



Ein cyf/Our ref MA/DB/0341/25

Mark Isherwood MS
Chair – Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee
Welsh Parliament

21 January 2026

Dear Mark,

Update on the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee Report on Care Home Commissioning

I am writing to provide the Committee with a final update on the Welsh Government's response to the recommendations in the Committee's report on care home commissioning. Since the Committee was last updated on 6 October 2022 we have concluded our consideration of all 13 recommendations. Of these, 10 were accepted and are being implemented, and 3 were not accepted, with rationale provided.

We are pleased with the opportunity provided to respond and strengthen health and social care commissioning including care home commissioning. Welsh Government have worked with statutory partners to ensure cross sector collaboration with a focus on citizen outcomes, and what matters most to people. We have amended the Partnership Arrangements (Wales) Regulations 2015 to strengthen partnership working and the National Office for Care and Support have developed the '*National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support in Wales: code of practice to local health boards and NHS trusts*'.

Welsh Government will continue to strengthen delivery through development of outcome focussed commissioning whilst ensuring engagement and coproduction with citizens. We will actively monitor progress through statutory partner reporting mechanisms.

This update forms part of our wider work to close down legacy reports and ensure all outstanding recommendations have been formally responded to. We appreciate the Committee's patience while this work was completed.

The detail of each recommendation and the Welsh Government's response is set out in annex 1 - Progress Report and evidence.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Conclusion

In summary, the Welsh Government has now considered all 13 recommendations of the Committee's report. Ten recommendations have been accepted and are either fully implemented or progressing well, while three were not accepted, with clear rationale provided. Collectively, this represents a significant strengthening of commissioning practice, citizen engagement, inspection activity, and workforce support across the care home sector.

This conclusion is supported by published evidence and statutory guidance, ensuring transparency and accountability in the Welsh Government's response.

I therefore consider that this audit item can now be regarded as closed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care

Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee Audit: Care Home Commissioning

Progress Report and evidence

The Audit report included 13 recommendations. 10 accepted, 3 rejected.

Recommendation – 1. We note the ongoing work to evaluate the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 but recommend the Welsh Government provides assurances as to how it is working with Local Authorities, Health Boards and other stakeholders to review compliance with the care home commissioning provisions set out in the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

Accept

WG Response

The core purpose of the Social Services and (Wales) Well-being Act evaluation studies is to understand the experiences and expectations of the people using services. The function of regulatory bodies, in this case CIW and HIW, is to assess compliance with the statutory framework as it applies to the social care sector, including the commissioning of provision. This is supplemented by a national performance improvement framework and local authority reporting including annual reports from statutory social services directors.

We will ensure this compliance and performance framework evolves through our Rebalancing Care and Support reforms which will be the basis of public consultation in 2023, and in the context of agreed recommendations from the Expert Group on the National Care Service.

Additionally Audit Wales reports and other independent reviews (KPMG review 2019) of joint commissioning and pooling of budgets between health boards and local authorities for the purpose of commissioning placements for older people have indicated limited impact and effectiveness of current arrangements. Through the rebalancing care and support programme of work to develop a national commissioning framework and strengthen regional working the existing duties and expectations will be reviewed and clarified. Further to this the rebalancing programme of work is looking to develop performance monitoring and joint inspection arrangements for integrated working.

Progress

Recommendation is fulfilled and action is continuing and being monitored through ongoing policy implementation. Commissioning arrangements have been considered in relation to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), including care home provisions.

The National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support Code of Practice sets new national principles and standards for Local Authorities and Health Boards in relation to commissioning of care and support services under the SSWBA. It specifically states that statutory partners should work collaboratively and in partnership, including where appropriate, using pooled budget arrangements. This has helped support and strengthen the expectations set out in the Part 9 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 guidance.

Welsh Government as part of Rebalancing Care and Support Programme worked with statutory partners to strengthen partnership working through Draft Partnership Arrangements (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2024. A consultation was published on 16 April 2024 and closed on 19 July 2024. The consultation sought views on amendments to three sets of Regulations:

- The Partnership Arrangements (Wales) Regulations 2015
- The Care and Support (Area Planning) (Wales) Regulations 2017
- The Partnership Arrangements (Amendment) and Regulated Services (Market Stability Reports) (Wales) Regulations 2021

The aim of the amendments was to clarify and strengthen regional partnership arrangements under Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and particularly the role and functions of the Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs). The Regulations and supporting guidance were published in May 2025.

The Regulations strengthen partnership working and in relation to care homes and commissioning of services, including a new RPB objective to ensure that the partnership bodies respond to the market stability reports, which sets out commissioning priorities, including care homes. In response to the findings of Audit Wales and the KPMG report, a specific focus was placed on understanding the challenges and barriers to pooling budgets. Through engagement and consultation the following approaches were identified a) the need to focus on strengthening joint outcomes-focused commissioning and recognising pooled budgets as a tool to support better commissioning rather than an end goal in themselves, b) the need to provide greater flexibility in the levels at which budgets and resources can be pooled/shared (regional, sub regional, local, individual). Pooled budget arrangements are now being monitored annually through NHS financial reporting systems.

