

ISSUE 01 · HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

BRIDGEHEAD SOCIAL CARE

THE HANDOVER

INTELLIGENCE FOR LEADERS IN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

MONTHLY, FROM BRIDGEHEAD · EXPERTS IN PM, POLICY & REPUTATION

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/ LEAD STORY · VIEWPOINT

PM Andy Burnham and the Open Questions for Care

Andy Burnham became Prime Minister on 20 July 2026, succeeding Keir Starmer. His own pledge, a National Care Service, free at the point of use, is not itself a costed policy. Whether it's a direction of travel or a firm destination changes what it means for the sector.

/ FROM THE EDITOR

What the sector needs to know before the next shift

Every month, health and social care leaders are handed a fresh set of things to know. A regulatory change, a funding announcement, a story running in the trade press, a line a competitor is using in front of commissioners. Most of it arrives piecemeal, in a dozen different feeds. *The Handover* is Bridgehead's attempt to hand it to you the way a good shift handover works, the signal, not the noise, and what it means for the decisions in front of you.

This issue leads with one of ours, the Care Association Alliance's first policy paper on adult social care funding, published this month ahead of the Casey Commission. It's the most consequential document to land in the sector's inbox in some time, so we've built this issue around it.

Each issue covers four things. The regulatory and policy shifts worth acting on, what the sector is seeing in national and trade media, one figure worth carrying into your next board meeting, and a shortlist of dates for the diary.

Will Walter

Founder, Bridgehead Communications

/ ABOUT THIS RELAUNCH

Bridgehead, and why this newsletter is starting again

Bridgehead Communications is a specialist PR, policy and reputation agency working across health and social care, helping providers, associations and commissioners make their case to regulators, commissioners, media and government. *The Handover* is our relaunched sector newsletter, a monthly briefing built for the people running care organisations, not just the people writing about them. More on our work at bridgeheadcommunications.com.

This issue also marks a first outing for Damian Green, who joins Bridgehead as Senior Policy Adviser and co-authors the CAA funding paper covered below. Damian is a former Deputy Prime Minister with direct responsibility for social care, and brings a first-hand understanding of how Westminster and Whitehall will actually read proposals like CAA's, the judgement this newsletter is meant to carry into every issue.

PM Andy Burnham: the open questions for care

Burnham became PM on 20 July 2026, succeeding Keir Starmer, after winning the Labour leadership unopposed. What follows is our own editorial read of what his premiership could mean for the sector. The questions below are open, not answered, and shouldn't be read as government policy.

Burnham left Westminster nearly a decade ago to become Mayor of Greater Manchester, returning to Parliament only weeks before securing the leadership, a route to Number 10 with few precedents. In his first speech as Prime Minister, delivered outside Downing Street on 20 July, he committed directly. Social care should "operate on the NHS principle" of being free at the point of use, he said, calling the current system "broken" and citing a cost that could reach £18bn a year. That is now a stated commitment from the Prime Minister himself, not a characterisation of his past record. What it commits to in practice is still unclear.

1. Is it a direction of travel or a destination? A speech-day commitment is not the same as a costed, timetabled policy. "Free at the point of use" could mean a long-run aspiration the country gradually travels towards as funding allows, or a firm end-state this government commits to delivering on a fixed timetable. Those are very different propositions for the sector to plan against, and the speech itself doesn't yet resolve which one this is.

2. How would it interact with CAA's own proposal? CAA's national-settlement paper (item 02, below) pools financial risk nationally but keeps delivery local. If a Burnham-style National Care Service leant instead towards NHS-style national commissioning, that would be a meaningful design tension with CAA's model, not a straightforward alignment, and one CAA may now need to engage with directly, given who's in Downing Street.

3. What would "affordable" mean in practice? Free-at-the-point-of-use doesn't remove the £8.3bn funding gap this issue leads on (item 03, below). It just changes who's asked to close it, and on what timescale. Whether that's funded through general taxation, a dedicated levy, or a longer transition period is an open question the new government has not yet answered publicly.

Source: Andy Burnham, first speech as Prime Minister, Downing Street, 20 July 2026 (commitment to a free-at-the-point-of-use, NHS-principle social care system, and the £18bn cost estimate). The reading of what that commitment means for CAA's proposal and the funding gap is our own analysis, Bridgehead Communications, not a government or CAA position.

