The King's Fund

Bold thinking for better health

From Dilnot to the death tax: public attitudes and social care reform

About me



Simon Bottery

Senior Fellow, Social Care

Before joining The King's Fund in 2017, Simon spent almost 10 years as Director of Policy at the older people's charity Independent Age.

He has wide experience in policy, communications and journalism, including as Director of Communications at Citizens Advice. He has also worked for the charity ActionAid, in the commercial sector for Guinness and in BBC local radio.

He chairs the advisory board of the NIHR's School for Social Care Research.



Where are we now?

DRAFT NOT FOR FURTHER CIRCULATION © The King’s Fund 2025

A PM with a focus on social care

I can again certainly attest from family experience that it's too hard for the **family carers**.



It's estimated today in England around 2 million adults have **unmet care needs.**

'There's **profiteering** in this sector as well'

Staff doing what they do on **poverty pay**.

Adults with disabilities will say that they face very **unfair care charges** just to live their life.

It needs to be recognised that people can see everything they've worked for wiped out by the **cost of care**.

And there is just no way that we can **restore the NHS** to the standards that we would all want to see without fixing this issue [social care].

What sort of service has the PM described?

"Older people"

'Free at the point of use'

Will include **personal care**, helping with things like eating, bathing and using the toilet.

'**Home care** whenever possible'

'The service **will not cover bed and board**'

The Kings Fund

Sounds familiar…?

Free personal care at home

£260 pw contribution towards costs in a care home

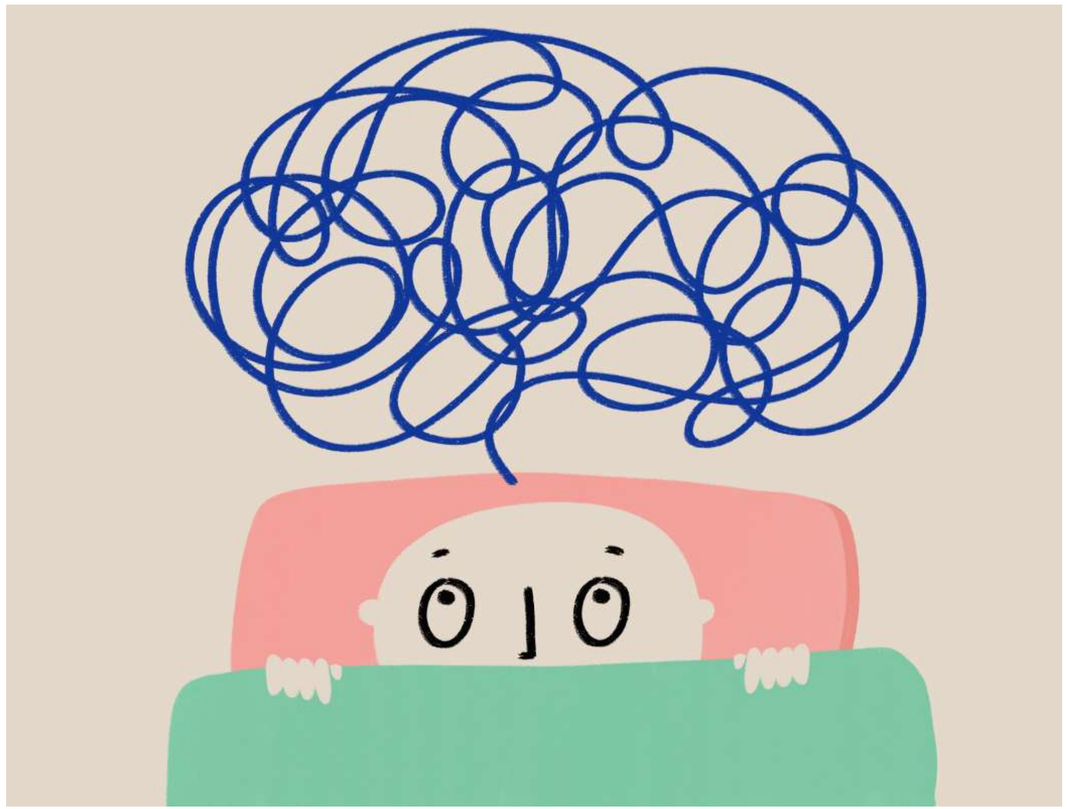


"There is free personal care elsewhere in the UK. I don't think it's right that people in England don't get the same .."

What stage are we at...?



‘Pitch rolling’



Puzzle solving

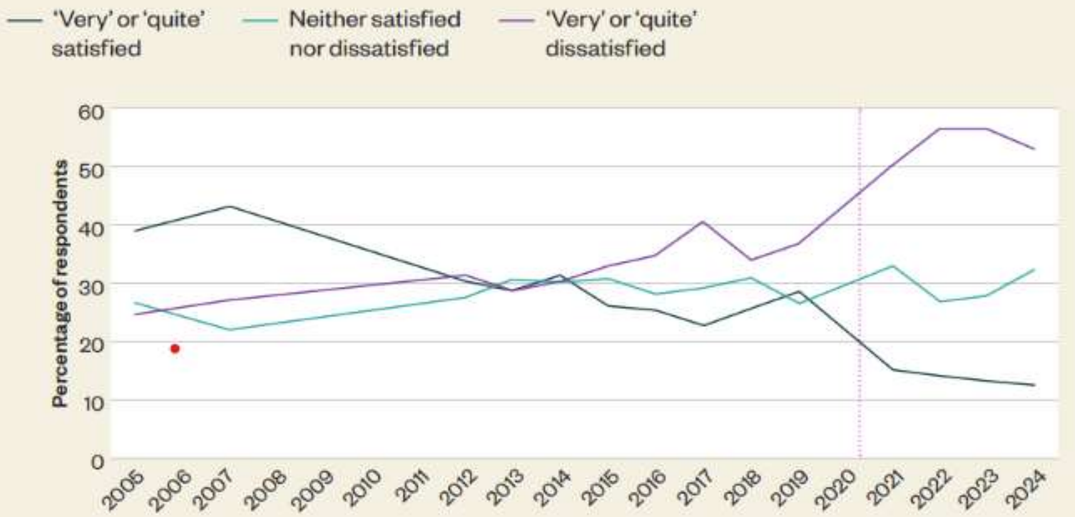
Why does the ‘pitch need rolling’?