The updated guidance introduces a new requirement for RPBs to undertake a self-assessment every 2 years to review governance, functions and effectiveness, including compliance with the care home commissioning provisions set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The first round of self-assessments is expected in 2026.

URL evidence links [National framework for commissioning care and support: code of practice](#) | [GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation – 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government considers the voice of service users as part of their policy reform in this area. The Committee would welcome further information from the Welsh Government about how they've consulted with service users and their families, as part of the work of the expert group on social care.

Accept

WG Response

The independent Expert Group to establish a National Care Service, free at the point of need, was established in February 2022 and completed its report in September 2022.

The Group was independent from government and consisted of individuals from a range of diverse backgrounds who offered the perspectives of citizens, service management, public administration, workforce representation and academia. The Expert Group also represented the views of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people, and to enhance the use of the Welsh language in social care. Due to the technical nature of the expert group, the inclusive representation on the group and the tight timescales for delivering a set of recommendations, it was felt that a wider consultation would be more appropriate at a later point. Having considered these factors, the Terms of Reference for the Expert Group, set by Ministers and the Plaid Cymru Designated Member, did not include expectations around extensive public consultation.

The Expert Group recommended a range of practical steps towards moving to a National Care Service free at the point of need, they presented their recommendations report to Ministers, and at that time Plaid Cymru, as part of the Co-operation agreement. Ministers were persuaded by this [report](#) and following consideration of the report an Initial Implementation plan was published ([Towards a National Care and Support Service for Wales - Initial Implementation Plan](#)). As recommended by the Expert Group, a National Office for Care and Support was established, supported by a cross sectoral Strategic Advisory Group to advise and scrutinise the work of the National Office. Potential models for delivering a National Care Services are being developed by the National Office in collaboration with the public and stakeholders. Once developed as part of the second phase delivery plan, an extensive public consultation will be held.

Progress

Recommendations have been fulfilled, and engagement continues to build as part of ongoing policy implementation by the National Office for Care and Support. Ministers are committed to working with service users and their carers, the social care workforce and our key stakeholders as we move forward with our Initial Implementation plan.

The Initial Implementation plan sets out the intended approach in relation to engaging and consulting with citizens. It sets out that moving towards a National Care and Support Service will be achieved through a three-staged process in which consultation, engagement and co-production on the component elements of the implementation plan will be undertaken. Working closely with Llais, the National Office has focused on creating a People's Forum to hear from service users, carers, families, and communities. For example, twenty people took part in our roundtable discussion around support for rural communities at the Royal Welsh Show, these included third sector representatives and rural service users. We welcomed a full house at the Welsh Government tent at the National Eisteddfod for a Q&A around the future of social care. The Chief Social Care Officer (CSCO) met with Cymru Older People's Alliance forum representatives to discuss their priorities for social care provision. Forum members included those from minority ethnic communities. The CSCO also met with around a hundred young carers from across Wales at the signing of the young Carers Covenant. A range of other events and activities are planned for 2026 as we build momentum in engaging and building a rapport with people from all communities across Wales.

With Stage 1 of the Initial Implementation Plan (2022–2025) nearing its completion, several components have already been delivered, including the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme and the establishment of the National Office for Care and Support. In Spring 2023, engagement and a public consultation commenced relating to the Rebalancing Care and Support programme, which in relation to the committee's report included our proposals for the National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support: Code of Practice, the updated Part 2 Code of Practice (General Functions) and the Part 9 statutory guidance: partnership arrangements which are taking forward the regional integration and partnership working elements of the Programme. These proposals were co-produced with

stakeholders from the social care sector through a National Technical Group and Task and Finish Groups. Officials undertook several engagement events and presented at key stakeholder events as well as holding public consultation events during the consultation period. Following the consultation, the feedback was used to refine the National Framework and inform the development of the National Office for Care and Support. The updated Framework came into force in September 2024.

As further component parts of the National Care Service Initial Implementation plan develop, arrangements will be put in place to ensure engagement activities take place with citizens and the whole of the social care sector and we recognise there will be the need to tailor our approach to engagement including in-person. For example, a series of engagement events may be held within the standard 12-week consultation period which would target specific parts of the sector. and events with citizens and people who use care and support services.

URL evidence links

Evidence of the original recommendations and vision - [Written Statement: National Care Service – Expert Group Report \(10 November 2022\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Evidence of how the Welsh Government is implementing those recommendations - [Towards a National Care and Support Service for Wales](#)

Rebalancing Care and Support programme consultation: [Rebalancing Care and Support Programme - Summary of response](#)

Initial Implementation Plan PDF: [Towards a National Care and Support Service for Wales](#)

Recommendation – 3. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government’s Task and Finish Groups developing the new National Framework for social care should consult service users as part of its work. The Welsh Government should provide an update about how this will be achieved, as part of its consultation in Spring 2023.

Accept

WG Response

The Rebalancing Care and Support Programme Partners - comprising of the membership of the Technical Group for the National Framework and membership of Task and Finish Groups to Strengthen regional partnership arrangements – include a range of voices from across the social care and healthcare sector. The members have committed to accurately represent the views, in relation to care and support, of their nominating organisation and/or region and to communicate updates from Group discussions to their own networks to feedback appropriately.

