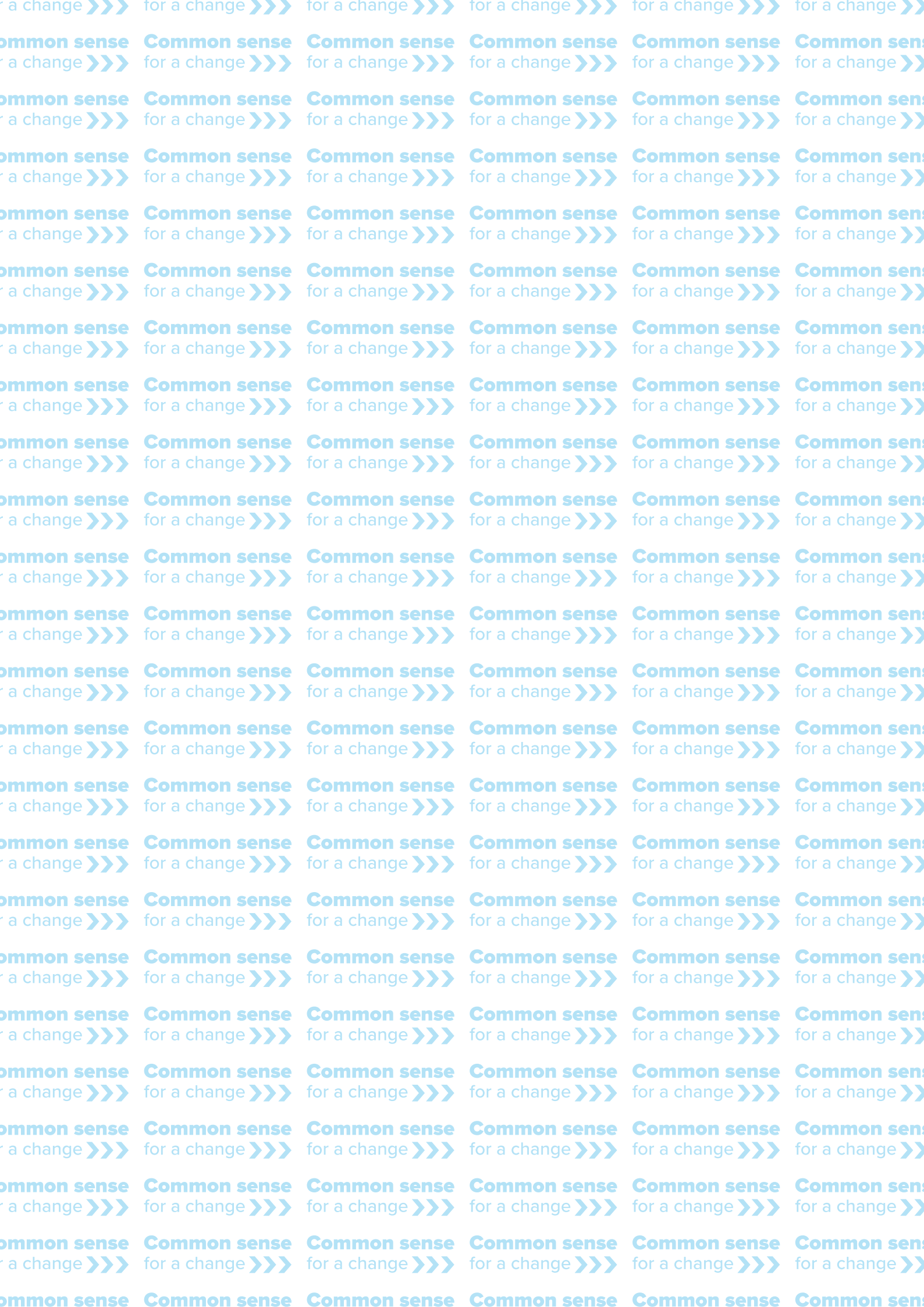


A COMMON SENSE PLAN

Fast Track to Care

Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
December 2025





Overview

The Scottish Conservatives believe that no patient who is medically ready to leave hospital should be left waiting on a ward simply because a care package is not yet in place. Delayed discharge from hospital puts unnecessary pressure on our NHS, reduces bed availability for those who need urgent treatment, and undermines the dignity and independence of patients who could otherwise be living in more appropriate settings. Last year alone, delayed discharges cost Scotland over 720,000 bed-days, the highest on record since guidelines were first introduced. But the SNP Government has failed to tackle this crisis.

Patients stuck on wards are more likely to get an hospital acquired infection and suffer from a series of events that can lead to them losing the ability to be independent again and return to their own home. Patients' mental wellbeing suffers and they are away from their family and loved ones. Relatives have to travel a long way in rural areas via multiple buses to see their loved ones.

Our 'Fast Track to Care' policy will change that. We will introduce a pilot scheme that enables patients who are ready for discharge to move temporarily into local care homes while local authorities complete the necessary planning for their long-term package of care. We would only pilot this proposal in council areas that have capacity in their care homes. Under our proposal, the NHS and local authorities will work in partnership to identify suitable short-term placements, ensuring patients receive safe and high-quality care during this transitional period. This will free up vital hospital capacity, reduce waiting

times, and allow individuals to begin their recovery or ongoing care in a more comfortable, community-based environment.

