

Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership Board

Date: 12th December 2025

Subject: Experiences of Migrant Health and Care Staff and UNISON Migrant Care Workers Charter

Report of: Alison McKenzie Folan – Chief Executive of Wigan Council, Executive Portfolio Holder for Health and Culture
James Bull –Regional Organiser, UNISON North West

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

This report describes the experience of migrant health and care staff in Greater Manchester, existing provision and practice in support of these staff groups across the city region, and efforts to improve this through the development of and engagement with the UNISON Migrant Care Workers Charter

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GM Integrated Care Partnership Board is recommended to:

- Express support in principle for the UNISON Migrant Care Workers Charter and its adoption across Greater Manchester.
- Encourage Local Authority Leaders to join the Greater Manchester Mayor in expressing their support for the UNISON Migrant Care Workers' Charter. Thereafter, that councils facilitate discussions between UNISON, elected members and officers at local level to adopt the Charter formally, agreeing a framework for implementation and review.
- Ask the Integrated Care Partnership Board Strategy Group to hold a discussion to identify and explore aspects of the Charter which would most helpfully and appropriately be implemented at Greater Manchester level, or which would benefit from greater collaboration between different parts of the health and social care

system. This discussion would be intended to identify the bodies, methods and resources which could best deliver them.

- Facilitate and support the ongoing implementation of the Charter across the City Region and aid collaboration between partner organisations to achieve its aims.

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List of Appendices referred to:

Appendix 1 – UNISON Migrant Care Workers' Charter (October 2025 version)

Appendix 2 – Testimonies gathered from migrant workers working in social care within Greater Manchester, 2025

Appendix 3 – Current GM provision and practice supporting the implementation of the UNISON Migrant Care Workers Charter.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Migrant workers are a crucial pillar of our social care system. In Greater Manchester, around 30% of social carers working in the city region are doing so on a visa, higher than the national average of around 21%.
- 1.2. Migrant workers employed in social care continue to be some of the most exploited workers in this country. Without local authorities keeping employers in check, workers continue to face mistreatment, exploitation and abuse at work while delivering essential public services.
- 1.3. Workers are fearful of raising concerns about employment practices when the same employers can remove their visa sponsorship. Unscrupulous employers are using the threat of removal to a care worker's home country to victimise migrant workers who whistle blow/complain about their treatment, as demonstrated by some of the testimonies of UNISON members in Appendix 2.
- 1.4. The Indefinite Leave to Remain proposal has caused further hurt to migrant workers who feel they have now been misled around the conditions of their ability to remain in the UK. It also means that without significant visa sponsorship reform, workers with exploitative employers will remain trapped in those employments for twice as long – some that were hoping they would be able to escape in the next year, now looking at a potential further 6 years.
- 1.5. The exploitation of many of these workers is also compounded by the fact that despite being taxpayers, migrant workers do not have recourse to public funds in order to redress the disadvantages they face, unlike UK citizens. This lack of recourse to public funds also makes it far more difficult for migrant workers to develop themselves and their skills in order to improve their own potential in the employment marketplace and maximise the contribution they can make to the city region.
- 1.6. UNISON migrant care worker members have co-produced the UNISON Migrant Care Worker Charter ('the Charter') to redress that balance – a summary is featured below in section 2, and the full Charter is featured in Appendix 1. The Charter seeks to set minimum standards in employment practice, health and safety, immigration and pastoral support.
- 1.7. It seeks not only to strengthen the rights and dignity of migrant care staff, but also to strengthen the stability, value and cost effectiveness of the social care system.

This can be achieved by investing in the social care workforce and avoiding costs associated with high turnover and crisis management, which can too often be a consequence of poor and in some cases exploitative employment practices.

