



A Better Life for Carers in Dorset

2023-
2028

Our plans to deliver the right support
for carers in Dorset

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About this strategy

This strategy should be read in conjunction with our main strategy, “*A Better Life for Adults in Dorset*”. This sets out the key principles that underpin our approach, including what we can do to help further develop and strengthen the community networks of support in the county.

Definitions and terminology

According to the Pan-Dorset Carers Steering Group **Together with Carers, A Dorset Vision** a Carer is

- » “Someone who provides unpaid care or support to a family member, partner or friend who could not manage without their help, due to age, illness, disability, mental ill health and substance or alcohol misuse. This is not the same as someone who is paid or employed as a formal care worker”.

The Care Act definition is:

- » “an adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult (“adult needing care”) clause 10 (3) Care Act (2014).

A young Carer is defined by the Children & Families Act 2014 as:

- » “a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work)...”

Terminology

Government and the adult social care professional community frequently use terms including “informal Carer” and “unpaid Carer”. The Carers that we spoke to were clear that these terms do not describe their role. Simply “Carer” is sufficient and preferred. “Informal” suggests that it is only a casual role, rather than being an expert on the life of their loved

one. “Unpaid” emphasises the transactional and is particularly offensive when considered in light of the low levels of state support for Carers. For those in receipt of Carers’ Allowance, “unpaid” can simply be confusing.

It is important not to categorise or label Carers too rigidly; however, when considering the different types of service, a Carer may require at the various stages of their journey and for commissioning purposes it is helpful to consider the various types:

- » Adult Carer (aged 18+)
- » Working Carers
- » Parent Carers of an adult dependent with a disability or who is disabled
- » Young adult Carers (16 – 25 yrs.)
- » Young Carers (under 16)
- » Sibling Carer
- » Occupational Carers

In avoiding terms such as “unpaid” or “informal”, we will need to be mindful that in some instances this can be considered to include those who do receive payment for their work. This includes not only those who are employed by a care agency, but also those self-employed as personal assistants, or as part of a Shared Lives arrangement. When we are describing Carers, therefore, and wish to make the distinction between these responsibilities, we will need to take time to set out what we mean, rather than use shorthand terms such as “unpaid Carer”.

Continuing to deliver the objectives in the Together with Carers, a Dorset Vision

The Together with Carers – A Dorset Vision was written by organisations working in partnership towards integrated health and social care services including Carers, Dorset Council, Carer Support Dorset, BCP (Bournemouth Christchurch Poole) Council, NHS Dorset, University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust, Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust, Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Dorset GP Alliance, Dorset Parent Carer Council, Parent Carers Foundation, NHS England and NHS Improvement. The Council are committed to building on this to deliver its priorities:

- » Ensure all Carers are valued, visible, and heard
- » Provide all Carers with choice and opportunities to take breaks from their caring role, as well as access to support in a crisis
- » Understand Carers’ personal needs and situations and treat everyone fairly
- » Support all Carers to have a meaningful and fulfilling life, alongside and after caring
- » Provide information, advice, guidance, and practical resources to enable Carers to carry out their caring role
- » Ensure Carers’ own physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing are supported
- » Be honest, consistent and work together to manage expectations

Our Dorset’s Together with Carers, A Dorset Vision is an ambitious one that was endorsed by Carers UK Dame Philippa Russell DBE. It aims to change and improve a complex network of people, processes and pathways supporting Carers. Dorset Council will continue to contribute to the delivery of the Vision’s objectives to ensure the quality of service delivered.

Who is a Carer?

Adult Carer

An adult Carer is someone who has a caring role over the age of 18 years. There are a high number of adult and older Carers living in the rural parts of Dorset. In the rural areas there are less community-based opportunities and less providers. This makes the need for a joined up and responsive service key to their support. Often older Carers in rural communities' health and wellbeing are impacted by their caring role as they cope with their own frailties and may not be digitally enabled.

Working Carers

Carers should not have to give up their chosen career due to caring responsibilities, however this is often the case. Many Carers will need to return to paid work to supplement income in the years ahead.

Corporately, Dorset Council want working Carers to feel supported and able to deliver both their work roles and their responsibilities as Carers. The Council has an agreed approach to supporting Carers in its workforce and seeks to be a best practice exemplar for other employers. From 1 April 2025 Dorset Council employees can request 1 week's unpaid leave, of which up to 3 days can be paid leave in any 12 months.

An information page dedicated to working Carers employed by Dorset Council has been developed with links to support, advice, and policies to support them. An employee network

for Carers was launched 2022 and continues to grow. They share information and experiences but also contribute to improving the understanding of Dorset Council as an employer. In early 2023 they coproduced an 'Employees who are Carers' guidance for managers and Carers which was shared with Dorset residents as best practice. The Pan-Dorset Carers Steering Group have outcomes in relation to this which are to be reported on regarding delivering support for working Carers:

- » Support all Carer's personal needs and situations and treat everyone fairly
- » Support Carers to have a meaningful and fulfilling life, alongside and after caring.
- » Learning can be gained from the NHS employee leaflet, 'Juggling caring and work'.

