

Northumberland Commitment to Carers Strategy

2025 - 2030





In partnership with



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1. Foreword

- 1.0 Unpaid carers are often the one constant in the lives of those receiving health and social care services. Any caring role can be emotionally and physically draining and caring can often impact on an unpaid carer's own health.
- 1.1 As someone in this role I know how important it is that unpaid carers have access to everything they need to be able to provide this care effectively.
- 1.2 A strong and effective carers strategy should make it clear to everyone involved that unpaid carers must be able to access the support they themselves may need to continue in this role. It should also outline the importance of carers being able to find information and support to meet the needs of the person that they care for.
- 1.3 A carers strategy should make it clear that the unpaid carer is a key partner in providing support. It should also recognise that carers have a lot of knowledge and should be involved and engaged effectively at every stage of care.
- 1.4 I am keen that this carers strategy should encourage partners to work together. The strategy should aim to provide continuity of care and support for both the unpaid carer and the cared for.

Ann Clark, unpaid carer on the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board

2. Introduction

- 2.0 Unpaid carers deliver a vital role in our communities by providing essential care and support for some of our most vulnerable people – it is a role that is often undervalued and unseen by wider society. The Northumberland Carers Partnership Board recognise and value unpaid carers. The health and care system would simply not be able to function without them.
- 2.1 This Northumberland Commitment to Carers Strategy aims to provide an overview of how the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board will work together to ensure that carers are identified, valued and supported. The Board includes unpaid carers, the voluntary sector, the council and health partners.
- 2.2 Language is incredibly important. The word ‘carer’ is often incorrectly used interchangeably to refer to both paid care workers and unpaid carers. In this strategy we are clear that the word carer refers to **unpaid** carers.
- 2.3 Our first Northumberland Commitment to Carers Strategy 2022 – 2024 helped build strong foundations for working together to create positive change for carers. We know however that there is still lots of work still to do.
- 2.4 We want to get better at listening to carers to help us understand what we do well and what we need to do better. Some of the challenges facing carers in Northumberland are unique due in part to our rurality and demography. Northumberland is England’s most northern county and is the largest unitary authority by geographic coverage and the sixth most sparsely populated in England.
- 2.5 This strategy has been developed with unpaid carers, ensuring that we are both acknowledging and responding to what matters. We would like to thank those carers who generously gave their time in providing feedback and working with us to shape and develop this strategy.
- 2.6 This ‘Commitment to Carers’ strategy is a shared responsibility. We look forward to working together on delivering positive change and ensuring that carers are not only recognised and valued but are actively supported. The strategy outlines five key priorities and is underpinned by a dynamic Carers Strategy Implementation Plan that includes what actions we will be undertaking to help achieve our priorities.
- 2.7 This is an inclusive strategy and relates to all carers, including young carers and parent carers.

3. Our Vision

3.0 Our Vision

3.1 We think that Northumberland should be a place where carers are:

- recognised, valued and included
- able to access the right opportunities, information and support at the right time for themselves and the person for whom they care.

4. Context

4.0 Definitions

4.1 There are many definitions of carers in the United Kingdom. The Northumberland Carers Partnership Board have agreed the following definitions:

4.1.1 Who is a carer?

4.1.2 A carer is anyone who provides unpaid care for a family member, partner or friend who needs help due to illness, frailty, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction, and cannot cope without their support.

4.1.3 Who is a young carer?

4.1.4 A young carer is a child or young person under the age of 18 who provides, or intends to provide, unpaid carer to another person which would normally be undertaken by an adult.

4.1.5 Who is a parent carer?

4.1.6 A parent carer is someone over 18 who provides care for a child with a special education need or disability for whom they have parental responsibility.

4.2 National Context

4.2.1 There are key pieces of legislation that provide an overarching framework for identifying, assessing, and meeting the needs of carers. These include:

- [Care Act 2014](#) – places a legal duty on local authorities to provide appropriate support that will maintain a carer's wellbeing. All carers are entitled to an assessment of their needs..

