

1. What, in your opinion, has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2024-2025 Budget?

Carers Trust supports a network of local carer organisations across Wales providing a wide range of services for unpaid carers, often including information and advice on issues such as benefits, grants and other help available. Their sources of income varies, with many receiving funding from statutory sources directly or indirectly. For example:

- Being commissioned to undertake carer's needs assessments on behalf of a local authority
- Funding through the Regional Integration Fund to deliver a hospital liaison service for carers, via Regional Partnership Boards
- Delivering short breaks or financial support services through grant agreements with Carers Trust as part of Short Breaks or Carers Support Fund programmes, funded by Welsh Government

Carers Trust's Network Data Exchange, an annual data capture to gather insight from our network of local carer organisations about their carer reach, resources and capacity. Our network has more than 96,000 unpaid carers registered with services, of these 28,000 are directly supported, including more than 2,000 young carers.

Overall, local carer services in Wales report facing greater need, and a greater complexity of need, for support from carers, while resources and capacity are stretched. Our Network Data Exchange highlights a reduction in the breadth of service offering from local carer organisations, as local carer organisations find themselves less able to deliver specific services and focus on core delivery. In this context, our most recent Pulse Monitor survey of the network found that 50% of partners had seen no uplift, or a reduction, in their contracts with statutory services for 2024-25. The decreasing value of contracts with statutory authorities has the effect of forcing more resources to be directed to core services at the expense of wider service provision. This is concerning as contracts from statutory bodies makes up approximately 70% (on average) of local carer organisations' income.

Statutory income per registered unpaid carer, from both local authorities and health organisations, has decreased to £63 during the Welsh Government's 2024-25 Budget. This has fallen from £71 in 2022-23 and is significantly below the UK average of £91. This inevitably leads to the situation local carer organisations currently face:

- Fewer than half of registered carers receive direct support
- Service provision is falling
- Overall support levels are down

"Difficulties trying to maintain current provision, with core funding increasingly stretched (no uplifts, but increasing costs) and lots of management time spent trying to obtain funding for non-core services just to maintain, means we can't develop or expand our reach and staff are struggling. Pressures on the system filter down and we're left holding carers whilst they're on waiting lists with increasingly complex needs."

On the other hand, the Welsh Government's 2024-25 budget has, as part of multiyear funding agreements, enabled vital services and support for unpaid carers to continue, specifically via the Carers Support Fund and the Short Breaks Scheme. Both of which will be referred to in this response.

2. How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2025-26 financial year, how will inflation impact on your ability to deliver planned objectives, and how robust is your ability to plan for future years?

As an organisation, Carers Trust receives funding from Welsh Government to facilitate and manage two large programmes that are due to end on 31 March 2025. As yet, there has been no indication of whether funding for the continuation of the Carers Support Fund and the Short Breaks Scheme will be made available in the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26. The impact of this means uncertainty for our staff, for the organisations who receive this funding, and also for unpaid carers who will have no comparable support funded elsewhere.

Local carer organisations across Wales face uncertainty and lack the ability to plan for future years, which has a direct impact on unpaid carers. 63% of Carers Trust's Network Partners have told us that fundraising/sustainability is a major challenge for them and half of our network of local carer organisations in Wales report there has been a decrease or no uplift in the value of one or more statutory contracts this year.

In light of the recent UK Budget and the increase of Employer's National Insurance Contributions alongside the rise in the National Living Wage, local carer organisations are facing a significant shortfall in their budgets for 2025-26. One local carer organisation has modelled an increase of more than £200,000 in their staffing costs for 2025-26 to account for these changes. In a context where there is no agreed uplift in contracts with public sector bodies for the delivery of (often) statutory services, organisations are having to consider scaling down on delivery. The impact of this will be felt not only by staff whose hours are cut but by carers who will experience gaps in support.

The income per carer registered at these local carer organisations shows that Government income and local authority income went down this financial year, while some other income streams have increased:

- Statutory health income went up from £13 (2022-23) to £16 (2023-24)
- Statutory Local Authority income went down from £58 (2022-23) to £47 (2023-24)
- Grants/Trusts income went up from £15 (2022-23) to £24 (2023-24)
- Carers Trust grants went up from £8 (2022-23) to £17 (2023-24). Grants administered by Carers Trust made to local carer organisations as part of the Carers Support Fund and Short Breaks Scheme will feature here. These grants are fully funded by Welsh Government.

