

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	23 November 2023
TITLE	Support for Unpaid Carers
PURPOSE	Is there suitable support for unpaid carers in Gwynedd?
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1. Purpose of the Report

A request was received from the Scrutiny Committee to provide information about the support available for unpaid carers in the county, which specifically considers:

- What existing support is on offer?
- Does the support meet the needs of unpaid carers?
- Are there new plans in the pipeline to improve the provision?

2. Background

2.1 Thousands of people provide unpaid care for members of the family or friends who are ill, elderly or disabled every day in Gwynedd. These numbers increase as the population ages.

2.2 These people are known as unpaid carers. They can be parent carers caring for a child with disabilities; parent carers caring for a child who has become an adult; an adult caring for another adult - partner / parent / friend or relative; children and young people who care, or help to care for a sibling, parent or relative.

2.3 **10,448 people identified themselves as unpaid carers in Gwynedd according to the 2021 Census, namely 8.9% of the population** - but, in reality, we know that the figure is much higher than this.

2.4 Unpaid carers provide the vast majority of care and support for vulnerable, disabled and unwell individuals in our society and, therefore, they save hundreds and thousands of pounds for statutory services every year. However, the effects of Covid, the cost-of-living crisis and the shortage of employed carers have worsened the situation of several unpaid carers. Therefore, the question whether we do enough to support them to continue with their caring role is a timely one, and the answer is simple - no we do not. But this is something that is recognised and we are eager to take action to improve the situation.

2.5 Every year, Carers Wales undertakes a survey of carers in order to understand their situation in Wales. According to the 'State of Caring in Wales 2022' report, carers are faced with increasing challenges with many feeling lonely, invisible and isolated, and in a very difficult financial climate.

3. Guidance from the Government

There is clear guidance and recognition of the role of unpaid carers from the Welsh Government and it is the duty of local authorities to recognise and take action on this. The Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 notes that carers are entitled to receive an assessment of their needs.

3.1 The Welsh Government's Unpaid Carers Strategy notes four priorities to support unpaid carers.

- Identifying and valuing
- Providing information, advice and assistance
- Helping to live as well as caring

- Supporting in education and employment

4. What is the current support available in Gwynedd?

The type of support currently provided varies and relies on the arrangements of departmental teams, the capacity of local providers and on geographical location to an extent.

Our teams in Adults Social Services, Learning Disabilities, Mental Health and Children Services are involved with carers of all kinds in their day-to-day work. They work closely with the individuals receiving a service, and as workers they also provide emotional and practical support to those caring for them. This in itself is very valuable and it is not something that can be easily measured. Care and support are often provided in the home for the loved ones of those who care and it can certainly be of great assistance, but nobody should be expected to care continuously.

There is an Unpaid Carers unit within the Supporting Health and Well-being Service, which coordinates developmental work in the field and promotes engagement and communication.

4.1 Carers' Assessment

In accordance with the act, the support for carers includes the offer of a carers' assessment for those people who come to the attention of teams in Gwynedd, and are identified as unpaid carers.

This is a good chat to understand and record the carers' situation, which gives them an opportunity to consider whether they need any additional help or support. Few carers are aware of the support available. At other times, they are reluctant to consider that they are entitled to support - such as an opportunity to have a break, help with costs or equipment as well as information about local services or groups.

This is usually offered as an individual or joint assessment. The term 'assessment' can be confusing and scary to some carers and there is a need to be cautious when presenting this. The carer is not always keen to receive an assessment, and the numbers formally recorded on our care management system (WCCIS) are relatively low, with the majority of them joint assessments. This provision is not entirely consistent across the teams, and there is an opportunity here to raise awareness of the right to receive an assessment, and to ensure that every assessment considers all aspects of the carer's life.

A care and support plan will derive from the assessment and arrangements or referrals can be made to various support including:

4.2 Short respite

4.51 After understanding the situation of the carer through the assessment, the type of support that would be most beneficial to them can be discussed on a joint level. In the Adults Service, this may include the opportunity to have a short respite by means of a keep company/sitting-in service where the carer can have a chance to have a break from their caring role. The short respite can be a few hours per week or it can be accumulated for a whole day. This type of support relies on providers' staffing levels.