- 1.8. Covering 7 core areas, UNISON members ask that commissioning authorities become signatories of the Charter, building its standards into the procurement of social care providers as well as their own practice, holding providers to account for delivering those standards. Our aim is to ensure that all Greater Manchester local authorities become signatories and put the Charter's measures in place at local level.
- 1.9. The Charter also seeks the commitment of Greater Manchester local authorities in calling for improvements in the immigration system which would make exploitation more difficult, through support for UNISON's 'Fair Visa' campaign. This includes the call for a separation between employment and sponsorship in our immigration system, so that workers' future immigration status cannot be weaponised against them by way of unfair leverage, or to buy the silence of people who would otherwise speak out about poor practice and abuse.
- 1.10. UNISON members are also actively engaged in lobbying Members of Parliament for national changes to the immigration system. Since August, as part of a regional lobby and individual MP meetings where local union members have been meeting with their MPs – the campaign has secured the support of 10 MPs in the North West, with 3 more meetings coming up in the coming months and more being arranged regularly. UNISON members have been using each meeting to tell their most powerful testimonies of how the visa sponsorship affects workers like them in their constituencies, as well as how this impacts on the care services that are provided to the community. Some of these testimonies are included in Appendix 2.
- 1.11. Although UNISON members are hopeful that as a result of their national campaign for a Fair Visa, firm commitments will be made to reform the sponsorship system and allow them to escape employers that abuse the power of sponsorship – it is more urgent than ever for local authorities across Greater Manchester to take steps to address the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers that currently is rife across the sector.

2. SUMMARY OF THE CHARTER'S SEVEN AREAS

2.1. Fair and equitable treatment of migrant care workers

- Migrant workers must receive the same pay, terms, and conditions as other employees doing the same work.
- Signatories will provide contracts and information in worker's first language where needed, and ensure access to trade unions, learning opportunities, and health & safety information.

2.2. Suitable travel and accommodation

- Accommodation must be safe, not overcrowded, and reasonably priced.
- Workers should not be required to stay in the accommodation provided by the employer and should be able to choose their own if they wish to do so.
- Workers will not be required to leave employer provided accommodation immediately in the event that they leave their employment, and are to be provided with a reasonable and agreed period to find a suitable alternative
- Signatories will provide information on housing standards and complaints processes where needed.

2.3. Wraparound Safety at work

- Employers must have robust risk assessments in place for migrant workers, considering additional safety risks in the workplace, when working in the community, and when commuting.
- Commissioning authorities should monitor compliance.

2.4. No Victimisation or Discrimination

- Migrant workers must be protected from discrimination and victimisation, signatories should promote diversity, provide training to staff on dealing with racial harassment and create frameworks to address victimisation and safeguard employment.

2.5. Safeguarding employment

- Signatories will safeguard the employment and visa status of migrant care workers who have been victimised or otherwise summarily have their employment terminated through no fault of their own, for reasons such as trade union victimisation, the liquidation of a care provider or the suspension of a

providers' ability to sponsor workers by the Home Office. Councils must act quickly, as workers have only 60 days before visa curtailment.

- Where councils deliver social care services directly – or where they wholly-own social care providers – they will work to protect the continuity of employment via these services and the maintenance of visa sponsorship by making them an employer of last resort. If direct employment isn't possible, councils should coordinate across Greater Manchester to find alternative roles with other local authorities, NHS employers, or ethical providers licensed for sponsorship.

2.6. No unethical fees

- Migrant workers are often charged unethical fees to secure sponsorship or to meet necessary requirements such as mandatory training or DBS certificates.
- Signatories will ensure that commissioned social care providers will not charge fees to migrant workers or use agencies that charge fees to the workers. Signatories will also work with UNISON to create secure reporting channels for unethical fees without fear of retaliation.

2.7. Ethical Recruitment

- Signatories will encourage the use of an existing Ethical Recruiter List, or develop a unique local list, to prevent exploitative practices.
- Support UNISON's campaign for a Fair Visa Scheme, advocating for government, rather than employer, sponsorship of migrant care staff.