As income from local authorities has gone down, Network Partners are having to look elsewhere for funding, as is shown in the significant increase in Grants/Trusts income. It is worrying that services that are commissioned by local authorities aren't being funded, which, in turn makes it difficult to prepare for the 2025-26 financial year.

3. What action should the Welsh Government take to: – help households cope with inflation and cost of living issues; – address the needs of people living in urban, post-industrial and rural communities, including building affordable housing and in supporting economies within those communities?

During 2022-2025 Welsh Government has funded Carers Trust Wales to deliver the Carers Support Fund, which aims to support carers facing financial hardship as a result of the cost

of living crisis through the provision of small grants to buy basic household essentials and through funding services that improve unpaid carers' financial resilience. To date, it has reached more than 22,000 unpaid carers in financial hardship. For each person accessing support through the Carers Support Fund, an average of 3.1 people within the household have benefited.

In the short term, Welsh Government should continue to fund support for unpaid carers facing immediate hardship

- Welsh Government funded hardship funds, such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund and small grants under the Carers Support Fund, provide vital short term funds for individuals in financial crisis. Unpaid carers need assurance that these funds are sustainable
- The Carers Support Fund has demonstrated the benefits of a model where hardship grants are accompanied by a broader offering of long-term support, particularly when delivered by organisations with expertise in the needs of unpaid carers and when partnered with organisations with expertise in poverty alleviation
- Additional consequential funding to Wales following the reintroduction of the Household Support Fund by the UK Government should be used towards the refunding of hardship schemes in Wales, including those aimed at unpaid carers

In the medium term unpaid carers need access to additional funds

- Alongside immediate support, unpaid carers must be able to access income maximisation services that are tailored to meet their needs as carers, ensuring they are accessing their full entitlements and welfare benefits. Some organisations funded by the Carers Support Fund are offering income maximisation and welfare benefits checks with proven impact; unpaid carers in Wales should have consistent access to these services locally
- Welsh Government must urge UK Government to deliver at pace on their ambition to review and overhaul Carer's Allowance. Until that point, a return of the Welsh Government Unpaid Carer's recognition payment from 2022-23 should be considered to bring Welsh carers in line financially with their peers in Scotland

4. Have Welsh Government business support policies been effective, given the economic outlook for 2025-26?

No view

7. The Committee would like to focus on a number of other specific areas in the scrutiny of the Budget. Do you have any specific comments on any of the areas identified below?

– Is enough being done to tackle the rising costs of living and support those people living in relative income poverty?

The Carers Support Fund is a proven response for unpaid carers who are living in financial hardship. It is a 3-year programme funded by Welsh Government to provide direct grant funding and additional support services to unpaid carers. Carers Trust facilitates the Carers Support Fund through its Network of local carer organisations, community-based organisations, and local authorities. Since March 2022, the Fund has reached over 22,000

unpaid carers across Wales, with 10,849 carers entirely new to accessing support from that carers service. This demonstrates the level of need across Wales for support for unpaid carers living with the devastating effects of the cost-of-living crisis.

Evaluation of the Fund provides insights into the impact this is having on unpaid carers:

- 3.1 people on average were helped for every support package offered
- 65% of respondents agreed the support had reduced financial hardship
- 77% of respondents agreed the support fund had increased quality of life

The Carers Support Fund helps to meet very basic needs, such as the cost of food and heating, but the impact of the Fund goes beyond the short-term benefit of a small grant alone; helping to encourage significant numbers of unpaid carers who were previously unknown to services, to come forward and access income maximisation and other support programmes, including those that focus on mental health and wellbeing.

Case study

One of the organisations funded by the Carers Support Fund, Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales, use their funding to run their Money Matters project, which aims to support carers to maximise their income and reduce their expenditure. They provide financial information sessions and help carers with applications for benefits and grants through a dedicated Welfare Benefits Adviser. The project also distributes direct carer grants and ensures that carers of all ages are provided with information and guidance to help them improve their financial literacy.

The project has empowered carers to access additional support which in turn helps them to maintain their wellbeing and sustain their caring role. Food vouchers have alleviated immediate pressures on carers who were in, or heading towards, financial crisis and in some cases didn't know where their next family meal would be coming from.

The feedback from carers about this project demonstrates its impact and the impact of the Carers Support Fund as a whole:

“My bills are covered, I can put fuel in the car. I can attend hospital appointments without having to worry if I have enough fuel to get there. It has helped my life out a lot.”

“I don't know what we would of done without your guidance and support and I don't know who we would of turned to.”

