

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol ar Gwella mynediad at gymorth i ofalwyr di-dâl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Improving access to support for unpaid carers](#).

UC27: Ymateb gan: Gyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol Torfaen | Response from: Torfaen County Borough Council

Improving access to support for unpaid carers

Consultation Response

[REDACTED]

Commissioning Officer, on behalf of Torfaen County Borough Council

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Torfaen Unpaid Carers

According to the 2021 Census, Torfaen's population was 92,300. Of that, 10,500 (11.4%) people identified as unpaid carers?

However, this is likely to be much more as many people who care for someone especially their partner or child do not class themselves as carers.

1. What are the main barriers faced by unpaid carers in Torfaen in accessing the support they need; including any specific challenges for carers based on factors such as age, ethnicity or where they live;

Unpaid carers in Torfaen face significant barriers to accessing support, including a lack of service awareness, financial hardship, and insufficient provision of culturally sensitive care. Specific challenges affect carers based on their age, ethnicity, and location, as shown by reports from Carers UK, Carers Trust Wales, and research into social care in Wales.

General barriers for unpaid carers

Lack of awareness and information: Many carers are not aware of what services are available to them and may not even identify with the term "carer," which prevents them from seeking help. Reports indicate that over one-third of carers in the UK and Wales feel this is a barrier.

Stigma and self-perception: Some carers, particularly in certain communities, may see caring as a familial or spousal duty rather than an additional role that requires external

support. Fear of intervention or judgement can also cause carers to hide their responsibilities.

Financial pressures: Many unpaid carers face significant financial hardship. This is worsened by inadequate benefits like Carer's Allowance and the high cost of replacement care. A 2024 report highlighted that more than half of carers worry about living costs and managing financially.

Access issues with social services: In Wales, many carers who attempt to get support from social care services face long wait times, and many services are not available when needed. Half of those who received a Carer's Needs Assessment did not feel supported by the local authority afterwards.

Specific challenges for different groups

By age

Young carers:

Educational attainment: Young carers are at higher risk of poorer educational outcomes, and many struggle to balance caring with school or college. A group of young carers in Torfaen met with local officials to raise the issue of not receiving their Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) if they miss lectures due to caring duties.

Social isolation: Many young carers experience isolation and feel unable to take part in social and leisure activities with their peers. The Torfaen Young Carers Service aims to combat this by providing social groups and trips.

Well-being: Young carers report higher levels of stress and poor mental and physical health.

Older carers: Research indicates that older carers report greater difficulty in finding and accessing support than younger carers.

By ethnicity

Minority ethnic carers:

Cultural perception of care: Carers from minority ethnic communities are less likely to self-identify as carers, as they often view it as a family responsibility rather than a role that needs external support.

Lack of culturally sensitive services: There is a significant gap between the support available and the needs of minority ethnic carers in Wales. This includes a lack of understanding of cultural practices and assumptions made by service providers.

Language barriers: Limited English skills can create practical barriers to accessing information and services, sometimes forcing young family members to act as translators.

Awareness and trust: These communities are less likely to be aware of support services and may have a lack of trust in statutory service providers.

By location

Rural carers: While specific data for rural areas of Torfaen is limited, rural carers in Wales often face issues with service accessibility due to poor transport links and potentially less frequent provision. Accessing online services can also be a challenge for those with limited internet access.

Local support in Torfaen

While these barriers persist, Torfaen Council and local partners offer specific services to address them:

Torfaen Carers Support: Offers a support worker to provide signposting, practical assistance, and help building support networks.

Bridging the Gap: A respite scheme, funded by the Welsh Government, that provides unpaid carers with much-needed breaks.

Torfaen Young Carers Service: Provides one-to-one support, social opportunities, and a Young Carer ID card for those under 18.

Carers Support Fund: Provides grants for essential items like household appliances, food vouchers, and IT equipment.

2. What is the current availability of respite care in Torfaen, including levels of variation across Gwent in the other LA regions

In Torfaen, respite care includes residential and family-based options, as well as new funding schemes for carers. Availability varies across the Gwent region, with Monmouthshire seeing a recent decrease in demand for a council-run residential respite home and Newport having several private providers

Respite care in Torfaen

Torfaen County Borough Council provides or commissions several types of respite care, which can be arranged through a social care support worker, doctor, or community nurse.

Residential respite: Allows the person being cared for to stay in a care home for a short period, giving their carer a break.

Family-based respite (Shared Lives): Matches a person needing care with a family that offers short-term care in their own home. This can involve overnight stays or day-only support.

"Bridging the Gap Gwent" (BTGG) scheme: In January 2024, Torfaen announced its participation in this scheme, which provides funding for unpaid carers to arrange a break. It is available to carers living in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport, or Torfaen.

Respite sessions for children: The council offers supervised play and respite sessions for children with disabilities or behavioral needs during weekends and school holidays.

