



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## **Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

Neil Gray MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care  
Scottish Government  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

**30<sup>th</sup> October 2025**

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

### **Inquiry into Conditions for Social Care Workers on Tied and Temporary Visas**

I am writing to you following a recent informal briefing session facilitated by the Worker Support Centre for Members of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. At that meeting and in a follow-up case study provided to the Committee concerns were raised about the experiences of social care workers employed in Scotland on sponsorship visas. The Committee wishes to draw your attention to the issues shared.

Participants described the realities of working in the social care sector under sponsorship arrangements, highlighting recurring themes of insecurity, exploitation, and insufficient regulatory oversight. The sections below summarise key areas where current systems appear to fall short of expected standards and where improved coordination or reform may be warranted. These concerns span both private and local authority social care employers.

#### **Sponsorship Licences and Immigration Insecurity**

The revocation of employer sponsorship licences emerged as a central issue. Workers who have invested years in training, complied with immigration requirements, and built lives in Scotland can face sudden displacement when a licence is withdrawn, often without prior notice. With only 60 days to secure a new sponsor, many find themselves in limbo, unable to work and at risk of losing the homes and livelihoods they've established.

Concerns were raised about the vetting process for sponsorship organisations, which may lack sufficient scrutiny before licences are granted. When complaints to the Home Office result in revocation, the consequences often fall on workers as well as employers.

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Contact: Social Justice and Social Security Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email [SJSS.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:SJSS.committee@parliament.scot). We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

An imbalance in the allocation of Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) was also noted. Care homes reportedly receive fewer CoS than home care providers, limiting opportunities for workers to transfer to more stable roles. Establishing clearer and faster pathways for displaced individuals to secure new sponsorship could reduce uncertainty, retain these skilled workers, which would help alleviate staffing pressures across Scotland's health and social care sectors. One suggestion is to establish a system which would enable a social care worker on a temporary or tied visa to move between local authorities to fill vacancies in circumstances where they are required to find a new sponsor.

## **Employment Conditions**

Accounts of unsafe and inequitable working practices were highlighted. Significant travel time between clients is frequently uncompensated, and split shifts contribute to excessively long days and extended periods of driving, raising health and safety, as well as work-life balance issues.

Many workers described feeling pressured to accept poor treatment, with employers implying that sponsorship should be met with gratitude. This dynamic fosters a climate where individuals feel compelled to tolerate exploitation and abuse for fear of losing their visa status.

Inconsistent shift patterns were also reported to have a detrimental impact on mental wellbeing, contributing to social isolation for both workers and their families.

## **Oversight, Regulation and Accountability**

Workers expressed concern about the effectiveness of the Care Inspectorate in addressing poor working conditions. A disconnect between migration policy and social care regulation was noted as leaving migrant workers marginalised in policy discussions and oversight mechanisms.

The development of an adult social care negotiating body presents was suggested as a means for positive change, particularly if it includes provisions for sponsored worker protections, transfer pathways, and enforcement mechanisms.

We hope this letter serves to highlight the concerns raised by social care workers residing in Scotland on sponsorship visas. We are aware that several of these concerns were acknowledged in the [Scottish Government's June 2025 proposals](#) to the UK Immigration White Paper, submitted by the Minister for Equalities and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, which called for improved protections for migrant workers, stronger oversight of sponsorship arrangements, and clearer pathways to stability for displaced workers.

We believe these testimonies offer a valuable insight into the lived experiences of those working in Scotland's social care sector under sponsorship arrangements. We hope they will inform ongoing discussions about how to build a fairer, safer and more sustainable system for social care workers. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

We look forward to your response.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Doris". The letters are cursive and fluid.

**Bob Doris MSP**  
**Deputy Convener**  
**Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

## **Annex B**

### **Anonymised note of issues raised by social care workers employed in Scotland on temporary and tied visas during information session**

*One social care worker (Worker A) attended this session, accompanied by a peer engagement officer from WSC. Worker A shared their personal account of working in the social care sector over the past four years, describing the challenges and realities of life on a sponsorship visa. Their testimony was interspersed with written accounts submitted by other social care workers, which were read aloud during the meeting. These additional testimonies provided a broader picture of the sector, highlighting recurring themes of insecurity, exploitation, and lack of oversight. These written submissions will be made available to both Committees for review, ensuring that the voices of those who were unable to attend in person are also represented in the evidence base.*

#### **Theme 1: Sponsorship Licences and Immigration Insecurity**

- Revocation of Sponsorship Licences
  - Workers described the revocation of employer sponsorship licences as “deeply distressing”. Many had invested years in training, complied with immigration laws, and built lives in Scotland, only to face sudden displacement due to employer negligence.
  - When a licence is revoked, workers receive no advance notice. They are left in limbo, unable to work, and at risk of losing their homes and livelihoods: “After years of calling this country home, we are worried about losing everything.”
  - It was noted that when workers lose their sponsorship, they are only provided with 60 days to provide a new sponsorship, which was described as “completely inhumane” by WSC workers.
  - Current staff shortages in the health and social care sector mean their skills are desperately needed, yet they are prevented from contributing.
- Lack of Oversight and Accountability
  - It was highlighted that sponsorship organisations are not properly vetted before being granted licences.
  - It was noted that licences for employers are sometimes revoked after complaints to the Home Office, but this punishes the workers along

with the employers.

