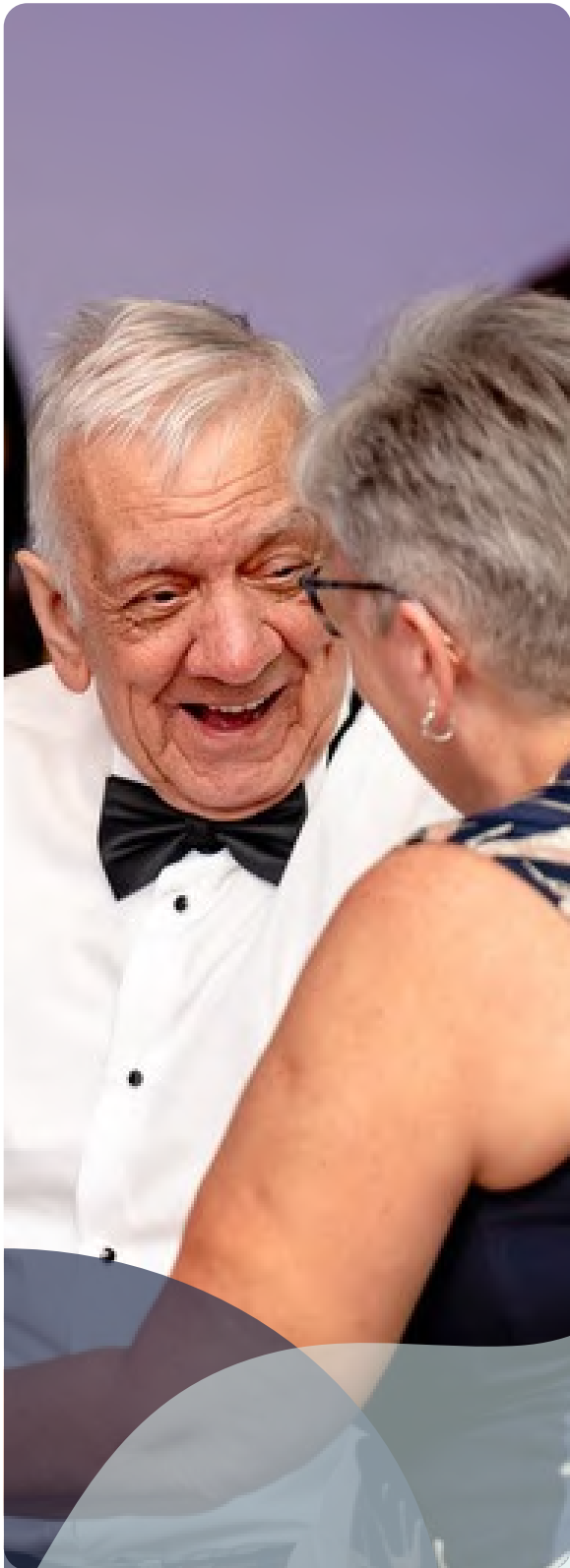


Annual Report

Activities &
Achievements

— 2025–2026

www.scottishcare.org
01292 270240
[@scottishcare](https://twitter.com/scottishcare)



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Foreword from our Chair

David Reilly

Chair of the Scottish Care Executive

It is a real privilege to introduce Scottish Care's Annual Report for 2025–2026, my first as Chair of the organisation.

After more than 33 years working in social care, my passion for our sector has only grown. Much has changed over that time, but one thing remains constant. Behind every decision are real people: those who draw on care and support, their families, and the dedicated people who support them every day.

This has undoubtedly been another challenging year for our sector. Providers continue to face financial pressures, workforce challenges, increasing costs and growing demand. Yet despite this, our sector continues to adapt, innovate and, most importantly, be there for people when they need us. That is something we should never lose sight of or stop being proud of.

Throughout the year, Scottish Care has continued to make sure the voice of the independent social care sector is heard. Our strategy, **Social Care that Works for Scotland**, and our four ambitions of being **Valued**, **Visible**, **Viable** and **Visionary** have helped provide a clear focus for that work.

For me, these are more than four words. We need a workforce that feels genuinely **valued**; a sector that is **visible** and recognised for the contribution it makes; organisations that are financially **viable** and able to plan for the future; and the confidence to be **visionary** about what social care can become.

The development of **Care Creates** has been particularly important this year, and I want to recognise the creativity of the Scottish Care team behind it. Changing the narrative around social care matters. Too often our sector is talked about in terms of pressure, crisis and cost, rather than the positive difference it makes. **Care Creates** helps us tell that story with greater confidence, highlighting how social care creates independence, relationships, stronger communities and, above all, enables people to live with dignity and choice.

Looking ahead, there is still much to do. Sustainable funding, fair work and workforce stability remain significant challenges. We recognise the difficult fiscal climate, and Scottish Care will continue to challenge where needed while working collaboratively with government, commissioners and partners to find practical and sustainable solutions.

Finally, I want to thank our members, the Scottish Care team, those who serve on our National and Executive Committees, and all our partners. Most importantly, thank you to everyone working across social care in Scotland. The commitment you show every day is what gives me confidence in the future of our sector.