We will also change the law so that adults with incapacity, who represent almost a quarter of all those occupying beds in hospitals, can be transferred to care homes under this specific scheme. This will only be done where necessary, and with the approval of a doctor and the family, in order to cut down the long waits caused by existing requirements to have the necessary legal paperwork completed.

This policy is in line with calls from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Professor Andrew Elder, President of the RCPE has said in response to record delayed discharge levels, "We again call for appropriate levels of funding to maximise availability of both "interim" and long-term care home placement and urgent review of those parts of the adults with incapacity legislation that prevent some people from moving from health facilities to social care facilities in a timely manner."





Key Proposals

>>> ALLOW CARE HOMES TO BE USED FOR THE DISCHARGE OF PATIENTS.

To cut bed blocking in hospitals, we would allow care homes to be used as a place to discharge patients in areas where there is spare capacity. This approach was taken by the Scottish Government in 2023 as a temporary measure to acquire 300 bedsⁱⁱ, so it can be done and delivered, but we believe the current discharge crisis requires a more ambitious reintroduction.

Under these plans, patients in eligible areas with care home capacity, boosted by funding from this scheme, would be placed temporarily in a care home within 48 hours of being declared fit for discharge. This scheme would only be piloted in council areas where local authorities have proactively opted-in and indicated there is capacity in their care homes to take part.



**hospital beds occupied
per day on average by
adults with incapacity**

Public Health Scotland, 4 November 2025

>>> SECURE UP TO 600 DEDICATED SHORT-TERM CARE HOME BEDS ACROSS SCOTLAND UNDER THE PILOT.

We would secure up to 600 short-term care home beds in pilot areas by providing funding to Health and Social Care Partnerships in those local authority areas that have opted-in to take part in the scheme.

As in the Scottish Government's previous scheme, this funding would allow them to pay 25% over and above the National Care Home rate to secure and procure these bedsⁱⁱⁱ. This additional funding on top of the standard rate would help incentivise local authorities to opt-in to the scheme.

>>> CHANGE THE LAW TO ALLOW ADULTS WITH INCAPACITY TO MORE EASILY BE DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL.

Adults with incapacity are those who are incapable of making decisions for themselves, such as people with severe dementia or learning disabilities^{iv}. In September 2025, there were 413 hospital beds occupied per day on average by adults with incapacity which represented 21% of all occupied beds that month, as well as three quarters of all beds occupied by adults with complex needs^v.

This is not helped by the difficulty of discharging adults with incapacity. Healthcare Improvement Scotland say the average delay in discharging adults with incapacity is significantly longer than standard delays, meaning that a few individuals delayed represent a high number of bed days^{vi}. In August 2021, out of the 422 patients facing delayed discharge of six weeks or more, adults with incapacity legislation were the single biggest factor listed as the principal reason for 45% of delays^{vii}. This is because of the requirement to wait for guardianship orders to be approved by the courts in cases where there is no Power of Attorney in place before they can be found more suitable accommodation.

In 2022-23, the most common primary diagnosis for those subject to a guardianship order under

adults with incapacity legislation was a learning disability (46%) and dementia (36.7%)^{viii}. 63% of people in care homes for older people in Scotland have dementia^{ix} and older people account for 91% of all care home residents, while there are 144 care homes dedicated to those with learning disabilities^x. This means that the majority of care homes could accommodate adults with incapacity on a temporary basis.

Therefore, we would change the law and amend the Adults with Incapacity Act 2000 to allow for these patients to be discharged to an appropriate care home under this scheme where possible. This would only be done with the approval of a doctor and the consent of the family, but without the need to wait for a guardianship order.

The interim standard rates paid by local authorities for care home beds in 2025-26 are £1,013.05 a week for nursing care and £881.98 a week for residential care^{xi}.

With NHS health boards paying 25% over and above the National Care Home rate in order to ensure they can secure beds, we estimate the cost of securing 600 beds in 2025-26 would be approximately £34 million.

However, savings would also be generated as this policy would prevent the need for health boards to pay for the care of these patients in hospital. Public Health Scotland previously estimated the daily cost of delayed discharge to be £262.^{xii} Therefore, if the NHS discharges these patients into care homes and no longer has to spend this money to pay for their care in hospital, this will actually save money for our health service.





Endnotes

- i Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 2 October 2024, [link](#)
- ii BBC News, 10 January 2023, [link](#)
- iii Scottish Government, 10 January 2023, [link](#)
- iv Scottish Government, 28 October 2004, [link](#)
- v Public Health Scotland, 4 November 2025, [link](#)
- vi Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Accessed 10 November 2025, [link](#)
- vii HealthandCareScotland, 13 October 2021, [link](#)
- viii Mental Welfare Commission, December 2023, [link](#)
- ix Public Health Scotland, 21 November 2023, [link](#)
- x Public Health Scotland, 19 November 2024, [link](#)
- xi Care Information Scotland, Accessed 10 November 2025, [link](#)
- xii Delayed discharges in NHSScotland annual, 16 November 2021, [link](#)