The task and finish group on citizen voice and engagement is reviewing the effectiveness of regional partnership mechanisms in including the views of service users, carers and other citizens. Citizen representatives have been engaged directly in the work of this task and finish group.

The whole programme will undertake extensive public consultation commencing in Spring 2023, and in the interim we are communicating using our programme newsletter.

Progress

This recommendation has been fulfilled. In 2023, we undertook an extensive public consultation on the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme proposals which included the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support, the updated Part 2 Code of Practice (General Functions) and Part 9 statutory guidance: partnership arrangements as well as other associated proposals.

To develop the National Framework, we established a National Technical Group and also two sub-groups to look in detail at specific elements of the National Framework. One of the sub-groups co-produced the draft principles and standards for commissioning care and support that were consulted on during the 2023 consultation. Through the public consultation over 90 consultation responses were received on the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support from a wide range of organisations and individuals, many of which provided detailed feedback on our proposals. The largest group of responses were from Third sector organisations who represent people who receive care and support, their responses included the views of people with whom they work. These organisations included the Older People's Commissioner in Wales, The Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Welsh Language Commissioner, Age Alliance Wales, Age Cymru, All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers of People with Learning Disabilities (AWF), All

Wales People First, Alzheimer's Society, Barnardo's Cymru, Carers Trust, Carers Wales, Children in Wales, Community Housing Cymru, Cymorth Cymru, Cwmpas, Cymru Older Peoples Alliance, Guide Dogs Cymru, Learning Disability Wales, Leonard Cheshire, Llamau, Marie Curie, Mencap Cymru, NSPCC, Oxfam Cymru, RCT People First, RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) Cymru, Stroke Association, WCVA and YMCA Cardiff.

These responses and the views of the people they represent have been extensively considered when developing the final version of the National Framework which came into force on 1 September.

Task and Finish Groups to Strengthen regional partnership arrangements

To support the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme and ensure stakeholder engagement. 5 task and finish groups were established focusing on the following areas:

- Integrated services
- planning and performance
- governance and scrutiny
- engagement and voice
- rebalancing the social care market

The task and finish groups completed engagement as part of the development of the amended Regulations (see recommendation 1). The views of stakeholders (Spring 2023) were incorporated into the design of the draft amended regulations (April 2024), which were agreed by Senedd 28 November 2024. The engagement and voice task and finish group also co-produced a Citizen Charter and guidance on roles and responsibilities for service user/unpaid carer representatives on RPBs. The charter and supporting materials have been included in the statutory Part 9 Social Services and (Wales) Well-being Act guidance and are now supporting improved engagement with service user and carer representatives in the work of RPBs.

Strategic Advisory Group

As part of the National Office's governance, an external Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) has been established to ensure robust governance arrangements. Its main role is to advise and support the National Office for Care and Support in the delivery of its work, by offering strategic advice and constructive challenge. In relation to engagement, it will play a crucial role in supporting the Chief Social Care Officer and the National Office in providing an informed voice for the sector and beyond, and to support engagement with stakeholders and service-users across the sector.

Citizen Forum

The National Office for Care and Support has made significant progress in embedding citizen voice mechanisms. The National Office has actively engaged with citizens through listening events led by the Chief Social Care Officer and the National Office and is working closely with Llais to ensure inclusive engagement. The Engagement and Voice Task and Finish Group co-produced a Citizen Charter and guidance for service user and unpaid carer representatives, now embedded in statutory guidance. The Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) has also been established to ensure citizen and stakeholder voices are represented in the governance arrangements of the National Office. The Citizen Forum is expected to become fully operational as part of the National Office's maturing engagement infrastructure, with a focus on reaching marginalised groups and ensuring broad representation across Wales.

URL evidence links

Evidence of consultation, co-production, and the embedding of citizen voice in the National Framework, progress on citizen engagement and the development of the Citizen Forum and supporting guidance.

[Rebalancing Care and Support Programme – Consultation Summary](#)

[National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support – Code of Practice](#)

[Regional Partnership Boards: charter for service user, carer, third sector and provider members \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

[National Office for Care and Support: annual report 2024 to 2025 | GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation – 4. We recommend the Welsh Government give consideration to encouraging and supporting the role of volunteers in care homes but within the strict boundaries of supporting quality of life such as developing shared interests and activities. Volunteers must not be used to provide professional care services.

Accept

WG Response

In 2021 the Welsh Government funded a small pilot project to recruit volunteers to support safe visiting between residents and relatives during the pandemic. This supported care homes by alleviating pressures on staff to undertake this specific role.

We are now building on the approach to recruiting, training and inducting volunteers that was developed during the initial project. Our new project aims to broaden the role, reach, skills, and number of volunteers across care homes in Wales, based on feedback from the pilot project, whilst ensuring volunteers' roles are clear and appropriate. The target is to recruit 80 new volunteers across 20 care homes in Wales in four geographical areas (Gwynedd, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Gwent and Pembrokeshire) with the support of a local organisation in each area. The aim is to work with 5 care homes in each area. We have provided Age Cymru with £63,000 of grant funding to undertake this work.

