Insights from the Second Advisory Board Meeting of the Year

Findings from the Care Advisory Board, July 2026

Executive Summary

Adult social care continues to operate within a complex and evolving environment, with providers balancing financial pressures, workforce development, regulatory uncertainty and rising expectations around quality and innovation. Discussions during the July 2026 Care Advisory Board reflected a sector that remains focused on improving outcomes despite ongoing operational challenges.

Members shared examples of organisations investing in leadership, strengthening governance, improving occupancy, expanding services and developing new ways of working to support both staff and the people they care for. Alongside these developments, providers described increasing interest in digital technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a means of reducing administrative burden and improving operational efficiency.

However, technology was viewed as only one part of a much broader picture. Throughout the discussion, providers consistently emphasised that sustainable progress depends on strong leadership, investment in people, effective regulation and maintaining the human-centred values that underpin high-quality care.

The conversation highlighted a sector that is not standing still. Despite continued uncertainty, providers are actively adapting their organisations, sharing practical learning and exploring new approaches that strengthen resilience while remaining firmly focused on delivering safe, compassionate and person-centred care.

Technology & AI: Supporting Better Care, Not Replacing It

Technology formed a significant part of the discussion, reflecting the speed at which Artificial Intelligence is becoming embedded within adult social care. Providers described a noticeable shift over the past 12 months, with AI moving from isolated experimentation to a strategic consideration being discussed at executive and board level.

Several organisations reported establishing formal AI governance programmes, appointing internal AI Champions and investing in enterprise AI platforms to ensure that adoption is coordinated, secure and aligned with organisational priorities. Others described developing bespoke applications tailored to their own services, using AI to improve policy management, streamline internal communications, support payroll functions and assist with administrative tasks that traditionally consume significant staff time.

Despite the enthusiasm surrounding these developments, providers consistently rejected the idea that AI should be viewed as a replacement for people. Instead, it was described as an opportunity to remove repetitive administrative work, allowing managers and frontline teams to devote more time to residents, families and colleagues. Tasks such as drafting policies, summarising lengthy documents, preparing meeting notes, producing reports and retrieving organisational knowledge were all cited as areas where AI is already delivering measurable efficiencies.

Technology & AI: Supporting Better Care, Not Replacing It

The discussion also highlighted the importance of approaching implementation responsibly. Providers recognised that enthusiasm alone is insufficient without appropriate governance. Concerns were raised around GDPR compliance, the handling of sensitive resident information, cloud-based storage, accountability for AI-generated content and maintaining appropriate levels of human oversight. Several organisations explained that while they are comfortable using AI for operational and administrative functions, they remain cautious about applying it to clinical documentation or decision-making until governance frameworks become more established.

Members also reflected on the wider technology landscape within adult social care. Existing care management systems were frequently described as lagging behind developments in AI, with limited interoperability and outdated infrastructure preventing providers from fully realising the efficiencies that modern technology could offer. There was a growing sense that organisations developing AI-native platforms may have an opportunity to reshape the market unless more established suppliers accelerate innovation.

Throughout the discussion, one principle remained consistent: technology should strengthen relationships rather than diminish them. Providers repeatedly emphasised that empathy, professional judgement and person-centred care cannot be replicated by artificial intelligence. Instead, the greatest opportunity lies in using technology to reduce administrative burden so that care professionals have more time to focus on the human aspects of their roles.

Workforce & Organisational Development

Alongside discussions around technology, workforce development remained a central theme, with providers highlighting the importance of investing in people as the foundation for sustainable improvement.

Several organisations described ongoing work to strengthen leadership capability, improve staff retention and develop cultures that encourage continuous learning. Rather than viewing digital transformation as an IT project, providers increasingly described it as a workforce development challenge, recognising that successful implementation depends on staff confidence, effective communication and visible leadership.

Examples shared during the meeting illustrated the resilience that continues to exist across the sector. One provider reported approaching twelve months without a single member of staff leaving the organisation, while others described improving occupancy, reducing reliance on agency workers and strengthening governance across multiple services. These examples demonstrated that, despite challenging operating conditions, organisations continue to find opportunities to improve performance through strong leadership and investment in their teams.

The discussion also explored broader approaches to improving quality of life for residents. Providers shared examples of enhanced dementia dining initiatives, greater investment in chef development and collaborative approaches to improving nutrition and mealtime experiences. These examples served as a reminder that innovation is not confined to digital technology but also includes practical improvements that enhance everyday care.