– How could the budget further address gender inequality in areas such as healthcare, skills and employment?

Caring is gendered, and we know that women are more likely to be unpaid carers, with the latest Census showing that 12% of women provided unpaid care, compared with 9% of

men¹. Female carers are also more likely to live in poverty, with a poverty rate of just under 30%, compared with 26% of male carers².

This difference in male and female carers can be seen in the employment rate amongst carers too. Around two-thirds of male carers (68%) and nearly 6 in 10 female carers (57%) were employed. Compare this to around 8 in 10 men (79%) and 7 in 10 women who were not carers (72%) were employed.

– Is the Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations

Carers Trust recognises the levels of acute need in the health and social care sector. Any investment in unpaid carers is 'preventative spending', because investment in the health and wellbeing of carers has a recognisable effect on the health and social care sector.

Half of carers report at least one adverse health effect from providing unpaid care, therefore preventative spending on unpaid carers is crucial so that carers can protect their own health, and as a result, can continue with their caring role.

Carers Trust is the National Coordinating Body for the Welsh Government Short Breaks Scheme, delivering on a Programme for Government commitment that aims to enable more than 30,000 unpaid carers of all ages to access a short break by 2025. More than 25,000 unpaid carers have had access to a break through the Short Breaks Scheme to date. Evidence from the project demonstrates the positive impact short breaks are having on unpaid carers, including improving wellbeing and resilience.

The impact of the breaks on carers and their wellbeing is evident, and carer' stories can be found on the Scheme's website: [Carers' stories - Carers Short Breaks Wales](#)

"It meant some peace and me time. It's really helped me and I feel more ready to go back to my caring role."

"We were exhausted, smothered in worries, and had no time for anything or anyone, even each other. The thought of that break gave us something to look forward to, like your favourite dessert at the end of a plate of over-cooked sprouts."

Only 14% of carers accessing the Short Breaks Scheme had accessed a break from elsewhere in the preceding 12 months (this is in a cohort where 66% provide 50+ hours of care).

The Short Breaks Scheme is preventative in the long run, but has immediate impact for unpaid carers who are preventing escalating need in the acute sectors.

– How should the Welsh Government prioritise its resources to tackle NHS waiting lists for planned and non-urgent NHS treatments. Do you think the Welsh Government has a robust plan to address this issue?

Unpaid carers are supporting people who are on waiting lists, and face additional caring 'burdens' when the person they care for is on a waiting list; and their care needs should be addressed with more urgency. These additional caring responsibilities could affect a carer's

¹ [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

² [UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

own health, especially if they are an older carer, which would result in more strain placed on health services.

49% of unpaid carers report having a health need associated with their caring role, with over a third (36%) of carers waiting for hospital treatment or assessment having been waiting for over a year³. This is 6% higher than the UK average, and highlights how many carers in Wales are dealing with their own health issues alongside their caring responsibilities.

– How should the Budget support young people?

To support young carers in education settings, some local carer organisations offer in reach/outreach, where they will go to the school/college to support the young carers and signpost them to other organisations who can help them. This should be sustainably funded to ensure continued support for young carers in education settings. Young carers need their school to understand their situations and be flexible in their approaches. One in three young carers and young adult carers struggle to balance caring with learning, and 40% do not get the support they need in education to balance caring and learning⁴. All schools and colleges should have a Young Carers' Lead with responsibility for coordinating support for young carers. This is happening successfully in some parts of Wales, however it's still a postcode lottery.

Every young carer must be recognised and have access to support through their school or college to help them balance their caring and education. To be able to do this adequately, there should be budget to collect information about young carers in schools. At present, Wales doesn't record young carers in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). This data could inform policy decisions, and has already proven insightful in England. For example, information on persistent absences has shown that almost half (46%) of secondary-aged young carers missed at least 1 day of school a fortnight, compared with 26% of non-young carers⁵.

– Is the support provided by the Welsh Government for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?

Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant

Carers Trust Wales has received confirmation from Welsh that our programmes funded under the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant have been extended for an additional year, into 2025-26. It is unclear whether this extension will include any uplift in funding to enable us to sustain the scale and reach of our programmes, which were originally costed in 2019. With no formal grant agreement received to date, no confirmation

³ [State of Caring 2023: The impact of caring on health in Wales | Carers UK](#)

⁴ UK, Carers Trust Young Carer/Young Adult Carer report, March 2023

⁵ [Carers Trust, Caring and Classes: The education gap for young carers, 2024](#)

of available budget and workplans yet to be agreed for 2025-26 planning for delivery is challenging.