David Reilly
Chair of the Scottish Care Executive



What we do



Scottish Care is the representative body, membership organisation, think tank and future-focused design partner for the independent social care and support sector in Scotland. We work alongside providers across care homes, care at home, housing support and related services, championing a vision of social care rooted in human rights, citizenship, dignity and community.

The year brought significant change and challenge across the social care landscape. Care Reform, continuing economic pressure, workforce fragility, regulatory demands and preparations for a new Scottish Parliamentary term all reinforced the need for determined and credible sector leadership. In response, Scottish Care combined evidence, practical support, policy influence and innovation to ensure that the voice of the independent social care sector remained present in national decision-making and public debate.

Our work continued to be guided by our strategy, **Social Care that Works for Scotland**, and by the four strategic pillars of being **Valued, Visible, Viable** and **Visionary**.

Year at a Glance 2025 – 26

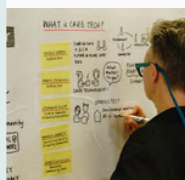
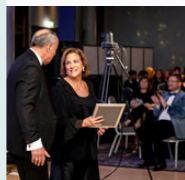
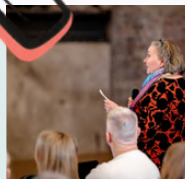


A defining achievement of the year was the development of the **Care Creates** campaign and **Scottish Care Manifesto**, which helped reframe public and political understanding of social care as a creator of connection, independence, opportunity and wellbeing. The campaign strengthened our advocacy and influencing work while helping shape priorities for the 2026 Scottish Parliamentary election.

Throughout the year, Scottish Care championed human rights, ethical commissioning, sustainable funding and meaningful reform, representing members through engagement with government, Parliament, regulators and national agencies. We supported workforce development through international recruitment initiatives, the National Induction Framework and ongoing partnership working with workforce and regulatory bodies.

Through conferences, awards, events, webinars and workshops, we connected providers, policymakers and partners, creating opportunities for learning, collaboration and sector leadership. Research and evidence remained central to our work, informing policy development and strengthening the case for investment, sustainability and reform.

Looking ahead, we will continue to promote innovation, digital transformation and future-focused service design, ensuring the sector is well placed to shape the future of care and support in Scotland. Guided by our strategy, **Social Care that Works for Scotland**, we remained committed to being **Valued, Visible, Viable** and **Visionary** in all that we do



Strategic Framework: The 4 V's

Valued



Recognising, Supporting, and Valuing People and Providers

Championing Rights and Ethical Care

Human Rights Leadership and Policy Influence

Scottish Care continued to place human rights at the centre of its policy, research and influencing activity throughout 2025–26. We engaged with a wide range of national discussions relating to human rights implementation, equality, dementia, palliative care and the rights of older and disabled people. In all our work, we argued that social care is one of the principal means through which people are enabled to exercise choice, maintain relationships, participate in their communities and live lives of dignity and fulfilment.

We also continued to contribute to debates on the proposed Human Rights Bill and equality and human rights mainstreaming, ensuring that the realities of social care provision remained visible within wider policy development. Through collaboration with partners and members, we sought to ensure that future reform is grounded in rights, participation, respect and inclusion.

We highlighted the intersection between human rights, ageing and women's health. Through our World Menopause Day reflections, we explored how menopause can affect dignity, participation, health and wellbeing across the life course, challenging the tendency to dismiss women's experiences as '*just age*'. We called for greater

recognition of women's rights to health, respect and support, both for those accessing care and for the predominantly female workforce that sustains social care services across Scotland.



Ethical Commissioning Work and Published Reports

Throughout the year, Scottish Care continued to champion ethical commissioning as a foundation for sustainable, rights-based social care and support. Working with providers, commissioners, government and partners, we argued for commissioning approaches that recognise relationships, prevention, wellbeing and long-term outcomes rather than short-term purchasing considerations alone.

We remained actively involved in national discussions on procurement reform, ethical commissioning and the implementation of Care Reform legislation. Through our reports, policy papers and engagement activity, we highlighted the importance of understanding the true cost of care and support and promoted commissioning models that place people, rights and sustainability at their heart.



Member Engagement and Support

Over the 2024–2026 period, representing the second cycle of Scottish Care's national member engagement programme, 14 branch visits were delivered across Scotland. These visits provided valuable opportunities to strengthen relationships with members, gather local intelligence and better understand the challenges and priorities facing care providers in different regions.

Following a review of attendance patterns, member feedback and engagement trends across this two-year cycle, we have made the strategic decision to transition Aberdeen & Shire, Fife, Argyll & Bute and Scottish Borders to an online engagement model for the third cycle in this cross country initiative for 2026–2028. This approach was intended to improve accessibility, increase participation for our members and ensure that engagement resources are aligned with member preferences while continuing to provide meaningful opportunities for local and national engagement.



