

The background features a light blue background with thin, horizontal white lines. In the upper left, a large orange hand is reaching towards a smaller pink hand. In the lower right, a large orange hand is reaching towards a smaller blue hand. Scattered throughout the background are several small hearts in various colors: orange, pink, and dark blue. The title text is centered in a dark blue band.

ALL-AGE UNPAID CARERS STRATEGY FOR OXFORDSHIRE



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



OUR OVERALL VISION:

UNPAID CARERS OF ALL AGES
IN OXFORDSHIRE ARE VALUED
AND SUPPORTED IN LIVING
THEIR LIVES TO THE FULLEST.

INTRODUCTION

This strategy is for anyone who regularly supports another person on an unpaid basis – whether that be a friend, child with additional needs, loved one, parent, sibling, or a combination of these people. This is not the same as someone who provides care professionally or through a voluntary organisation.

The care given by unpaid carers is exceptional and essential in supporting the health and social care system but more importantly: you matter, and your needs deserve to be met.

We have been listening to carers through workshops, surveys, storytelling and carers' voices events in shaping this strategy, to make sure we understand your priorities. You tell us that although caring can be rewarding, you are tired, cannot easily find information that you need, have to keep retelling your story, and that you do not feel valued.

This strategy has been co-produced with 1,600 adult and young carers along with stakeholders from the county council, Carers Oxfordshire, Rethink Mental Illness, Oxfordshire Family Support Network, Be Free Young Carers,

Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum, Age UK Oxfordshire, Dementia Oxfordshire, Oxford Health, Oxford University Hospitals, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board and Oxford City Primary Care Networks Social Prescribers.

The action plan within this strategy sets out the practical steps that we are collectively going to take to recognise, involve, empower and support carers of all ages. We will continue to listen to carers throughout the lifetime of the strategy to ensure you are supported and get the recognition you so richly deserve.



Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

FOREWORD AND WHO IS AN UNPAID CARER?

Unpaid carers make a significant contribution to British society. Each day, 12,000 people become unpaid carers across the UK¹.

An unpaid carer is a child, young person or adult who cares for a family member or friend who could not cope without that support, due to ill-health, frailty, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction. Many who provide unpaid care to a family member or friend do not identify themselves as an ‘unpaid carer’ but rather as a spouse/partner/son/daughter/friend. Sometimes the person being cared for does not wish to recognise that they are being cared for, which is difficult and frustrating for the carer who in turn may not be recognised as an unpaid carer. The term ‘unpaid carer’ is not about labelling people but describing what they do to help them access help and support.

The range of support provided by unpaid carers includes help dealing with care services/benefits, personal care, making medical and other appointments, providing transport as well as supporting people at appointments, collecting prescriptions, shopping, providing companionship, looking after siblings, housework, keeping an eye on them and other practical help including dealing with crises at short notice. This can take up a few hours each week, or involve caring for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can impact on employment, education, and school attendance.

The good quality, consistent support that unpaid carers give is not only vital in helping people remain in their own homes, be discharged from hospital earlier or avoid hospital admission in the first place, but also reduces isolation and loneliness for the person being cared for and can help support their memory and mental wellbeing.

1 in 5 adults in the UK currently provides unpaid care, and the estimated value of unpaid care was £530 million per day and £193 billion per year during the pandemic². The Census 2021 shows that the proportion of residents who provide weekly unpaid care has decreased across Oxfordshire from 9.3 per cent in 2011 to 7.6 per cent in 2021 though the hours of care they individually provide has increased³.



¹ [Cycles of caring: transitions in and out of unpaid care | the Centre for Care](#)

² <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/unseen-and-undervalued-the-value-of-unpaid-care-provided-to-date-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

³ [Census | Oxfordshire Insight](#)

THE IMPACT OF CARING

Caring for a friend or family member can be very rewarding but can also be exhausting, stressful, overwhelming, and isolating at times. Many people combine their caring role with employment, education and/or parenthood or childhood, leaving them little time or energy for themselves.

Young carers said what they found most difficult about caring was feeling different from their peers and having no one to talk to about their situation:

- › 'I have no other friends like me'
- › 'having to do things on top of what you already have to do'
- › 'it's hard to speak to your parent about how you feel'
- › 'it's hard to talk to people about what I'm feeling'

Some of the aspects of caring that adult carers tell us what they found most difficult are:

- › Being unable to leave the person cared for ("everything from the chance to nip to the loo to going shopping on your own")
- › Dealing with incontinence
- › Finding time to make calls, etc
- › Finding patience
- › Balancing family and work life with caring role

- › Seeing your cared for person decline
- › Letting go of caring and having paid carers in – the emotional attachment you have with your cared for
- › Find yourself in a bubble – difficult to find time to meet with friends
- › Finding appropriate activities to access for your cared for person and keeping them happy

Unpaid carers continue to provide the bulk of care to their loved ones with little or no support from outside, and at the cost of their own health and wellbeing⁴.

Estimates show that 1.2 million carers in the UK are living in poverty.



1.2 MILLION CARERS
IN THE UK ARE LIVING
IN POVERTY.

⁴ Falling short: How far have we come in improving support for unpaid carers in England? (nuffieldtrust.org.uk)

WHAT'S CHANGED FOR CARERS?

