

The Casey Commission: A consensus for change

03 January 2025  James Arrowsmith

The recent announcement by the government to establish an independent commission, led by Baroness Louise Casey, to recommend long-term reform for adult social care has sparked a mix of optimism and concern across the sector.

The Casey Commission aims to address the deep-rooted challenges within the social care system, with a vision of creating a 'national care service' based on cross-party consensus. However, the timeline for the commission's final report, set for 2028, has raised eyebrows, highlighting the urgent need for immediate action amidst ongoing pressures.

Historically, the journey towards social care reform in England has been fraught with challenges. Past commissions and reports, such as the Royal Commission on Long Term Care for the Elderly and the Dilnot Commission, have made significant recommendations. Yet, a cohesive and effective implementation of these reforms has remained elusive. The absence of consensus has significantly hindered the effectiveness of past efforts in delivering the comprehensive reform needed.

The Casey Commission's approach is commendable. Engaging with the public, stakeholders, and political parties to build consensus around the future of social care could be a step towards delivering meaningful system wide reform. This dialogue can serve as a foundation for developing a vision that addresses the sector's challenges, including funding, workforce issues, and the integration of health and social care services. As Sarah Woolnough, Chief Executive at The King's Fund has commented: 'This could offer a real opportunity to break the cycle of failure to reform social care'.

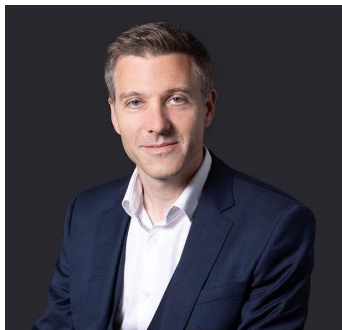
However, it is imperative that this commission does not slow ongoing improvement efforts. The sector is currently facing significant pressures, including funding shortfalls, workforce challenges, and the increasing demands of an ageing population. Immediate actions, such as investment in workforce development and the integration of technology and data sharing, are crucial steps that cannot wait. The announcement makes clear that at least some work, including on data, will be undertaken in parallel and if the commission can achieve early focus on other areas capable of rapid implementation then this will support ongoing parallel policy development and implementation.

The government's vision shows can expect a focus on prevention, regional autonomy, and community engagement. This vision suggests that development of a 'national care service' should not be taken as signposting centralisation. The interrelationship with health and other factors influencing independence such as appropriate housing solutions and community facilities will continue to play an important role. An genuine and innovative emphasis on social care workforce development is a positive step towards ensuring that the social care sector can attract and retain the talent it needs.

As the Casey Commission moves forward, it is essential for leaders within the social care system to actively engage with their teams, service users, and other stakeholders. Developing a narrative for the commission and investing in the relationships necessary for implementing change are critical components of this process. The sector cannot afford to wait until 2028 for reforms to materialize. Instead, it must continue to push for immediate improvements while also contributing to the national conversation.

The establishment of the Commission represents a potential turning point in the long-standing quest for social care reform in England. But we have seen those before. Achieving meaningful change requires more than just long-term planning; it demands immediate action to address current challenges and a collective effort to build a consensus around the future of social care that is sustainable for the future.

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