

Divisions Affected – N/A

**DELEGATED DECISIONS FOR CABINET MEMBER FOR
ADULT SOCIAL CARE
19 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**EXTENSION OF CARER SUPPORT SERVICE CONTRACT WITH
ACTION FOR CARERS OXFORDSHIRE**

Report by Interim Corporate Director of Adult Social Care

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Agree that the Carer Support Service contract is extended for two years from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026. Scope for service improvements have been identified and Commissioners will work with the Provider to deliver these.
 - b) Agree that there should be a further review of the scope, purpose and amounts that Oxfordshire County Council and BOB Integrated Care Board commits in Carers' Personal Budgets as a separate exercise. Further recommendations will be reviewed in the Adult Social Care Directorate Leadership Team and Council and Integrated Care Board Joint Commissioning Executive and agreed for implementation from April 2024 in line with each organisation's scheme of delegation.

Executive Summary

2. The Carer Support Service (branded Carers Oxfordshire) is provided by Action for Carers Oxfordshire with a sub-contract with Rethink Mental Illness. The service is funded by Oxfordshire County Council (the council) and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (ICB). The contract is for three years plus a possible further two years extension. The first three years expire on 31 March 2024. A decision is required about whether the contract is extended. This paper provides a review of the service covering cost, demand, quality, strategic priorities, followed by options for service provision from 1 April 2024.
3. The review concludes that although there are some areas where improvement is required, the service is performing well, and the provider is engaged in the strategic priorities for carers.

4. Carers told us in the review that this service is extremely helpful. For example: *“Prior to having this assessment and support my focus was on my son who I care for. After having this assessment and support it has opened up many opportunities for me to start focussing on myself. Pointed into directions of additional support that I wasn’t aware of, given me a more positive outlook. A lot of the facilities on offer aren’t common knowledge, my caring role is fairly isolated due to my sons needs so having this assessment and support is really helpful for myself and my son.”*¹

5. The council and ICB as joint funders of the service contract are both facing significant financial pressures in the period 2023-25. Any decision to extend the contract must recognise these pressures and seek to mitigate them where possible. Our conclusion from the review is that the service should continue, should address the improvement objectives set out below and continue to underpin the newly developed All-age Unpaid Carers Strategy 2023-26 for Oxfordshire. However, there may be opportunities to review the operation of the Carers personal budgets which are aligned to the service. These options are considered below.

Decision table

Board	Date	Decision
Joint Commissioning Executive	10 August 2023	Agreed
Adult Social Care Directorate Leadership Team	14 August 2023	Agreed
Key decision at Cabinet	19 September 2023	

Contract details

Introduction

6. An unpaid carer is a child, young person or adult who cares for a family member or friend who could not cope without that support, due to ill-health, frailty, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction. Many who provide unpaid care to a family member or friend do not identify themselves as an ‘unpaid carer’ but rather as a spouse/partner/son/daughter/friend. Sometimes the person being cared for does not wish to recognise that they are being cared for, which is difficult and frustrating for the carer who in turn may not be recognised as an unpaid carer. The term ‘unpaid carer’ is not about labelling people but describing what they do to help them access help and support.

7. Issues of inequality leading to poor health outcomes and additional financial pressures are a daily experience of unpaid carers. Caring has been announced as being a social determinant of health recently by Public Health England.

¹ Carer response from Carers Oxfordshire feedback forms (anonymous)

8. According to Carers UK, unpaid carers in England and Wales contribute £445 million to the economy in England and Wales every day, which is £162 billion per year.²

Background

9. The council and NHS are responsible for the provision of information, advice and support to carers under the Care Act 2014.
10. In 2020, a carer pathway review was held, and a new design was co-produced. This included listening and stakeholder events with carers, localities teams and operational colleagues, voluntary and community sector organisations etc., and a co-design group with carers. The outcome was that the funding from the council and the then Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG) should be pooled, and a specialist carer support service be commissioned, with changes to the model for carer’s payments.
11. The Carer Support Service was commissioned and following a competitive tender process, the contract was awarded to Action for Carers Oxfordshire (AfCO). The contract commenced on 1 April 2021 and Action for Carers Oxfordshire deliver the service in partnership with Rethink Mental Illness. The service is branded Carers Oxfordshire.
12. The contract is for three years and is due to expire on 31 March 2024. There is an option to extend for a further two years.

Contract value

13. The Carer Support Service is funded jointly from the Age Well pooled budget by the council and the ICB.
14. The contract value is £837,302 per year. The council funds £428,824pa and the remainder is funded by ICB. At the time the finances for the contract were being identified, OCCG, as was, had a certain level of funding available. During 2020-21, OCCG reduced the funding by £6,000 which meant that the contract had a shortfall of £6,000. Unfortunately, this matter was not resolved at the time and the funding remains unidentified. To date it has been covered by ICB. It is noted that this funding is no longer available. It is proposed that the shortfall is covered by efficiencies from within the carer personal budget line.
15. In April 2023, the council also awarded AfCo with an additional one-off £100,000 from the Better Care Fund for carer short breaks via a contract variation.