We welcome the recognition that these programmes are vital to the effective delivery of carers rights under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and that they contribute positively to the priorities set out in Welsh Government's Carers Strategy and Carers Charter. We are confident that through the delivery of our programmes we have sufficiently demonstrated our impact and the growing demand making a strong case for multi-year funding agreements. Short term funding reduces sector confidence, makes recruitment and retention of expert staff extremely difficult and reduces the sector's ability to scale effective models of delivery to meet growing need. As an infrastructure organisation and a capacity builder within the third sector, we believe strongly that investment in national as well as local organisations is crucial to ensuring the efficiency of service development and delivery across Wales and in turn the maximisation of the impact of government investment.

Carers Trust's major grants programmes, funded by Welsh Government

Carers Trust partners with its network of ten local carer organisations and a wider network of delivery partners in Wales to deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes. Between 2022-25 we have led two major grants programmes funded by Welsh Government: Carers Support Fund and Short Breaks Scheme. Carers Trust oversees the coordination of these programmes nationally and leads a grants programme that provides capacity to third sector organisations to deliver locally.

Our network of local carer organisations in Wales provide direct support to unpaid carers to sustain them in their caring role. In the past year, 96,000 carers were registered with our local carer organisations and, of these, 29,000 received direct support. Despite the number of people registered with our services increasing year on year, the number of carers who are directly supported decreased slightly in 2023-24, with local carer organisations citing the increased complexity of need presented by each individual carer as the reason for this. Carers are presenting to our services later and with more complex or acute needs as preventative public sector services retract.

The Carers Support Fund is a three-year Welsh Government funded programme, worth £4.5m between 2022-25. It enables Carers Trust and our network of local carer organisations to respond to the increased complexity of need seen by local carer organisations, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis and pandemic. The assurance in 2022 of three-year funding for this programme (in comparison with year-on-year funding in 2020 and 2021) enabled Carers Trust to work with our network of local carer organisations and delivery partners to embed a sustainable approach to supporting unpaid carers in financial hardship. This included developing local services and building capacity and expertise in carer organisations with the assurance that resources would be available until 2025.

Despite a strong evidence base demonstrating the impact of this programme and the ongoing need for support amongst carers, Welsh Government have not yet been able to indicate that there will be funding for the programme beyond 31 March 2025. Should this funding not continue in 2025, this would equate to around 7,000 unpaid carers in Wales in 2025-26 not receiving small grants and services to support them. Without the funding many local organisations would have significantly reduced ability to address the most urgent financial need, including access to food, heating or a bed to sleep in or to support carers to maximise their household income through improved access to unclaimed benefits. In many

areas of Wales demand for grants and services already significantly outstrips supply, with an expectation that winter pressures will increase demand further.

Not investing in the Carers Support Fund will also see capacity to support carers in financial hardship reduced for upwards of 10 local third sector organisations across Wales. This includes the reduction of staff as well as services that have been developed, refined and been found to be highly effective over the past three years. Almost half of those accessing this most vital support were previously unconnected to services with many of those citing that without this fund they would have been forced to borrow money from loan sharks, take payday loans or to simply go without.

Carers Trust is the national coordinating body for the Short Breaks Scheme, funded by Welsh Government between 2022-25. Through this Scheme more than 25,000 unpaid carers have accessed a break from their caring role to date. The Scheme has seen an increase in national and local capacity to respond to unpaid carers' short breaks needs, with 33 third sector organisations across the country funded to deliver short breaks and to resource the administration and delivery of these services. Early insights from an ongoing independent evaluation of this Scheme by Bangor University have shown that it is successfully increasing the availability and accessibility of short breaks. It is providing more personalised, flexible, and responsive break options and is effectively targeting short breaks to those who need it most.

As with the Carers Support Fund, there has been no formal confirmation from Welsh Government about their vision for the future of the Short Breaks Scheme will continue beyond its current term. Without such clarity, Carers Trust and the 33 organisations delivering short breaks across Wales face a very uncertain start to 2025 putting at risk jobs across Wales and risking a reduction in the availability of much-needed breaks for carers.

Third sector organisations need sufficient planning time to either wind-up large-scale programmes effectively or to plan for delivery in the next financial year. Most small to medium third sector organisations simply do not have the financial reserves available to plan to sustain posts and delivery without confirmation that funding will be forthcoming. As such, without confirmation, their only option is to begin to plan to reduce or end services upon which we rely to deliver statutory duties created under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act