



Social care provision in the UK and the role of carers

Debate on 24 June 2021

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On 24 June 2021, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Baroness Jolly (Liberal Democrat) that “this House takes note of social care provision in the United Kingdom, and the role of carers in that provision”.

The term ‘social care’ covers a wide range of support provided to children, young people, and working age and older adults, as well as their carers. This support can be provided formally, either by local authorities, private companies, charities, or other bodies; informally, by family members, friends, or neighbours; or through a combination of these. Although in practice it can include support for both children and adults, the term is often used as shorthand for adult social care in debates on the subject.

Social care is a devolved matter and provision differs across the UK:

- In England, local authorities hold both responsibility for children’s social care and a formal role in assessing the need for and commissioning adult social care. Differences in budgets, costs and local authorities having discretion to provide adult care services to individuals outside of eligibility thresholds have led to variations across the country. The adult social care system has been the focus of longstanding calls for reform. The UK Government has said it will bring forward proposals to “fix” adult social care in England later this year.
- In Scotland, where an entitlement to free personal social care has been in place since 2002, the Scottish Government has pledged to create a National Care Service.
- In Wales, there is a cap on non-residential care fees and a £50,000 capital limit on residential care costs for adult social care.
- In Northern Ireland, where the health and social care system is integrated, health and social care trusts hold responsibility for adult social care.

Carers may be professionals working in the sector, volunteers working for charitable bodies, or unpaid, so-called ‘informal’ carers within families and communities. In each of the UK’s four nations, the paid social care workforce represents a large proportion of employment. Estimates suggest there are 1.6 million people working in the adult social care sector in England alone.

There is a strong reliance on informal carers across the UK, and most adult social care is delivered in this way. Estimates for the number of unpaid carers vary. The Government’s family resources survey indicates that 7% of the population provided unpaid care in the 2019/2020 financial year. Reports suggest this number may have risen dramatically following the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

This briefing provides an introduction to and overview of the subject. The House of Commons Library briefing [Coronavirus: Adult Social Care Key Issues and Sources](#) (12 May 2021) provides further information on issues relating to adult social care in England during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I. What is social care?

The term ‘social care’ can include all forms of personal and practical assistance for children, young people and adults who need extra support, including those who care for others.¹ In practice, this means the term can cover a huge range of activities, from child protection to end-of-life care.²

Children’s social care includes support for children with disabilities; those requiring protection from harm; and children looked after by a local authority.³ It can include foster and residential care placements. Meanwhile, adult social care can include supporting individuals and their carers with needs ranging from managing and maintaining nutrition to assisting with personal hygiene and toilet needs. It can also include help with:

- being appropriately clothed;
- being able to make use of the adult’s home safely and maintain a habitable home environment;
- developing and maintaining family or other personal relationships;
- accessing and engaging in work, training, education or volunteering;
- making use of necessary facilities or services in the local community including public transport and recreational facilities or services; and
- carrying out caring responsibilities for a child.⁴

Both adult and children’s social care can be delivered in formal settings such as day centres or residential homes, or in an individual’s home, depending on a recipient’s needs.⁵ Care can be provided by paid carers, volunteers, and/or unpaid carers who may be relations, friends or neighbours of the recipient. Unpaid care is often referred to as ‘informal care’.⁶

2. Social care provision across the UK

In general, the funding and provision of formal social care is a devolved matter.⁷ This means the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland hold responsibility for social care in their jurisdictions. The UK Government remains responsible for social care in England.

¹ Scottish Government, ‘[Social care](#)’, accessed 14 June 2021; and National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), July 2018.

² King’s Fund, ‘[What is social care and how does it work?](#)’, accessed 14 June 2021; and ‘[Bite-sized social care: what is social care?](#)’, 11 May 2017.

³ Institute for Government, ‘[Children’s social care](#)’, accessed 14 June 2021.

⁴ National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), July 2018, p 5.

⁵ King’s Fund, ‘[Key facts and figures about adult social care](#)’, 20 November 2019. See also: National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care in England: Overview](#), 13 March 2014, HC 1102 of session 2013–14.