/ 02 · REGULATORY & POLICY WATCH

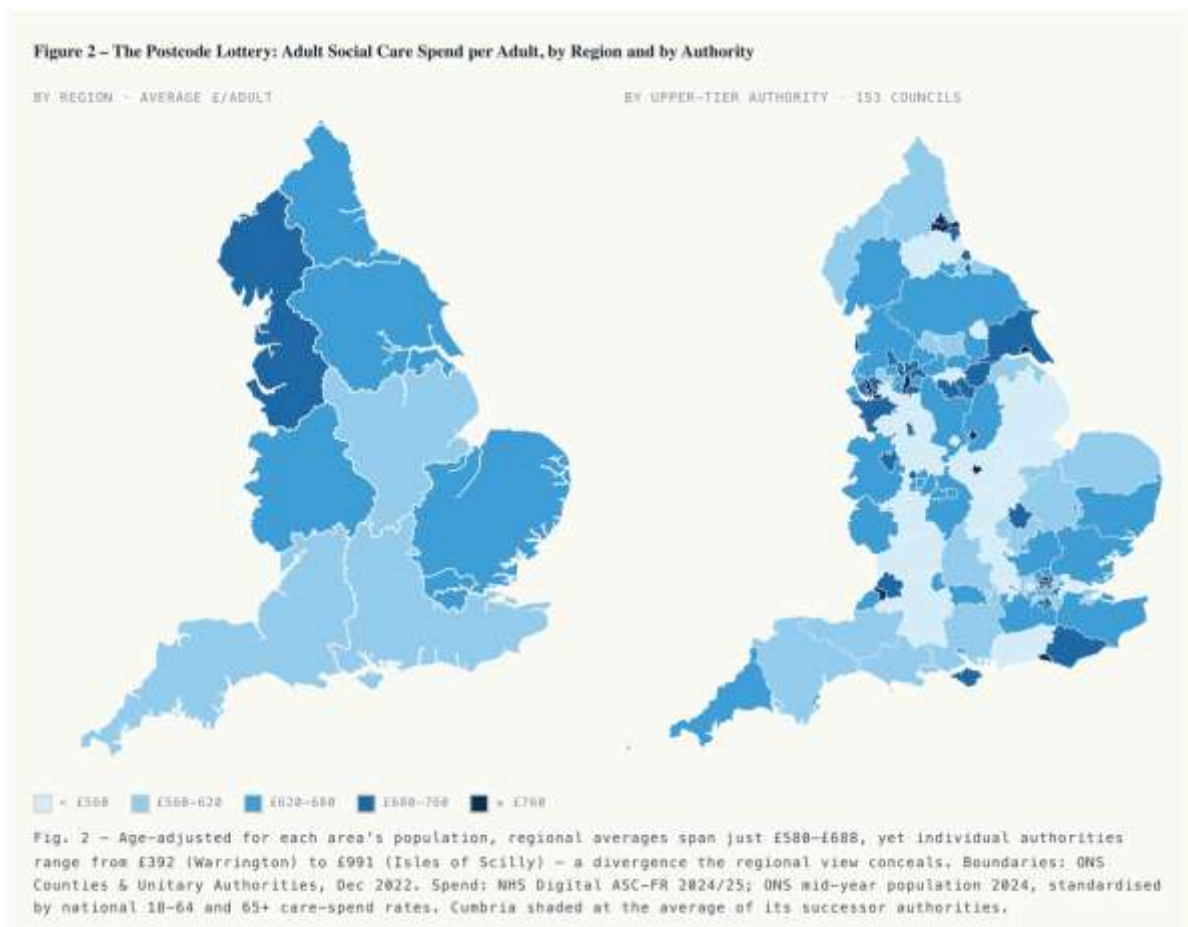
CAA opens its funding reform programme

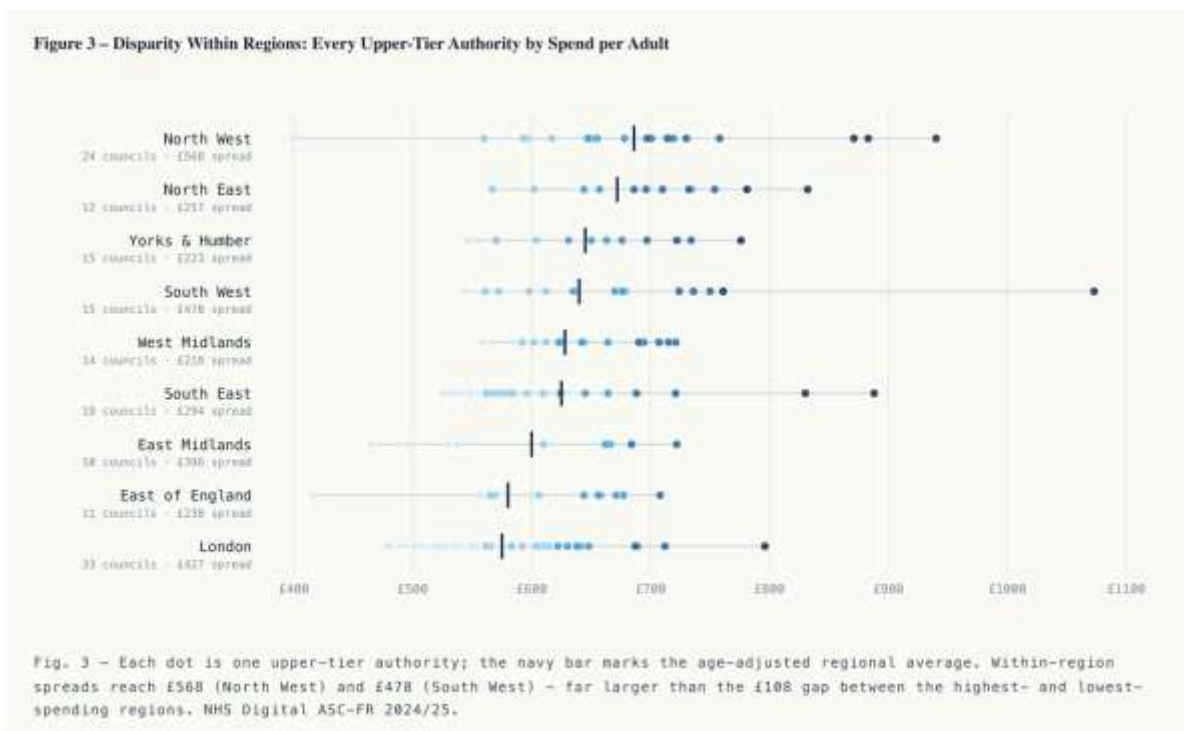
The Care Association Alliance has published *Adult Social Care Funding Reform* (July 2026), the first in a planned programme of work, positioning its proposals directly at the remit of the Casey Commission. The paper proposes a national funding settlement built on three principles: national pooling of financial risk, statutory entitlement triggered by

assessed need, and local delivery within a national framework. It is delivered through five components. A ring-fenced, needs-adjusted national care grant; a reformed means test with a substantially raised capital threshold and a lifetime cap on individual contributions; a national tariff covering residential and domiciliary care; a bundled funding model for residential care with portable assessed packages; and a reformed Deferred Payment Agreement framework so no one is required to sell their home to fund residential care. Ten recommendations accompany the proposal, from establishing the national settlement itself through to reforming CQC data publication to support provider market confidence.

Source: Care Association Alliance, *Adult Social Care Funding Reform*, July 2026, Executive Summary & Ten Recommendations.

The paper's geographic analysis is also worth flagging to anyone managing multi-region commissioning relationships. Adult social care spend per adult across England's 153 upper-tier authorities ranges from £392 (Warrington) to £991 (Isles of Scilly), a divergence that regional averages conceal. Within-region spread reaches £568 in the North West and £478 in the South West, larger than the gap between the highest- and lowest-spending regions overall.





Source: same paper, Figures 2 to 3, standardised on NHS Digital ASC-FR 2024/25 and ONS mid-year population 2024.

/ THE SIGNAL

This month's figure

THE FUNDING GAP BY 2032/33

The additional annual spend the OBR-consistent modelling says is needed just to maintain current social care service levels against rising demand. Not to improve the system, but to stand still.

Health Foundation modelling (2023), as cited in CAA, *Adult Social Care Funding Reform*, July 2026, Fig. 1.