A small team of Dementia Support Workers provide support and companionship for individuals living with dementia in the county (primarily funded through the Regional Integrated Fund) and it ensures respite for those caring for them.

The Learning Disabilities Team provides a range of day opportunities for their clients, which is also a way of enabling the carers to have a period of respite. These include Shared Lives Scheme/respite group/Llwybrau Llesiant group sessions/short stay with friends.

4.3 Residential Respite

The Adults Service can arrange respite care in a residential home for those cared for in order to offer a complete break for a period of up to two weeks.

The Learning Disabilities Team has Bespoke respite units at Sŵn y Môr, Pwllheli and Brookfield, Bangor, and they can help to refer clients to have short holidays e.g. Carers Outreach caravan in Hafan y Môr.

4.4 Direct Payments

The teams can offer direct payments for carers giving more choice, control and flexibility for them in terms of the type of support than can be arranged. If an individual is eligible for support for their care and support needs, the Council can provide **funding** for them rather than **a service**. They can use the Direct Payments to arrange support that is most suitable for their personal situation.

At present, the number receiving direct payments is very low. A specific project looking at improving, developing and promoting opportunities to offer Direct Payments is currently ongoing.

4.5 Dementia Actif

The Dementia Actif Team is preparing a range of activities, groups and sessions across the county for individuals living with dementia and those who care for them. These include low-impact exercise and socialising classes, Boccia League, Carers' Group, Gardening Group, Sporting Memories Club and walking groups.

4.6 Day Care

The Council used to provide a programme of traditional day care activities in specific locations in the county for adults who needed support. A limited choice of activities was often available and some had to travel considerable distances to reach them. Despite this, a number of individuals and carers valued them - maybe when nothing else was available. A further scrutiny report notes potential developments in terms of support on a community level.

4.7 Aidi App

A new website launched on a joint basis with Anglesey to help young carers to find information and support and to self-refer for an assessment. It is a unique app that corresponds with the website and is a way of identifying young carers, and they can use it in several local shops etc. for discounts. It is also a way of quickly contacting the school or college when they are running late as a result of their caring responsibilities. 61 young carers have signed up so far.

4.8 Information on the Council Website

Although comprehensive information is available on the Council website, it is unclear how many people turn to these pages to search for information. In reality, information is available in several various locations which makes it difficult and confusing for carers. There is an opportunity here to consider how to collaborate to make the most of the resources available.

We have reviewed and reprinted the 'Looking after Someone' booklet, which is one way of offering information in one place. This will be widely distributed during the next few weeks.

4.9 3rd Sector Support for Carers

The Council commissions two specific 3rd sector agencies to provide support for carers, namely Carers Outreach - for adults and Action for Children - for children and young people. They offer a range of services:

- **Carers Outreach** - Providing emotional and practical advice and support which includes benefits information, as well as specific support groups and advocacy and counselling service. They have two caravans on the Hafan y Môr site in Pwllheli, which is available for a reduced price for carers to have a break. They run the well-being grant on behalf of the Council for carers, and more recently, they administrate the Brêc Bach grant for all types of respite for carers. In addition, they administrate white goods vouchers for those facing financial hardship. At present, parent carers make the most use of these grants.
- **Action for Children** - This organisation is commissioned to undertake young carers' assessments on behalf of the Council, and they have closely collaborated with the Young Carers' officers in the Supporting Health and Well-being Service to develop the Aidi App for Young Carers. They offer practical support for children and young people who are carers, including advice and support for individuals, group support, trips and activities, well-being courses and help to gain access to further services. They also offer small grants and vouchers.