- One Member highlighted the contradiction: “We have so many vacancies that need filled, yet it is virtually impossible for workers to find a new sponsor”.
- Impact of Policy & Thresholds
  - The new salary threshold makes it difficult for organisations to afford sponsorship, further reducing opportunities.
  - Workers are given only 60 days to find a new sponsor after licence revocation, which was described as “completely inhumane” given the lives they have built in Scotland.
- Worker Requests
  - Worker A requested the establishment of clear pathways for displaced care workers to find new opportunities.
  - Checks should be introduced to ensure the sponsoring person can provide the hours and has the capacity to provide the services before granting them a licence.
  - Introduce monitoring and accountability measures for employers
  - Ensure workers are not punished for the mistakes of, or mismanagement by their employers.
  - Recognise the urgent need for a functioning social care system in Scotland.

## **Theme 2: Employment Conditions and Exploitation**

- Unpaid Travel and Long Hours
  - Worker A reported that only direct contact time with clients is paid. Travel time between clients, often significant, is unpaid.
  - They described driving 90 miles in a single day without compensation.
  - Split shifts meant excessively long days: “Sometimes you leave at 6am
  - and return at 11pm. You survive on sandwiches because there’s no time for a proper meal.”
- Physical Strain and Unsafe Practices
  - Long hours of driving left Worker A with back and shoulder pain.
  - One Member noted that driving without adequate breaks is unsafe and

violates health and safety standards, yet no body appears to be monitoring this.

- Lack of Security and Power Imbalance
  - Worker A described living “always on the edge,” with no sense of security.
  - Sponsorship status was used to justify poor treatment: “You are told you are on sponsorship – does it make me inferior or less? I pay my taxes. It doesn’t make me less.”

Worker A highlighted that many migrant social care workers put up with abuse and exploitation because they are scared of losing their sponsorship.

### **Theme 3: Mental Health, Belonging, and Social Isolation**

- Emotional Toll
  - Worker A explained that the pressures of the job leave little time to talk to colleagues or seek support, leading many to bottle up their problems.
  - They admitted: “I almost packed my bags and was about to go home. That’s when I reached out to WSC.”
  - The relentless shift patterns and constant pressure had a severe impact on her mental health, leaving her drained and isolated.
- Isolation from Communities
  - Social isolation was described as a “massive factor” preventing integration into local communities.
  - Workers feel invisible: “You’re made to feel like you don’t belong or even have the ability to speak up.”
- Desire for work-life balance
  - Worker A expressed: “Cooking my favourite meal, taking a walk in the park – that’s all I want.”
  - Sponsorship status created a sense of being “not like other people,” reinforcing exclusion.

## **Theme 4: Oversight, Regulation, and Accountability**

- Failure of Oversight Bodies
  - Workers and advocates criticised the Care Inspectorate for failing to act on poor conditions.
  - WSC reported asking local authorities to review the situation, but gaps remain.
- Disconnect Between Systems
  - One Member noted a disconnect between social care and migration policy, with no overall body responsible for worker welfare.
  - Worker A noted that care contracts are awarded to providers without accounting for the workers themselves.
  - Workers are excluded from decision-making and often informed of changes at the last minute. Despite employers having prior notice of moving people who need care, they are often told: “No more shifts tomorrow, do not come to work.”
  - One Member questioned why the 28 day notification requirement in employment law is not being applied?
- Invisible to Policymakers
  - Workers felt invisible in policy discussions. It was stressed that visibility is the first building block for change.
  - One Member highlighted: “Social care workers are part of the fabric of society,” yet their voices seem absent from policymaking.

## **Theme 5: Structural Contradictions and Systemic Failures**

- Contradictions in Care Provision
  - One Member explained that Scotland urgently needs more social care workers to address hospital discharge delays and care shortages.
  - Yet it seemed from the discussion that restrictive immigration rules, inflexible Home Office policies, and lack of sponsorship opportunities are preventing workers from filling these roles.
- Exploitation Risks

- Worker A and the advocate highlighted that without recourse to public funds, displaced workers often face risks of homelessness and destitution.
- It was noted that local authorities have responsibilities for children in these situations, but do not always fulfil them.
- Sector-Wide Challenges
  - Both private and local authority employers use the same sponsorship schemes, and Worker A reported similar negative experiences across both.
  - Workers are pressured to work on days off, guilt-tripped into answering calls, and denied overtime.
  - One Member questioned whether local authorities are able to liaise with each other to ensure that skilled care workers can move between authorities.

## **Theme 6: Worker Voice and Advocacy**

- Need for Representation
  - Worker A emphasised the importance of being included in conversations about their future: “We are never included in the conversation. Information is kept until the last minute.”
- Role of WSC and Advocacy Bodies
  - An adult social care negotiating body is currently being developed, which could provide a vehicle for systemic change.
- Engagement with Policy Structures
  - It was highlighted that WSC are due to meet with COSLA’s migration team on 13th October, to discuss the issues raised during this session.

## **Reflections and Next Steps**

- Actions Requested by Worker A and advocate
  - Paid travel time and fairer shift structures.
  - Legal reforms to protect workers from employer negligence.
  - Pathways for displaced workers to remain in Scotland and continue contributing.

- Advocacy Priorities
  - Push for tangible leadership and humane policies that reflect the reality of workers' lives.
  - Ensure accountability of employers, oversight bodies, and government agencies.
  - Highlight the contradiction between Scotland's urgent care needs and restrictive immigration practices.
  - It was raised that improvements in support for migrant social care workers would actually benefit local authorities.
  
- Closing Reflections
  - Worker A expressed gratitude for being heard: "If I am treated well, I will treat well. If my cup is empty, I cannot give."
  - Members thanked Worker A for sharing their experience.
  - Members agreed to report back the findings from the session to their colleagues in order to discuss potential future actions.