3. PROGRESS TO DATE

3.1. Since the first signing of the Charter in Salford in October 2024, migrant worker members have continued to organise for improvements on the key challenges they face. UNISON has continued to discuss and develop the Charter with stakeholders within the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care system:

3.2. A roundtable meeting was convened between the Mayor, leaders from UNISON, RCN and RCM, and around 30 union member colleagues to discuss current issues being faced by migrant health and care workers in November 2024, including discussion of the Migrant Care Workers' Charter. Approaches to raise more awareness on these issues were explored, with a view to galvanising system, regional, and national support to improving working and living conditions for these staff groups.

- 3.3. The Charter has been engaged with throughout GM system governance over the course of this year. Initial discussions regarding potential implementation of the Charter have also taken place with Oldham, Stockport and Tameside Councils.
- 3.4. The engagement process described has prompted the development of the information in section 6 below, and in appendix 3, which shows current Local Authority and city-regional provision and practice in supporting these staff groups and implementing against each of the Charter themes. Whilst progress has been made in improving the support available for migrant care workers during this time, it is recognised that that more could be done across the city region to support migrant care staff displaced from their roles through no fault of their own, who may otherwise be suitable for employment in the sector.
- 3.5. Furthermore, tenets of the Charter relating to other matters like accommodation, ethical recruitment practices and risk assessment are not yet in place in Greater Manchester. For example, there is no single list of ethical employment agencies or agreed, consistent standards around avoiding the use of agencies which charge unethical fees.
- 3.6. Following discussions and organising work to date, it is believed that now is the time to adopt the Charter fully and more widely across our city region, putting words into practice.

4. UPDATES TO THE CHARTER – OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2025

- 4.1. The Charter has been developed on an ongoing basis in consultation with stakeholders (NHS Greater Manchester, Integrated Care Partnership, local authorities) to reflect changes in members' circumstances, developments in national policy and to reflect what has been learnt through organising migrant care workers, as well as through discussions with Greater Manchester councils.
- 4.2. The most recent/up to date version of the Charter in Appendix 1 of this report is current as of October 2025, and contains several changes on previous versions:
- 'Safeguarding Employment' has been updated to provide more clarity around potential mechanisms for safeguarding employment, recognising the collaborative work undertaken at Greater Manchester level (such as the mailbox for displaced staff and associated support) where it is not possible to directly place displaced staff in alternative roles, as well as the ability of some

Councils to provide alternative employment directly through in house or wholly-owned provider arrangements.

- The initial version of the Charter included a commitment in section 5 that local authorities would become an employer of last resort. The current version does not require this where it isn't feasible or viable and instead includes a commitment in those circumstances to finding alternative employment within the GM health and social care system. This amendment was made to reflect commissioners' feedback that the initial clause would not be practical from a statutory viewpoint. Not all local authorities have an in-house workforce to deliver care, and if they were to take too many people on, they wouldn't be able to meet the licence conditions and put their own sponsorship status at risk. It would also put domestic workers at a disadvantage if the reason for displacement was linked to liquidation of the organisation (i.e. international workers being guaranteed full time work, but domestic workforce not getting that guarantee.) Notwithstanding this change, the revised section in this version should and is intended to provide meaningful, practical support and protection to workers displaced from employment through no fault of their own. Good practice in meeting this section exists in Salford where the Charter is already being implemented, for some councils there may be a need to explore opportunities outside of their local authority area, which is reflected in the updated wording.
- 'Unethical Fees' has been developed further to clarify what is being asked of providers and commissioners in relation to stopping the charging of excessive fees to migrant care staff, and to include a commitment to work with UNISON to establish a secure and confidential route for migrant social care staff to report concerns regarding unethical fees.
- 'Ethical Recruitment' has been updated to clarify what is being asked of commissioners and describes the background to this tenet of the Charter in terms of the current challenges currently faced by migrant care staff.

4.3. The Health and Care Visa salary threshold for migrant social care workers is £25,000, based on a 37.5-hour working week as stated by the UK Government. However, employers often have different full-time equivalents or higher contracted

hours, creating confusion about compliance, and variations in working hours and benefits across employers adds complexity.

