Carers Strategy 2025-2028

Partnership Effectiveness: 12 Months' Progress Report








West Berkshire Council

This report provides an overview and brief explanation of the progress made against the Carers Strategy 2025–2028 over the past 12 months. For clarity and ease of reading, the report is structured around the six strategic priorities.

In outlining progress, the report also reflects on the effectiveness of our partnership working with key organizations, including partner agencies, the voluntary sector, Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB), Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and internally within West Berkshire Council. Achieving the aims of this strategy is only possible through strong and sustained collaboration across these groups.

I am also mindful that this is a three-year strategy, and the progress described represents just one year within that wider timeframe.

Priority One: 'Raise awareness and increase the identification of carers (including hidden carers) to enable them to access help and support.'

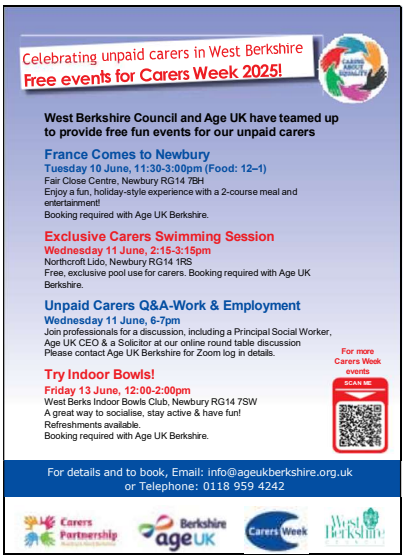
The council has continued to make strong progress this year, particularly in our work to raise awareness of unpaid carers. Through our annual campaigns, Carers Week (9–15 June 2025) and Carers Rights Day (20 November 2025), we reached a wider audience and identified new unpaid carers.

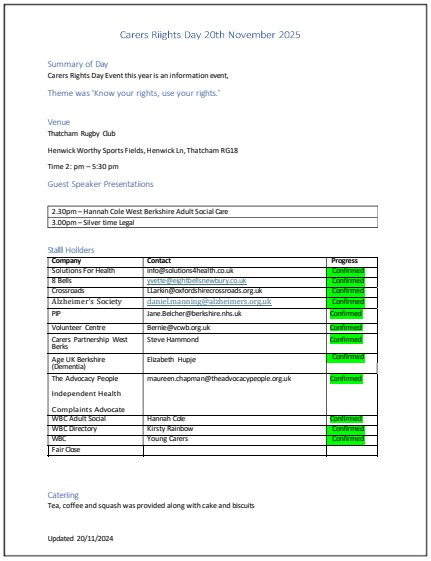
The theme for Carers Rights Day was "Know your rights and use your rights." A dedicated subgroup of the Carers Strategy Group was formed to plan both events, with careful consideration given to accessible venues that would attract unpaid carers. Carers Rights Day saw strong representation from stallholders and successfully engaged hidden carers: 27 existing carers attended alongside 25 newly identified carers, giving a total of 56 participants. Feedback highlighted that the presentations and timing of the event were particularly well received.

This increased visibility has been felt not only among adult carers but also within the young carer's community. There has been a noticeable rise in new referrals, with the Young Carers Project Worker reporting 69 new referrals from 2025 to present date.

As part of wider awareness raising activity, the Young Carers Project Worker also organized an online workshop for professionals supporting young carers. This session took place on 11 November 2025 at 1:00pm and was promoted through the Early Response Hub. These lunchtime learning sessions focus on the support and opportunities available to families in West Berkshire. All workshops were delivered via Microsoft Teams and were free to attend. Up to ten people attended the session.

At the end of each event, it is added to the agenda for the next quarterly meeting so the group can evaluate the event and discuss how we might attract more carers in future. We also review the feedback forms completed by carers to ensure any issues raised are addressed and improvements are made for the planning of the next event.





Carers Rights Day 20th November 2025

Summary of Day
Carers Rights Day Event this year is an information event,

Theme was 'Know your rights, use your rights.'

Venue
Thatcham Rugby Club

Henwick Worthy Sports Fields, Henwick Ln, Thatcham RG18

Time 2: pm – 5:30 pm

Guest Speaker Presentations

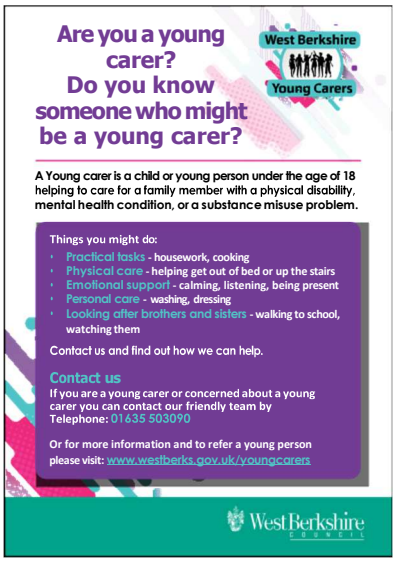
2.30pm – Hannah Cole West Berkshire Adult Social Care
3.00pm – Silver time Legal

