

Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting	20th February 2025
Report Subject	Update on Unpaid Carers Services in Flintshire
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, frailty, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support.

The local Authority has a number of statutory duties in terms of supporting carers:

- To **identify carers** that provide or intend to provide care for an adult or disabled child.
- A **duty to assess** a carer where there appears to be a need for support, regardless of the level of needs or resources. The assessment will focus on '*what matters*' to the carer and the carers needs in their own right.
- A carer is entitled to a joint assessment with the cared for if it is considered beneficial and there is consent from both.
- A duty to meet the needs of the carer following an assessment, depending on eligibility.
- The carer's assessment should be reviewed annually or when there is a significant change in circumstances.
- Provide **advocacy** support for carers.

Flintshire has the highest number of carers in North Wales, at 18,000, which is reflective of the overall population numbers. This is an increase of approximately 8% since the 2001 census (North Wales Population Needs Assessment).

The preventative value of carers services, both in promoting the well-being of carers, and in avoiding additional costs to local authorities and local health boards, is well-publicised.

The role undertaken by carers is of clear benefit to the local economy and contributes to easing pressure on the local authority and Health Board in a challenging market capacity and financial climate. The Welsh Government have calculated that Welsh carers contributed the equivalent of £8.1bn of care each year (Welsh Government Strategy for Unpaid Carers, 2021) which far exceeds the

£2bn spent by local authorities across Wales on social care during 2019-20 (bbc.co.uk).

Flintshire Social Services delivers a wide range of services for carers, both in-house and commissioned through external third sector providers. Each service has a defined specification to deliver services to specific groups of carers within Flintshire.

In June this year, the process, and proposals for recommissioning unpaid carers services for Flintshire was reported.

This report provides information on the progress of recommissioning as well as a wider update of developments in carers services in Flintshire including:

- The Public Services Ombudsman of Wales (PSOW), Own Initiative Investigation into Carers Services.
- Carers Wales - Track the Act Report - monitoring and evaluating how the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 is working for unpaid carers.
- The opening of the NEWCIS Carers Centre.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To acknowledge the update on the process of recommissioning unpaid carers services.
2	To acknowledge the outcome of the PSOW's "Own Initiative" Investigation into Carers Services and the resulting action plan.
3	To acknowledge the outcome of the Carers Wales "Track the Act" Report.
4	To endorse the positive work underway with NEWCIS to develop our unpaid carers services and the Carers Centre as a hub for unpaid carers in Flintshire.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING UPDATE ON UNPAID CARERS SERVICES IN FLINTSHIRE
1.01	<p>A carer is broadly someone who provides or intends to provide care and support to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their age, physical or mental illness, or disability; this does not include someone who is paid or employed to carry out that role, or someone who is volunteering (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act).</p> <p>A carer may be any age including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A young carer under 18 years of age.

- A parent carer caring for a child with additional support needs.
- A friend or neighbour providing support to someone who is vulnerable.
- A husband, wife or partner.
- A person caring for an elderly parent who needs support.

Caring for someone can take up a few hours each week, or a carer may be caring for 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Nationally we are seeing an ever growing, ageing population with increasingly complex needs and as a result we are also seeing an increasing number of individuals who consequently become carers for their loved ones. Carers Trust Wales now reports that 3 in 5 people in Wales will become a carer at some point in their lives.

According to the 2021 census there were 73,000 unpaid carers across North Wales, which is 11% of the population. Flintshire has the highest number of carers in North Wales, at 18,000, which is reflective of the overall population numbers. This is an increase of approximately 8% since the 2011 census (North Wales Population Needs Assessment). The number of carers continues to grow and locally we are seeing increasing demand for carer support services.

The preventative value of carers services, both in promoting the well-being of carers, and in avoiding additional costs to local authorities and local health boards, is well-publicised.

The role undertaken by carers is of clear benefit to the local economy and contributes to easing pressure on the local authority and Health Board in a challenging financial climate. The Welsh Government have calculated that Welsh carers contributed the equivalent of £8.1bn of care each year (Welsh Government Strategy for Unpaid Carers, 2021) which far exceeds the £2bn spent by local authorities across Wales on social care during 2019-20 (bbc.co.uk).

In England, the Royal College of General Practitioners has worked with Baker Tilly (2015) to identify the social return on investment which can be made when Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) invest in services which support carers. The study shows that this could equate to a saving of almost £4 for every £1 invested.

1.02

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 significantly changed the definition of a carer. Under the Act, carers have an equal right to support as that of the person they care for. This is a very positive move for carers in recognition of the value they hold.

The local Authority has a number of duties under the Act, terms of supporting carers:

- To **identify carers** that provide or intend to provide care for an adult or disabled child.

