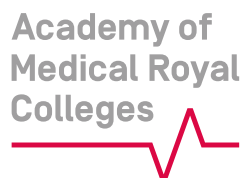


AN EMERGING CONSENSUS MPS' AND COUNCILLORS' VIEWS ON FIXING SOCIAL CARE FUNDING

1.4 MILLION PEOPLE ARE LEFT
TO STRUGGLE EACH DAY WITHOUT
THE SUPPORT OF SOCIAL CARE



Health for Care is a coalition, led by the NHS Confederation, of 15 national health organisations. We're calling for the government to deliver a sustainable social care system in England, backed up by a long-term financial settlement.

Find out more at

nhsconfed.org/healthforcare

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social care sector was already under intense pressure before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with long-term policy failure and funding restrictions as well as staff shortages and market stability taking a toll across the country. The last 12 months have exposed deep cracks in the system and exacerbated structural vulnerabilities, with devastating consequences.

The government's long-delayed plans for social care reform are expected to be published this year, following the Prime Minister's promise to "fix social care once and for all." Given the substantial political change over the last two years following the election of a Conservative-majority government, as well as the impact of the pandemic, we wanted to test the latest political opinion on the prospects for social care reform. The general election in December 2019 saw a huge churn in parliament, with a quarter of elected MPs being new (almost a third in the Conservative Party). We also wanted to test opinion among local councillors.

We commissioned YouGov to survey a representative sample of MPs and councillors in England between November and December 2020. The findings reveal a strong consensus on the need for adult social care reform in England. This consensus spans party divides and both national and local government. A summary of the key findings is below:

- 9 in 10 MPs surveyed – and 92 per cent of councillors – agreed that [local government does not have enough resources to meet the growing need for social care services](#) for those currently eligible for state-funded or subsidised care.
- Over three-quarters of MPs believe that [the budget for social care should be raised](#). Almost two-thirds (60 per cent) of all MPs believe the social care budget should be raised by £7 billion a year or more by 2023/24. This is higher among councillors, with 86 per cent (including almost three-quarters of Conservative councillors) believing the social care budget should be increased by £7 billion a year. This is in line with authoritative assessments of the size of the funding gap in social care.
- Almost two-thirds of MPs felt that a [long-term financial plan and workforce strategy should be a priority](#) for the social care sector. A third of both MPs and councillors said it is the top priority for social care.
- While we found considerable cross-party consensus on the need for reform, we also found that on one of the biggest issues for politicians, how to fund social care, many [MPs are still undecided about the best approach](#). However, almost half of MPs surveyed (and 72 per cent of councillors) believe that social care should be paid for through some form of collective funding mechanism from across the population (for example this could include a National Insurance style tax mechanism similar to how the NHS is funded, or a progressive tax based on age, among other mechanisms).

COVID-19 has helped to cement a consensus in both parliament and local government that urgent action is needed to fix social care. There is strong support for a long-term financial and workforce plan for social care – and for a settlement of at least the £7 billion a year by 2023/2024 that has been recommended by the Health and Social Care Select Committee.¹

There is an urgent need for the new plan to address the complex problems social care faces: underfunding; an overstretched, low paid and under-valued workforce; a fragile provider sector; extensive unmet need; a lack of clarity about the cost of care; and a complex system for the public to navigate.

To address these problems, it will be imperative to ensure that the social care system is based on the principles of fair eligibility, shared costs, improved integration and accessibility, and sustainability. Additionally, it will be crucial to value the care workforce and provide comprehensive support for carers. The Health for Care coalition urges the government to finally seize this moment and bring forward comprehensive proposals for reform. This is long overdue.

BACKGROUND

There is a growing consensus that additional funding and support are needed for social care to ensure services are both sustainable and accessible to everyone that needs care. The status quo is untenable: staff are overstretched and underpaid, the market for providers is fragile and there is growing unmet need for support.

This was true 18 months ago when Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, promising to bring forward proposals to “fix social care once and for all.” Since then, COVID-19 has further exposed the underlying weaknesses in the social care system, strengthening the case for urgent action.

The pandemic has exacerbated the problems faced by the sector, but it has not caused them. The sector faces multiple challenges, which have a direct impact on care recipients:

- Social care spending per person fell by 12 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19.²
- The 2020 Spending Review³ provided at most £1 billion in additional funding – while we welcome the extra funding, this was another sticking-plaster solution. The March 2021 Budget was almost silent on social care funding, continuing the funding pressures and uncertainty within the sector ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- The average vacancy rate in social care is 7.3 per cent – more than 120,000 staff vacancies.⁴
- Between April 2019 and March 2020 (before the peak of the pandemic), around 6.72 million days were lost to sickness among care workers.⁵
- Median pay for care workers is £8.50 an hour and around a quarter of jobs are zero-hour contracts.⁶
- New immigration policies have affected how care providers can recruit staff, which may have a significant impact given that 7 per cent of the workforce holds an EU nationality. Up until March 2021, all care workers were excluded from the Shortage Occupation List. The list enables workers earning above a set amount to come to the UK. From March 2021, senior care workers will be added to the list.⁷
- Along with low pay, the lack of career progression and training has been identified as a factor in the high turnover and low retention of staff.
- 400,000 people have fallen out of the means-test, which has not increased with inflation since 2010.⁸
- An estimated 1.4 million people have an unmet need for social care.⁹

These challenges create serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people of all ages, and those family and friends who provide unpaid care. Our recent report, [Let's Do This: The Promise of Fixing Social Care](#),¹⁰ revealed that this also has a knock-on effect on the NHS, increasing demand for healthcare and putting pressure on NHS staff.

The NHS Confederation leads Health for Care, a coalition of 15 national health organisations which have joined forces to make the case for a sustainable social care system, backed up by a long-term funding settlement. We stand in support of our colleagues in social care who have long called for extra funding and support as part of a new long-term strategy for the sector.

THE POLLING

In June 2019, the Health for Care coalition published the findings of a [ComRes poll of more than 100 MPs](#) representative of the House of Commons.¹¹ This poll investigated MPs' views on the path toward social care reform and MPs' overall experience of the social care crisis, through casework received from their constituents.

This revealed a cross-party consensus on the worsening crisis in adult social care in England, and 6 in 10 MPs said they believed their constituents were suffering because of funding cuts to social care services.

A lot has changed since the publication of these findings in June 2019. In December 2019, a new parliament was elected and just months later the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities and fragility of the care sector, its workforce shortages and its under-funding.

In late 2020, the Health for Care coalition decided to commission YouGov to carry out another independent poll of MPs to find out how their views on social care reform may have developed in light of the pandemic. YouGov carried out online interviews with 96 MPs between 25 November and 15 December. During the same period, they also interviewed 520 councillors to give us insight into the views of local political leaders. Results for MPs were weighted by party, gender, electoral cohort, and geography to ensure a representative sample; councillor responses were weighted by party, region and authority type.

KEY FINDINGS

**OVER THREE-QUARTERS OF MPs
BELIEVE THE BUDGET FOR
SOCIAL CARE SHOULD BE RAISED.**

We asked MPs and councillors to answer four questions about the future of social care, covering local government resources for social care; the overall level funding for social care; and the priority that should be given to a long-term financial and workforce strategy for social care.

