



Cues for Change

December 2017

Economical

Fears over levels of household debts

The Bank for International Settlements has warned financial watchdogs and central bank officials across the world to monitor household borrowing amid concerns that it could shake financial markets. Britain's household debt as a share of gross domestic product stands at 78%, the BIS noted, against 72% in the US and 92% in Australia. The BIS warned that levels of debt helped determine how far households would cut back on consumption after an economic shock.

The Times, The Guardian

Britain hits bottom of pay league

Analysis by the TUC suggests Britain is next year set to reach the bottom of the pay growth league of the world's advanced economies. The fall will be prompted by inflation's impact on real wages, which are expected to drop by 0.7% in 2018. The data from the TUC is based on November's wage growth and inflation forecasts from the OECD.

The Times, The Guardian

Higher council tax amid social care crisis

The Government is understood to be looking at ways of allowing local authorities to increase council tax in order to boost funding for social care. Theresa May is said to be resistant to council calls for an end to rules that require them to hold a local vote for the largest increases, although some flexibility could be conceded when the details of the local government finance settlement are announced next week.

Chancellor Philip Hammond is said to be sympathetic, as is Communities Secretary Sajid Javid. Last year 147 out of 152 councils in England and Wales made use of the right to raise bills to pay for social care, although there is a limit on such increases. One option being considered by ministers is having this ceiling lifted and extended plus a commitment to future rises to keep pace with inflation.

The Times

Poor children more likely to end up in A&E

Children from poor families are far more likely to end up in hospital A&E departments or need emergency treatment for conditions such as asthma and diabetes, according to a study by the Nuffield Trust. In findings that senior doctors said showed the "*devastating impact*" of deprivation on child health, the nation's poorest teenagers were found to be almost 70% more likely to appear in A&E than their less deprived counterparts.

The Observer

Social

Charity given control of Coventry's heritage

Coventry City Council has handed over responsibility of the city's heritage to the Historic Coventry Trust. The charity wants to open up empty buildings such as the Georgian Drapers' Hall and medieval Charterhouse Priory to the public again. It is the first time such a scheme has been tried on a city-wide scale and could serve as a template for other local authorities struggling with shrinking budgets.

The Times

Crowdfunding campaign to save Brighton's seafront arches goes over target

A crowdfunding campaign to raise enough money to restore Brighton's crumbling Victorian seafront arches has exceeded its initial target of £421,000. **Brighton & Hove City Council** leader Warren Morgan said the "*incredible backing*" that raised £466,000 from the local community put the council in a much better position to submit a bid for Heritage Lottery funding.

Virgin's children's contract 'galloping privatisation', MPs claim

Campaigners have challenged Virgin Care's receipt of a £108m contract for providing children's health services in Lancashire as "*galloping privatisation*." The service is currently delivered by the local Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust, until the end of March, the Independent notes, with a final deal pending the trust deciding to appeal. **Lancashire County Council** has asserted its transparency processes when awarding the contract, while the paper notes Virgin Care successfully challenged six Surrey Clinical Commissioning Groups, **Surrey County Council** and NHS England last month for a significant settlement.

The Independent

Living near gym boosts health

Research has indicated that people who live under a mile away from a gym, playing field or swimming pool are less likely to be overweight, although proximity to fast-food takeaways also has an impact on people's health. Report author Kate Mason, who is studying for a PhD at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "*Policy-makers should consider interventions aimed at tackling unhealthy-built environments.*" Senior study co-author Professor Steven Cummins added: "*It would be important to make sure new physical activity facilities are affordable, especially when they are located in lower-income areas.*"

Daily Express, Daily Mirror

‘Social prescribing’ could bring ‘transformational’ benefits

Doctors should start prescribing activities like gardening, tango dancing and Nordic walking, instead of opting for medicines every time, according to Simon Stevens, head of the NHS England. Family doctors are being urged to take up “*social prescribing*” after research by the University of Westminster found such schemes cut GP consultation rates by 28% and A&E attendance by 24%.

The Daily Telegraph, The Sun

Homelessness rises by 75% among vulnerable groups

The Observer reports that homelessness among people with mental and physical health problems has increased by around 75% since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, and there has been a similar rise in the number of families with dependent children who are classed as homeless. According to official figures collated by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the number of homeless households in England identified by councils as priority cases because they contain someone who is classed as vulnerable because of their mental illness, has risen from 3,200 in 2010 to 5,470 this year.

The Observer

Alcohol: gone in a generation?

Professor David Nutt, an Imperial College lecturer and former government drugs advisor, has predicted that Western societies could give up alcohol in favour of synthetic alternatives “*in another 10 or 20 years.*” Professor Nutt predicted that alcosynth, which mimics the enjoyable effects of alcohol without the health risks or risks of increased violence, will largely replace alcohol. He has also predicted that tobacco and cigarettes will largely disappear, replaced by electronic cigarettes.

The Independent

More GP appointments for Londoners

An extra 75,000 routine GP appointments a month are to be made available in London as part of a £26m initiative by NHS England which aims to reduce pressures on stretched A&E departments. If surgeries are fully booked or closed when registered patients call up, they will be able to book with other nearby practices, and GPs will have access to electronic patient records so that patients do not have to be seen by their regular doctor.

BBC News

Young and old brought together at school

In what is thought to be the first scheme of its kind in England, Downshall primary school in Ilford, Essex, is hosting a day centre for older people, who interact with pupils by reading books, singing songs and other activities. The project is designed to improve the mental health of elderly locals suffering from isolation, depression and early dementia, while the youngsters benefit from the interaction with adults. Redbridge Council’s adult health social services is supporting the project.

The Guardian

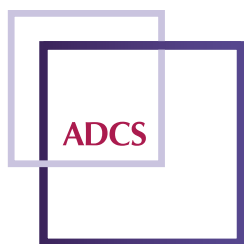
‘Shameful’ inequalities among older people, study says

The Review on Inequalities in Later Life, by the Centre for Ageing Better, has found “*shameful*” inequalities among older people through poverty and disadvantage, with women aged 65-69 suffering the worst discrimination of all. Female part-time workers or women with low-grade jobs are at the greatest risk of financial insecurity in later life, the report found, noting that people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and some from LGBT backgrounds, are also disproportionately disadvantaged. The review noted that many older people in socially deprived areas worry about safety, security and mobility, and asserted that education is key in preventing isolation.

A fifth of children obese by 14

Researchers from the Institute of Education at University College London have found that 20% of children born in the year 2000 were obese by the age of 14. Nearly 40% of children whose mothers had no qualifications higher than GCSEs were obese or overweight, compared with 26% of children whose mothers had a degree or higher qualification. The think tank The Centre for Social Justice, chaired by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith, has called on the UK to follow the lead of Amsterdam by increasing coordination between public bodies, medical professionals, businesses, and charities.

The Times, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Sun



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