



**Thangam Debbonaire MP**

Member of Parliament for Bristol West  
Shadow Leader of the House of Commons  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

David Smallacombe  
Chief Executive  
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c/o Gladstone House  
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Dear David,

Thank you for writing to me about the critical situation facing the care and its workforce.

I believe health and care staff have been at the heart of the fight against coronavirus, working day and night to protect the NHS and save lives. They do so much to make our health service one to be proud of and they deserve our respect, admiration, and full support.

Despite carers' remarkable efforts, a decade of poor planning and short-term thinking by the government has left services struggling to cope with chronic staff shortages. We entered the pandemic with 100,000 vacancies across the NHS and 112,000 in social care. Years of pay freezes and pressures are affecting hard-pressed staff, work-related stress has increased, and mental health is consistently the most reported reason for staff absence.

I was very concerned to read a cross-party report published in June, which said workforce burnout across the NHS and social care has reached an "emergency level" and poses a risk to the future functioning of services.

The Health and Care Bill, which is progressing through Parliament, provides an opportunity to address high rates of vacancy, inadequate levels of retention and workforce terms and conditions. Yet the Government has failed to bring forward a long-term strategy.

I supported an amendment to the Bill that would have required the Government to publish, every two years, a full and transparent assessment of current and future workforce requirements in health and social care.

The amendment was an opportunity for Ministers to show their commitment to a strategic, long-term approach to health and care workforce planning. Sadly, Government MPs voted against it and it was defeated. I share the disappointment of health charities and Royal Colleges who campaigned tirelessly on this issue.

Despite pledges and manifesto commitments, there is still no plan from the Government to address workforce shortages, and at the recent Budget and Spending Review Ministers failed to provide certainty about the budgets for staff education and training.

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The government's National Insurance tax rise won't "fix the crisis in social care", as promised, let alone build a system fit for the 21st Century. The so-called 'NHS and Care Levy' won't provide any additional resources for social care until at least 2023, with little if any guarantee of extra funding after that.

Your letter underlines the importance of bringing forward a credible plan to recruit, retain and train staff needed. Health and care services must have the workforce they need to deliver safe high-quality services now and in the future.

Labour is calling for a New Deal for Care Workers, to transform their pay, training, terms and conditions, ensure proper career progression and so frontline care staff are equally valued with those in the NHS. I believe we will never fix the problems you describe unless this happens.

Thank you once again for contacting me about this, and please pass on my heartfelt thanks to your colleagues for the care they provide to people in Bristol.

Yours sincerely,

*Thangam Debbonaire*

Thangam Debbonaire, MP for Bristol West