International recruitment and workforce sustainability were also discussed. Members acknowledged the continued contribution made by overseas colleagues while recognising the uncertainty created by changes to immigration policy. Concerns were raised regarding sponsorship arrangements, workforce planning and ensuring that international staff continue to feel welcomed, supported and valued within organisations.

Overall, providers described workforce development as one of the most important investments any organisation can make. Whether introducing new technologies, expanding services or responding to regulatory change, the discussion reinforced that sustainable improvement depends upon engaged, well-supported teams with opportunities to develop their skills and contribute to organisational success.

Regulatory Uncertainty Continues to Affect Confidence

Regulation remained one of the most consistently discussed operational challenges facing providers.

Across the organisations represented, members described significant variation in their experiences with inspection activity. Several providers reported that services had not been inspected for seven or even eight years, despite previous assurances that organisations awaiting inspection would be prioritised. Others highlighted concerns that outdated ratings continue to be displayed publicly, leaving providers unable to demonstrate improvements that have been achieved over recent years.

The discussion extended beyond inspections to include wider frustrations around communication and consistency. Slow registration processes for managers, uncertainty surrounding implementation of the revised CQC assessment framework and the absence of consistent relationship managers were all identified as factors contributing to reduced confidence in the regulatory system.

Providers recognised that work is taking place behind the scenes to reform inspection processes and introduce new approaches. However, there was a shared perception that progress has been considerably slower than anticipated. Members expressed concern that while significant effort appears to be focused on testing new systems and frameworks, the practical benefits have yet to be experienced consistently by providers on the ground.

Interestingly, experiences differed across the UK. Welsh providers reported generally positive relationships with Care Inspectorate Wales, describing inspections as proportionate, constructive and professionally conducted. This contrast prompted wider discussion around the importance of consistency, transparency and meaningful engagement between regulators and providers.

The discussion highlighted a common desire for a regulatory environment that provides reassurance to the public while also recognising good practice, encouraging improvement and maintaining constructive relationships with providers.

Innovation Continues Despite System Pressures

Perhaps the strongest theme emerging from the meeting was the determination of providers to continue investing in improvement despite persistent financial, workforce and regulatory pressures.

Throughout the discussion, members shared examples of organisations opening new services, expanding capacity, strengthening governance structures and introducing new operational approaches designed to improve both efficiency and quality. These developments demonstrate a sector that continues to evolve rather than standing still in response to external challenges.

Providers also highlighted examples of collaboration, sharing practical learning and exploring new ideas across organisational boundaries. Whether discussing AI implementation, workforce development or operational improvements, there was a clear willingness to learn from one another's experiences and adapt successful approaches to individual organisations.

This culture of continuous improvement was particularly evident in conversations around organisational resilience. Rather than waiting for wider system reform, providers described taking proactive steps to strengthen their businesses through improved governance, investment in leadership, greater use of data, digital innovation and enhanced quality assurance processes.

At the same time, members acknowledged that these improvements continue to take place against a backdrop of ongoing financial pressures, workforce shortages and uncertainty surrounding future regulation. The ability of organisations to continue investing despite these challenges reflects both the resilience of the sector and the commitment of leaders to improving outcomes for residents, families and staff.

The discussion suggested that innovation within adult social care is increasingly characterised by practical problem-solving rather than large-scale transformation. Small but meaningful improvements, whether technological, operational or cultural, are enabling providers to build stronger, more resilient organisations capable of responding to an increasingly complex operating environment.

Conclusion

The July 2026 Care Advisory Board highlighted a sector that continues to demonstrate resilience, adaptability and a strong commitment to continuous improvement. While providers remain concerned about regulatory uncertainty, workforce pressures and wider financial challenges, the discussion also showcased organisations actively investing in their people, strengthening governance and embracing new ways of working.

Technology and particularly Artificial Intelligence formed an important part of the conversation, but it was consistently viewed as one element of a broader strategy to improve efficiency and release more time for meaningful care. Providers were clear that innovation should always support, rather than replace, the compassion, professional judgement and relationships that define high-quality adult social care.

Ultimately, the discussion reflected a sector looking beyond immediate challenges to build more sustainable, resilient organisations. Through collaboration, responsible innovation and continued investment in people, providers are demonstrating a shared commitment to delivering better outcomes while preserving the values that remain at the heart of exceptional care.

With thanks to the Advisory Board:

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Upcoming Events

Care Roadshow South

Epsom Downs Racecourse, 13th October 2026

Care Roadshow Yorkshire

Elland Road Stadium, 3rd November 2026

Care Roadshow Wales

Cardiff City Stadium, 10th November 2026