Paradox:
People are very unhappy about social care but it is still not a priority for them

Public satisfaction with social care is at an all time low

Figure 6 Satisfaction with social care has declined over time

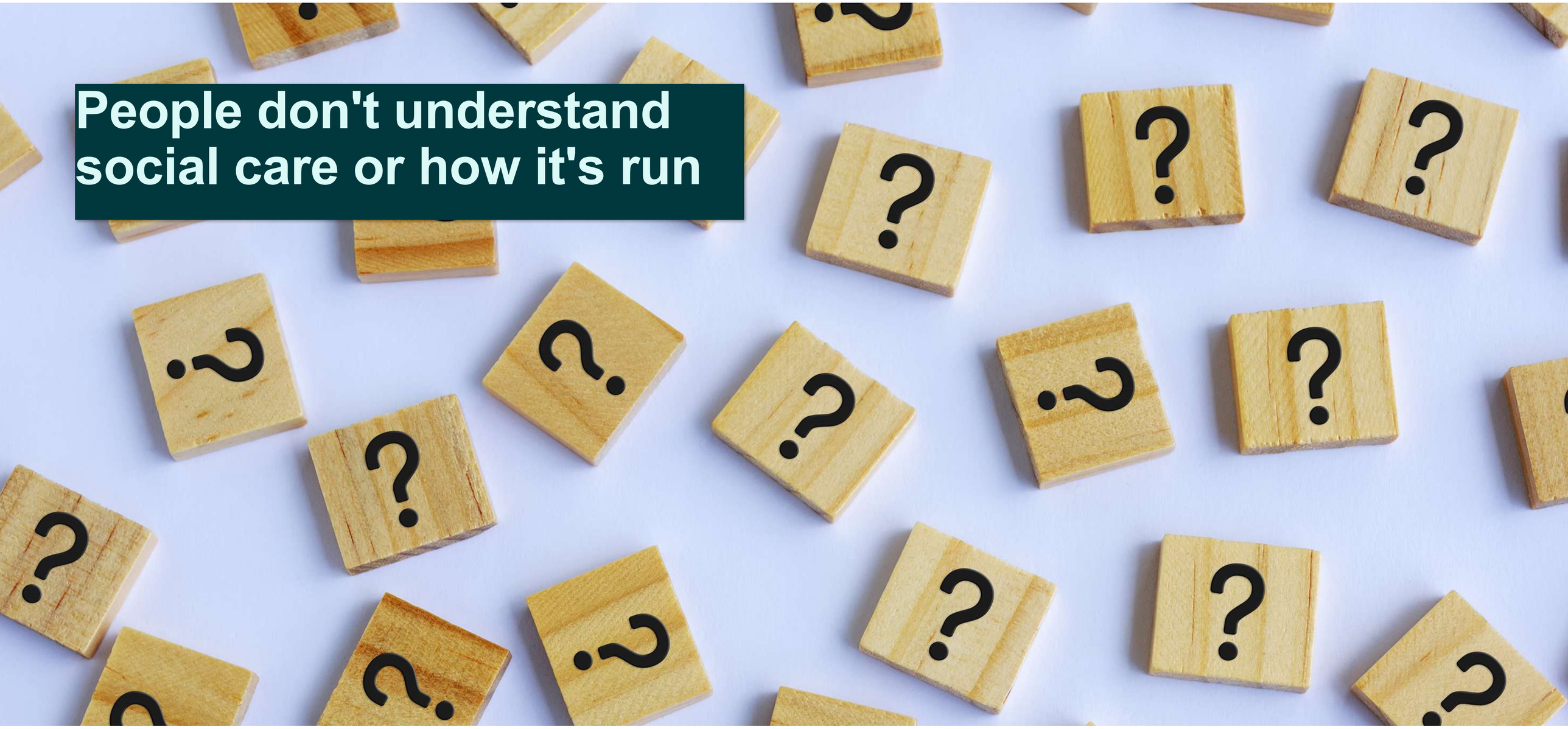
Question asked: (until 2021) 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with social care provided by local authorities for people who cannot look after themselves because of illness, disability or old age?'; (from 2021) 'From your own experience, or from what you have heard, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with social care for people who cannot look after themselves because of illness, disability or old age?'



Source: The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen's BSA survey data (Taylor *et al* 2025). 2024 sample size = 2,945. This question was not asked in 2020; 'don't know' and 'refusal' responses are not shown, in 2024 these response categories were selected by 2.0% of respondents. Data has been carefully weighted to minimise differences due to the change in methodology between 2020 and previous years.

The King's Fund

People don't understand social care or how it's run



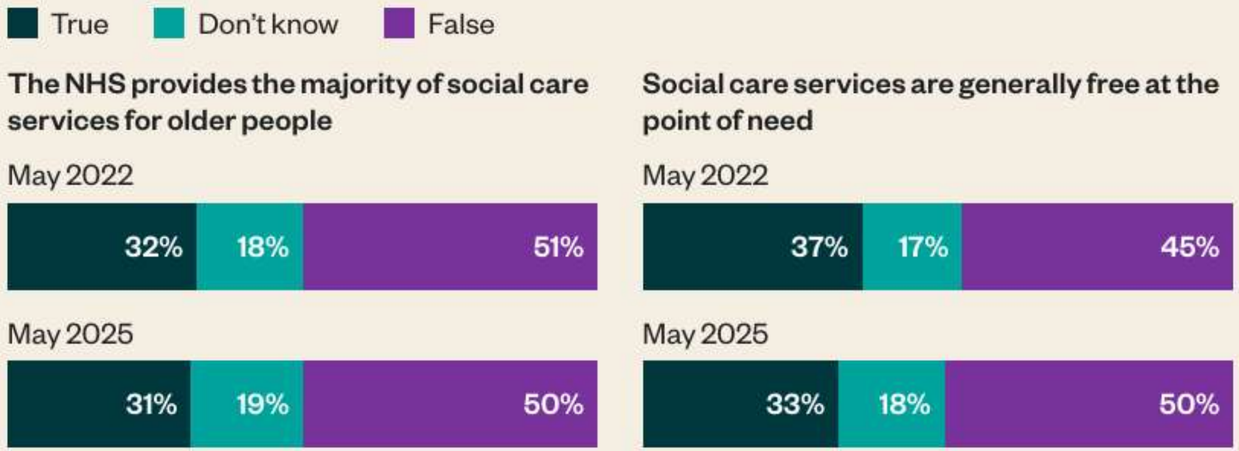
The King's Fund

DRAFT NOT FOR FURTHER CIRCULATION © The King's Fund 2025

Many people still think social care is free

Figure 1 People in England continue to have misconceptions about who provides social care and whether care services are free at the point of need

Question asked: 'Can you please select whether each of the below statements is true or false?'



Source: Ipsos for the Health Foundation (Ipsos 2025b) Conducted May 2025.
Base: 1,804 (May 2025) and 1,622 (May 2022) respondents in England.
Note: People selecting 'true' incorrectly believe that the statement is accurate.

The King's Fund

People think care is about vulnerable older people



It's only top of mind for a handful of people in every 1,000

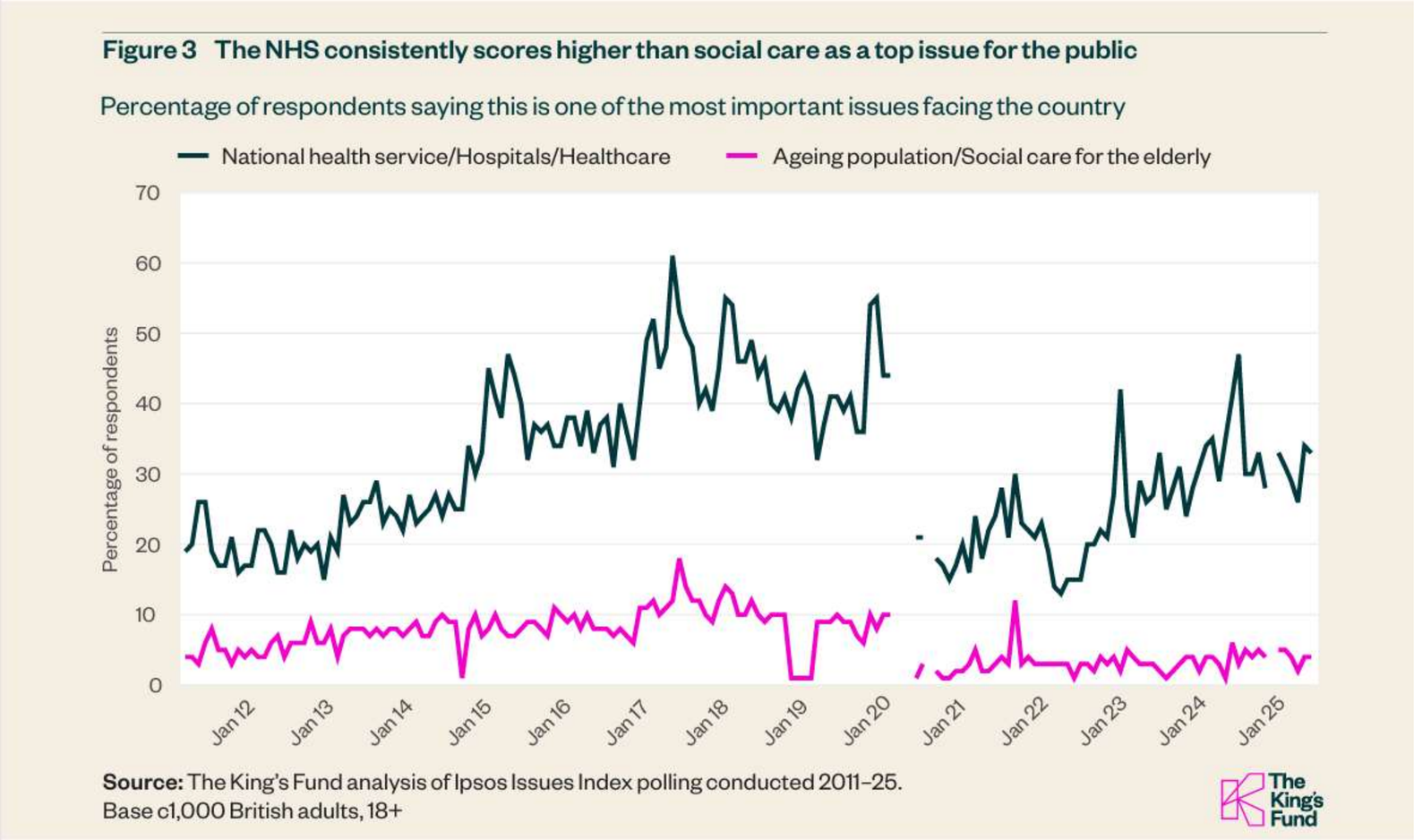


How do you ‘roll the pitch’?

- Focus on older people
- Focus on basics like care at home
- Link it to the NHS



The NHS is much more of a policy priority than social care



"Broken social care will in the end break the NHS"

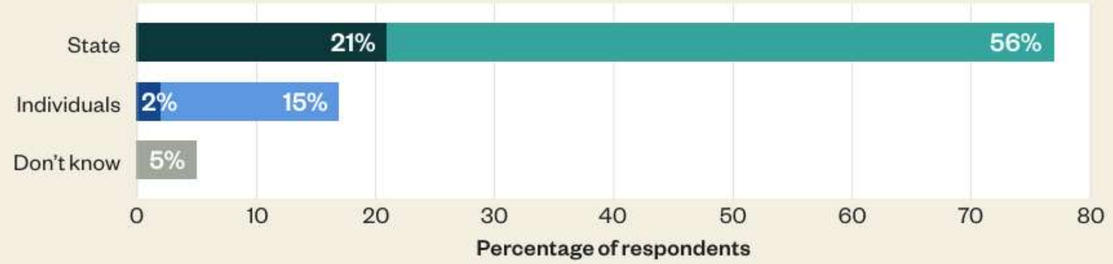
But has the ‘puzzle’ been solved?

Most people don’t expect ‘free’ care

Figure 9 The public in England prefers a more generous system of publicly funded care and support

Question asked: ‘When it comes to paying for social care services, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?’

- The state should be responsible for paying for all the care individuals need
- The state should be responsible for paying for some care for everyone who needs it regardless of what they can afford, but people who can afford it should also pay towards their care
- Individuals should be responsible for paying for all the care they need
- Individuals should be responsible for paying for all the care they need, but the state should pay for those who can’t afford it



Source: Ipsos for the Health Foundation (Ipsos 2025). Conducted May 2025.
Base: 1,804 respondents in England.

The King’s Fund

Selling homes to pay for care remains a big issue…



‘Just forget about touching people’s houses. That should be a principle. Just get rid of that rule. You work for that. It’s for the generation to come. It’s yours. You can find other ways of raising money and leave people’s houses out of it.’

How about funding?



IFS

The Kings Fund

The funding trap

People pay attention when the debate is about ‘who pays?’



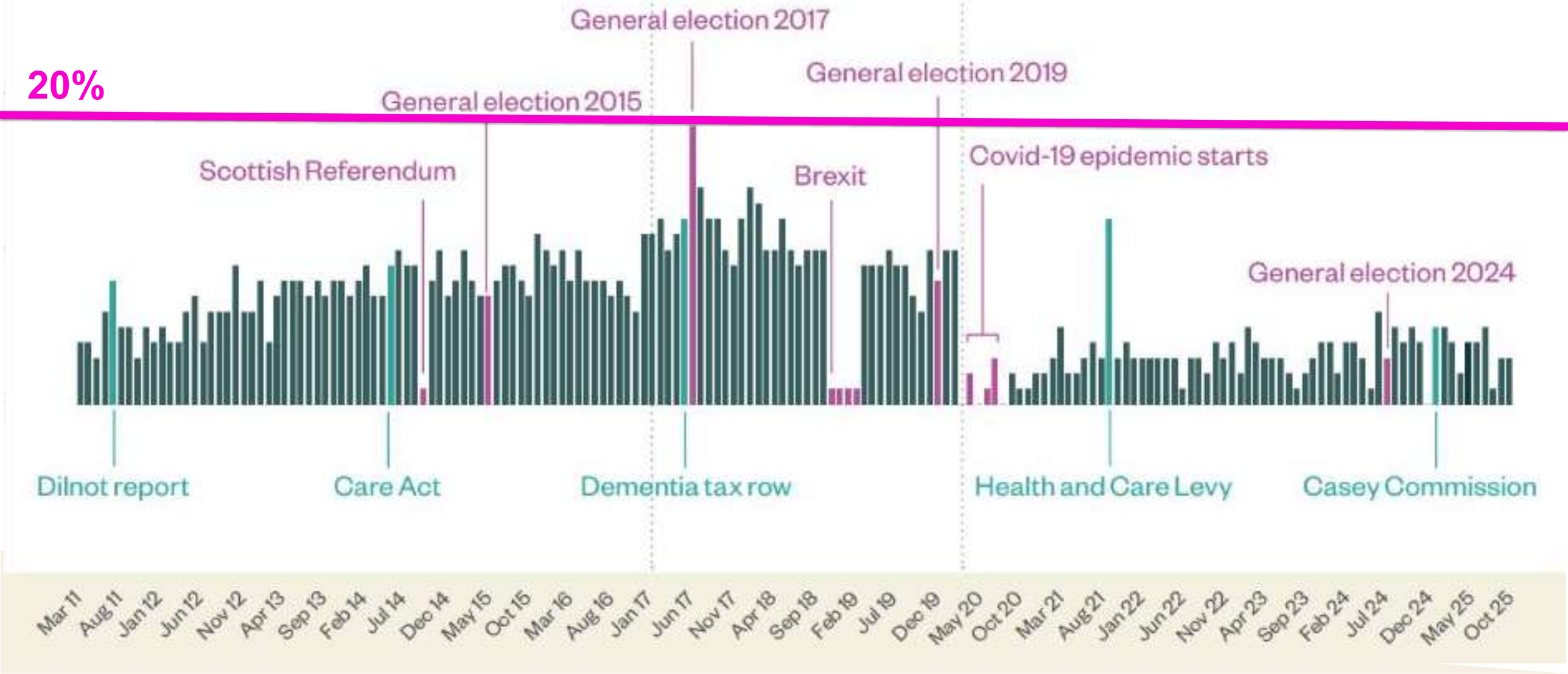
The King's Fund

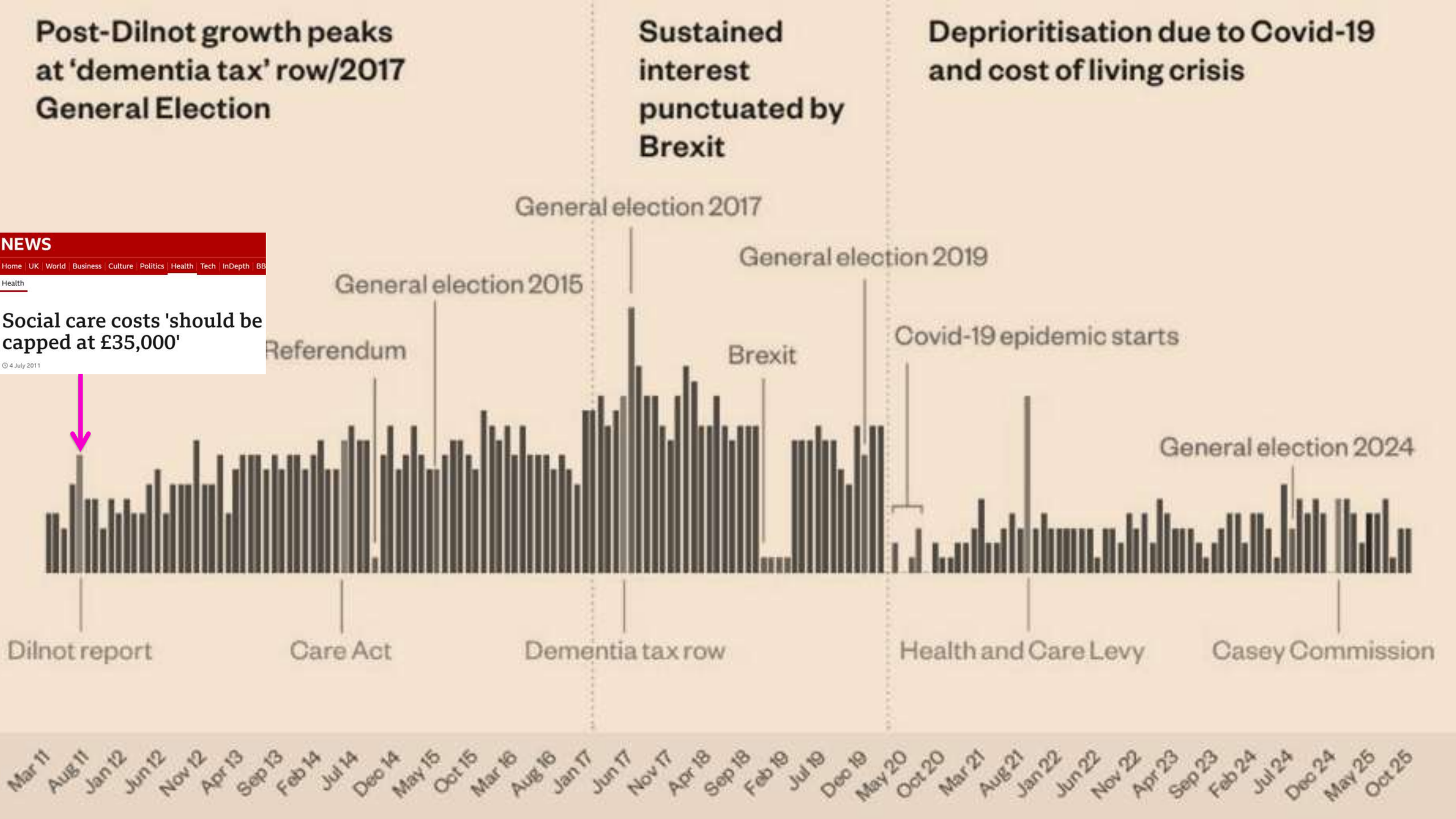
DRAFT NOT FOR FURTHER CIRCULATION © The King's Fund 2025

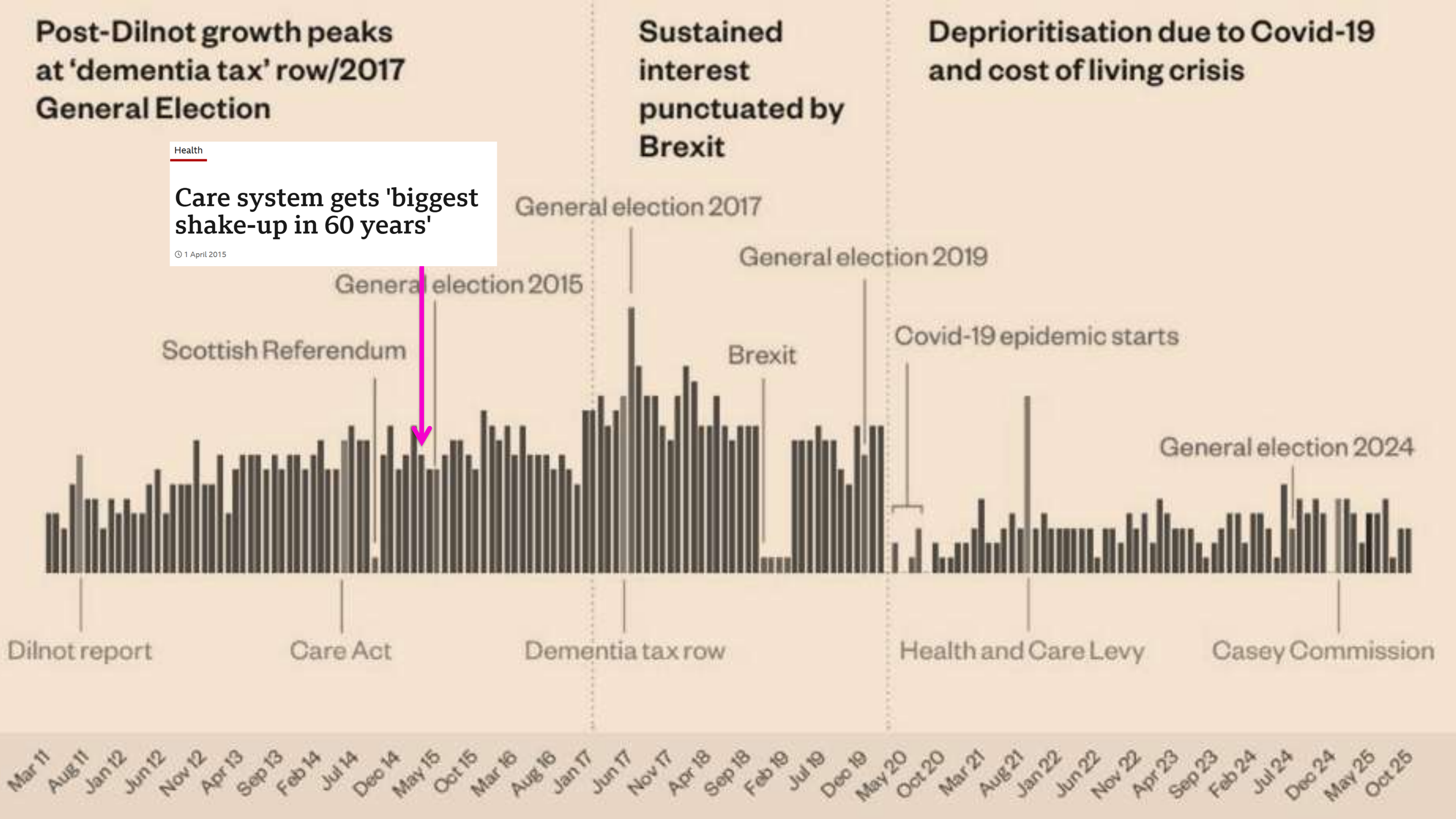
Post-Dilnot growth peaks at 'dementia tax' row/2017 General Election

Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit

Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis




Post-Dilnot growth peaks at 'dementia tax' row/2017 General Election
Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit
Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis
NEWS
Home | UK | World | Business | Culture | Politics | Health | Tech | InDepth | BB
Health
Social care costs 'should be capped at £35,000'
4 July 2011
General election 2017
General election 2015
General election 2019
Referendum
Brexit
Covid-19 epidemic starts
General election 2024
Dilnot report
Care Act
Dementia tax row
Health and Care Levy
Casey Commission
Mar 11
Aug 11
Jan 12
Jun 12
Nov 12
Apr 13
Sep 13
Feb 14
Jul 14
Dec 14
May 15
Oct 15
Mar 16
Aug 16
Jan 17
Jun 17
Nov 17
Apr 18
Sep 18
Feb 19
Jul 19
Dec 19
May 20
Oct 20
Mar 21
Aug 21
Jan 22
Jun 22
Nov 22
Apr 23
Sep 23
Feb 24
Jul 24
Dec 24
May 25
Oct 25


Post-Dilnot growth peaks at 'dementia tax' row/2017 General Election
Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit
Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis
Health
Care system gets 'biggest shake-up in 60 years'
1 April 2015
General election 2017
General election 2019
General election 2015
Scottish Referendum
Brexit
Covid-19 epidemic starts
General election 2024
Dilnot report
Care Act
Dementia tax row
Health and Care Levy
Casey Commission
Mar 11
Aug 11
Jan 12
Jun 12
Nov 12
Apr 13
Sep 13
Feb 14
Jul 14
Dec 14
May 15
Oct 15
Mar 16
Aug 16
Jan 17
Jun 17
Nov 17
Apr 18
Sep 18
Feb 19
Jul 19
Dec 19
May 20
Oct 20
Mar 21
Aug 21
Jan 22
Jun 22
Nov 22
Apr 23
Sep 23
Feb 24
Jul 24
Dec 24
May 25
Oct 25

Post-Dilnot growth peaks at ‘dementia tax’ row/2017 General Election

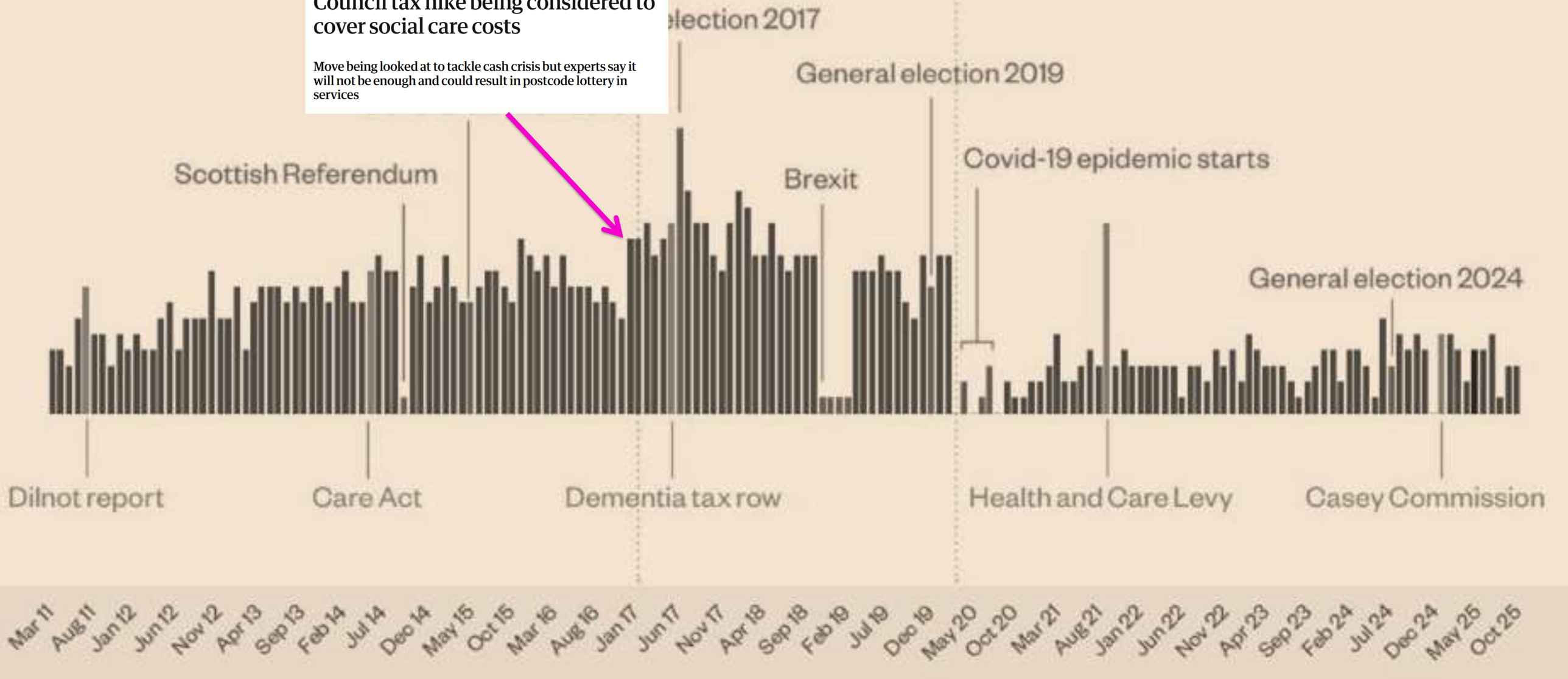
Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit

Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis

Social care

Council tax hike being considered to cover social care costs

Move being looked at to tackle cash crisis but experts say it will not be enough and could result in postcode lottery in services



