

THE IMPACT OF FUEL COSTS ON CARE WORKERS



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FOREWARD

Care workers across the UK do not stop when the world becomes more difficult, they carry on often at personal significant cost. Rising fuel prices are not an abstract economic concern for this workforce. They are a daily, practical barrier to doing a job society depends on.

The findings in this report shine a light on a workforce that is, in many cases, spending a meaningful proportion of their already limited income simply getting to and from the people they support. This is not sustainable and should not be acceptable.

To every care worker who took the time to respond, thank you. Your willingness to share your experiences is what makes our work possible, and it is what ensures your voices are heard in the conversations that matter.



KAROLINA GERLICH

CEO, The Care Workers' Charity

INTRODUCTION

When conflict drives up the cost of fuel, the impact is felt in homes, in communities and in the daily decisions of working people across the UK. For adult social care workers, a workforce of nearly two million who are already among the lowest paid in the UK, rising fuel prices present a pressure the sector cannot afford to ignore.

The Care Workers' Charity exists to support the financial, mental and professional wellbeing of paid adult social care workers. When we identified fuel costs as an emerging and urgent concern for the workforce, we launched a survey to understand the scale and nature of that impact. In total, 136 paid adult social care workers responded and what they told us is a sobering reminder that the consequences of global conflict aren't felt equally.

The findings that follow are not simply data points. They are the experiences of a workforce that continues to show up in circumstances that too often go unacknowledged.



IMPACT ON PERSONAL FINANCES:



The financial toll is significant and widespread. When asked to what extent rising fuel costs had impacted their personal finances, 72.06% reported a significant impact. A further 25.74% reported a moderate impact, with only 2.21% describing the impact as slight.



Nearly three quarters of respondents are experiencing serious financial strain as a direct result of fuel costs, on top of the existing pressures of working in one of the lowest-paid sectors in the UK.

AWARENESS OF RISING FUEL COSTS:

The scale of awareness among respondents was near universal. When asked whether they had noticed an increase in fuel costs over the past four weeks, 99.26% said yes.

Only one respondent had not.

This is not a workforce that is unaware of the pressures bearing down on them, they are living them.

RELIANCE ON PERSONAL VEHICLES

Many respondents depend on their own car or motorbike to carry out their work.



- 80.88% rely on their personal vehicle every day.
- 19.12% rely on their personal vehicle most days.



- For these respondents, the cost of fuel is one they are personally absorbing. This is a workforce for whom fuel is not a lifestyle expense, it is an occupational necessity.

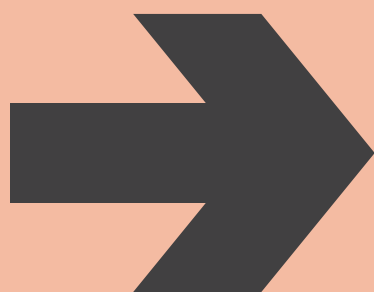
IMPACT ON ABILITY TO CARRY OUT THEIR ROLE:

When asked whether rising fuel costs had affected their ability to carry out their role in adult social care, the findings were stark.

- 52.94% stated that rising costs were significantly impacting their ability to deliver care.
- 30.88% stated they were somewhat impacting their ability to deliver care.
- Only 2.94% said costs were not impacting their ability to deliver care.

Care workers in this survey are telling us that the cost of fuel is directly undermining their ability to do their job. That is not a minor operational concern, it is a workforce crisis in the making.

CHANGES TO MODE OF TRANSPORT:



Despite the scale of the financial pressure, 88.24% of respondents had not changed their mode of transport. For some, this is not a matter of choice. As one respondent explained:

“Our company doesn’t allow us to use public transport, so even though this would be cheaper for us, we aren’t able to due to the short amount of travel time we are given between calls.”

Of the 11.76% who had made changes, the responses reveal a workforce finding whatever solutions they can, often at personal cost or risk:

“My partner has a car that uses less fuel, which I use if I can’t afford petrol. So I drop him to work and pick him up during my working day.”

“Being on the minimum wage and running out of fuel before I get paid has been a disaster, so I had to ride my bike. I’ve been knocked off twice. Not happy.”

“I might need to start walking to closer clients and limit my travel.”



EMPLOYER REIMBURSEMENT

Just over half of respondents, 52.21%, said they always receive reimbursement for travel or fuel costs from their employer. Notably, 30.88% receive no reimbursement at all.

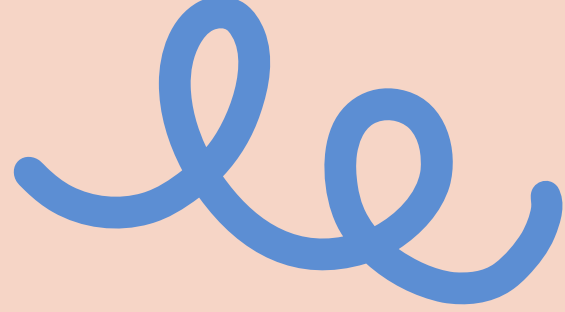
For those who do receive reimbursement, it is falling short of covering actual costs. Of the 94 respondents who receive reimbursement either always or sometimes, 67.02% said it does not cover their costs at all. A further 32.98% said it only partially covers them.

