

People & Health Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2025

Adults and Housing Deep Dive into Carers

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member: Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team: J Price, Executive Director of People - Adults

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

Following agreement with the Committee Chair, the Adults and Housing Directorate will undertake a focussed deep dive into two priority areas identified by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

These are:

- a) The waiting lists held across our Directorate and the actions we are taking to manage them.
- b) The Directorate's work with unpaid carers.

This paper focusses on priority area b) the Directorate's work with unpaid carers.

Unpaid and family carers are the backbone of the care and support of thousands of vulnerable adults and children in Dorset. Supporting them where they choose to maintain their caring role is a key statutory responsibility of the LA as set out in the Care Act 2014.

Unpaid carers across the country often report feeling undervalued, unheard, and unrecognised. Dorset Council is committed to changing that narrative. We have taken significant steps to improve how we work with unpaid carers, ensuring their voices are heard, strengthening co-production, enhancing our commissioned services, and improving access to personal budgets.

In addition, we have bolstered our operational capacity to deliver timely carer assessments and provide ongoing support and advice through robust case management systems.

This report also highlights the innovative work undertaken to enhance our digital offer, particularly through the development and implementation of the Bridgit Tool.

1. **Recommendation(s)**

1.1 This report on unpaid carers is provided for the awareness and oversight of Committee members and does not include any formal recommendations.

2. An overview of the Directorates Work with Unpaid Carers

1.0 Definition and Data:

A Carer is someone who provides unpaid help and support to another person who could not manage without their help. This can include caring for a friend, family member or neighbour due to old age, addition, disability or physical or mental illness.

Census 2021 data tells us:

In Dorset Council area there were **35,505 Carers** (14,365 male, 21,145 female).

9.7% of residents (aged 5 and over) provide unpaid care. This is similar to the averages for the South-West (9%) and England & Wales (8.9%).

In Dorset, 6.8% of unpaid carers provide up to 50 hours of care per week, while nearly 3% provide more than 50 hours.

1.1 Partnership Working for and with Carers in Dorset

Dorset uses a collaborative, system-wide approach to supporting carers. This includes Dorset Council, Carer Provider Forums, Dorset Parent Carer Council, Community Health Services, Hospitals, Voluntary and Third Sector organisations, GP Practices, Education Providers, and Commissioned Services.

Key structures and Forums

The Dorset Area Carer Provider Forum: offers an inclusive and collaborative space for stakeholders. The forum promotes best practice and innovation. The forum has expanded to include providers who may support carers indirectly, such as Live Well Dorset, which recently developed a wellbeing course for carers.

Testimonial from Jackie Hicken (Mid Dorset PCN) highlights the value of forums in sharing best practices and innovations like the Carer's Passport scheme:

“The Dorset Carers Provider Forum has been an invaluable and interactive resource in my role as Mid Dorset PCN Carers Lead. It’s a fantastic platform for networking, collaboration, and sharing ideas. Connecting with organisations across Dorset has helped me explore and adapt innovative ways to support carers locally. For example, attending a forum last year introduced me to the hospital-led Carer’s Passport scheme and work around the patient journey from admission to discharge.”

The Pan-Dorset Carers Steering Group: Led, by a person with lived carer experience, comprises both carers and professionals. The Pan-Dorset Carer Steering Group co-produced, with Carers, a strategic document.

'Together with Carers – A Dorset Vision' published October 2024.

The objectives are :

- ensure all carers are valued, visible, and heard.
- provide all carers with choice and opportunities to take breaks from their caring role, as well as access to support in a crisis.
- support all carers to have a meaningful and fulfilling life, alongside, and after caring.
- understand carers' personal needs and situations and treat everyone fairly.
- provide information, advice, guidance, and practical resources to enable carers to carry out their caring role.
- ensure carers' own physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing are supported.
- be honest, consistent, and work together to manage expectations.

The Dorset Carers Partnership Group (DCPG) serves as the operational arm of the Steering Group. It drives improvements aligned with the Dorset Vision such as Bereavement support and joint approaches to national awareness campaigns. Dorset Council co-chairs the DCPG with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.