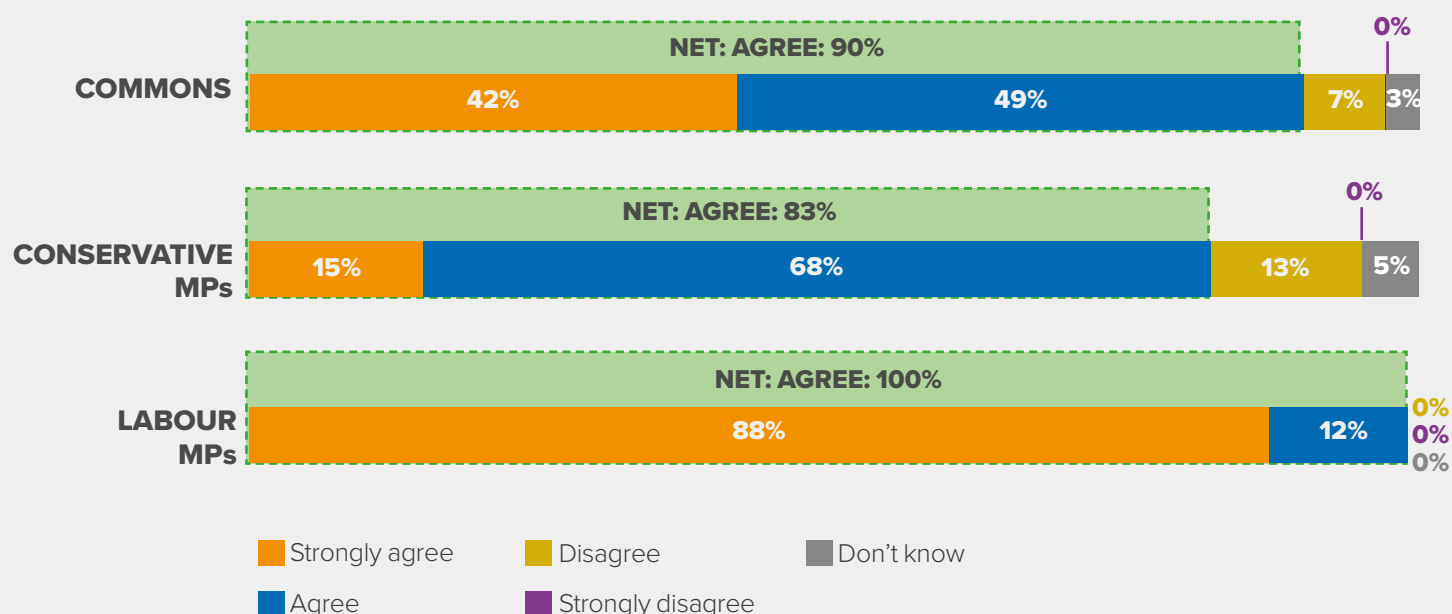
We found considerable cross-party consensus on the need for reform, in particular on funding. However, we also found that on one of the biggest issues for politicians – how to fund social care – many MPs are still undecided about the best approach. The following sections look at each question in turn.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

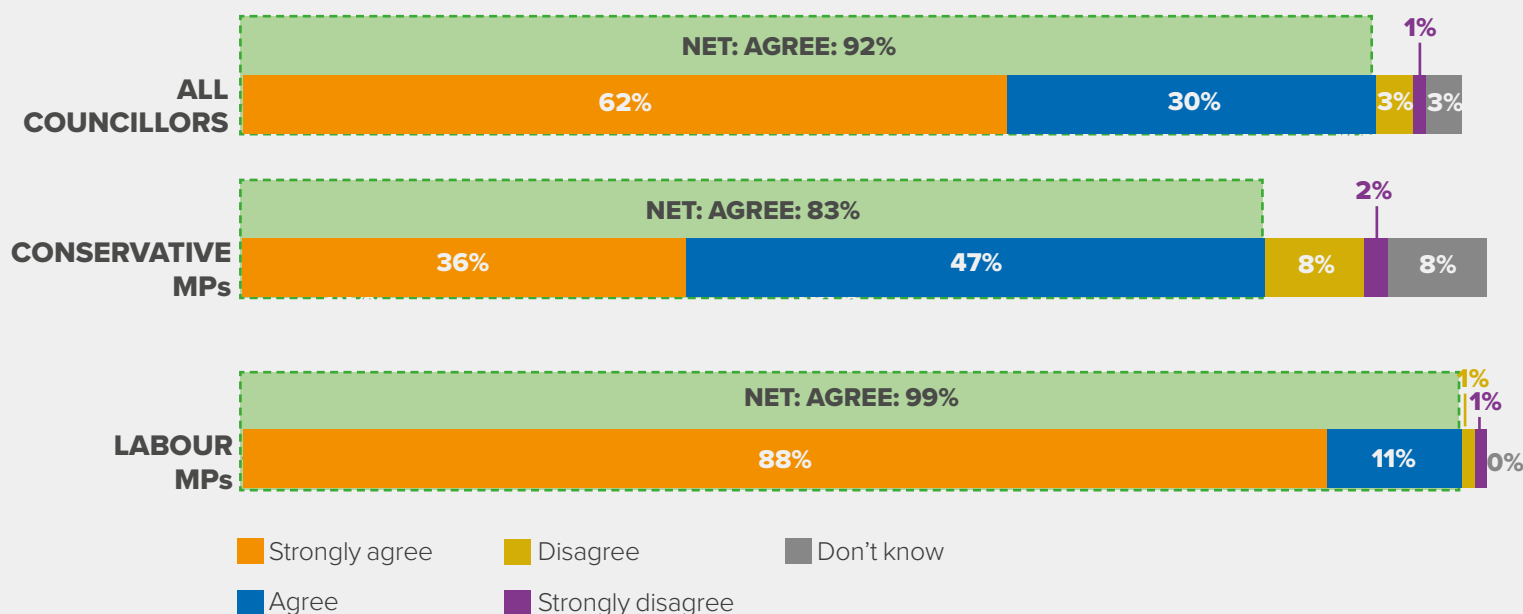
We asked MPs and councillors to what extent they agreed with the statement ‘Local government does not have enough resources to meet the growing need for social care services from those currently eligible for state-funded or subsidised care’.

We found cross-party agreement among MPs and councillors that local government does not have sufficient resources to meet the needs of those currently eligible for council support for social care. Ninety per cent of MPs questioned (including all Labour MPs and 83 per cent of Conservative MPs polled), and a slightly higher proportion of councillors, agreed with this statement.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
‘Local government does not have enough resources to meet the growing need for social care services from those currently eligible for state-funded subsidised care.’**



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'Local government does not have enough resources to meet the growing need for social
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LEVEL OF FUNDING

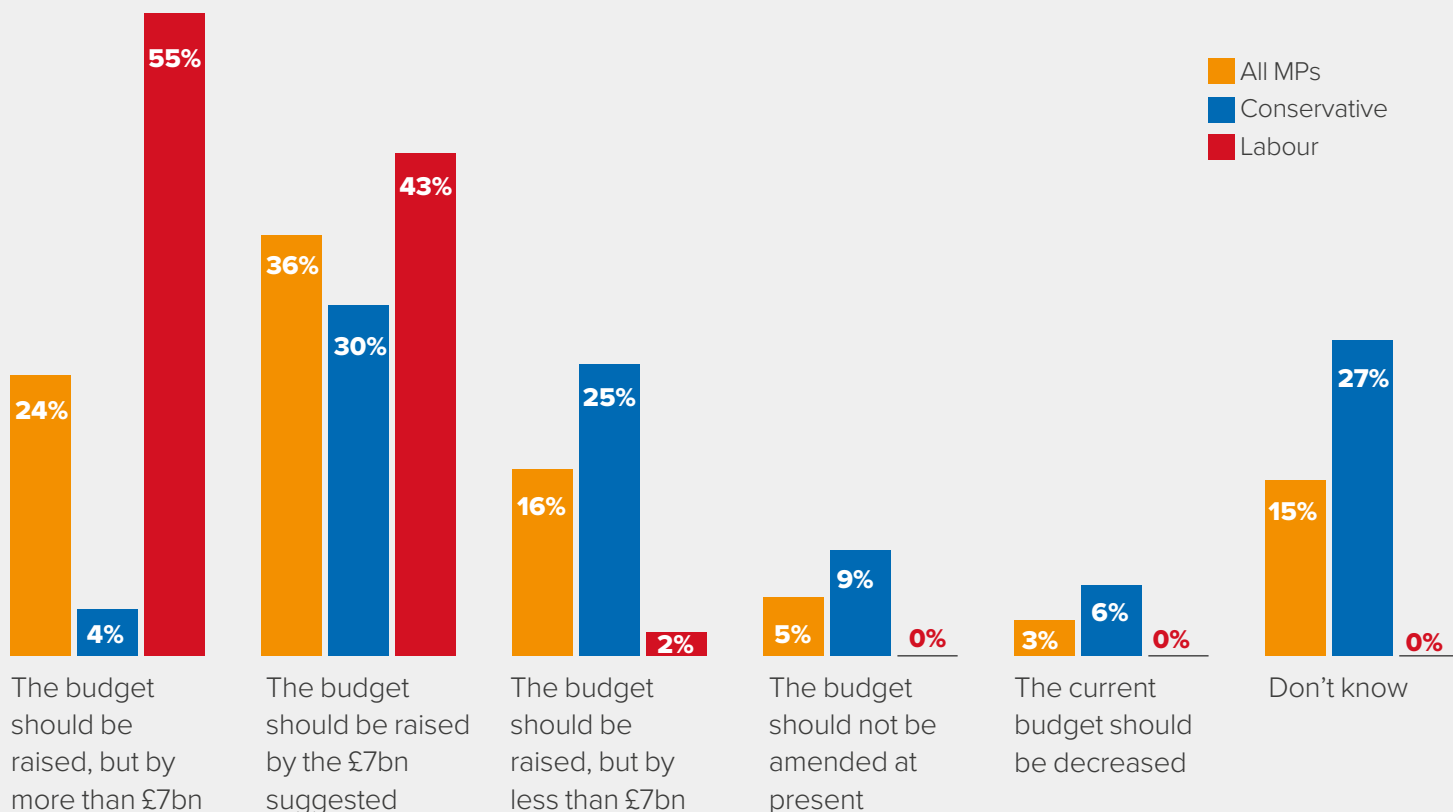
We also asked for their views on the overall level of funding for adult social care. In October 2020, the Health and Social Care Select Committee published a report on funding and workforce in social care. This concluded that an increase in the budget for adult social care of £7 billion a year by 2023/24 is needed to provide for demographic changes, to protect people who face catastrophic social care costs and to uplift pay in line with the National Minimum wage.¹²