Parent Carers of adult children

It is also important to recognise parent Carers of disabled children or SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disability). Getting information to parents and Carers at the right time regarding what support is available to them when the young person moves from childhood into adulthood, moving from Children's Services to Adult Social Care support can be challenging. This is a critical part of our work on the Birth to Settled Adulthood pathway (see our wider strategy on A Better Life for Adults).

Young Adult Carers, Young Carers

Strategic plans are being developed in partnership with Children's Services under the Birth to Settled Adulthood Programme to improve young Carers service delivery, including the whole family approach. The Birth to Settled Adulthood Team is working with Adult Social Care to develop and embed pathways for young carers to be supported into their adulthood. Between adult social care, children's services and health services we need to agree on consistent age ranges for provision of young Carers' support.

Sibling Carers

Within a family home where there is an Adult with health or social care needs, their children take on caring roles. Sibling Carers are children who care for their sibling to help the parents. Sibling Carers who are often missed out of existing service deliveries. Children's Services are developing their strategy for this area as part of their Young and Thriving strategy.

Occupational Carers

There are also paid Carers, also known as occupational Carers. This strategy does not include this group.

Vision for Carers in Dorset

The population of Dorset is increasing and the number of people providing care to another continues to increase, although there is an assumption that most are not coming forward and identifying as Carers. With the increased pressure on the care system, hospitals, and lack of professional care staff in the community, the burden on Carers is expected to increase and further preventive support will need to be identified and developed by a systemwide approach including the Health, Social Care and Community networks.

Our vision draws on our learning from engagement with Carers, professionals, providers and the national guidance whilst also making it relevant to local needs. The overarching aim and set of objectives can be used to measure how we deliver better support for Carers in Dorset. Dorset Council want to identify potential Carers of the future, provide preventative support, register identified Carers, support them throughout their caring journey and reach individuals at risk before they reach crisis. We want Carers supported across the whole system, and for caring to be acknowledged and recognised as an important role by everyone, not just Adult Social Care.

We will work together so that all Carers are empowered to lead their best life, are respected, informed, involved, valued, and receive the right support, at the right time, and in the right place.

The Right Support

Work to improve services needs to be a shared activity with NHS partners, Carers organisations and others, and involve Carers in the design.

Work has taken place to improve our information, advice and guidance offer to be more joined up, clear and easily accessible. Key priority issues for Carers such as planning ahead, financial planning, contingency planning and digital literacy.

We want to further develop the range of available support, with an emphasis on flexibly responding to Carers needs, with elements of choice, crisis prevention and response. We also want to develop a clearer carer break offer for Carers with a significant caring role. Dorset Community Response and Help and Kindness have introduced community volunteer support for Carers which will continue to grow.

Community support encourages people to engage, including the Dorset Carer Card and a Carer Friendly Community accreditation scheme for organisations/businesses led by Forward Carers.

Technology can provide opportunities to make life easier and relieve some anxiety of caring at home, and assistive technology and equipment should be incorporated into every Carer's assessment. Online platform Bridgit is providing information 24/7 and self-serve options.

We want more people to have a carers' personal budget and direct payment, to have the freedom and flexibility to arrange the support that they need, with support from an Individual Service Fund provider for those who need it.

The Right Place

Our Carers Case Workers provide valuable support on a one-to-one basis where there is complexity, however, there is a need to ensure resources are aligned to different locality need. As part of developing the range of support available, we are introducing more peer support groups across Dorset to encourage Carers to take part in local community support.

