Herefordshire Council

Title	Scrutiny Briefing Paper for Community Activities, Respite and Shared Lives
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Introduction

This paper has been developed to provide an update to members of Scrutiny on services which provide meaningful activity to vulnerable adults eligible for care under the Care Act 2014. These services support families and carers to have a break and are categorised in the following services: community activities, respite and Shared Lives[1].

The Herefordshire All-Age Carers Strategy 2024-2029 Herefordshire All-Age Carers Strategy 2024-29 recognises the critical role of Carers. It focuses on prevention and a strengths-based approach to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care.

Community Activities Framework

Community activities are a valuable part of the Council's preventative services, promoting the independence of participants and reducing people's need for other types of support, including home care, residential care and supported living. They provide meaningful activities for people with a range of needs, including people with a learning disability, autism, physical disability, and those with mental health needs. These services are provided for the cared for person as part of their assessed needs and can also give the carer a break, although these services are not termed respite in their usual sense. Services are advertised on Talk Community Directory Search - Talk Community Directory.

The Council's priorities for these services are that:

- people are supported to be as independent as possible, doing things that they choose to do, within their own community.
- carers are supported to continue in their caring role.
- services offer value for money.

A review carried out in 2022 concluded services are generally of good quality and are person-centred, people who access the services are generally positive about the activities they do and the people who support them. The review also concluded the need for the Council to manage the pricing of the activities, comply with procurement legislation, and to have a clearer contractual position to enable this. A subsequent service review in 2022 was approved by the Commissioning Board and the proposal to procure a new framework was signed off by the Directorate Leadership Team.

Once approvals were sought to procure a new framework, work got underway to co-design the service specification with stakeholders including people who access the services and community activity providers who were delivering services at the time. An invitation to tender followed in early 2024 which concluded in the summer of 2024. A new Community Activity Framework was set up and went live on 1 September 2024 with the aim to:

- Promote independence through constructive, purposeful, stimulating and safe activities
- Help people feel connected to their community and develop friendships
- Enable carers to continue in their caring role through access to respite and breaks

[1] Short breaks provision provided for children and young people is covered by other reports.

- Support people to become work ready as part of their transition into employment
- Support people to develop other useful life skills such as managing personal budgets

Currently there are 13 providers on the community activity framework, 6 are actively providing community activity provisions. Based on data as of 28th February 2025, we directly commissioned community activities for 192 individuals and 193 individuals receive funding through a direct payment to attend community activities.

There are available spaces to attend activities with all the framework providers but not for all of the projects they provide. At present no provider has a waiting list for activities but some providers have noted that some projects are becoming popular and at full capacity so they may consider a waiting list.

Some of the activities available through the community activity framework.

- Drama groups
- Cookery classes
- Exploring the community
- Working with animals
- Growing and selling produce
- Upcycling furniture
- Woodwork activities
- Craft sessions
- Radio presenting sessions

Table 1 shows the types of service provision by level of need, the types of activity and the range of costs. Costings for Community Activities vary based on level of support provided at the provision.

Table 1. Costs for Community Activities

General low needs group activities	General group activities including (but not limited to) workshops, retail, woodworking, crafts, theatre and arts, gardening, etc	£50.00-£55.00 per day
Activities with specialist support	Activities including those with specialised professional support such as OTs, physio etc	£60 to £65 per day
1:1 and other intensive support	1:1 and other intensive support services	£100 to £110 per day
Specialist day care exclusively for older adults (typically 65 years plus)	Activities specifically for over 65 year olds	£60 to £65 per day

Some providers chose not to enter the framework or were unsuccessful in their bid and continue to operate services funded via direct payments. Many of the providers who deliver community

activities both on and off the framework are affiliated with Herefordshire Activities Together Herefordshire Activities Together | Support | Herefordshire, UK, a network of voluntary and community sector providers working collaboratively to develop specialist support for vulnerable adults. Membership to HAT includes the following providers and activities:

- Affinity Trust – day services, skills development in the community and day trips
- Aspire – day services, skills development in café, gardening and day trips
- Autism West Midlands
- Choices Foundation – community interest company providing work-based activities and training in woodwork
- The Cart Shed – working farm for 14-25 years to learn skills
- Echo – Radio Echo channel, woodwork workshop, arts and crafts, community garden, storytelling and theatre productions.
- EnviroAbility
- The Horizon Centre – arts, crafts, gardening and woodwork
- Headway Herefordshire – therapeutic support, rehabilitation and wellbeing day services
- Herefordshire Community Farm
- Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support (HVOSS)
- Herefordshire MIND
- Houghton – farm project
- Marches Family Network – family activities
- MiEnterprise – café
- Walsingham Support Creative Learning – variety of provision

Plans will be developed to review community activities provision in Herefordshire, focussing on better use of existing building-based provision, technology focussed support, preventing loneliness and isolation, maximising independent living and reduction or elimination of the need for an ongoing care packages by building natural supports and resilience, building on the strengths – skills – aspirations of individuals, to increase confidence, and for some individuals providing opportunities to work towards paid work.