We asked whether MPs and councillors believe that the adult social care budget should be increased by £7 billion, more, less, or whether it should be decreased. There was overwhelming support for raising the social care budget among both MPs and councillors. Over three-quarters of the MPs polled said they believe the budget for social care should be raised. This included 36 per cent who believed that it should be increased by £7 billion a year and almost a quarter who believed the increase should be more than £7 billion.

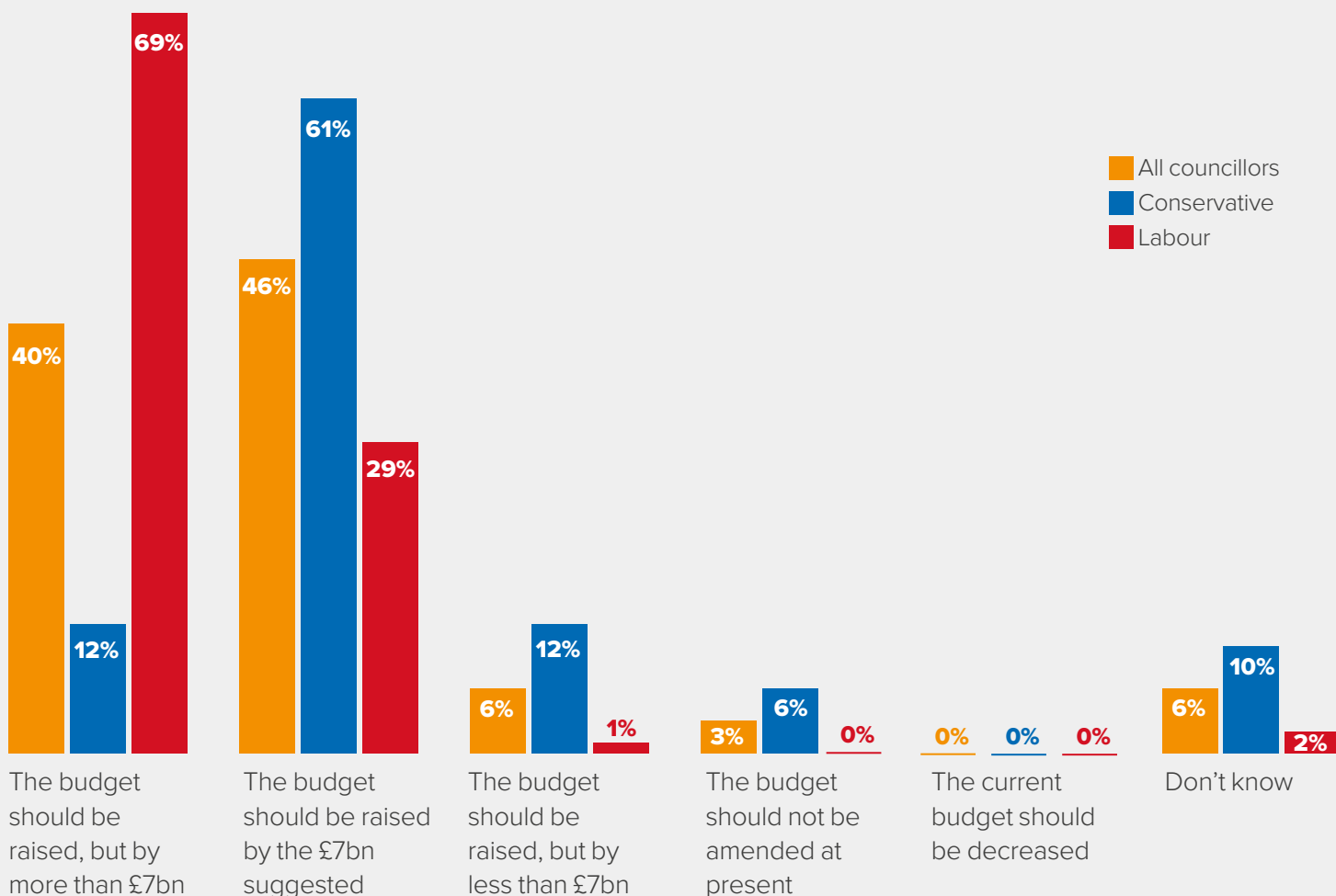
Support for raising the social care budget was even higher in local government. Almost 9 in 10 councillors (86 per cent) – including almost three-quarters of Conservative councillors – believe the social care budget should be increased by £7 billion a year or more.