Since Oxfordshire County Council published its Carers' Strategy 2017-20, there have been a number of changes:

- › The Survey of Adult Carers in England 2021/22 showed that unpaid carers' satisfaction levels against all measures had fallen, nationally and in Oxfordshire
- › Census 2021 showed that although the number of unpaid carers overall has fallen, the hours of care each generally provides has increased
- › The existing Carers' Strategy 2017-20 contained out of date information, particularly regarding young carers
- › Better communication is needed between the wider health, education, social care and voluntary sector organisations
- › The COVID-19 pandemic increased isolation and loneliness for unpaid carers, with mental health problems rising starkly for young carers in particular⁵
- › An increased number of unpaid carers report having financial issues due to cost-of-living crisis in the UK⁶, potentially risking their health
- › The 'People at the Heart of Care'⁷ white paper, presented in December 2021, set out a 10-year vision for support and care in England, including empowering unpaid carers and ensuring they have access to information and advocacy



⁵ What We Do - Impact of Covid-19 Young Carers | Carers Trust

⁶ <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/under-pressure-caring-and-the-cost-of-living-crisis/>

⁷ People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

CURRENT SUPPORT FOR UNPAID CARERS IN OXFORDSHIRE



All the statutory organisations within health, education and social care in Oxfordshire together with the city and district councils and voluntary sector partners have confirmed their commitment to support for carers and families. Examples of this support include:

- › Carers Oxfordshire, a partnership between the charities Action for Carers (Oxfordshire) and Rethink Mental Illness, has been commissioned by the council to be the primary adult social care service for unpaid carers aged 18 years and older
- › Personal budgets are available for unpaid carers to support their wellbeing
- › Carers Oxfordshire has developed a range of offers to give unpaid carers time for themselves
- › Oxford University Hospital's Carer Policy 2022 sets out how carer liaison officers will support staff to support carers, and how its carer passports aid early identification and additional support for carers
- › Oxford Health's Family, Friends and Carers Strategy 2021 sets out its objectives to ensure carers feel listened to, involved, and supported
- › Be Free Young Carers is a charity that provides some practical and emotional support to young carers, including respite activities, befriending, mental health and wellbeing support, and a 13+ youth group

The new strategy builds on this existing good practice and commitment and sets the goals and priorities agreed with unpaid carers to achieve the stated vision and herald a better future for carers of all ages. It also sets out how progress will be measured.



CARERS' RIGHTS

Unpaid carers have rights that are set out in law, which include:

- › The right to choose, as an adult, whether or not to be a carer for another adult
- › The right to choose what caring tasks you are willing to do
- › The right for the carer's views to be considered by health and social care services when organising provision for the cared-for person, including in hospital discharge planning
- › The right to a carer's assessment – to identify and support your own needs, as well as measuring the impact of the caring role on your wellbeing
- › The right to request flexible working and time off to care for dependants
- › The right not to be discriminated against as a carer by association with the cared for person
- › The right to engage in employment, education, training, and leisure

These rights are contained in the Children's Act 1989, the Work and Families Act 2006, the Equality Act 2010, the Care Act 2014, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Health and Care Act 2022.



PRIORITIES

Our strategic priorities are:

PRIORITY 2:

To safeguard adult and young carers at risk who need more support to look after themselves, particularly during times of change and transition.

PRIORITY 1:

To identify carers and effectively support them, improving their health and wellbeing and providing opportunities for a break from their caring role.

PRIORITY 3:

To encourage and enable carers to have an active life outside their caring role, including fulfilling their education, employment, and training potential.

To ensure these priorities are met in Oxfordshire, we make the following commitments.

COMMITMENTS TO CARERS

Health, social care, education, city and district councils and voluntary organisations will work in partnership to deliver the following commitments to unpaid carers of all ages in Oxfordshire:

- ▶ Carers of all ages will shape and influence strategy, procedures, and support for carers through co-production⁸
- ▶ Services and procedures will be kept up-to-date and appropriate for carers through ongoing co-production
- ▶ Improved identification and support of unpaid carers by aligning workplans across health, education and social care will reduce the need to repeat information about carers and those they care for
- ▶ Carers and those supporting/advising them can easily find information, advice, and support when they need it
- ▶ Carers are valued and treated as the experts in their lives and what they need to support their health and wellbeing
- ▶ Carers can access breaks from their caring role to support their own wellbeing
- ▶ Development of joined systems between organisations
- ▶ Increase organisation / staff carer awareness and training to be able to explore and learn about ways that professionals can pro-actively engage with, increase identification, referrals and support of carers

To ensure this happens, we have agreed with carers what they wish us to achieve and how we will know when we have done it.

⁸ Co-production offers the opportunity for people with real life experiences to help shape, co-design and develop services by working in partnership with the county council. The aim is to strengthen services and ultimately improve the lives and experiences of those who use them.

HOW WE WILL KNOW IF WE HAVE MADE PROGRESS

Carers along with Healthwatch⁹, the independent health and social care watchdog, are invited to monitor and comment on the progress partners make on their action plans. The actions will be reviewed as required.

Updates will be published in the [Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#) newsletter and [Care Matters Magazine](#), also on Carers Oxfordshire's website: [Unpaid Carers Strategy - Carers Oxfordshire](#), where you can feedback on progress.


To become involved in monitoring progress, please contact:

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Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Board will annually review the progress being made and take into account carers' feedback to ensure the strategy remains relevant and up to date.

⁹ <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/>

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLAN

To deliver the All-age Unpaid Carers Strategy 2023-26, actions have been identified by partners. Actions and completion dates will be finalised over summer 2023.

The first year of the strategy will allow us to set manageable targets to improve outcomes for carers. These plans will identify our current baseline level of provision and performance in all age services.

We will work collaboratively with all partners to ensure our systemwide support to carers delivers more cohesive services.

[\[Link to OCC web page containing action plan\]](#)