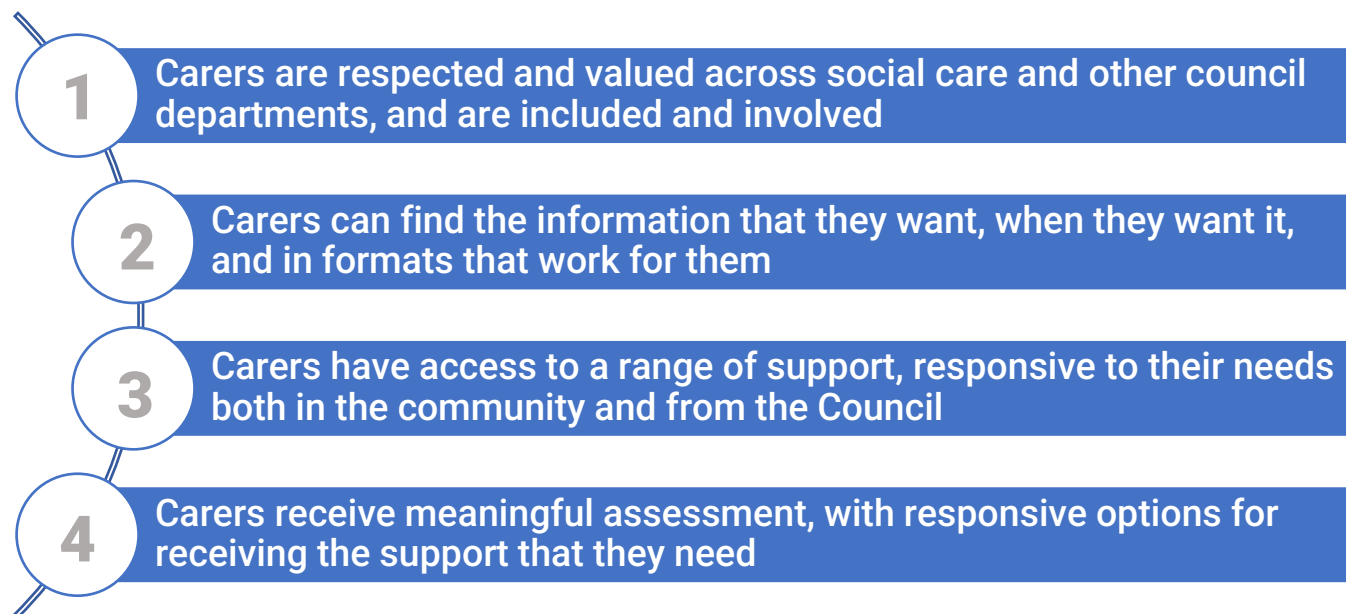
The Right Time

We need to bring more people and organisations into the work of identifying Carers and flagging to them that there is support available. This will enable more Carers to access the timely support they need, and provide a more immediate response to crisis, as well as identifying those who may soon become Carers, and those who are ageing and for whom caring is becoming ever more challenging. The Carers Provider Forum provides opportunity to work closer together and explore opportunities.

For those young people who take on caring roles so early in life, the right support joined up across children and adult services is critical to their future growth and development.

Outcomes

All of these aspirations are captured in four high-level outcomes that guide our work. These help us to think about what the issues are that get in the way, and what we need to work on to fix them.



Our Priorities:

- » Recommission the lead Carer organisation as an improved All Age Carers Service Spring 2025.
- » Review the Short Breaks Service to ensure it is sustainable and providing the right support for Carers.
- » Review how we can meet Carers reported outcomes from universal services.
- » Establish how we can better co-ordinate information for Carers, so they do not have to contact different agencies.
- » Further develop online self-service digital offer (Bridgit) which has attracted over 12,555 Carers self-serving.
- » Contribute to the delivery of the Pan-Dorset Carer Steering Group 'Together with Carers – a Dorset Vision' objectives.

Culture, trust, respect, and recognition

Carers strongly tell us that they deserved recognition for the hard and complex work that they do, and the impact that it has on their lives. This sounds like a simple statement, but behind it is a frustration with the difficulties of navigating not only the care system, but all statutory sources of potential help, finance, and support, including housing, benefits, and other areas.

Carers tell us that too few interactions with Council officers gave them confidence that their lives as Carers were understood, or that there was appreciation of the stresses and pressures in a Carer's life. They also talk about not feeling trusted in their caring role, including where they are taking financial decisions with their cared-for person. This is a

key part of better respecting and recognising Carers, and they tell us that culture and behaviours need to change. They say that they want a more 'human element' to their support. This 'relational' approach is a long-term piece of culture change work, but it is an important journey to take. The importance of 'walking in our shoes' cannot be overstated, as well as having insight into life as a Carer. And crucially, it should be a whole-council endeavour.

There should be more campaigns about the Carer role, which would build awareness, but could also help in identifying Carers and improving the levels of Carer registration so that support could be offered. We will also implement a wider training programme for

Council and other organisations' workforce, including using the high-profile national Carer support campaigns (e.g. Carers Week, Carers Rights Day and Young Carers Action Day) to maintain visibility.

In all of our work to strengthen the voice of the Carer, we must also be careful not to lose the voice of the person with the care needs. This is a delicate balance and includes issues around privacy and data protection that must be sensitively handled. Carers tell us that they understand that these are issues, but when navigating the issue, they want us to be more attentive to their needs as people intimately involved with the care of their friend or family member, and as an active partner in the delivery of care to the cared-for person.

Task-and-finish review of Carer support, April 2022

In March 2022 a Task & Finish Group was established to look into the issues facing Carers in Dorset, and to produce recommendations for improvements to the support that is available. This was intended to inform this strategy, which was in development at the time.

The group brought together Carers, Carer representative organisations, and Council officers, and was chaired by Cllr Cherry Brooks. It met four times, with a number of carers involved through the process, as well as individuals running organisations providing support to Carers, and a number of people who also talked both from their professional perspective and a personal perspective as Carers themselves. The recommendations, right, emerging from this process have been instrumental in shaping this strategy.

- » **respect Carers, their work, and their challenges**
- » **make the different support offers clearer**
- » **improve information and support, including accessibility**
- » **remove the operating silos**
- » **take a more "relational" approach to supporting Carers**
- » **review and improve the impact of Carers' assessments**
- » **review the rules around short breaks, where possible**
- » **widen the uptake of direct payments or individual service funds**
- » **review the contract of Carer Support Dorset and make the offer clearer**
- » **review the Carer Caseworker service and make the offer clearer**
- » **ensure Carers are considered in assessment of future housing demands**
- » **diversify the provision of day opportunities, including virtual contact and addressing digital exclusion**

What we have heard from Carers

Carers voices, providers and professional Carers leads have fed into this strategy, ensuring the right services are commissioned and assumptions are not made. We are very grateful to everyone who has taken part.

