

November 24th: What was said in the Debate:

Health and Social Care Bill – Committee Stage – Day 7

This week's committee (The 7th day) on the Health and Social Care bill concentrated on the Secretary of State's mandate laying down the resources for the National Commissioning board and the Clinical Care Groups; the role of Healthwatch; and the responsibilities and duties of the Commissioning bodies. Lord Warner (Lab) moved a useful amendment which would allow the Board to express reservations to Parliament about the ability of the Board to meet the objectives set if it believed the resources to be inadequate to do so.

I personally thought this would be a good way to educate all of us on the need to reconfigure services towards community care, but the Minister Earl Howe feared this would lead to micromanagement by Parliament. The amendment was taken to the vote and lost. On Healthwatch, almost everyone who spoke thought Healthwatch should be independent, not a subcommittee of the Care Quality Commission. The strength of opinion may persuade the Department to reconsider its position on this matter. Lord Hunt for Labour later moved a similar amendment giving Parliament the right to make recommendations on the mandate; again Earl Howe objected on the grounds of dangers of micromanagement, clearly something deplored by Ministers. I supported a subsequent amendment by Lord Warner to establish an independent panel to lay down standards for accounting and for evaluating service delivery. The Minister said that the Board would assess the performance of Clinical Care Groups and also set out accounting standards.

The committee went on to discuss the tariffs set by Monitor and the importance of the integration of health care. Issues on Clinical Care Groups and on what happens in the event of failure will be scrutinised next week. The committee is moving slowly because of the sheer weight of amendments, now over three hundred. The key votes will be taken at Report Stage, after the Christmas and New Year break.