



National Care and Support Service Programme

*Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2
Implementation Plan*

Contents

Background	1
Stage 1 – Initial Implementation plan activities	2
Stage 1: Initial Implementation plan delivery outcomes	3
Implementing the National Care and Support Service: Transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2	15
Stage 2 Implementation Plan (2026-2028)	17

Background

Whilst in operation, the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru had 46 policy areas of joint working. One of the policy areas is the future national arrangements for the provision of social care. This included a commitment to establish an Expert Group to support the shared ambition to create a National Care and Support Service (NCSS) for Wales, free at the point of need, with social care continuing as a public service.

The formation of an Expert Group was announced in a [Written Statement](#) on 21 February 2022. The Expert Group met from February to September 2022 and prepared a Recommendations Report to Ministers and the then Designated Member. This [report](#), was published on 10 November 2022. There are 46 far-reaching recommendations in the Expert Group’s report, which also highlighted the essential role of further consultation and engagement with the sector to ensure that the foundations of a NCSS are co-produced, ultimately ensuring the needs of the present and future are met.

The Expert Group acknowledged that the vision presented in their report would likely require a phased approach with development and delivery spanning at least a 10-year period. Ministers and the then Designated Member agreed to this direction of travel and were persuaded by the recommendations in the report. An [Initial Implementation Plan](#) was therefore drawn-up and published on 14 December 2023, and announced in a [Written Statement](#) of the same day.

Maintaining a three-staged programme of delivery aligns to the vision set out in the Expert Group’s report, with each stage of the delivery plan being taken forward through co-production and engagement with the sector, people who receive care and support and their carers. Continuous engagement will be maintained throughout each delivery phase of this programme.



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Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Stage 1 – Initial Implementation plan activities

The Initial Implementation plan delivered several commitments from the Programme for Government and the Co-operation Agreement, as well as research for future stages:

- Rebalancing care and support programme
 - Establish a National Office for care and support within Welsh Government
 - Development of a National framework for commissioning care and support
 - Strengthening Partnership working and integration
- Working with the Fair Work Forum, developed the principles of a progression framework and voluntary collective bargaining unit, considering also sick pay and zero-hours contracts
- Development of a national performance and outcomes dataset
- Develop new models of integrated care through the Regional Integration Fund and provider opportunities for local authorities to invest in adult residential care provision through the Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund.
- Consider options in relation to Continuing Healthcare (CHC) following implementation of updated guidance along with developments such as Director Payments and a performance framework
- Create a National Market Oversight framework to assist commissioners to identify, understand and put in place relevant mitigations within the social care market to enhance resilience and moderate risk.
- Research
 - Consider potential options relating to paying for care, assessing demographic changes; modelling/re-modelling financial projections; assessing the potential system impacts, risks and unintended consequences.
 - Better understand the financial and operational impacts of care free at the point of need with particular reference to the weekly charge for domiciliary care and the capital limit in residential care
 - Commence work towards the feasibility of creating national fee methodologies including for care home placements
 - Explore options around developing an accountability framework to accompany social care funding

The National Office for Care and Support (NOCS) has coordinated Stage 1 of the Initial Implementation plan, collaborating with stakeholders to deliver 25 activities and 4 research areas. All work will conclude by March 2026.

The next section provides a progress update on these tasks and research through March 2026.



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Stage 1: Initial Implementation plan delivery outcomes

Building the foundation for a NCSS

Establishment of the National Office for Care and Support (NOCS)

The NOCS was officially launched in a [Written Statement](#) issued in April 2024. Designed as an outward-facing function, the NOCS collaborates closely with the sector to improve outcomes for the people of Wales. It also offers robust national leadership and works alongside the [Chief Social Care Officer for Wales](#). The National Office also holds responsibility for taking forward plans for the NCSS for Wales.

Operating within Welsh Government, the National Office provides strong national leadership and strategic direction consistent with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It supports national priorities and standards and collaborates with Wales' 22 local authorities, stakeholders, the NHS, individuals using social care and support services, their carers, the social care workforce, professional bodies, and other key partners. An external Strategic Advisory Group supports robust governance arrangements. While members provide strategic advice and constructive critique to the National Office for Care and Support and the Chief Social Care Officer, decision-making authority remains with Welsh Government Ministers.

Its first year was considered transitional, with achievements detailed in the inaugural [annual report](#) published in July 2025. This report highlighted positive progress in establishing the National Office and laying the foundation for developing the National Care and Support Service in Wales. As the National Office continues to evolve, it will facilitate greater innovation, improvement, and transformation across adult and children's services. The remit expanded in mid-2025 to encompass Safeguarding, Social Care Workforce, and Pathways of Care. Progress includes improving social care data collection, developing a clearer understanding of service delivery, and supporting the Chief Social Care Officer in amplifying the sector's voice.