⁶ House of Commons Library, [Informal Carers](#), 7 June 2021. See also: House of Commons Library, [Support for Family and Friends Carers Looking after Children](#), 11 September 2019.

⁷ Department of Health and Social Care, [Government Response to the Health and Social Care Committee report on Adult Social Care: Funding and Workforce](#), 29 January 2021, CP 360, p 5. See also: Scottish Parliament Information Centre, [Adult Social Care and Support in Scotland](#), 3 December 2020; Senedd Research, ‘[Social care: a system at breaking point?](#)’, 17 May 2021; and Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, ‘[Supporting carers in Northern Ireland: where are we with legislation and policy?](#)’, 24 July 2018, and ‘[Carers in Northern Ireland: some key statistics](#)’, 26 July 2018.

2.1 Social care in England

Children's social care

In England, local authorities (LAs) fund and deliver children's social care.⁸ Their statutory responsibilities include a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of 'children in need', defined to include both disabled children and those taken into care.⁹ LAs are also responsible for delivering non-statutory services for children and young people, such as children's centres.¹⁰

The Government has noted that LAs "describe their children's services by using a four-tier model, which may be represented as a pyramid or continuum of needs".¹¹ Non-statutory services fall within tiers one and two, while statutory services fall into tiers three and four:

- **Tier 1:** Universal services such as schools, and health visiting.
- **Tier 2:** Targeted services for children and families beginning to experience, or at risk of, difficulties; for example school counselling, parenting programmes, and support for teenage parents.
- **Tier 3:** Specialist services for children and families with multiple needs such as intensive family support, and services for children with disabilities.
- **Tier 4:** Specialist services for children and families with severe and complex needs, including child protection services, and looked after children.¹²

In 2019, the National Audit Office (NAO) reported there were 404,710 children in need as at the end of March 2018.¹³ In addition, LAs spent £8.8 billion on children's services in 2017/18 against a budget of £8 billion. This translated to 91% of LAs having overspent on children's social care that year. The NAO found that there was "significant variation" between different local authorities in both the activity and cost of their children's services.

Adult social care

Adult social care includes personal care and practical support for working age or older adults with a physical disability, a learning disability, or physical or mental illness.¹⁴ It also includes social work, in which qualified, registered professionals assist individuals to try to improve outcomes; and support for carers. Adult social care is usually provided once a person reaches the age of 18.¹⁵ The term 'social care' is often used as shorthand for adult social care.

⁸ Institute for Government, '[Children's social care](#)', accessed 14 June 2021. See also: House of Commons Library, '[Children's Social Care Services in England](#)', 12 March 2021; and '[Local Authority Support for Children in Need \(England\)](#)', 13 January 2020.

⁹ Children Act 1989, s 17. In 2018, the Association of Directors of Children's Services found LAs had almost 300 statutory duties to provide services for children and young people (Institute for Government, '[Children's social care](#)', accessed 14 June 2021).

¹⁰ National Audit Office, '[Pressures on Children's Social Care](#)', 23 January 2019, HC 1868 of session 2017–19, p 6.

¹¹ Department for Education, '[Children's Services: Spending and Delivery](#)', 6 July 2016, p 7.

¹² *ibid*, p 9; and House of Commons Library, '[Children's Social Care Services in England](#)', 12 March 2021, p 6.

¹³ National Audit Office, '[Pressures on Children's Social Care](#)', 23 January 2019, HC 1868 of session 2017–19, p 4.

¹⁴ National Audit Office, '[Adult Social Care at a Glance](#)', 16 July 2018, p 4. See also: Institute for Government, '[Performance tracker 2019: adult social care](#)' and '[Performance tracker 2020: adult social care](#)', accessed 14 June 2021.

¹⁵ Department of Health and Social Care, '[Care and support statutory guidance](#)', 21 April 2021.

The NAO has observed that adults with care needs can be supported in two main ways:

- either formally through services they or their local authority pay for; or
- informally by family, friends, or neighbours.¹⁶

An individual's care needs may be met through a combination of the above, plus free formal services provided by a voluntary organisation. Formal support can include a wide range of services, ranging from health to housing and welfare and benefits to leisure and wellbeing.