While very few (only 3 per cent) of MPs said that they felt the current social care budget was too high, there was a notable minority who said that they did not know whether social care funding should be increased – over a quarter of Conservative MPs gave this response.

Based on the Health and Social Care Select Committee's report and other research you may be aware of, how do you feel about the prospect of the government raising the annual adult social care budget by £7 billion?



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HOW TO FUND SOCIAL CARE

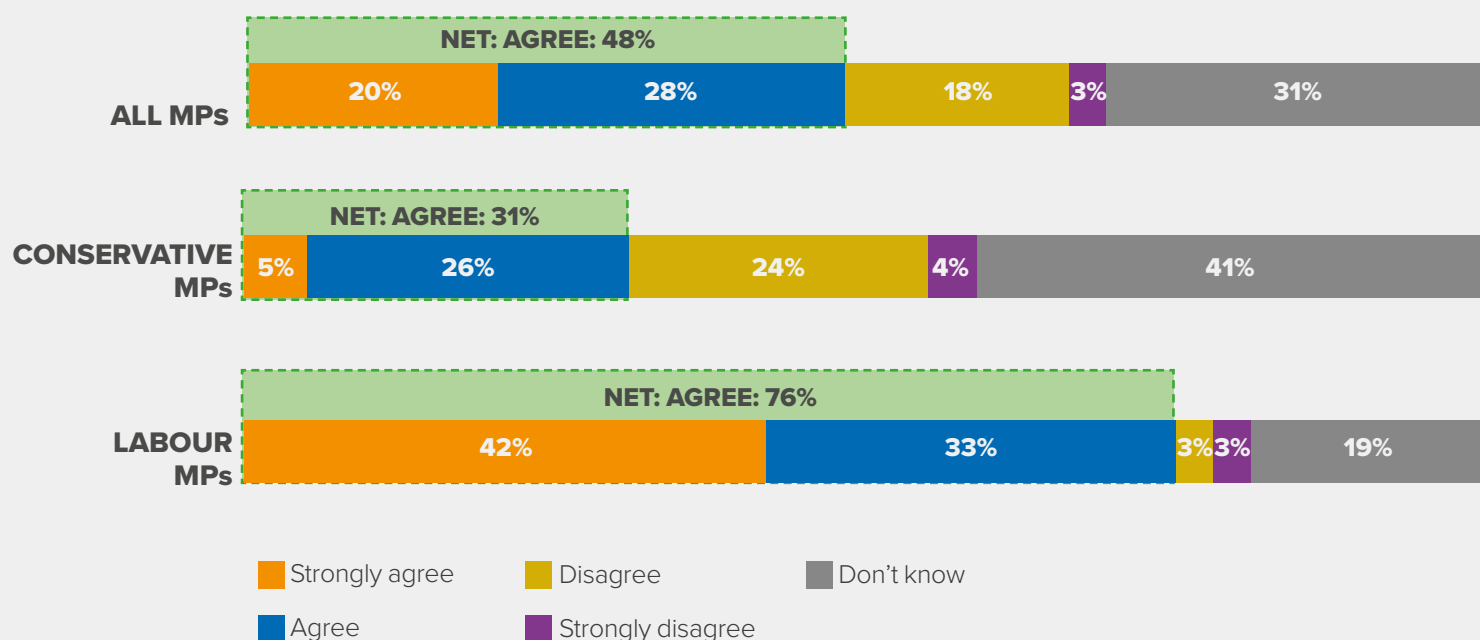
Despite high support for increasing the adult social care budget, MPs were unclear about how this should be funded. Almost half (48 per cent) of MPs said that social care should be paid for using a new collective funding mechanism across the population – three-quarters of Labour MPs agreed with this compared to just under a third of Conservatives.

