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Community Integrated Care firmly believes in the importance of impartiality and non-partisanship in its work. By adhering to these principles, Community Integrated Care advocates for positive change within the social care sector without allegiance to a specific political ideology or affiliation to a particular party. Throughout the production of this report, Community Integrated Care has remained faithful to these values.

1. WELCOME

TERESA EXELBY, CHIEF CORPORATE SERVICES & PEOPLE OFFICER AT COMMUNITY INTEGRATED CARE



Community
Integrated
Care

HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE FOURTH EDITION OF UNFAIR TO CARE.

Since we published our last report a year ago, the **political landscape has shifted significantly**. We now have a new government, alongside a **growing recognition that social care — like the NHS — requires a long-term strategy**. Several key reviews and reports are currently underway to shape this plan and, significantly, there is now a commitment

to moving towards a more equitable framework for care worker pay through the Fair Pay Agreement.

Like many others in the sector, **Community Integrated Care is committed to being an active and constructive partner** in this work. Our focus in recent months has been on contributing to these national discussions, **sharing our expertise with government and engaging with policymakers, to advocate for realistic change**. Our colleagues and the people we support have been meeting with parliamentarians, policy leaders, and partners, to **express loudly and proudly the vital role that social care plays in society and the urgent need for improved funding and fair pay**.

In doing so, we aim not only to help government understand the real challenges facing our sector, but importantly, to highlight the **opportunities that exist to create transformational outcomes** – not just for those who deliver and draw on care, but for wider society too.

FOUR YEARS ON: THE PAY GAP CONTINUES

Now four years after our first report, the 2024/2025 data paints a concerning picture: **the pay gap between a social care support worker in England and their NHS Band 3 counterpart remains unacceptably wide – standing at 30.3%, or £7,120 per year**.

This is not just a statistic; it is a **stark reflection of the persistent undervaluing of one of society's most vital workforces**. Despite the clear and undeniable evidence that social care roles require significant **skill, accountability, and emotional resilience**, pay levels do not reflect the **complexity or demands of the job**.

The consequences of this inequality are clear. The sector continues to face a **high turnover rate for direct care (all roles) – 26.5%, equivalent to 285,000 leavers a year, combined with vacancy rates of 9.4%, or 112,000 roles** – all of which creates a workforce crisis that is unfair and unsustainable. This instability impacts the lives of people who access care and work in the sector, the viability of care providers, the capacity of the NHS, and the wider economy. **If we are serious about creating a care system that provides people with dignity and security, we must start by valuing the workforce that delivers it.**

INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL CARE: AN ECONOMIC NECESSITY

Crucially, but all too often overlooked, is the fact that **social care plays a vital role in supporting the Government's two major priorities: economic growth and restoring the NHS**. As we move towards a preventative healthcare model – one that is embedded in communities rather than reliant on hospital-based interventions – social care will be central to its success.

Investing in better pay for care workers is not just about fairness, it is an economic necessity.

A well-paid, motivated workforce would help tackle recruitment and retention challenges while delivering what we call the **'Social Care Triple Win'**:

- 1. Better lives** for people who deliver and access care.
- 2. A cost-effective and sustainable social care and health system.**
- 3. Stronger economic growth** through reduced welfare spending, greater employment opportunities, and increased investment in lower-income areas.

A successful fair pay framework will be key to achieving this, but the sector cannot wait until 2027, at the earliest, for it to be implemented. To achieve the Social Care Triple Win and address the immediate workforce challenges we face, **an interim uplift in hourly pay for social care workers is urgently needed**.

THE COST OF ACTION – AND INACTION

Some may say that increasing care worker pay is unaffordable, yet **this report aims to demonstrate how it is possible and the potential returns it brings**.

Our estimates show that every **50p increase** in hourly pay for **1.29 million frontline social care and support workers** would cost the Government **no more than £723 million**; this is just **2.3% of the £32 billion** currently spent on publicly-funded **adult social care in England** and only **2.8% of the £25.7 billion additional funding given to the NHS in the Autumn 2024 Budget**.

In fact, the **true costs may be far lower, as investment in care pay generates wider benefits**. Increased pay could unlock NHS capacity by enabling faster, more cost-effective hospital discharges, improve workforce stability by reducing costly staff turnover and recruitment expenses, and allow care providers to become more sustainable and make investments in areas such as training, technology, and innovation.

At Community Integrated Care, we have seen this in action. By increasing pay and focusing on key areas such as **colleague experience, learning and development, and career pathways**, we have achieved retention rates of **80% for direct care (care workers only), compared to a sector average of 70.1%**. This stability has allowed us to reinvest in our services, expand our impact, and take steps towards becoming the kind of care provider that society needs.

However, pay is not the only factor affecting the sector's long-term sustainability. We have called for the development of a **national social care workforce plan**, and to that end, we welcome the progress made by **Skills for Care** to create a comprehensive **Workforce Strategy for England**.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL TIME FOR SOCIAL CARE?

