



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Social Care Fair Work Forum: annual progress update 2024

The forum's progress against its fair work priorities in the social care sector during 2023 and emerging priorities for 2024.

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Our vision: working in social partnership

The Social Care Fair Work Forum (“forum”) was established in September 2020. The forum was designed to bring government, employers, and trade unions together to work in social partnership and consider how different elements of fair work should be implemented within the social care sector in Wales.

The forum focussed its initial efforts on improvements in pay and invested considerable time in preparing advice on the implementation of the Real Living Wage in social care in Wales. During the past eighteen months the forum has been progressing other elements of its work programme, for example prioritising the drafting of a pay and progression framework for social care and initiating a ‘social care workforce partnership’ which will advance collective bargaining arrangements for social care.

Each year the forum provides an update on progress against its work programme and explains how it has been working to support the implementation of good working practices in social care. This report provides an overview of our activities and highlights the emergent issues that the forum has been addressing during 2024.

Our progress against our fair work priorities

Parity on terms and conditions through social partnership

Sections of the social care workforce already have their terms and conditions covered by collective bargaining arrangements but these arrangements do not apply to all. In response to this situation, a forum task and finish group has spent time considering how to develop a unique model for collective bargaining for the independent social care sector in Wales. This work has culminated in the

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establishment of a 'social care workforce partnership' which over time aims to incorporate many elements of fair work for employees in the independent social care sector in Wales.

The forum has now agreed an over-arching vision and broad set of principles for the social care workforce partnership. A memorandum of understanding for voluntary membership is currently being finalised and will be published later this year. The partnership will consider 'models of best practice' which could be adopted across the independent social care sector. Initially, this would be on a voluntary basis by employers, but the ambition of the partnership will be for these models of best practice to be embedded for all staff within scope in the social care sector over time.

A fair pay and progression framework for the whole sector

Forum members have been working hard to outline a set of good practice terms and conditions for those delivering social care. A sub-group of the forum worked closely with HR experts across the sector to develop a draft pay and progression framework which will be focussed on direct care in the first instance.

The aim of the draft framework is to provide more consistent and equitable pay, progression and development opportunities, and this will be achieved by setting out social care role bands that are aligned with skills and learning development. Over time these will be linked with pay, in conjunction with the Social Care Partnership Council.

The draft framework has been out to consultation and was met with a positive response. A subgroup has met to discuss next steps, and we now move into phase two of the framework where we will develop a project plan and agree actions that will drive the framework forward.

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Fair reward

Tackling low pay in the commissioned independent sector

Historically, commissioning arrangements in Wales have tended to produce variable contractual arrangement and pay levels that remain at the statutory minimum which can convey an impression of social care employment as a low status and undervalued occupation.

The forum prepared a detailed case for the implementation of the Real Living Wage across social care in Wales and in April 2022, the Welsh Government responded with £43m of funding to local authorities and health boards for 2022 to 2023 to introduce the Real Living Wage to social care workers in Wales with a further £70m provided in 2023 to 2024 to uplift the wage of social care workers to meet the Living Wage Foundation's recommended rate of £10.90 per hour from April 2023.

Welsh Government has since further announced that that the budget for 2024 to 2025 includes funding to support authorities' efforts to continue to meet the ongoing costs of the Real Living Wage.

The forum is mindful of the severe and challenging financial pressures that are being experienced at all levels of government but will continue to be vigilant in terms of the implementation of the Real Living Wage across the sector. This will include examining the outcomes of an independent evaluation when its report is published. In the meantime, the forum will remain focused on its long-term ambition to extend the Real Living Wage to all ancillary employees working in care homes.

Sick pay

The forum is concerned about a further inequity within the social care workforce; many social care employees in the independent sector, and those employed via direct payments, may only receive the statutory minimum sick pay. This sits in clear contrast to those directly employed by local authorities and the NHS and besides having a negative impact on social care workers, it also presents a serious risk for those receiving and relying on care.

The forum views sick pay as an urgent priority for staff working in the independent sector and has previously provided advice to ministers on this matter. Over the coming months, the forum will continue to prioritise better provision of sick pay across the sector and will work with ministers and officials to address existing inequalities.

The experience of personal assistants in the social care sector

Personal assistants are a growing constituency within the social care workforce and the forum has been keen to ensure that their terms and conditions are reflected within the scope of its activities. Through its Personal Assistants Task and Finish Group, the forum has been considering issues being faced by the personal assistant workforce in Wales.