Every Carers situation is unique however there are some common themes: activities, wellbeing, and pathways.

Activities

- » Day centres and services are valued and more activities with Carer/without Carer are wanted
- » Carers want activities, not just meeting other Carers, they want to be distracted of their caring role – although transport is a barrier

Wellbeing

- » Carers do not get a break from their caring responsibilities (this can describe hours, days, weekends, overnights)
- » Carers report feeling isolated, lonely, and deteriorated mental health illness
- » Caring had escalated and become more difficult and challenging throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, with lockdowns making support and activities/respite less available – a situation which has continued
- » Some of the Carers were elderly, had health or practical support needs themselves, or the cared for person didn't want support, making caring more challenging.
- » Carers want some or more time off, to see friends, have a weekend away, to have fun

separately and together, but didn't complain and some commented it was their 'duty'.

- » Most welcomed more support for their wellbeing, by means of day trips, wellbeing treatments and to be able to eat out and admission tickets to attend events/shows.
- » Many Carers reported they did not have family, friends, or neighbours to ask for support/give them a break/rest.

Pathways

- » Assessments are not received by all, and some felt it was difficult to get one
- » Carers are not sure if they are registered with Carer Support Dorset
- » Carers are not always clear which organisation provides the support they receive, e.g. many register with GPs unaware of other support available
- » Access to services and care in the rural parts of Dorset are harder to find or don't exist
- » We know at least 30% of the Carers are not digitally enabled
- » Some Carers appear not to know what is available to them or how to access it.
- » Most Carers do not access and don't know how to access the Short Breaks service

From the work that has taken place we have listened to what Carers have told us they need to support them in their caring role. There is lots of work to be undertaken to improve the marketing of the existing offer, making it clearer to understand, and widening access to all groups in the community.

Co-Production

A series of events and conversations were convened over the summer of 2021. Members of public and representatives from Dorset Council and providers/partners who participated included some Carers, and this is what they told us they wanted:

- » Go back to what they were doing before Coronavirus
- » Be independent, feel valued and live their life with purpose
- » Be listened to, trusted, valued and treated with respect
- » Have support staff who care and know them well
- » Socialise and make new friends
- » Get a break/rest from caring responsibilities
- » Be offered more choice of activities
- » Get better information about day opportunities
- » Be helped to access the support they need even if they can pay for it themselves

In particular, people us they want to:

- » Find work
- » Volunteer
- » Learn life skills
- » Take part in sport
- » Explore new places
- » Go on walks and day trips

(2025) Further engagement continues with Carers throughout all services and projects including but not limited to Bridgit and Direct Payments.

Universal services, information and advice

There are many services or support for adult residents which also benefit Carers.

A 'Carers tool kit' was developed during 2020 to detail the universal services provided by the VCSE that was used by Councillors to enable them to sign post Carers to services.

'If Only I'd Known That' is a booklet produced by PramaLife and The Leonardo Trust which is based on a Carer's journey over 20 years ago, which is still very relevant today. The booklet is free to all Carers and provides hints and tips on navigating the services and provides a helpful index of contact points at the back. This has been sent to all elected members and is sent to all registered Carers. Similarly, 'Angels in Gumboots' was published in 2022 by a Dorset Carer Jennifer, who is looking after her husband who was diagnosed with dementia whilst trying to run a farm and family home. It emphasises the many issues Carers face, especially the need for timely support, up to date information and practical help.

Information, advice and guidance offer

Information and advice provision is a critical part of getting Carers the support they need, when they need it. With a number of different web offers on information and advice, Carers tell us that this causes confusion and, whilst there are links and routes between them, this remains confusing. There is also in some cases easy access to information on the

important issues that Carers needed to know. For some, they didn't know some of what they might need to know and therefore didn't know how to ask for it until too late. However, this was not solely about information on being a Carer; it also applied to information about arranging and managing care for their cared-for person. These themes are relevant for the work that was undertaken to redesign the Council's information and advice offer, and Carers' work is integral to the project teams established for that work. This is an area for continual improvement to ensure the customer journey is as seamless as possible.

For some the reliance solely on websites was not sufficient, and some Carers appreciated printed matter as a source of information that they could retain and refer to at a later time. This is not incompatible with a fundamentally digital offer, and it is possible to facilitate this with, for example, the ability to output webpages as printable PDFs, which professionals and support organisations could then share with Carers on demand. Relying on a suite of PDFs uploaded to the site was recognised to be problematic in accessibility terms, and for keeping them updated.

Carers also tell us that the adult social care system is complex and difficult to navigate, and when a Carer is in need of information they are also likely to be in a place of distress or anxiety. Therefore, the Council needs to give

thought to how people can have a meaningful conversation to get to the answers that they need: in short, a 'human touch'. This could also apply to the provision of training for Carers, to provide spaces for them to more fully explore important themes in their role as a Carer.