This is a pivotal moment for our sector. We are seeing increasing acknowledgment of the need to take action. **The challenges are significant, but we believe the opportunities are greater**. By working closely with people who access and work in care, families and loved ones, as well as sector leaders and experts, we can shape **an exciting new future for social care – one where care work is a sustainable and rewarding vocation, where people live their best lives, and the sector is a powerful driver of economic productivity and growth**.

This year's Unfair To Care builds on the **foundations of our previous detailed reports**, to provide a **focused update on the core data**. For as long as it is relevant and useful, we will continue to outline the pay gap that exists and would encourage you to explore **past editions** of our report to understand the **important human stories that sit behind these numbers**.

As always, we hope Unfair To Care provides valuable insight for government, policymakers, care organisations, sector partners, and all those who share **our ambition for a stronger, fairer, and more sustainable social care system**.

Teresa .

VIC RAYNER, CEO, NATIONAL CARE FORUM



Reflecting back to this time last year, and the launch of the 2024 Unfair To Care report, it felt like there was an air of cautious optimism that a potential change of government might expedite the improvement of pay and terms and conditions for the 1.59 million dedicated colleagues, across our social care workforce. Sadly, this year's report – to which we contributed pay benchmarking figures

from across the not-for-profit sector – reveals that we are far from closing the gap between social care support workers and their equivalents in the NHS.

Social care workers are earning 30.3% less than their Band 3 NHS counterparts – and this calculation does not include other enhanced terms received by NHS workers in comparison to social care workers. Meanwhile, measures affecting employer National Insurance Contributions in last year's Autumn Budget have put providers under further financial pressures, which ultimately threaten care worker jobs. On top of this, if increases to the National Living Wage, which are welcomed by employers, remain unfunded, these pressures will continue to heighten, along with the recruitment and retention challenges that care providers have long grappled with.

Combined voices in the sector, both from NCF and our members, have drawn the new government's attention to the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that the parliamentary majority, achieved in the 2024 General Election, represents. If the Government begins to see the funding of social care as an investment rather than a cost, huge potential for economic growth could be unlocked. Properly funding a sustainable social care infrastructure will also support the ambitions set out in the Government's three 'big shifts' – moving from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

A fully-funded Fair Pay Agreement for care workers, that addresses the thrust of this report, may be a long way off. However, if we are to retain these dedicated, skilled professionals who provide vital, life-changing care and support to so many people, action is needed now to improve pay.

We support the call for an immediate interim uplift to care worker pay, as detailed in this report. Additionally, we urge the Government to adopt the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy which will enable the creation of long-term robust plans to support future workforce requirements, while developing career pathways and qualifications for this dedicated and capable workforce.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

 **KORN FERRY** – the world’s leading experts in job evaluation.



A 360° VIEW OF THE ROLE OF A FRONTLINE SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT WORKER



SKILLED, ACCOUNTABLE, AND COMPLEX WITH RARE VOCATIONAL QUALITIES EQUIVALENT TO A BAND 3 NHS WORKER.

ROLE SIZE

- AMBULANCE PARAMEDIC
- POLICE CONSTABLE
- HIGHER LEVEL TEACHING ASSISTANT
- SUPPORT WORKER – SUPPORTED LIVING/CARE HOME
- HEALTHCARE ASSISTANT HIGHER (NHS BAND 3)
- POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER
- NURSERY PRACTITIONER
- CLEANSING OPERATIVE
- CHECKOUT WORKER
- SCHOOL CROSSING ASSISTANT



PAY GAP WITH NHS EQUIVALENTS

30%
> UP TO 47%

when factoring in 'Total Package' benefits.

£7,120

difference in take-home pay each year.



> 'DIRECT CARE' FILLED POSTS

9.4% = **112,000**
vacancy rate vacant posts

26.5% = **285,000**
annual turnover leavers

HIGH VACANCY RATES



HIGH TURNOVER

= POOR PRODUCTIVITY, GROSS INEFFICIENCY AND POOR VALUE FOR MONEY



THE CARING ECONOMY

> 1.59 MILLION PEOPLE

The social care sector is large and growing – employing in total **1.59m people** and contributing an estimated **£68.1 billion** in gross value added to the economy in England in 2024.

> £723 MILLION

The estimated net cost to the Government of every **50p** increase in the hourly pay of **1.29 million** direct care and support workers



ONLY 2.3% OF THE £32 BILLION SPENT ON PUBLICLY-FUNDED ADULT SOCIAL CARE IN ENGLAND.



OUR CALL TO GOVERNMENT:

INVESTMENT IN AN INTERIM UPLIFT IN CARE WORKER PAY.