Adult social care in England, unlike health care, is not free at the point of use.¹⁷ LAs play a key role in assessing the need for formal support.¹⁸ They are required to apply national criteria to assess whether a person is eligible for social care. If the LA charges for the required type of support, an individual may then have to undergo means-testing. Depending on their financial situation, they may then be liable for either a proportion or all of their care costs.¹⁹ Social care paid for by LAs makes up a minority of the total amount of adult social care delivered each year.

LAs are also responsible for commissioning care. The NAO has said this is mostly from independent providers that are autonomous enterprises.²⁰ It has noted that around 14,800 registered organisations across 25,800 locations provide care in England, and that 839,000 adults accessed long-term support arranged by LAs in 2019/20.²¹ The NAO has previously recorded that over two-thirds of adults receiving care through LAs are aged 65 or over.²² It has also highlighted survey results that indicate around a quarter of adults aged 65 and over have unmet care needs for an activity of daily living.²³

LAs fund social care through a combination of central government grants and local revenue-raising mechanisms, such as council tax and the social care precept. The NAO has noted that LAs spent a net total of £16.5 billion on care in 2019/20. Adult social care is the largest area of spend for LAs, followed by children's social services.²⁴

Calls for adult social care funding reform

Calls for reform of the adult social care system in England have a long history, and in recent years the subject has remained an ongoing subject of parliamentary interest. The coronavirus pandemic has added to long-standing calls for reform, not least due to increasing funding and workforce pressures.²⁵

¹⁶ National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), 16 July 2018, p 5.

¹⁷ King's Fund, [A short history of social care funding reform in England: 1997 to 2019](#), 31 July 2019.

¹⁸ National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), 16 July 2018, p 5.

¹⁹ LAs have discretion to provide services to individuals outside of the eligibility threshold (Nuffield Trust, [Who organises and funds social care?](#), 18 March 2020).

²⁰ National Audit Office, [The Adult Social Care Market in England](#), 25 March 2021, HC 1244 of session 2019–21, p 5.

²¹ National Audit Office, [The adult social care market in England](#), 25 March 2021.

²² National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care in England: Overview](#), 13 March 2014, HC 1102 of session 2013–14, p 17.

²³ National Audit Office, [The adult social care market in England](#), 25 March 2021.

²⁴ National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), 16 July 2018, p 11.

²⁵ See, for example: House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, [Social Care: Funding and Workforce](#), 22 October 2020, HC 206 of session 2019–21, p 1. See also: House of Commons Library, [Adult Social Care Funding \(England\)](#), 11 December 2020.

In June 2018, the House of Commons Health and Social Care and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committees published a joint report into the long-term funding of adult social care.²⁶ The report concluded that the social care system was under “unsustainable strain”. It added:

In its present state, the system is not fit to respond to the demographic trends of the future. Of greatest concern is the fact that the very people the system is there to support get only the care they need to survive, rather than the care they need to live full and independent lives.²⁷

The report said a cross-party approach on reforming social care funding was “now essential”. It called for a cross-party parliamentary commission to make progress on achieving a “fair, long-term and sustainable settlement” for social care. The report argued such a system should aspire over time to provide universal access to free personal care, to help with the basic activities of daily living.

In July 2019, the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee published a report into the funding of adult social care.²⁸ The report argued it was a “national scandal” the sector had been underfunded for many years. It said a funding increase was urgently required and argued the Government should both implement a sustainable long-term funding solution and address disparities in provision between local authorities. It agreed with the earlier House of Commons joint committee report that an entitlement to free personal care should be introduced. The committee said this should be done over a period of five years. It also said a means test for accommodation costs should be retained, but capped, and that funding should be largely funded from general taxation.

In October 2020, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee published a report on social care funding and the sector’s workforce. It surveyed the current funding problems and stakeholder estimates that the sector required billions in extra spending to maintain and improve the situation for both those receiving and delivering care. The report concluded that the “case for making a sustained investment in social care has never been stronger”. It added that the toll of the Covid-19 pandemic meant the social care sector was “no longer a hidden problem, but one that the country as a whole understands”. The committee urged the Government to “now address this crisis as a matter of urgency”.²⁹

In March 2021, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee launched a new inquiry on long-term funding of adult social care in England.³⁰ This is a follow-up to its earlier report, to take account of how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the sector and its long-term funding needs.³¹

²⁶ House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Long-term Funding of Adult Social Care](#), 27 June 2018, HC 768 of session 2017–19.

