

Written evidence submitted by The Disabilities Trust (SCF0026)

The Disabilities Trust is a nationwide charity, providing specialist community-based and residential support for adults with acquired brain injury, complex psychological or learning disabilities and for people with autism, including those in education. Working in partnership with those we support, their families and friends, local authorities, health authorities, housing associations and other organisations, we have an established track record of delivering leading-edge services that meet the needs of people with complex and challenging disabilities.

Introduction:

The imperative to reform social care has been acutely felt by individuals, families, communities and organisations like The Disabilities Trust, across the country. Publicly funded social care – help, care and support that adults of all ages may need as a result of disability, illness, or other life circumstances – is only available to those with the highest needs and lowest means.

Within the UK, there are 13.3 million people living with disabilities. This represents an increase of 18% since the period of 2007/2008 (VODG, 2020). Despite the vital role the social care sector plays in providing essential care, support and rehabilitation, the sector has suffered ten years of financial constraints (Watkins et al., 2017), with an estimated loss of £15 billion in Government funding over the past decade. Local Authorities increasingly face significant difficulties in providing and budgeting for social care services (Local Government Association, 2020). Now than more ever, it is crucial reforms include all of us, those of us who are disabled or older, those of us whose lives are dependent on, supported by or rehabilitated by social care.

What impact is the current social care funding situation having on the NHS and on people who need social care?

It is estimated there are now more than a million people receiving social care funding by the state and Age UK argue one in six of us are providing unpaid care for adult family members in England (Age UK, 2019). Despite increase in demand for services, total expenditure on social care is £300 million below the level it was in 2010/2011. Moreover, of those supported by the social care sector, just under half are adults of working-age. Questions regarding social care funding often place emphasis on those who are older and our ageing population, with an increase of 3.3% in requests for support from those aged 65 years and over. It is fundamental, however, to remember the needs of adults of working-age with disabilities; requests for support for working-age adults has, in turn, increased by 5.1% since 2015/2016 (Kings Fund, 2020b). Despite this need for care, packages designed to provide long-term care (LTC) have remained static for working-age adults, demonstrative of the needs to consider a social care funding model which not only considers our ageing population, but also the needs and rights of working-age adults, who may require long-term care.

Spending reductions have affected access, with fewer people eligible for care. But they have also affected the ability of social care providers to deliver high quality services. The amount local authorities are able to pay towards somebody's care in all accommodation settings is often less than it costs to provide it. As set out by the Competition and Markets Authority in 2017, "The current model of service provision cannot be sustained without additional public funding. Providers that supply primarily local authority funded residents are unlikely to be sustainable at the current rates pay. Significant reforms are needed to enable the sector to grow to meet the expected substantial increase in care needs."

The Disabilities Trust recently undertook an audit, benchmarking service user fees using a nationally recognized benchmarking tool and determined that, assessed needs were on average 57% higher than the commissioned levels of support. Across our audit sample, we found that in order to provide the level of care required, The Trust consistently needed to 'top-up' local authority funding using charitable resources. If we consider the implications of this, across all of our supported living and accommodation-based services, the chronic underfunding renders this level of support financially unviable, risks our ability to meet individuals critical care needs and compromises the quality of support we can provide.

This funding crisis means providers like the Disabilities Trust, may have to serve notice on current contracts and compromises our ability to recruit and retain staff. This represents a risk for both the system and for those who use and rely on residential and community services. Without providers of care we do not have a social care system. Continued diminished short-term funding creates uncertainty in the market, preventing local authorities from planning for the longer term. In turn, there is reduced ability for providers to innovate as the chronic under funding means services are at risk of being financial unviable as all resources are directed towards ensuring financial survival in the short-term.

What level of funding is required in each of the next five years to address this?

There must, moving forward, be a realistic assessment of needs to base funding levels on. The House of Lords' Economic Committee stated that the adult social care system would need around £8 billion a year to "restore care quality and access to 2009/2010 standards, addressing the increased pressure on unpaid carers and local authorities and the unmet need that has developed since then." It also cautions more will be needed in the future to meet demographic and demand changes.

