

**Oxfordshire Carers' Strategy and Carers' Personal Budgets:  
Response to the consultation**

**January 2017**

**Introduction**

1. As a consequence of ongoing financial pressures, savings against carers' services totalling £660,000 were agreed by Oxfordshire County Council in February 2016. This included a suggestion that savings could be made by introducing charging for carers' services.
2. Some of the savings required by the council were achieved through the reprocurement of the Carers Oxfordshire service (implemented in April 2016). It was found following investigation that the introduction of charging for carers' services was not viable and would not produce the savings required.
3. Proposals for releasing funding by redesigning carers' personal budgets were developed, and these proposals were the subject of a public consultation, alongside the refreshed and updated version of the Oxfordshire Carers' Strategy.
4. The consultation ran from 22nd August until 28th November 2016, and this paper sets out our responses to the report of the consultation.
5. A total of 51 questionnaire responses were received (25 via the online portal; 26 paper questionnaires and 6 responses in other written forms) and feedback was also gathered during three consultation workshops for carers, a workshop for service providers and a workshop at the Caring Matters Conference held at the Kassam Stadium on 25th November 2016.

**Response to the key messages from the consultation**

KEY MESSAGE	RESPONSE
<p>6. A key message was 'one size doesn't fit all', which applied to how people access information and guidance and how they want to be supported. Many carers use a variety of means e.g. Carers Oxfordshire, Age UK Oxfordshire, Carers UK and government websites to get information and guidance. It would be beneficial if there was parity and joined up thinking between the range of information and guidance available, our local strategy and the national strategy</p>	<p>There are many sources of information, advice and support for carers, which may be conflicting and may cause confusion. Whilst recognising this, our ambition is for Carers Oxfordshire to be the initial 'go to' resource for carers in Oxfordshire, whether that is online, over the phone or face to face. Oxfordshire County Council will continue to work strategically with partners such as Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Age UK Oxfordshire and Oxford University Hospitals in the development of support for carers</p>
<p>7. There is wide recognition of how well Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning</p>	<p>Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group respect the crucial role that carers play in the lives of</p>

Group have supported carers over the years but carers do not feel as valued as they used to be. Carers see themselves as experts by experience and wish to be respected for the knowledge they have and skill they evidence on a daily basis for their cared for person

those they care for, and have a shared and ongoing commitment to support carers. The two organisations will continue to work together to raise the quality and improve the value of health and social care services for both service users and for carers, within the financial resources available

8. Carers told us that the identification of carers was very important with many people suggesting that there should be a register of carers, although some people don't like the label of carer. Carers also told us that the range of terminologies used by different agencies, including use of the name 'personal budgets' causes confusion

GPs may often be in a position to identify carers and as such have a key role. As a result of the consultation, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group is proposing to fund an enhanced information and advice offer for all carers via direct electronic referral by a GP, which is proposed to be delivered by an extension to the current Carers Oxfordshire service. This will help to consolidate and extend the reach of the service to more carers in the county

9. Mental health for all carers including young carers is a big concern. Loneliness, being overwhelmed by one's individual situation and depression all add to the weight of responsibility in caring for someone. Carers are feeling the strain of caring in this modern world and are concerned that a lack of respite will send more families to breaking point. Carers also feel vulnerable, partly because they are worried about the ability of agencies to deliver the priorities

The council acknowledges these concerns, and is continuing to fund both Carers Oxfordshire and the Young Carers Service, which provide mental health and well-being support to carers.

The council acknowledges that changes in respite and daytime support services are concerning for many carers but respite services will continue to be available to eligible service users

10. Respondents said that the three priorities in the Oxfordshire Carers' Strategy are broadly right although there is concern at the ability of services to deliver against them. Outcomes are difficult to identify for carers, and even harder for services to measure them

The strategy will be reviewed in light of comments received in the consultation and amendments made as appropriate

11. Carers agreed that it was right not to charge for carers' services although two respondents said that charging for services would be acceptable to them. Carers also told us that the award of a

The council will not proceed with the proposal to charge for carers' services

personal budget helps carers to feel valued

12. Carers' personal budgets - options 1 and 2 were the preferred options for carers. A number of respondents felt that personal budgets should be available for as many carers as possible, and also that carers with the greatest needs should be targeted.

As a result of the consultation responses, a revised proposal has been developed, which retains the award of a carers' personal budget payment for those carers with high needs