

Care Futures

Questions for the future of social care in Scotland

The Road to Quality Care and Fair Work

Issue 3—October 2021

The Scottish Government are consulting on setting up a National Care Service this will oversee a comprehensive range of social care services for all ages, from infants to the elderly. As well as alcohol, drug and all social work services. As the union representing staff across all of these areas UNISON will play an important role in shaping that change. Care Futures is a series of briefings that will provide members and branches with information to help discuss and develop UNISON's approach to these reforms.

Failed Commissioning

Integrated social care was intended to focus on service user needs and then integrate health and care services to improve care quality. The model has failed.

Service users and workers have been excluded from the identification of service user need, service design and commissioning.

The fixation with low-cost delivery has driven IJBs to use procurement to outsource and privatise lifeline services.

Service quality is then driven by the business model of low cost providers rather than service user need.

UNISON holds evidence of major commissioners actively intervening to drive down working conditions during regulated procurement.

The race to the bottom drives unfair work, poor quality care,

high staff turnover and creates the staffing crises that bedevils social care.

Planning

Identifying Service User Need

UNISON has evidence that care services frequently fall short of assessed care needs. The NCS must underpin care assessments with new legal rights to participate in needs assessment and to receive care as assessed.

Collaborative Service Reviews

UNISON holds evidence that service monitoring and review focuses on capacity and cost. It is not possible to assess whether service user needs are met in full when reviews of existing services are commissioner-focused and not person-centred. Commissioning will only be ethical when we put people before price or profit.

KEY POINTS

- The Scottish government say they want the national care service to be based on ethical commissioning
- As the NCS will be commissioning and procuring all of its services framework used to decide how services are provided matters to everyone.
- The aim of ethical commissioning is to raise standards by emphasising fair work & user involvement.
- The principles of ethical commissioning won't be controversial. Getting them put into practice however may take a considerable effort.



Co-design of Services

Localised person-centred care is a fiction in 2021. It will be more elusive if the NCS is centralised in Edinburgh. MSPs must step away from centralism and create a legal right for service users and workers to co-design care within locally accountable services.

Commissioning

Ethical commissioning

Pre Covid, the default commissioning approach was to assemble a service specification and procure a low-cost provider. Service user needs and employee voice were side-lined, care standards dropped and Fair Work aspirations vanished. During the pandemic, workers and service users were exposed to avoidable infection as a result.

There is no place for a commissioning culture that defaults to outsourcing and syphons millions of care funds to tax havens while the care sector crumbles. The key criteria for Ethical Commissioning in the National Care Service will be of care quality, co-production and Fair Work. Procurement will be the exception and any tendering will reflect Ethical Care Standards.

Supporting Co-production

UNISON has published previously on the day-to-day role of social care workers in giving effect to real service user autonomy and meaningful choices through a human rights based approach. The NCS must empower service users and workers to make person centred care a reality, and offer an effective remedy when standards drop.

Scotland needs a statutory right to Fair Care.

Monitoring

What gets measured gets managed, and care monitoring is currently focused on capacity and cost. Monitoring indicators of care quality and Fair Work will end the staffing crisis, save valuable funds and raise care standards.

Governance, Compliance and Review

Care services already have various ethical standards embedded in care contracts. They just play no active role in commissioning or delivery and they don't get monitored, evaluated, or reviewed. The National Care Service must guarantee an effective voice for workers and service users in social care governance.