

# PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4<sup>th</sup> June 2026

## Update on the Council's Shared Lives service

### Report by Corporate Director of Adult Social Care

#### RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

Consider the support that the Council's Care Quality Commission (CQC)-registered Shared Lives service provides in terms of offering equitable access, sufficient capacity and positive outcomes for the people that it supports. This includes efforts to broaden the offer of the Shared Lives service particularly in respect of younger adults. The Council also asks the Committee to support its efforts to increase awareness across Oxfordshire of the value of becoming a Shared Lives carer.

#### Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to offering and delivering a strong Shared Lives service for our residents. This report summaries the actions that have been taken to ensure that our Shared Lives carers provide the highest standard of care and support to residents in terms of maximising independence in line with the principles of [the Oxfordshire Way](#). The report will also include the actions taken to maintain and grow the Council's Shared Lives carer numbers as well as describing the areas the Council have explored in terms of broadening the offer. As stated above, Shared Lives is a CQC-registered service and the Council is proud to be rated 'Good' by the CQC.

#### Background

3. Shared Lives is a community based social care service that supports adults who need help to live independently by matching them with an approved Shared Lives carer. The individual lives as part of the carer's household, or is supported through regular visits, short breaks or day support, rather than living in a residential care setting. Shared Lives is built around family life, relationships and belonging, offering people the chance to live in their local community while receiving personalised support tailored to their needs.
4. There are approximately 150 Shared Lives schemes across the UK with the large majority operating in England. Most schemes are run directly by Local Authorities and usually within Adult Social Care. However, some areas do choose to outsource their Shared Lives offer to external providers. There are

10,000 people across the UK who are supported by Shared Lives whether that be in a long-term or short-term respite arrangements. Shared Lives schemes predominantly support people with a Learning Disability and Autism. However, there is currently national exploration of the possibility of supporting wider needs such as dementia, homelessness, acute mental health needs and Care Leavers.

## **The Oxfordshire Overview**

5. The Oxfordshire County Council Shared Lives Scheme is well established and has been in existence since the 1990s with 86 households approved with the Scheme across the whole county. Additionally, there are two households, outside of Oxfordshire who the Council support and monitor due to their close proximity geographically. In the Oxfordshire Scheme, Shared Lives Carers are approved and operate in a similar way to foster carers but are offering support to adults operating within the legislative framework governing Adult Social Care, ensuring that all practice meets established standards and requirements.
6. At present, the Shared Lives Scheme supports a total of 114 individuals. Of these, 92 people are in long-term arrangements, while 22 access the scheme for short breaks.
7. Shared Lives Carers go through a rigorous process to establish their suitability for the role. Within the Oxfordshire Scheme this involves an in-depth assessment by a Social Worker which is considered by the Scheme's independent approval Panel, and includes a number of references and checks, such as enhanced DBS checks. The membership of the panel also includes people with lived experience including former Shared Lives carers as well as people who live in Shared Lives arrangements currently. The Council also involves people with lived experience in any recruitment for the Shared Lives Team.
8. Once Shared lives Carers are approved with the Scheme carers are required to commit to a 5-day induction programme after which there is an ongoing programme of training, support and monitoring which is developed with feedback from the people we support. Shared Lives Carers are carefully matched with people who wish to use the service and factors such as shared interests are considered as well as the skills and suitability of the Shared lives Carers. There is an introduction process to enable everyone to get to know each other before deciding whether to go ahead with the match. This involves at least an initial meeting with the social worker, a meal visit, and an overnight stay but often involves further visits. The Scheme accepts referrals from Oxfordshire County Council Adult Social Care workers.
9. Shared lives Carers can support up to 3 people at any one time. If they were to support more people, they would need to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as a small care home. The Council does not currently have any carers that support more than 3 people so have not had to register with CQC individually. The scheme also enables Shared Lives Carers to take

up to 42 nights a year break from providing support arrangements. Whilst carers are taking respite breaks, the people we support usually stay with other Shared Lives carers so that there is consistency and continuity.

