

## Appendix 2

# Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

## Herefordshire All-Age Carers Strategy 2024-2029

### action plan working group

### Findings

#### Background

On 18 July 2024, Cabinet approved the Herefordshire All-Age Carers Strategy 2024-2029. At this meeting, Cabinet members suggested that the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee may wish to scrutinise any published action plan to support the strategy.

The Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee agreed to scrutinise the action plan, choosing to wait for the plan to be drafted and for the council to appoint a lay chair to the Carers' Partnership Group to oversee delivery of the plan.

Because the committee wished to scrutinise the action plan in detail, it decided to carry out this work in an informal working group. This appendix details the findings and recommendations resulting from this work.

#### Objectives

The group aimed to:

- scrutinise the draft all-age carers' strategy action plan and
- identify opportunities to develop the plan further.

#### Participants

The following people attended the meeting:

- Chair, Carers' Partnership Board
- Head of Service Commissioning – Living Well, Community Wellbeing, Herefordshire Council
- Commissioning Manager – Living Well, Community Wellbeing, Herefordshire Council
- Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Herefordshire Council
- Cllr Pauline Crockett (chair of the group)
- Cllr Jenny Bartlett
- Cllr David Davies

#### Approach

The chair suggested that the meeting format would follow the five thematic sections of the action plan:

- Valuing and Recognition
- Young Carers
- Assessments
- Staying Healthy and
- Information and Guidance.

The group agreed to work through each section methodically to assess progress, identify gaps, and suggest improvements to the action plan. There was also recognition that technology, although not a separate tab in the document, should be considered within relevant sections due to its growing importance in supporting carers.

### **Valuing and recognition**

A key priority discussed was the establishment and function of the Carers Partnership Board, which had already been implemented and held three meetings. Its action plan, being considered in this meeting, has been shared with the partnership board members and partner organisations for comment and further development. The board, chaired by Sylvia Nicholls, includes representatives with lived experience and wide sectoral expertise. It aims to create a safe and effective space for carers to voice needs and shape policy. Sylvia emphasised the importance of officer support from commissioning in making carers feel comfortable and ensuring the board's effectiveness. This support helps carers engage more effectively and contribute to the board's work. Group members highlighted the necessity of integrating this board into the broader governance landscape, including interface with other Partnership Boards to avoid duplication, ensure visibility and accountability.

The group also discussed identifying carer leads within Herefordshire Council to support staff with caring responsibilities. A survey had revealed that approximately 20% of council employees identified as unpaid carers, indicating the importance of internal support. The Commissioning Manager noted that although a designated principal social worker had left, he was ensuring coordination of work to support actions related to the workforce.

It was agreed that it is important that Herefordshire Council continues its work in becoming a carer-friendly organisation. This involves ensuring flexibility of hours and, awareness, of the additional demands faced by employees with caring responsibilities. The group heard that council's long-term vision includes extending these standards into commissioning processes, influencing external providers to also become carer friendly.

Members supported the development of a Carers' Passport system to enhance hospital access and support for carers, including involvement in patient care during admissions. This idea was welcomed by the group, who noted that its success required senior-level buy-in. Wye Valley Trust and mental health support providers were identified by officers and group members as potential early adopters of the passport system.

Training for staff and broader awareness campaigns were emphasised by the group as necessary to ensure carers are recognised and appropriately supported.

## Young carers

The group focussed on the hidden nature of young carers and the impact of caring responsibilities on their education. The subgroup on young carers, including members from public health, early help, and third-sector stakeholders, was commended for its efforts. However, members expressed concern about schools' inconsistent responses.

A group member raised the importance of not leaving school involvement to voluntary participation, advocating for a more structured, possibly mandatory, framework. Officers agreed with the concern, noting that some schools failed to recognise the challenges of their pupils with unpaid caring obligations. Academisation makes it impossible to require schools to adopt any council policy, so the group discussed embedding expectations through early help initiatives and promoting school champions for young carers.

The commissioning manager elaborated on work with the council's education safeguarding lead and upcoming conference engagements to raise awareness among school staff. The group emphasised that schools should apply compassionate and flexible approaches, such as soft starts to the school day, to accommodate young carers' responsibilities.

The partnership chair and others highlighted variability in school staffing and policies, noting that success often depends on the individual headteacher. The importance of linking with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and safeguarding leads was reiterated.

Transport limitations in rural Herefordshire were acknowledged as a significant barrier to participation in support groups. Nonetheless, existing peer support programs like those provided by Herefordshire Young and Young Adult Carers were praised for offering safe and empowering spaces. The use of online and WhatsApp groups was noted as a good practice, and there were calls for further development of these digital resources to aid participation.

