

Deeds not Words:
Are people really at the
heart of care?

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by Phil Hopes

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The Government's White Paper on Adult Social Care '[People at the Heart of Care](#)' published on 1st December 2021 builds on the earlier announcement on 9th September of a new £36bn Health and Care Levy to fund health and social care services over the next three years.

The White Paper sets out the next steps for social care reform which it describes as a journey that will not solve all the problems immediately, but is 'a significant step in moving towards a new vision for social care that the whole of government is committed to'. It emphasises a shift away from a reliance on residential care towards offering people genuine options for drawing on outstanding care at home and in the community.

Person-centred care is a key theme throughout the White Paper's ten-year vision that, in its words: offers people choice and control over the care they receive

- promotes independence and enables people to live well as part of a community
- properly values the social care workforce, enabling them to deliver the high quality care that they want to provide

- recognises unpaid carers for their contribution and treats them fairly

The 34 'I statements' that the government wants to see delivered (e.g., 'I lead a fulfilling life with access to support, aids and adaptations to maintain and enhance my wellbeing') for those who draw on care and support (19), for unpaid carers (9) and for the care workforce (6) provide a strong foundation and clear criteria for judging whether the government is achieving the goals of the White Paper for the care system.

The detailed proposals contain much that the care sector supports and, indeed, has already been developing and implementing on the ground. Funding over three years has been identified for some of the proposals, and the sector will welcome the principle that every decision about care should consider housing (£300m); the commitment to maximising the full potential of technology to support people's lives and aspirations (£150m); the New Models of Care programme (£30m); the focus on prevention and health promotion; support for empowering service users and unpaid carers

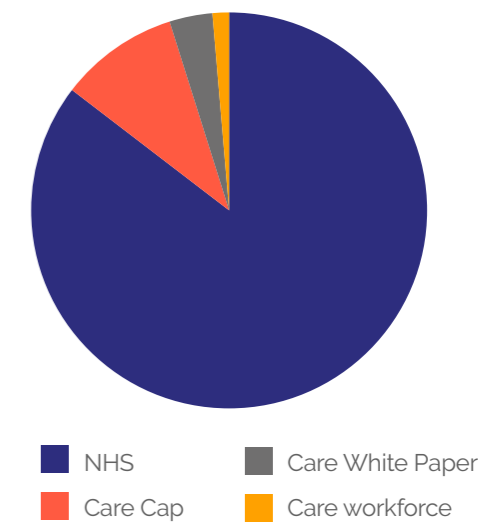
(£30m); a new strategy for the social care workforce (£500m); and support for local authorities to deliver social care reform (£70m).

However, reactions to the White Paper from the social care sector have been shaped by the deep disappointment that only a fraction of the new funding raised by the Health and Care Levy will go to social care and almost none will fund additional frontline care services.

The bulk of the Levy will be spent on the NHS, leaving the social care system - commissioners, providers and the workforce - continuing to struggle to cope with the demands and challenges it faces. Of the £5.4bn (15% of the total Levy) for social care, £3.6 billion will pay for the cap on care costs, the extension to the means test, and support progress towards local authorities paying a fair cost of care. Only £1.8 billion over three years will go to improving a social care system in England that has a workforce of 1.5 million carers, 10 million adults receiving care and support, and 1.3m unpaid carers.

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Who benefits from the £36bn Health and Care Levy?



The primary concern, indeed anger, in the care sector however is the mismatch between the government's declared aspiration for the social care workforce in the White Paper that:

'We want people to say social care is a rewarding career with clear opportunities to develop and progress, and where I feel valued in my role and I feel recognised for the important role I play in helping people who draw on care and support to receive high-quality personalised support that enriches their lives.'

We all know that the low pay and poor conditions of care workers is the 'elephant in the room' of People at the Heart of Care.

and the reality for care workers, also described in the White Paper, of:

'Very high levels of staff turnover (overall annual staff turnover rate in 2020 to 2021 was 30%), particularly among frontline care workers and nurses... vacancies rates are also persistently high...much of the workforce suffers from poor mental health and burnout...'

The detailed proposals in the workforce strategy chapter of the White Paper – a Knowledge and Skills Framework, portable Care Certificates etc - are valuable but only represent small steps forward. We all know that the low pay and poor conditions of care workers is the 'elephant in the room' of 'People at the Heart of Care'.

As we move into winter, the immediate crisis in recruitment and retention will have a huge impact not only on those who rely on care but also on the ability of the NHS to cope with the pressures it faces. The short-term staff retention fund announced in October is welcome and, crucially, demonstrates that government can intervene directly to deal with the problems created by low pay in the care workforce. But more, much more is needed.

Nationally, a clear and visible signal this winter to reinforce the White Paper's support for a dedicated and valued workforce, should be provided through an immediate £500 care worker's retention bonus (£78 million) and an immediate and permanent uplift to the Real Living Wage rate of £9.90 per hour (£1.2 billion) for care workers as proposed by the [Future Social Care Coalition](#).

Locally, the integration of NHS and social care through Integrated Care Systems provides a real opportunity for local areas to address low pay in the care workforce through integrated budgets and workforce planning. The NHS in places like Stafford is already funding support for the care workforce because it is in their interests to do so

Without serious and immediate action to improve the pay and conditions of the care workforce the government's aspiration to put 'People at the Heart of Care will always ring hollow. Deeds not words are needed, and needed right now.

For further information about the Government's Social Care Plan, please contact joecormack@gkstrategy.com