Discussions on this theme also point to the importance of digital exclusion, and work to tackle it, in supporting Carers' wellbeing. Evidence and survey results have evidenced many Carers are not digital, with a high percentage being older adults. In talking about digital offers, therefore, there was a strong recognition that levels of digital exclusion in Dorset were high, and that therefore Carers should be "high up on the list" for any support to get online and overcome this exclusion. Other things to consider when attempting to reach Carers is Dorset has a blend of rural and urban settings with a high population of elderly people, including people with disabilities, blindness, sensory impairment, or other difficulties, and this will include Carers.

Bridgit

Bridgit online platform has tools to enable Carers to access information, share they are a Carer with their GP/Council, develop a self-assessment plan, start an online Carer Assessment or digital Dorset Carer Card. Following a "pilot" the digital platform continues to be developed as part of the suite of services to support Carers in Dorset.

Communities that support Carers

It is a key ambition of this strategy that all services that provide for the communities of Dorset are understanding and supportive of the needs of Carers. Supporting Carers is everyone's business, and we will work with statutory and community partners, and with community leaders across the county, to develop this supportive culture.

There is an opportunity to work closer with the VCSE (Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise) who are already engaged in projects such as the Dorset Community Response. Partnerships with the VCSE and our commissioned services including our lead carer organisation Carer Support Dorset will be further developed and nurtured.

There is already an appetite for partnership working with the established provider Forums. This now needs to be developed to the next stage of how to join up the services for Carers regardless of their entry to request for help. We need to consider how best to make it as easy as possible for Carers to access services with no wrong front door.

The Pan-Dorset Carers Partnership Group lead on Carer Awareness Days with joint comms to promote events across Dorset. Work is underway to develop further joint working and shared resources to maximise efficiencies and reach through sharing resources. Events continue to increase as the partnerships develop.

The new Dorset Carer Friendly ID Card scheme launched in early 2023 and has continued to grow from strength to strength. Forward Carers are leading on developing Dorset as Carer Friendly, raising awareness of Carers and supporting communities to support the Carers who live in it. This also provides an opportunity to explore more community-based support where Carers cafes and support groups can become embedded in local businesses signed up to the Carers Card scheme. This has provided the ability to develop Community Champions and in future it is hoped possibly local business awards linked to the work on Carer-friendly employers.

The Dementia Friendly Purbeck scheme is a good example of organisations and the community working closely together to make the community a welcoming place for the people with Dementia and their Carer's. Help and Kindness are already working on further exploration work to understand what other friendly communities are in Dorset and their assets. This will link very nicely to Carers and help us understand what is available and what the gaps are.

The lead carer organisation is being retendered 2025 which provides an opportunity to further enhance the service to include more support, activities, training and events. We are also introducing a Carers Grant Fund to enable the Carers service to support Carers in what they want to achieve following their Carer Assessment.

In tandem, these improvements allow opportunity to further develop the Direct Payment offer (alongside the more supportive individual service fund approach) as part of the Personal Budget, we will create greater flexibility as requested by Carers. The work nicely links to Day Opportunities where more choice will be available for Carers and the person they care for.

The Direct Payment Steering Group are improving the Direct Payment offer with training and practice guidance. Letters were coproduced with Carers and the information on the Dorset Council website is being improved.

Services for Carers: The Carers' Caseworkers

The Adult Carers Team, Carers Case Workers led by a Social Work Management Team provide the statutory support under the Care Act 2014 where there is complexity or safeguarding concerns. The team do not undertake all Carers Assessments. They are strategically based across Dorset including localities and linked to some hospital sites. The Community Mental Health Teams also have some Carers leads.

The posts were created to work with Carers in more complex situations where there is a need for a formal Carers Assessment under the Care Act 2014, and it is not appropriate for an allocated worker to complete the assessment. This would include the following situations:

1. Safeguarding concerns and complications.
2. Where there is conflict between the Carer and the cared for person, or where there are conflicting views between the Carer and the cared for person about desired outcomes.
3. Where there are complex inter-relationships between the needs of the Carer and the needs of the cared for person and there is a need for independent support for the Carer.
4. Where there is no allocated worker for the cared for person (private funders where there is no request for an assessment of the cared for person).

Carer Case Workers also offer support to bereaved Carers in the short term and signpost to other organisations. There was an increase in welfare calls and sadly bereavement support during the Covid 19 pandemic. It is recognised that they offer valuable support to Carers which was made particularly difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic with many Carers shielding and lack of resources to refer them to.

In addition, Carers Case Workers are the experts in their locality/specialist team and provide training, advice and support to colleagues undertaking Carers assessments. They hold local peer support groups to keep in touch with Carers, providing a forum for feedback and change.

They also lead in their local communities working with the Primary Care Networks, GP surgeries, hospitals, the community and other organisations in the area. They are the primary coordinator of the Carers Provider Forum, working very closely with primary care and other providers in their setting.