²⁷ *ibid*, p 13.

²⁸ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Social Care Funding: Time to End a National Scandal](#), 4 July 2019, HL Paper 392 of session 2017–19. See also: House of Lords Library, [Social care funding: debate on the Economic Affairs Committee report](#), 21 January 2021.

²⁹ House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, [Social Care: Funding and Workforce](#), 22 October 2020, HC 206 of session 2019–21, pp 6 and 34.

³⁰ House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Long-term funding of adult social care](#), accessed 15 June 2021.

³¹ House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [New inquiry: long-term funding of adult social care](#), 4 March 2021.

Responding to the launch of this new inquiry, Councillor Ian Hudspeth, chair of the Local Government Association’s Community Wellbeing Board, said:

Bold action is desperately needed to secure both the immediate and long-term future of care and support.

This cross-party inquiry will be another important contributor to how we can sustainably pay for social care services, which have been seriously impacted by the pandemic but also affected by decades of delayed reforms by successive governments of different political colours.

In addition to supporting this inquiry, we continue to call on the Government to urgently bring forward its proposals and a clear timetable for reform, so that we can finally put social care on a sustainable footing and enable people to live the lives they want to lead.³²

Government policy on reform

In its February 2021 white paper on proposals for a Health and Care Bill, the Government said it remained “committed to the sustainable improvement of adult social care”.³³ It added that it would bring forward proposals later in 2021. It repeated the commitment to bring forward proposals in the Queen’s Speech delivered on 11 May 2021.³⁴

Successive governments have considered policy proposals on how to reform the adult social care system in England.³⁵ Most recently, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government has indicated its intention to pursue reform on several occasions over the past two years:

- In July 2019, in his first speech as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said “we will fix the crisis in social care once and for all”.³⁶ He said the vehicle for this would be a “clear plan we have prepared to give every older person the dignity and security they deserve”.
- The Conservative Party manifesto for the December 2019 general election included an undertaking to build a cross-party consensus on social care.³⁷ It said a condition of any option would be that “nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it”. The December 2019 Queen’s Speech reiterated this commitment.³⁸
- In January 2020, the Prime Minister said the Government would bring forward a plan on adult social care “this year” and would “get it done within this Parliament”. In March 2020, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock wrote to all MPs and

³² Local Government Association, ‘[LGA responds to HCLG Committee inquiry launch into adult social care funding](#)’, 4 March 2021.

³³ Department of Health and Social Care, [Integration and Innovation: Working Together to Improve Health and Social Care for All](#), 11 February 2021, CP 381, pp 6–7.

³⁴ [HL Hansard, 11 May 2021, col 1](#).

³⁵ See House of Commons Library, [Social Care: Government Reviews and Policy Proposals for Paying for Care Since 1997 \(England\)](#), 23 October 2017; and ‘[Paying for social care: 20 years of inaction](#)’, 19 December 2019.

³⁶ Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Boris Johnson’s first speech as Prime Minister: 24 July 2019](#)’, 24 July 2019.

³⁷ Conservative Party, [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#), November 2019, p 12.

³⁸ Prime Minister’s Office, [Queen’s Speech December 2019: Background Briefing Notes](#), 19 December 2019, p 37.

members of the House of Lords to initiate talks.³⁹ He outlined that the Government intended to move to “structured talks on reform options in May”. However, Mr Hancock subsequently indicated the coronavirus pandemic would delay progress.⁴⁰

- In June, the Prime Minister said the Government was finalising plans to “solve social care”.⁴¹ The November spending review added that the Government was “committed to sustainable improvement of the adult social care system” and would bring forward proposals in 2021.⁴²
- In March 2021, Minister for Care Helen Whately said the Government was “absolutely committed to the reform of the adult social care system” and would bring forward proposals later in the year.⁴³
- The same month, the Prime Minister said he thought it was “highly likely” that social care would feature in the next Queen’s Speech.⁴⁴

2.2 Provision in the devolved nations

In 2020, the Nuffield Trust summarised the situation in respect of adult social care provision across the four nations of the UK.⁴⁵ In a series of articles, it highlighted the following key points on how the devolved nations differ in the level of provision offered when compared to England and each other.⁴⁶ These read as follows:

Who organises and funds social care?