Branch
Visits



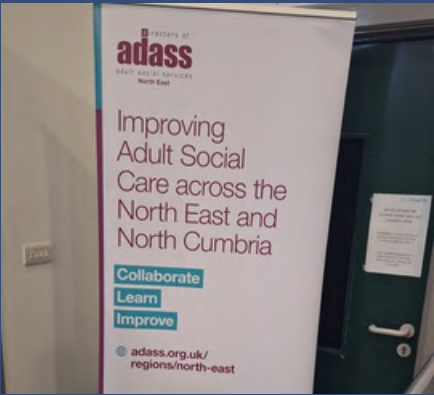
Supporting the Workforce

International recruitment and Displaced Worker Recruitment Events

Scottish Care continued to place human rights at the centre of its policy, research and influencing activity throughout 2025–26. We engaged with a wide range of national discussions relating to human rights implementation, equality, dementia, palliative care and the rights of older and disabled people. In all our work, we argued that social care is one of the principal means through which people are enabled to exercise choice, maintain relationships, participate in their communities and live lives of dignity and

Scottish Care also supported the Scottish Displaced Worker Scheme, working with the Scottish Refugee Council, North East and North Cumbria Displaced Worker Hub, and the Centre for Workforce Supply to connect displaced workers with employment opportunities and reduce barriers to recruitment. A joint recruitment event involving nine Scottish care organisations created direct pathways into employment for displaced workers seeking to continue careers in social care. Feedback highlighted the quality of candidates, the value of collaborative recruitment approaches, and the contribution of these initiatives to addressing workforce shortages across the sector.

This work generated workforce intelligence on recruitment challenges, sponsorship and compliance issues, and the need for sustainable and ethical recruitment pathways, helping to inform national workforce planning and policy discussions.



Adult Social Care National Induction Framework

Scottish Care played an active role in developing and implementing the National Induction Framework (NIF) with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), NHS Education for Scotland/Public Services Delivery Scotland, and other national stakeholders. The initiative was designed to create a nationally recognised, portable induction programme for adult social care workers, reducing duplication of mandatory training and supporting workforce mobility.

Progress included the development of a National Induction Learning Zone and the integration of learning records into the SSSC MyLearning App, enabling workers to retain and transfer evidence of completed induction when moving between employers. This supports workforce mobility, reduces onboarding time and costs for providers, improves consistency of induction standards, and strengthens workforce confidence and retention through early career development.

Scottish Care promoted the NIF Passport through national forums, presentations, communications and stakeholder engagement, ensuring the independent social care sector informed its ongoing design and implementation. The programme supports a more visible, valued and sustainable workforce by enabling portable learning, career progression and a consistent approach to induction across adult social care services.

Workforce regulation and registration

Scottish Care engaged with the Care Inspectorate, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), Disclosure Scotland, and other national partners to ensure workforce policy, regulation and practice developments reflected the needs of the independent social care sector.

Through ongoing dialogue, guidance and sector representation, Scottish Care helped providers prepare for legislative and

regulatory changes, including the Employment Rights Act 2025, while promoting proportionate and effective regulation. This engagement improved communication between providers and national bodies, supported workforce development, and ensured the social care workforce was represented in national decision-making.

Key areas of support included SSSC registration requirements, annual declarations, qualification expectations, fitness to practise processes, and changes to registration policy and fees. Scottish Care also worked with Disclosure Scotland to support implementation of the new five-year PVG membership model, helping providers understand implications for recruitment and safeguarding, and with the Care Inspectorate on inspection approaches, digital transformation, self-evaluation, staffing obligations and regulatory guidance. Feedback on qualification barriers, fitness to practise investigations, registration challenges and regulatory reform proposals was gathered and escalated to inform national discussions.

Scottish Care also partnered with regulators to deliver sector engagement events, including the ***‘Ready for Regulation: Equipping Today’s Social Care Workforce’*** conference, which helped providers better understand regulatory expectations, inspection processes, safer recruitment requirements and workforce compliance responsibilities. This work strengthened relationships between providers and regulators and supported a more informed, confident and prepared workforce.



Celebrating Achievement Across the Sector

Celebrating Success

Scottish Care continued to celebrate and amplify the achievements of the independent social care sector across Scotland.

A significant focus of communications activity was ensuring that positive stories from the sector were visible and widely shared. We worked closely with members to gather and promote good news stories, examples of innovation, workforce achievements and person-led care, helping to challenge outdated perceptions of social care and highlight the essential contribution the sector makes to communities across Scotland.



Visible

Influence, Representation, Data and Public Profile



Influencing National Policy

Representation of Members at National and Strategic Forums

Evidence to UK and Scottish Public Inquiries

The experiences of providers, staff, residents, families and those who access support continued to inform contributions to both the UK and Scottish Covid-19 Public Inquiries. Evidence submitted during the year sought to ensure that the lessons of the pandemic were fully understood and that the contribution of social care was properly recognised. This work focused not only on reflecting upon what happened during the pandemic but also on influencing future emergency preparedness, resilience planning and public policy so that social care is regarded as an equal partner within Scotland's health and care system.