Stall Holders

Company	Contact	Progress
Solutions For Health	info@solutions4health.co.uk	Confirmed
8 Balls	yvette@eightballsnewbury.co.uk	Confirmed
Crossroads	LLarkin@oxfordshirecrossroads.org.uk	Confirmed
Alzheimer's Society	daniel.manning@alzheimers.org.uk	Confirmed
PIP	Jane.Belcher@berkshire.nhs.uk	Confirmed
Volunteer Centre	Bernie@rvcwb.org.uk	Confirmed
Carers Partnership West Berks	Steve Hammond	Confirmed
Age UK Berkshire (Dementia)	Elizabeth Hupje	Confirmed
The Advocacy People Independent Health Complaints Advocate	maureen.chapman@theadvocacypeople.org.uk	Confirmed
WBC Adult Social	Hannah Cole	Confirmed
WBC Directory	Kirsty Rainbow	Confirmed
WBC	Young Carers	Confirmed
Fair Close		

Catering
Tea, coffee and squash was provided along with cake and biscuits

Updated 20/11/2024



Adverts for the events we have held

In terms of attracting hidden carers, West Berkshire has been working as part of a consortium with four other Local Authorities - Reading, Wokingham, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire - through the Accelerating Reform Fund. The project focused on producing leaflets to help unpaid carers recognize their caring role and identify themselves as carers. Each Local Authority is responsible for promoting these materials within its own area. For West Berkshire, the leaflets are available in English, Portuguese, Romanian, and Polish, reflecting the main community languages identified in the 2021 Census.

The leaflet explains that unpaid carers can contact Adult Social Care to register their caring role. This will help reduce the gap between the number of carers known to Adult Social Care and the much higher number recorded in the Census.

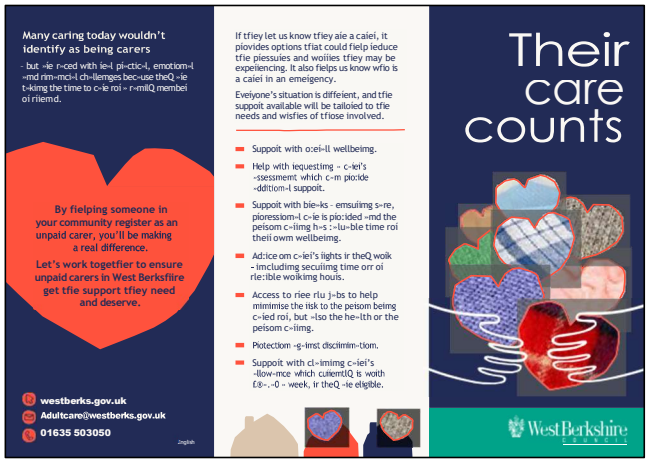
In addition to the translated versions commissioned by West Berkshire, we will also benefit from the languages selected by the other four local authorities. It was agreed that, by sharing the translated materials, each authority would have access to a wider range of languages than those they originally put forward. This will help improve engagement with our diverse communities and support us in reaching hidden carers who may not otherwise come forward to access support.

The leaflets have been widely distributed across the district, including libraries, Edu Café (which attracts large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds), local pharmacies, and through members of the Carers Strategy Group via their networks. They were also made available at carer events.

Distribution will continue as an ongoing activity to ensure sustained visibility and reach.

Two versions of the leaflet were produced:

- **'Your Care Counts' –** designed for unpaid carers themselves
- **'Their Care Counts' –** designed for supporters who may know someone in a caring role and want to encourage them to register





Priority Two:
'To provide information and advice to carers and young carers.'

West Berkshire council now subscribes to Carers UK Digital Resources and the Jointly app, both went live on the 1st of May 2026. This annual subscription gives carers in West Berkshire full access to Carers UK's digital tools, including e-learning modules and online training covering a wide range of topics.

Early feedback from Carers UK indicates strong initial engagement, with 27 carers signing up in May. We recognize the need to continue promoting these resources to increase usage, and we plan to meet monthly with the Carers UK Officer to receive usage reports and explore ways to encourage more carers to register. There is also an intention to promote Jointly more widely, particularly in complex cases where families may benefit from a shared digital platform to communicate and contribute to their loved one's care plan.

Another significant area of progress is the launch of the online Carer's Self-Assessment, which went live in August 2025. This development was made possible through Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) funding, which enabled us to employ a part-time Digital Officer and a Social Care Practitioner dedicated to carer assessments.

