

The National Care Service Bill: Verdict of Social Work Staff



Introduction

The National Care Service Bill is the biggest change to social work services in over 50 years. The Bill was introduced to parliament in June 2022 and its principles will be voted on by MSPs in March 2023. This [UNISON briefing](#) provides an overview of what the NCS proposals mean for social work.

We asked our social work members across Scotland what they think about the National Care Service Bill. Almost 1,100 members across all 32 local authorities took part in our online survey in autumn 2022. They work in a very wide range of job roles within social work services. Sixty per cent of respondents work in adult services, 24% in children and families teams, 5% in justice social work and 11% in other areas. We asked them for their views on the main proposals in the bill and what these will mean for social work practice.

Overview of survey findings

It's clear from the results that the National Care Service Bill creates additional pressures for a workforce already overstretched and under-resourced. Most staff do not agree the proposals are the best way to improve services and most believe it will create additional difficulties. Large numbers of staff are concerned about the insecurity created for their jobs, pay and pensions. For many the upheaval and uncertainty of a major restructure involving staff transfers could be the final straw. The uncertainty caused by the Bill risks making far worse the existing difficulties with staff recruitment and retention. And it risks affecting the service received by the children, families and adults who need social work support.

Do you agree with the government's plans?

- Only a small minority (13%) of staff agree with the government's view that the best way to improve the quality and consistency of social work services is through centralisation - transferring statutory duties and responsibilities from councils to Scottish Ministers. Over half (52%) of social work staff disagree with the government's National Care Service plans.

What will the NCS mean for the workforce?

- Insecurity about jobs, pensions and changes to terms and conditions are major concerns for staff. 77% say the changes will mean insecurity for staff and 64% are concerned about their pension.
- A small minority (11%) think the National Care Service could bring very positive changes to their employment.
- More staff believe the NCS is likely to lead to a levelling down of employment conditions (41% agree) rather than a levelling up (7% agree).

KEY POINTS:

- **Social work staff taking part in UNISON's survey do not support the government's National Care Service plans**
- **Staff have major concerns about the security of their jobs, pensions and pay and conditions.**
- **7 out of 10 believe there will be a negative impact on those who receive social work services.**



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Do you agree with social work functions being removed from councils?

- Almost two thirds of staff working in children & families services (64%) and justice social work (65%) do not support these services being removed from councils.
- Over half of the staff in Children and Families services who responded (54%) think the removal of social work from councils will have a largely negative impact on implementing the Independent Care Review for children and young people (The Promise).

What will councils becoming contractors mean for social work?

- 71% think ending direct public provision by councils will have a negative impact on the people who receive a social work service and 72% think it will be negative for staff.
- More than half of social work staff (54%) think removing social work and social care from councils will make their jobs more difficult. For example, it risks causing disintegration with other council services.

What things *would* improve the quality and consistency of services?

Social work staff have clear ideas about what things *would* make a difference to social work practice and provide a better quality of service to those they support.

- They say what is really needed is investment in social work staffing and resources (94%), better pay, terms and conditions (85%) and enough time to build relationships with the people they support (72%).
- They told us financial austerity is now the main barrier to improved integrated working and meeting the needs of individuals and their families. One said, “*Everything comes down to a battle for resources.*”

The lack of detail in the government’s plans about what the NCS will look like and how it will work is a further driver of insecurity. In a major public service reform it is vital to take the workforce with you. Too many staff are unsure what is happening: around one third of responses to questions in the survey were ‘don’t know’.

Conclusion

UNISON believes spending well over £500m on creating new structures is not the right priority. The insecurity and uncertainty created by these proposals risks making the existing staff retention and recruitment crisis worse, undermining services. UNISON is campaigning for the bill to be withdrawn and a process of grassroots engagement begun to develop the kind of National Care Service we can be proud of.

What can you do?

Email your MSP and ask them to support UNISON’s campaign to scrap the bill. [Click on this online link](#) - it takes only a minute, just enter your postcode.

Additional reading

- [Main UNISON Scotland report: National Care Service Bill: Verdict of Social Work Staff](#)
- [UNISON Scotland’s National Care Service Campaign](#)
- [Social Work and the National Care Service briefing](#)
- [Pensions and the National Care Service Bill briefing](#)
- [A Brief Guide to the National Care Service Bill](#)
- [‘Save from Harm’ report - UNISON survey of social work teams](#)



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