Care Reform / National Care Service

Care Reform remained a major focus during 2025–26. Scottish Care contributed to legislative scrutiny, advisory groups and stakeholder engagement processes, ensuring reform proposals reflected the realities of delivering social care services. Advocacy focused on provider diversity, human rights, ethical commissioning, workforce support and sustainable implementation, reinforcing the independent sector's role as a key partner in delivering publicly funded care and support.



Promoting Sustainable Social Care

Negotiation and Advocacy on Funding and Viability

Financial sustainability remained a key priority throughout the year. In response to rising employment costs, inflation, workforce shortages and commissioning pressures, Scottish Care advocated for improved funding settlements, sustainable commissioning models and investment aligned to the true cost of care. Evidence gathered from across the sector demonstrated that funding levels remained insufficient in many areas, strengthening calls for action to protect service viability and sustainability.



Sector Data and Intelligence Gathering

Scottish Care continued to strengthen its role as a trusted source of intelligence on the independent social care sector, ensuring that policy positions, advocacy and public engagement were grounded in the realities experienced by providers, staff and people accessing support. Particular focus was given to understanding the impact of workforce and funding challenges. Research on international recruitment highlighted the scale of reliance on overseas workers and the risks posed by changing immigration policy, whilst sustainability and funding analysis demonstrated the widening gap between the true cost of care and available resources. This intelligence informed parliamentary briefings, media activity, consultation responses and engagement with government, helping to ensure that the experience of independent sector providers remained visible within national debate and decision-making.

Tailored Policy and Research

Scottish Care delivered a significant programme of policy and research activity designed to support members, influence decision-makers and bridge the gap between policy ambition and operational reality. Working across the Policy & Research team, outputs included policy briefings, consultation responses, member resources and research papers covering Care Reform, ethical commissioning, workforce sustainability, immigration, funding, human rights, climate change and digital transformation. This work combined member intelligence, provider experience and research evidence to ensure that independent sector perspectives informed national policy discussions and legislative development.

Alongside responding to emerging policy developments, Scottish Care produced tailored analysis to help members understand the implications of legislative and regulatory change, while also presenting practical alternatives informed by frontline experience. Work on Care Reform, workforce policy, provider sustainability and commissioning helped strengthen Scottish Care's reputation as a trusted source of policy expertise and reinforced its role as both a representative body and future-focused policy partner for the sector.



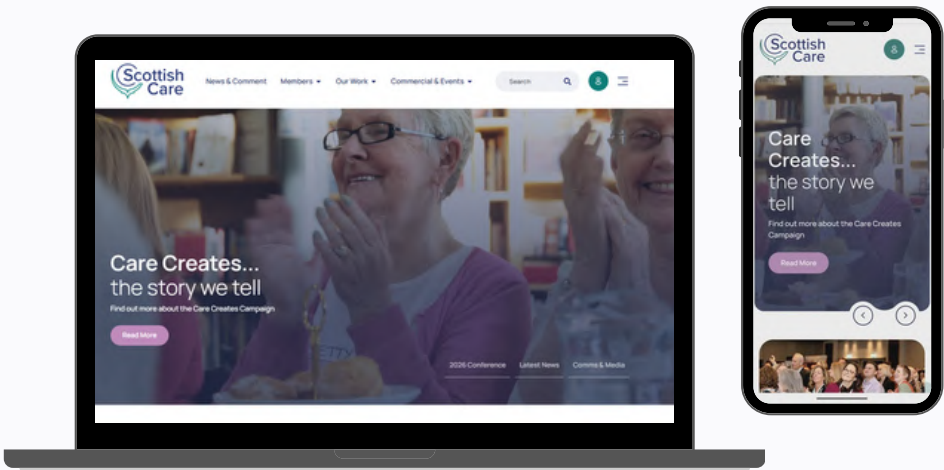
Raising the Profile of Social Care

Communications and Digital Strategy

Between April 2025 and March 2026, Scottish Care strengthened its communications and digital strategy to support the visible strand of its strategy, ensuring social care is recognised, understood and valued by the public, policymakers and wider society.

A key achievement was the redevelopment of the Scottish Care website, creating a more accessible and member-focused platform for sharing information, resources, events, campaigns and sector intelligence. This formed part of a wider digital transformation programme to improve member engagement, user experience and organisational sustainability.

To inform this work, Scottish Care conducted a Communications and Engagement Survey in August 2025, gathering member feedback on communications, engagement and improvement priorities. The findings led to the creation of a short-life working group of member representatives, which provided practical input on communications activity and website development, ensuring members helped shape future engagement approaches.



Scottish Care also applied learning from the IMPACT Demonstrator Project, using evidence on changing perceptions of adult social care to shift communications away from crisis-focused narratives towards messages centred on contribution, rights, relationships and solutions. This informed the **Care Creates** campaign, developed through the Scottish Care Manifesto, which highlighted how social care creates dignity, independence, opportunity, innovation and stronger communities.

Through e-bulletins, website content and social media, Scottish Care continued to promote member achievements and sector successes, increasing the visibility of social care and recognising the innovation and dedication of providers across Scotland.