A broader engagement plan has been implemented to work with delivery partners, the workforce and their representatives, and service users, their carers, family, and friends. Over the past year, national engagements included a roundtable event at the Royal Welsh Show and a Q&A session at the National Eisteddfod. These activities are elevating the profile of social care and fostering discussion on developing a National Care and Support Service for Wales. Further engagement is underway with Llais to conduct targeted community outreach with key groups.



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Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Appointment of a Consultant Social Worker

A [Consultant Social Worker](#), hosted by BASW Cymru and funded by the National Office, has been appointed to serve as a catalyst for transformative change.

The role was created following listening events led by Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, in response to concerns about gaps between the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and lived experiences. Over 300 participants emphasised ongoing challenges in translating the Act's values into practice, highlighting the need for stronger anti-racist and culturally responsive approaches, consistent standards, better data usage, and visible leadership.

The primary aim is to support the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#) within social work by:

- Advancing social work practice for racially minoritised individuals, families, and communities.
- Building a culturally competent, anti-racist workforce through training and leadership development, improved data systems, inclusive career pathways, targeted training, and dedicated support for minoritised social workers.
- Advising on impact assessments, local anti-racist plans, and service evaluations.
- Championing anti-racist social work practices across Wales.

Key activities include engaging with leaders and professional bodies to influence systemic change, raising awareness, identifying training opportunities, demonstrating progress via evaluations, and promoting best practices for racially minoritised communities. The post is supported by a network of people with lived experience, regulators, and partners.

Co-production, cultural awareness and leadership

Cultural awareness and national design principles are central to developing the National Care and Support Service therefore, this work is ongoing.

Following feedback from stakeholders, it has been proposed a cultural awareness campaign is first preceded by a series of listening activities and engagement sessions. The Engagement Plan for the National Office 2025-26 has taken forward a number of activities in close collaboration with people and the sector.

A series of events took place in 2025 summer period, including various sector conferences and events for example at the Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod, which provided opportunities to gather stakeholder and public ideas on



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

priorities for national design principles, and raising the profile of social care as part of early cultural awareness work.

National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support

The National Framework, established under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, serves as a [Code of Practice](#) for the commissioning of care and support by local authorities, local health boards, and NHS trusts. Developed through the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme, it was laid before the Senedd on 11 June, issued on 24 July, and became effective from 1 September 2024.

The implementation and ongoing development of the National Framework is being led by the National Office for Care and Support. To facilitate alignment with the national principles and standards of the National Framework, the National Office has established and maintains a publicly accessible toolkit of resources for commissioners, launched on 1 August 2024 and hosted on the Social Care Wales communities' platform. In addition, Local Authorities and Local Health Boards have been provided with 48 funded places for Level 5 qualifications to enhance skills and success in implementing the required commissioning standards.

To further support implementation, in October 2025, the National Office organised and delivered three one-day mini conferences for commissioners. These events enabled commissioners to review progress, refine the implementation support (self-assessment) tool, and discuss reporting through Directors of Social Service and Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) annual reports. The National Office is also developing a theory of change to evaluate the impact of the Code and inform future reviews. Ongoing support will be provided to help commissioners continue to develop their practices in accordance with the principles and standards outlined in the Code of Practice.

Co-producing care with citizens in Wales

Updating requirement for Directors of Social Services Annual Reports

A comprehensive review was conducted to revise the requirements for Directors of Social Services' annual reports as outlined in Part 8 of the [Code of Practice](#) on the Role of the Director of Social Services. The purpose of this work was to ensure that reporting requirements remain clear, proportionate, and consistent with broader legislative and policy frameworks governing social services in Wales. The review specifically addressed the annual reporting provisions contained within Part 8 of the Code, evaluating their effectiveness in promoting accountability, assurance, and



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

transparency, as well as their capacity to facilitate uniform and meaningful reporting across local authorities while accommodating the local context.

The updated requirements now place greater emphasis on the annual report's function as a statutory mechanism for accountability and assurance. They clarify expectations that reports should deliver a cohesive narrative regarding how local authorities are administering social services functions and enhancing outcomes for individuals receiving care and support. Enhanced expectations surrounding the demonstration of engagement have been established, requiring annual reports to illustrate how the perspectives and experiences of service users, carers, providers, and partners inform their content.

Additionally, alignment with existing performance, quality, commissioning, and inspection frameworks has been strengthened to minimise duplication, bolster consistency across reporting obligations, and enable local authorities to leverage current evidence and data as appropriate. The revised requirements underscore governance and scrutiny practices, including presentation to elected members, sharing arrangements with relevant regional and national partners, and publication to promote transparency.

The updated requirements are designed to foster greater uniformity in Directors of Social Services' annual reports throughout Wales, while preserving flexibility in report structure and presentation. These changes aim to reinforce the annual report's role as a clear, accessible document evidencing statutory compliance, collaborative partnerships, and positive impacts on outcomes for those who receive care.

