At the height of the pandemic in 2020 it was estimated that there were 683,000 unpaid carers in Wales. Carers saved local authority social services and the NHS £33 million every day by providing unpaid care to ill, elderly and disabled people which local social services would otherwise have to provide.

Despite Wales having emerged from lockdown over a year ago, and at a time of minimal Covid restrictions, unpaid carers struggle to see a recovery from the pandemic. Local authority provided services relied on by carers, and those they care for, have been slow to get back to anything approaching normal service levels. Carers are struggling with the increased costs of caring on top of the wider cost-of-living crisis, and too many carers are not even identified by their council and struggle without information, services and support. Carers Wales will be publishing a Local Government Briefing which will explore in-depth the pressures facing carers in a local government context.

Carers across Wales desperately need practical help from the new local authorities elected in May. These are Carers Wales’ proposals to make a difference.
Reinforce the foundations of social services

60% of carers say their physical health has deteriorated and 71% say their mental health has worsened. 72% of carers had not had their support needs assessed since 2016.

• Local authorities must reduce the number of families reaching crisis point by increasing spending on services for carers in every year of the 2022-2027 local authority term.

• Local authorities should set out how they will increase the number of carers receiving information, advice, Carers Needs Assessments or ‘What Matters Conversations’ and support in every year of the next local authority term.

A Recovery for Carers

Just 8% of carers say day services and care homes for respite have fully re-opened, and only 16% say sitting services are fully operational. 72% of carers in Wales haven’t been able to take any breaks from caring at all since the pandemic began.

• Local authorities should set out how they will increase capacity to deal with the backlog of increased needs created by the pandemic.

• Local authorities must restore or create new services for unpaid carers and people requiring care

Ensure access to Covid tests

Carers look after many of the people who are most vulnerable to Covid-19. Carers, already struggling financially, would find it difficult to afford Covid tests and are fearful about what would happen to their loved one if they fall ill.

• Local authorities must provide urgent clarity around carer access to free Covid tests in the coming months and organize targeted messaging to carers around accessing tests.

• Local authorities should ensure the process to apply for free tests is as quick and accessible as possible.
Reach out to local carers

62% of carers say they are caring alone without support, and the majority do not receive information to help them care.

• Local authorities should investigate drawing together all existing records of local carers into a database to increase their ability to proactively reach carers with information and support.

• To do this, councils should explore information sharing with their local health board for carers e.g. those who were identified through the Covid vaccine rollout, applications made by carers to their local authority for PPE, Covid tests and the £500 recognition payment.

Help with the costs of caring

51% of unpaid carers in Wales are currently unable to manage their monthly expenses, 66% have cut back on heating in recent months and carers have to spend an average of £1,300 annually to care for their loved one.

• Local authorities must provide dedicated local grants schemes for carers, such as for more energy efficient white goods.

• Local authorities must support carers to maximise their income through targeted financial advice, including on welfare entitlements and what schemes exist to support carers with their living costs.

• Local authorities should provide carers with free or discounted access to council funded facilities such as swimming pools and gyms.
Carers Wales is the national campaigning charity for unpaid carers in Wales. Part of Carers UK, we provide information, advice and wellbeing support for all carers in Wales. We research to influence and campaign to make lives better for carers.

To find out more about unpaid carers, visit

www.carerswales.org

@carerswales /carerswales

Carers Wales is a part of Carers UK, a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX.