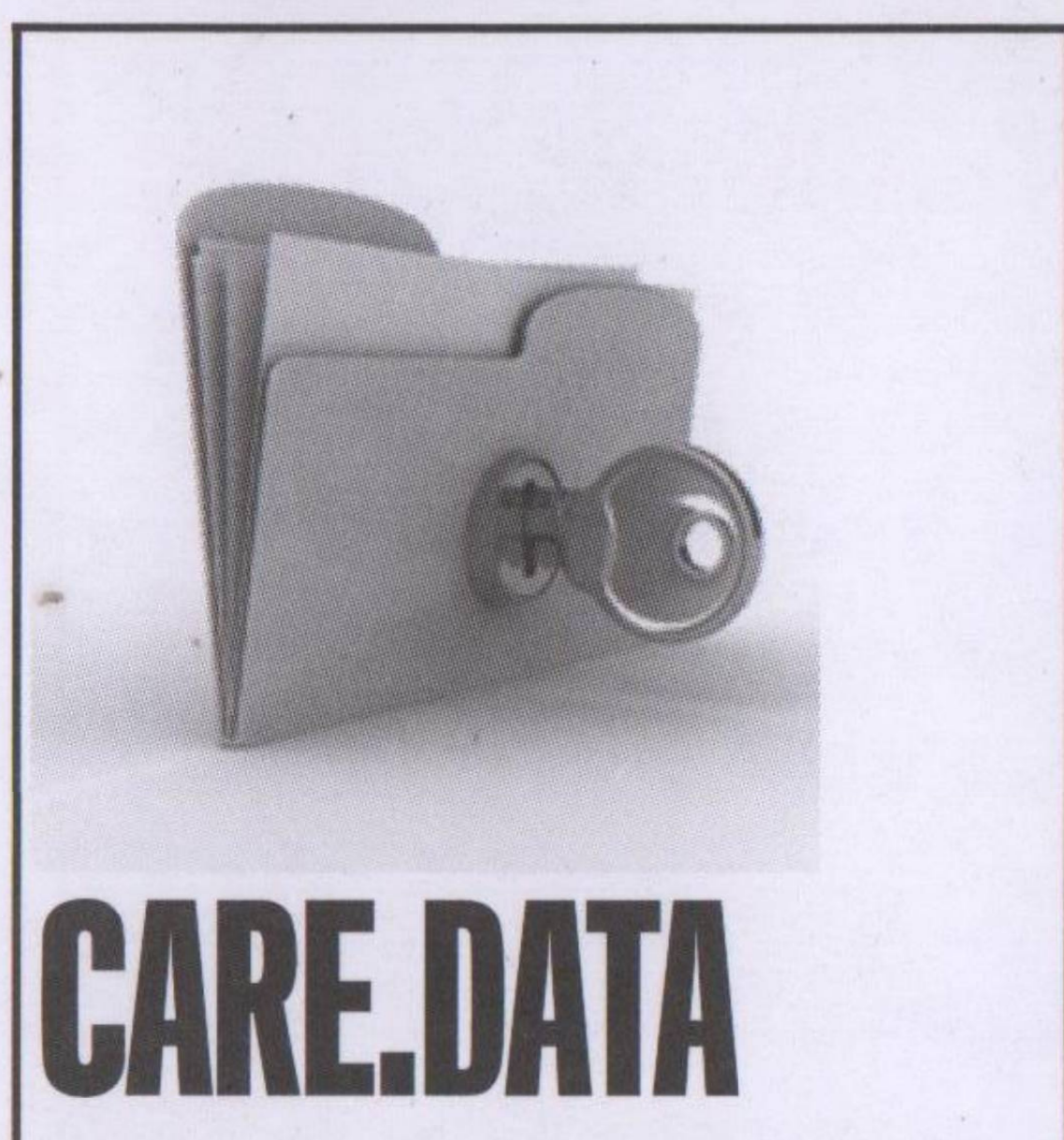


# Robin Hood Solidarity Newsletter

Community News Through Your Door

March 2014



- This newsletter is about local stories and issues.
- It's written by a group of Forest Fields residents who are tired of feeling isolated within our community and powerless over our lives.
- If you have something you want say: a story you want to write, a story that we could write with you, or a comment about this newsletter, get in touch at: [info@robinhoodsolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@robinhoodsolidarity.org.uk) or call on **07747431859**.
- We run sessions tackling debt, housing, benefits, employment, or anything else at **Forest Fields Advice Centre every Tuesday 10am-2pm**.
- Sessions can be one-to-one or group focused, depending on needs. We offer information and problem solving if we can and if not we'll point you towards a decent organisation who can.

You've probably had a leaflet from the NHS through your door in the last few weeks titled 'Better information means better care'. It's about a scheme called care.data, although its never mentioned by this name. Under this scheme a government agency, the HSCIC, will be first of all collecting all primary care data (patient records) and compiling them in a huge database, and then selling access to this database. Currently all patient records are confidential and do not leave your doctor's office, so this is a big change.

history will be there, so it is likely that someone would be able to reconstruct the stripped data by cross-referencing with other datasets, eg the census or the electoral register. There is no external oversight over who the HSCIC sells this data to.

- **"Green"** - Anonymised – This is aggregated data, which means that it would be impossible or very difficult to identify individuals. It can be sold at any time, at any price, to anyone, to be decided by HSCIC.

Government agencies have shown time and time again that when they collate data they also end up losing it. There is also a worrying lack of oversight on who the data will be sold to and where it might end up.

The changes are worrying for two main reasons. First, there is the obvious issue of privacy – it will be very possible to identify individuals from this database. Second, there is the concern over the creeping privatisation of the NHS – this information will be bought and used by private healthcare corporations to advance their business at the expense of the free nationalised health service.