Support for a collective funding mechanism was notably stronger among councillors, with over 72 per cent of councillors agreeing with this, consistent across the parties.

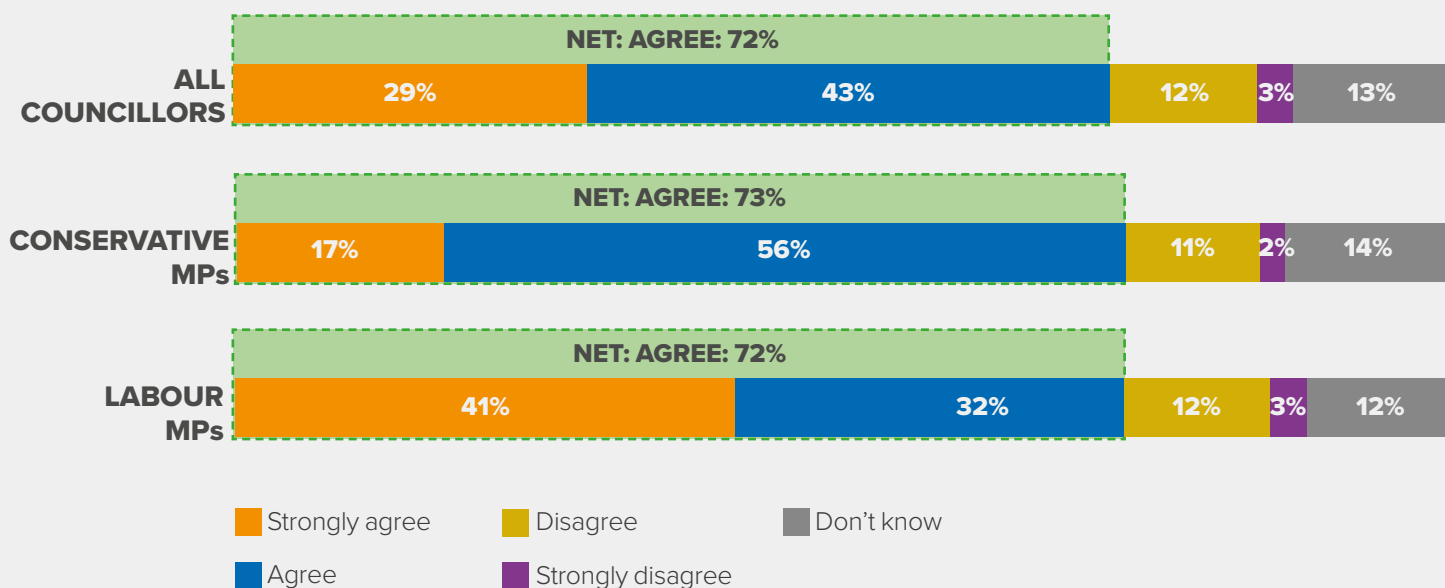
However, although just under half of MPs overall supported a collective funding mechanism, only 21 per cent were opposed to one. Answers to this question revealed considerable uncertainty about the best approach to funding social care. While 31 per cent of MPs overall said they did not know, this rose to 41 per cent among Conservative MPs. This suggests that many MPs' minds have not been made up about either the level or mechanism for funding social care. There is therefore potential to build a stronger consensus around a collective solution for the future funding of social care.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

'Social care should be paid for by a new collective funding mechanism across the population.'