4.10 Condition-specific Organisations

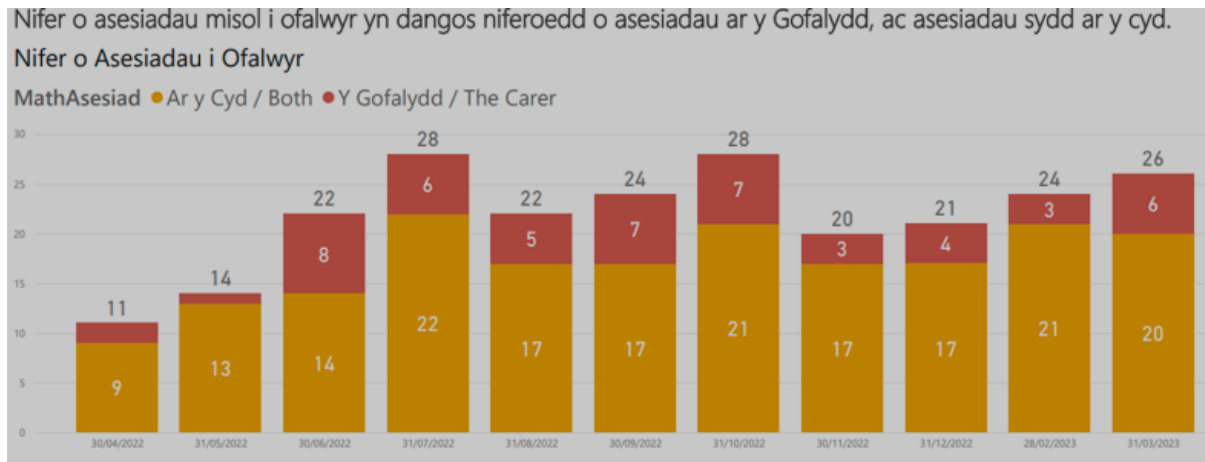
A number of organisations offer support and information for various health conditions, e.g. RNIB, but there are too many to note here. All of these can offer all types of information and support for carers.

4.11 Community Provision

A number of community enterprises are operational in pockets of Gwynedd that provide all types of services on a local level. By now, a further range of provision is available for people in their local community with the development of the community hubs as centres that '*Understand needs and make the most of local assets, make connections, create relationships and co-produce solutions in the community so that people can live good lives*'. A network of lunch/supper clubs, warm welcome centres, drop-in sessions, transport schemes, well-being activities etc. now exist across the county. By collaborating, nurturing connections and jointly developing on a local level, it is hoped that it will be possible to develop and enrich the provision for unpaid carers per community.

5. The numbers receiving support - examples

5.1 Carers' Assessments 2022/23



5.2 Carers Outreach Services

There were 316 new registrations during 2022/23 (a total of 1627 receive support):

196 - have received support through the benefits support project

77 - have received support by the Ysbyty Gwynedd project officer

162 - have received a grant from the well-being fund

56 - have received support from the Ysbyty Gwynedd Dementia project officer (support in YG for carers of individuals living with dementia)

5.3 Action for Children

121 young carers receiving support via Action for Children in 2022/23

44 have received a new assessment during the period.

£2400 of financial support through the family emergency fund

5.4 Dementia Actif

The total number of people who have attended Dementia Actif sessions during 2022/23: 240

Number of these living with dementia or are carers: 95

Number of sessions held across Gwynedd: 17 various sessions per week

6. Does the support meet the needs of unpaid carers?

6.1 It was already noted that 10,448 people identified themselves as unpaid carers in Gwynedd according to the 2021 Census. Only a very small percentage of these people are open to us, therefore, the support available today meets the needs of a small number of carers, and probably a partial number. Much good work is taking place to support carers but further work is to be done to understand to what extent we meet their needs, and to reach out in a timely manner to seek to identify and support carers who are hidden to us, and this in a preventative context.

