

## **Susan Kramer – Liberal Democrat MP for Richmond Park and North Kingston**

### **1. What do you think are the main issues facing older people in the Borough?**

Most older people are determined to remain independent as long as possible and to lead full lives, many wish to work for as long as they are able; others are the backbone of much of the volunteer work that allows our communities to thrive. Eventually however, many pensioners will rely first on social services and the NHS and later on residential care. Many fear that a move into care will result in a loss of independence and dignity whilst their families are often concerned that the care provided will not be of a quality standard.

Many older people are also struggling on low incomes, especially when it comes to paying council tax or when cold weather strikes and heating bills soar. Many elderly people often end up living below the poverty line and are unable to maintain their homes or heat them efficiently.

### **2. How do you propose to address these issues?**

I believe that older people and their carers should be far more in control of the services they receive which is why the move to personal budgets is progressing fast locally. I am keen to see people deciding how the money for their support should be spent in so that they may shape services to suit their own needs. However, the system is new and monitoring is essential to ensure that older people are getting the service they expect.

I have visited some excellent residential care homes such as Murray House where the residents are involved at every stage of the decision making process. I want to use my position to make sure that this positive culture is offered in many more care homes locally.

As part of rebuilding the economy, the Liberal Democrats will give priority to programmes for home insulation including non-means tested schemes for older people and extending the Warm Front scheme even further. This will help older people stay warm in winter, as well as helping the environment.

### **3. Why should the Borough's older people vote for you? What are you proposing that the other parties aren't?**

As a Liberal Democrat, I believe in a fairer tax system which would include no tax on income up to £10,000. This will help many older people who rely on modest pensions - making them £700 per year better off. This would also help to reduce the dependence on means tested benefits. I know many older people have difficulty claiming the benefits to which they are entitled due to the complicated nature of the current system.

The Liberal Democrats, along with reforming the tax system, have a commitment to restoring the link between the state pension and earnings earlier than the other parties which is quite distinctive. We retain our commitment to replace the council tax system with a local income tax based on the ability to pay. But a proper state pension linked to earnings not inflation will help put pensioners in a stronger financial position.

I support my party's policies but even more than that I am personally engaged in promoting improvements in residential care homes. Furthermore, I am very concerned about the safety of older people both in their homes and whilst out in the local area. Much work has been done working with the local councils, safer neighbourhood teams and community to tackle crime, but keeping crime low is a key priority for me.

The Lib Dems are alone in committing to raising income tax thresholds, having a local income tax rather than council tax and giving priority to warm homes for all.

### **4. What do you think are the main issues facing older people nationally?**

The national issues are similar to the local issues. A disproportionate number of older people have been victims of crime and subsequently live in fear of crime. In some areas pensioners may feel too afraid to leave their homes after dark.

Many people have also expressed a desire to work past the current retirement age without facing ageist discrimination. Older people often feel that they might be the first to go should redundancies need to be made in a workplace, or that they will be overlooked when applying for new jobs.

The economic crisis has really hit older people across the country, and long term financial security remains a worry for so many people. Worries about the security of jobs and homes continue – whether for themselves, sons or daughters or grandchildren. We need tough action to prevent another economic crisis and to support those still suffering from its effects.

**5. At a national level, what is there for older people in your party's manifesto?**

I can confirm that all the commitments previously mentioned such as reforming the tax system, linking pensions to earnings and proving more insulation will all be in the manifesto. We are still committed to providing free personal care for all older people but due to the huge deficit run up by the Government have delayed its introduction.

The Liberal Democrats have clear solutions to cut crime and help everyone in the UK, especially pensioners, feel safer in their homes and communities. To do this it is essential we tackle the causes of anti-social behaviour and set up Community Justice Panels.

My party has led the way in arguing for an end to an enforced retirement age and greater flexibility allowing older people to draw part of their private or occupational pension whilst working part-time.

**6. Do you think that organisations like Age Concern Kingston should be fully resourced?**

Resources are always going to be strained but I am particularly concerned that Age Concern Kingston is resourced to help older people make the best use of their personal budget and to assist older people in accessing all their rights, services and benefits. The work of Age Concern actually saves the Government money as it allows older people to live more independently.

**7. Transport barriers and their effect on the quality of life of older people in the capital and the local area are a hot topic at the moment. What do you propose to do to tackle the problem?**

I am totally committed to ensuring that the Freedom Pass remains intact as it enables older people to live fuller lives. For so many people it has been an absolute lifeline – and for the Government to threaten its future is cruel. We still also need improvements in local transport for older people with disabilities.