FUNDING FAIR PAY IS NOT A COST BUT AN INVESTMENT THAT WILL DELIVER THE 'SOCIAL CARE TRIPLE WIN' OF:



Better lives for people who deliver and draw on social care



Cost-effective and sustainable care and health services



Economic growth and productivity

3.

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE FOURTH EDITION OF COMMUNITY INTEGRATED CARE'S UNFAIR TO CARE REPORT SERIES¹.

Unfair To Care uniquely compares the pay of social care support workers to their equivalents working in **Band 3 of the NHS Agenda For Change framework in 2024/25**. In doing so, it shines an important light on the challenges facing the 1.59 million adult social care workforce in England², alongside their 138,500 counterparts in Scotland³, and the opportunities to address them for the benefit of society, the economy, and the NHS.

It shows that to **achieve take-home pay parity with their NHS counterparts, adult social care support workers in England would need a 30.3% – or £7,120 – pay rise**. This figure does not reflect a host of other enhanced terms received by NHS workers compared to their social care peers.

This gap drives **intense workforce challenges** that are impossible for care providers to directly address. This pressure has been further compounded by **unfunded increases to employer National Insurance Contributions and the National Living Wage (totalling around £2.8 billion⁴)** announced in the Autumn 2024 Budget, creating severe pressure on already overstretched budgets.

Difficult choices are now having to be made by providers to **reduce the quality of services, hand back care contracts to local government commissioners, or leave the care market entirely**. These consequences directly affect the lives of people who draw upon and deliver social care and fatally undermine one of the new government's 'big shifts' for the NHS – 'from hospital to community'.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE SECTOR IS ENTERING A PERIOD OF MAJOR SYSTEM-WIDE CHANGE THAT PROVIDES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING SOCIAL CARE, INCLUDING:

- A new **NHS Ten Year Plan**, promised by officials to be announced in summer 2025 – which will be heavily reliant on better social care services, if it is to be implemented successfully.
- A new **Fair Pay Agreement** for care workers that may be implemented by 2027.
- A **major reform of the care assessment framework** by the Care Quality Commission.
- A **Comprehensive Spending Review** settlement in summer 2025 which will determine local government and social care funding for the remainder of Parliament.
- A significant and fundamental **two-part review of the social care system** and how it is funded by **Baroness Casey**, due to report in 2026 (phase 1) and in 2028 (phase 2).

1. www.unfairtocare.co.uk
 2. 'The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England', Skills for Care, October 2024
 3. 'Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2023 Workforce Data', Scottish Social Services Council, August 2024
 4. 'Social care providers at risk of collapse as analysis reveals cost to sector of employer national insurance hike', Nuffield Trust press release, November 2024

In this report we argue that **social care is not just a cost, but an investment**, playing a vital role in **driving economic growth and restoring the NHS – the Government's two key priorities**.

The 'caring economy' works two ways – a strong economy provides the funding for the delivery of care and support; and social care makes a huge contribution to overall economic growth and the productivity of the NHS. It is a symbiotic relationship.

AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE 2024 EDITION OF UNFAIR TO CARE – 'WHO CARES WINS' – INVESTING IN BETTER PAY FOR SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT WORKERS GENERATES A 'SOCIAL CARE TRIPLE WIN' FOR THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH:



IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE WHO DELIVER AND DRAW ON SOCIAL CARE



IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY AND ACHIEVING KEY TARGETS IN BOTH SOCIAL CARE AND THE NHS



DELIVERING ALL-IMPORTANT ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR THE COUNTRY

WE ESTIMATE THAT THE ANNUAL NET COST TO THE GOVERNMENT OF EVERY 50P INCREASE IN THE HOURLY PAY OF 1.29M SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT WORKERS⁵ IS NO MORE THAN £723 MILLION. THIS REPRESENTS JUST 2.3% OF THE £32.0 BILLION BEING SPENT ON PUBLICLY-FUNDED ADULT SOCIAL CARE IN ENGLAND⁶ AND ONLY 2.8% OF THE ADDITIONAL £25.7 BILLION AWARDED TO THE NHS IN THE AUTUMN 2024 BUDGET.

We believe that **government investment in an interim pay uplift for social care support workers before the implementation of a Fair Pay Agreement** – alongside the creation of a Care Workforce Strategy – is not only affordable and fair, but makes economic sense and would actively support a more productive NHS.

At a time when social care faces serious financial challenges, these actions would provide the basis for **renewed hope and optimism for all those who deliver and draw upon social care, now and into the future**.

5. The number of 'direct care' filled posts as referenced in 'The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England', Skills for Care, October 2024
 6. 'Social care 360: expenditure', The King's Fund, March 2025

SOCIAL CARE IS AN ECONOMICALLY POSITIVE INVESTMENT THAT PAYS OFF IN MANY AREAS – INCLUDING REDUCING DEMANDS ON PUBLIC SERVICES, INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY, AND CREATING SIGNIFICANT DIRECT, INDUCED AND INDIRECT VALUE.

