



General Council Statement on Social Care

The General Council believes that no political issue in Scotland is more important than root and branch reform of our Social Care system. Social care users and Care workers have been let down by successive Scottish Governments. Along with pay and jobs, we are prioritising the issue during the Scottish election campaign. We expect Social Care to continue to be a key campaigning issue, supporting affiliates' campaigns to improve pay and conditions in the sector and the creation of a Scottish National Care Service with direct delivery and not-for-profit at its core. This strategy should centre on supporting the organising and bargaining priorities of all care affiliates whilst highlighting the wider social value of a decent care service.

The majority of residential care in Scotland is provided by for profit enterprises, often owned by private equity firms whose ultimate ownership lies in tax havens. Scotland can neither afford nor tolerate the social care investment lost to the opaque and complex corporate structures of many private providers.

Over the past year developments in the care sector have amounted to a crisis within the crisis. There has been an appalling loss of life in Care Homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as unacceptable health risks to workers. The chronic low-pay and exploitative working practices in social care which predated the pandemic, affecting a workforce comprising of predominantly women and BAME workers, is now well understood and are driving a clear sense of undervaluation within workers across the sector. The under valuation of these workers and harrowing experiences of the past year have led to a crisis of confidence in government and employers with a knock-on effect in terms of recruitment and retention.

The General Council recognises that affiliated unions are pursuing excellent campaigning and organising initiatives, suitable to the workplaces and members they represent, and to their own political and campaigning objectives. Unison's Care Workers for Change, GMBs fight for 15 and Unites 'Who Cares for Our Carers' are all testimony to the commitment of unions to empowering workers and combatting low pay.

Compared to other public services where collective bargaining is the norm, arrangements in the Care Sector are more atomised. The General Council believes that this has been a significant contributor to the failure of government and employers to deliver decent terms and conditions for carers.

The Feeley Review into Social Care provides a starting point for workers, through their unions, to play a central role in reshaping the sector. Building on the work of the Fair Work Conventions 'Fair Work in Social Care' it highlights the central issues of pay, collective bargaining and service commissioning reform as central to reshaping the sector. As is

appropriate, care sector affiliates are active within the workstreams created to deliver reform.

The General Council believes that some progress has been made both in terms of winning the Living Wage for carers, improving Living Wage delivery, and more generally, in increasing workers' voice and influence in the sector. However, there is much more to be done. The Real Living Wage is a starting point and by no means the final destination for achieving pay justice for care workers.

The next months will be critical in pressuring government to commit to increase the quantum of funding for social care to allow for meaningful wage bargaining whilst building the architecture to support collective bargaining. The Scottish Government must act urgently to institute sectoral collective bargaining for the care sector.

Equally, radical reform of service commissioning should be a priority along with continuing to campaign for the profit motive to be eliminated from social care. The Scottish Government should formulate a national workforce plan for social care. This should be based on the principles of Fair Work and include a strategy to address immediate training issues and professional development.

It should work with all bodies involved in Integration Joint Boards to take all available steps in the current regulatory framework to shift care away from being a commodity provided for profit to being a service provided as a human right.