- A **duty to assess** a carer where there appears to be a need for support, regardless of the level of needs or resources. The assessment will focus on '*what matters*' to the carer and the carers needs in their own right.
- A carer is entitled to a joint assessment with the cared for if it is considered beneficial and there is consent from both.
- A **duty to meet the needs** of the carer following an assessment, depending on eligibility.
- The carer's assessment should be reviewed annually or when there is a significant change in circumstances.
- Provide **advocacy** support for carers.

1.03 Our register of unpaid carers in Flintshire is maintained on a voluntary enrolment basis for carers who wish to register to receive information, advice and assistance and engage with support services available. The number of carers registered since prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to increase. The number of Adult Carers registered has increased by 82% since 2019 and the number of Young Carers has increased by 290% over the same period.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Adult Carers	5,996	6,231	6,573	7,209	9,611	10,954
Young Carers	121	204	263	332	404	472

1.04 Carers Services Review

Flintshire Social Services delivers a wide range of services for carers, both in-house and commissioned through external third sector providers. Each service has a defined specification with a set amount of funding to deliver services to specific groups of carers within Flintshire.

As detailed in the review earlier in the year, (appendix 5.01) the contracts for all externally commissioned services end on the 31st March 2025. In order to inform its commissioning strategy for unpaid carers services post April 2025, Flintshire County Council Social Services undertook a review of current carers services in collaboration with carers and stakeholder partners.

To move forward it is vitally important that Flintshire Social Services and its partners, ensure that services are sustainable, accessible, and suitable for carers in Flintshire. This includes younger carers, working carers and carers that are not currently involved with social services.

Over the past few years, the COVID-19 pandemic compounded unprecedented demands on unpaid carers.

By undertaking a review of carers services, Flintshire County Council Social Services aimed to establish how the current provision is meeting the

	<p>needs of carers now and whether it is fit for purpose in the future as well as explore opportunities and areas for development.</p> <p>Fundamentally, it was important to understand the services available and the wider carers strategy for unpaid carers in Flintshire to enable a thorough analysis of what is working, what is not working and what gaps we may have that need to be addressed.</p>
1.05	<p>It is easy to see the valuable contribution that unpaid carers give in providing care and support to their loved ones. Without the support of unpaid carers, many individuals would not be able to continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as they do, which is important to many in their feelings on their quality of life. Nationally, the increased pressures on the health and social care sector do not appear to have an imminent resolution and therefore challenges in staffing and budget constraints look likely to continue.</p> <p>Budgetary pressures on local authorities are well documented and the coming years are likely to be the “most challenging that we have ever faced”. While it would seem natural to increase the budget for unpaid carer’s services to support increasing demand, it is not a viable option. Furthermore, to compound this pressure on budgets the cost-of-living crisis and increase in inflation over the last few years has meant that goods and services are now costing more than they were at the beginning of the current service contracts. This means that it is likely to cost more to recommission the same service that are currently in place without considering any uplift to account for the increase in carers.</p> <p>The result of these pressures meant that difficult decisions were unavoidable in considering what is to be recommissioned from April 2025 to ensure that we are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) meeting our statutory obligations, b) effectively supporting and meeting the needs of as many carers as possible and c) achieving the best value for money for the services that we commission. <p>In summary, the review found that overall, the pathways and services commissioned were generally effective and valued by carers. It was acknowledged by several sources that we do have a good standard and a wide range of carers services and support available that supports our commitment to the WG Strategy for Unpaid Carers. With some changes identified through the review improvements will hopefully further enhance the support provided to carers in Flintshire while improving efficiency and sustainability.</p> <p>The specifications for the new contracts were realigned, reducing the overall number of contracts from the current 11 to 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Carers Gateway and Carers Needs Assessments • Creative Respite and Carer Well-being