As part of this project, which runs from July 2022 to March 2023, volunteers will be trained to engage with care home residents using the 'appreciative enquiry' approach; this works with people's values, respecting hidden stories of experience and personal narratives, demonstrating a sensitivity to feelings. Training volunteers in this way will support residents to give feedback to the care home on the issues that matter to them. Volunteers will also be trained to support activities co-ordinators to reinvigorate care homes during this transitional period out of the pandemic towards a more normal and more vibrant way of life.

Progress

This recommendation has been fulfilled. In June 2023 the Welsh Government funded Age Cymru to continue to work towards embedding volunteering within the care home sector, to strategically raise the profile of volunteering in care homes and to evaluate the approach taken to improve the resident well-being within adult care homes through the volunteering project. Between June 2023 and March 2024, 44 volunteers were trained and placed in 28 care homes completing 990 hours of volunteering and engaging with 870 residents. Two conferences were held to disseminate the tools and good practice established throughout the project and present the evaluation report.

The adult care home resident well-being workstream, working with Age Cymru, has brought all the good practice, tools and learning completed over the last few years, together into one online toolkit for care homes. This was launched in January 2025. The [Resident wellbeing toolkit](#) includes a section on volunteering, covering recruitment, training and management of volunteers.

Social Care Wales was funded 2024/25 by the Volunteering Wales Strategic Grant (WG), via WCVA to undertake research into volunteering in care homes. The final report has been published and is being considered by SCW. <https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/whats-on/news-and-blogs/volunteering-in-social-care-a-new-report>

Social Care Wales has also undertaken a new research project exploring how volunteering can serve as a pathway into paid roles in social care.

URL evidence links

Evidence of the volunteering programme's impact and resources developed to support future activity.

[Care Home Volunteering Evaluation – Age Cymru](#)

[Care Home Volunteer Toolkit – Age Cymru](#)

Recommendation – 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's considers, as part of the development of a National Care Service, what more can be done to review the salaries and terms and conditions of care workers, to ensure parity with NHS staff and to be competitive with other industries, such as the hospitality industry. Without parity of pay and conditions, the sector will continue to face problems recruiting and retaining staff.

Accept

WG Response

Introducing the Real Living Wage (RLW) for social care workers has been a priority for Welsh Government and a key commitment in the programme for government. The sector urgently needed support to address recruitment and retention issues, exacerbated by the extreme challenges presented during the Covid-19 pandemic. £43m of funding was made available to Local Authorities and Health Boards for 2022/23 financial year, and £70 million in 2023/24 to deliver the RLW commitment. Since then, the costs for the RLW have been factored into the local authority settlement.

In 2020, the Welsh Government convened the Social Care Fair Work Forum, a social partnership group in which trade unions, employers and Government come together to look at how the working conditions of social care workers can be improved in Wales and find viable medium and long-term options to address the recruitment concerns, improve workforce terms and conditions and to find ways to improve and build a sustainable sector for the future. The Forum is committed to working together to influence national priorities and policy regarding fair work in the social care sector in Wales and to work ambitiously and pragmatically to achieve practical and implementable change.

It has prioritised certain issues regarding fair work in the sector:

- o The payment of Real Living wage to all social care staff as a minimum.
- o Developing a Pay and Progression Framework for social care staff.
- o Establishing a Social Care Workforce Partnership.
- o Examine the role and experiences of Personal Assistants in social care and their access to fair work.
- o Supporting safe, healthy and inclusive working environments in social care.
- o Understand the impact on workers of non-guaranteed hours and the extent to which workers have knowledge of and can access their rights.

In the short term the Social Care Fair Work Forum focussed its efforts on improvements to pay and provided advice on implementation of the Real Living wage, it is now focusing on its wider priorities. These include work programmes to improve pay, terms and conditions for the social care sector such as the Pay and Progression Framework being developed. This will highlight the various roles and progression opportunities available within the social care sector, and promote social care as a career for life, with varying roles at different pay levels set out.

Progress

We are now in the fourth financial year of our commitment to pay the Real Living Wage (RLW) to social care workers in Wales. Across 2022–23 and 2023–24, we provided funding of approximately £113 million to support this commitment.

Since 2024–25, the funding has been available within the Local Government Revenue Support Grant to meet the costs associated with the difference between the NLW and RLW.

On 22 October 2025 an independent evaluation on the implementation of the RLW was published. To inform this work Cordis Bright, who were contracted to undertake the independent evaluation, have engaged with national stakeholders and those involved in the operational delivery. The Minister for Children and Social Care is currently considering the findings and recommendations. Positively the report states that 84% of respondents now receive the RLW, however, this highlights that it is not reaching all our social care workers, and therefore the Minister will review the report and consider whether improvements can be made to ensure the policy is as effective as it can be.

The Social Care Fair Work Forum continues to meet quarterly, with various Task and Finish Groups established that are led by Forum members on work areas relating to fair work and improving conditions for social care workers. Working in social partnership to ensure the voice of the workers and providers are considered is key to moving forward with these work programmes.