- In England, Wales and Scotland, local authorities are responsible for adult social care and this duty is set in law. Funding comes from central grants, which can be subject to squeezes from central government, and from council tax on properties.
- In Northern Ireland, health and social care trusts have this responsibility due to the integrated nature of their health and social care system.

Offer and eligibility: who can access state-funded adult care and what are people entitled to?

- All of the countries operate a means and needs test to determine access to social care support from the local authority or health and social care trust. England is the least generous country in its offer, as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland offer additional support outside of the means test.

³⁹ Matt Hancock, ‘[Personal Twitter Account](#)’, 6 March 2020.

⁴⁰ Independent, ‘[Coronavirus pandemic could delay reforms to social care, Health Secretary says](#)’, 2 June 2020.

⁴¹ Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[PM economy speech: 30 June 2020](#)’, 30 June 2020.

⁴² HM Treasury, ‘[Spending Review 2020](#)’, 25 November 2020, CP 330, p 44.

⁴³ [HC Hansard, 18 March 2021, col 230WH](#).

⁴⁴ House of Commons Liaison Committee, ‘[Oral evidence: Evidence from the Prime Minister](#)’, 24 March 2021, HC 1285 of session 2019–21, Q36–8.

⁴⁵ Nuffield Trust, ‘[Adult social care in the four countries of the UK](#)’, 12 May 2020.

⁴⁶ Nuffield Trust, ‘[Who organises and funds social care?](#)’, 18 March 2020; ‘[Offer and eligibility: who can access state-funded adult care and what are people entitled to?](#)’, 18 March 2020; ‘[How much social care does each country fund?](#)’, 18 March 2020; and ‘[What does the provider market look like across the four countries?](#)’, 11 May 2020.

- The number of state-funded individuals varies considerably across the countries, with the greatest differences arising for these over 65. The high number of over-65s accessing state-funded care in Scotland is likely a consequence of their [free personal care policy](#).
- Across each country, there is a drive to promote the use of personal budgets (or self-directed support) to push greater personalisation in social care.

How much social care does each country fund?

- There is wide variation in public expenditure per capita. England is by far the least generous, spending on average £303 per head, compared to £428 in Scotland, £396 in Wales and £461 in Northern Ireland.
- Estimates of self-funders also vary considerably by country—with England having the highest proportion.

What does the provider market look like across the four countries?

- The distribution of public, private and voluntary providers, as well as their size, varies considerably across the four countries. England has the most privately owned providers.
- The four countries share issues around the stability of the market for care. Across the UK there is a high turnover of care providers with many being forced to hand back contracts for services.
- Many providers across the UK have a mix of self-funded and state-funded service users and as such all report issues of cross-subsidisation, whereby self-funding individuals are required to pay more for their services than state-funded individuals. Across the four countries, on average an individual funding their care themselves would pay over £200 more per week for the same service in a care home. However, it is estimated that England has a much more significant proportion of self-funders.
- In Wales and Scotland, inspection and regulation is undertaken by a dedicated regulator for social care and other social services. In contrast, the regulator in England and Northern Ireland also has responsibility for health.

In April 2021, the Institute for Government (IfG) published a report on devolved public services. In respect of adult social care, it noted that different levels of care were provided in the four nations of the UK. The IfG called for improved data availability in the future to assist comparisons. The report included the following headline conclusions:

- The social care systems of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provide different levels of care. Proportionally, nearly twice as many older people receive care at home or in a care home in Northern Ireland than in England, and all three devolved governments spend more on care than in England.
- Differences in spending reflect differences in policy: Scotland and Northern Ireland spend more because they have chosen to provide some free home care to all people in need, not just those who pass a means test.

