

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.](#)

UC28: Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru | Response from: Welsh Local Government Association

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# WLGA response to the Inquiry on improving access to support for unpaid carers

September 2025

## About Us

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all local authorities determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA also appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
3. The WLGA works closely with and is often advised by professional advisors and professional associations from local government, however, the WLGA is the representative body for local government and provides the collective, political voice of local government in Wales.

## Introduction

4. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry on improving access to support for unpaid carers. Unpaid carers are the backbone of our health and social care system, providing essential care and support that enables thousands of people across Wales to live with dignity and independence. Their contribution is estimated to save public services billions of pounds annually, yet many carers face significant challenges in accessing the support to which they are entitled.
5. This inquiry is particularly important for local government because the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places clear statutory duties on local authorities to assess and support carers. Local authorities are at the frontline of delivering these responsibilities and remain committed to ensuring carers are recognised, valued and supported to live a life alongside caring. The findings of this inquiry has the potential to influence how councils plan, commission, and deliver services for carers. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry, providing a critical opportunity to examine the current provision of, and access to services for unpaid carers across Wales, and identify changes to improve statutory support and enable unpaid carers to sustain a life beyond caring, helping to ensure sustainability for the future.

## Demand for Services

6. According to the 2021 Census, there are over 310,000 (1 in 10 of the population) people caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend across Wales. This is the highest proportionate figure of all UK countries<sup>1</sup>, with 103,594 people in Wales providing over 50 hours of unpaid care per week.
7. The demographic changes being seen across the UK mean that the number of unpaid carers will continue to increase. An ageing population with improved life expectancy for people with long term conditions or complex disabilities means the need for more high-level care provided for longer. We are likely to see more older people in a caring role, with the number of carers over 85 predicted to double in the next 20 years<sup>2</sup>. Increasing hours of care often results in the general health of carers deteriorating incrementally. Unpaid carers who provide high levels of care for sick, or disabled relatives and friends, are more than twice as likely to suffer from poor health compared to people without caring responsibilities<sup>3</sup>. Caring responsibilities can have an adverse impact on the physical and mental health, education and employment potential of those who care, leading to more than 1 in 4 unpaid carers living in poverty in Wales<sup>4</sup>, which can result in significantly poorer health and quality of life outcomes. These in turn can affect a carers effectiveness and lead to the admission of the cared for person to hospital or residential care, placing further pressure on our already over-stretched system.
8. A growing number of carers (22%) are caring for more than one person<sup>5</sup> with some caring for four or more people. The impact on the mental health of these unpaid carers is particularly concerning with 25% more of them reporting bad or very bad mental health than those caring for one person (60% compared to 35%), and over 80% feeling often or always overwhelmed. There is evidence that the oldest carers are providing the highest number of hours of care a week and are worried about those they care for when they are unable to do so.
9. In one 2023 report, it was identified that half of unpaid carers in Wales delay their own health treatments<sup>6</sup> because they feel they cannot take a break from their caring responsibilities, and are unable to prioritise their own needs. This may lead to longer recovery times or unplanned hospital admissions due to a health crisis and emergency care needing to be provided for the cared for.
10. Many do not define themselves as 'carers', but a family member, friend or neighbour – however the act of caring, the time it involves, the physical and emotional expenditure, the impact on working life and social networks can significantly affect the carer's health and wellbeing, financial security and ability to meet their own life-time's goals.
11. Carers have been particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed<sup>7</sup>, and then by the cost of living crisis<sup>8</sup> adding to the financial and other pressures.

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<sup>1</sup> [facts-about-carers-march-2025-final.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> Social Care Wales – Care and Support in Wales: National Population Assessment Report

<sup>3</sup> [NHS commissioning » Carer Facts – why investing in carers matters \(england.nhs.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Wales](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Carers Wales State of Caring 2024 The Impact of caring on carers health and wellbeing](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/media/wrnfh0mg/sociw23-health-design-final-eng-compressed.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [Report highlights challenges faced by unpaid carers during pandemic - Public Health Wales](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Fuel prices and the cost of living: making a bad situation worse for unpaid carers and domiciliary care](#)

In addition, a 2022 report found that almost a third of carers felt lonely often or always<sup>9</sup>. The impacts of loneliness on physical and mental health<sup>10</sup> places an extra risk for unpaid carers and threatens the stability of the health and social care system.

12. The demand for unpaid carers' support is growing at a pace that outstrips available resources, creating a widening gap that threatens the sustainability of our health and social care system. Without coordinated action to recognise, value, and support unpaid carers, we risk not only the wellbeing of carers themselves but also the stability of the services that depend on them. Addressing this challenge must be a national priority, requiring investment, innovation, and partnership to ensure that carers are recognised as essential partners in delivering better outcomes for individuals, families and communities across Wales.