The design of the review will include stakeholders, including individuals who currently access the community activities provision and young people who will be the coming into adult services in the coming years.

Respite

The term respite is used to describe care that is delivered to a person to enable their family Carer to take a break from their caring responsibilities. It enables the person needing the break to look after themselves so they can continue providing support without becoming exhausted. Respite services are assessed by professionals who determine eligibility for support under the Care Act 2014. Eligibility for support is based solely on whether the carer's role has or is likely to have a 'significant impact' on their wellbeing and as a result they are unable to achieve one or more of the wellbeing outcomes described in the Care Act.

Support can be for a few hours during the day to enable a carer to go out or it can be overnight or for longer periods. Usually, respite is categorised in two ways, planned or emergency support. The identification of need is captured via Carer's Assessments carried out by adult social care professionals, usually Social Workers.

Respite services that are delivered in Herefordshire include the following provisions both bed based, and non-bed based shown in table 2 and include capacity and the current block price per year.

Table 2. Herefordshire Respite Offer

Service Name	Provider Name	Number of Beds	Block Price Per Week	Block Price Per Year
Southbank (adults with disabilities)	Hoople Ltd	5 beds	£1,337.13	£347,654*
Orchard House (older adults)	Shaw Healthcare	10 beds	£737.29	£384,454
Spot nursing residential respite	Various	Various	N/A	£170,000
Shared Lives	Various	Various	N/A	£58,000
Direct payments and replacement care at home	Various	Various	N/A	£0
Total annual budget				£960,108

Southbank Respite Service (Hoople Care Ltd) is service delivered by Hoople Care. It consists of 5 beds as part of a wider 13-unit residential care service for adults with learning disabilities. Bookings are taken directly with the service on a 24-hr period, although the usual length of stay is 3-4 days over a long weekend. Utilisation rates require focus as report of under use shows bed occupancy across the entire Southbank provision as 87%. Refurbishment works are currently underway as part of a phased approach to modernise the building following successful bids to the Council's capital programme, as well as engagement with young people, adults and their families to help shape the future provision.

Orchard House (Shaw Health Care) has a respite service that is part of a larger block contract for residential care which has been in place since 2004. The service supports people with low-mid level dementia. Analysis shows some underutilisation of beds since the pandemic, and this is being addressed as part of a wider transformation project.

In 2023/24, in addition to the commissioned bed-based services, the Council commissioned respite care from a further 22 residential care homes on a spot contract basis. In the same year the Council also commissioned respite from 9 care homes with nursing. The total value of the spot contracted overnight respite spend in 2023/24 was £103,536.93 on 117 weeks of respite for 65 people, equating to an average of 1.8 weeks respite per person. In addition, those people requiring overnight respite with nursing care was £27,280.83 on 27 weeks of respite for 19 people, equating to 1.4 weeks of respite per person.

Shared Lives

Shared Lives is a service provision registered under the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014. This is separate from the Local Authority CQC regulation.

Herefordshire's Shared Lives Scheme Shared Lives Scheme – Herefordshire Council has a dedicated CQC Registered Manager, reporting to CQC on a regular basis and managing a small team of Shared Lives Coordinators whose role includes:

- Robust assessment and training of Shared Lives carer applicants.
- Presentation of completed assessments to independent Shared Lives Panel for quality assurance and to make recommendations to the registered manager regarding approval.
- Introductions and matching of Shared Lives carers with referred individuals.
- Supporting, monitoring and reviewing the Shared Lives arrangements. This involves a minimum of quarterly face to face contact with the households. Included in this are annual Shared Lives carer reviews, environmental health and safety checks, risk assessments, annual Individual Arrangement reviews and Individual Plan updates, medication competency checks, general support and guidance. The team also update and work with the locality teams.

The ethos of Shared Lives is that the providers (Shared Lives carers) are willing to share their home and family / community life with an individual (or up to a maximum of three at any time) who has support needs.

Shared Lives carers are self-employed people who enter into an agreement with Herefordshire Council Shared Lives. They are paid as part of the adult social care workforce as individual suppliers, receiving a care and support fee from the LA, while rent and food and utilities are paid to them directly by the individuals they support (or their representatives), from their benefits. The Shared Lives carer uses their home as their base and Shared Lives income is tax exempt.