The task and finish group first commissioned [research to better understand the challenges faced by this workforce, which has now been completed and is available on our website](#). The findings have been considered by the task and finish group who have developed a number of areas or recommendations to consider as next steps. During the coming months, the forum will take these recommendations forward to improve the working experience for personal assistants and to ensure greater consistency across

Wales. This will involve incorporating personal assistants into the pay and progression framework and promoting the benefits of union membership to this sector of the workforce.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

During the last twelve months, the Welsh Government has launched its Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and a series of reports have highlighted issues of equality, diversity and inclusion with recommendations for the social care sector. In response, the forum has established a new Equality, Diversity and inclusion Task and Finish Group to support the implementation of recommendations related to the social care workforce. It will also consider actions needed in response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's inquiry into the experiences of lower paid ethnic minority staff in health and social care and research papers on personal assistants and micro carers from an equality, diversity and inclusion perspective.

Menopause support

Women comprise over 80% of the social care workforce and so it is vital that social care employers are equipped to support workers during the menopause. The forum convened a social partnership workshop in the autumn of 2023 focused on menopause support, guidance and advice for employers. As a result of those discussions, Social Care Wales will survey providers across the sector so that the forum can gain a clearer sense of the level of support currently available. The survey findings will enable the forum to highlight gaps in support and promote good practice with the hope that this will help to ensure improved physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits for women across the sector.

Commissioning research and engagement work on the

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provision of micro-care services

The role of 'micro-carers' is expanding within the social care sector. Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, including the forum, in January 2024 Welsh Government published 'Micro-care services: engagement report' which includes a summary of the engagement work about providing personal care through micro-care services and sets out next steps to develop policy and good practice principles for micro-care services (see Welsh and English links to the report below).

The report identified several areas that require further consideration so the forum is ensuring that micro-carers are included within the scope of its work programme and will work with Welsh Government ministers as they begin to implement the report's findings and recommendations.

Highlighting contract security and flexibility

Over the coming months, the forum will be working to better understand the impact of non-guaranteed hours, or 'zero-hour' contracts, on social care workers. The forum will be drawing on research on zero-hour contracts in social care in Wales which was commissioned last summer 2023 with a final report due to be published later this year.

Emerging priorities for the forum in 2024

Social care workforce partnership

The forum was pleased that the first 'social care workforce partnership' was held in April 2024 and a second meeting held in July. Following these meetings, a

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programme of work will involve further engagement with the sector ahead of a phased approach to implementing and testing a voluntary partnership arrangement for the independent social care sector in Wales.

Pay and progression

The pay and progression framework has moved into stage two and the next steps are to develop a project plan to agree tasks and deadlines relating to the key priorities of the framework, such as standardised job roles, opportunities for progression and consideration of pay scales. The forum's aim is for the new framework to set clear expectations about how our skilled and committed workforce should be recognised nationally.

A focus on employee rights, voice and representation

Over the last year, the forum has received repeated evidence that indicates a widespread lack of awareness of workforce rights within the social care sector. Raising awareness of employee rights will be a priority for the forum in the coming months, in addition to promoting the benefits of trade union membership.

International recruitment

The forum is aware of a range of emerging issues relating to, and impacting on, overseas care workers which will also be considered going forward. Welsh Government is working closely with UK government, social partners and other stakeholders including trade union representatives from the forum to consider how we can provide further guidance and support to our international workforce.

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Further information

Micro-care services engagement report

The Social Care Fair Work Forum was established in September 2020 following recommendation of the Fair Work Wales Commission and is independently chaired by Professor Rachel Ashworth, Dean and Head of Cardiff Business School.

The forum is a social partnership group consisting of employers, employees, stakeholders and government on an equal basis. The members are:

- Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru
- Care Forum Wales
- GMB
- National Provider Forum
- Royal College of Nursing
- Social Care Wales
- Wales Trades Union Congress
- Unison
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Local Government Association

The remit of the forum is focussed on paid social care workers in the public, private and third sectors. It has initially focussed primarily on social care workers in the independent sector in the first instance, but its considerations will also extend into the public sector. The forum will not impinge upon those professions with existing collective bargaining agreements in place, such as social workers, occupational therapists, registered nurses and so on.

More information about the forum can be found on [the Welsh Government's webpage for the Social Care Fair Work forum](#).

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