- [Children and Families Act 2014](#) – gives young carers and parent carers in England a right to an assessment of their own needs.
- [Health and Social Care Act 2022](#) – requires the Integrated Care System to involve carers in decisions to change or develop a service and to ensure that carers are involved in the cared for person's treatment, diagnosis and care.
- [NHS Long Term Plan 2019](#) – promises to maintain our focus on identifying and supporting carers.
- [Carers Leave Act 2024](#) – introduces a new and flexible entitlement of five days unpaid leave per year for employees who have a dependent with a long-term care need.
- The National Institute for Health and Carer Excellence (NICE) guideline '[Supporting adult carers](#)' (NG150) aims to improve the lives of carers by helping health and social care practitioners identify people who are caring for someone and give them the right information and support.

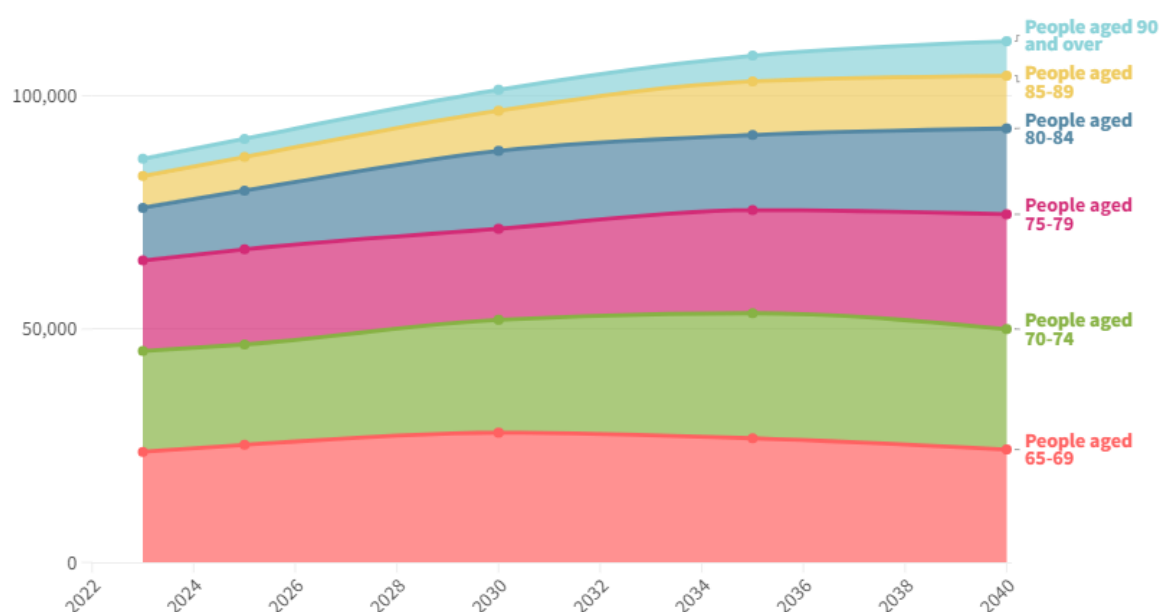
4.3 Unpaid carers in Northumberland

- 4.3.1 According to the 2021 census the population of Northumberland is 320,600.
- 4.3.2 The 2021 Census tells us that 9.7% (31,098) of people provide some level of unpaid carer (compared to 9% of people in England/Wales), broken down by the following:
 - 4.6% under 19 hours / week.
 - 2.1% 20 – 49 hours / week.
 - 3.0% 50+ hours / week.
- 4.3.3 However, we think this is a significant under-representation as some people do not identify themselves as carers, and the census was completed during the Covid-19 lockdown which will have influenced responses.
 - As of 30 November 2024 there were 8,329 carers registered with the charity Carers Northumberland, of which 825 are parent carers and 614 are young carers.
 - As of 2 December 2024 43.8% of NCC adult social care clients had a carer recognised on their record (2756 carers registered for 6,296 clients).

4.3.4 Our Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) Carers Chapter January 2024 tells us:

- Northumberland has an older population in comparison to the rest of England which already puts high demand on unpaid carers and statutory providers (Aged 75+ is 11.1% of the population). The proportion of the population over 75 years of age is predicted to grow over the next few years and therefore there is the potential that demand on services and informal carers will also grow.

4.4 Population aged 65 and over, projected to 2040



4.4.1 The 2021 Census identified 127,175 young carers (aged 5 – 17) in England and Wales which is an overall decrease of 28.5% since 2011. However, the intensity of caring has increased between 2011 and 2021 for young carers, with more caring from 20 – 49 hours and over 50 hours (per week). Data is unfortunately not available per Local Authority area.