4.

THE RESEARCH

AS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS' REPORTS, UNFAIR TO CARE OFFERS A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMPARATIVE ROLES OF SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT WORKERS AND NHS BAND 3 WORKERS, DRAWING UPON THE RESPECTED **KORN FERRY ASSESSMENT**.

It also utilises the **National Care Forum's national pay benchmarking exercise for the not-for-profit sector from October 2024**, which demonstrates that the **average rate of pay for social care workers in England (outside of London) in 2024 was £12.00 per hour**.

KORN FERRY'S ANALYSIS

The Korn Ferry Hay Guide Chart – Profile Method is the most widely recognised and utilised tool for role analysis worldwide. Trusted by thousands of organisations across various industries, it serves as a foundation for developing effective job frameworks.

This methodology provides clarity, objectivity, and consistency in defining roles and responsibilities. Its thorough and nuanced approach ensures a robust evaluation of a frontline care and support worker's true value – **shifting the conversation about fair pay from one of moral subjectivity to objective fact.**



THE THEMES OF KORN FERRY'S ANALYSIS

- › Practical/Technical Knowledge
- › Planning, Organising and Integrating Knowledge
- › Communicating and Influencing Skills



- › Thinking Environment
- › Thinking Challenge



- › Freedom to Act
- › Impact
- › Magnitude



TOTAL JOB SIZE

SKILLED, ACCOUNTABLE AND COMPLEX

The in-depth assessment by Korn Ferry of the **physical, environmental, and emotional demands** of a frontline adult social care and support worker position – the ‘Support Worker’ role – shows that the role complexity and size is at least equivalent to that of a NHS Band 3 member of staff.

ROLE SIZE

AMBULANCE PARAMEDIC

POLICE CONSTABLE

HIGHER LEVEL TEACHING ASSISTANT

SUPPORT WORKER – SUPPORTED LIVING/CARE HOME

HEALTHCARE ASSISTANT HIGHER (NHS BAND 3)

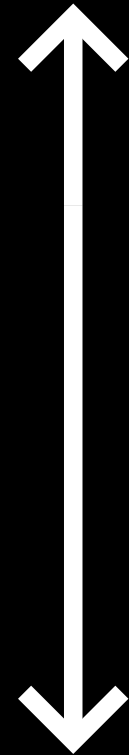
POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER

NURSERY PRACTITIONER

CLEANSING OPERATIVE

CHECKOUT WORKER

SCHOOL CROSSING ASSISTANT



Korn Ferry’s deep dive into the working routines and practices of Support Workers demonstrably proves that the stereotype of ‘low-skilled work’ is wrong and unjust. It shows that social care work requires:

- **Specialist skills** – including understanding the specific needs, behaviours, and emotions of the people they support.
- **Rare characteristics** – including innate empathy and patience.
- **Accountability** – colleagues work in a highly consequential environment, which is heavily regulated, and take on significant personal responsibility.
- **Physical effort** – including working long shifts, delivering physically demanding tasks – such as providing personal care and facing disrupted sleep when working ‘sleep-ins’.
- **Adapting to environmental challenges** – such as exposure to unpleasant conditions, e.g. contact with bodily fluids, noise, and shouting.
- **Facing emotional demands** – including exposure to physical aggression or supporting end-of-life care.



**KORN FERRY’S ANALYSIS
BENCHMARKS THE
SUPPORT WORKER ROLE
AS EQUIVALENT TO AN
NHS BAND 3 WORKER IN
THE NHS AGENDA FOR
CHANGE FRAMEWORK.**



THE 2024–25 GAP

(All figures relate to a 37.5-hour working week.)

SOCIAL CARE

➤ Average Support Worker pay†

£23,464

NHS

➤ Average Band 3 NHS base salary mid-point ‡

£24,873

6%
£1,409
GAP

➤ Average Support Worker pay†

£23,464

➤ Mean 'Total Pay' of NHS Band 3 roles**

£30,584

Includes allowances and additional hours premiums

30.3%
£7,120
GAP

➤ Average Support Worker pay with pension†

£24,168

Inclusive of industry standard 3% pension contribution

➤ Mean 'Total Package' of NHS Band 3 roles***

£35,472

Inclusive of pension and other benefits

46.8%
£11,304
GAP



30.3%

or £7,120 is the total pay rise needed by social care support workers in England to achieve take-home pay parity with their NHS counterparts****

5. THE RESULTS – 2024/25

The National Care Forum 2024 pay survey, combined with the Korn Ferry analysis, once again enables us to demonstrate the **stark gap between social care support workers and their equivalents in the NHS.**

The gap has narrowed slightly since last year's results – largely as a result of welcome increases to the National Living Wage – but there continues to be a pronounced and unfair difference in the pay of people carrying out equivalently sized jobs in social care and the NHS.