Media Engagement and Social Media Growth

Throughout the year, Scottish Care responded to key policy developments and emerging issues affecting the sector, including workforce sustainability, funding, immigration, technology, social care reform and the future of social care support. Through media statements, press releases, interviews and comment pieces, we worked to ensure that the voice of the independent sector was heard in public debate and policy discussions.

Social media plays an important role in increasing visibility and engagement. Scottish Care maintained active presence across LinkedIn, Facebook, X, Instagram and Bluesky, sharing news, events, campaigns, policy updates and member stories with a growing and increasingly diverse audience.

LinkedIn emerged as our most engaged platform during the year, with continued growth in both followers and audience interaction, helping strengthen our reach. While X remains our largest platform by follower numbers, the continued development of our wider social media presence enabled us to reach new audiences and create more meaningful engagement across channels.



National Campaigns and Coalitions

Throughout 2025–26, Scottish Care used national campaigns and coalition activity to amplify the voice of social care and connect sector priorities with wider political and public debate. Through member engagement, manifesto workshops and public affairs activity, Scottish Care worked with providers to identify priorities for the 2026 Scottish Parliamentary election and promote a positive vision for the future of care and support.

The manifesto process included member-led discussions on human rights, collaboration, workforce, funding, climate and reform, culminating in the **Social Care Hustings** in March 2026.

Scottish Care also contributed to collaborative initiatives including **A Scotland that Cares**, helping to promote ambitious action on investment, reform and support. As part of this work, Scottish Care supported development of the first Care Policy Scorecard, strengthening public and political accountability by providing an independent assessment of political party commitments to social care.

Through continued involvement in the Scottish Food Coalition, Scottish Care advocated for good food as a core component of person-centred care, healthy ageing, wellbeing and community connection. This work ensured the experiences of people accessing care and support informed the development of Good Food Nation policy and wider discussions linking food, health and social care.

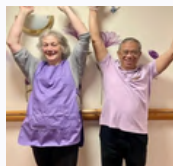
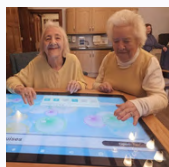
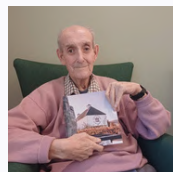
By working with partners across social care, health, human rights and civil society, Scottish Care extended the reach of its influencing activity, strengthened new relationships, and increased recognition of social care as fundamental to Scotland's social and economic wellbeing.

Care Creates Campaign

A defining achievement of 2025–26 was the development and growth of the **Care Creates** campaign. Launched in March 2026, the campaign placed storytelling at its heart, creating a powerful platform through which Scottish Care, members and partners could demonstrate the contribution social care makes to Scotland's communities, economy and public life. By sharing real-life experiences of those delivering and receiving support, the campaign highlighted how social care creates opportunity, connection, independence, wellbeing and belonging.

Through engagement with politicians, civic leaders, stakeholders and the wider public, **Care Creates** helped shift the conversation beyond narratives of crisis and cost towards a fuller understanding of social care's social and economic value. The campaign drew attention to the vital role social care plays in supporting families, strengthening communities, enabling employment and improving population wellbeing, while informing Scottish Care's policy and influencing work and helping shape our manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliamentary election.

By positioning social care as an essential driver of opportunity, inclusion and prosperity, **Care Creates** strengthened the case for social care as a cornerstone of a flourishing Scotland and encouraged greater recognition of the value created every day by providers, staff and those who access support.



Partners for Integration

The Joint National Leads and Partners for Integration (Pfl) team strengthened collaboration across health and social care by connecting provider experience with national policy, improvement activity and service planning.

National Leads represented the sector through involvement in organisations and forums including Healthcare Improvement Scotland, the Scottish Care and SSSC Regulatory Forum, the National SDS Collaborative, the International Foundation of Integrated Care Scotland, and wider social care reform activity. This strengthened the sector's contribution to national policy and improvement discussions while linking local priorities with emerging developments. Health and Social Care Partnerships remained central to the programme, with Independent Sector Leads (ISLs) supporting provider engagement, local relationship building and sector involvement in planning and improvement activity.

Key activity included participation in policy and practice forums relating to Self-Directed Support, SSSC initiatives, Getting It Right for Everyone (GIRFE) and wider integration agendas; contribution to Scottish Care events and engagement activity; and work to strengthen communication between providers, Health and Social Care Partnerships and national stakeholders. This improved information sharing, promoted shared learning and supported a stronger and more consistent independent sector voice.



Examples of impact included continued development of the Trusted Assessor approach in Perth and Kinross, demonstrating more joined-up discharge and assessment processes, and collaborative work on meaningful activity in care homes through the SSSC Open Badges initiative in Perth and Kinross and Aberdeen. Pfl also contributed to sector-wide events, including the **October 2025 Pfl event**, which provided opportunities for shared learning, practical insight and stronger connections between local and national

Overall, this work demonstrated the value of strong local partnerships, national engagement and shared learning in strengthening collaboration and supporting the independent sector's contribution to social care in Scotland.