- In December 2024 there were 560 Young Carers recorded within NCC children's social care records.

5. How has this strategy been developed?

5.0 The Northumberland Carers Partnership Board have developed this strategy. The Northumberland Carers Partnership Board includes Carers and partners across the health and social care system.

5.1 Members of the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board include:

- Alzheimer's Society
- Carers
- Carers Northumberland
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- ESCAPE family support
- Healthwatch Northumberland
- Mobilise
- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
- Northumberland County Council
- Northumberland Parent Carer Forum
- Northumberland Primary Care Networks (Well Up North, Valens Medical Partnership)
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

5.2 Members of the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board shared feedback that they have gathered from unpaid carers to help shape the strategy development. Examples include:

- Carers Northumberland annual carers survey
- Northumberland County Council biennial carers survey, Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment
- ESCAPE family support annual report, carers questionnaire
- Mobilise Northumberland dashboard
- Parent Carer forum conference feedback

5.3 The Partnership Board held a workshop in June 2024 to start to draft out our vision, definitions and priorities and then held a two-month consultation

period to talk to carers and stakeholders about our draft strategy and make any necessary changes.

6. Our Priorities

6.0 We WILL listen to the voices of carers.

6.1 Provide accurate and accessible information and advice for carers.

6.2 Increase opportunities to identify carers and reduce barriers to accessing support.

6.3 Work collaboratively to support carers – right support at the right time.

6.4 Continue to enhance the quality of support and services for carers.

6.5 For each of our priority areas we have identified:

- **What carers tell us** – quotes from carers gathered by Carers Northumberland.
- **What does this mean?** – we have provided a description about what the priority means.
- **Our existing foundations** – it is important to recognise that in Northumberland we already have some excellent examples of individual projects and collective workstreams that support carers.
- **What we would like to do: Our Objectives** – we have highlighted some areas that we would like to work on. These will be detailed and updated within our dynamic carers strategy implementation plan.

6.6 We WILL listen to the voices of carers

6.6.1 Carers tell us:

- “Honestly, I would rather talk to someone about it”
- “I attend a local carer group in Blyth and it really does help to speak to other people in a similar situation. It helps to talk”

6.6.2 What does this mean?

- We provide time, place and space for carers to talk and feel listened to.
- We will create opportunities for carers to feel involved in the care and support process, have a voice, and together build a

bigger picture as to what is happening for them and the person for whom they care.

- The views, opinions and experiences of carers will be gathered right across the health and social care system on an ongoing basis at strategic and operational levels and these views will be acted upon in order to develop and improve services for carers.
- Carers will be involved in service development, design and review.

6.6.3 Our existing foundations

- NCC Adult Services have developed a People's Advisory Group, which includes carers, in partnership with Healthwatch. The aim of the group is to shape adult social care services at a strategic level
- Patient Participation Groups gather feedback from carers to support improvements in individual GP practices and across Primary Care Networks (PCNs)
- Carers Northumberland facilitate a quarterly Young Carer Forum
- The Community Care Support Team at CNTW operates across two mental health clinical treatment teams covering the breadth of Northumberland and there are Carer Leads within the Inpatient and Crisis teams. Carer feedback is routinely captured from every carer to help inform, guide, improve and develop the service around carer needs. Carer feedback is often positive and demonstrates that CNTW are listening to carer voices and adapting practice
- NCC Adult Services carer assessment training course was co-produced with carers
- NCC Adult Services lead on the statutory biennial carers survey, the results of which are shared with the Carers Partnership Board and support service improvement
- Carers Northumberland conducts an annual Carers Survey

6.6.4 What would we like to do - our objectives

- Establish a Carers Forum that provides a route for carers to share their views, opinions and experiences to advise and guide our Carers Partnership Board.

- Adopt a flexible and inclusive approach to engagement to increase opportunities for co-production that focuses on strengths and potential, rather than problems and needs.
- Ensure that any carers feedback is recorded, reported and acted upon.
- Use personal stories to share good practice and identify areas for improvement.
- We will actively engage in carer research projects and participate in regional and national initiatives, sharing the voices of carers in Northumberland to generate positive changes for carers.