6.2 At a meeting this year of the Dementia super group, this is what the attendees (which included unpaid carers) had to say in terms of the type of support that they need:

- Need factual, appropriate advice and support for carers 'early' to be able to make informed choices and avoid an emergency.
- Look at how to share the information in an easy way and ensure that the information is consistent in every community.
- Practitioners, especially GPs, to take more note of the challenges that carers are facing and the impact on their health and well-being.
- Appropriate and meaningful respite for carers, which is consistent across the county.

- Better understanding of how to use direct payments to pay for respite.

7. Are there new plans in the pipeline to improve the provision?

'Supporting unpaid carers' has been identified as one of the objectives within the 'Caring Gwynedd' priority area in the Council's 2023-28 Plan.

7.1 There has already been an agreement on internal recommendations deriving from the Gwynedd Adults' Needs Assessment 2022-27 for the field, and work is ongoing to address the internal challenges including strengthening and reconciling the system of undertaking carers' assessments, promoting a joint understanding between Council services and our partners in the 3rd sector, and ensuring clarity on the charging policy for carers.

7.2 However, we are eager to collaborate with our partners to develop a strong and ambitious Carers' Plan on a joint basis for Gwynedd, and based on the four national priorities. This Plan will be a plan across all age ranges - children, young people and adults who are unpaid carers. We intend to understand what would help carers to live a good life as they continue with their caring role, what works at grass roots' level today, and address the challenges that face us within the field. This is an example of the type of priorities that have arisen thus far:

7.3 Priority Table

Theme	Priority area of work
Theme 1. Identifying and appreciating unpaid carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying ways of including carers in developments and plans • Promoting carers' assessments and reconciling arrangements across the Council • Raising the awareness of carers of their role and its importance and improving the recognition • A joint conference to raise awareness • Re-visiting the idea of electing an unpaid carers champion(s) • Scoping work to consider the benefit of extending the Aidi scheme to older carers in Gwynedd
Theme 2. Providing information, advice and assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update the Council website creating a link to suitable information • Coordinate multi-agency information sessions across the county • Strengthen the Carers' Network - in terms of membership • Collaborate with local hubs to share information and attendance • Raise awareness of the right for a carers' assessment and what it entails • Improve access to information for workers in the field
Theme 3. Helping to live as well as caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to give people more choice via Direct Payments - need to promote for residents/staff • Promote the awareness of people/staff of well-being grants/Time - especially older people • Promote awareness of Carers Outreach/Action for Children support among staff and residents • Collaborate to develop flexible and suitable community support for individuals and carers • Need a central system to share information about what is available in every community

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use and adapt the local assets available to offer suitable and flexible options • Raise awareness and collaborate with the community hubs and local care providers • Promote more of the local care micro businesses to give people more choice, and to consider extending business development support for small businesses that support children and young people (the emphasis has been on adults so far) • Consider how technology can support unpaid carers and their families
<p>Theme 4. Supporting unpaid carers in education and in the workplace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to raise the awareness of pupils and teachers through the work of the Young Carers officer • Promote good practice in terms of policy/carers' rights to staff among partner organisations/county employers • Develop and promote the support for staff who are carers within the Council • Make further contact with Bangor University and Coleg Llandrillo Menai - share data and information

8. Conclusion

8.1 Two out of three of us will provide unpaid care for our loved ones at some point in our lives, and therefore it is important that help is available as easy and soon as possible to ensure that this experience is as positive as possible.

8.2 We need to identify carers sooner - and this in terms of employers, health and well-being services, and within our communities, and ensure fair and timely support and recognition for them.

8.3 There is a need to recognise that this is a preventative agenda and that the aim is to support carers to continue with their role, and that this will benefit the carer, their loved ones and the statutory services. We know that there is room to extend the provision that is currently available.

8.4 The support that can be provided to unpaid carers in Gwynedd is very reliant on grant funding, and drawing up a county Carers' Plan that addresses the need, but is also affordable, is a massive challenge. There will be a need to carefully weigh up the obvious financial risks and the risks to individuals' well-being when planning for the future.

8.5 Members of the Care Scrutiny Committee are asked for any observations on the above plans, any ideas that they would add, or any challenge to what has been presented.