This leads us to the other main issue. This scheme is part of a wider picture of piecemeal monetisation and privatisation of the NHS. Successive governments since Thatcher have been eyeing up the assets of the NHS, a truly huge and immensely valuable organisation, and coming up with ideas on how to strip assets to sell off to make short term economic gains. This data is a core asset of the NHS, coming as it does from years of work with people all over the country – its a unique resource, and selling it to the competitors of the NHS (private healthcare providers like Virgin or Serco) will allow those competitors to market themselves more effectively. Its part of a wider Tory desire to see free markets triumph despite the fact that in this

- First, the privacy issue. There will be three levels of anonymisation of the data:
- **"Red"** - Clearly personal identifiable data – This will be uploaded to the central database (unless you object) but will not be up for sale in the first version of care.data. However, it will be available to be sold at some point in the future to "approved" researchers.
  - **"Amber"** - Pseudonymized or potentially identifiable – Your name will be stripped from the data, but your DOB, postcode and entire medical

case they will be triumphing over a unique organisation which we own and which still provides free care at the point of delivery. The NHS is an institution which previous generations fought for and which we should be proud of and we should defend.

So, what can you do? You can opt out of this scheme – all you have to do is let your GP know, by writing, that you do not wish for your records to be shared, or else send them an opt-out form. Go to the link at the end of this article to download an opt-out form.

<http://medconfidential.org/how-to-opt-out/>

## FOREST REC CAFE REOPENING

Its been a long time coming, but the cafe on the Forest Rec is finally to be re-opened. The cafe will be run by Homemade, which currently has a cafe in the city centre. It will open in mid-March, in the newly refurbished pavilion. In recent years a number of local community groups have made applications to run the cafe as a social enterprise, but have not been successful. It's a shame that the cafe wont be community run, but at the same time, its better that the tender went to a local business and not to one of the big coffee chains.

# A TAX ON HOUSING

Its fortunate that Nottingham City Council is so wholeheartedly opposed to the under-occupancy penalty, A.K.A. the 'Bedroom Tax', which was introduced by Cameron's Tory government in April last year. The Bedroom Tax is a reduction in the amount of housing benefit received by social housing tenants who have a 'spare' room. This effectively means that hard-up people who have an apparently 'spare' room are having to stump up extra cash for their rent payments. It is affecting around 5,000 people in Nottingham and 35,000 in the entire East Midlands region.

The 'tax' ignores the many legitimate reasons for having a 'spare' room, such as living with a disability that requires room to store essential equipment, being a separated parent and needing a place for children to stay at weekends, having a family member in the military, or just because there are no one or two-bedroom properties available. At the same time, the tax is targeting some of the most vulnerable people in the country, i.e. those surviving on low incomes, disabled people and carers. But most ludicrous of all is that people on low incomes are expected to suddenly juggle all their finances to be able to cough up 14%-25% of their rent. This comes at the same time as Council Tax Benefit being cut, resulting in an increase in the amount required to pay towards Council Tax. All in all its not looking great for people who who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Graham Chapman, deputy leader of the Labour lead Nottingham City Council, did recently make a motion against 'cuts in welfare and local government spending', calling on the Government to reverse the bedroom tax. All well and good, but in the words of hereandnow in their comment on the Evening Post article - "Bit blinking late now!"

What's unfortunate is that NCC do not seem to have any spine when it comes to actually making a stand against the things they claim to oppose. Did they refuse to implement this unfair legislation? Did they promise to prevent any evictions of people from their homes? Did they increase their budget for Discretionary Housing Payments? In short, no. There is a petition.



Other than a lot of hot air, the only action I can see being taken is a protocol that has been created by the big social landlords (Asra, City Homes and NCHA) and the Council which will offer tenants 'every option to prevent eviction.' This essentially says that an eviction shouldn't happen if tenants are engaging with either debt advice agencies, or with landlords' tenancy sustainment teams that manage arrears. Every tenant who goes into this scheme will also receive a Discretionary Housing Payment (a pot of money allocated as an emergency hardship grant) which will have to be paid back over time.

During the last 25 years, since Thatcher's Right to Buy scheme, much of the council housing stock has been sold on to tenants. Regardless of your opinions on this the reality is that most local authorities in the UK now only have a relatively small stock of social housing. In our fair city its mostly managed by Nottingham City Homes with some owned and managed by housing associations. As this pattern has continued it has become common to prioritise social housing for the most vulnerable individuals in society, for example, people with disabilities, health problems, single parents, the elderly, etc.

Social housing should always be fought for and preserved while it still clings to existence, but when social housing is understood as being primarily for the most vulnerable people in society I find it very difficult to see any justification for an aggressive economic policy demanding additional rent contributions from social housing tenants. The Bedroom Tax represents the latest in a long string of methods by which the nation's many economic shortfalls are being passed onto local communities while also being targeted at some of the poorest and most vulnerable people. All the while big business and the rich are allowed to accumulate more and more wealth thanks to the gift from government; of economic freedoms, concessions and tax breaks, to the wealthiest individuals and their businesses.

In short it seems that Nottingham City Council are making some small efforts towards supporting individuals and families who are being affected by this unfair tax, but they are playing it very safe. And in the mean time they are implementing their own measures to grease the way for this money to be taken from the 5,500 social housing tenants being affected in Nottingham. Nottingham City Council should be putting their money where their mouth is and taking a much firmer stand against the Tory Bedroom Tax.

Our advice is simple – **appeal!** Everybody has the right to appeal any decision made by the council or jobcentre. Come along to one of our **Tuesday Sessions 10 – 2 at Forest Fields Advice Centre** if you want any support with it. For more info on how to appeal see:

<http://combatbedroomtax.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/appealing-against-bedroom-tax-decision.html>

If it comes down to bailiffs knocking on your door to evict, there's always the choice to resist. Here's some top-knotch advice on that topic: <http://haringeyhousingaction.org.uk/taking-action-together/resisting-eviction/>

**the COMBAT BEDROOMTAX**



<http://combatbedroomtax.blogspot.co.uk>

This newsletter is for Forest Fields residents. If you've got something to say give us a shout and we'll put it in the next edition.

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