National oversight of Mwy Na Geiriau (More Than Just Words)

The National Office recognises the role of the Welsh language and respecting individuals' choice of language. The focus of work in this area has been on strengthening the connections across the social care sector and linking in with the work of the Mwy Na Geiriau advisory group, on which there is a Director of Social Services representative. The advisory group provides advice and challenges to support the delivery of the [More than just words 5 year plan](#), sharing expertise and best practices to improve bilingual services across sectors. [Progress reports](#) are published annually.

Through the Analysis and Innovation function of the National Office, data has also been collected on all adults', children's and carers' assessments and where there was evidence of the active offer, if that offer was accepted and if the assessment occurred in the language of choice. Updated guidance for the Directors of Social Services Annual Reports also includes a requirement to explain how local authorities are exercising its



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

functions under relevant legislation including progress in the context of Mwy Na Geiriau and the active offer.

With these activities in place, the National Office has supported a national oversight mechanism to monitor delivery of the strategy and will continue to work with colleagues and partners to ensure social care reporting features in the Mwy Na Geiriau annual reporting.

Supporting and valuing the workforce

Fair work Forum

The Social Care [Fair Work Forum](#) is a tripartite social partnership group committed to embedding fair work and improving terms and conditions for those working within the social care sector. The forum exists to allow representatives of trade unions, employers, stakeholders and the Welsh Government to work together to influence national priorities and policy regarding fair work in the social care sector in Wales. A founding principle for the forum is the recognition that delivery of better fair work outcomes will improve the lives of workers, enhance the provision of quality care, and strengthen long-term resilience of the sector.

Social Care Workforce Partnership

Through the work of the Fair Work Forum, the Social Care Workforce Partnership was established and [announced](#) in 2025, and was the first of its kind in the UK bringing together government, employers and unions to work in social partnership. Over the past year, the partnership has developed exemplar policies for the workforce, particularly the independent sector. This has been an important step to support more consistent policy approaches and better working conditions across the sector. The first of these model policies were [published](#) in February 2026. These model policy documents support social care providers to implement fair and consistent employment practices, which can be downloaded and adapted to suit local arrangements.

Pay and Progression Framework

Led by Social Care Wales, a Pay and Progression subgroup was established in October 2024 to strengthen an existing draft framework using the vast amount of experience and knowledge the members had and taking account the consultation responses on the draft framework published as part of the rebalancing care and support consultation which closed in August 2023. The voluntary framework will support providers to offer consistent pay and terms and conditions for the workforce, whilst displaying clear progression and development opportunities, helping improve recruitment and retention in the sector. The Forum [published the pay and progression framework](#) in February 2026.



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National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Development of a National Care Academy for Wales

Building on this strong evidence of what works, we are now committing £1.5 million to begin the first phase of a National Care Academy for Wales, allowing us to scale proven approaches, strengthen existing foundations, and extend the benefits to more people and communities across Wales.

Broader support for the social care workforce

Whilst not an activity originally featured in the Stage 1 Implementation Plan, the development of the [National Social Care Academy for Wales](#) and the launch of a [consultation](#) in February 2026 on a Social Care Negotiating Body to develop Fair Pay Agreements for social care workers in Wales highlights the National Office's role in supporting the social care workforce and in progressing on key areas to support the social care workforce as a strong basis for a National Care and Support Service.

Personal Assistants (PAs) and Direct Payments

Since the passing of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025, and pending secondary legislation being in place, work has progressed to enable direct payments for adults in receipt of CHC to be legally possible in Wales. This is an option that can strengthen an individual's voice, choice and control by allowing them to manage their own care arrangements, including the employment of PAs.

A public [consultation](#) seeking views on proposals for regulations to inform the drafting of secondary legislation was held over a 12-week period, launching in mid-July and closing in early October 2025. It sought views on proposals for the secondary legislation and supporting guidance that will enable local health boards to make direct payments on behalf of Welsh Ministers. Consultation responses were reviewed and informed the drafting of guidance.

Supporting what matters

National dataset for recording 'what matters' conversations, including digital stories

Exploration has started to consider how a national approach to accurately recording "what matters" conversations could be taken forward through the development of a national dataset for collection at local levels.

The Analysis and Innovation function of the National Office is considering how to create a national survey targeting all adults who receive care and support, aiming to better understand their experiences and wellbeing.



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

A proposal has been put forward to establish a national group that will collaborate with the National Office to refine this plan, with key stakeholders already notified to prepare for their involvement. Work has begun on designing the survey questions, which will soon be tested. Once completed, the project will enter a feasibility testing phase before potentially launching fully in the coming years.

This project is expected to be long-term, and planning for this work will continue as part of a Stage 2 Implementation plan.

Revision of the Part 2 Code of Practice

Regional Partnership Boards must produce a Population Needs Assessment (PNA) every electoral cycle, as required by statutory guidance. Welsh Government has formed a task and finish group with national leads (Public Health Wales, Social Care Wales, Data Cymru) to prepare the next PNA report for April 2027. This group will collaborate with Public Service Board leads to align the PNA with Well-being Assessments under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and consider unified assessment guidance. The revised Part 2 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act [Code of Practice](#) guidance is now published.