Events and Sector Engagement

Throughout 2025–26, Scottish Care delivered a comprehensive programme of conferences, workforce events, webinars, workshops and sector engagement activities. These events provided opportunities for learning, networking, policy discussion, professional development and celebration, whilst ensuring members remained connected to emerging developments across social care.



Conferences, Exhibitions and Awards

Scottish Care's flagship conferences and awards programmes continued to bring together providers, policymakers, practitioners, academics and partners from across Scotland to share innovation, explore emerging issues and celebrate excellence in care and support.

Key events included:

- Care at Home and Housing Support Conference, Exhibition & Awards (16 May)
- Bereavement Conference (28 August)
- Social Care Nursing Conference (3 September)
- Care Home Conference, Exhibition & Awards (14 November)

These events provided important opportunities for professional learning, networking and recognition, while showcasing innovation and best practice from across the sector.



Innovation and Digital Events

Supporting innovation and future-focused thinking remained a key priority throughout the year.

Events included:

- Care Tech Assembly (19 June)
- Care Tech Unplugged (2 October)

These events enabled providers to explore emerging technologies, digital transformation and innovative approaches to care and support.



Policy, Integration and Public Affairs Events

Scottish Care continued to create opportunities for discussion and engagement on key policy and system developments.

Events included:

- Partners for Integration Event (9 October)
- Social Care Hustings (23 March)

These forums connected providers with policymakers, partners and stakeholders, helping to strengthen the independent sector's voice in discussions around reform, integration and the future of social care.



Workforce Development Events

Ready for Regulation

Workforce development remained a significant component of Scottish Care's events programme.

Two dedicated workforce events were delivered during the year:

- Ready for Regulation: Developing the Future Workforce (24 April)
- Ready for Regulation: Equipping Today's Care Workforce (29 October)

The Ready for Regulation programme supported providers, managers and workforce leaders to strengthen understanding of current and future regulatory expectations while promoting confidence in quality improvement approaches.



Webinars, Workshops and Workforce Forums

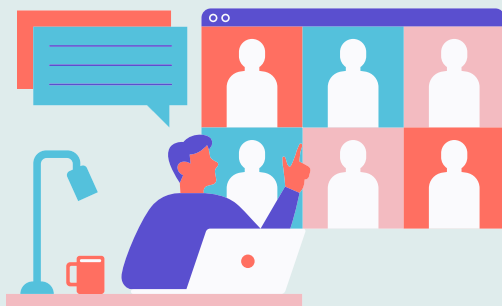
Alongside its national events programme, Scottish Care delivered an extensive programme of webinars, workshops and forums through the Workforce Matters programme. These activities supported workforce capability, leadership development, recruitment, retention and workforce sustainability across the independent social care sector.

Workforce Policy and Development Webinars

A programme of webinars and information sessions helped providers understand significant policy and legislative developments.

Topics included:

- Employment Rights Act
- Fair Work developments
- Workforce wellbeing
- Qualification reform
- Workforce planning
- International recruitment



These sessions enabled employers to assess workforce implications, understand emerging responsibilities and prepare for future legislative change.

Strategic Workforce Workshops and Forums

Quarterly Strategic Workforce Group meetings provided opportunities for discussion and intelligence sharing on key workforce issues, including:

- Recruitment and retention
- Sectoral bargaining
- Workforce funding
- Ethical commissioning
- Workforce planning



These sessions enabled members to identify emerging risks, share experiences and contribute directly to national workforce policy discussions.

Viable

Sustainability, funding, fairness, and system reform



Securing Sustainable Funding

Government Engagement

Constructive relationships with Ministers, MSPs, civil servants and national agencies remained an important means of influencing policy development and reform. Engagement throughout the year covered a broad range of issues including Care Reform, immigration, ethical commissioning, digital transformation, workforce policy and the future funding of social care. Through parliamentary engagement, ministerial meetings, advisory structures and consultation processes, member perspectives helped inform national discussions and contributed to shaping policy across Scotland's social care landscape.

Market Sustainability

Financial resilience across the independent sector remained under significant pressure during 2025–26 as providers responded to rising employment costs, inflation and increasing complexity of need. Priority was given to highlighting the risks facing services, promoting sustainable commissioning approaches and advocating for funding arrangements capable of supporting stability and long-term service development.

Evidence gathered from members continued to demonstrate the considerable challenges facing both care home and care at home provision, reinforcing the importance of creating conditions in which providers can remain viable whilst continuing to deliver high-quality care and support.

National Care Home Contract

Negotiations surrounding the National Care Home Contract remained a key area of focus. Discussions concentrated on ensuring that contractual arrangements better reflected increasing care complexity, rising employment costs, inflationary pressures and the growing expectations being placed upon providers. Considerable effort was devoted to demonstrating the financial realities of care provision and advancing the case for funding mechanisms that properly reflect the costs of delivering high-quality nursing and residential care. This remains fundamental to the future stability of care home services across Scotland.