The assessment was co-produced with carers. We shared the draft questions with over 300 carers for testing, running a six-week trial period supported by a feedback form. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version.

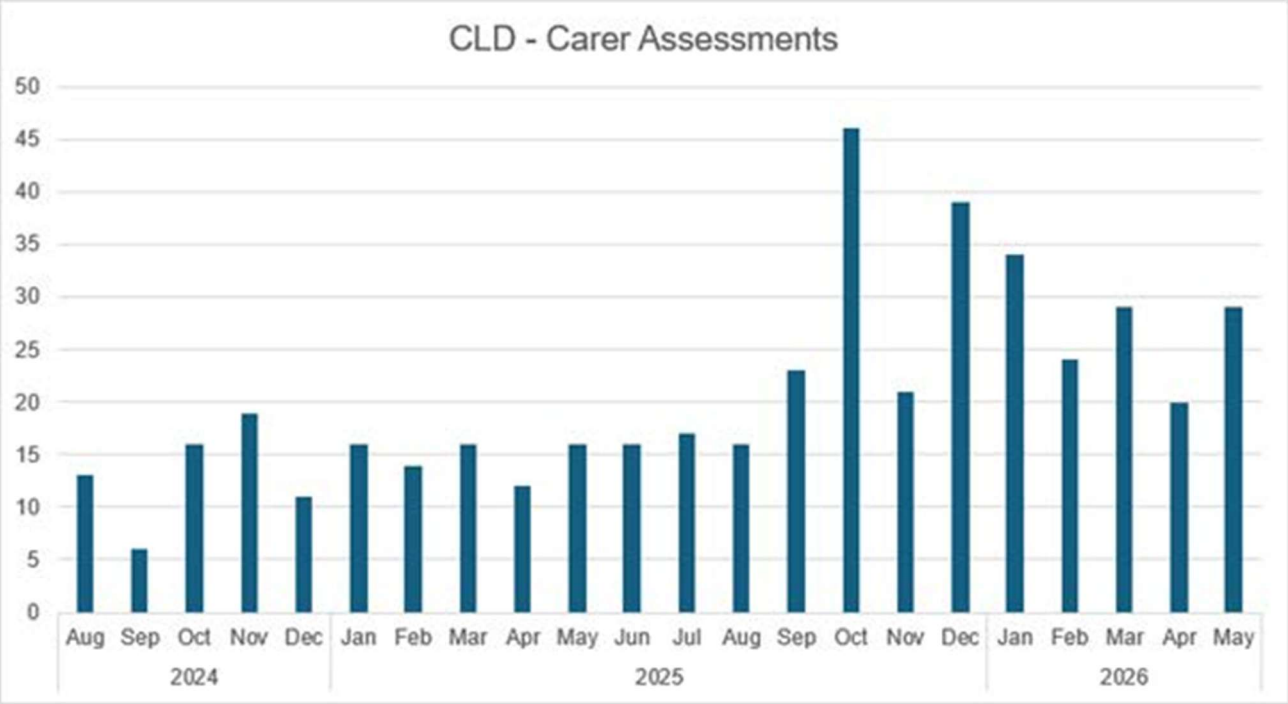
To ensure accessibility for carers who are not digitally confident, we wrote to 20 carers and invited them to attend three supported sessions at the library. Staff sat with carers to go through the assessment, gather feedback, and ensure the form worked well for everyone.

Since going live, the online assessment has been working effectively, and we have seen a steady flow of submissions. A dedicated practitioner now manages these requests to ensure they are processed promptly. Carers also continue to contact the carers inbox, which remains an important communication channel.

The backlog of carer assessment requests has now been cleared. All carer assessments submitted online and via the previous paper-based process are now up to date. The Social Care Practitioner also carries out home visits to support carers who need help completing the form or who prefer to meet in person, and carers are welcome to attend our offices if that is more convenient. Overall, we have seen an increase in the number of completed carer assessments, and carers who are not eligible for support are signposted appropriately and without unnecessary delay.

The graph below demonstrates an increase in Carer Assessments since August 2025.

Comparing the equivalent 10-month periods pre and post self-assessment:
August 2024 – May 2025: 139 carer assessments completed
August 2025 – May 2026: 290 carer assessments completed



This progress is particularly important because, when CQC assessed West Berkshire in February 2024, they noted that some carers they spoke to were unaware of the Carer's Assessment or had not been informed about it by staff. The Council now has a clear record showing that carers are being informed about their rights to an assessment, and that assessments are being completed.

Priority Three:
‘Enable access to Peer Support Groups for carers and young carers.’