The relationships they hold with their local communities, colleagues, Health partners and Primary Care Network enables good outcomes for Carers. The Dorset Carer Provider Forum they host provide opportunity to share good practice, hear about risks and gaps and new services for Carers in their respective areas.

Improving services

A good partnership exists between the Operational lead, Area Practice Manager, Carers Case Workers, Commissioner, Commissioned services, and partners that needs to continue to strengthen with clear direction from this Strategy taking new opportunities forward to progress the service delivery.

However, some Carers told us (2021/2022) that there was confusion about whether the Carers caseworker service was a universal one, including the provision of Carers' assessments to anyone who came forward for one, or whether it was a targeted service aiming to intervene where Carers are in difficulty or crisis.

There was a clear sense that Carers didn't know what they might get from an assessment, or the support of a Carer Caseworker, and that others had received some substantial support. Whilst this may, in reality, be needs-led, it was also perceived as inequitable.

Alongside the clearer specification and communication about the role of Carer Support Dorset, it was suggested that a similar exercise needs to happen for the Adult Carer Team (Carer Case Workers), and this has been initiated. This will help to shape the work of the team, bring consistency and improve performance, and reduce waiting times for assessment.

Services for Carers: short breaks and respite

Short Break services have traditionally been an offer of support to Carers following a Carers Assessment under the Care Act. These have taken the form of a replacement care home care service, and the provision is not subject to a financial assessment.

The current offer is for care in the home and as such is subject to availability within the care market. The experience of Covid 19, where Carers have been unable to access the provision, coupled with engagement feedback, demonstrated the need to revisit what constitutes a 'short break' offer. A more personalised offer is seen as a way of Carers securing goods or services that support them individually in their caring role.

Examples of some of the wider provision that could benefit a Carer could include:

- » a course of relaxation classes,
- » training on stress management,
- » gym or leisure membership,
- » adult learning,
- » development of new work skills or refreshing existing skills.
- » pursuit of hobbies, purchasing a garden shed for activities, or laptop to stay in touch with friends and family.

Eligibility for Carers to access services is clear and agreed support is detailed in a Support Plan. Whether or not there is a need for replacement care, Carers may need support to help them to look after their own wellbeing.

Currently Dorset Council does not consistently provide Carers with a personal budget for themselves, for their wellbeing. This is an area for development under this strategy.

The direct funding a Carer receives from Dorset Council is usually used for the Short Breaks Service, or a Direct Payment for a Personal Assistant. Carers are also given equipment where appropriate, although this is usually provided to the cared-for person.

Addressing issues with Short Breaks

Key to our improvement ambitions are the actions we will take to improve the uptake of Carers assessments and direct payments, so that people have the flexibility to make their own arrangements for their support.

Workforce commissioning is essential to improve the choice for Carers to access replacement care services. The Carers Strategy links with micro-provider, community response and workforce development opportunities in the overarching Commissioning Strategy, to encourage people to come forward to volunteer or start their own business as a paid or occupational Carer. Higher incentives have to be given to encourage more people into caring employment.

Day services and day opportunities

Our commissioning strategy contains ambitions to increase the flexibility of day opportunities. In some cases, these are beneficial to Carers as an alternative to organising replacement care. Activities should be available to both the Carer and the cared for person. This is subject to availability, cost, accessibility and funding, but it is useful to remember Carers told us that a distraction from their caring role can improve their wellbeing. A 'Memorable Moments' pilot was successful and was welcomed by those who participated.

The 'Zoom' and 'safe places' offer that was created by a number of providers through the pandemic was appreciated. It was felt that this should be an integral part of the on-going offer into the future, for both a cared-for person and Carer. Online activities for the cared for person also enable a small break for the Carer while their loved one was online.

In general, Carers have spoken of day opportunities as being really important for creating small spaces in the day in which they could do other things in their lives. There was support for diversity of provision, and this will be something that the lead Carer organisation and Care Dorset will be thinking about as it evolves and rebuilds an offer post-pandemic.

Services for Carers: Dorset Carer Friendly ID Card (this is a commissioned Service)

Dorset Carer Card (known as the Dorset Carer Friendly ID Card)

The Dorset Carers Card is a joint contract with BCP funded by the Better Care Fund. It gives access to a photographic card in the style of a driving licence that can be used as Carer identification and provides discounts across Dorset (and nationally). Special offers can be found at cafes, shops, attractions, businesses and discounts with some professional services.

The Dorset Carer Card website includes printable information and helps Carers to discover the hundreds of offers available ranging across categories of transport, home, breaks, food and drink, shopping, wellbeing, complementary therapies, and hobbies. Carers will be able to use the photo ID credit card sized printed card or digital version saved to a smart phone.

The inclusion of a QR code on the card can be scanned by the business to verify the Carer is active (no personal information shared) and also sign up to the scheme if not already a member.

The Carers Card scheme distributed to registered Carers - including adults, young Carers and Parent Carers of children who are disabled or with SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disability) by Carer Support Dorset and BCP Carers Service for BCP Council, although the scheme is currently coordinated by 'Forward Carers'. In addition, Forward Carers work in partnership with other organisations, and the community to develop Carer Friendly Dorset, raise Carer awareness, recruit Carer Ambassadors in local communities and offer a Carer Friendly Accreditation scheme.

Improving Dorset Carer Card 2023

A review with businesses registered indicated the scope to improve this service with:

- » improved marketing,
- » making the information more accessible (paper based or App development),
- » having 1 card design rather than the 3 previous cards to improve trust in the scheme and
- » developing the offer to be more attractive to younger Carers

This contract will therefore be expanded to include advertising of day opportunities, activities in the local community, any free or discounted theatres/cinemas opportunities that can be negotiated, as well as any other opportunities identifying as a Carer can bring.

Carer Support Dorset increased their newsletters and started a What's On guide. Carers Support Dorset are currently providing the whole Council service for a one-year period whilst we tender a new Dorset Carers service.

Caring Matters Magazine

Two surveys during 2021 with Carers resulted in the Caring Matters magazine being withdrawn as was not felt met Carers needs and was not cost effective. The alternative booklets such as 'If only I'd known that' and newsletters was found to be more useful to Carers.

Services for Carers: Carer Support Dorset (this is a commissioned service)

Carer Support Dorset offers a 'front door, one stop shop' approach, for Carers of all ages from Dorset Council. This service contributes to the collective model of early intervention and prevention, providing a preventative offer to delay Carer breakdown and reduce the need for Adult Social Care intervention. They are the first point of contact offering the information, advice, support, signposting, befriending and guidance. They also hold the Dorset Carers Register on Dorset Councils behalf for Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

A vast amount of data is available provided by quarterly reports from Carer Support Dorset to understand about Dorset Carers.

Carer Support Dorset is developing as the lead Carer organisation, the front door for Dorset Council resident Carers. Their reach and registration of Carers and young Carers has grown over the years. They have positive survey results of Carers regarding the services they provide. Further feedback include:

- » They are recognised by health and partners as the lead carer organisation for Dorset Council, however they are not recognised as the lead carer organisation for Dorset Council by all providers and Carers. Carers report there is confusion as to who to contact and how to access an Assessment under the Care Act

2014. Carers want information, respite, replacement care and support for the cared for person but Carer Support Dorset cannot help with this. Part of the resolution will be in Carer Support Dorset recording more information on Carer contacts, so targeted help can be provided.

- » The Reference group was not successful and was handed back to Dorset Council 2025.
- » Newsletters are sent on a regular basis (electronically and by post) to inform Carers of training opportunities, news, and information.
- » The team make 'Keep in Touch' calls to Carers when time permit to see how things are, to show support and offer more help.
- » Carer Support Dorset are keen to get involved in community activity which has increased post Covid restrictions, and they have increased their information points, GP Clinics and peer support group café's.
- » They are increasing networking and sharing of universal information to Carers of services from across Dorset.
- » Training is very much Carer led; and are signposted by Carer Support Dorset to local opportunities with some targeted activity.
- » Peer support groups are scattered across Dorset, with some areas (particularly rural) lacking. The aim is to develop more grass root groups and nurture them into self-managed groups.
- » They offer regular advice, guidance and support for those who have registered.

Developing Carer Support Dorset

There is an opportunity to work closer with the community, to allow them to volunteer for Carer Support Dorset, providing the much needed and valued Here to talk befriending service and other areas such as peer support groups. This is an exciting area that is just beginning to flourish. Joint work with Help and Kindness Community Response will open more doors to Carer Support Dorset to connect with community and voluntary organisations to improve the service and response to Carers at a community local level.

We are aware many citizens are funding their own replacement care so to support them information needs to be developed to inform them what is available and make it easier for them to access it. This should help with decision making and encourage self-management and planning ahead.

Carers who are no longer caring or would like to enhance their learning or develop as a volunteer need information to understand what is available to them. Some joint work with organisations such as the Dorset Volunteer Centre, local educational settings and Adult Education will enable this area to be developed.

Services for Carers: Time to Talk, Counselling & SWAN Advocacy (these are commissioned services)

Time to Talk – mental wellbeing for Carers

The Time to Talk contract is a bespoke demand led counselling service jointly shared with BCP Council funded by the Better Care Fund. The service offers a free counselling service to Carers for up to 6 sessions, with an optional additional 6 sessions if required by exception.

In June 2022 the service moved over to be in partnership with the Leonardo Carer Service which does not require a Carers assessment to access it ensuring a true preventative approach with no barriers. This service has been recommissioned for a further 2 years to 2026.

The service enables the Carer to focus on themselves and to think about their own needs in a non-judgemental and safe environment. The service is available in various languages, in person, on the telephone or online.

Further talking therapies are also available including Steps to Wellbeing from Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust.

SWAN Advocacy

A new advocacy contract was commissioned in 2023, SWAN Advocacy which included a dedicated Carers service. This is now embedded and provides more support options for Carers. We can also involve the community to respond and support the Carers and person they care for with local organisations services, volunteers, friends and family support.