Partnering locally around the person needing support

Supporting Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs)

Work was undertaken to update the [Part 9 guidance](#) on partnership arrangements to strengthen accountability for integration and introducing new Part 9 Responsible Officers for cooperation within each local authority and health board to provide clearer lines of accountability alongside the seven Regional Partnership Boards. The updated Part 9 Guidance came into force in May 2025.

A national outcomes reporting tool has also been developed for reporting against Regional Integration Fund (RIF) and includes 20 quantitative national measures. The tool is used to demonstrate impact across jointly funded projects and models of care, and an indication of health and social care integration. The reporting tool can be considered and adapted for more specific commissioned projects and services if required.

Performance measures will be continuously monitored and reviewed throughout the duration of the RIF, with annual progress detailed in the Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) [position statement](#), in addition to other related programmes. The RIF contributes to the broader development of the ICCS for Wales, and outcomes data is yielding valuable evidence to inform the design of future successor initiatives.



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

In addition to the RIF report, Regional Partnership Boards produce annual reports detailing commissioning and pooled budget arrangements. The Welsh Government continues to identify lessons and best practices from RPBs to enhance outcome measurement and delivery.

Carer's Strategy and Delivery Plan

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities have a statutory responsibility to support unpaid carers.

The [Strategy for Unpaid Carers](#) aims to improve the recognition of and support to unpaid carers. The [Delivery Plan](#) (2025-2026) has been developed with stakeholders representing unpaid carers, local authorities, health boards and the third sector. The Plan sets out a series of strategic priorities:

- Identifying and valuing carers
- Providing information, advice and assistance
- Supporting life alongside caring
- Supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace

In February 2026, a [consultation](#) was [launched](#) on a new National Strategy for Unpaid Carers. The draft strategy will replace the one previously published in 2021 and is based on what unpaid carers and their organisations have told Welsh Government what matters most to them.

The [Charter](#) for unpaid carers has also been included within the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support.

Respite

The Short Breaks Scheme was established in 2022 to provide additional opportunities for unpaid carers to have a break from their caring roles, above and beyond the existing duties on local authorities to support them. Over 2022-25, the scheme delivered breaks to over 50,000 unpaid carers of all ages.

The [Written Statement](#) of November 2025 announced the renewed commitment for the scheme until the end of March 2029. This represents a substantial investment of a further £15.75m.

Short breaks are just one aspect of respite provision. Respite can also include alternative overnight care arrangements for the person with care and support needs.

Social Care Checkpoint Reporting to aid benchmarking and system learning



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Substantial progress has been achieved in preparing the Social Care Capacity and Demand (formerly referred to as Checkpoint) dataset for publication, with the initial release scheduled for early March 2026. The forthcoming publication of national capacity and demand statistics for social services will help clearly show the range of social care demand and services, reflecting both activity and increases in need. This initiative is part of the National Office's commitment to transparency and openness, and it brings social care data in line with health service information already available to the public. The publication of this data will enhance understanding among stakeholders and facilitate informed engagement by both organisations and the public. The first release is expected to cover submissions dating back to April 2024, offering valuable context for current figures and insights into long-term trends.

Continuing Healthcare (CHC)

Guidance is being developed for introducing Direct Payments for CHC in Wales. Welsh Government are working closely with the NHS Value and Sustainability Board to advance a national digital tool for CHC oversight, including case management, performance, and finance. Developing a Performance Management Framework and exploring AI technology are also key priorities.

Investing in prevention and early intervention

Independent research was commissioned to analyse local authority spending on prevention and early intervention services over the past decade. The research specification followed covered the following areas:

- set out the role of commissioned preventative services, including:
- how much funding is dedicated to preventative services now
- how much funding has been dedicated to preventative services over the last 10 years
- what prevention services are available to people, and
- how people are accessing these preventative services
- define the current arrangements for funding, delivering and paying for commissioned preventative services for social care, relative to wider social care spending and activity
- describe how demand and funding for preventative services have changed (in reference to wider social care activities, population and health trends)
- consider how demand for preventative services is predicted to change in the next 5 and 10 years+



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

- undertake research to provide an estimate of the impact of preventative services on public sector spend (i.e. a return on investment) and on people's wellbeing
- estimate the level of funding that would be needed to have sustainable preventative services, based on the level of need and impact of prevention

The research phase ended in December 2025, with the final report submitted to Welsh Government in Spring 2026. Findings will be carefully considered, and recommendations used to inform future policy decisions as part of a Stage 2 Implementation Plan.

Role of profit in the care system

Restriction of profit from children's services

On 24 March 2025, the [Health and Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2025](#) ('the 2025 Act') became law in Wales. This legislation includes measures to limit profit-making by providers of children's homes, secure accommodation, and fostering services.