6.7 Provide accurate and accessible information and advice for carers

6.7.1 Carers tell us:

- “I don’t know a lot about what services are out there”
- “No practical information available”

6.7.2 What does this mean?

- Timely, accurate, accessible and consistent information and advice will be available for carers where they need it and when they need it.
- Information and advice is co-produced with carers.
- There should be 'no wrong door' for carers to access information, advice and support.
- Our workforce know where to go for information and advice for effective support, signposting and referral.

6.7.3 Our existing foundations

- The Frontline app is an up-to-date information resource, sharing what support is available across different areas of Northumberland
- All our partner organisations provide information and advice. For example, Carers Northumberland delivers a dedicated Information and Advice service, Mobilise provides an online platform of generic and targeted support for carers and CNTW has a Carer Starter Pack with information, groups and tailored support

- Information and advice for carers is available on organisational websites, for example Carers Northumberland, NCC and CNTW.
- Carers Northumberland provide a comprehensive programme of Carers Awareness training for a multitude of different stakeholder organisations including primary care and social care.
- In 2024 NCC and Carers Northumberland provided updated training for NCC call handlers to identify, support and effectively signpost carers.
- Social prescribing link workers provide information, advice and signposting to carers accessing primary care.
- Collectively we come together to share information and advice during national campaigns such as Carers Week and Carers Rights Day.

6.7.4 What would we like to do: Our Objectives

- Work with carers to better understand their information and advice needs.
- Agree and implement a minimum information and advice offer for carers that is available.
- Improve our information and advice offer for young carers.
- Work collectively to ensure that our information and advice offer is more accessible.
- Continue to be innovative and research national and regional best practice regarding information and advice for carers.

6.8 Increase opportunities to identify carers and reduce barriers to accessing support

6.8.1 Carers tell us:

- “I don’t feel like I am a carer, I am a wife looking after my husband”
- “Help and support is difficult to access when living in very rural areas”

6.8.2 What does this mean?

- We aim to identify carers at the earliest possible stage, especially those who are hidden or not self-identify as carers.
- Reinforce the importance of language when referring to carers.
- Recognise that no two carers' situations are the same, and we need to adapt our information, advice and support to the individual needs and circumstances of each carer.

6.8.3 Our existing foundations

- Carers Northumberland carer awareness training courses highlight the importance of recognising that carers are unpaid.
- Carers Northumberland programme of young carer awareness and outreach support, such as school assemblies.
- ESCAPE Family support provide support for families affected by addiction and continuously highlight that carers of family members with addictions are often 'hidden carers'.
- The Northumberland Inequalities plan is a system-wide plan to collectively work together to tackle inequalities taking a community-centred and strengths-based approach.
- CNTW run regular 'in house' Carer Awareness training for all staff to encourage greater understanding and more proactive approach to early carer identification and engagement. They have developed a Carer Card that easily recognises the carer for their support role and also offers Carer benefits both within our Trust sites and beyond.
- CNTW have identified that a significant proportion of Carers are Veterans and have tailored parts of the carer support service to their specific needs and challenges, linking in with partner organisations.

6.8.4 What would we like to do: Our Objectives

- Work collectively to understand who our 'hidden' carers are in Northumberland and work to identify and offer information, advice and support to those carers. For example, work with male carers to understand barriers to accessing support services.
- Develop consistent system wide messages for carers, for example a carer does not have to live with the person that they care for to be considered as an unpaid carer and carers have the right to choose not to care.

- Expand carer awareness training opportunities. For example, across primary and secondary care.
- Identify inequalities that carers endure and respond with meaningful action

6.9 Work collaboratively to support carers – right support at the right time

6.9.1 Carers tell us:

- “It’s very hard to get time to self-care”
- “I worry that, if needed, there won’t be help in the house or a place in a care home. I have friends who help out but often feel everything is a bit precarious”
- “Contingency planning is vital – many carers live every day of their lives with that ‘what if’ question nagging away at the back of their minds”

6.9.2 What does this mean?

- We work collaboratively, not competitively, to support our carers - ensuring that services complement each other and avoid duplication and competition
- We create a more joined up approach to help carers, providing support to navigate between different services
- We are open to change and to evolve and develop support for carers as demand changes

6.9.3 Our existing foundations

- The Northumberland Carers Partnership Board have developed strong foundations for working together to improve outcomes for carers
- The young carers steering group have worked collaboratively on shared projects such as the young carer pathway
- We have revised our NCC Adult Services carer assessment training in recognition that carer assessments are often the gateway to carers receiving tailored advice, information and support - right support at the right time
- The Working for Carers Project supports unpaid carers across Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle to find a job, maintain employment, advance in their careers, or return to work.

6.9.4 What would we like to do: Our Objectives

- Improve the work of the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board with advice and guidance from the Carers Forum
- Source opportunities and funding for sustaining existing effective initiatives.
- Work together to develop resources and support for carers based on identified need. Examples include:
 - Work together on developing a Northumberland-wide approach to contingency planning.
 - Review carers card / carers passports to see if there could be one approach for Northumberland.
 - Continue to improve the quality of carer assessments and reviews.
 - Identify and enhance the range of support available to meet the emotional demands of being a carer.

6.10 Continue to enhance the quality of support for carers

6.10.1 Carers tell us:

- “I know there’s help out there if I need it. I have phone numbers I can ring and I know Carers Northumberland would help me if needed”
- “It’s hard to be a carer, but I just don’t trust anyone else to care for my hubby as they just don’t see the everyday problems”

6.10.2 What does this mean?

- We monitor and evaluate services for carers to ensure that they are high quality, responsive and designed to meet the complex and varied needs of carers.
- Services are commissioned based upon need, and are rigorously quality assured.
- Good practice and areas for improvement is shared and we work together to make continuous improvements.

6.10.3 Our existing foundations

- We have many examples across our partner organisations where carer feedback has been used to generate quality improvements for carers.

- Our commissioned services are subject to robust health and social care quality assurance processes.
- ESCAPE have developed a trauma informed audit and developed subsequent actions that emanate from this.
- We have generated links with the Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership (NCASP) and the Safer Northumberland Community Safety Partnership to learn from Safeguarding Adult Reviews, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews involving carers.
- CNTW have introduced a Carer Stress Measure, completed by the carer to get an overview of the impact their role is having on them, which is then re-visited later to see where and how support has made a difference.

6.10.4 What would we like to do: Our Objectives

- Continue to gather evidence to demonstrate impact. Benchmark our approach to carers in Northumberland using NICE Guidelines and other national and regional benchmarking information.
- Share our findings from inspections / assurance visits / reviews / evaluations / audits / complaints / compliments to generate a common understanding about the quality of our support and services for carers and make necessary improvements.
- Identify gaps in support or service provision either now or in the future.

7. Implementation and Review

7.0 The Carers Partnership Board have developed a dynamic Carers Strategy Implementation Plan that will support the Board to monitor progress against each of the priorities identified within the strategy. Importantly, the plan will also provide evidence of impact. Carers have told us that they would like us, where possible, to use 'real carer stories' when demonstrating impact.

7.1 The Implementation Plan includes:

- Objectives – What we would like to do
- SMART actions – How we are going to achieve our objectives
- Lead Organisation / Officers

- Deadline
- Updates and Evidence
- Impact

7.2 The Carers Strategy Implementation Plan will be reviewed at every Northumberland Carers Partnership Board Meeting and constantly updated.

8. Abbreviations

CNTW - Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

CQC - Care Quality Commission

JSNAA - Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment

NCC - Northumberland County Council

NCPB - Northumberland Carers Partnership Board

NCT - Northumberland Communities Together

NENC ICB - North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

NHFT - Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

NHS - National Health Service

NICE - National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

PCN - Primary Care Network

9. Useful Links

- NCC Website – Carers - [Northumberland County Council - Support for carers](#)
- Carers Northumberland - [Carers Northumberland - Carers, Charity, Nonprofit](#)
- ESCAPE Family Support - [Escape Family Support – Opening doors to drug and alcohol support](#)
- MOBILISE - [Online support for unpaid carers | Mobilise \(mobiliseonline.co.uk\)](#)
- Research in Practice - [Social work with carers | Research in Practice](#)

- NICE Quick Guide for social care practitioners - [supporting-adult-carers-quick-guide.pdf \(nice.org.uk\)](#)
- SCIE Carers Assessment video series: [Care Act training: carer assessments – SCIE](#)