

Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

12 June 2024

Title	Joint All Age Carers' Strategy for Reading
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Melissa Wise – Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care Lara Patel – Executive Director of Children's Services
Lead Councillor	Cllr Paul Gittings – Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care Cllr Wendy Griffith – Lead Councillor for Children
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee endorses and adopts the Joint All Age Carers Strategy for Reading 2. The Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee endorses the Carers Action Plan to deliver the Joint All Age Carers Strategy and agrees to its associated resources

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Reading has an established Carer's Steering Group bringing partners including Carers together to determine local need and set the direction of travel for services.
- 1.2. A deep dive document was created to better understand the needs of local Carers which highlighted the need for a cohesive strategy outlining services for carers.
- 1.3. The Carer's Steering Group carried out a needs assessment exercise over the summer of 2023.
- 1.4. 147 responses were collected from carers across the borough. This was done via two separate surveys. One for carers who are over 18 years and one for young carers, under 18 years.
- 1.5. Four focus groups were also undertaken during this time, with 44 carers sharing their experiences in this way. These focus groups took place at the Dementia Carers Support Group run by Age UK Reading; a coffee morning at the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE); the Whitley Wood Over 50s Lunch Club and the Coley Park Over 50s Lunch Club.
- 1.6. In addition to the focus groups for adult carers, young carers were supported to take part in this piece of work by Brighter Futures for Children. Specifically, the early help teams who support young carers and deliver a range of young carer's clubs. The team used the young carer's clubs to have informal discussions with young carer's attending.
- 1.7. The Carer's Steering Group formed a Working Group to use the insight gathered during this exercise to inform and develop the Joint All Age Carer's Strategy and Action Plan. 2024-2027.

- 1.8. The 5 key strategic priorities for the Strategy are as follows and will be the focus for the Action Plan for the next 3 years. Where priorities talk about carers, this includes carers of all ages:

Priority 1: Identifying carers and promoting carer's rights

Priority 2: Supporting and recognising carers

Priority 3: Maximising carer's voice

Priority 4: Ensuring culturally competent support is available locally, including carers breaks and crisis support

Priority 5: Supporting carers with employment and learning

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Care Act 2014 gave new rights and recognition to carers, including a duty on local authorities to prevent, reduce and delay their need for support.
- 2.2. The Children Act 1989 "Working Together to Safeguard Children" was last amended on 15 December 2023, and for the first time includes a section on support for young carers which reinforces the requirements of the Young Carers Needs Assessments Regulations. The mandatory statutory guidance also requires that Early Help systems must reflect the potential need for support for children who are young carers.
- 2.3. The last national Carers Strategy was published in 2008, followed by the Carers Action Plan 2018-2020. There has not been a national strategic document for carers since the action plan came to an end in 2020.
- 2.4. On 8th February 2024 the All-Party Political Group (APPG) for Carers launched a survey to gather the views of carers and organisations who represent them. The survey called for a response to the APPG proposal for the UK Government to develop a new National Carers' Strategy. The survey closed 7th March 2024, but the results are yet to be published. However, the chair of the APPG for Carers continues to call for a National Carers' Strategy.
- 2.5. The development of this strategy aligns with Priorities set out in the Berkshire West Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy. All five priorities within the strategy are relevant for carers.
- 2.6. Delivery of this strategy contributes to the delivery of the Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan.

3. The Proposal

Identifying the Need:

- 3.1. 7.5% of Reading's population provide between 9-50+ hours of unpaid care (ONS 2021 census data).
- 3.2. In the most recent ASCOF (Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework) data, carers accessing Adult Social Care in Reading reported a lower quality of life and consistently reported worse outcomes than the regional and national averages. (2023/4) Locally, we have improved in some areas when comparing to 2022/23 data, however, Reading is still below the regional and national averages.¹
- 3.3. Carer identification and data collection is lacking across the Borough – the 2021 census identified 10,985 carers, however across our system partners the figures are not

¹ Please note: 2023/24 ASCOF data is still being fully analysed and so data shared here is preliminary data. Full analysis is expected nationally in late June 2024

representative of this suggesting there is not a clear joined up view of the need which could be resulting in Carers not getting the support they need:

- 3.3.1. There are currently 582 carers registered with Adult Social Care (according to 2022/23 SALT returns) who are actively caring for someone
- 3.3.2. There are 1,855 people receiving Carers Allowance in Reading (as of August 2023, according to the Department for Work and Pensions). This is the latest data.
- 3.3.3. There are currently 4,514 people registered as Caregivers in Reading on the Shared Record System (Connected Care, accessed 25/04/2024).
- 3.3.4. Reading and West Berkshire Carers Partnership have delivered 394 carers assessments, 165 carer contingency plans and have supported 1280 carers with information and guidance since November 2022.
- 3.3.5. Between September 2022 – September 2023 116 young carers were referred to Brighter Futures for Children for a young carers assessment. Of these 116 requests, 99 children and their families agreed to the assessment and 17 declined.
- 3.4. Reading & West Berkshire Carer's Partnership is the jointly commissioned information and advice service for carers in Reading and West Berkshire. They also deliver carer's assessments in Reading. The partnership consists of Age UK Reading, Age UK Berkshire, Reading Mencap and Communicare. The partnership was commissioned to start delivering support to carers locally in November 2022, taking over from the previous provider.
- 3.5. Brighter Futures for Children provide young carers needs assessments in the Early Help teams. They also provide young carer support in the form of young carer's club for young carers aged 5-17 years old.
- 3.6. The Carer's Steering Group is a partnership between Carers, Reading Borough Council, voluntary sector partners and health partners and has been meeting since 2013. The group identified the need for a Reading specific strategy in early 2022 to bring services together, with the voice of carers at the heart.
- 3.7. The Carer's Steering Group engaged with 147 carers in Reading between June and September 2023 to understand what was important to them to help shape the strategy. Carers were able to complete a survey or attend in person focus groups during this time. This response rate is higher than the numbers of carers who responded to the annual Adult Social Care carers survey over the last 2 years. In 2021/22, 132 carers responded and the preliminary data for the 2023/24 surveys shows 103 carers responded.
- 3.8. 75 adult carers completed the survey. Typically, they were more likely to be White British, Christian, heterosexual, females between the ages of 55-64 years old. Most respondents cared for 1 person and cared for more than 50 hours a week and had been in a caring role for more than 5 years. Adult carers were typically caring for someone with a learning disability or autism/neurodiversity.
- 3.9. 44 adults engaged via face-to-face focus groups, where individual data was not recorded. These focus groups took place in partnership with the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality; Age UK Reading's Dementia Carers Support Group; Whitley Wood Over 50s; and Coley Park Over 50s. The focus groups saw more engagement from ethnically diverse communities, specifically our Black African, Black Caribbean, and Black British communities. However, as is the case for focus groups individual data was not recorded so a further breakdown of the demographics of focus group attendees is unavailable.
- 3.10. Young carers were also supported to share their experiences at young carers clubs. 28 young carers completed the survey and took part in informal discussions with Brighter Futures for Children staff at young carers clubs. Typically, those who responded to the young carers survey were more likely to be White British, heterosexual females with no religion, between the ages of 13-15 years old. Most young carers cared for either a parent

or a sibling, with 18% caring for both a parent and a sibling. Young carers were typically caring for someone with a physical disability.

- 3.11. The full responses to the surveys and the findings from the focus groups can be found in Appendix 1
- 3.12. As part of the development of the strategy and action plan a benchmarking exercise was carried out in partnership with the Social Care and Health Collaborative, using the Local Government Association's Unpaid Carers and Care Quality Commission Assurance toolkit. This exercise benchmarked the current position of Reading's Adult Social Care teams against the criteria outlined in the toolkit and made clear recommendations for improvement. These recommendations have been embedded within the action plan.

The Strategic Framework:

- 3.13. Working with and supporting carers is a strategic focus for key partners across Reading. There is already a commitment for improving the experience of Carers in Reading shared across various strategic documents in the system including:
 - **Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust have a Carers Charter** - *'Recognising the valuable role of Carers and working with them as partners to deliver excellent patient care'*
 - **Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust have a Friends, Family & Carers Charter and a Carers Strategy** - *'Promoting a culture of supporting and working in partnership with Carers'*
 - **Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy**
 - **Reading Borough Council's Adult Social Care Strategy** - *'Supporting the life that matters to you'*
 - **Berkshire West, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Partnership reference carers as a priority within the recent Integrated Care Partnership Strategy** - *'We will look after carers'*

The Proposal:

- 3.14. The Carer's Steering Group is proposing that the Committee adopts the Reading Joint All Age Carer's Strategy and Action Plan as the key document for Reading which encompasses the themes from these wider strategic documents and prioritises the needs of carers of Reading.
- 3.15. This strategy and associated action plan will be driven by the Carer's Steering Group and will be publicly accountable to the Health and Wellbeing Board with progress reporting once every quarter.
- 3.16. Based on the findings from the engagement exercise, the strategic priorities for the Carers' Strategy are outlined below including why they were deemed important, direct quotes from Carers on their experience, how we will seek to deliver the priority and the outcome of the work:

Priority 1: Identifying carers and promoting carer's rights

Why?

During a focus group, participants talked about how the role of a carer is seen in different cultures, and how in some cultures it is shameful to access any support. Often this was because of cultural stigma attached to the cared for person and the perception of reaching out for support in a caring role.

"I have not asked for any support as I did not know I was entitled to any" (Adult carer)

“People need to be shown that it is better to get help, than to suffer in silence.” (Adult carer)

Of the young carers who responded to the survey 46% said a friend/family member identified them as a carer followed by 32% who said it was social services.

How?

- Develop a co-produced communications campaign to raise the visibility and profile of what it means to be a carer, specifically capturing the experiences of carers who are typically underrepresented
- Deliver culturally appropriate awareness raising events to promote the visibility of what it means to be a carer and to promote the local support available, with particular focus around Carers Week and Carers Rights day

Outcome:

More people understand what it means to be a carer and carers and professionals understand the rights of carers

Priority 2: Supporting and recognising carers in Reading

Why?

In a focus group carers told us: Unrecognised carers aren't aware of the support available to them, on top of to the stigma from within their community, this means these carers do not reach out for support and do not understand what they are entitled to.

“Most people do not understand the implications of being a full-time carer, unfortunately even people who should understand don't, it's always about the person you're caring for and not the person giving the care” (Adult carer)

When we asked young carers if they saw themselves as a young carer, one young person responded saying:

“I don't really talk about it. I know school said I am.” (Young carer)

How?

- Improve the pathways and processes into and out of social care for carers
- Create a co-produced training and awareness raising programme for the borough to support professionals, faith and community leaders and carers themselves to understand carer's rights, local support and what it means to be a carer

Outcome:

Carers, professionals and faith leaders understand the rights of carers and the pathways to support are transparent and understandable

Priority 3: Maximising the voice of carers

Why?

48% of carers felt like they did not have the opportunity to have their voices heard as a carer in Reading. (Adult carers)

73% said they would like to be more involved in opportunities to have their voice heard, with 31% saying they preferred to do this through an annual carers survey and 29% said they wanted to do this through carer support groups. (Adult carers)

How?

- Commit to delivering the annual Carers Steering Group survey, including focus groups
- Develop coproduction channels for carers to influence and shape local services, including the commissioning of services. Do this as a partnership, and explore the potential of working jointly with Berkshire West colleagues

Outcome:

Carers feel heard and included in the decisions made about them

Priority 4: Ensuring culturally competent support is available locally, including carers breaks and crisis support

Why?

60% of carers either did not have an emergency plan in place or didn't know where they would get support if they were in crisis

When we asked carers what the most valuable support they had accessed, they said:

"Carers group gives me a place where I feel safe and comfortable to be and socialize with different people more than I do and having someone to talk to feels like a weight lifted off my shoulders and I don't have to keep everything to myself" (Young carer)

"More respite without having to jump through hoops and justify everything to get something. There is also a lack of qualified carers able to offer support for complex needs." (Adult carer)

In focus groups, many participants told us they would reach out to their faith leader for support before reaching out to social services, but many were unsure of how to access any further support. Carers also expressed a fear around a lack of shared experience with those providing services and that this puts individuals off from then accessing those support services.

How?

- Work with carers to commission a carers breaks service for Reading which allows carers to have time for themselves
- Ensure carers have a contingency/emergency plan in place for when they are in crisis and that this is registered on their shared care record and accessible for relevant partners where necessary including NHS and Adult Social Care staff.

Outcome:

The support available for carers in Reading is person-centred, culturally appropriate, and wide ranging

Priority 5: Supporting carers with employment and learning

Why?

When we asked carers to tell us how their caring role impacted on their ability to access paid employment and education, they said:

"I have to ensure any employment I take on is highly flexible and my employer has a knowledge of the pressures of being a carer. I can only work a certain number of hours in order to ensure I don't 'burn out'" (Adult carer)

"I need my role to be very flexible and close to home therefore I had to take a significant cut in wages" (Adult carer)

"Being well enough to continue caring. Having a job that keeps me an individual with skills that are appreciated and allows a different focus" (Adult carer)

We asked young carers how they felt about their education and whether their caring role impacted on this, they said:

“Not Sure – I’m keen to learn but will always check on mum via phone frequently and pop home if needed.” (Young carer)

“Home can be draining and makes me not want to go to school sometimes” (Young carer)

How?

- Work with partners to develop and promote carer friendly learning and employment opportunities for all carers, including young carers.
- Promote carers employment rights in line with the Carers Leave Bill coming into action and encourage key employers in the borough, including Reading Borough Council, Brighter Futures for Children and NHS providers to be compliant with this bill

Outcome:

Carers feel supported and able to remain in work and education alongside their caring role.

3.17. These five priorities sit alongside the carers action plan which details how these strategic priorities will be delivered over the next 3 years. The action plan will be a living document, able to adapt based on the changes in the needs of carers in Reading.

3.18. The strategy can be found in Appendix 2 and the accompanying action plan can be found in Appendix 3.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. The Joint All Age Carers’ Strategy aligns with the Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan priorities as follows:

4.2. Thriving Communities

4.3. All carers are at a higher risk of facing health inequalities due to the impact of their caring role on their own health and wellbeing. Carers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds are less likely to identify as a carer and less likely to access support. This work will look to improve the visibility of carers and the support they can access, especially across groups who are more likely to be experiencing health inequalities.

4.4. This process will build relationships and strengthen the capacity and resilience of not only the voluntary and community sector, but the wider system/partners who are supporting carers.

4.5. This work will create more opportunities for carers from some of our most marginalised groups to be heard. Listening to carers and working with them to identify the needs they feel should be prioritised will be crucial to continuing to develop this work.

4.6. Inclusive Economies

4.7. There are many carers who are also working but are struggling to maintain their employment.

4.8. Carers who are providing 50+ hours of unpaid care are more likely to be in from lower socio-economic areas (IMD 1 and 2). This work will encourage improved data collection and sharing which will give us better insight into the support that is needed locally to support these cohorts.

4.9. Local businesses and employers will be key partners in this work to promote supportive workplaces and policies for carers, promoting best practice across Reading employers.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. At this stage of strategy development and associated action plan, new services have not been defined, therefore it is too early for us to understand if there are any environmental impacts. However, this will be reviewed throughout the implementation of the strategy and action plan, with any new services following due process in considering environmental and climate implications.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. As noted earlier in the report this Strategy and Action Plan has been co-produced through a number of engagement activities. The Carer's Steering Group collected 147 responses from carers across the borough. This was done via two separate surveys. One for carers who are over 18 years and one for young carers, under 18 years. Young carers were supported to take part in this piece of work by Brighter Futures for Children. Specifically, the early help teams who support young carers and deliver a range of young carer's clubs.
- 6.2. Four focus groups were also undertaken during this time, with 44 carers sharing their experiences in this way. These focus groups took place at the Dementia Carers Support Group run by Age UK Reading; a coffee morning at the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE); the Whitley Wood Over 50s Lunch Club and the Coley Park Over 50s Lunch Club.
- 6.3. The needs assessment surveys and focus group questions were co-designed with members of the Carer's Steering Group, including Carer Leads from Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Reading and West Berkshire Carer Partnership, Brighter Futures for Children and Adult Social Care/Reading Borough Council. Different methods of engagement were used throughout the survey period to ensure views were captured from as wide range of Carers as possible.
- 6.4. The surveys were available to complete online, with a full range of accessibility options available including contacting the team by phone, requesting a posted copy of the survey, or translated versions of the survey. However, consideration was given that a survey is not always a preferred or accessible option for people to share feedback. Feedback was also collected through the different focus groups which ran, and Brighter Futures for Children held informal discussions with young carers at the different young carers clubs they run.

6.5. Key engagement partners:

Engagement partner	Method of engagement
Reading & West Berkshire Carer's Partnership (includes: Communicare, Age UK Reading, Age UK Berkshire and Reading Mencap)	Mailing list send out; promotion at carers week events; shared on website and social media; facilitated focus groups and informal discussions at support groups
Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust	Shared on social media platforms and display screens around the hospital; shared with internal staff carer network and with RBFT carer champions; shared with cancer champions
Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust	Shared with internal staff carer group and across services; shared with carer support groups