Following a consultation on a draft voluntary Pay and Progression Framework for the sector, the Forum agreed to the establishment of two expert groups focusing on pay, and progression, respectively. This framework will support providers to offer consistent pay with clear progression and development opportunities. The working groups have specific experience and knowledge on either pay or progression within social care and also include NHS representation to ensure we are considering and trying to align with how NHS set out their pay scales. We are in the final stages of this work and aim to publish the Framework in early 2026.

Ongoing work of the Forum around collective bargaining has resulted in the establishment of a 'Social Care Workforce Partnership' for the independent social care sector in Wales. Trade Unions, social care employers and Welsh Government have formed this partnership to agree a set of 'Models of Best Practice' of employment for those working in the independent social care sector. Three 'Models of best practice' HR policies will be the priority for the first year of the Partnership, having consulted with the workforce and providers on what is important to them. The aim of developing these model policies is to bring consistency with the terms and conditions across the social care sector.

Linked to pay, the UK Government Employment Rights Bill contained a clause to introduce Fair Pay Agreements for social care workers. Welsh Government has worked closely with UK Government to ensure that these provisions also relate to Wales. Fair Pay Agreements will mark a significant change for pay in social care, setting enforceable pay rates. In July 2025 the Senedd passed the Legislative Consent Motion to allow a Social Care Negotiating Body to be developed for Wales, which will set Fair Pay Agreements in the future. The Forum has now begun working with government to inform and shape the approach we will take for developing a Social Care Negotiating Body for Wales.

URL evidence links

Evidence of the Welsh Government's commitment to fair pay and conditions through the Real Living Wage, the Social Care Fair Work Forum, and the Social Care Workforce Partnership.

[Administering the Real Living Wage – GOV.WALES](#)

[Social Care Fair Work Forum – GOV.WALES](#)

[Social Care Workforce Partnership – GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation – 6. We endorse Recommendation 14 of the recent report of the Health and Social Care Committee in relation to the Welsh Governments [sic] which calls upon the Welsh Government to undertake a robust evaluation of the WeCare. Wales recruitment campaign.

Accept

WG Response

We will work with Social Care Wales to ensure robust evaluation of the WeCare.Wales campaign through a range of evaluation activities.

WeCare.Wales is made up of a series of focussed campaigns managed by Social Care Wales addressing key issues and challenges facing the sector. This includes facilitated training through the Introduction to Social Care scheme and the website including a jobs portal.

As the WeCare.Wales campaign is managed by Social Care Wales, it is Social Care Wales that is responsible for evaluation of this campaign. Welsh Government contribute funding towards WeCare.Wales, and we consider it appropriate that Social Care Wales has the responsibility for evaluating the impact of its work. There are existing mechanisms in place for Welsh Government to oversee the work of Social Care Wales and how it is achieving against its strategic outcomes.

Social Care Wales is commissioning detailed research to better understand care employer methods of recruitment and barriers encountered. The research will also understand employers' involvement and awareness of WeCare.Wales and how this may have impacted on their recruitment and will be completed by April 2023. Social Care Wales is also running a public perception survey which will build on surveys carried out in 2018 and 2020 and provide trend data on public opinion and views of the social care, early years and childcare sectors. The second perceptions survey carried out in 2020 showed public attitudes about the value of the sector and its workforce had improved. This third run of the public perceptions survey is due for completion early 2023.

Progress

We continue to work with Social Care Wales to ensure robust evaluation of the WeCare.Wales campaign through a range of evaluation activities and through the existing mechanisms in place for Welsh Government to oversee the work of Social Care Wales and how it is achieving against its strategic outcomes Welsh Government contribute funding towards WeCare.Wales, however it is managed by Social Care Wales and we therefore consider it appropriate that Social Care Wales has responsibility for evaluating the impact of its work.

Social Care Wales commissioned Urban Foresight to conduct research that explores how the workforce challenges facing social care in Wales can be addressed. The research was split into two themes: understanding job-seeking behaviours and understanding attraction, recruitment and the role of WeCare Wales.

To support addressing the challenges in attraction and recruitment, WeCare Wales was launched in 2019 aiming to raise the profile of the sector and make the sector more attractive to jobseekers through running local and national campaigns, developing online resources, advertising vacancies and providing support to jobseekers and employers.

The research conducted by Urban Foresight also considered the impact of WeCare Wales. Published earlier this year, it presented findings from the qualitative research with stakeholders from the sector and a series of desk-based reviews.

The report stated that WeCare Wales brings significant value for the sector. Its activities do well to engage and inform jobseekers and are perceived as vital to address the attraction and recruitment challenges, however awareness in the sector needs to be increased.

Some positives captured in the report were the introduction to social care course which had been popular in raising awareness of the sector, and prepares future candidates for the type of work involved, the large reach and views of some of the campaign videos produced, and the extensive programme of outreach and engagement activities such as Regional Connectors, school engagement, jobseeker engagement, stakeholder toolkits, and Care Ambassadors. This raises awareness of the sector and challenges negative perceptions.

Overall, the findings were that WeCare Wales has been successful in supporting the sector to attract workers, however it was recognised that more could be done and so a series of recommendations for WeCare Wales and, by extension, Social Care Wales are proposed alongside other recommendations for employers and providers in addressing the recruitment challenges.