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, Education and Employment Support • Young Carers Services • Support for Carers and families of Children and Young People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions • Support for Carers of individuals with a Neurological Condition • Carers of Individuals requiring Continuing Health Care (CHC) support <p>For the full report, including detailed analysis of the services currently provided, feedback from carers, gap analysis and the resulting conclusion, please see appendix at paragraph 5.01.</p> <p>It was proposed and agreed that carers services were to be recommissioned from April 2025 for a five year period to enable the council to meet its statutory duties with regards to services and support for unpaid carers.</p>
1.06	<p><u>Carers Services Recommissioning</u></p> <p>The process of recommissioning carers services is almost complete. A full open tender exercise was undertaken over the summer months and the following award recommendations have been made:</p> <p><u>LOT 1</u> - Adult Carers Gateway and Carers Needs Assessments – NEWCIS <u>LOT 2</u> - Creative Respite and Carer Well-being – NEWCIS <u>LOT 3</u> - Training, Education and Employment Support – NEWCIS <u>LOT 4</u> - Young Carers Services – NEWCIS <u>LOT 5</u> - Support for Carers and families of Children and Young People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions – DAFFODILS <u>LOT 6</u> - Support for Carers of individuals with a Neurological Condition – The Neuro Therapy Centre <u>LOT 7</u> - Carers of Individuals requiring Continuing Health Care (CHC) support – NEWCIS.</p>
1.07	<p><u>The Public Services Ombudsman of Wales (PSOW), Own Initiative Investigation into Carers Services</u></p> <p>Over the last 18 months, the Public Services Ombudsman of Wales has been undertaking an “Own Initiative Investigation” investigation into unpaid carers services in Wales.</p> <p>The PSOW “has powers under section 4 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019, to undertake “Own Initiative” investigations into a matter beyond its impact on an individual and without having to wait for a complaint”.</p> <p>The process began with an open consultation on carers services and specifically the administration of Carers Needs Assessments. The consultation received 76 responses, with almost half of these being from unpaid carers across Wales. Flintshire County Council, along with</p>

	<p>Caerphilly County Borough Council, Ceredigion County Council and Neath Port Talbot Council were chosen to take part in the resulting investigation.</p> <p>The process has been challenging however, the final report was published on 31st October. The Ombudsman’s lead adviser noted that, overall, carers are being asked about their experiences and are able to express and explore a wide range and variety of support needs. The report went on to advise that the four authorities had effectively assessed whether adult carers had needs for support and had worked with carers to identify what those needs were (a link to the full report can be found in appendix 5.02).</p> <p>We are pleased to report that the Ombudsman highlighted several areas of good practice specifically in Flintshire, which reinforces the findings of the carers services review undertaken internally as part of the recommissioning process this year.</p> <p>The Ombudsman also made several recommendations for service development and an action plan has been created based on these recommendations. The full action plan can be found in appendix 5.03 however, to summarise the key recommendations relevant to Flintshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Amendments to the Carers Needs Assessment form to ensure information is explicitly recorded. b) Review of the Carers Needs Assessment factsheet. c) Review of the template letter that accompanies the completed Carers Needs Assessment when sent out to the carer. d) Further training on Carers, Carers Rights and Carers Needs Assessments for SPOA staff. e) Awareness training for wider council staff on carers and identifying carers. f) Review the equality data that is collected for carers. g) Confirm and share a plan for improving collaborative working with health services, including GPs, hospitals and pharmacies. h) Review the processes for revisiting and assessing the effectiveness of Direct Payments for carers to make sure that they meet their needs. <p>As can be seen (appendix 5.03), the recommendations relating to Flintshire are straight forward to address without significant resource implications. Furthermore, most of the recommendations have already been completed.</p> <p>The Ombudsman invited the other 18 local authorities in Wales to review their own carers services based on the report produced and are looking to collate data from the other authorities over the coming months.</p>
1.08	<p><u>Carers Wales - Track the Act Report - monitoring and evaluating how the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) is working for unpaid carers</u></p> <p>Track the Act was launched in November 2016 as a series of briefings on how local authorities in Wales were delivering on their new duties towards carers as set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.</p>

The briefings were published up to the pandemic in 2020.

Carers Wales have re-launched research with an online survey of unpaid carers from November 2023 to May 2024 where 454 carers from across Wales responded and information requests to local authorities, health boards and the Welsh Government in June 2024 (a link to the full report is in appendix 5.04).

The report summarises its findings across Wales in key areas and in Flintshire, we have been highlighted with some significant praise in a number of areas.

Identification of carers - The report states that the (early) identification of carers remains a challenge.

In Flintshire, we do appear to be seeing success in this area with a high percentage of carers registered with our carer's services (currently approximately 11,500 versus the number reported in the census of approximately 18,000). In interpreting the information contained within the report, it appears that Flintshire has one of, if not the highest percentage of carers identified out of the local authorities in Wales.

Information and advice – The report states that proactive information for carers is not visible enough, however, acknowledges that the quality of the information available is generally good.

The report acknowledges that when carers do actively seek advice from local authorities specifically, 79% stated that it was partly or completely helpful and 88% said the same about information from third sector organisations.

“Compared to pre-pandemic information and advice resourcing, the current provision to support carers is significantly stronger with more carers likely to benefit once engaged with a Local Authority.”

Flintshire was again highlighted as having a high percentage of carers accessing information through our online presence, as well as having ongoing information provided to carers through our newsletters.

The report recommends that the Welsh Government introduce a nation-wide campaign to support the work of local authorities and health boards in identifying and raising awareness of carers.

Carers Needs Assessments – The report states that it believes not enough Carers are receiving a Carers Needs Assessment, however, acknowledges that when carers are receiving an assessment they are generally of a good standard.