† Figures used are average rates of pay for social care support worker roles in England (outside London) and are based upon the National Care Forum's national pay benchmarking exercise of the not-for-profit sector, October 2024

‡ NHS Agenda for Change Pay Scale for 2024/25 – Band 3 roles

** Mean Total Pay: Assumed 5.5% increase in line with pay award from 2023/24 figures

*** Mean Total Package: Maintained the differential between 'basic pay' and 'Total Package' from 2023/24

**** This figure is based on a comparison between the Average Support Worker Pay and the NHS Mean 'Total Pay' and therefore underestimates the extent of the pay gap in real terms by not factoring in entitlements such as pension and sick pay etc i.e. 'Total Package'

WHEN SIMPLY REVIEWING THE GAP BETWEEN THE BASIC HOURLY WAGE OF AN NHS WORKER AT THE MIDPOINT OF THE NHS BAND 3 GRADE, THERE IS A **6% GAP IN BASIC PAY**⁷.

2024/25	Care and support worker average pay*	NHS Staff Band 3 midpoint	Pay gap	
Average hourly pay	£12.00	£12.72	£0.72	6%
Average annual salary	£23,464	£24,873	£1,409	6%

* Data from the National Care Forum's national pay benchmarking exercise of the not-for-profit sector (October 2024)

However, simply comparing baseline pay rates overlooks a key factor: **NHS employees have access to enhanced pay that goes well beyond standard hourly wages.** The NHS 'Total Pay' includes additional pay premiums for working unsocial hours, night shifts, weekends, and bank holidays – conditions that are also common for social care workers but rarely come with enhanced rates and, as a result, do not increase take-home pay.



When a standard portion of this benefit is included in the pay comparison, the true gap between the two similar roles becomes much more apparent.

Our analysis shows that the average take-home 'Total Pay' salary of equivalent NHS Band 3 staff is **30.3% higher** than that of the average salary of frontline care and support staff⁸.

This rises to **46.8%** if we look at 'Total Package' compensation for Band 3 NHS workers, reflective of competitive pension rates and sick pay entitlements.

SCOTLAND

The position is different in Scotland, where social care and the NHS are devolved responsibilities. Data from the Scottish government and the NHS Scotland Pay Bands (Agenda for Change) 2024/2025 shows that the difference in basic pay between care workers and their equivalents in the NHS in 2024/25 was an unacceptable 19%.

SCOTTISH MINIMUM BASIC PAY

> Hourly pay

£12.00

NHS BASIC PAY BAND 3 MIDPOINT

> Hourly pay

£14.29

19% GAP

£4,478 DIFFERENCE IN BASIC PAY

> Annual salary

£23,464

> Annual salary

£27,942



7. This figure is down from 10.3% in 2024 as reported in the 2024 edition of Unfair To Care 'Who Cares Wins'

8. This figure is down from 35.6% in 2024 as reported in the 2024 edition of Unfair To Care 'Who Cares Wins'



6.

THE CARING ECONOMY

Low and unfair pay in the social care system is the main driver of the high vacancy and high turnover rates of social care support workers. This leads to poor productivity, gross inefficiency, and poor value for money, as care providers face unnecessary costs from a reliance on more expensive agency staff to cover staff shortages and from continuous recruitment and training of new staff. This in turn leads to poor productivity in the NHS which, in countless communities, lacks capacity in social care to discharge medically fit patients from hospital.

WHILST THE VACANCY RATE OF 9.4% (112,000) IN THE 1.29 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE IN ENGLAND⁹ HAS SLIGHTLY IMPROVED RECENTLY, THIS IS STILL VERY HIGH COMPARED TO A NATIONAL AVERAGE OF 2.5%¹⁰.