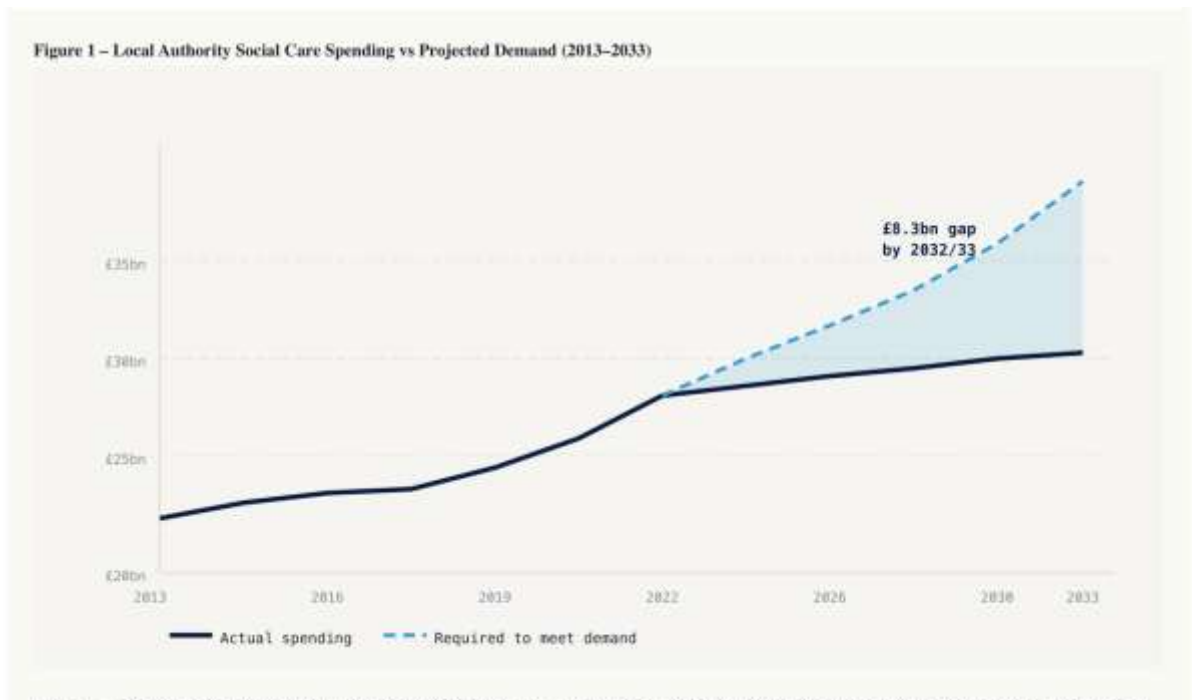


Fig. 1 – Illustrative projection based on OBR long-run projections (2024), ADASS budget surveys 2013–2024, and Health Foundation modelling (2023). Source: Illustrative projection based on OBR long-run projections (2024), ADASS budget surveys 2013–2024, and Health Foundation modelling (2023). Gap estimate: Health Foundation, Social Care Funding Gap, 2023.

/ IN THE PRESS

What the sector is reading

Care Home Professional

"INTERVIEW: What does Andy Burnham mean for social care? Two MPs give their verdicts"

Bridgehead's own William Walter put the new PM's premiership to two MPs from opposite sides of the House. Two extracts:

"Andy Burnham inherits the social care crisis he has spent fifteen years diagnosing. For the sector, the question is whether he'll finally treat it." ALISON BENNETT MP, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT SPOKESPERSON FOR SOCIAL CARE

"I welcome what Andy Burnham has outlined, especially an NHS-style, free-at-the-point-of-use social care service, and I believe his own experience with his father's Alzheimer's will bring a personal connection to these reforms." SOJAN JOSEPH MP, CHAIR, APPG ON ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Source: *Care Home Professional*, 23 July 2026. Interviews conducted by William Walter, Bridgehead Communications.

[Read the full interview →](#)

/ FROM THE SECTOR

Policy Paper One: a national settlement for social care funding



Adult Social Care Funding Reform · Policy Paper One · July 2026

Adult Social Care Funding Reform opens a sustained programme of work from the Care Association Alliance, prepared with Bridgehead Communications. It is authored by Melanie Weatherley MBE (Co-Chair, Care Association Alliance), Damian Green (Senior

Policy Adviser, former Deputy Prime Minister responsible for social care), William Walter (Lead Author) and Tom Zundel (Senior Author & Head of Research).

"153 local authorities are bearing national demographic risk. That is not a funding model. It is a managed retreat."

In her foreword, Melanie Weatherley MBE writes that the paper "represents a deliberate decision that the sector cannot wait for others to make the case on its behalf," and frames the Casey Commission as "a genuine opportunity to settle what a reformed funding model should look like." Weatherley's read on the new PM is direct. "Andy Burnham wrote the last serious blueprint for a National Care Service in 2010, and watched it scrapped within weeks. He now has the mandate to finish what he started."

Source: Melanie Weatherley MBE, quoted in *Care Home Professional*, 23 July 2026.

[Read the full paper →](#)

/ DIARY

Dates to hold

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Jul 2026 | Adult Social Care Funding Reform published
CAA Policy Paper One, prepared with Bridgehead Communications. |
| 16 Jul, 1 Sep | Parliament in summer recess
The Commons rose on 16 July and returns on 1 September. Little movement on the Casey Commission or CAA's proposal expected before then. |
| 19, 22 Sep | Liberal Democrat Autumn Conference, Brighton
First conference-season test of appetite for CAA's national settlement model. |
| 27, 30 Sep | Labour Party Conference, Liverpool
PM Andy Burnham's first conference as party leader. Worth watching for any detail on the National Care Service pledge. |
| 4, 7 Oct | Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham
Opposition response to the funding settlement debate expected here. |
| 15 Sep,
12 Oct | Parliament in conference recess
Commons sitting resumes 12 October, covering all three conferences above. |
| TBC | Casey Commission
Reporting timeline not yet confirmed. The paper positions its proposals directly at the Commission's remit. |
| Next issue | The Handover, Issue 02
Cadence to be confirmed. |

Source: UK Parliament recess dates (House of Commons); Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and Conservative Party conference schedules, 2026.

Experts in PR, Policy & Reputation.

The Handover is Bridgehead Communications' monthly intelligence briefing for leaders across health and social care. Visit [thehandover.co.uk](#)

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