**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
'Social care should be paid for by a new collective funding mechanism across the population.'**



FINANCIAL AND WORKFORCE STRATEGY

Finally, we asked MPs and councillors, thinking about the next three to five years, the extent to which they believe that a long-term financial and workforce strategy is a priority for social care. Almost two-thirds of MPs (63 per cent) think such a strategy should be one of several priorities for the social care sector. A third of both MPs and councillors (and half of Labour MPs) think it should be the top priority.

CALL TO ACTION

**WE URGE THE GOVERNMENT
TO PUT AN END TO REPEATED
DELAYS AND SET OUT A
VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF
SOCIAL CARE.**

These findings demonstrate the growing consensus that urgent action is needed to put social care on a sustainable footing. MPs and councillors are in agreement that current resources are insufficient and that more funding is needed to ensure that people get the care they need. Indeed, there is significant support for at least an additional £7 billion a year in funding as recommended by the Health and Social Care Select Committee.¹³

As the sector begins to recover from the third wave of COVID-19, we urge the government to put an end to repeated delays and to set out its vision for the future of social care as soon as possible. The stakes are too high for the public and the sector to leave this until the end of the year, when the social care, and NHS, will again be facing the challenge of winter pressures.

We recognise that there is still a degree of uncertainty among MPs, particularly around the precise level of funding and the mechanism for this. We believe that this offers an opportunity for the government to make a case for an approach that offers the funding and long-term strategy that MPs recognise is so desperately needed.

The Health for Care coalition is clear that sustainable and adequate funding is necessary, but not sufficient – comprehensive proposals for reform are needed to address access to care and workforce pressures. Eligibility should be based on need and services must be delivered in a way that enables people to live a life that is meaningful to them.

Without urgent reform, people's health and wellbeing is at risk, as is the viability of many providers in the sector. This has a direct impact on the NHS. Failure to address the current pressures on social care puts at risk achieving the ambitions set out in both the NHS Long Term Plan and the recent white paper 'Working together to improve health and social care for all'.¹⁴

SEVEN KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL CARE REFORM

We are calling on the government to introduce proposals for comprehensive reform of social care early this year, and to seek cross-party support for them. These should reflect the seven key principles adopted by the coalition:

1. **Sharing costs:** A system providing the care people need should be funded by the introduction of a new financial contribution drawn from across the population. This may require differences in when, how and how much people pay towards the care system.
 2. **Fair eligibility:** Eligibility should be based on need and must be widened to ensure that those of any age with unmet or under-met need have access to appropriate support. Eligibility must also guarantee parity of esteem across physical, mental and cognitive health.
 3. **Improving integration:** Social care services should work more effectively with other sectors, including with the NHS and the housing sector. Personalisation should be at the heart of greater integration, so that care recipients hold maximum possible control over the support they receive, enabling them to live healthy, independent and meaningful lives.
 4. **Sustainability:** Establishing a sustainable social care system will require closing the existing funding gap in the short-term, as well as establishing a permanent funding settlement that would enable both members of the public and care providers to plan for their long-term future. Levels of funding should also sustain a diverse and stable market of providers.
 5. **Valuing the workforce:** More workers should be recruited to, and retained within, the care sector. Furthermore, those who work within the care sector should be offered sufficient pay, higher quality training (along with the protected time away from work to undertake training), opportunities for career progression and new career paths.
 6. **Supporting carers:** Unpaid carers should be eligible for increased support from the state. Additionally, offers of care should not be reduced on the basis that someone may be a recipient or possible recipient of informal care.
 7. **Accessibility:** The criteria and assessment process for receiving state-funded care should be simple enough for everyone to understand, with guidance on offers of care to be made widely available. In addition, assessments of individuals' care needs should be conducted by appropriately-trained assessors.
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