Supporting Sustainable Services

Workforce Regulatory Forums

A series of national Scottish Care and SSSC Workforce Regulatory Forums were delivered for both care homes and care at home/housing support services. These forums brought together Scottish Care members with SSSC, Care Inspectorate, NES Social Care Directorate and Disclosure Scotland colleagues to discuss:

- Registration and regulatory changes
- National Induction Framework implementation
- Qualification reform and SVQ developments
- Workforce wellbeing findings
- Learning and development opportunities
- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Regulatory and inspection developments

The forums continued to act as a key route for information sharing and collaborative problem solving across the sector.



Fair Work and Employment Conditions

Workforce issues remained among the most significant priorities of the year. Engagement with government, workforce partners, trade unions and representative organisations focused on fair work principles, sectoral bargaining, recruitment and retention, employment rights, leadership development and workforce wellbeing.

Significant attention was placed on ensuring that ambitions for fair work are matched by realistic implementation plans and the investment necessary to sustain improved pay, conditions and career opportunities across the sector. The consistent message throughout the year was that quality care depends upon a valued, supported and professionally recognised workforce.

Future-Proofing the Sector

Net Zero and Climate Adaptation Considerations

Climate resilience and environmental sustainability have increasingly emerged as strategic considerations for social care providers. Work during the year explored how services can respond to climate-related risks, reduce environmental impact and adapt to changing expectations while maintaining safe and effective care.

Particular focus was given to the challenges facing rural and island services, highlighting the need for practical support, realistic timescales and investment that enables providers to contribute to Scotland's environmental ambitions.



Visionary

Innovation, future design,
and system transformation



Innovation, future design, and system transformation

Service Design and Futures Thinking

Thinking beyond immediate pressures remained an important element of the year's work. Through service design methodologies, systems thinking and horizon-scanning activity, attention was given to the long-term trends that will shape social care in the years ahead. Demographic change, technological development, shifting expectations and economic pressures all informed discussions about how services may need to evolve. The emphasis was not simply on anticipating change, but on helping to shape it in ways that reflect the values and aspirations of people and communities.

Community-Connected Care Research

Research and development activity increasingly explored how care and support can strengthen connection, belonging and citizenship within local communities. Attention was given to models that move beyond traditional service delivery and focus instead on relationships, participation and community capacity.

This work examined how social care can contribute to preventing isolation, strengthening place-based support and enabling people to live meaningful lives as active members of their communities. The insights emerging from this research continue to inform thinking about prevention, wellbeing and the future shape of social care in Scotland.

Digital Leadership

Planned Social Care Works Innovation Hub

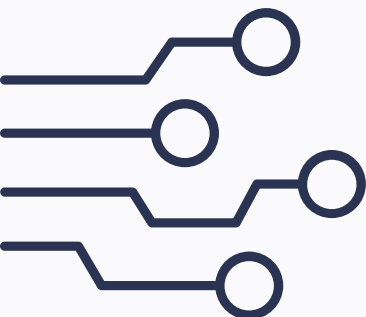
Planning progressed for the development of the Social Care Works Innovation Hub, an ambitious initiative designed to create a dedicated space for collaboration, experimentation and applied innovation within social care.

The vision was to bring together providers, researchers, investors, technology partners and people with lived experience to explore solutions to some of the most significant challenges facing the sector. By connecting ideas, evidence and practical experience, the hub was intended to accelerate innovation while ensuring that new approaches remain firmly grounded in human rights, relationships and real-world practice.

Ethical Use of Digital and AI

As digital technologies and artificial intelligence continue to develop at pace, significant attention was given to ensuring that innovation is guided by clear ethical principles. Thought leadership, research activity and partnership working focused on how technology can enhance care and support whilst protecting human rights, dignity, choice and autonomy.

Rather than viewing technology as a replacement for human care, this work promoted approaches that strengthen relationships, support professional practice and empower individuals. In doing so, it helped establish a framework for responsible innovation that places people, rather than technology, at the centre of decision-making.





Shaping Scotland's Digital Future

As digital transformation accelerates across health and public services, Scottish Care continued to ensure the independent social care sector is an active partner in shaping Scotland's future. This included contributing to work on information governance, data standards and the use of the Community Health Index (CHI) as a unique identifier to improve the safe flow of information across health, social work and social care. Through this work we helped to ensure digital transformation included the independent sector from the outset.

Building Readiness for Emerging Technologies

Technology alone does not transform services – people, leadership and organisational readiness do. Throughout the year we have worked with members, government, academia and industry to better understand the sector's digital maturity and readiness for technologies including artificial intelligence, robotics and care technology.

Working with partners including the University of Edinburgh, the Oxford Institute for Ethics in AI and a growing network of technology innovators, we are helped shape approaches to responsible AI implementation that place ethics, governance, workforce confidence and person-centred care at their heart. This work ensures providers are prepared not only to adopt emerging technologies, but to influence how they are developed and implemented.



