

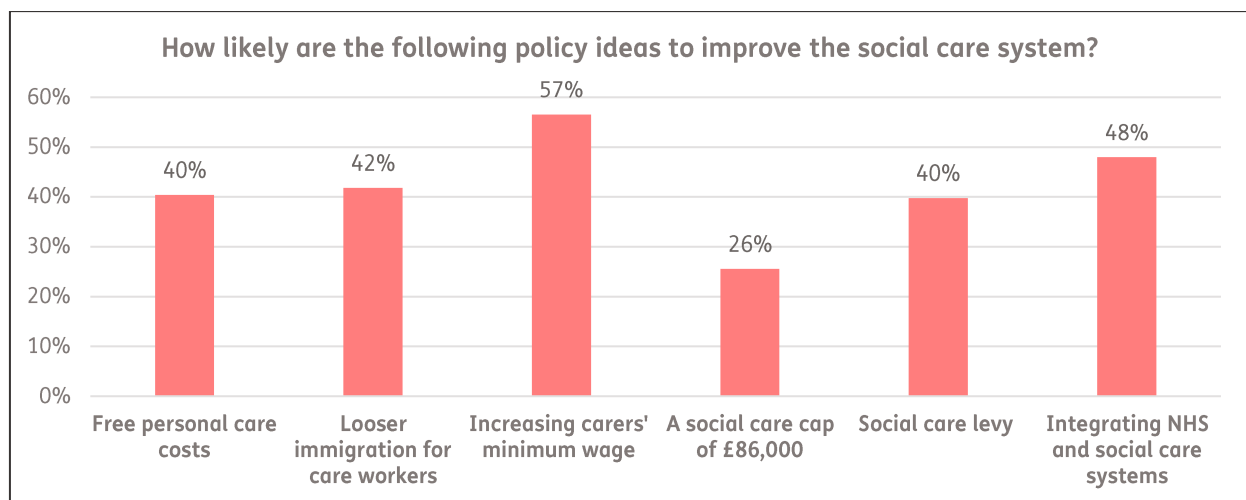


Social care cap scrap: Most voters happy to pay more tax for better services and favour increase in carers' minimum wage

- Government cancellation of social care cap leaves policy vacuum for sector reform
- Increasing carers' minimum wage – a Labour manifesto pledge – was most popular option among voters to improve system
- Strained public finances likely to limit options but majority happy to pay more tax for better social care services

Following the Chancellor's abolition of the planned reforms to cap lifetime personal care costs at £86,000, attention now turns to how the government may look to reform the sector.

Research¹ conducted by retirement specialist Just Group before the General Election assessed public attitudes to various options available for improving the system. This included a care cap which the previous Conservative government had planned to implement in October 2025.



An increase in the minimum wage for carers was the idea that the highest proportion of voters said was most likely to improve social care. It follows Labour's manifesto pledge for a fair pay agreement for adult care workers to improve recruitment and ease the burden on the NHS.

Over four in 10 (42%) also supported looser immigration for care workers to bolster the workforce given the sector's difficulties in talent attraction and retention. It follows recent Home Office data showing applications for UK visas to work in health and social care fell by over 80% last month compared with the year before despite an estimated 130,000 vacancies in the care market.

The option voters were least likely to believe would improve social care was a lifetime cap on personal care costs of £86,000, based on recommendations made by an independent commission in 2011. Implementation has been subject to a series of delays and has now been cancelled by Chancellor Rachel Reeves. This is despite Wes Streeting, now the Health Secretary, indicating during the election campaign that it would go ahead if Labour won.

The Liberal Democrats put the NHS and social care at the front and centre of their manifesto, promising free personal care, which two-in-five (40%) said was likely to improve the system.

Stephen Lowe, group communications director at retirement specialist Just Group, said: “It is surprising that the social care cap was considered the least likely option to improve the social care system. It perhaps reflects voters’ perception that while its aim was to prevent individuals needing extensive care from potentially catastrophic costs, it would do little to improve the social care system generally.

“The stand-out policy among voters was an increase in the minimum wage for carers which would aim to improve recruitment, retention and quality of staff in the sector. It will be interesting to see how and when Labour’s promise of a fair pay agreement for care workers emerges given the focus on the strain in public finances.”

When voters were asked whether they would be willing to pay more – either via general taxation or via a ring-fenced social care levy equal to around a 1.25% rise in National Insurance – to improve the social care system, the majority (54%) said that they would. It reinforces the implication that voters see quality rather than cost as a key challenge facing the sector.

This was true even among younger voters such as the 18-34 age group (52%) and 35-49 age group (50%) who may have been considered less likely to be willing to foot the care bill of older generations.

The proportion of those willing to pay more into the system for a better quality of service surges among voters who have either had to arrange care for a parent (70%) or a parent-in-law (75%).

“It is evident from our research that voters are not only worried about how they will fund any social care they or their family might need, but are also concerned about quality of social care available,” said Stephen Lowe. “People, particularly those with first-hand experience, tell us they are willing to put more into the system via taxation if it means they are more likely to receive a better service.

“Of course, there are other competing priorities for the public purse and our research shows a level of incredulity among the public of any government addressing the issue of social care. Almost six in ten adults aged 18 plus said that, regardless of who won the General Election, they thought it was unlikely any governing party would deliver an effective social care system in the next term of government.

“The question now is that given the Chancellor has scrapped the plans for a social care cap, will this government come up with a credible new policy that voters can count on?”

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Notes to Editors

Research

1 – Research conducted by Opinium among 2,000 adults in England between 19-25 June 2024

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