The Settlement

A newsletter from the campaign for a National Care Service

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From the co-chair

A Prime Minister with a plan for care. Now for the funding settlement beneath it.

It has been a month of real movement in Westminster. On 29 July, Andy Burnham gave his first major speech on social care as Prime Minister, pledging to fix what he called a "broken" system. He wants a National Care Service, brought forward Baroness Casey's review to 2027, and committed to expanding the existing fair pay agreement into a wider programme of workforce reform. He has also invited the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats into cross-party talks.

What matters is not the structure sitting above the system, but the funding settlement sitting beneath it.

Melanie Weatherley MBE, Co-Chair, Care Association Alliance

Two appointments followed in the reshuffle around him. Alison McGovern MP became Minister of State for Care on 4 August. Jacqui Smith, Baroness Smith of Malvern, was reappointed Skills Minister, keeping the dual Department for Education and Department for Work and Pensions brief covering apprenticeships and further education that was created last September.

Here is where we want to be precise. Mr Burnham said he wants his National Care Service "fully integrated" into the NHS. We have said, consistently, that this is not what the sector needs. When reports first circulated that a standalone arm's-length body had been shelved, we said clearly it did not matter to us: 'we never needed our own version of the NHS, we need a national funding settlement.'

That was the message in May. By the time the Prime Minister spoke on 29 July, we went further: reform of the structure must come first, and the question of how much money, and where it comes from, follows from it. A means test frozen at £23,250 since 2010, and a tariff that pays providers less than care costs, are not fixed by routing extra billions through the same broken structure. We welcome a Prime Minister who wants to talk about this. But structural reform is the precondition, not an afterthought to funding.

We are also being realistic about what this sequencing means. The funding settlement itself will not be resolved before Baroness Casey reports; that decision sits with her review, whenever it lands in 2027. But workforce reform does not need to wait. The Prime Minister's commitment to expand the fair pay agreement, and the proposals in our own Paper Two, can and should be delivered in advance of Casey, not held back until she publishes. To be clear, that is not an argument against new money. Better direction of existing funding, which we have long argued for, will not by itself fix pay and retention. Workforce reform needs investment too, not just redirection.



Melanie Weatherley MBE

Co-Chair

Care Association Alliance

The Number | This edition's figure

130,000 fewer British workers in adult social care since 2020/21, even as the sector's vacancy rate has fallen to a decade low of 6.2%, the workforce problem Paper Two is being written to address.

Source: Care Association Alliance press statement, 24 June 2026, Melanie Weatherley MBE responding to Skills for Care's annual workforce report.

What the campaign has been doing

The CAA issued a fuller statement on 29 July, the same day as the Prime Minister's speech, welcoming cross-party talks while warning that new money poured into a broken structure changes nothing. Reform of the structure must come first, with funding decisions following from it.

We have been building the case directly with the people now holding the brief. A full briefing on our funding proposals has gone to Alison McGovern MP, with an early meeting requested.

Earlier in the period, following Skills for Care's annual workforce report, Melanie's 24 June statement warned that 130,000 fewer British workers are in care than five years ago, even as vacancies fall to a decade low, the structural gap Paper Two is being written to close.

With Parliament in recess, we also ran a physical mailout to target MPs and to our associations directly. A printed leave-behind lands differently to an email in a quiet news month. Let us know if you'd like a copy.

Who holds the brief now, across parties

01 

Alison McGovern MP, Minister of State for Care

Confirmed 4 August. MP for Birkenhead (previously Wirral South, 2010–2024); was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Gordon Brown, then held shadow roles for Children and Families and International Development. Served as Minister of State for Employment, then for Local Government and Homelessness, before this appointment. The Alliance has sent her a full briefing on our funding proposals and requested an early meeting. We will update members as soon as a date is confirmed.

02 

Jacqui Smith, Skills Minister (DfE/DWP)

Reappointed in the same reshuffle, retaining the joint brief over apprenticeships and further education, relevant to the workforce pipeline Paper Two addresses.

03 

Stuart Andrew MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Appointed to the post on 22 July 2025 and retained through the summer reshuffle around the new Prime Minister. The Alliance has not yet briefed him directly on the funding proposals.

04 

Dr Luke Evans MP, Shadow Minister for Primary Care and Social Care

A meeting with Melanie is being arranged.

05 

Helen Morgan MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Health and Social Care

Holds the Liberal Democrats' overall health and social care brief under Ed Davey's frontbench team.

06 

Alison Bennett MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Care and Carers

Holds the Liberal Democrats' dedicated care and carers brief. Interviewed by Bridgehead's William Walter on the Prime Minister's social care plans for Care Home Professional.

07 

Anne Marie Morris, Reform UK — stepping back from social care

A former Conservative MP for Newton Abbot (2010–2024), Morris joined Reform UK on 2 July 2025 to lead its social care policy work. Melanie understands she has since stepped back from that role to concentrate on her PhD. Reform UK has not yet named a successor; the Alliance will make contact once one is confirmed.

Three things to do now

- **Watch for Paper Two, on the workforce**
- A steering group draft was discussed with members on 3 August, and now includes a new section on care technologists. Bridgehead is working it up now, alongside Damian Green, and it will come back to members for comment before publication. Get in touch if you want a say in what it covers.

Forward this issue to your own colleagues

- The campaign's reach depends on cascade, not just national coverage.

Care Association Alliance

The Settlement, produced by Bridgehead Communications for the Care Association Alliance.

Sources

1. Andy Burnham, speech on social care reform, 29 July 2026, reported by the Centre for Care and Guido Fawkes.
2. Melanie Weatherley MBE, statement on behalf of the Care Association Alliance in response to the Prime Minister's announcement on social care reform, 29 July 2026.
3. Melanie Weatherley MBE, quoted in Croner Navigate-Care, 9 June 2026, and Caring Times, 3 June 2026, on the Alliance's response to reports that a standalone national care service body had been shelved.
4. Coverage secured for Paper One in mid-July: Care Talk and Caring Times (17 July), Ealing Times (16 July), Care Home Professional and The Carer (15 July), and Comment Central (13 July).
5. Alison McGovern MP's appointment as Minister of State for Care, DHSC, confirmed 4 August 2026.
6. Jacqui Smith's reappointment as Skills Minister (DfE/DWP), August 2026 reshuffle.
7. Melanie Weatherley MBE, statement on behalf of the Care Association Alliance responding to Skills for Care's annual workforce report, 24 June 2026.
8. Bridgehead Steering Group workforce paper draft, circulated to CAA members 4–5 August 2026.