Variation of availability across Gwent

Availability of specific types of respite care can vary among the five local authority areas that make up Gwent:

A formal assessment is generally required to access publicly funded respite care in any Gwent authority.

Contact your local social services: The first step is to speak with a social worker or another professional to conduct a "What Matters Conversation" or "Carers Needs Assessment".

In Torfaen, you can call Torfaen Social Services at 01495 762200.

Direct payments: Some carers may be eligible for Direct Payments, which provide funding and greater control over arranging their own services.

Private care providers: Families can also directly contact independent care homes and agencies, which often have their own availability.

3. what is the extent to which the demand for carers support services in Torfaen is being assessed and addressed, and current levels of unmet needs;

There is a recognised gap between the demand for carers' support services in Torfaen and the provision available, leading to significant levels of unmet need

Assessments are conducted and services are offered, but broader regional and national data indicate that many carers do not receive adequate support after an assessment or are not connected with services in the first place.

Assessment of demand

Torfaen's demand for carer support is assessed through several mechanisms, primarily driven by the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Population Needs Assessments (PNAs): The Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB), which includes Torfaen, is responsible for conducting regular PNAs. The PNA developed in 2022 is the foundation for planning future service provision. It assesses the extent of need for care and support, including the support needs of carers, using both data and citizen engagement.

Individual Carer Assessments: Any individual in Torfaen who identifies as a carer is entitled to an assessment of their needs by the council's Social Services department.

Carer feedback: Torfaen Council conducts annual surveys with carers who have received an assessment to gather their views. It also encourages ongoing feedback through its "Have Your Say" network.

Collaboration with third sector organisations: The local authority works with partners like the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance and the Carers Trust to gather insights on local needs.

Current provision and addressing needs

Torfaen Council and its partners provide a range of services aimed at addressing the demand from carers:

Carer Support Worker: Offers practical support, information, and signposting tailored to the individual's situation.

Respite care: In partnership with Bridging the Gap (BTGG), Torfaen offers a respite scheme to provide carers with much-needed breaks.

Financial support: This includes Carers Grants, guidance on accessing Carer's Allowance, and the South East Wales Carer Support Fund for financial hardship.

Young Carers Service: Specifically supports over 140 young carers with needs assessments, one-on-one support, social groups, and respite opportunities.

Carer's ID schemes: Offers an Emergency Card Scheme and a Library Card with enhanced borrowing privileges to registered carers.

Unmet needs and systemic challenges

Despite the efforts to assess and address demand, significant gaps remain. These are recognised in regional strategies and reports from national charities.

Low assessment rates: Carers UK reports that many carers across Wales are not receiving assessments. In a 2020 survey, 85% of respondents had not had a carer's needs assessment within the last year, and 41% had never heard of one. This suggests that services are not reaching many of those in need.

Inadequate support post-assessment: A Carers Wales report published in March 2025 indicated that 51% of carers who did have a needs assessment felt their local authority had not supported them afterward. They felt their needs were identified but not met with practical support.

Financial insecurity: The Carers Trust has highlighted the systemic causes of financial hardship for carers. While short-term funding like the Carers Support Fund provides relief, it does not solve the long-term issue of financial resilience.

Impact on well-being: The lack of breaks and support has a direct impact on carers' mental health. A 2025 report noted that many carers feel overwhelmed and have seen a worsening of their mental health.

Accessibility and visibility of services: Many carers, even those actively looking for support online, are not effectively engaging with local authority carer services. This highlights the need for better outreach and communication. The Gwent RPB Area Plan recognises the need for increased public understanding of carers' needs.

4. What is the role of Gwent Regional Partnership Board in the provision of support for unpaid carers, and the effectiveness of current commissioning practices for services;

The Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) is responsible for developing strategic plans and commissioning integrated health and social care services for unpaid carers across the region, guided by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

Its commissioning practices emphasise co-production with carers, but the effectiveness of these efforts is mixed, with some progress noted in specific areas and continued challenges reported in others.

Role of the Gwent Regional Partnership Board

- **Strategic Planning:** The RPB creates a regional Area Plan informed by a Population Needs Assessment (PNA). This plan sets out strategic priorities and identifies the level and range of services required to meet the population's needs, including unpaid carers. A key objective is to ensure carers feel "valued and supported" in their role and overall well-being.
- **Joint Commissioning:** The RPB brings together its six member organisations—Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the councils of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, and Torfaen—to plan and fund services. It also

manages regional funding, such as the Welsh Government's Regional Integration Fund, to finance programs that support unpaid carers.

- Partnership and Collaboration: The RPB facilitates collaboration between its statutory partners and the third sector to deliver integrated services. This includes funding key organisations that provide direct support to carers, such as the Gwent Carers Hub.
- Co-production: The RPB promotes co-production, ensuring unpaid carers and citizens are involved in service design and delivery. It engages with the Gwent Citizens Panel and other stakeholder groups to inform planning and development.