## Financial Context

13. Councils deliver over 700 services, many of which directly contribute to improving well-being and addressing the social factors that influence health. These include housing, employment, welfare, leisure, and transport—all of which play a crucial role in supporting carers' health and well-being. However, according to Audit Wales<sup>11</sup> over the past decade core local government funding has decreased in real-terms by 0.55%. Councils have sought to protect statutory services such as social care as much as possible. However, this has led to significant reductions in non-statutory, preventative community services—like leisure, parks, adult education, housing, transport, and community facilities—which are essential to supporting carers' health and well-being.
14. While local government has managed to shield communities from the worst effects of the cuts, the cumulative impact is now threatening essential services—including those that support carers. Financial pressures are expected to further intensify over future years. For 2026-27 councils are facing an estimated pressure of over £550m, and that is just to maintain current service levels. Social care accounts for over a third of this pressure.
15. The local government funding position has serious consequences for wellbeing. Councils' capacity to deliver vital well-being support is being significantly weakened by ongoing reductions in their budgets. This restricts social care which, in turn, constrains the voluntary sector and care providers. This all points to the need to urgently reform our current arrangements and take on the complex task of developing a long-term sustainable funding framework for social care. There is a desperate need for this work to lead to the provision of an additional source of funding for local government as part of an overall settlement that provides sustainable funding for all the vital services that councils deliver.
16. To realise our ambitions for carers and to fulfil the aims of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Welsh Government must ensure that local authorities receive sufficient funding to meet the increasing responsibilities placed upon them. Additional funding must reflect the reality of growing demand, inflationary pressures and workforce challenges. Without adequate investment, councils will struggle to meet statutory duties and unpaid carers will continue to experience significant inequality of access.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/media/lrzlh5p/compressed-carers-wales-state-of-caring-in-wales-2022-report-english-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [Health-and-loneliness-in-Wales.pdf](#)

<sup>11</sup> [No time to lose: Lessons from our work under the Well-being of Future Generations Act](#)

## Provision of Services

17. Local government has welcomed the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, but there is a need to recognise the increasing expectations that are being placed on councils at a time of reducing resources. Working alongside Welsh Government, councils have played (and continue to play) a key role in supporting the implementation of the legislation. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act sets out important legislative changes for carers, crucially giving them the same recognition and parity of esteem with those they support. Councils have a duty to offer assessments and support plans for carers, developed with them as equal partners, and with the goal of enabling carers to live the life they want to achieve. The Act provides a strong legislative framework for carers' rights, but its implementation is challenging in the current context
18. The Act requires each region to produce and publish a Regional Population Needs Assessment, which evaluates the care and support needs within their area—carers being a key focus. These plans consistently highlight the essential role of unpaid carers and express a commitment to improving access to appropriate breaks and respite care that reflect the diverse and often complex needs of those being cared for. Regions recognise that all carers—regardless of age—need opportunities to take a break from their caring responsibilities, and that flexible, tailored respite options are crucial to helping them continue in their roles.
19. Here, Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) can play an important role in bringing together health, social care and the third sector to plan services, and there are positive examples of innovation emerging from RPB-funded initiatives. Some regions offer a range of options, including residential respite, day opportunities and in-home services. However, workforce and provider capacity can be a limiting factor. Residential respite services, along with emergency and flexible respite options remain under pressure due to high demand and workforce shortages.
20. Councils have introduced innovative solutions, including sitting services and community-based micro-enterprises, often in partnership with the third sector. These approaches are highly valued by carers because they provide flexibility and enable care to be delivered in familiar environments. However, these initiatives are often smaller in scale and reliant on short-term funding. Many regions are actively exploring more adaptable respite solutions to meet specialist needs, such as those related to autism or dementia. There is also growing awareness of the need to plan for the future needs of older carers and to support them in preparing for what lies ahead. However, the impact of funding cuts continue to impede councils' ability to maintain and expand such services. Some regions have raised concerns about the sustainability of carer services, particularly where delivery relies on third sector organisations that are often dependent on short-term grant funding.
21. Whilst much work is ongoing the SCIE report, 'Preventative support for adult carers in Wales' identified that considerable challenges remain in providing consistent support and better outcomes for carers across the UK. The report found that the most effective services in both England and Wales have been developed in response to local priorities, shaped by a strong carer voice at local level, and supported by proactive partnership working between health, social care and the voluntary sector. They aim to provide person-centred, holistic support tailored to specific needs. One of the key messages of the research is that caring is

more than a health and social care issue, and to develop caring communities, carers' rights need to be embedded within broader health, social and employment policies.