10. The Oxfordshire scheme is registered with the Care Quality Commission to provide “personal care” and is rated as “Good” overall, with “Outstanding” in the caring component.
11. At the Council’s last CQC Shared Lives inspection in 2019 it was found that specifically in relation to the ‘Caring’ category *‘Oxfordshire Shared Lives Scheme is an extraordinary service which supports people, regardless of their care needs to share both family and community life with shared lives carers. The service is designed to carefully match people to households which in turn contributes to creating a ‘personal touch’ and a strong, visible person-centred approach. People were exceptionally complimentary about both shared lives workers and shared lives carers and the support received. Both verbal and nonverbal feedback from people reflected how people were able to form meaningful, caring relationships with shared lives carers and within the wider community’.*

## **Ensuring equitable access to the scheme**

12. The Council is strongly committed to the on-going development of Shared Lives scheme as it aligns very closely with the strategic principles detailed within our Oxfordshire Way. Shared Lives arrangements provide consistent, proportionate, strengths-based support in a family environment. Strengths-based support is a core principle in social care practice. It moves away from a deficit model. It focuses on what people can do and what is most important to them including family, their community and their goals and aspirations. Shared Lives allows people who have a need for supported accommodation to maximise their independent living skills in a nurturing and supportive setting.
13. The Council has a number of practice forums where all potential support options are considered to meet people’s eligible needs under the Care Act 2014. These forums are chaired by operational leads and ensure that there is consistency in decision-making. If following a Care Act assessment, it is identified that a person has a need for supported accommodation, the Council ensures that Shared Lives is considered before any other option such as Supported Living or residential care.
14. In terms of the needs of the people who access the Council’s Shared Lives scheme, it is not dissimilar to the national picture. At the current time, 83% of people who are in long-term arrangements have a Learning Disability. The remaining 17% of people have a range of needs such as autism or mental health conditions.
15. A strategic ambition of the Council has been to see a higher proportion of young people access the scheme. Shared Lives gives younger people a stable and consistent environment to maximise their independence and

achieve their goals and aspirations and offers the opportunity for people to live ordinary lives in family settings.

16. The Council is proud that 39% of the people that have support from Shared Lives are aged 30 or under. The scheme currently supports 39 Care Leavers which equates to 40% of the total people we support in long-term arrangements.

## **Ensuring sufficiency of Shared Lives arrangements**

17. As with any support provider, recruitment and retention is an essential component of maintaining a strong Shared Lives scheme. Shared Lives tends to attract carers who are of an older demographic often who are towards the end of their working careers and who have a spare room in their house. This is a particularly important element to note in the context of Oxfordshire where both the cost of living and property prices are higher. At least one household per year will take retirement so recruitment is essential component of operational business as usual.
18. The Council has had an increased focus on marketing in recent years in an attempt to increase the amount of interest in becoming Shared Lives carers. This has included a television advert, Facebook and social media adverts as well as target mail drops in areas of the County where we have smaller numbers of carers. This approach was recommended by Shared Lives Plus who are the leading national charity for Shared Lives schemes in the UK. These approaches unfortunately yielded limited results however the Council continuously reviews its approaches in this area. The Shared Lives team also attend a number of community events throughout the year to highlight the scheme. For example, they recently attended the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum-hosted 'SEND Better Together' event.
19. The most effective way of recruiting new carers into the Council's Shared Lives scheme continues to be word of mouth. The Council's current carers will often recommend the scheme to friends and families which leads to formal applications to become Shared Lives carers. For example, the Council has had some very positive examples where adult children of Shared Lives Carers have gone on to be approved as carers themselves. This has been very positive as they have had the previous experience of living in Shared Lives households so have the necessary skills and experience to fulfil the role to a very high standard.
20. In 2025 the Council approved 11 new households to be Shared Lives carers. This represents a significant increase in comparison to the previous 5 years where on average 5 households are approved per year.
21. Carer retention is also an important element of maintaining a strong Shared Lives scheme. The Council's Shared Lives scheme has not had anyone that has stopped being a carer over the past five years for any other reason than retirement. The Shared Lives Team offer robust and positive support to its carers. This includes six weekly monitoring visits as well as ad hoc support as

and when it is required. These visits are by a member of the Shared Lives Team. The purpose of these visits is to meet with the individual to ensure they are happy and settled. It also serves as an opportunity to meet with the carers to discuss any issues and offer support where necessary.

22. Regular training is also a feature in a variety of areas such as medication administration, moving and handling and health and safety. This is essential to maintain the Council's CQC-compliance and ensures that carers have the skills and confidence to provide the highest quality care and support. The Council has also invested in more specialist training so that carers feel confident in supporting people with more complex needs. A recent example would be training in relation to trauma-informed practice.
23. The Council is proud that some of its Shared Lives carers have been recognised for their many years of service supporting people in their homes. In 2025, Kym and Roger Garnett from Banbury were presented with a long-service award by the Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers (OACP) after 29 years in the scheme. Their story was publicised by the BBC [Oxfordshire couple share home with strangers for 27 years - BBC News](#)
24. Another carer, Lynn Lacey also received an award from a 'High Commendation' award from Shared Lives Plus for her support of people over the past 27 years. She was also invited to meet their Majesties, the King and Queen at a reception at Windsor Castle celebrating the efforts of those who work in the care sector. Her story can be seen here [Oxfordshire Shared Lives carer honoured at royal reception](#)

## **Broadening the Council's Shared Lives offer**


25. The Council remains committed to exploring whether Shared Lives can support a broader range of needs. This includes those suffering from acute mental health problems as well as those that are homeless. There are some challenges in relation to this. This includes having access to robust mental health support from other agencies. It is also important to recognise that a Shared Lives setting is a family environment. Therefore, there are some people who it would not be appropriate to accommodate in Shared Lives due to the risks posed and the level of support that Shared Lives carers can provide. Regardless of this, the Council will continue to explore and remain involved in national dialogue in relation to this.
26. One area where significant progress has been made is in relation to Care Leavers. In the period 24/25 the Council had an additional 9 Care Leavers supported into Shared Lives arrangements and in 25/26 we had a further 13 Care Leavers join the scheme. This is a result of a targeted project to identify Care Leavers who may be suitable for a Shared Lives arrangements. The Shared Lives Team has a specific Social Worker who is leading on this work. The lead has worked collaboratively with Children's and Adults Social Care to

support this work. This has included the Council's disabled children's teams as well as the Moving into Adulthood Team in Adult Social Care.

27. The Council is also involved in a national project organised by Shared Lives Plus in relation to Care Leavers. As a result of the work that the Council has completed in this area, they were pleased to host representatives from the Departments of Education and Health and Social Care in May 2025. This included Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children's and Families in the UK. After her visit to Oxfordshire, she stated the following *"They were both brilliant days. I am very grateful for the time [the young people and carers] all spent with me, and for sharing their many success stories. I was also pleased to have the opportunity to meet with so many colleagues working in collaboration in the local authorities and for Shared Lives"*.
28. The Council has identified young people with disabilities who are in foster care arrangements where the carer has stated that they would like to support a person on a long-term basis. The Shared Lives Team will then complete the relevant assessments for the carer to become a Shared Lives carer in advance of a young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This process ensures long-term stability and continuity of care for our care experienced young people. The Council also continues to identify young people in care with disabilities who are in children's residential care who may be suitable for Shared Lives.
29. As detailed the Council is proud to have 39 Care experienced people who are supported by Shared Lives in Oxfordshire. The Council has seen some fantastic outcomes achieved for our care experienced population in Shared Lives. Below are two recent examples of the outcomes 2 care experienced individuals have achieved with the service;
30. *M is a 26-year-old who has been living with his Shared Lives Carer, L since the age of 18. M has some learning challenges and health conditions. He spent much of his childhood in various foster placements out of county. Due to close working between children and adults social care the Council was able to match M with a placement in advance of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. M initially needed support with aspects of daily living such as budgeting as well as emotional support. However, he has thrived and now has a full-time job as a chef in a local pub and is ready to live independently which he is being supported to do.*
31. *J had a very challenging start to life and was one of 8 siblings who was removed from his family. J was initially adopted but unfortunately this broke down and J moved to a foster placement in his mid-teens. J has autism and difficulties with attachment due to childhood trauma. His behaviour at times could be impulsive and volatile. However, his foster carers remained totally committed to J and supported him through this difficult period.*

*As he approached 18, due to his needs he was referred to Adult Social Care for assessment. It was found that he had eligible needs. His foster carers were clear that they wanted to support him past his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. They were assessed and approved by the Shared Lives Team which meant J could stay with them into adulthood. Due to the stability and continuity provided J was*

*able to maximise his independence to such an extent that he now lives in his own home with no additional support at all. He is in full-time employment, in a long-term arrangement and about to start his only family. He stays in frequent touch with the carers who showed him the unwavering dedication and support to achieve his goals and aspirations.*

32. The Council also participated nationally to a segment on the BBC's One Show in relation to Shared Lives and Care Leavers which emphasises the positive environment the scheme can create to support our care experienced young people to flourish and achieve their goals and aspirations. This segment can be seen here  [The One Show - Shared Lives for young people leaving care.mp4](#)
33. The Council is proud of the high-quality support that its Shared Lives carers provide to people with additional needs and is truly grateful for their unwavering dedication and commitment. The Council also believes that their Shared Lives Team is a strong, caring and skilled team. They ensure that carers feel supported in their role and that the voices and wishes of the people we support are always at the forefront of everything the Council does. The Council remains fully committed to enhancing the scheme and encouraging caring, compassionate and strengths-based carers to join the scheme in line with our strategic vision 'The Oxfordshire Way' and our wider corporate values.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

34. Adult Social Care's priorities are shaped by our corporate vision and priorities, with particular focus on:
- Tackling inequalities - working with partners to address inequalities focussing support on those in greatest need, embedding and implementing our digital inclusion strategy,
  - Prioritising the health and wellbeing of our residents: working with partners to implement our health and wellbeing strategy prioritising preventative initiatives, and
  - Supporting carers and the social care system: deliver seamless services, explore new ways to provide services promoting self-directed support and increasing choice.

## **Financial Implications**

35. This is a report for information only. There are no direct financial implications in the body of this paper.

Comments checked by:

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## **Legal Implications**

36. Shared Lives services (formerly known as adult placement) are a means of meeting the care and support needs of those assessed as eligible under the Care Act 2014. The scheme provides a service that is registered and regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to ensure quality and safety.
37. This report provides an update on the Oxfordshire Shared Lives Scheme only and does not have any direct legal implications  
Comments checked by:

Janice White, Principal Solicitor – ASC, Education and SEND

## **Staff Implications**

38. There are no additional staffing implications arising from this report.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

39. Equity in experiences and outcomes is a key priority for Adult Social Care arising from our statutory duties under Care Act 2014 and CQC Assurance Framework. We take a person-centred approach to supporting people and any protected characteristics they have would be part of this framework.

## **Sustainability Implications**

40. There are no sustainability implications in relation to this report.

## **Risk Management**

41. Adult Social Care Directorate Leadership Team has oversight of the risks and maintains a risk register and reports to Senior Leadership Team and Informal Cabinet through monthly updates.

Karen Fuller, Corporate Director of Adult Social Care

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Sam Harper, Head of Service- Learning Disability, Moving into Adulthood and Provider Services.

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