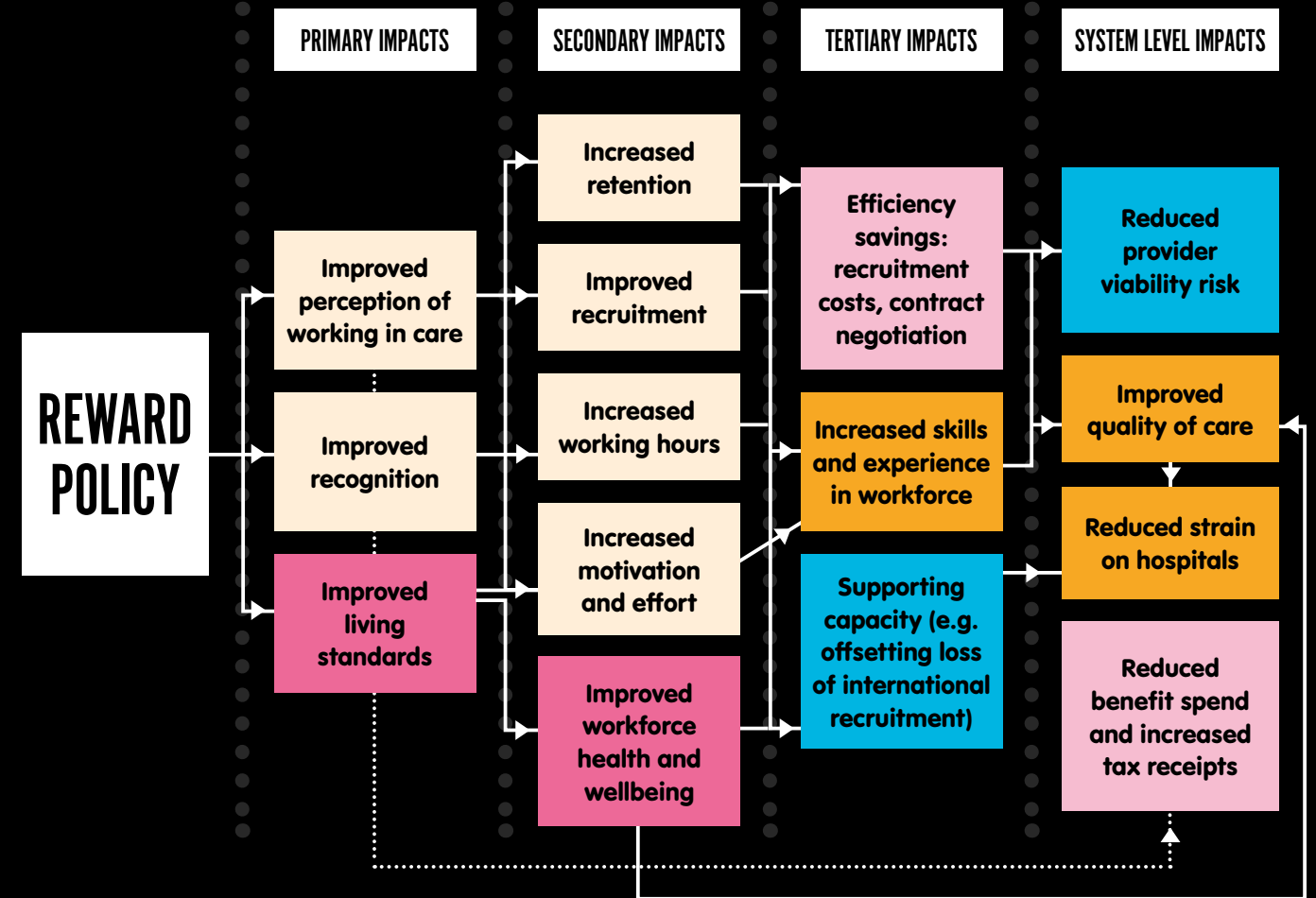


AND THE HIGH TURNOVER RATE OF 26.5% IN THE SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE IS EQUIVALENT TO 285,000 LEAVERS EACH YEAR, CREATING MORE UNNECESSARY COSTS¹¹.

The latest government guidance on the adult social care workforce and work-related quality of life shows that low income or pay is the most frequently cited motivation for care workers leaving their jobs (67%)¹². Evidence from Skills for Care shows that this movement is partly the result of social care staff moving into the NHS because of the difference in workforce pay and conditions¹³. Shared systems that should be working as symbiotic partners are instead in constant turmoil because of this lack of pay parity.

The Government has recognised the benefits to the social care system of awarding higher pay in their own Impact Assessment of the proposed Fair Pay Agreement for care workers¹⁴. This is illustrated below in a series of impacts flowing from better reward policies.

THE CASCADING IMPACTS OF BETTER PAY, ILLUSTRATED IN THE GOVERNMENT REPORT 'ESTABLISH A FAIR PAY AGREEMENTS PROCESS IN THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE SECTOR'.



9. All figures refer to 'direct care' filled posts as referenced in 'The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England', Skills for Care, October 2024
 10. 'Number of job vacancies per 100 employee jobs in the United Kingdom from 3rd quarter 2001 to 4th quarter 2024', Statista, January 2025
 11. All figures refer to 'direct care' filled posts as referenced in 'The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England', Skills for Care, October 2024

12. 'Executive summary: adult social care workforce and work-related quality of life', Guidance from the Department of Health & Social Care, February 2025
 13. 'Understanding the reasons care workers move on and their future intentions', Skills For Care, February 2023
 14. Impact assessment: Establish a Fair Pay Agreements process in the Adult Social Care sector

Our 2024 Unfair To Care report [‘Who Cares Wins’](#) goes further, and describes the more wide-ranging ‘Social Care Triple Win’ to be gained from investing in higher pay for social care support workers:

WIN 1

BETTER LIVES

- **Reducing overall demand for a range of services**, as consistent, quality social care improves the health and wellbeing of people who draw upon care and support.
- **Income security for the workforce** leading to higher morale, better personal and family lives, and better support/education of children.

