

Subject: Consultation: priorities for the Local Government and Housing Committee

Dear Local Government and Housing Committee,

### **Carers in Wales**

There are at least 487,000<sup>1</sup> unpaid carers in Wales, providing care on an unpaid basis to people who need care and support due to age, illness, disability or due to mental health. While some carers may provide care for a few hours a week, many have substantial caring responsibilities with 67%<sup>2</sup> of carers in Wales who responded to our State of Caring survey in 2019 saying they provide at least 50 hours of care a week. Carers perform a range of tasks, from administering medication and assisting with personal care through to accompanying the cared for person to appointments and preparing meals.

Unpaid carers are an integral part of the social care system. While carers may primarily fall under the remit of the Senedd's Health and Social Care committee, as social care is a major delivery priority and source of expenditure for local government, we have decided to respond to your consultation on future priorities to ensure the experiences and needs of carers are considered in relevant discussions and inquiries undertaken by the Local Government committee.

Carers Wales is the national membership charity for unpaid carers in Wales. Part of Carers UK, we provide a range of information resources for carers, support carers to balance caring with employment and provide carer-focused wellbeing initiatives. We also conduct research into the experiences of carers in Wales and use our findings to respond to policy developments and campaign for better support for carers.

If unpaid carers were not providing care to vulnerable people local government and other statutory services would have to step in. Because of this, it was estimated before the pandemic that unpaid carers saved the public sector in Wales £8.1 billion pounds a year<sup>3</sup>, and Welsh Government data suggests 96%<sup>4</sup> of all care in Wales is delivered by unpaid carers. At the height

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<sup>1</sup> Carers Week: Carers Week 2020 Research Report (2020)

<sup>2</sup> Carers Wales: State of Caring in Wales 2019 (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government: Minister confirms £15m investment to support carers and adults with care needs (2018)

<sup>4</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence: Preventative support for adult carers in Wales: rapid review (2017)

of the pandemic, it was estimated that unpaid carers were saving Wales £33m every day<sup>5</sup>. Unpaid carers are the foundation of the social care system in Wales, and should there be a failure to prioritize carers, the future sustainability of the social care system would be at risk.

### **Local services: delivery and recovery**

We have noted with considerable concern the moves by a number of local authorities (such as those in Gwent<sup>6</sup>, Swansea<sup>7</sup> and Pembrokeshire<sup>8</sup>) this summer who have asked carers to take on additional caring duties due to challenges in the paid care workforce. We have called on these local authorities and health boards to be upfront and honest with carers about the changes they are proposing, give clear timescales for when care packages will be reinstated and provide additional direct payments so carers can try and source replacement support themselves. Unfortunately, carers will feel they have no choice but to take on additional duties, and as such these moves by local authorities undermine their legal obligation to promote voice and control contained within the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 which states that carers must have a choice whether to care and over how much care they are willing and able to provide.

Unpaid carers are already close to breaking point having cared for longer with less support throughout the pandemic, a situation which we feel has been overlooked in the recent requests made of them by some local authorities. A Carers Wales survey of carers published in October 2020<sup>9</sup> found that 80% of carers were having to provide care for longer with less support during the pandemic, and 37% were doing so as a direct result of the withdrawal of local services they used to rely on such as day centers and sitting services. In the same survey 76% of carers described themselves as exhausted and close to breaking point. Shockingly 73% of carers in Wales have been unable to take any breaks whatsoever from their caring role since the pandemic began according to research published in June 2021<sup>10</sup>. In this context it is unacceptable and unsustainable to expect more from already exhausted unpaid carers, most of whom have been caring nonstop since March 2020.