The group also discussed the "No Wrong Door" memorandum of understanding, which ensures that young carers identified by any professional are referred appropriately. This initiative requires strategic sign-off but is seen as crucial for interagency cooperation. A similar model from Leeds City Council was cited as a possible benchmark.

Transition planning was also covered. The group stressed that young carers should not fall through service gaps when the cared-for individual transitions to adult services. Consistent support must be maintained through the transition.

## Assessments

There was a consensus on the importance of accessible and timely carers' assessments. These assessments are essential to ensure carers receive the support they need, including financial, respite, and health-related services. The commissioning manager noted the difficulty in using the current MOSAIC system to update social care records and emphasised that better visibility and information sharing, especially through General Practice surgeries and social prescribing, could lead to increased uptake of carer assessments.

The discussion noted that many carers do not self-identify as such and therefore miss out on available support. Raising awareness and normalising the process of identifying as a carer was seen by the group as key to increasing assessment rates. The implementation of the

Carers Passport and awareness in General Practice surgeries were identified as helpful mechanisms for this purpose.

### **Staying healthy**

Health and wellbeing of carers was identified by the group as a critical concern. Carers often neglect their own physical and mental health due to the demands of their role. The group agreed that future iterations of the plan should include actions to support carers' access to healthcare, mental health services, and opportunities for respite.

There was also mention of the indirect support that tech-enabled care solutions can offer. For example, tech developed through the Accelerating Reform Fund, which helps monitor both hydration and falls, could be useful for carers. While originally aimed at expediting hospital discharges, such technologies have potential secondary benefits for carers' peace of mind and should be explored further.

### **Information and guidance**

The group agreed that central, accessible, and up-to-date information is critical. Many carers are unaware of their rights or available support. Carers Links, operated by 2gether as Herefordshire Carer Links, plays a pivotal role. However, members noted that the organisation's website was hard to navigate, and that Herefordshire-specific content was hard to locate. Work is ongoing to update and relaunch these online resources, coinciding with Carers Week in June 2025.

Participants in the meeting raised concerns about the website's failure to mention the Carers Partnership Board. A councillor suggested adding outcomes or links to technology initiatives that support carers, especially those helping people with dementia. The Commissioning Manager agreed to create a new webpage section referencing the tech team's work. The group also discussed making the website more user-friendly and informative to ensure carers can more easily find the support they need.

The action plan aims to ensure consistency of information across council, NHS, and third-sector platforms. Integration and clarity are vital to prevent carers from being passed around services without resolution. Training and guidance for frontline staff were also endorsed to ensure they could direct carers to appropriate support confidently.

### **Next steps**

It was agreed that actions arising from the group would include suggestions for further collaboration with other committees, particularly the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, given the cross-cutting nature of young carers' issues.

The group acknowledged the complexity and significance of the carers' agenda, and appreciation for the contributions made by carers, officers and partner organisations. The work to develop and enact the action plan is clearly ongoing, with many elements in early stages. However, the group also expressed a strong commitment to ensuring the strategy

remains a living document, informed by carers' real experiences and underpinned by tangible, measurable improvements.

The group noted that they had had the opportunity to discuss with officers the suitability of their suggestions to amend the action plan. As everyone attending the working group meeting had agreed upon the final suggestions, the group agreed to not make formal recommendations for the committee to consider. Instead, the working group recommended that the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee consider an update on the action plan at a future meeting of the committee.

<b>Suggested action</b>	<b>Responsible person(s)</b>
Add a technology section to the action plan, referencing Accelerating Reform Fund tools.	Commissioning Manager
Contact the tech team for carer-related metrics.	Commissioning Manager
Improve internal visibility of the Carers Partnership Board and its website presence.	Commissioning Manager
Update Herefordshire Council website with carer support info and partnership board details.	Commissioning Manager
Provide clearer training for Council staff on identifying and supporting carers.	Commissioning Manager and HR/Training Teams
Implement the Carers Passport pilot at Wye Valley Trust.	Commissioning Manager and Wye Valley Trust contact
Engage schools to appoint Young Carer Champions.	Commissioning Manager and Early Help team
Provide school guidance on flexible support for young carers.	Commissioning Manager and Education Leads
Attend and present at the Safeguarding Leads Conference in June 2025	Commissioning Manager
Refer the issue of young carers in education to Children and Young People Committee.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer / Cllr. Crockett
Coordinate with Leeds City Council to learn from their No Wrong Door Memorandum experience.	Commissioning Manager
Monitor and report on young carers support in rural areas and transport access.	Commissioning Manager
Ensure support continues for young carers in transition to adult services.	Commissioning Manager and Transitions Team
Promote Herefordshire Carer Links event in Carers Week (June 2025).	Commissioning Manager and Communications Team