WIN 2

COST-EFFECTIVE CARE

Social care recruitment costs

- £3,600 per head = **£1.02bn**
- Reduced use of agency staff
- Reduced use of overseas staff

NHS lost productivity

- Delayed transfers of care = **£1.7bn**
- Fewer GP attendances
- Less unnecessary use of A&E

Functional care market (contracts)

Aligned health and social care workforce (two-way)

WIN 3

ECONOMIC GROWTH

- **Economic GVA of social care: £68.1bn**
- **£1.75 return for every £1 invested**
- Reduction in welfare system costs such as Universal Credit
- Reduced poverty-alleviation costs
- More people in work contributing to the economy
- Levelling up in local economies
- Fewer people leaving jobs to become unpaid carers and more unpaid carers taking up work (reduced Carer’s Allowance)

The economic impact of improving people’s lives is also described in the Treasury’s Green Book guidance 2021¹⁵, which analyses how significant economic benefits can be gained from improving people’s wellbeing. According to this research, the measurable financial value of improving a person’s life satisfaction for one year – known as a WELLBY – is £13,000 in 2019 prices.

The social care sector is large and growing (up 13.2% on the previous year) with the sector employing 1.59 million people and estimated to contribute £68.1 billion gross value added (GVA) to the economy in England in 2024¹⁶.

The NHS and social care systems are also highly dependent upon each other for their success. The NHS will only be truly ‘fixed’ if the social care system is fixed too, in a large part through investing in higher pay.

INVESTING IN THE ‘CARING ECONOMY’ WORKS TWO WAYS – A SUCCESSFUL ECONOMY PROVIDES THE FUNDS FOR THE CARE OF PEOPLE WE SUPPORT, AND SOCIAL CARE MAKES A HUGE CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE NHS.

15. ‘Green Book supplementary guidance: wellbeing’, HM Treasury, published July 2021

16. ‘The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England’, Skills for Care, October 2024



7.

THE IMPACT ON LIVES

WHILST THIS EDITION OF UNFAIR TO CARE FOCUSES LARGELY ON PROVIDING KEY FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC DATA, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE DO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THOSE WHO ARE MOST IMPACTED BY LOW AND UNFAIR PAY.

1. PEOPLE WHO ACCESS CARE

High turnover rates and chronic understaffing result in inconsistent care provision for too many people, constraining quality of life.

Social care is a sector that requires strong relationships and stability to be effective. You can only live your best life possible if you are supported by skilled people who know you deeply and can offer you the responsive, reliable, and respectful support that you need to meet your individual goals.

A lack of available support effectively disables many people – meaning that they cannot pursue their lives with independence and choice. A high turnover undermines the ability to build

trust and develop meaningful relationships – care that should be comforting and enabling becomes unsettling and constraining. This inconsistency is being further exacerbated by a growing pattern of providers being forced to hand back contracts or close services that they simply can no longer financially sustain.

Past editions of Unfair To Care explored these issues in detail, with leading psychological experts in care highlighting how the breakdown of a long-standing caring relationship – as a person exits a care service or the sector for better pay – can feel akin to a bereavement.

2. PEOPLE WHO WORK IN CARE

Financial pressure forces many people who work in social care to take on second jobs or to leave the sector altogether in search of better-paying opportunities, exacerbating the already severe workforce shortages.

Previous issues of Unfair To Care highlighted the growing trend of care providers offering crisis support to their workforce, as staff are squeezed by the rising costs-of-living – including offering financial grants and creating internal foodbanks.

These reports have powerfully demonstrated that many care workers work to simply make ends meet – living without any material financial buffer of savings. Previous case studies, which included people facing the risk of homelessness, eviction, and the loss of essential household services, reflect the perilous nature of life on low pay.

3. FAMILY CARERS

Family members often carry the responsibility when social care systems fail to provide consistent and adequate support. As professional care becomes unreliable or inaccessible, relatives and friends – often unpaid – step in to fill the gaps. This has a significant financial and emotional toll on family carers, many of whom are forced to reduce their working hours or leave employment altogether, resulting in lost income and diminished future pension entitlements.

The strain of caregiving without adequate professional support also leads to increased mental health challenges and physical exhaustion. Family carers are at a higher risk of social isolation, depression, and anxiety as they juggle their caregiving duties with personal responsibilities. Without appropriate financial assistance or respite services, the long-term impact on their wellbeing can be devastating.



CARERS UK REPORTS THAT 1.2 MILLION CARERS LIVE IN POVERTY WHILST 79% OF CARERS FEEL STRESSED OR ANXIOUS, AND HALF OF CARERS (49%) FEEL DEPRESSED¹⁷.



8. OUR ASK OF GOVERNMENT

AN INTERIM UPLIFT IN CARE WORKER PAY

The new legislation to create a Fair Pay Agreement for care workers, alongside other measures to eliminate unfair employment practices in the workplace, is welcome. However, this agreement is unlikely to be determined and come into effect until 2027 at the earliest.