Post-Dilnot growth peaks at ‘dementia tax’ row/2017 General Election

Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit

Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis

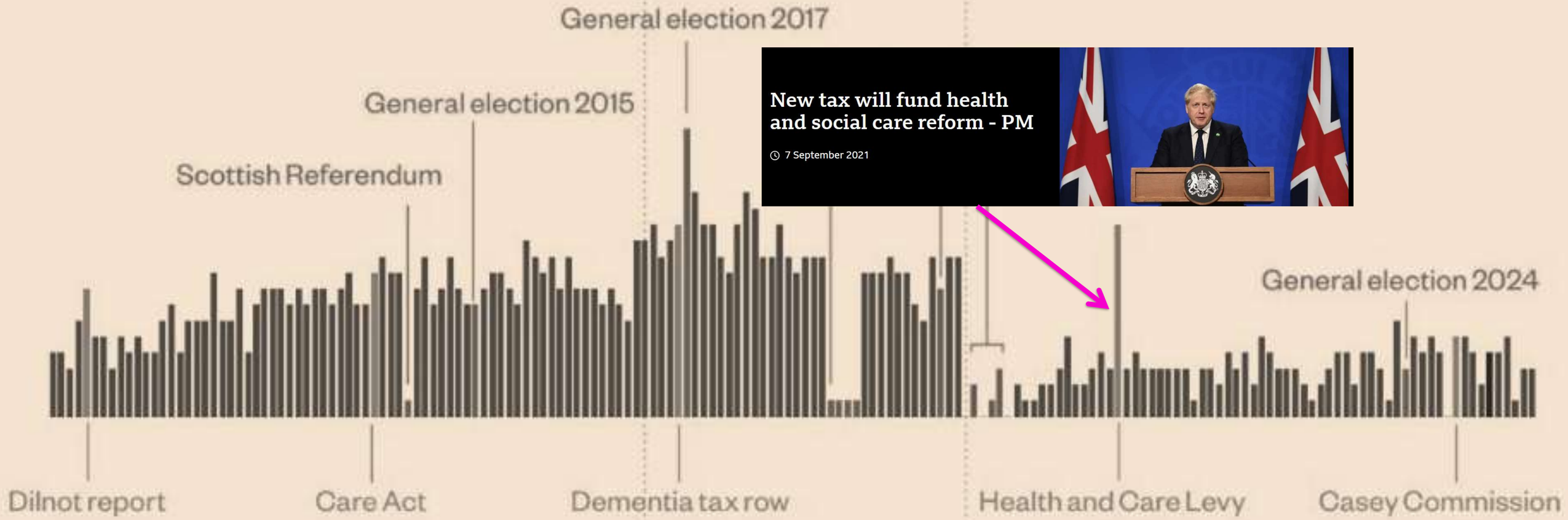


Mar 11 Aug 11 Jan 12 Jun 12 Nov 12 Apr 13 Sep 13 Feb 14 Jul 14 Dec 14 May 15 Oct 15 Mar 16 Aug 16 Jan 17 Jun 17 Nov 17 Apr 18 Sep 18 Feb 19 Jul 19 Dec 19 May 20 Oct 20 Mar 21 Aug 21 Jan 22 Jun 22 Nov 22 Apr 23 Sep 23 Feb 24 Jul 24 Dec 24 May 25 Oct 25

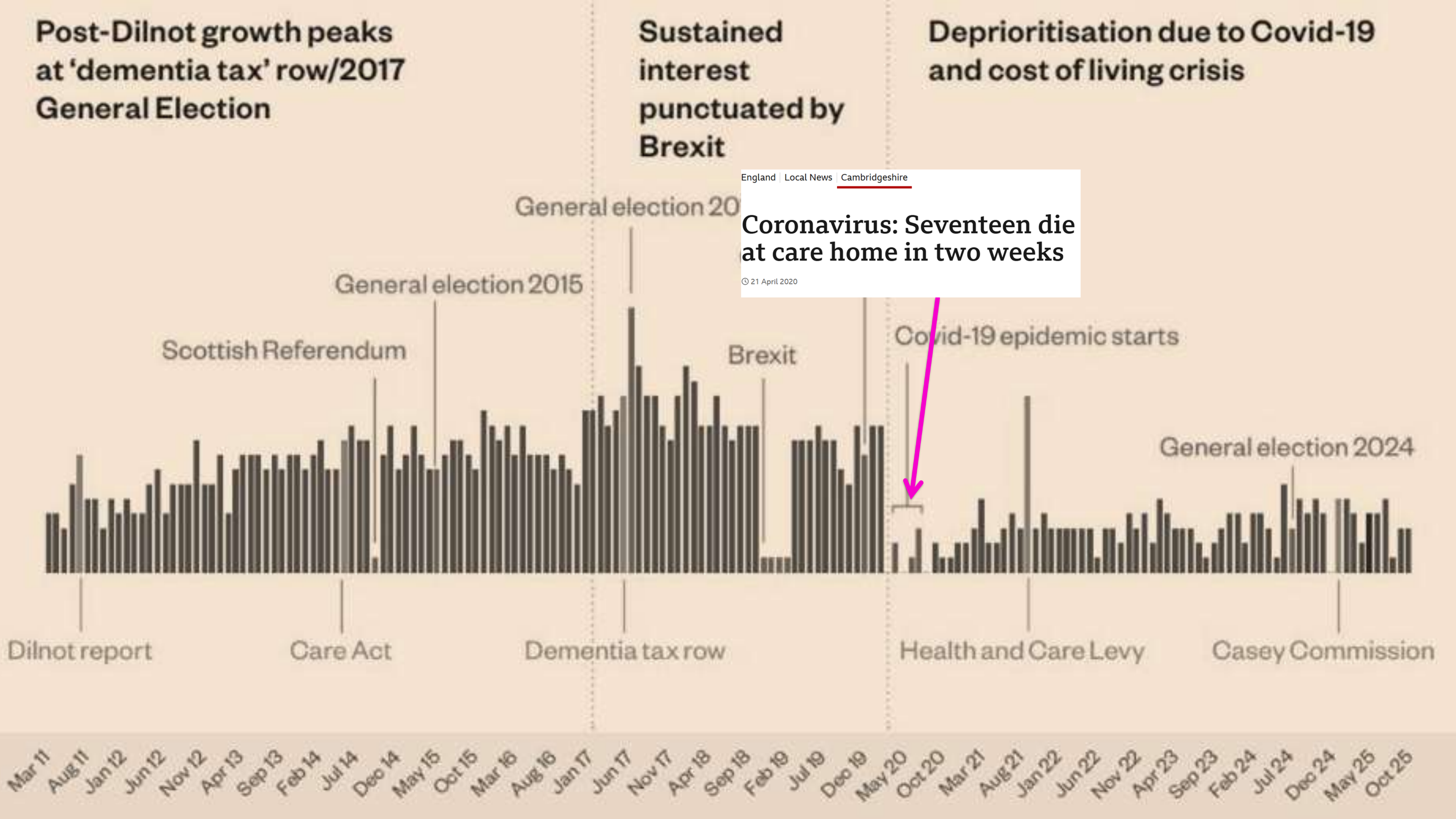
Post-Dilnot growth peaks at 'dementia tax' row/2017 General Election

Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit

Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis



Mar 11 Aug 11 Jan 12 Jun 12 Nov 12 Apr 13 Sep 13 Feb 14 Jul 14 Dec 14 May 15 Oct 15 Mar 16 Aug 16 Jan 17 Jun 17 Nov 17 Apr 18 Sep 18 Feb 19 Jul 19 Dec 19 May 20 Oct 20 Mar 21 Aug 21 Jan 22 Jun 22 Nov 22 Apr 23 Sep 23 Feb 24 Jul 24 Dec 24 May 25 Oct 25


Post-Dilnot growth peaks at 'dementia tax' row/2017 General Election
Sustained interest punctuated by Brexit
Deprioritisation due to Covid-19 and cost of living crisis
England | Local News | Cambridgeshire
Coronavirus: Seventeen die at care home in two weeks
21 April 2020
General election 20
General election 2015
Scottish Referendum
Brexit
Covid-19 epidemic starts
General election 2024
Dilnot report
Care Act
Dementia tax row
Health and Care Levy
Casey Commission
Mar 11
Aug 11
Jan 12
Jun 12
Nov 12
Apr 13
Sep 13
Feb 14
Jul 14
Dec 14
May 15
Oct 15
Mar 16
Aug 16
Jan 17
Jun 17
Nov 17
Apr 18
Sep 18
Feb 19
Jul 19
Dec 19
May 20
Oct 20
Mar 21
Aug 21
Jan 22
Jun 22
Nov 22
Apr 23
Sep 23
Feb 24
Jul 24
Dec 24
May 25
Oct 25

And here we go again…

The Sunday Telegraph

Burnham's 'death tax' threatens millions of families

Many more could be dragged into selling homes to foot Britain's ballooning social care bill

How should the sector respond?

Understand where the public is on social care

Lack of understanding is hard to tackle because it is driven by: an unclear boundary between the NHS and social care; low usage of social care; the subject matter.

The outcomes, choices, control approach of the Care Act has passed people by

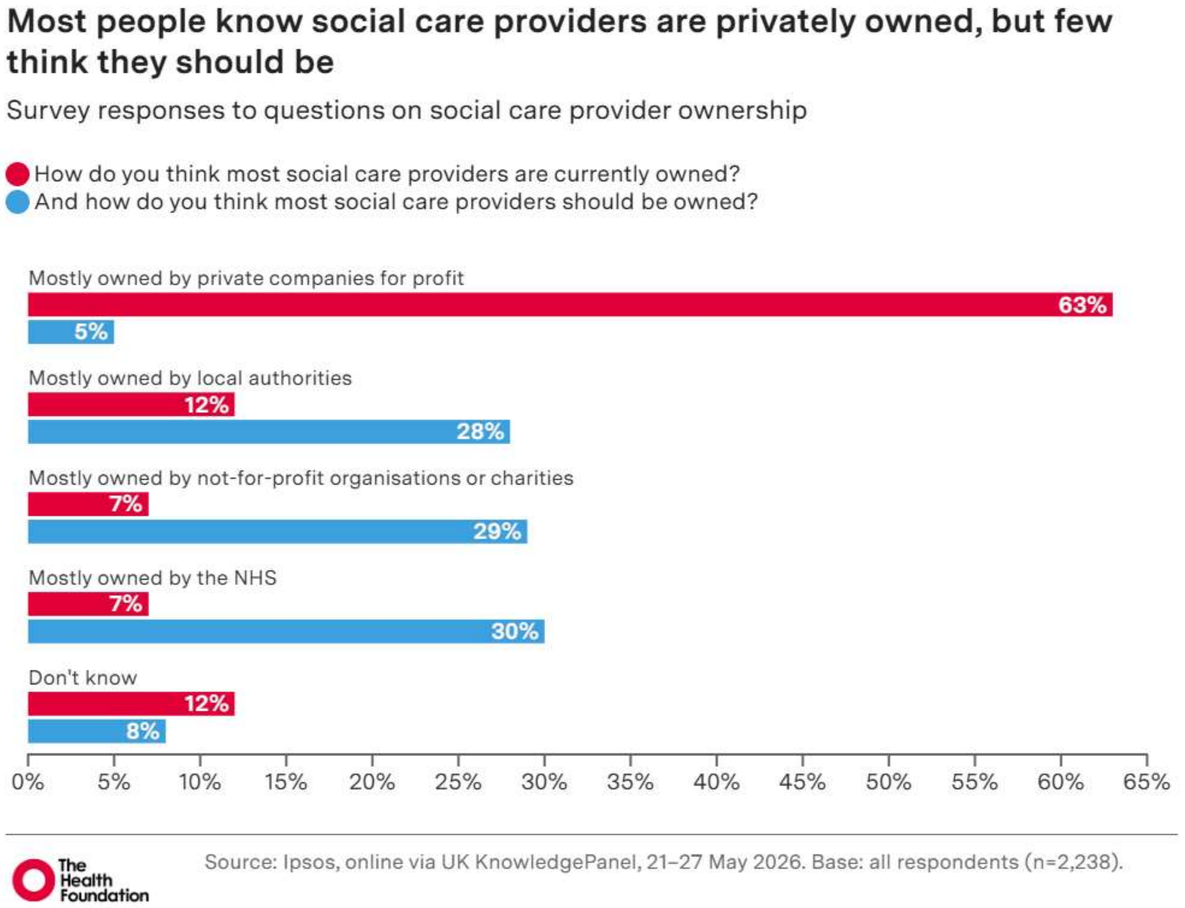
Third parties – the media, family and friends – are driving public views on satisfaction with social care

The history of social care reform may have led to people being fatalistic about change – and the sector may have contributed.

National political activity, rather than social care sector campaigning, drives public prioritisation of social care

There is public concern about **private ownership**

Listen to the warning signs



"A serious reputational signal" – The Homecare Association

Beware the easy narratives

Fury as devastating figures show full scale of social care crisis

The glue that binds: how reframing can move public mindsets about the nature, value and importance of adult social care

Recognise the chance for change



For further information please see published report at
Not My Priority: How The Public Sees Social Care (And What Can Be Done About It) | The King's Fund

Equal Access: A Fairer System Of Social Care Support For England | The King's Fund

Or contact: s.bottery@kingsfund.org.uk

kingsfund.org.uk

The King's Fund
Bold thinking for better health