“Carers Wales is still pleased that the process and theoretical implementation of Carers Needs Assessments are in a more substantive and process-orientated position than before the pandemic when the previous Track the Act report was written.”

	<p><i>“... separate processes for young carers with trained professionals who specialise in working with young people. This is hugely positive as this is clearly the right approach for vulnerable young people.”</i></p> <p>Flintshire were positively highlighted as having the lowest wait for a Carers Needs Assessment at just 11 days, with many other authorities significantly higher, the highest being 162 days.</p> <p>Support for carers – The report states that it believes <i>“not enough carers are accessing community-based support despite knowing of its existence.”</i></p> <p>NEWCIS and Flintshire have been highlighted positively for sharing learning and good practice across Wales with the development of our Bridging the Gap model which has been adopted in several other authority areas including Newport and Gwent. The report notes that <i>“this group learning is hugely progressive and positive to see.”</i></p> <p>Importantly, this report places responsibility for supporting carers equally on the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Health Boards and makes individual recommendations for each in terms of areas for improvement. It also acknowledges there are significant financial challenges to achieving the ambitions of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA).</p>
1.09	<p><u>The opening of the Carers Centre in Mold</u></p> <p>Our commissioned carers service has purchased a premises in the centre of Mold to make services more visible, accessible and integrated with the local community. The project has been supported by the Welsh Government’s Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant.</p> <p>NEWCIS are aiming to make this a central Carers Centre for Flintshire that will welcome carers, volunteers and the wider community to raise the profile and awareness of carers, developing links and integrating with the wider community. The centre will enable the expansion and co-production of services, engagement with other organisations, private business and support statutory services.</p> <p>The premises will be used to work with providers to facilitate courses, workshops, groups and events, providing opportunities for more volunteers and carers to become involved. It will provide opportunities to increase and develop the connections between services and create partnerships as well as provide the only facility in Mold to have not only a fully accessible toilet, but also fully accessible changing facilities including a changing table and hoist.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>The financial implications relating to the recommissioning process were reported in the previous “Recommissioning of Unpaid Carers Services” report in May this year. There are currently no foreseen additional cost implications resulting from the content of this report.</p>
2.02	<p><u>Capital</u></p> <p>There are no implications for the approved capital programme for either the current financial year or for future financial years.</p>
2.03	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>The human resource implications relating to the recommissioning process were reported in the previous “Recommissioning of Unpaid Carers Services” report in May this year. There are currently no foreseen additional human resource implications resulting from the update to this process.</p> <p>The outcomes of the PSOW “Own Initiative Investigation” into Carers Services and the “Track the Act” report may have some implications on human resources, however at this point this looks likely to be limited to cohorts of staff undertaking a training workshop/e-learning. The training workshop and e-learning are both already available at no additional expense. Once this training has been undertaken, the knowledge gained will support day to day activity and will not require further resource.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p><u>Integrated Impact Assessments (IIAs)</u></p> <p>A full IIA was undertaken in preparation for the recommissioning process. The IIA was included with the previous report. There have not needed to be any changes to this resulting from the update to the recommissioning process.</p> <p>The outcomes of the PSOW “Own Initiative Investigation” into Carers Services and the “Track the Act” reports do not require an IIA for the actions currently identified. Should it become apparent that any actions undertaken will need an IIA, this will be completed separately.</p>

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>See previous report “Unpaid Carers Services Review 2024” report (appendix 5.01) for details of the consultation carried out under that process.</p>

	The updates on the PSOW “Own Initiative Investigation” into Carers Services, the “Track the Act” report and the opening of the NEWCIS Carers Centre did not require consultation on our behalf. Consultation was carried out by the individual organisations themselves.
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5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Unpaid Carers Services Review 2024
5.02	The Public Services Ombudsman of Wales (PSOW), Own Initiative Investigation into Carers Services. https://www.ombudsman.wales/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Are-we-caring-for-our-carers-An-Own-Initiative-investigation-into-the-administration-of-carers-needs-assessments-in-Wales.pdf
5.03	PSOW Investigation Action Plan (November 2024)
5.04	Carers Wales - Track the Act Report - monitoring and evaluating how the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) is working for unpaid carers. https://www.carersuk.org/media/x5odnlk5/track-the-act-6-english-compressed.pdf

6.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
6.01	Contact Officer: Naomi Harper, Planning and Development Officer Telephone: 07918 616425 E-mail: naomi.harper@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Direct Award: Occurs when a contract is awarded to a contractor without a competitive tender process. Social Service (Wales) Well-being 2014 Act: This Act sets out the legal duties and powers of local authorities in Wales to provide care and support for adults, children and carers. It also covers the assessment, charging, financial assessment, looked after children and looked after children's accommodation.