Whichever funding model is developed, it must work for both older individuals, but also those of working age with disabilities. It must be truly person-centred and built around individuals' needs and contracts. As illustrated by VODG's report, in the light of Britain's exit from the EU, funding must be sustainable for two reasons. Firstly, the negative impact of leaving the UK on the economy may exacerbate the funding gap. Secondly, a new immigration policy is required to sustain the levels of EU workers, which account for 8% of the social care labour market (VODG, 2020).

The Social Care sector has also suffered from previous Governments reliance on single-year funding, in an environment of growing demand and unmet need. We urge this Government to be clear on a

longer-term funding commitment across the full five years of this parliament. A five-year funding commitment would enable Local Authorities and providers to develop sustainable plans, meeting the growing demand in our communities.

The Care Act provides social care with a good legal framework, based around the needs of service users. At the Trust we have a committed and caring workforce, who work incredibly hard to provide good quality care, despite lower levels of pay and benefits as a result of financial constraints. The chronic underfunding, however, limits the sectors ability to fulfil the ambitions of the Care Act and subsequent best practice guidelines.

What is the extent of current workforce shortages in social care, how will they change over the next five years, and how do they need to be addressed?

There has been a recruitment and retention workforce crisis experienced across the social care sector for many years. There are an estimated 110,000 vacancies in adult social care– around one in ten social workers and one in eleven care workers (The Kings Fund 2019) .Care staff do essential, rewarding, challenging and skilled work, but workforce recruitment and retention has become more challenging, as pay remains comparatively very low and doesn't adequately remunerate people for their skilled work, or the contribution they make. Moreover, many feel their value is not always recognised within wider society. This can only be truly addressed by government – first through immediate additional funding, and in the longer term through comprehensive reform of adult social care funding.

The Disabilities Trust has historically faced significant vacancy levels; at some points, facing 20% vacancies across the organisation. Providing services, with such considerable staff shortages threatens not only the timely support we are able to offer, but also the future sustainability of some services. As a result of the high unemployment rates sparked by the economic impact of the coronavirus restrictions, The Disabilities Trust has been able to improve its recruitment rates, however, we are concerned that such recruitment gains may be short lived, without intervention.

The Disabilities Trust pays its front-line workforce above the national minimum wage, however, our ability to adequately reward our staff and therefore retain skilled employees is limited by the systemic under funding of the sector discussed above. As shown throughout the coronavirus pandemic, our social care staff are providing crucial services; enabling so many to live the lives that they want. However, many are paid substantially below their peers in the NHS and often below rates in entry-level, unskilled retail jobs. We can only start to address the workforce issues, in terms of pay but also further skills development and career paths if we invest in adult social care and in our hardworking and skilled social care workforce.

We know from many of our dedicated staff, pay is not the main reason why people choose to work in the health and social care sectors; however, it does have an impact on attracting and retaining skills and talent. Looking over a longer horizon, more thought needs to go into what the publicly funded health and social care system's offer to staff, and whether that involves guaranteed and consistent levels of pay, training and recognition of the immense social value of their roles.

What further reforms are needed to the social care funding system in the long-term?

We need a care market that supports the Third Sector and recognises the significant contribution of social care to the economy. Emphasis should be placed on social value in social care contracts. We need to review the current model of market regulation, so that it promotes sustainable models that are not just about fee levels, but about quality and soft outcomes, the contribution to local economies and the legal structure of organisations and how they are funded. We need an adult social care long-term plan which mirrors, complements and interacts with the NHS Long-Term Plan.

Conclusions made by The Disabilities Trust:

Successive Governments, upon assuming office have listed reform of adult social care amongst their top domestic policy priorities yet have ultimately failed to deliver on this promise. There have been a series of government reports on social care reform – two green papers, four white papers, and various consultations – as well as five independent commissions. Yet there has been no solution to the growing crisis. Now there is an opportunity for transformation that supports and empowers strong resilient individuals, families and communities and builds a thriving social care sector.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at foundation@thedtgroup.org or on 01444 239123.

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