Effectiveness of commissioning practices

Evidence of effectiveness

- Funding for frontline services: The RPB's commissioning has resulted in funding for services that provide direct support to carers, including the Gwent Carers Hub and the "Bridging the Gap" respite scheme, which offer advice, respite, and support groups.
- Third-sector collaboration: Commissioning practices have effectively leveraged third-sector partners, who are often more adept at reaching and engaging carers through various outreach channels and services.
- Specific initiatives: The RPB has piloted effective targeted initiatives, such as the Micro Carers program, which delivered more affordable and flexible care provision while also engaging local college students in social care.

Areas for improvement

- Low uptake and engagement: A 2024 review of the 2022–23 RPB Annual Report found that while services were funded for over 19,000 unpaid carers, only about 2,000 reported feeling less isolated. This low uptake highlights a significant challenge in the effectiveness of existing services and suggests that awareness and accessibility are still insufficient.
- Need for better data: The 2024 committee review noted that further exploration was needed to understand how to improve uptake and gather more positive feedback from carers. This points to a need for more robust evaluation and a feedback loop.
- Consistent accessibility of information: Carers consistently report difficulty accessing information and support despite the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act. Better coordination and communication are needed to ensure information is consistently and easily accessible.
- Improving reporting transparency: A 2024 committee advised the RPB to improve its reporting by reducing jargon and repetition and ensuring ward councillors are better informed about available programs. Better communication is needed to enhance transparency and community-level access to information.
- Impact on diverse communities: While some engagement with ethnic minority communities has occurred, scrutiny committees have queried the effectiveness and reach of outreach efforts to these groups. Commissioning needs to address potential disparities in access and engagement for diverse populations.

5. What are the actions required to improve the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provisions for unpaid carers (including Carers Assessments and support plans).

Improving the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 for unpaid carers requires action in three main areas:

- Raising awareness and identification,
- Improving the quality and consistency of assessments and support plans, and
- Ensuring access to appropriate, preventative support.

1. Identify and value unpaid carers

To ensure carers receive the support they are entitled to, they must first be identified and recognised, both by themselves and by professionals.

- Increase public awareness. Campaigns should help people who do not identify as "carers" understand that their caring responsibilities mean they are eligible for support. Awareness campaigns should use accessible formats and languages, including Welsh, and appear in various settings like learning environments, community centers, and GP surgeries.
- Educate professionals. All professionals, including those in health, social care, and education, should be trained to recognise unpaid carers and understand their rights under the Act. They should then actively offer information, advice, and assistance.
- Enhance hospital discharge processes. The hospital discharge process is a key point for identifying new carers. Hospital staff must identify carers, consult with them meaningfully, and inform them of their right to a Carer's Needs Assessment.
- Encourage employers and schools to identify carers. Promote employer initiatives like the Carers' Passport scheme and accreditation for schools to help them identify and support student and employee carers.
- Commit to using consistent terminology. The Welsh Government and its partners should use the term "unpaid carer" consistently and establish clear language principles to avoid confusion.

2. Improve the quality and consistency of assessments and support plans

Carer's Needs Assessments should be consistently person-centred and outcomes-focused across all local authorities.

- Promote co-production. Carers should be involved as equal partners in the design, delivery, and review of services. Their voices and experiences should inform assessment practice, training, and policy decisions.
- Improve practitioner skills. Practitioners need consistent guidance and skills training to conduct high-quality, outcomes-focused "what matters" conversations with carers. Toolkits and resources developed by bodies like Social Care Wales can help standardise this process.
- Address inconsistent practice. The Welsh Government must take greater leadership to address the regional disparities in assessment practices and eligibility criteria. This

includes producing a clear Action and Implementation Plan that addresses the findings of previous reviews.

- Strengthen monitoring systems. Managers must implement monitoring systems to ensure that all aspects of the Carer's Needs Assessment are delivered in practice, as required by the statutory codes of practice.
- Use standardised data. Local authorities, Health Boards, and NHS Trusts must work together to ensure that care and support plans use a consistent minimum core data set across regions.

3. Ensure access to preventative, flexible support

To promote well-being and prevent carer burnout, support must be accessible, flexible, and responsive.

- Expand access to short breaks. Develop a national model for breaks in Wales and explore innovative options beyond traditional replacement care. This includes activities for health and wellbeing, psychological support, and different types of respite.
- Improve access to information, advice, and assistance (IAA). Local authorities and health boards must improve access to timely and appropriate IAA, including signposting to community and third-sector support. This addresses the digital divide and ensures non-digital alternatives are available.
- Ensure financial resilience. Carers need access to financial advice, information on benefits (like Carer's Allowance), and support with managing direct payments. Financial assessments for support should be fair and transparent.
- Improve access to advocacy. Ensure that all carers can access advocacy services, especially those who cannot fully participate in discussions about their support needs.
- Promote multi-agency collaboration. Services for carers must be better integrated across health, social care, education, and the third sector. Relevant partners, including the NHS, must cooperate to deliver well-being outcomes for carers.