As part of clarifying what constitutes profit and the features of not-for-profit organisations in Stage 1, the 2025 Act defines a 'not for profit' entity (excluding local authorities) as:

- having objects or purposes that primarily relate to the welfare of children (or any other public good the Welsh Ministers may prescribe); and operating under one of the following types of undertaking:
- a charitable company limited by guarantee without a share capital;
- a charitable incorporated organisation;
- a charitable registered society; or,
- a community interest company limited by guarantee without a share capital.

The commitment to remove profit is being implemented rapidly. Beginning 1 April 2026, new for-profit providers cannot register with Care Inspectorate Wales, and existing for-profit providers are barred from adding new services or places. Additional restrictions will be introduced in 2027 and 2030, maintaining a phased rollout to minimise the risk of placement disruption.

Work on secondary legislation to support implementation is ongoing, including a recent [consultation](#) on requiring local authorities to develop annual sufficiency plans. These plans aim to enhance strategic planning, foster transparency, and create a sustainable approach to addressing the needs of children and young people in care as local authorities eliminate profit from their operations.



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National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Expansion of direct provision

A series of workshop discussions has been convened to facilitate the development of an Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) for Wales, alongside consideration of a potential expanded capital and revenue fund. Representatives from the Urgent Goals team, Strategic Primary Care Programme, and Partnerships and Integration have engaged in dialogue regarding the necessity of a unified approach to community support and early intervention (ICCS), with the objective of minimising duplication and optimising resource allocation. Currently, Regional Integration Fund (RIF), Integration & Rebalancing Capital Fund (IRCF), and Housing Care Fund (HCF) funding streams extend through April 2027, with capital funding identified as an essential element of ICCS provision moving forward. The ICCS blueprint has been revised to align with the Strategic Programme for Primary Care and now incorporates a proposed governance framework, which is under review by RPB Chairs and strategic leaders.

Future funding for sustainable social care and support services and the transition to care free at the point of need

Research – to better understand the level of finance needed to deliver sustainable social care

Work undertaken on the optimum funding required to have sustainable social care service underpins the commitment as part of a NCCS for sustainable future delivery and ensures there is a robust evidence base for future policy development and subsequent implementation.

To achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of the financial requirements for developing sustainable and effective long-term social care services, an extensive internal review has analysed current social care expenditure and evaluated existing sector funding mechanisms. Its aim is to anticipate future challenges associated with demographic shifts, changing care demands, and economic constraints.

Complementing this analysis, preliminary financial modelling has been performed, drawing upon research commissioned during the previous Senedd term that offered valuable insights into projected service demand, cost drivers, and potential funding strategies. By incorporating findings from earlier research, the present review builds on established evidence while remaining adaptable to recent policy changes and sector developments. This integrated approach ensures any recommendations for future service provision are both evidence-based and responsive to evolving social care needs.



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National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

The ongoing objective of this work is to establish a clear and robust financial framework that will support the ongoing delivery and improvement of social care services, ensuring they remain accessible, high-quality, and sustainable for all those who need them in the years ahead.

Research – understand financial and operational impacts of care free at the point of need

Work is ongoing to analyse the financial and operational effects of providing care free at the point of need. Findings from Stage 1 will inform the Stage 2 implementation plan for 2026-28.

Efforts continue to address data gaps, such as self-funders, to refine policy questions for future work. It is intended for detailed modelling to assess both the financial and operational impacts of introducing free non-residential care services at the point of need take place, with next steps including extension of modelling to examine the financial and operational consequences of providing free care (excluding accommodation costs) within residential care settings.

This is a complex policy area, with legislative implications for implementation. It therefore requires full consideration, stress-testing, consultation, and exploration of lessons learned from other UK nations and global examples.

Given the scale, importance and significance of interdependencies involved in this work, future, more in-depth, research will be needed to fully consider the options available for paying for care and support services, how these could be funded, and the operational impacts of care which is free at the point of need. The National Office will continue to work closely with relevant stakeholders to ensure full consideration of options available, and any impacts of progressing these as we move forward with establishing a National Care and Support Service.

Research – feasibility of creating national fee methodologies for care home placements

The National Office commissioned a feasibility study to consider establishing national fee methodologies for care home placements, including Continuing Healthcare (CHC) and Funded Nursing Care (FNC). This work is aligned with the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support.

As part of the study, extensive engagement was conducted with a broad range of stakeholders, including local authorities, health boards, and providers. Researchers reviewed the current fee setting approaches, evaluated their practicality, and examined whether adopting a national fee methodology would be beneficial for Wales,



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National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

considering feedback from the sector. The resulting [report](#) presented several recommendations and proposed next steps.

With additional research and investigation planned by the National Office, building on the report's findings, this work is expected to progress further through subsequent phases of the National Care and Support Service programme.

Implementing the National Care and Support Service: Transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2

Building on existing research

Several key areas of work initiated in Stage 1 will require continuation and further development as the programme transitions into Stage 2, with particular emphasis on research activities.