Services for carers: Carers' Assessments and Direct Payments

Direct Payments

For all of these possible community-led options and breaks, personal budgets and Direct Payments for Carers is key to unlocking the flexibility that Carers say they want. Currently, Dorset is performing poorly compared to the rest of the country in the provision of Carers' Direct Payments, albeit that there is steady improvement. At 41.5% this compares to 60.6% across the Southwest and 77.4% across England.

A Direct Payment would mean that a Carer could "buy in" the support that worked for them and met the identified priorities of the support plan and, together with provision of Individual Service Funds for those who want someone else to make the arrangements, is critical to improving choice and control for Carers. It also opens up the possibility of a range of flexible and responsive brokerage support options, so that community-based organisations could start to offer assistance to get the support in place that the Carer wanted.

Individual service funds

The option of an 'individual service fund' would provide similar flexibility but also involve a support organisation to provide the assistance that some Carers are asking for to make the arrangements for the support that they need.

Carers' Assessments

There are delays in the social care system to obtain a strengths-based Carers Assessment under the Care Act 2014. Reporting shows this has increased during the Coronavirus pandemic with levels of assessment being lower than previous years. The demand for Carers Assessments continue to rise and are expected to continue to do so. By providing good quality preventative services to support Carers earlier this may help to reach Carers sooner.

In the Carers' Task and Finish Group work undertaken in 2022, there were mixed views expressed about whether Carers' assessments that members of the group had undertaken had been impactful. Some felt very strongly that they were a "box-ticking exercise", whilst others had found them helpful for exploring ways that they could manage the impact of their caring upon them. Some Carers are fearful that an Assessment is 'a check of how they are caring' so they don't welcome it. The language needs to be clear and friendly and simple to understand. The actual process of the assessment also needs to be simpler, quicker to remove the stress and time for the Carer & Adult Social Care to improve turnover/support more people. Bridgit provides an option to start a self-assessment enabling the Carer to record it in their own words.

Improving uptake of Carers' Assessments and Direct Payments

Our wider strategy has a fuller discussion of our ambitions to increase uptake of Direct Payments, and this applies equally to Carers as with others with whom adult social care works. We need to make the system more understood and higher profile, creating a clearer sense of what people could access if they had a direct payment to pay for it.

However, key to this is to increase the numbers of Carers' Assessments undertaken. This is challenging, given the pressure that exists on the whole adult social care assessment system. Nevertheless, we remain committed to expanding access to an assessment and to the support that will help people to continue to care whilst remaining well and healthy. The provision of an assessment and support would be less costly in the long run than the breakdown of a caring relationship; this doesn't, however, remove the workforce challenges of providing both of the assessment and the support.

The Bridgit online platform has tools to enable Carers to develop a self-assessment online. The online self-assessments are followed up with a conversation and where eligible, Support Plan.

Similarly, the digital approaches that we are taking will make managing a Direct Payment easier for people.

Other areas for action

Recovering from the pandemic

Covid hit people hard from all backgrounds, and Carers struggled to manage additional hours of providing care without support, which negatively impacted on their health and wellbeing. Whilst the community support response was enormous, and many services provided digital options, for Carers there remains a legacy that we need to be aware of.

Domestic abuse

The Dorset Safeguarding Adult Board have completed a Safeguarding Adults Review which focuses on domestic abuse in later life, including a multi-agency action plan to consider how older people can be more effectively supported when they are victims of domestic abuse. This will include Carers.

Paragon (formally You Trust), Dorset Council's commissioned Integrated Domestic Abuse Service has a free awareness workshop for people in the community and organisations. The aim is to increase awareness across our most hard to reach communities by creating 'champions' who can act as a link to specialist support services.

Support with planning for hospital admission and discharge

The You Trust and Volunteer Centre Dorset are supporting people to discharge from hospital in partnership with the Adult Carers Team and Acute Hospital Carer Leads and wards. The "One Off Support" grants provide essential support to reduce delayed discharge. Further work is being developed to support planning for admission and to support discharge for the Carer and the person they are caring for.

Cross-border working

It is not unusual for Carers, especially in urban areas, to live in a different local authority area to the person they support. They have tended to be known as "cross-border" Carers.

Carers have expressed their confusion in relation to borders and why services differ across them. Dorset PCN's also do not relate to Dorset Adult Social Care borders which adds to confusion as to where to register. The (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services) Carers Leads in South East England have developed a cross-border protocol.

Themes for further exploration

This strategy will continue to develop, and there are a number of themes around Carer experience and support that we will need to explore further as we deliver the priorities outlined here. We will continue to work with Carers to co-produce the solutions, but some of the points include:

- » Inconsistent offer between Dorset Council and BCP Council for Dorset Residents
- » Workforce capacity for replacement care
- » Specific workforce training on Carers services and assessments
- » Sharing of information between social care, health, CMHT, providers
- » Social Prescribing
- » Carers Case Worker links with the NHS Carer Support and Patient Information Advisers based in the Acute Hospitals and some hospital wards
- » Digital exclusion and digital solutions.
- » Emergency response or contingency planning
- » Resources and advice to plan ahead for parent Carers and for potential future Carers
- » Develop the new Dorset Council wide carers support service in partnership with carers (service to commence November 2025).



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