be properly and fairly funded, sadly for a decade it's been cut by the government, and nationally the system faces a financial blackhole of billions and ever-increasing demand.

Despite all the fanfare, the government's 'plan' announced last week does nothing to address this crisis.

The so-called Health and Social Care Levy is a manifesto-breaking, economically damaging, unfair tax on jobs. It's the biggest rise in taxes on families for over 50 years, with no thought to the impact on working people, and it won't even solve the problems of long-term funding for the care sector.

Yes, tax rises are needed in order to generate the funding that essential services like care need, but the burden should not fall on the keyworkers who got us through lockdowns, who kept essential services running, and who in many cases are already underpaid and overtaxed.

Several residents have contacted me to ask if the government's announcement means we won't have to raise council tax next year, but sadly the answer is that's very unlikely.

It's not been clear from the government's announcements and the way it's been covered in some media, but we don't actually know yet when the social care sector may get the extra funding or exactly how much it can expect. It might also be the case that the extra funding is to be used just to cover the charging reforms announced (the amount you pay for your care through selling your home) rather than already existing (and increasing) pressures in the system.

The government will still therefore expect rising costs and day-to-day pressures to be met through council tax rises and long-term "efficiencies" (cuts, to you and me).

In 2010 St Helens received £127 million government funding per year, but this year it was just £13 million. At the same time, demand on the services the Council provides has increased massively and will continue to grow: in the next 15 years the number of people aged 85 and over in St Helens borough is expected to increase by over 60%. Many more people will need – and deserve, after a lifetime of working and paying into the system – quality social care.

It should be free at the point of use, and those with the broadest shoulders should pay the greatest burden. That's the fairest and most sustainable way of doing it, but it's not something this government are ever going to do.

Best wishes to all Star readers.