- But all four social care systems have been squeezed in recent years, as spending has not risen in line with demand. This has blunted the impact of those policy differences, as providers in all four countries have used similar strategies to manage demand locally.
- It is not possible to say which social care system performs best. The four governments measure very few social care outcomes, and those that they do measure are difficult to compare. This lack of information has hindered governments in the four nations from learning from each other's experiences in order to improve services. Improving data availability and comparability must be a priority.⁴⁷

Recent developments

In its manifesto published ahead of the Scottish parliamentary elections held in May 2021, the Scottish National Party said that if returned to government it would:

- Establish a new National Care Service and increase investment in social care by 25%.
- Support the new NHS Centre for Sustainable Delivery to pioneer and deliver new, better and more sustainable ways of working across the NHS and social care, and fully harness the benefits of technology and new treatments.
- Scrap all non-residential social care charges for those who need support.⁴⁸

In Wales, Welsh Labour said ahead of the May 2021 Senedd elections that it would “continue to cap non-residential care fees and maintain the £50,000 capital limit, helping people hold onto more of their savings before paying for care than any other UK nation”.⁴⁹ It added it would deliver the real living wage for all social care staff and continue to invest in integrated health and social care centres.

In Northern Ireland, the [New Decade, New Approach](#) agreement published in January 2020 said the programme for health and social care agreed by the previous executive “will continue to be a priority”.⁵⁰ It added: “Within this, there will be a greater focus on mental health and well-being”.

3. Role of carers in providing care

Social care is delivered by a wide range of people, including paid professionals working for care organisations and unpaid carers providing care within families and communities.⁵¹

Estimates suggest up to 1.6 million people work in the adult social care sector in England alone.⁵² This compares to the NHS workforce of around 1.3 million.⁵³ The Nuffield Trust has said of the social care workforce across the UK:

⁴⁷ Institute for Government, [Devolved Public Services: The NHS, Schools and Social Care in the Four Nations](#), 29 April 2021, p 38.

⁴⁸ Scottish National Party, [SNP Manifesto 2021](#), 15 April 2021, p 18.

⁴⁹ Welsh Labour, [Welsh Labour Manifesto 2021](#), April 2021, pp 5–19.

⁵⁰ HM Government, [New Decade, New Approach](#), January 2020, p 43. See also: Northern Ireland Department of Health, [Transformation programme](#), accessed 15 June 2021.

⁵¹ King's Fund, [What is social care and how does it work?](#), accessed 15 June 2021; and [Bite-sized social care: who provides social care?](#), 11 May 2017.

⁵² Nuffield Trust, [What does the social care workforce look like across the four countries?](#), 15 April 2020.

⁵³ NHS England, [Working in the NHS](#), accessed 15 June 2021.

- In each of the UK countries, the social care workforce represents a large proportion of employment.
- The four countries have shared challenges around recruitment and retention of the workforce—challenges that are linked to poor pay and conditions, and perceptions of attractiveness of the sector.
- England is the only country that does not have a non-departmental public body which is responsible for the regulation and registration of its workforce. In the other UK countries, all social care workers must be on a register, and in Scotland and Wales, a qualification is necessary to work in social care. There is early evidence that this is having a positive impact on retention and perceptions of the workforce.⁵⁴

In October 2020, the Care Quality Commission said in its annual report for 2019/20 that the pandemic had highlighted the “longstanding need for reform, investment and workforce planning”. On the social care workforce in particular, it called for a “new deal for the adult social care workforce that reaches across health and care”. This would be “one that develops clear career progression, secures the right skills for the sector, better recognises and values staff, invests in their training and supports appropriate professionalisation”.⁵⁵

In the same month, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee noted the adult social care workforce in England was under “significant pressure, with 122,000 vacancies, a turnover rate of 30.8%, and a quarter of staff employed on zero hours contracts”.⁵⁶ It said demand was “calling into question the long-term sustainability of the social care workforce”. The committee also noted estimates that suggested that up to 580,000 to 800,000 more social care jobs could be required by 2035. Amongst its conclusions and recommendations, the committee argued:

- Improving the level of recognition afforded to social care workers “must be a key focus for the Government to safeguard the future of the social care workforce”.
- The proposals for reform of how people pay for care must provide “a sustainable basis for continued rises in pay above and beyond increases to the national minimum wage and in line with increases given to NHS staff”.
- The Government should “bring forward proposals to support the improvement of employment conditions in the sector, including reducing the over-reliance on zero hours contracts and improving the provision of sick pay”.
- The Government should “bring forward a plan to streamline the training of social care workers in order to improve routes of entry to the profession and improve career progression for existing social care workers”.
- The Government “must ensure that transitional arrangements are in place to ensure that social care workers can continue to be recruited from overseas for as long as it takes to build sufficient resilience in the domestic supply of social care workers”. Building this resilience “will depend on improving pay and other workforce issues in social care”.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Nuffield Trust, [‘What does the social care workforce look like across the four countries?’](#), 15 April 2020.

⁵⁵ Care Quality Commission, [State of Care: The State of Health Care and Adult Social Care in England 2019/20](#), 16 October 2020, HC 799 of session 2019–21, p 10.

⁵⁶ House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, [Social Care: Funding and Workforce](#), 22 October 2020, HC 206 of session 2019–21, p 16.

⁵⁷ House of Commons Library, [‘Social care reform and the social care workforce’](#), 15 March 2021.

The Government responded to the committee's report in January 2021.⁵⁸ It said it was considering the committee's recommendations "carefully as part of ongoing policy development".

Bodies such as the British Medical Association have called for social care staff in England to be provided with opportunities for salary and career progression, and their employment terms and conditions brought into line with those of the NHS.⁵⁹

Unpaid carers

There is a strong reliance on unpaid carers in all four nations of the UK.⁶⁰ Most adult social care is provided informally by family, friends and neighbours. It has been estimated the value of such care could be up to £100 billion per year.⁶¹

Data from the Government's most recent family resources survey indicate that more than 7% of the UK population provided informal, unpaid care to someone else in 2019/20.⁶² This translates to more than 4.5 million people. Other sources give a higher figure. For example, Carers UK and others estimate there were 9.1 million unpaid carers before the coronavirus pandemic.⁶³ The same Carers UK report suggested that up to 4.5 million additional people had taken on unpaid caring responsibilities since the beginning of the pandemic. This would mean up to 13.6 million people could have been providing unpaid care in the UK in 2020, or one in four of the population.

4. Read more

- House of Commons Health and Social Care and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committees, [Long-term Funding of Adult Social Care](#), 27 June 2018, HC 768 of session 2017–19
- House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Social Care Funding: Time to End a National Scandal](#), 4 July 2019, HL Paper 392 of session 2017–19
- House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, [Social Care: Funding and Workforce](#), 22 October 2020, HC 206 of session 2019–21; and [Workforce Burnout and Resilience in the NHS and Social Care](#), 8 June 2021, HC 22 of session 2021–22
- [Debate on 'Social Care Funding \(EAC Report\)'](#), HL *Hansard*, 28 January 2021, cols 235–80GC
- [Debate on 'Social Care Reform'](#), HC *Hansard*, 18 March 2021, cols 207–32WH

⁵⁸ Department of Health and Social Care, [Social Care Funding and Workforce Report: Government Response](#), 29 January 2021, CP 360. See also: House of Commons, [Written Question: Social Services: Vacancies](#), 8 December 2020, 120018.

⁵⁹ British Medical Association, [Social care in England](#), 10 September 2020. For further information on workforce pressures, see: House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, [Workforce Burnout and Resilience in the NHS and Social Care](#), 8 June 2021, HC 22 of session 2021–22.

⁶⁰ Nuffield Trust, [What are carers in each of the four UK countries entitled to?](#), 15 April 2020. See also: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Unpaid Care](#), 19 July 2018; and House of Commons Library, [Informal Carers](#), 7 June 2021.

⁶¹ National Audit Office, [Adult Social Care at a Glance](#), July 2018, p 10.

⁶² Department for Work and Pensions, [Family Resources Survey: Financial Year 2019 to 2020](#), 25 March 2021.

⁶³ Carers Week, [Research Report: The Rise in the Number of Unpaid Carers During the Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) Outbreak](#), June 2020, p 4. Estimate based on a poll of 4,557 people over the age of 18 living in the UK.

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