This means that the immediate workforce challenges of high vacancy rates and high staff turnover, alongside the challenges of delayed transfers of care and the missed economic opportunities from investing in care pay, remain in place.

This is why we are now calling on the Government for an immediate investment into an interim uplift in care worker pay, to help close the gap with equivalent staff working in the NHS. We believe this will kickstart the many benefits that higher pay brings to those the care system supports, grow the economy, and bolster NHS productivity, until a fairer pay framework that recognises the skills and capabilities of care workers is implemented.

Our experience from providing social care support workers with pay at 50p above national minimum wage is that this – alongside other actions to improve our recruitment and retention activities – increased retention of staff from 71% to 80% and virtually eradicated vacancy rates, which were once at 12.5%. But this approach is not financially sustainable in the long-term without additional government support.

A SECTOR-WIDE INTERIM UPLIFT IN PAY TO ACHIEVE ALL OF THE 'TRIPLE-WIN' BENEFITS IT CREATES WILL NEED TO BE FUNDED BY THE GOVERNMENT – AND THE AMOUNT INVOLVED IS NOT UNAFFORDABLE. FOR EXAMPLE, WE ESTIMATE THE ANNUAL COST TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INVESTING IN AN INTERIM UPLIFT OF 50P IN THE HOURLY PAY OF 1.29 MILLION DIRECT (FRONTLINE) CARE AND SUPPORT WORKERS¹⁸ WOULD BE...

**> GROSS COST
£1.062 BILLION**

**> NET COST
£723 MILLION**

The net cost of this investment is substantially less than the gross cost, reflecting that the Treasury would automatically clawback significant proportions of this investment through the increased tax and NI contributions from the higher pay.

We can be confident that these costs are in fact a significant overestimation. Further savings would accrue in several areas, including:

> Fewer working age adults needing to leave the workforce to act as unpaid carers.

> NHS productivity improving as fewer people will seek to access or occupy health facilities.

> Economic growth in low-income areas from the increased expenditure by care staff on local goods and services, many of which would be subject to VAT.

Put in context, in 2023/24 total expenditure by local government on adult social care in England was around £32.0 billion. Therefore, we estimate that the **annual net cost to government of investment in an interim pay uplift of 50p per hour would amount to around just 2.3% of the total adult social care budget.**

Implementation of an interim pay uplift is straightforward: Treasury funding through the ring-fenced grant to local councils, combined with a departmental requirement on local government commissioners to

include this uplift in pay as a mandatory minimum requirement, in all publicly-funded care contracts.

Crucially, this government investment in better pay must be in addition to the investment required in the Comprehensive Spending Review. This will be the only way to properly fund improvements to the social care system, such as the implementation of an Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy and the recommendations from the Casey Commission in 2026, as well as ensuring delivery of the NHS Ten-Year Plan which will be reliant on the viability of the social care sector.

9.

CONCLUSION

SOCIAL CARE IS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE. THE PEOPLE WHO DRAW ON CARE AND SUPPORT AND THE PEOPLE WHO DELIVER IT ARE BEING FAILED RIGHT NOW.

The social care workforce deserves to be properly valued and rewarded for all it delivers, and the prospect of a future fairer pay framework, underpinned in legislation, is a welcome step. We know that this will bring improvements to efficiency and productivity in the NHS and social care services, and contribute directly to the country's economic growth.

However, there will be a long gap before a fairer pay framework is implemented, and the increase to the National Living Wage in April 2025 to £12.21 per hour for all workers will not help care recruitment in a highly-competitive labour market. Neither do we anticipate the costs of the increased National Living Wage and additional employer National Insurance Contributions being covered to any sufficient extent by government funding, adding even more financial pressure to already struggling providers.

SO IT IS VITAL THAT THE GOVERNMENT INVESTS IN AN INTERIM UPLIFT TO THE PAY OF SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT WORKERS ABOVE THE NATIONAL LIVING WAGE, TO MEET IMMEDIATE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES AND FILL THE GAP UNTIL A FAIRER PAY FRAMEWORK IS IMPLEMENTED.

THE NET COST TO THE GOVERNMENT IS RELATIVELY LOW – AND WE WOULD ARGUE AFFORDABLE, WHEN CONSIDERED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE OVERALL ANNUAL ADULT SOCIAL CARE BUDGET, AND IN LIGHT OF THE ADDITIONAL FUNDING RECENTLY AWARDED TO THE NHS – BUT THE POSSIBLE RETURN IS HIGH.

THIS, ALONGSIDE THE FIRST-EVER COMPREHENSIVE CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY, WOULD DO MUCH TO HELP THE SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM SURVIVE THE SERIOUS FINANCIAL CHALLENGES IT IS EXPERIENCING TODAY, AS WELL AS CREATING OPTIMISM FOR A LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.



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