URL evidence links

Evidence of the independent evaluation of the WeCare Wales campaign and its impact on recruitment and public perception.

[Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales – Main report](#)

[Understanding attraction, recruitment and job-seeking behaviours - reports and resources - Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation](#)

[What WeCare Wales has learnt from recent research about attraction, recruitment and retention - Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation](#)

Recommendation – 7. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with the industry and other stakeholders to attract more volunteers to the care home sector to provide additional quality of life services, but not to replace professional care.

Accept

WG Response

We are working with a number of key stakeholders as part of our grant-funded volunteer project to broaden the role, reach, skills, and number of volunteers across care homes in Wales. These include Age Cymru, the WCVA, Care Forum Wales, Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales. The inaugural meeting of the project stakeholder group will be held in October.

Progress

This recommendation has been fulfilled. The Age Cymru Good Neighbours project that has been reported on has concluded. The project outlined at Recommendation 4 has also concluded. This successfully enabled Age Cymru to embed volunteering within the care home sector. Two conferences were held to disseminate the tools and good practice established throughout the project and present the evaluation report. The provision of volunteering in care homes will remain an area of ongoing development for the sector. There is no active Welsh Government-led programme, via third sector funding there are a range of localised projects that are proceeding.

URL evidence links

Evidence of the successful embedding of volunteering in care homes and resources developed to support future third sector-led initiatives.

[Care Home Volunteering Evaluation – Age Cymru](#)

[Care Home Volunteer Toolkit – Age Cymru](#)

[Care Homes and Volunteering – WCVA](#)

Recommendation – 8. The Welsh Government needs to mandate a more proactive approach to sharing information across the care home sector, particularly information on service user experience and satisfaction, linked with the seven well-being goals for Wales. This mandatory requirement to share information should be implemented on a national level, to ensure providers, service users, the Welsh Government and other have access to consistent and relevant information. The Welsh Government should

work with providers to proactively seek consent from service users and their families for the sharing of information.

Reject

WG Response

We agree fully that citizen experiences must be the basis and impetus for improvement in the provision of social care services. This citizen-centred perspective is central to the Social Services and Well-being Act. Therefore, we are seeking to develop an environment where stronger national data sets are a basis for learning and drive service improvement. A range of measures are already in place to this end.

For local authorities we have set out in a Code of Practice that local authorities should collect service user experiences and outcomes, and use that information to drive improvement, as part of the Performance and Improvement Framework. Evidence that they have done this must be provided in the Directors of Social Services Annual Reports. Care Inspectorate Wales also puts the views of care users at the heart of its own work, and the conclusions of its inspections are published.

However, we are not at this time seeking to mandate the sharing of information about individuals' experiences, as we do not view the high cost of implementing such an approach across many hundreds of providers would create a proportionate benefit in terms of data development over and above the measures we have already taken and have in hand.

URL evidence links

Evidence of existing mechanisms for capturing and using service user experience data across the care home sector.

[Performance and Improvement Framework – GOV.WALES](#)

[Director of Social Services Annual Report Guidance – GOV.WALES](#)

[CIW Inspection Reports – Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

Recommendation – 9. The Code of Practice on inspection flowing from the requirements of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 requires inspectors to seek service user voices in all inspections. The Committee seeks assurances and evidence that the provisions are now being implemented and monitored in full.

Accept

WG Response

People who are in receipt of care and support are the primary focus of every inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). CIW has undertaken 705 inspections of 614 adult care homes between 1 October 2021 and 31 August 2022 and spent 9,181 hours on site at those care homes. This provides the opportunity to always talk to people who live in the care homes and their families and friends when they are present during our visit.

Where people are unable to talk with CIW, for example if they are living with dementia, an evidence-based tool called Short Observation Framework for Inspection (SOFI) is used which helps us understand people's experience of living in the care home. CIW also considers how well people have been involved in the development of their personal plans and look for evidence whether people have a voice in the running of their home in accordance with the requirement of the regulations. Where CIW finds this is not evidenced, we would highlight this as an area for improvement and check this is actioned at the next inspection.

In addition, CIW has a short feedback survey which can be completed during an inspection or at any other time as it is available online. Between 1 October 2021 and 31 August 2022, CIW received 982 feedback surveys about care homes in Wales including 672 from staff, 98 from people living in care homes and 182 from their representatives and 30 from other health and social care professionals. CIW also reflects the views of people in our inspection reports as appropriate. Here are some extracts from recent inspection reports:

- “The health and wellbeing of people is actively supported. People told us “they are always interested in how we are doing”, another person told us; “staff are really good with no problems here”. We also spoke to three relatives, one of whom told us “the care is fantastic”.
- “Another person living with dementia has recently moved into the service. They are comfortable and relaxed following a period of initial distress when moving in. Their relative attends the home daily and is extremely

positive about staff and the environment, saying “it’s the best home I have ever been in, and I’ve been in many”.”

Progress

This recommendation has been fulfilled. Care Inspectorate Wales inspectors speak to people who use social care services at every inspection to seek their views and understand their experiences. Where people are unable to communicate verbally CIW uses its Short Observation Framework for Inspection tool SOFI2 to focus on people’s well-being by observing what life is like for people using services. CIW also uses feedback surveys to seek the views of family members and of staff working in social care services.

