

# Adult Social Care Policy Committee

## 1 July 2024



## Public Forum

The following **Public Forum Statement** has been received:

- 1. Steve Mills, UNISON.** Note: This statement was originally submitted to HR Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024. It has been re-submitted here for information.

Please note: The views and information contained within these public statements are those of the individuals concerned and not of the Council.



## **STATEMENT 1 – Steve Mills, UNISON**

We are writing to you in relation to the crisis in public services, but specifically for now. Social care. Many care providers are running 30-40% vacancy rate. Which is then filled by costly agency staff. There has been a significant number of staff leaving the service.

Whilst we accept that BCC are no longer the employers and most services have been transferred to the private sector. BCC is the main funder, in most cases. Furthermore, many of the employees and recipients of these services are Bristolians.

The drain on staff has been caused by.. reasons and is culminating in the perfect storm.

Post COVID; Carers worked through the pandemic. Normally at great risk to themselves and their families. Many became ill and some even died. However, the smattering of applause once a week, was mainly directed at NHS staff and did not pay the bills. We had numerous cases of members catching COVID and being sent home, without sick pay. They received SSP, which amounts to £95 pw. We had members crying on the phone, as they could not make ends meet and run up debts. Because they worked in care. Following COVID, they felt completely let down and under valued by the system and their employers. So left the service.

BREXIT; Many care workers were European. They have now gone home, feeling unwanted. Whilst we fully understand that this has nothing to do with BCC and most councillors and employees were against BREXIT. It does have a material effect on vacancy levels, and it would be remiss of us to ignore this.

Cost of living and pay; Recent pay awards have not kept pace with inflation and the cost of living. Many care workers have to work several jobs and sign waver clauses on the working time directive. Many are voting with their feet and getting better pay and terms and conditions in supermarkets and warehouses. Also, significantly less stressful employment.

Agency workers; With the vacancy levels so high, due to the above. Many employees work side by side with agency workers. Who are paid better and normally do not have to undertake personal care, driving duties or give medication. This disparity further undermines the confidence of care workers. Many who have resigned from service, to return shortly after as a agency worker. Without the pressures and stressors and with a better pay packet.

Sick pay; Most care providers do not pay sick pay. leaving these workers vulnerable. SSP does not cover the basics and leaves the employee, who is also unwell. Facing poverty and debt. The provision of care leaves the employee at risk of cross contamination of viruses. This is further augmented by those who are ill, but do not want to force their family into poverty. Take a lemsip and get on with it. Infecting colleagues and service users alike. Muscular skeletal injuries are also prevalent, some have life changing effects. As overstretched and stressed staff, try to cover their workload, without reflecting on their own well-being. Manual handling training can only give a worker so much protection. As constant strain over the period of a shift, will negatively impact the body. Which is made worse, as under staffing and the utilisation of agency workers, led to an over reliance on the remaining staff.

We have supported members during numerous grievances and disciplinaries. Some of the later, relate to medication errors. Whilst we concede and understand these are serious issues, that can have a detrimental effect on a service users health. Nearly all of these are directly related to understaffing and overstretched staff making small errors. This can in turn lead to employees being struck off, further reducing the workforce. We have had members who do not wish to defend themselves during

a debarring hearing, As they have no intention of continuing to work in care. As they have had enough of long hours, low staffing and morale, with wages that cannot meet basic needs.

We are heading for the perfect storm. Due to the understaffing and the cost of agency workers, also augmented by the CQC inspections. Care providers could start choosing not to renew contracts. Leaving BCC struggling to fulfil their statutory duties and find suitable placements. BCC has since closed nearly all their provisions. We no longer care for the vulnerable and sick of our city.

We call upon the HR Committee to start a process, via officers in Health and Social care. Also Cllr Francis the current Adult social Committee Chair.

Engage with care providers, including homes, outreaches, supported living and home care. Ask about the staffing crisis.

Update and amend the Baseline Standards for funding and contractors. To ensure that at least the real living wage is paid. Our understanding is that Brunel Care pay this, and do not struggle like their colleagues to recruit and retain. Bristol City Council has signed up to the living wage and should ensure that those that contract with them, or receive funding pay this also.

<https://www.bristolonecity.com/bristol-living-wage-city/>

<https://livingwage.org.uk/living-wage-employers>

Adequately fund providers, so they can pay sick pay and amend the baseline standards to reflect this.

We understand that Bristol City Council has signed up to the ethical care charter. We want the authority to engage with us and inform us what stage BCC has reached. Also, to continue to work with your trade union partners on this initiative.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/care-workers-your-rights/the-ethical-care-charter/>

We also call upon Bristol City Council to sign the open letter, please see the link below. To the labour and Conservative leaders asking for a commitment to the real living wage in Adult Social Care, to offset the growing staffing crisis. This letter is intended to be sent prior to July 4<sup>th</sup>'s General Election.

[https://www.citizensuk.org/about-us/news/lwsc\\_open\\_letter/](https://www.citizensuk.org/about-us/news/lwsc_open_letter/)