

Appendix 10 - Evidence from other organisations

Carers Trust

1. Carers Trust is a UK charity working to transform the lives of unpaid carers across the UK. It said that, in Wales, it partners with a network of 9 local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy. Carers Trust's vision is that carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.
2. Carers Trust said that, although access to assessments has improved since the pandemic, it remained concerned that not enough unpaid carers were having their needs assessed, as local authorities are overstretched. It identified that the timing of an assessment was important, as many carers were not having their needs assessed until they had reached crisis point.
3. Carers Trust said that carers were often unsure if they have had their needs assessed, as they were unclear whether their own needs had been assessed as part of the assessment for the person they care for. It said that, even when carers had their needs assessed, they were not sure of the outcome and what, if anything, was put in place for them. Carers Trust said that this demonstrated the importance of carers being provided with a written copy of their assessment.
4. Carers Trust said that, where needs assessments were completed by carer organisations, the time taken for further action once an assessment had been referred back to the local authority for review, was a barrier. It acknowledged that there were likely to be delays in securing a package of care, or short breaks and respite, due to Social Worker capacity and the social care crisis.
5. A further barrier identified by Carers Trust was self-recognition, with many carers not identifying themselves as an unpaid carer.

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

6. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales ("OPCW") said that it was important to ensure that the carer's rights, and the rights of those they care for, as set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 ("SSWB Act") and accompanying Regulations and Codes of Practice, were properly upheld. It said that no-one providing unpaid care should miss out on the support to which they were entitled; it said that it was important to ensure that every contact counted when it came to identifying unpaid carers within the community.

7. The OPCW highlighted that approximately 55% of carers in Wales are over the age of 55, meaning that there are now roughly 275,000 older carers in Wales.¹ It said that it was important to ensure that the SSWB Act was fully implemented by proactively promoting carers' rights. It said that improved data collection was also required to provide assurance that rights were properly enacted and to ensure that diverse people who provide unpaid care were not disadvantaged in their access to support.

8. The OPCW said that, whilst not all enquiries to its Advice and Assistance Service were in relation to social care and, in particular, access to a carer's needs assessment, there were some common themes or issues drawn from casework to provide a Wales-wide picture.

9. The OPCW said that there was a lack of proactive offers of a carer's needs assessment by professionals, even when it was clear that a person would be providing care as part of their loved one's Care and Support Plan; this unfairly put the onus on the carer to have detailed knowledge of their rights under the SSWB Act. Given that many older people were not aware of their rights and therefore did not know that they had the right to a carer's needs assessment, older people who were providing unpaid care were missing out on the support that could help them in their caring role.

¹ Carers Wales (2020) Carers Week 2020 Research Report: The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3vQ9yBC> Carers Wales (2022) State of Caring in Wales 2022 A snapshot of unpaid care in Wales. November 2022. Available at: https://www.carersuk.org/images/State_of_caring_in_Wales/Compressed_Carers_Wales_State_of_Caring_in_Wales__2022_report_English_final.pdf

10. The OPCW said that digital exclusion may be a factor in the lack of awareness about people's rights to a carer's needs assessment, as much of the information available was only accessible online. Similarly, information on how to access social care on local authority websites often directed people to online content, with telephone numbers sometimes difficult to find for those people who need to talk to a professional.

11. It said that waiting times for both care and support assessments and carers' needs assessments were an ongoing concern, especially given the current pressures on social care. The OPCW highlighted examples where, following an initial care and support assessment, there had been no contact from the local authority, resulting in a person having to continue to provide unpaid care, despite seeking support. Similarly, for those unpaid carers who were waiting for a care and support plan to take place, they have had to continue to provide care, often to the detriment of their own well-being and employment/finances.

12. The OPCW said that respite can be a vital lifeline. When a service or respite activity has closed or changed, this did not always trigger a review of a carer's Support Plan, as would be expected. Alternatives, such as exploring the use of Direct Payments to mitigate a loss of a respite service, should be considered, but this did not always happen.

13. The OPCW believes that there is a role for every professional in key services, that they have regular contact with carers to inform them about their right to a carer's needs assessment, by making every contact count. Her office said that it was aware of examples where carers had been in contact with other local authority departments outside of Social Care, for example, home adaptations, or at hospital discharge, where this had not been the case and unpaid carers were left struggling to cope.

14. The OPCW was concerned about the lack of equality data collected in relation to the provisions of the SSWB Act. It said that the national datasets required by Welsh Government under the Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services did not report on any data by age and, as such, the age profile of people in receipt of a carer's needs assessment, or of a Support Plan, was unknown. Similarly, the age profile of carers in receipt of Direct Payments was unknown, as was the age profile of people seeking information on social care or requesting independent advocacy. It said that, without equality data collected, many groups of people, including older people, were rendered invisible.

15. The OPCW provided 4 case examples: 1 from Caerphilly County Borough Council's area, 2 from Ceredigion County Council's area and 1 from Neath Port Talbot Council's area. It had no cases relating to Support Assessments from Flintshire County Council's area.

16. The example from Caerphilly County Borough Council's area related to a change in the carer's ability to provide care and they were told that they should not have agreed to provide care if they were unable to do so and that the Council could not help to fill the gap in care. The OPCW said that this example highlighted the potential lack of ongoing reviews of Support Plans, to ensure a carer's needs were met, as situations change.

17. The first example from Ceredigion County Council's area related to concerns from a carer about the delay in re-opening day centres to support people living with dementia, following the pandemic. The carer had not received a carer's needs assessment. Following support from the OPCW office, the carer was able to secure some respite support, via Direct Payments. This case highlighted the lack of pro-active offers of a carer's needs assessment, even when a carer was identified in the Care and Support Plan of the person they care for. It also highlights the under use of Direct Payments, especially for older people.

18. The second example from Ceredigion County Council's area involved a person being cared for by a family member. They enquired about securing home adaptations and a Blue Badge and raised concerns about what would happen to her if her family member could no longer care for them. They were referred to the Care and Repair Service². The person was provided advice and assistance by OPCW, including how they and their family member could request a care and support assessment and a carer's needs assessment, respectively. This demonstrated the lack of a proactive offer of a carer's needs assessment and the need for more to be done to emergency-proof caring arrangements.

19. The example from Neath Port Talbot Council's area related to a delay in providing a replacement provider of domiciliary care to their loved one, meaning that the individual faced the possibility of having to take unpaid leave for an undetermined period, to care for their loved one, which caused a great deal of stress. A new provider of domiciliary care was identified, after contact from the OPCW's office. This highlighted the lack of a proactive offer of a carer's needs assessment by the local authority.

² A service providing repairs, adaptations and home maintenance for older people to help them live independently.