22. One of the overarching challenges is identification, both encouraging people to self-identify as a carer but also with health and care professionals identifying carers, so that carers are able to access the information and support that is available. When carers do not identify themselves as carers but see the support they provide as a natural part of their relationship with the cared-for person they may be reluctant to come forward and fail to access benefits or support services, which could improve their quality of life. A previous poll published by Carers UK highlighted that, "the public is unable to recognise friends and family that care" with 51 per cent of those polled underestimating the number of carers in their own family, friendship network or workplace<sup>12</sup>. Carers UK's 'Missing Out' report noted that in Wales 55 per cent of carers took more than a year to recognise their caring role, while 24 per cent took more than five years to identify as a carer.
23. Early intervention, identifying carers before they reach crisis point, is crucial, as is identifying priorities and outcomes for carers on an individual basis once they have come forward to provide the right level and type of support. This has shown to be particularly true in relation to older carers (aged 80 years old or above) looking after a spouse or partner, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic carers, LGBTQ+ carers, and carers of people with dementia or mental health issues where there may be perceived to be an element of stigma and a wish to keep things private.
24. Issues of identification are compounded by those of accessibility. Carers living in remote or rural communities in Wales will have specific needs where social isolation, poverty, deprivation, lack of transport and long distances to travel to access health and care services mean that rural carers face additional challenges in accessing services. For example, if there are significant transport times this has an impact on the availability and length of time of respite care. There are also additional challenges for carers from minority ethnic backgrounds and for Welsh-speaking carers, who may struggle to find culturally appropriate or Welsh-medium services. Specific groups, such as young carers and older carers, also require targeted support. Many young carers experience disruption to their education and social development. Older carers, often managing their own health needs, are at greater risk of isolation and ill health if they cannot access breaks. These barriers underline the need for a more coherent and nationally coordinated approach.
25. In Wales we need to have an overarching ambition to make being identified as a 'carer' a positive, with the support of our communities, so that more people can ask for support - and not just monetary help – to look after their own health, and ultimately benefit the whole of society, with a focus on encouraging people to self-identify as carers as a route to unlocking support from the community, public sector and businesses.
26. There is a need for practical recommendations on how to support carers who do not self-identify. The NHS and GPs are crucial in helping to identify carers, but there may also be more community-based or voluntary services adept at identifying and supporting carers. There may also be particular groups that are more difficult to identify. Working with other sectors, for instance faith groups, may open other avenues for engaging with these groups.

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<sup>12</sup> [Unpaid carers missing out on vital support as 'public is unable to recognise friends and family that care' - Carers UK](#)

27. Too many carers also leave employment or reduce their working hours to balance caring responsibilities with their work and thereby miss out on career progression, improved pay, or training and development. Carers not in employment, education or training should have opportunities to access the right information, advice and support to develop the skills to gain suitable employment, whether re-entering the workforce, or getting a job for the first time without leaving the person they care for at risk due to other services not being present to support them. As part of this consideration needs to be given as to how both employers, of all sizes, and education settings can be supported to be able to change existing practices. This includes ensuring that unpaid carers have access to flexible working arrangements. Some councils already demonstrate good practice in this area by offering enhanced flexibility and, in some cases, additional unpaid leave entitlements to support carers in balancing work and caring responsibilities. In addition the Carers Leave Act 2024 provides employees with the statutory right to take up to one week of unpaid leave per year to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. While this provides some additional employment protection, it also may not be accessible for some unpaid carers with financial issues, including those living in poverty for whom the loss of a weeks wage could be particularly difficult to manage leading to poorer health outcomes for the carer and those that they care for.
28. A vital element of a preventative approach is for all carers to receive the right information and advice when needed and in an appropriate format. Many carers do not need to access formal statutory or specific social services or health provision but simply require the right information, in the right format, at the right time, in order to manage their caring role. Knowing where and how to access different forms of information, advice and assistance such as welfare benefits or more general rights, can also be preventative. Not all carers will access local authority Information, Advice and Assistance services and so there is a need to raise awareness of alternative ways of accessing information such as GPs, community services, or online resources such as DEWIS Cymru. This highlights that the responsibility for supporting carers is much wider than just social services. There is a need to ensure that all partners, organisations and departments such as education, housing, welfare, GPs, health, transport, as well as employers are fully aware of the importance of the role that they can play. Raising awareness of carers' rights is essential, and a national multilingual information campaign to complement local efforts would help ensure carers in all communities understand their rights and know where to go for support.
29. In previous evidence we have highlighted the importance of the workforce, and in particular the need to ensure that unpaid carers are recognised, valued and included as part of the workforce planning to ensure carers receive appropriate training and support for the roles they undertake. It was positive to see 'A Healthier Wales' identify the need to recognise and support the vital role played by the informal workforce of unpaid carers and the need for greater parity of esteem not just between health and care professionals, but with carers as well. The long-term social care workforce strategy provides an opportunity to ensure that the workforce we have in Wales, including carers, feel valued and supported and are enabled to access relevant education, training and support opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

30. Local authorities remain committed to supporting unpaid carers and delivering on the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. However, the current

system is under immense pressure. Councils are operating in a context of increasing complexity of need, rising demand, workforce shortages and sustained financial pressures. These challenges are shared across the public sector and the third sector, and they limit the capacity to deliver consistent respite services and broader support for carers. Despite these constraints, councils have worked innovatively, including with Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs), health boards and voluntary organisations to deliver support where possible.

31. Councils are keen to continue to work with Welsh Government, carers and carers organisations to make sure that carers are fully supported and signposted to services to avoid them and families reaching crisis point and care breakdown. It is fundamentally important for society as a whole that carers have the support they need to maintain their own wellbeing and to be able to lead fulfilling lives; to maintain social relationships; undertake education and training; maintain employment; and be active community members.