Brighter Futures for Children	Shared with staff; leading engagement sessions with young carers
Berkshire West, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board	Shared through GP bulletin; shared through primary care management teams; shared through patient voice groups
Healthwatch Reading	Shared through mailing lists and networks; sharing with advisory board
Compass Recovery College	Shared with participants attending sessions; shared through mailing lists
GLL – Better Reading	Shared printed flyers to promote the survey across all leisure sites in Reading
Reading Borough Council – key departments include Adult Social Care, libraries, public health and wellbeing, New Directions	Shared with staff; encouraged staff to support customers to engage; promoted the survey via flyers and digital screens in all libraries and through New Directions. Promoted through social media
Partnership forums including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dementia Friendly Reading Steering Group - Older People’s Working Group - Access and Disabilities Forum - Mental Wellbeing Group - Befriending Forum - Social Prescribing Forum 	Shared the survey and printed flyers with a range of these group members to raise awareness
Wider voluntary sector partners including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading Voluntary Action & social prescribers - Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE) including Alafia and Community Health Champions - Autism Berkshire - Alzheimer’s Society - Fifi’s Vision - Citizens Advice Reading - Swings and Smiles - Together UK - Refugee Support Group - Support U - Thames Valley Positive Support - Berkshire Vision 	A range of engagement methods were used including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the survey to service users - Supporting with hosting focus groups/allowing us to attend pre-existing sessions and support groups - Raising awareness of the survey and the Carers Steering Group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading Association for the Blind - Alana House (PACT) - No 5 Young People - The Mustard Tree (Starting Point and Engage befriending) - Reading Community Learning Centre - Younger People with Dementia 	
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- 6.6. The surveys launched on Monday 5th June 2023 to coincide with Carers Week. Printed copies of both surveys were available at a Carers Week event organised by Reading and West Berkshire Carers Partnership in the Broad Street Mall and Carers Steering Group member organisations were on hand to support people to complete the survey.
- 6.7. The needs assessment surveys closed on 31st July 2023 and focus groups took place until 9th August 2023. Brighter Futures for Children carried out a second round of engagement with young carers between November 2023 and January 2024.
- 6.8. The response from this engagement exercise was analysed and used to inform the development of the strategy and action plan. This was led by the Carers Strategy Working Group, a subgroup of the Carers Steering Group.
- 6.9. This included the Carers Leads for both NHS foundation trusts, members of the Carers Partnership, Adult Social Care and Public Health staff, Healthwatch Reading, Compass Recovery College, Brighter Futures for Children, and the Integrated Care Board. Many of the members of the working group also brought their lived experience as carers themselves, and the wider steering group, including carers, worked alongside the working group partners to finalise the strategic priorities and action plan.
- 6.10. Once the strategy is launched the Carer's Steering Group will oversee the delivery of the strategy, holding partners to account for the commitments made in the action plan. The group will also continue to offer a platform for carers in Reading to have their voices heard, to feedback to local services and shape the ongoing delivery of the strategy and action plan.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and can be found in Appendix 4.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. There are no other relevant considerations for this decision.

9. Legal Implications

9.1. There are no legal implications for this decision.

10. Financial Implications

10.1. Outlined below is the funding allocated to support Carers in line with the Strategy and its associated Action plan.

Joint All Age Carers' Strategy	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	TOTAL £
Accelerated Reform Fund	67,798	54,355	0	122,153
Better Care Fund/LA Matched Funding	144,282	144,282 *	144,282 *	432,846
Better Care Fund (Carers Breaks)	75,000	75,000 *	75,000 *	225,000
Better Care Fund (Carers Lead - additional)	56,000	56,000 *	56,000 *	168,000
TOTAL	343,080	329,637	275,282	947,999

10.2 There are no additional funding requests/pressures to account for within this budget and there are no Capital Implications.

10.3 * It should be noted that the funding for the Better Care Fund has not yet been confirmed for 2025/26 onwards but we have assumed continued funding as in previous years – the funding round the Better Care Fund has been consistent for a number of years, so we are not expecting any fundamental changes

11. Timetable for Implementation

11.1. The timeline for the delivery of the strategy is as follows:

Activity	Expected Timeline
Strategy finalised by Carers Steering Group	Wednesday 20 th March 2024
Strategy presented to Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education committee for approval/endorsement	Wednesday 12 th June 2024
Public launch of the Strategy and Action Plan	12 th June -14 th June 2024 – during Carers Week
Recruitment of Carers Lead post to deliver the strategy	By October 2024

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are none.

Appendices –

1. **Adult Carers Survey Responses**
2. **Young Carers Survey Response**
3. **Focus Group Findings**
4. **Joint All Age Carers' Action Plan 2024-2027**

5. **Joint All Age Carers' Strategy 2024-2027 (current version is with the designer for final amendments including correction of apostrophe placement)**
6. **Equality Impact Assessment**