The 'Our Dorset' joint working initiative exemplifies integrated health and care system collaboration, including shared communications for key events such as Carers Week (June) and Carers Rights Day (November). It includes NHS organisations, councils, public services, and voluntary and community partners such as Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust, Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, University Hospitals Dorset, NHS England, Dorset Parent Carer Council, BCP Carer Support, and BCP Council, [Carers - Our Dorset](#).

This collaborative approach also extended to the Integrated Care System (ICS), which, in partnership with Carers, co-produced a simple two step leaflet to encourage carer identification and promote registration with both their GP Practice and the Dorset Council commissioned service.

1.2 Dorset Council Adult Carers Team:

- ☐ Specialist team (8.2 FTE) within Dorset Council, led by an Area Practice Manager and overseen by a Service manager
- ☐ Provides consistent practice standards and continuous service improvement.
- ☐ Conducts most statutory Care Act (2014) Carer Assessments
- ☐ Joint Assessments with cared for people re conducted in partnership with community-based teams
- ☐ Champions carers' rights and wellbeing
- ☐ Facilitates peer support, training, and drop-ins
- ☐ Collaborates with other teams (e.g., mental health, learning disability)
- ☐ Uses performance dashboards and weekly Carers Digest for improvement

Having a dedicated team who focus solely on working with carers sends a strong and positive public message that carers are important to us. The team uphold carers rights, ensuring that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of their practice, meeting our Equality Act (2010) duties. The Area Practice Manager (APM) also leads Dorset Council Carer Employee Network which is linked into our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

1.3 Working with Young Carers Reaching Adulthood:

The Adult Carers Team works in partnership with the Young Carers team in Children's Services. This collaboration supports smoother transitions into adult's services, reducing carer responsibilities and streamline processes. The plan is to align adult and young carer assessments with close involvement from the B2SA Team. Regular contact is breaking down silos and improving shared knowledge.

1.4 How we co-produce and hear the voice of carers in our work?

- ☐ Carers are involved in service design (e.g., Carers Journal, Bridgit platform)
- ☐ Website co-designed with carers for clarity and accessibility
- ☐ Feedback used to improve services like the Short Break Service

Co-Production and co-design are crucial elements of our service development. Dorset Council recognises the challenges carers face in managing complex and busy lives. We co-developed the Carers Journal (launched on Carers Rights Day 2024). Designed to simplify terminology and address common questions, the journal helps carers stay organised and informed.

Recent input from a Carers survey has helped us to enhance the Short Break Service improve service quality and communication.

1.5 An overview of Dorset Council's Commissioned Services for Carers:

Commissioned services are managed through partnerships and effective contract management, ensuring high-quality support for carers across Dorset.

Commissioned Service	Offer
Carer Support Dorset (2019–2025)	Carer Support Dorset are the current lead organisation until 21st November 2025. They have provided a service for carers aged 5 years and over. This offer includes a befriending service, regular newsletters, peer and support groups and an offer for young carers. Carer Support Dorset are also linked with the Dorset Race Equality Council to reduce inequalities in the support we provide carers.
Help & Care and MY TIME Young Carers (from Nov 2025)	This contract is due to start on 22nd November 2025 and supports carers aged 5 years and over. This service offers Health and Wellbeing coaching, training opportunities for carers, memory support and advice and the Hope programme- a self-management course for people living with long term health conditions or caring responsibilities. MYTIME are a specialist young carers charity based in Dorset and they actively support young carers whatever the level of need, providing activities and, education and employability support up to 25 years.
Forward Carers ID Card	The Dorset Carer Friendly ID Card is free for anyone who is registered with our lead carer organisation. The photographic card provides identification, gives free access to local and national discounts or entrance to places, provides a space to record In Case of Emergency contact details and comes as a physical or digital card for the mobile phone. Forward Carers are supporting businesses and local organisations to recognise Carers, and support them with varying opening hours, soft lighting, special opening times, or improved accessibility.