Research into the financial and operational impacts of providing care free at the point of need will continue. Ongoing analysis seeks to understand the implications of care free at the point of need, including the need to address data gaps, such as the inclusion of self-funders, and the development of detailed modelling to assess both financial and operational consequences. This work will consider the introduction of free non-residential care services and extend to evaluating the effects of providing free care, excluding accommodation costs, within residential settings. Due to the complexity and scale of this undertaking, additional in-depth research will be necessary to fully explore the available options for funding care and support services, alongside the wider operational impacts of making care free at the point of need. The National Office remains committed to collaborating closely with stakeholders to ensure comprehensive consideration of all available options and the implications of progressing towards a National Care and Support Service.

The feasibility of developing national fee methodologies for care home placements continues to be a priority. Subsequent work, building on these findings, are planned as the programme advances through its future phases with a number of activities, drawing on the recommendations of the report, to take place in Stage 2.

Activity from Stage 1 that will require further activity in future stages

National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

The completion of the National Framework for commissioning care and support, implemented through a statutory Code of Practice, represents a significant milestone. Continued efforts will be necessary to facilitate its implementation and ensure that commissioners consistently adhere to the requirements outlined within the Code. The Code of Practice is scheduled for biennial updates, with the next revision planned for 2027. This update process has now been incorporated into standard operational procedures within the commissioning branch of the National Office.

As the programme progresses to Stage 2, the following areas of work will be continued:

- Sustained implementation of the National Framework, providing commissioners with support to comprehend and apply the statutory Code of Practice in their responsibilities.
- Systematic monitoring and assessment of commissioning practices to confirm compliance with the Code and identify opportunities for additional guidance or support.
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement and co-design initiatives to promote cultural awareness and ensure the Framework remains responsive to the sector's evolving requirements.
- Preparatory activities for the scheduled biennial updates of the Code, including the collection of feedback and evidence to inform future revisions.
- Integration of insights and recommendations from Stage 1 into current operations, informing the approach to commissioning throughout Stage 2.

This structured approach will help maintain the robust implementation of the National Framework, ensuring it remains relevant and effective as the programme advances.

Feasibility Study on Fee Methodology for Adult Care Homes

Building upon the completed feasibility report concerning national fee methodologies for care home placements, Stage 2 will encompass a thorough review of the report's outcomes and recommendations. Activities arising from accepted recommendations will be carried forward into Stage 2.

Ongoing Engagement and Cultural Awareness

Sustained engagement, cultural awareness, and co-design are integral components of the National Care and Support Service. It is proposed that these actions continue for the duration of the programme.

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National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

The National Office, supported by the Chief Social Care Officer, will oversee and monitor the implementation of the Mwy Na Geiriau five-year strategy within social care.

Recording “What Matters” Conversations and Outcomes

Stage 2 will prioritise the development of a standardised national process for documenting 'what matters' conversations and creating digital stories. This will involve a feasibility study and user testing in 2025/26, the design and piloting of digital recording tools in 2026/27, and preparation for a nationwide rollout in 2027/28.

Unpaid Carers

While initial actions regarding unpaid carers have been concluded in Stage 1, Stage 2 will focus on a comprehensive evaluation of their impact and consideration of further enhancements. This will include consultation with carers to identify emerging needs, the development of additional support mechanisms where necessary, and the integration of carers' feedback into policy and programme planning to maintain their essential role throughout subsequent stages.

Continuing Health Care

Following the review of Continuing Health Care (CHC) policy in Stage 1, Stage 2 will aim to align CHC delivery with the introduction of direct payments.

Removing Private Profit from the Care of Children Looked After

With foundational work under the Eliminate and Rebalancing Care and Support programmes complete, Stage 2 will concentrate on formulating more targeted and refined measures to ensure children's transformation remains at the heart of the programme.

Stage 2 Implementation Plan (2026-2028)

The activities and research undertaken during Stage 1 have put in place strong foundations from which to move into a Stage 2 Implementation plan, led and coordinated by the National Office for care and support.

In line with the approach taken in Stage 1, delivery of the plan will continue to be taken forward through collaboration with the sector and citizens to deliver key aspects of the plan, by working with Llais, the Fair Work Forum, and the Good Practice Forum, we are enhancing engagement with diverse stakeholders and citizens.

The National Office for Care and Support's Leadership Forum invites Directors of Social Services to have an open dialogue with the National Office teams and the Chief Social



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Care Officer, which enables exploration of the barriers faced and how we can collectively work to overcome these to ensure positive change in social care as we move further towards a National Care and Support Service for Wales.

Co-production is a core principle of the National Office, and wider consultations relating to specific policy areas will be undertaken throughout the course of moving towards this journey of reform.

Having considered the strong foundations already put in place through the delivery of the Stage 1 Initial Implementation plan and reviewing the steps set out by the Expert Group, the table below sets out proposed activity and research which would logically form a Stage 2 Implementation plan.