Developing the Workforce of the Future

Scottish Care continued to lead innovation in workforce development through the Care Technologist programme. During the year we supported implementation planning to explore how the role could be scaled across Scotland, while working with colleagues in England to develop a national training programme. We also continued to test and learn from the Care Connector role alongside learning disability services, exploring new ways technology-enabled roles can strengthen independence, wellbeing and community connection.

Alongside these programmes, Scottish Care continued to invest in future talent and innovation through partnerships with the Glasgow School of Art and Edinburgh College of Art. Student internships and collaborative design projects have brought fresh perspectives to real-world challenges facing social care while creating opportunities to develop practical solutions alongside providers. These partnerships strengthened our capacity for innovation and ensured emerging designers and technologists understand the realities and opportunities within adult social care.



International Learning and Networks

International engagement continued to provide valuable opportunities to exchange knowledge, explore emerging ideas and strengthen Scotland's contribution to global discussions on social care. Relationships with international networks and organisations enabled learning from developments across Europe and beyond, while also creating opportunities to showcase Scottish experience and expertise.

This outward-looking approach helped ensure that members benefited from new thinking on ageing, workforce development, integrated care, technology and innovation, whilst contributing Scottish insight to wider international conversations about the future of care and support.

Research, Evidence and Thought Leadership

Research and Reports

Research and evidence remained central to Scottish Care's efforts to influence policy, challenge misconceptions and demonstrate the contribution of social care to Scotland's communities and economy. During the year, we published and promoted a range of reports, briefings and surveys examining workforce sustainability, international recruitment, funding, commissioning, provider viability and future reform. These outputs were used extensively in advocacy, political engagement, media activity and member support.

Reports:

- Overcoming Qualification Barriers in Scottish Social Care (*April 2025*)
- Myth Busting 2025: Compassion In Crisis (*May 2025*)
- Social Care Nursing Workforce Report (*September 2025*)
- Scottish Care Manifesto – Care Creates... (*December 2025*)



Alongside these published outputs, Scottish Care continued to develop collaborative research and innovation projects with academic, policy and sector partners, strengthening the evidence base available to policymakers while helping shape future approaches to care and support. This included successful submission and delivery of a workshop exploring the ethical use of artificial intelligence in social care at the Global Ageing Conference in Boston, providing an opportunity to share Scottish experience, contribute to international learning and promote approaches to innovation grounded in human rights, relationships and person-centred care.

Consultations

- National Adult Support and Protection Learning and Development Framework (*August 2025*)
- Good Food Nation Proposed National Plan (*March 2025*)
- Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill (*August 2025*)
- Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill (*September 2025*)
- Draft Climate Change Plan Scrutiny 2025 (*September 2025*)
- Polypharmacy Prescribing Guidance Consultation (*September 2025*)
- Draft Circular Economy Strategy (*January 2026*)
- Fair Pay Agreement Process in Adult Social Care (*January 2026*)
- Make Work Pay: Trade Union Right of Access (*May 2026*)
- Make Work Pay: Draft Code of Practice on Electronic and Workplace Balloting (*May 2026*)
- Draft Climate Change Plan (*January 2026*)
- Earned Settlement (*February 2026*)
- Extension of Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to private and third sector care home and care at home providers (*March 2026*)





Professor Donald Macaskill
CEO, Scottish Care

Closing Reflections

The pages which precede this reflection demonstrate the breadth, depth and significance of Scottish Care's work during 2025–26. They tell a story not simply of organisational activity, but of a sector that has continued to show resilience, professionalism and compassion in the face of sustained pressure. Across the year, our work has sought to support members, influence policy, strengthen evidence, champion innovation and ensure that the voices of those who deliver and draw upon care and support are heard where decisions are made.

This has been a year shaped by economic challenge, workforce pressure, continuing Care Reform and preparation for a new Parliamentary term. Yet it has also been a year in which the value of social care has been articulated with clarity and confidence. Through the strength of our membership, the dedication of staff and Board Directors, and the commitment of partners across Scotland and beyond, we have advanced a vision of social care that is valued, visible, viable and visionary.

The development of Care Creates has given renewed energy and focus to that vision. It has helped us express what those involved in social care know every day: that care is not an abstract service or a marginal public cost, but a force that enables connection, independence, participation, employment, wellbeing and belonging. It has allowed us to challenge narratives of scarcity and crisis while offering a more hopeful and ambitious account of what social care contributes to Scotland's future.

Looking ahead, the challenges remain considerable. Meaningful reform will require courage, investment, honesty and sustained collaboration. But we move into the next phase of our work with confidence in the expertise, creativity and determination that exist across the sector. Scottish Care will continue to stand alongside its members, champion their contribution and work for a Scotland where every person can access the care and support they need to live with dignity, purpose and fulfilment.

My sincere thanks go to our members, staff, Board Directors, partners and supporters. Together, we will continue to ensure that social care works for Scotland.





If you have any questions relating to this report, please contact Scottish Care:

Bld 372
Ground Floor Offices
22-27 Alpha Freight
Glasgow Prestwick Airport
Prestwick KA9 2QA

01292 270240
comms@scottishcare.org

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