	This supports Dorset as a Carer Friendly Community.
SWAN Advocacy	SWAN Advocacy provide independent advocacy, over and above our statutory duty, to Carers who need it. They also provide volunteers to support carers emotionally and provide coaching. Sometimes confidence building or someone to listen is all they need. Although there has been a low uptake on referrals for this service, the added value of the reassurance of a service being available when needed is making a positive impact in the community.
Leonardo Counselling	This is delivered in partnership with Dorset Council and the Leonardo Carer Support. This preventative service has supported Carers in crisis as well as dealing with past trauma which continues to impact them. There can be changes in the relationship when caring for someone which can be instant due to an accident or trauma or increasing over a long period of time. We have supported 98 Carers over the last financial year with 600 hours of Counselling. The standard offer is 6 sessions; some have more some have less, depending on their level of need.
Hospital discharge support (DIPPs)	The Dorset Integrated Prevention Partnership (DIPPs) is recognising Carers. Volunteer Centre Dorset and The YOU Trust for Carers are based at Dorset County Hospital and are providing support to carers who's cared for person is being discharged. Currently based in Discharge Lounge and working upstream into Wards and A&E to identify Carers earlier. Support is provided with information, advice and guidance, equipment needs and contingency planning. They are also supporting with proactive calls to prepare people for admission and offer a personalised service.

8.6 Our Digital Approach to supporting Carers:

Bridgit is a self-serve digital platform designed to empower unpaid carers by enabling them to access support independently. Its development has involved carers.

The platform's is accessible in multiple languages, attracting users who speak Spanish, Ukrainian, Russian, Portuguese, Hungarian, and Polish.

The Brigit platform offers carers the option to complete self-assessments which allows for enhanced carer accessibility and autonomy.

It offers a range of features, including:

- access to information, advice, and guidance
- the ability to notify their GP Practice or Dorset Council's lead Carer organisation of their caring role
- information on local events and activities
- an application process for a digital Carer Friendly ID Card
- smart referrals to relevant support organisations
- tools to create a personalised self-help plan based on selected areas of interest
- the option to begin a statutory Carer Assessment in their own words

The Dorset Care Association promotes The Bridgit platform to its providers, partners, and carers, and has established a Bridgit User Engagement Group to support ongoing collaboration and feedback.

The impact of the Bridgit platform includes: **21,770 carers being identified** by the end of September 2025 with **21,050 self-help plans being generated**. 66,580 support areas were clicked on by carers including depression or dementia. 824 Carers have now signed up to email support generated by Bridgit and 140 Carer Assessments have been requested through Adult Social Care.

Using national-level data, the platform is estimated to deliver approximately:

- £2.75 million in system cost avoidance
- £712,000 in carer-related benefits
- 18,000 hours saved
- Prevention of 90 carer burnouts

Note: These figures are based on national data and have not yet been verified specifically for the Dorset Council area.

The level of carer engagement and reach that has been obtained through the Bridgit platform, alongside the feedback received from carers (included in 8.7), show the value of this accessible platform that offers personalised information and tools. Being able to provide advice when it is most needed for carers, is a positive in offering both flexible and timely support.

8.7 Carer Feedback:

“I just wanted to say how pleased and surprised I was when I registered as a carer on Bridgit. It was simple to use and full of relevant information. It was great that it informs my GP I’m a carer and registers me with our local carers support. I agreed to a carers card that will give me discounts and it came through straight away digitally. I would strongly recommend if you are supporting someone who could not manage without your help then go to Bridgit”

“Thank you so much for the time you took to reply (and at such length). It was very helpful and full of insight and guidance. So much you said correlated with me and my feelings. It also depicted our situation exactly - the difference when others are present compared to the daily reality.”

“Without my Carers Case Worker and Dr M, I wouldn’t be here now. I can talk to her and know that she will listen. My CCW has helped a lot and I know that I can ring her when things get on top of me.”

9. Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)