The activities and research proposed for Stage 2, enables a process of building on the current foundations and progress to date, thereby also ensuring a balance between managing current pressures and increasing demands whilst also moving closer towards a National Care and Support Service for Wales.

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
Journey to significant change	
Extensive consultation and engagement through the programme phases	National Office for Care and Support and the Social Services and Integration Division will continue to engage, co-produce and consult on key components of activity through the duration of this programme.
Addressing the power imbalance	
Collecting citizen stories	Collation and analysis of the Directors of Social Services Annual Reports, which will help inform a new national State of the Nation report which will be used to shape changes within the sector. Report will be published annually from 2026
Equality and inclusion	
Enhance the voices of diverse groups inform future developments	Support the delivery of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, with ownership of actions relating to social care. Consultant Social Worker post to continue to support delivery of the Chief Social Care Officer priorities connecting and engaging with social workers
Supporting and valuing the social care workforce	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
Development of a national pay and progression framework for the social care workforce	<p>The Social Care Fair Work Forum and Social Care Workforce Partnership will make progress towards creating appropriate pay levels, terms and conditions for the social care workforce by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing a voluntary pay and progression framework for independent providers to adopt. This will highlight the opportunities and varied roles, to progress and build a career in the social care sector and provide approximate pay levels (aligned closely to the health sector where possible). This work will be built upon during the next year following the findings of research undertaken on pay levels across social care. • The Partnership will continue to work with the published model of best practice in relation to HR policies which providers and workers prioritised as part of a survey. These are: Recognition Agreements, Health and Safety (including violence in the workplace) and Grievance and Disciplinary, for independent providers to adopt, with the aim of bringing consistency to terms and conditions across the social care sector. • Take forward work to develop Fair Pay Agreements for social care in Wales through the UK Government Employment Rights Bill. This includes the published consultation on the process to develop a Social Care Negotiating Body for Wales through regulations, who, through collective bargaining arrangements, will work to set Fair Pay Agreements in social care during 2027. This will mark a significant shift, as it will enable enforceable pay levels for social care workers for the first time. • Consider how we can support both social care providers and overseas workers to manage the impact of changes by UK Visa and Immigration that have the potential to cause additional pressures on recruitment within the social care sector. • In the first 12 months of developing a National Social Care Academy, we will focus on putting strong foundations in place. This will include mapping existing training and learning provision across Wales, capturing the impact of current local care academies, and co designing the Academy’s purpose, functions and priorities with stakeholders. We will also develop a clear
Establishment of a Collective Bargaining Unit for the social care workforce	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
	<p>brand and communications approach to support the publication of a shared national vision and objectives. This groundwork will directly inform the next phase, which will move into early implementation and set out the longer term steps required to fully establish a National Social Care Academy for Wales.</p> <p>RESEARCH</p> <p>The Fair Work Forum will model the cost and level of funding required to implement the Pay and Progression Framework, prior to the National Office exploring options for a phased implementation of a revised charging regime.</p>
Unpaid carers	
Improved recognition and support for unpaid carers	Recognition and support for carers is a priority of the current National Strategy for Unpaid Carers , published in 2021 and will remain key strategic objectives of the new National strategy for Unpaid Carers which will be published in 2026 following the assessment of comments to the consultation launched in February 2026.
Respite	
Continued investment for flexible respite care provision	The Minister has confirmed commitment to the Welsh Government Short Breaks scheme for a further 3 years, to March 2029.
Volunteers in care and support	
Engagement with third sector organisations and volunteers	<p>Through engagement and listening sessions held by the National Office and the Chief Social Care Officer, there will be opportunities for organisations, communities and the workforce to become part of conversations on the design of the National Care and Support Service.</p> <p>Proposals on design principles once developed will be subject to public consultation.</p>
New ‘design principles’ for social care	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
<p>Creation of national design principles for the National Care and Support Service</p>	<p>The National Office will support a central-guiding hand to the sector, facilitating positive leadership to bring about a culture change campaign to strengthen the profile of the social care sector. This will include supporting CIW and SCW in their work on positive cultures.</p> <p>The National Office will work with its Leadership Forum, People’s Forum, Strategic Advisory Group and key stakeholders to co-produce a draft set of national design principles, which will be formally consulted on during the latter part of Stage 2 with a view to implementing these in Stage 3.</p>
<p>The broader benefit of ‘what matters’ conversations</p>	
<p>Measuring outcomes and ‘what matters’ to people</p>	<p>Consider options to develop a national adult service user survey to measure experiences of social care and what matters to people. Work will need to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept design • Feasibility and survey testing • Identify funding <p>Implementation is proposed for Stage 3 (2029 onwards).</p> <p>Welsh Government will continue to work closely with the WLGA on the implementation of Connecting Care across social services departments in Wales.</p>
<p>Establishing a ‘learning loop’ culture</p>	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
<p>Building best practice and learning into the social care system</p>	<p>The National Office will continue to work with the sector to highlight and promote notable practice through the Good Practice Forum which enables an open forum to share good practice in a learning loop, with the thematic approach being led by group members from across the 22 Local Authorities.</p> <p>Directors of Social Services annual reports are submitted to Welsh Government, and the National Office will continue to use these and other reports to develop annual State of the Nation reports.</p> <p>Publication of social care demand and capacity data and annual publication of national reports by the National Office.</p> <p>Social care capacity and demand data is collated monthly as ‘checkpoint data’. The National Office will lead on the next step of moving to publish this dataset.</p>
<p>Continuing Health Care (CHC)</p>	
<p>Review and implement revised CHC framework and introduce direct payments within NHC Continuing Healthcare</p>	<p>The current ‘<i>Continuing NHS Healthcare – The National Framework for implementation in Wales</i>’ includes a commitment to review the Framework within five years of implementation. The review of the CHC Framework will take place and a revised version will be issued within 2026-28.</p> <p>Part 2 of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 makes amendments to the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 which will enable the introduction of direct payments within NHS Continuing Healthcare. Regulations under the Act have been consulted on and we intend to implement Direct Payments as an option for those eligible for CHC from April 2026.</p>
<p>Investing in prevention and early intervention</p>	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
Understand current investment into preventative services and understand the optimum funding required within a National Care and Support Service.	Stage 2 activity to be confirmed and taken forward following receipt of the Stage 1 research report which is expected by end of March 2026.
Adult social care charging	
Understand the optimum funding required to deliver sustainable social care in Wales	<p>RESEARCH</p> <p>Analyse the data gathered during Stage 1 in collaboration with key stakeholders, to assess current service pressures as part of sustainable funding considerations. This work will aim to clarify the present funding landscape and involve robust modelling exercises to identify any existing funding shortfalls, thereby contributing to a clearer understanding of the investment needed to achieve a sustainable social care system.</p>
Understand the financial and operational impact of moving to care free at the point of need	<p>RESEARCH</p> <p>Undertake modelling to assess both the financial and operational impacts of making non-residential care services free at the point of need, starting with a focus on the operational and financial implications of a transition to this approach.</p> <p>Subsequently, undertake modelling to examine the financial and operational consequences of extending free care (excluding accommodation costs) to residential care settings.</p>
Assess the feasibility of	



National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
<p>creating national fee methodologies for care home placements (older people)</p> <p>Distinguish between care costs and accommodation costs within fee methodologies</p>	<p>Based on the output of the feasibility report commissioned in Stage 1 – take forward further activity aligned to the findings and recommendations made.</p> <p>Conduct a thorough review, building on Stage 1 research findings in relation to fee methodologies, to explicitly distinguish between ‘care costs’ (covering the direct support and personal care provided) and ‘accommodation costs’, which must be clearly defined and itemised into specific elements such as food, utilities, and housing. The review will reflect that accommodation costs reflect the principle that everyone is responsible for their own living expenses, regardless of their care needs, while care costs are treated separately to ensure clarity and fairness in charging arrangements.</p> <p>Maintain and uphold the existing statutory policy, as set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, by actively ensuring that individuals are supported to exercise their right to choose their residential care accommodation. The National Office will work with local authorities to better understand any barriers to application of this policy in practice, to address challenges as part of wider work to move further towards our National Care and Support Service.</p>
<p>The need for more data</p>	
<p>Using data more effectively</p>	<p>The National Office will oversee the Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework, annual census collections for children, adults and unpaid carers and the National Outcomes Framework, using data to develop indicators and working with local authorities on how data should be interpreted.</p> <p>The National Office will produce an annual ‘state of the nation’ report to provide national oversight of social services delivery – first report March 2026</p>
<p>The role of profit in the care system</p>	
<p>Share learning from removal of profit from social care</p>	<p>Continue to deliver the children’s services eliminate programme with learning to inform the National Care and Support Service model of delivery from Stage 3</p>



Newid Cadarnhaol mewn
Gofal Cymdeithasol

Positive Change
in Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru

Swyddfa Genedlaethol Gofal a Chymorth

Welsh Government

National Office for Care and Support

National Care and Support Service Programme

Update on Delivery of Stage 1 Initial Implementation Plan and Proposed Stage 2 Implementation Plan

Objective	Stage 2 Implementation Plan Programme 2026 - 28
services to children and families	
Rebalancing care through gradual expansion of direct provision of care services	<p>The Integration and Rebalancing capital funding will continue to end March 2027.</p> <p>Consideration of future funding post March 2027</p>
Establish a national market oversight mechanism and understanding value within commissioned services	RESEARCH – Commence work with commissioners to measure value (including social value) derived from directly provided and commissioned social care services.
	Develop a National Market Oversight mechanism to monitor sustainability of providers and development of annual national market stability report to be published from 2008/9
	Delivery of the Eliminate programme across children services