Long-term, short breaks and now Shared Days arrangements for adults who have eligible care and / or support needs are offered. This is done by carefully matching individuals, usually referred by social workers following a Care Act Assessment, with the Shared Lives Carers. Shared Days is a model implemented in other areas where family carers have benefited from as a source of person-centred respite. In Herefordshire this is an area that is currently being scoped as part of the service offer. Predominately, the service supports adults with learning disabilities and/or autism (approx. 75%) but has expanded to support people with other primary support needs.

The service is making improvements with the aim to increase the number of shared lives settings for both permanent and respite placements. The service is proactively working with the Council's marketing team to promote becoming a Shared Lives Carer. Increasing capacity to be able to offer more overnight respite could help reduce reliance on residential care homes for those will lower dependency needs and provide a more personal home-from home.

On 1 March 2025 there are 60 individuals supported in long-term arrangements and 10 in short breaks arrangements within the Shared Lives provision. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the types of households providing Shared Lives, a description of the individuals and the range of costs.

Table 2. Shared Lives Households and Costs

Shared Lives Households	
Current households	45
Current Shared Lives Carers	68 (within the 45 households)
In assessment process	2
Approved support carers (can provide alternative support in the absence of the main carer only in the home of the main carer)	22
Households providing long-term arrangements	34

	(some do both long-term and short term)
Household providing short-breaks arrangements	18 (some do both short term and long term)
Households willing to offer Shared Days	12
Individuals Supported / Living in Shared Lives	
Long term arrangements	52
Short breaks arrangements **external**	4
Short breaks arrangements **internal (included for work involved these are main Shared Lives carer beaks arrangements**	(15)
Primary Support Reason[2]	
People who have a learning disability	48
People with mental health support needs	6
Autistic people or people with an autistic spectrum condition	12
People diagnosed as living with dementia	4
Age Range of People Supported	
18-24	6
25-29	3
30-44	8
45-64	29
65+	10
Weekly Rates	
Standard rate / enhanced rate Long- term arrangements (25/26	£381.40 / £454.78
Standard rate / enhanced rate Short- breaks arrangement (25/26)	£555.27/ £628.61
Sessional day rates Shared Days (up to 6 hours)	£74.13
Sessional half say rates Shared Days (up to 3 hours)	£37.06

The cost of Shared Lives is broken down in table 3 into age categories and shows small difference in the weekly average cost of support for 18–64year old when compared to people aged 65yrs+.

Table 3. Shared Lives Costs

Age	Number of People	Gross Weekly Cost	Council Weekly Cost[3]	Average Gross Weekly Cost
18-64yrs	42	£18,753.28	£14,454.64	£446.51
65yrs+	10	£4,175.36	£2,809.81	£417.54
Total	52	**£22,928.64**	**£17,264.45**	**N/A**

[2] Primary support reason as described by The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework 2014/15

[3] Council Weekly Cost is the gross weekly cost minus health contributions and client contributions, to give the cost to Herefordshire Council.

The Shared Lives service is working to raise greater awareness and promotion of the service to attract new applicants given there is an ageing population of Shared Lives Carers and approvals for them are almost matched with those retiring. The service is also keen to implement digital and technological solutions to support the provision and enhance independence for people living with Shared Lives Carers. Connectivity with the children's fostering and children and young people's teams aims to create a holistic offer for care leavers by supporting foster carers to become Shared Lives Carers.

Direct Payments

For people seeking greater flexibility or choice in how and when their care and support is delivered, Direct Payments (DP's) are available. A DP is a cash payment paid by the local authority following the identification of eligible needs under the Care Act Assessment, instead of providing care and support through services commissioned by the Council. A direct payment can be on-going for example when a person employs their own care and support staff or a one-off payment for a single activity or item. It is mandatory for Councils to offer a direct payment to an adult with Care Act eligible needs, although the person does not have to take one if they choose to receive commissioned services.

Herefordshire Council has a direct payments service Direct payments and personal budgets – Herefordshire Council and employs a team to administer direct payments. The team provides advice on information on the direct payments payment card, support for people to understand the requirements of financial accounting of the direct payment and advice on costs of services and day activities.

The Council has several approved support service providers[4] who will provide specific advice, guidance and support when a DP recipient choses to employ their own staff e.g. advice on paying staff, budgeting and record keeping. They will support with recruitment and selection of staff to ensure DP recipients remain compliant with their duties as an employer, and other general support.

The Council also offers a direct payment care account which is safe and easy to use. It enables DP recipients or their Appointee to pay for services and activities using the card providing greater flexibility.

Many DP recipients in need of respite employ their Personal Assistants (PA's) to provide additional hours rather than seek bed-based respite services. The benefits are the staff are already known to them, the care and support becomes an extension of the care and support they already receive, and staff can do more hours.