URL evidence links

Evidence of CIW’s inspection methodology and tools used to capture service user voice during care home inspections.

[How We Inspect Adult and Children's Services – CIW](#)

[SOFI2 Quality of Life Methodology – CIW \(PDF\)](#)

[Feedback Survey – CIW \(PDF\)](#)

[CIW Inspection Reports Directory](#)

Recommendation – 10. The Welsh Government should provide the Committee with data about the number of inspections conducted of care homes in Wales so far in 2022, outline the future inspections work being undertaken for the remainder of the year. The Committee would also like to hear about the Welsh Government intends to address the backlog in inspections over the pandemic.

Accept

WG Response

As of 31 August 2022, there are 1,044 adult care homes registered with CIW. CIW has inspected 486 of these since January 2022. CIW’s approach to inspection is set out in its code of practice (210122-code-of-practice-for-inspection-RISCA-en.pdf (careinspectorate.wales). CIW prioritises inspections based on the intelligence we hold about services. During 2022, CIW initially focused on inspecting services where our intelligence raised concerns, or where CIW had identified poor outcomes for people at previous inspections and CIW needed to inspect again to consider if improvements had been made. CIW also prioritised inspection of services which were due for inspection following their re-registration under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. The re-registration of 1,639 services took place between 1 April 2018 and 26 January 2021.

The timetable for the inspection of adult care homes has to be considered alongside the requirement for CIW to inspect 927 other regulated adult and children’s services including domiciliary support services, care homes for children, boarding schools, etc.

Between 1 October 2021 and 31 August 2022, we have inspected 614 adult care homes. The aim of the current inspection programme is to have inspected all registered adult care homes in the 18-month period between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2023. However, CIW are acutely aware of the continuing impact of the pandemic on the social care sector exacerbated by staff recruitment and retention pressures. Where CIW finds poor outcomes for people, it will require the provider to take action, and we will return to inspect the service to check improvements have been made. Such additional inspections could delay the completion of the planned programme which is difficult to predict or quantify.

In addition to our inspection activity, CIW works closely with partners to underpin and support our inspection programme. For example, we meet regularly with local authority and health board commissioners to share information about care services. This includes sharing feedback commissioners may have from people living in care homes and from health and social care professionals who regularly visit care services. CIW has developed a formal information sharing protocol and memorandum of understanding with commissioners. CIW also actively encourages people using services, their friends and families and care staff to share any concerns they have about care home services. This intelligence informs the planning of our inspection activity.

Progress

This recommendation has been fulfilled. As of May 2023, CIW had inspected 98% of adult care homes at least once since October 2021. According to CIW’s latest published statistics and inspection reports, the remaining care homes

have now been inspected, completing the original 18-month inspection cycle. CIW continues to operate a dynamic, risk-based inspection programme, aiming to inspect each care home at least once within 18 months of its last inspection. This cycle is actively being maintained, with prioritisation based on concerns, outcomes, and re-inspection needs. CIW has also expanded its inspection programme to include new published ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services from April 2025, further strengthening transparency and accountability.

URL evidence links

Evidence of CIW's inspection activity, prioritisation approach, and recruitment to support the care home inspection programme.

[Annual Statistics – CIW](#)

[Code of Practice for Inspection – CIW \(PDF\)](#)

[Work for Us – CIW](#)

[Inspection ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services | GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation – 11. The Committee is deeply concerned about the charging of top-up fees and recommends that the Welsh Government issues binding restrictions, to limit the areas where such fees are charged, which should be kept to a minimum and published. The Welsh Government should undertake a comprehensive review of this at the earliest possible opportunity

Reject - See joint response below for 11 and 12.

Recommendation – 12. The Committee recommends that a robust independent redress system be implemented, to allow service users or their relatives to challenge top-up fees.

Reject – Joint response for 11 and 12

The Welsh Government would be deeply concerned where any individual is being charged for care where that care is already provided free of charge through the public purse.

There are already clear guidelines in place within the Continuing Healthcare Framework which set out the approach to additional services, defined as services which are over and above those detailed in the care plan developed to address assessed need. The guidelines are clear that such personal contribution arrangements must never be utilised as a mechanism for subsidising the service provision for which the Local Health Board is responsible, should be a matter of personal choice, and that individuals are not put at risk of financial exploitation. The guidelines also provide a clear accountability framework which we expect Local Health Boards to adhere to.

In relation to local authority commissioned or arranged care, the regulations and code of practice for charging for adult social care only provide very limited and specific situations where additional cost payments may be appropriate, e.g. when a local authority has agreed to a person's request to be provided with more expensive accommodation than they would usually provide. For local authority commissioned or arranged care, access to advocacy, the local authority complaints system and the public services Ombudsman are further resources or channels of recourse that an individual can pursue.

For people that self-fund and arrange their own care we expect care home providers to be clear and upfront about the fees they charge individuals for residential care. They are required by law to set out this information in their written guide for the service as well as an individual's service agreement.

