

Archbishop Justin spoke at the Reimagining Care Commission Report Launch.

As delivered:

Thank you to Anna, Bishop James, and all of the Commission members for your extraordinarily hard work on this report. I am very pleased to be here with all of you, and in particular with special guests who have contributed very generously to the Commission's work: members of Livability's 'Changes for the Future Forum', Seeability, and a number of family carers. I'm also particularly pleased that I'm accompanied by our daughter Ellie who is herself in receipt of care and I have permission to say that. Normally if I mention any of our children there's a long-standing tradition in the family that I have to pay £5 for every mention! But, she's very kindly let me off that today. The others will be very disappointed. I haven't mentioned any others, just for the record!

The timing of the Commission's work could not have been better. The Archbishop of York and I had the privilege of launching this Commission in April 2021 – incidentally two Prime Ministers and four Health Secretaries ago – when the Government was making plans to reform social care. The Government's particular focus was on how to fund the social care system.

Drawing on Christian theology, tradition and values, the Commission has addressed a much more fundamental set of issues. Before we think about how to fund social care, we need to step back and consider the nature and purpose of care and support. In other words: what do we want to fund?

What are the values which underpin care? How do we support one another to live well and participate in our communities, regardless of our age or ability?

This is one of a package of pragmatic and self-critical reports of the Church of England which also challenge others, as well as the Church of England. They seek to reverse the usual political question, "What do we spend our money on?" with two questions of ultimate value: "What are our values for the society and the country we seek in the world in which we live? And how do we finance it over the long term?"

In recent Government reports there is a heavy emphasis on rights, choice, independence, control. They may matter. But they cannot be sustained unless, as this report does, we combine with those rights an emphasis on values we do not often talk about much in public policy: loving kindness, mutuality, interdependence, combined with a hard-nosed realism about the difficulties faced by people who draw on care and support, care workers, and unpaid carers.

There is no magical bullet to fix our broken social care system. But there is an opportunity for change, to rebuild something broken into something much better. To reimagine care.

The Commission has called as one of its central recommendations - probably the most important - for the development of a National Care

Covenant, which would provide clarity about what we can expect and what is expected of us, as individuals, as families, as communities, and local and national government.

The theme of ‘covenant’ appears a number of times in the Bible as God enters relationships with human beings and God and His people make promises to one another. This is enormously relevant to our own times and our understanding of care. At its heart, a National Care Covenant is about a solemn agreement that all relevant parties will work together to ensure that people have the right care and the right support to flourish as much as they are able in life.

There is already a covenant in our national life: the military covenant. And that is about how we support those who are serving or who have served in the armed services.

The idea of a covenant encourages us to move away from the language of contract and rights, towards the language of partnership and interdependence. This is a radical change in thinking. It is a radical challenge to the philosophical basis of our society.

Social care should not be reduced simply to a system of users and providers because it involves us all: people who draw on care and support; people who make social care their profession; family members and neighbours who are caring for their loved ones, and a society in which we are all diminished when any are held back.

How we care for those who are outwardly, outwardly I stress, powerless is a test of a society that acts well. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”. Normally when that is read people go, “Ahhh, how cute!” But what He was actually doing was challenging a basic sense of society. In those days, because of the very high levels of infant mortality, children didn’t count very much. They often, in some countries, didn’t get named until they’d got past the most dangerous stage. It was too painful. And Jesus is saying something radically challenging. There are people in our society who are quite wrongly perceived as lacking value: people who are older, people who are disabled. The Bible calls us to repent of our attitudes and to see such people as those from whom we receive blessing. And as Ellie here would remind me if I didn’t say it, not all disability is visible. She has been challenged by a bus conductor who said, “Well you don’t look disabled” when he saw her card.

This report reminds us that we all have value as God’s children: people who are created in the image of God, intimately known and deeply loved whatever our circumstances, age or ability. It reminds us that care and support is about all of us, for we will all be cared for and supported at different times in our lives, from infancy to old age. And we will all offer care and support to the people around us. Interdependence, not independence, must lie at the heart of our approach to care: we all need each other.

There is a special role here for communities. This report encourages us to move away from a false choice, a false binary, of whether the State

should do more or whether families should do more to provide care. The answer lies not in asking communities to do more with limited resources, but truly investing in our communities; recognising the value of places in which everyone, regardless of age or ability, can develop relationships, participate, and be supported to stay well and healthy.

The message of this report is something for which institutions from government downwards must bear responsibility: central government, with significant funding implications; local government, with significant implementation obligations; through to NGOs, the voluntary sector, churches, with significant participatory implications. That is the call on institutions.

There is nothing party political about this report. The social care system has been brewing the current crisis for far longer than any single party has been in office. The call on individuals is equally important: groups of people in their community who come together to create inclusive, welcoming spaces; unpaid carers, who every day point us to the love of Jesus Christ, carrying out their duties which are often thankless, often under enormous almost unendurable pressure, and who must be valued far more in return; the call on all of us to love our neighbour and to remind each other of the innate dignity and worth of every single human being.

The task of reimagining care is for all of us. That means we must work together – cross party, faith groups, local communities – taking our lead from the priorities of people who are most affected – as part of a wider effort to change attitudes, to articulate a hopeful vision of what care and support could and should be like. There is nothing in here that is unattainable or impossible.

If we embrace the idea of covenant, if we put partnership and values at the heart of our efforts, then we can truly reimagine care and support for these times.

It is now my pleasure to hand over to the Chair and Co-Chair of the Commission, Anna and Bishop James, to share the findings of their report.

Read more [here](#).



You can read the report here:

- [Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England \(Full version\)](#)
- [Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England \(Summarised version\)](#)
- [Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England \(Easy read version\)](#)

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