Young carers continue to attend weekly peer support groups during term time, with one group delivered by Berkshire Youth and another held at Hungerford Youth Centre. However, the Hungerford young carers group which supports children from years 5+

will not continue from September due to not having the funding. Young carers who have been assessed are then referred to community groups where they can take part in respite activities alongside other young carers. Berkshire Youth run a secondary aged group at Greenham Community Centre and has stopped their primary aged group due to lack of funding.

Adult Carers Peer Support Group (June 2025 – June 2026)

Carers have access to four permanent Carer Support Groups located across the region, these run monthly: Calcot, Burghfield Common, Newbury and Hungerford. These four groups have a total of 259 carers a year attending. The Reading and West Berkshire Carers Partnership facilitates the peer support groups.

The carers who attend these groups vary over time. Approximately 25% attend regularly, while others access the groups on a more flexible basis, depending on their needs and availability. When their caring role is more manageable and circumstances allow, many choose to focus on their own wellbeing and personal activities.

Many carers attend a group on a one-off basis, often to gain perspective on their own circumstances. Some may feel their situation is not serious enough to seek support, while others may be anxious following a diagnosis and find reassurance in meeting people who are coping with similar challenges.

These groups provide an opportunity for carers to talk openly about their experiences, learn how others manage similar situations, and gain reassurance and emotional support from people who understand their circumstances.

For carers who are unable to leave the person they care for, the Carers Partnership has teamed up with Fair Close to provide quarterly themed events. Many carers attend with the person they care for, allowing them to enjoy a meal and the social aspects of the event together. These sessions also give carers the opportunity to meet others in similar situations and benefit from valuable peer support and private conversations. Approximately 15 carers attend each session.

If a peer support group session falls on a bank holiday and cannot take place as scheduled, carers often meet informally at a local garden centre to maintain social connections and peer support.

The peer support sessions have also been held on different days of the week and at a local garden centre to encourage attendance from carers who may not be able to attend the usual groups, helping to engage a wider range of people.

There remains scope to increase participation in the group, introduce additional guest speakers based on carers' interests and identified needs, and continue reviewing locations and meeting times to ensure the sessions remain accessible, inclusive and relevant to as many carers as possible.

Carers have commented:

"it's good to meet others in a similar position"

"very helpful to get views and support from others"

"sometimes the only respite I get"

"Professional help on hand"

"I've got a new family that understands me"

"very helpful"

Priority Four: 'Carers are supported to improve their physical, mental, emotional and overall wellbeing.'

Children and Family Services received funding from Public Health England in April 2026, allocated to support young carers over a three-year period. This funding will be used to provide a range of activities for young carers, including after school clubs and school holiday respite opportunities. During the recent half term (week beginning 25 May), two respite trips were organized for young carers: one to Northway Climbing Centre in Newbury and another to Oxygen Trampoline Park. A total of 11 young carers attended these activities.

Following the online Carer's Self-Assessment we have seen a range of support requests from unpaid carers, including gym memberships, domestic support, yoga, swimming, and spa day activities. We have also noticed that other professionals, such as physiotherapists, are referring to carers for assessments and working with us to support carers' physical health needs. To strengthen this offer, the Social Care Practitioner and I met with the Health, Activity and Wellbeing Manager from Everyone Active to learn more about their activities and outreach program, including the leisure center's they operate and the services available. This ensures the Social Care Practitioner can confidently signpost carers to these resources during assessments. The Social Care Practitioner now provides carers with the Everyday Active timetable, and we have also shared this timetable with members of the Carers Strategy Group so it can be circulated through their networks.

Priority Five:
‘Support Carers and young carers to take breaks from caring.’

The Young Carer Project Worker reported that she referred two young carers at the end of 2025 and one in 2026 to Honeyport Charity for short respite breaks. In addition, ten young carers attended a respite break at Honeyport in October 2025.

The Young Carer Project Worker attended a parent workshop on 23 June 2026. The session, Time Out for Parents, is being delivered by the Thatcham Family Hub.

In Adult Social Care, between July 2024 and June 2025, 116 distinct service users received Carer Respite services. Between July 2025 and June 2026, this increased slightly to 119 distinct clients. Overall, the number of carers accessing respite support has remained relatively stable across the two years, with a modest increase of three clients (2.6%) during 2025/26. This suggests that demand for Carer Respite services has remained broadly consistent over the reporting period.

Priority Six:
‘Support a life outside caring to enable carers and young carers to achieve their potential.’

For adult carers, the theme for Carers Rights Day 2025 was Know Your Rights. There was also a presentation by the Carers Lead focusing on carers’ rights. The session highlighted eight key rights available to carers and explained each one using practical examples to illustrate how these rights can support carers in their day-to-day lives.

Report prepared by
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