



Providing care
and support in
your community

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Cornerstone Community Care
The Doges Studios
Templeton Business Centre
62 Templeton Street
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Thursday 23rd October 2025

Sent via email

FAO First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

Dear Mr Swinney and Mr Gray

Social Care at Breaking Point – A Joint Call for Action

We are writing to you jointly as one of Scotland's leading social care providers and as UNISON, the trade union representing thousands of workers across the sector. It is not often that an employer and a union speak with one voice, but such is the gravity of the crisis in social care that we feel compelled to come together.

As the *Sunday Herald* recently reported, the third sector is in a parlous state. Years of cuts and chronic underfunding have left services teetering, staff exhausted, and the people who rely on our support facing growing uncertainty. This is not just about budgets, it is about the lives of thousands of Scotland's most vulnerable citizens.

Cornerstone employs staff across much of Scotland and UNISON represents Cornerstone staff in negotiations for pay, terms and conditions. Despite best efforts, these negotiations have become protracted and increasingly difficult, and we now face the possibility of industrial action along with other providers in the sector.

While Cornerstone and UNISON are in dispute, we are united in our view that social care workers are a vital part of our communities and our economy, and they deserve pay that recognises the challenge, skill and professionalism of their roles. Unless urgent investment is made to ensure fair pay and sustainable funding, unrest across the sector will only deepen. The prospect of industrial action, not only at Cornerstone, but across Scotland, is real. Such disruption would have a devastating impact on individuals and families who already live with fragile support. You will know from the open letter published in the *Sunday Herald* on 17th August, which Cornerstone was a signatory to, that many providers in the sector are in the same position.

The multi-year 'investment' that Scottish Government has made in the sector may seem significant on paper, but the reality is that inflation has fully consumed all additional funding. The squeezing of HSCP budgets is being pushed down the supply chain to providers like Cornerstone, and rather than



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receiving investment, providers are being asked to deliver cost savings. At the same time, local government pay settlements see social care workers in the public sector paid 20-30% more than those in the charitable sector, funded from the same public purse that funds the services that Cornerstone deliver.

Cornerstone staff are angry and disillusioned by this widening gap between public and third sector pay. The Government has received many representations on this issue from Cornerstone, the STUC, employers and employer organisations. Cornerstone staff are frustrated that the many representations made to Scottish Government about this situation and the consequences of inaction continue to fall on deaf ears. Workers now feel they have no choice but to take direct action, and we are facing the very real threat of strikes.

Cornerstone and UNISON are united in our view that the only solution to these issues lies squarely with you, the Scottish Government.

We believe Scotland cannot deliver on its ambitions for dignity, equality, and wellbeing without decisive action on social care. Investment must be seen not as a cost but as a foundation for a just society and a sustainable economy as highlighted by the Independent Review of Adult Social Care by Derek Feeley in 2021.

We therefore urge you, as a matter of urgency, to commit to proper and sustained funding for social care, to ensure:

- The immediate commitment to a minimum £15 per hour rate of pay for all frontline social care workers
- Sufficient ongoing funding to maintain fair pay differentials for all other staff across the workforce.
- Implementation of sectoral bargaining in Scotland for Social Care in 2026/27
- The first meeting of the bargaining committee before the end of 2025
- Recognition that care work in the voluntary and private sector is undervalued and only pay parity across the sector will bring equality.
- Delivery of a timetable for pay parity, to pay care workers the value for the role, that the Scottish Government should pay care workers in the charitable sector the same as other comparable workers in Local Government and the NHS.
- Services are stable, resilient and sustainable, able to meet the needs of the people who rely on them.
- The sector is recognised as an essential part of Scotland's social and economic fabric.

This letter is unusual, a joint appeal from employer and union together, but it reflects the strength of feeling and the urgency of the moment. We are united in our view that the current path is unsustainable and that only meaningful investment can deliver the care, dignity, and fairness that the people of Scotland deserve. Without this the sector will collapse, leaving some of our most vulnerable citizens at risk and causing significant job losses across the country.





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We stand ready to meet with you at the earliest opportunity to discuss how we can avert this crisis together. But the time for warm words and empty platitudes has passed, what we need now is decisive action.

Yours Sincerely

HAZEL BROWN
CEO
Cornerstone Community Care

PETER HUNTER
Regional Manager – Organising, Learning, Equality and Legal
UNISON Scotland