

Paul Cummins
Cabinet Council Member
Sefton Council
(Sent by email only)

24th May 2023

Re: Sefton Council Supported Living Rates 2023-24 – Sector Risks


Dear Mr Cummins,

I hope this letter finds you well. I have wrote to you previously on the matter of Sefton Council providing appropriate funding to social care providers to ensure quality, safety and sustainability in our provision.

The principle point being that providers continue to struggle to attract and retain skilled and experienced care staff within a National Living Wage (NLW) Council funded model. High inflation, the cost of living crisis, and competing sectors offering significantly greater salaries and benefits are preventing providers competing for essential workforce. This is a national crisis outlined by Skills for Care assessment that the sector is currently carrying >165,000 social care vacancies at any one time (14.4% of required workforce).

In my review of your Cabinet papers for 25th May 2023, I note that Council officers have ignored calls by Supported Living providers to address the problems and risks of funding services at NLW levels. In fact we are still awaiting a formal response from the Council to the feedback provided from the consultation process and included in the Cabinet pack. This avoidance to respond and address the funding and workforce issue will continue to cause significant difficulties for Supported Living providers and put at risk the safety and sustainability of services. The pay market for care workers has shifted significantly away from NLW in the last 18 months with Real Living Wage (RLW) now being the competitive norm in order to attract and retain skilled and experienced staff.

Contrastingly, I note that the Council has increased funding for all elderly services, such as Care Homes, Domiciliary Care and Extra Care, in order to allow providers to afford RLW. This "service selective increase" of funding to afford RLW for elderly people services will further exacerbate the workforce issues by creating a 2-tier sector pay issue. The consequence of this will mean staff from Supported Living and other "NLW funded/paid" services will be at flight risk in moving from NLW paid services to better paid RLW funded elderly services. This deliberate strategy is against the principles and duties of market shaping as outlined in the Care Act - section 5, and will cause added risk to the already fragile social care workforce market in Sefton.



Furthermore, this action significantly discriminates disability services which are predominantly funded and provided by the Supported Living sector. The Council have essentially sent a message to disabled people and the disability services sector that their care and support is secondary in priority and funding to that of elderly services. This cannot be ethical. It will also send a wrong message to care workers in Supported Living that they are not as valued as those workers in elderly care home or domiciliary services.

In the Liverpool City Region Fair Pay Charter, Steve Rotheram demands “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work”. He also talks about the need for all workers in LCR to be paid the “Real Living Wage”. This has been recognised by all other Liverpool City Region Councils who now fund Supported Living providers at a Real Living Wage level, but yet Sefton are proposing not to do this. It would appear that Labour party principles are not at the heart of decision making in Sefton when it comes to Supported Living and disability service funding. Our services seem very much the poor and forgotten relation which makes motivating our workforce incredibly difficult. I also suggest that the news of your funding plans have yet to reach the families of the people we support otherwise you would likely have had representation from them also.

Finally, as AFG is a provider of Supported Living services to almost all LCR authorities, it gives me no pleasure to inform you that Sefton is the lowest paying authority in LCR for Supported Living services. It is now also the only Council offering an NLW pay rate for Support Workers in 2023-24 financial year. At £18.41 per hour, Sefton’s Supported Living rate is £1.11 per hour LESS than Wirral Council and £0.60 per hour LESS than Liverpool City Council. Sefton will also be the only authority where a 2-tier pay system will be created between care workers depending upon if they work in elderly-focused (RLW pay) or disability services (NLW pay).

Whilst I continue to fully appreciate the funding challenges that the Council faces from Central Government, it has been shown by the likes of Wirral and Liverpool Council (who face equal if not worse challenges), that funding can be prioritised to afford RLW fund service where there is a political will. I therefore politely request that the above issue is verbally raised at the Cabinet meeting on the 25th May 2023 for full consideration prior to approval of 2023/24 Supported Living fees. The creation of a 2-tier pay market within Sefton service provision is a high risk strategy and not a positive outcome for any of us, especially our incredible workforce, the vulnerable people we support on your behalf, and their families.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Pritchard
CEO | Alternative Futures Group

CC:

Cllr. Ian Maher - Leader of the Council and Leader of Labour Group
Cllr. Ian Moncur - Cabinet Member - Health and Wellbeing
Cllr. Carla Thomas - Chair Adult Social Care & Health Committee
Deborah Butcher – Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Health