With these arrangements in place, until we have given full consideration to the findings of the National Care Service Expert Group, and engaged with partners on next steps, it would not be appropriate to commit to any wholesale amendments of regulation or, to initiate a new independent redress system at this particular time, in the absence of that detail.

However, in keeping with evidence provided to the committee, subject to the outcome of the Expert Group, and as part of any new system, we would provide any further or updated clarification needed about charging for additional services. In terms of redress, we would need to carefully consider how any consequential refinements we might make to the existing regulations and frameworks sit in the context of any new system, and the Competition and Markets Authority's existing advice on consumer law for UK care home providers for older people, which already provides a level of protection for people.

URL evidence links

Evidence of existing safeguards and redress mechanisms relating to top-up fees and care home charging.

[National Framework for Continuing NHS Healthcare – GOV.WALES](#)

[Charging Code of Practice – GOV.WALES](#)

[How to Complain – Public Services Ombudsman for Wales](#)

[Consumer Law Advice for Care Homes – CMA \(PDF\)](#)

Recommendation – 13. The Welsh Government should write to the Committee to outline their intentions for pooled funding for care home commissioning, in the context of the ongoing policy reform in the sector and the proposed National Care Service and National Framework.

Accept

WG Response

The development and sharing of this report provide intentions of pooled funding, more specifically the response provided to recommendation 1. As part of the rebalancing care and support programme, five task and finish groups have been established to consider and strengthen regional integration and joint working via Regional Partnership Boards. The Integrated Services Task and Finish group has been specifically reviewing existing provision and arrangements for the regional pooling of funds and in particular considering the recommendations of the 2021 Audit Wales Report on the commissioning of care home placements for older people. It will also review and consider the impact and usage of the ADSSC pooled budgets toolkit that was co-produced in 2019 with a range of stakeholders to provide practical guidance on how to overcome potential barriers to pooled fund arrangements.

Engagement with the task and finish group members and learning from the KPMG review of pooled budget arrangements suggests change is needed to ensure joint commissioning is more effective, outcomes focused and that pooled funds are considered as a tool within a joint commissioning arrangement as opposed to being perceived as an end goal in themselves.

To that end the task and finish group will likely be making recommendations about amending the part 9 guidance that will:

- Focus on the pooling of resources, which goes beyond just the pooling of budgets.
- More clearly position pooled funds within a joint commissioning context.
- Provide greater flexibility for partners in relation to how, when and where they pool funds i.e. regional, sub regional, local or individual; and
- Highlight other priority areas for joint commissioning and the pooling of resources.

Recommendations from the task and finish group will, subject to Ministerial consideration and decision, shape the revised Part 9 statutory guidance which is due to be consulted upon on in Spring 2023. Following ministerial approval to the revised draft guidance, the Committee will be formally issued a copy of the consultation documents for their consideration and comment.

Progress

As part of the rebalancing care and support programme, five task and finish groups were established to consider and strengthen regional integration and joint working via Regional Partnership Boards. The Integrated Services Task and Finish group specifically reviewed existing provision and arrangements for the regional pooling of funds and considered the recommendations of the Audit Wales Report on the commissioning of care home placements for older people. It also considered the impact and usage of the ADSSC pooled budgets toolkit that was co-produced in 2019 with a range of stakeholders to provide practical guidance on how to overcome potential barriers to pooled fund arrangements.

Engagement with the task and finish group members and learning from the Audit Wales and KPMG review of pooled budget arrangements suggested change was needed to ensure joint commissioning is more effective, outcomes-focused and that a pooled fund is considered as a tool within a joint commissioning arrangement as opposed to it being perceived as the end goal in itself.

To that end the task and finish group made the following recommendations about amending the part 9 guidance so that it will:

- Focus on the pooling of resources, which goes beyond just the pooling of budgets.

- More clearly position pooled funds within a joint commissioning context.
- Provide greater flexibility for partners in relation to how, when and where they pool funds i.e. regional, sub regional, local or individual; and
- Highlight other priority areas for joint commissioning and the pooling of resources.

Recommendations from the task and finish group have informed revisions to the Part 2 Code of Practice and the Part 9 regulations and guidance that were consulted on in 2023 and 2024. The amendments to the Part 9 regulations have now been concluded and published in Version 3 of the Statutory Guidance (April 2025). The revised part 9 guidance will address the points raised by task and finish group in relation to positioning pooled funds within a joint commissioning context. The following statement is a defined RPB function within the Part 9 guidance: *'facilitating the joint commissioning of integrated health and care services and making effective use of pooled resources to bring staff, goods and services together'*.

Improvements in joint commissioning practice will be supported by the National Commissioning Framework and monitoring of pooled budgets will occur through NHS financial reporting systems as well as through scrutiny of RPB annual reports and bi-annual self-assessments.

URL evidence links

Evidence of Welsh Government's intentions and reforms relating to pooled funding and joint commissioning, informed by statutory guidance and independent reviews.

[Part 9 Statutory Guidance – GOV.WALES](#)

[Audit Wales Report – Care Home Commissioning](#)

[Pooled Budgets Evaluation Framework – GOV.WALES](#)

[National Framework Code of Practice – GOV.WALES](#)