4.4. UNISON have briefed that no inherent problem exists if employers pay National Minimum Wage for a 40-hour week or Foundation Living Wage for a 37 Hour Week. Practical solutions include adjusting contractual hours, adding guaranteed overtime or enhanced pay for unsociable hours, provided these are contractual and available to all staff. If contractual hours and pay exceed the threshold, the Home Office is unlikely to challenge sponsorship. Employers are asked to work with local authorities which have successfully implemented the charter, such as Salford City Council, and UNISON are open to case-by-case discussions to ensure compliance.

5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHARTER TO DELIVERY OF GMS PRIORITIES

- **Healthy homes for all** – The Charter seeks to contribute to the delivery of this priority through the ‘accommodation’ provisions and commitments it contains, ensuring social care staff are housed appropriately in suitable accommodation.
- **Safe and strong communities** – The Charter seeks to contribute to the delivery of this priority by improving the resilience and stability of the social care sector, by supporting a key part of its workforce who currently face structural disadvantages not suffered by other workers.
- **A clear line of sight to high quality jobs** – The Charter seeks to contribute to the delivery of this priority by improving the quality of employment in the social care sector, creating dignity in employment and a level playing field for all staff who seek to work in social care.
- **Everyday support in every neighbourhood** – The Charter seeks to contribute to the delivery of this priority by improving the quality and resilience of social care delivery, through supporting its workforce.

6. HOW GM LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH THE DHSC GRANT

6.1. Greater Manchester (GM) received £746k of funding from the DHSC International Recruitment Fund (2025/26) to strengthen ethical recruitment and provide practical support for displaced international care workers. The programme is coordinated by the GM ICB Adult Social Care Transformation Team and delivered in partnership with local authorities, GMCA, and voluntary sector partners. Key offers provided across the city region by this programme are described below.

- NHS Professionals (NHSP) works with ASC providers to match displaced workers to vacancies quickly and supports onboarding, compliance checks, and training coordination for safe and efficient recruitment.
- Support to Succeed (STS) is a borough-level service offering employability support, holistic assessments, and signposting to housing, financial aid, and English language provision.
- Citizens Advice provides guidance on rights as GM residents, including employment, housing, financial support, and access to local services.
- GM Immigration Aid Unit offers immigration advice, safeguarding guidance, and legal casework for visa extensions or alternative routes.
- GMCA Grants fund community engagement and employer workshops to promote inclusive recruitment and prevent exploitation.
- LINGLY Language Offer is digital language training tailored for care workers to improve communication and reduce errors in care delivery.
- Working with Devolved Governments & NHS Trusts and coordinating efforts to identify vacancies across health and social care, ensuring ethical and efficient transitions into roles.
- The GM Hub, a central coordination point led by the GM ICB Adult Social Care Transformation Team, linking commissioners, providers, and advice services to streamline support and recruitment.

7. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

7.1. Providing system agreement, the Charter will be taken through additional GM and local governance meetings so that the specifics can be worked up to ensure that

the charter is appropriately operationalised and implemented across each local authority. Future work will also seek to understand the principles within the charter which could be adapted to NHS services and organisations in Greater Manchester in order to further support international staff members.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. The Integrated Care Partnership Board is recommended to:

- Express support in principle for the charter and its adoption across Greater Manchester.
- Encourage Local Authority Leaders to join the Greater Manchester Mayor in expressing their support for the UNISON Migrant Care Workers' Charter. Thereafter, that councils facilitate discussions between UNISON, elected members and officers at local level to adopt the charter formally, agreeing a framework for implementation and review.
- Ask the Integrated Care Partnership Board Strategy Group to hold a discussion to identify and explore aspects of the charter which would most helpfully and appropriately be implemented at Greater Manchester level, or which would benefit from greater collaboration between different parts of the health and social care system. This discussion would be intended to identify the bodies, methods and resources which could best deliver them.
- Facilitate and support the ongoing implementation of the charter across the City Region and aid collaboration between partner organisations to achieve its aims.