While some service changes were to be expected during periods of lockdown, we are concerned that many local authority-provided services which carers and those they care for rely on are still operating at much reduced capacities or remain closed entirely. There has also

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<sup>5</sup> Carers Wales: Unpaid carers in Wales have saved £33 million every day of the pandemic (2020)

<sup>6</sup> Wales Online: Families could be called on to help relatives because of 'severe' shortage of carers in Gwent (2021)

<sup>7</sup> BBC News: 'Alarming' Swansea carer shortage prompts family SOS call (2021)

<sup>8</sup> Western Telegraph: Pembrokeshire County Council contingencies for Brexit and Covid carer shortage (2021)

<sup>9</sup> Carers UK: Caring Behind Closed Doors: Six Months On (2020)

<sup>10</sup> Carers Week: Carers Week 2021 Research Report (2021)

been little clarity from local authorities as to when they expect services to return to operating at normal or close to normal capacity. At a time when nearly all COVID related restrictions have been lifted, carers and the people who rely on them feel overlooked. We would appreciate it if the committee could seek further clarity on the reopening of such local authority provided and funded services.

Section 16 of the 2014 Act places a duty on local authorities to promote how social enterprises, third sector providers and co-operative organisations can provide care and preventative services in the community. While such initiatives could help to alleviate the workload of the paid care workforce, we have seen only limited engagement from local authorities and regional partnership boards on developing new models of care and support. Regrettably, carers involved in many local authorities and RPBs continue to report that they are not properly included in the process of designing and commissioning services, impeding innovation in services and undermining the principle of co-production in the Act. We believe the committee should work with local government to further embed co-production with carers and service users throughout service design and review.

A recovery from COVID in health, social care and local government requires full reinstatement of existing services for carers and additional investment in them to meet the needs of carers and the vulnerable people who rely on them. By providing care and managing conditions in the home, carers can prevent people from requiring admission to hospital and, at a time when the NHS is unable to discharge many patients who are ready to leave hospital, sufficient support for carers in the community enables these patients to be discharged and hospital capacity to be released. Insufficient funding for social care in general negatively impacts on both unpaid carers and the well-being of the paid care workforce by increasing demand and pressures on social care staff and increasing the likelihood local authorities will have to seek costly residential care placements as carers will be unable to cope in the home.

Home adaptations are also vital in enabling people in need of care to remain in their own homes for longer. When carers are unable to secure adequate home adaptations, they are often forced to request more extensive formal support to manage the condition of the person they care for.

### **Future Social Care Funding**

Turning to local authority funding for social care, we believe attention is needed on the level of funding each local authority allocates to social care and what form this spending takes. When the Welsh Government announced £48m of funding to support social care on September 14<sup>th</sup>

2021, £40m was in the form of funding to local authorities that had not been ring-fenced to reach social care, and our research has long suggested that carers receive markedly different levels of support in different counties across Wales. Our research over 2019 to 2020<sup>11</sup> found that among carers who had undergone a carers needs assessment there appeared to be wide variability between counties regarding the proportion who are then given a support plan or direct payments, ranging from 62% in Carmarthenshire to just 4% in Caerphilly. This apparent postcode lottery in carer support sees carers and the people who rely on them lose out, and undermines the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 which guaranteed uniform legal entitlements to support for carers across Wales.

We appreciate that local government funding settlements have struggled to keep pace with increasing demand for services in recent years. As the Welsh Government considers how to use the funding from the recently announced increase in National Insurance, we believe substantial additional funding should be given to local authorities to increase the amount of social care they are able to provide or commission, to improve the quality of this care and to widen the eligibility so fewer people miss out on support. We also need to see additional dedicated funding for services to support the health and well-being of carers themselves.

At the same time, we hope the committee could make representations to ensure that a new settlement for social care is coupled with robust monitoring and ring-fenced funding streams so all involved can be confident the funding will reach front line social care. However, with the proceeds of the National Insurance increase some years away we are in no doubt, as set out throughout this response, that immediate substantial investment is needed in social care and services for carers to enable the health and social care system to recover from the pandemic and begin to deliver the level of support promised by the 2014 Act.

We look forward to working with the committee in the years to come and would be happy to discuss our research and our work for carers at any time.

Yours faithfully,

Jake Smith

Policy Officer

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<sup>11</sup> Carers Wales: Track the Act Briefing 5: Monitoring the 4th year of implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (2020)