Not a single respondent said their reimbursement adequately covered what they spend.

IMPACT ON WORKING PATTERNS:

Perhaps the most significant finding of all is the effect on working patterns. When asked whether rising fuel costs had influenced decisions about their work, including reducing shifts, changing roles or considering leaving the sector, 53.68% said it had. A further 11.76% were unsure, and only 34.56% said no.

More than half of this survey's respondents are already making, or actively considering, decisions about their working lives because of fuel costs. In a sector already facing a significant workforce and recruitment crisis, this finding demands urgent attention.



IMPACT ON WELLBEING

The financial pressures outlined in this report do not stay financial for long. They become stress, anxiety, debt and ultimately, decisions about whether to stay in the sector at all. We asked respondents how rising fuel costs were affecting their wellbeing:

“Thinking about leaving my role as I can’t afford to pay upfront. My employer pays 40p per mile, which I know is reasonable, but filling the car up twice a week to do my job and waiting a month to be reimbursed is not sustainable.”

“It’s causing more stress. We are already low-paid earners, barely meeting daily expenses, and the increase in fuel prices is making life more difficult and uncertain.”

“I’m putting fuel on credit cards as I can’t afford it now.”

“I had to cut my days and couldn’t afford to work full-time due to petrol costs. The stress of this has affected my health.”

“It has reduced my living standards. I have to spend more on fuel and am not paid for the distances I drive.”

These are the words of experienced, committed care workers being pushed to a breaking point that the sector cannot afford to ignore.



THE STORIES OF CARE WORKERS

We reached out to members of our Care Worker Advisory Board and Champions Project to learn more about the direct impact of the rise in fuel costs. Their responses are as follows:

“Rising fuel costs are placing an overwhelming burden on me as both a domiciliary carer and an inpatient hospital care worker. My roles require constant travel moving between clients in the community and commuting to hospital shifts yet the increasing cost of transport is making it harder to keep up. Since my accident left me without a car, I now rely heavily on expensive taxis, multiple buses, and even trekking long distances just to get to work and care for others. Even when I had a car, the 30p per mile allowance was nowhere near enough to cover the reality of travelling long distances between clients, sitting in traffic, and spending almost £70 a week on petrol. For carers like me, who dedicate our lives to supporting vulnerable people, rising fuel and transport costs are not just inconvenient, they are financially draining and deeply unfair.”

“Rising fuel costs are starting to have an impact on me, as I rely on my car to travel everyday. Increasing travel expenses are beginning to place additional financial pressure on me whilst I am already working hard to balance my job responsibilities, childcare, and mental wellbeing. I did consider giving my transport up but I will be worse off. It certainly is challenging trying to weigh everything up just to get through the month.”



THE STORIES OF CARE WORKERS

“I use my car for work, taking the guys I support to hospital appointments, community activities, etc. Putting in a mileage claim form at the end of the month (45p per mile), means I’m paying out for diesel up front. I was owed £80 in mileage this month’s wages which I didn’t receive! I had to chase up HR before they agreed to pay me next week.

I live in quite an isolated town, and I couldn’t work without a car. As I have a 1 hour drive to the majority of services I work in, it’s not cost affective driving for anything less than a long day or sleep shift, which means I’m away from my home more and doing longer shifts to subsidise the cost of getting to work in the first place. I’ve started putting the car in neutral and rolling when coming down the fells as a way to save on fuel and doing long day sleep shifts back-to-back in different services in the same area which has saved on diesel.

Care workers are one of the lowest paid work forces in the country. Don’t penalise us even more by making it harder for us to do our job. We have a lot of people relying on us.”



WHAT ARE CARE WORKERS ASKING FOR?

As a final question, we asked respondents what would help to reduce the impact of rising fuel costs. Three themes emerged clearly above all others:

- Higher mileage reimbursement.
- More stable and localised rotas.
- Better access to alternative transport options.

These are not unreasonable demands. They are the minimum conditions that would allow care workers to continue doing a job they are committed to, without subsidising it from their own pockets.



CONCLUSION

The findings in this report are a reminder that global events carry a human cost and that cost is rarely distributed fairly. For adult social care workers, rising fuel prices are a direct and immediate threat to financial stability, personal wellbeing and workforce retention.

Care workers are asking to be able to afford to stay in a sector they chose because they are passionate and they care. The Care Workers' Charity will continue to advocate on behalf of care workers, however, advocacy alone is not enough. The people who keep our care system running need practical support, and they need it now.



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THE CARE WORKERS' VIEW



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