The gross weekly cost of DP's is £280,052.63 for 530 people. This gives an average cost of £528.40 per person per week. However, due to the Council's finance systems it is not possible to differentiate between the services delivered and therefore the cost of respite and community activities is not available.

Next Steps

A review of respite provision in late 2024 concluded there are opportunities to rethink the services that provide services to the cared for person to support Carers having a break. There is scope for investment in buildings to support a wider range of needs, traditional models can be replaced with short break initiatives, the community activities offer can be broadened and integrated into mainstream activities, respite for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities needs to

[4] Direct payments approved support providers: Compass Independent Living, Penderels Trust, and Services for Independent Living.

be considered across children and adult services and the use of digital technologies to support individuals regardless of the type of provision.

Herefordshire Council's Delivery Plan for 2025/26 has a focus on community activities with a view to consult with people who attend community activity centres, their families and the providers to understand the areas for improvement and how to create greater independence and integration into community with a revised model of support. To support this, several best practice examples from across the country have been added below to demonstrate what other areas are providing.

Best Practice
The Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE) Practice Examples of Adult Carer's Breaks are given below and provide some early research into alternative models of respite and short breaks.

Example 1 - Call and Care – Home-based respite in Ealing – Provider Dementia Concerns – Voluntary Sector
This is a home-based carers' respite service for people living with dementia and their carers from all communities within Ealing, which is a diverse borough. It is rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission as staff can assist with personal care as needed.

Dementia Concern, which is a voluntary organisation, has run dementia services for 25 years. Carers are offered a weekly break of at least three hours on a regular or occasional basis. Staff provide stimulating activities in the person's own home environment or take them out for walks, social activities, or to pursue hobbies and interests. Activities are tailored to meet the needs of all community groups, respecting their cultural and religious requirements.

Every family accessing the service knows when and where they will receive the service and has a 'short break plan' detailing the frequency, duration and type of short breaks available. From April 2019, the Call and Care service will be funded by fees paid by individual carers and people living with dementia and partial funding from Ealing Council.

The service is co-produced with people who use services and carers in terms of agreeing hours and days of the respite break. A care plan is individually tailored to meet the needs of the person living with dementia to take into consideration their needs, wants, preferences and aspirations.

Regular feedback from services users and carers is requested via surveys, consultation events and a newsletter to inform them about improvements and developments.

Example 2 - CareFree– Annual short breaks in the hospitality industry
Carefree is a multi-award-winning digital charity, Its mission is to offer every full-time unpaid carer in the UK the chance of an annual short break by partnering with the hospitality industry to donate its excess capacity. Carefree is partnered with 130 accommodation providers across the UK, offering circa 1000-3000 donated room nights per month via its online carer break platform.

Full-time unpaid carers can gain access to the Breaks Hub through the organisation's self-referral pathway or by being referred by one of CareFree's 100+ Community Partners nationwide (inc. Local Authorities, NHS Trusts and hyper-local carer support organisations).

97 per cent of CareFree's Community Partners say that Carefree have increased access to breaks in their area, also giving the organisation an average score of 9.4/10 for their experience of working with them. Two thirds cited strengthened voluntary sector delivery as a key benefit of CareFree's work.

There is a £25 admin fee towards the operating costs of the charity for every break booked by a carer which can be paid for by the referral partner, the carer or sponsored by a member of the public.

In 2023 they delivered 3,661 carer breaks. 95% of carers reported an improvement in their wellbeing.88% of carers say they wouldn't have been able to take a break without Carefree and 76% also said they felt less socially isolated following their break.

Example 3 - Fairburn and Stibbs are both registered nursing homes providing short residential breaks for adults with learning and physical disabilities in and around south Gloucestershire and Bristol.

Established for over 25 years, Fairburn has seven beds and Stibbs has 10 beds. The services enable individuals to have time away so all family members can get a break. It provides support to families and carers with continuity of care for the cared-for adults. It currently supports 70 families and carers.

There is a nursing team that provides support across both services as well as a leadership team and a highly skilled support worker team.

Both Stibbs and Fairburn have provided breaks which have avoided families going into crisis or having hospital admissions. The service supports individuals to enhance their independent living skills whilst away from their home and encourages opportunities for social integration within the local communities. It provides networking opportunities for families and professionals, and advice on advocacy, transitional services and health issues. All participants have outcome-focused support plans which cover health and wellbeing. The support is person-centred to ensure that continuity of care is provided. Fairburn and Stibbs work closely with family and other professionals to ensure the support being provided is right for the individual and the flexibility of the service recognises the individuals' needs, wants and wishes.