Year	Dates	Value	BCF
Year 1	1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022	£837,302	£0
Year 2	1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023	£837,302	£0
Year 3	1 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024	£837,302	£100,000

² [Unpaid care in England and Wales valued at £445 million per day | Carers UK](#)

16. The council and ICB also fund the carer payments (personal budgets). Following a carer assessment, carers can be given up to £300 in any 12-month period. The budget for carer payments is £525,250pa split equally between the council and ICB. The spend has been as follows:

Year	Dates	Total budget	Total spend
Year 1	1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022	£525,250	£478,021
Year 2	1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023	£525,250	£530,382
Year 3	1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024	£525,250	£118,900 (to end June 2023)

17. The Carers Personal Budget model was developed via co-production prior to the start of the current contract. It has largely been used to support respite, but with a significant increase in demand reported to use the funding against cost-of-living pressures.
18. The Carers Personal Budgets are *not* formally subject to the contract extension but clearly should be aligned in terms of timeframe.
19. Since the commencement of the current Personal Budget model, there has been significant development of a range of options that support people to identify options for self-help in the community both in terms of navigation and resource.
20. There has also been valuable learning in relation to the deployment to the additional BCF funding around respite and breaks.
21. There is an opportunity to consider:
- The scope and amount of the budget for personal budgets
 - Targeting of personal budgets in terms of purpose and thresholds
 - The interaction with other navigation support and community resource that should be equally available to carers as other groups within the population
 - The wider respite demand and offer across Adult Social Care
- And make further recommendations including scope for service efficiencies.

The service offer

22. The core offer of the service is to provide information, advice and support to unpaid carers over the age of 18 years who are caring for a person of any age.
23. The service supports carers to identify and manage their own needs and to plan for the future using a three-stage, strengths-based ‘guided conversation’ approach, aligned with the carers assessment.
24. The personal outcomes sought through the delivery of the service are:
- Carers have a contingency plan, and are encouraged to register as a carer with their GP

- Carers participate in strengths-based conversations and receive personalised support, and achieve the outcomes on their support plans
- Carers are able to access information and support through a wide range of community-based services
- Carers are better connected and aware of choices for improving their health and wellbeing and increasing their quality of life
- Carers receive training and have increased confidence in managing their role as a carer
- Carers are supported to link with other carers to enable peer to peer support.

Meeting demand

25. According to the 2021 Census³, in Oxfordshire, there are 52,674 people providing unpaid care. This varies from 1 hour to 50+ with the larger number providing 1 to 19 hours unpaid care per week.

Provision of unpaid care	Value	% of population	% of population (age standardised)
No care	634,627	92.3%	92.1%
1-19 hours	29,895	4.3%	4.5%
20-49 hours	9,143	1.3%	1.4%
50+ hours	13,636	2.0%	2.1%

26. The table below provides information on the activity of the service under the current contract for 2022-23.

Number of carers reached 2022-23

	Apr – Jun	Jul – Sep	Oct – Dec	Jan - Mar	Totals
Referrals	502	756	598	780	2,636
Self-referrals	270	467	384	376	1,497
Carersline	717	970	628	666	2,981
Website	3,413	4,900	4,407	5,918	18,638
Contacted & engaged by email	Unknown	955	892	1,223	3,070
Care Matters publication (sent out to carers 6-monthly)	N/A	9,058	N/A	9,065	18,123

27. This means there is still further potential demand on the service with people who have identified themselves as a carer in the census and those carers who have yet to be identified.

³ [Unpaid care in Oxfordshire | Oxfordshire Insight](#)

Quality and impact

28. Targets attached to outcomes in the contract were reviewed and adjusted by commissioners in 2022. A 10% increase to the targets for continuous improvement purposes was applied and not all targets have been achieved.
- In some areas, the provider has reached the baseline but not the 10% increase, for example the number of parent carers registered with the service.
 - In some areas the provider has not reached the baseline, such as reviewing carer self-assessments within two working days. The provider exceeded/met in three quarters but were under in the final quarter due to being a staff member down.
 - In some outcomes, the provider has vastly exceeded the target such as the number of carers supported in groups which was 25% over the target.
29. The council and Action for Carers Oxfordshire and Rethink Mental Illness meet on a quarterly basis to discuss performance. The providers are confident that they can improve performance where targets have not been reached.

Carer feedback

30. Following receipt of a service, carers are asked to complete an anonymous feedback form. Since this was introduced, there have been 402 responses and these range from carers who have received face to face support, telephone or email support or accessed the website.

Graphic demonstrating the type of support carers received from the service.

Carer's assessment	341
Information and/or Advice	273
Talking to someone who understands...	187
Carers Group	40
Other	45



Graphic demonstrating how satisfied carers are with the support they received from the service

Very dissatisfied	15
Dissatisfied	4
Satisfied	107
Very satisfied	276



31. Carers said⁴:
- “It’s nice to have support where ultimately the support is for me as a carer when normally I’m thinking about my son who I’m caring for. Being directed and advised gives you a push to get up and try new things, change things that are not suiting you etc. It encourages me to get out more, explore new opportunities and hope for a better day.”*
- “I was totally oblivious as to what was available for me as a carer, but now relieved there is light at the end of the tunnel to try to get a life back for myself.”*
- “I found attending the Carers meeting very helpful making me realise there is much support available.”*
- “I feel that there is a lot of support available to me, which I was previously unaware of. I feel that I matter, as well as the person I care for.”*
- “The service is amazing and a lifeline as worries were quickly eased.”*

Carer strategy

32. The council has recently co-produced an [All-Age Unpaid Carers Strategy 2023-26 for Oxfordshire](#) as agreed by the Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board on 16 March 2023. The Head of Service and other colleagues from the Carers Oxfordshire service have engaged in the preparation of the strategy and have been vital partners.
33. The strategic priorities are:
- Priority 1:** To identify carers and effectively support them, improving their health and wellbeing and providing opportunities for a break from their caring role.
- Priority 2:** To safeguard adult and young carers at risk who need more support to look after themselves, particularly during times of change and transition.
- Priority 3:** To encourage and enable carers to have an active life outside their caring role, including fulfilling their education, employment and training potential.
34. In order to deliver the Strategy, actions have been identified by partners and targets have been set to improve outcomes for carers. Carer’s Oxfordshire has committed to actions and initiatives against each of the priorities.

Quality and impact conclusion

35. Routine contract monitoring, through quarterly contract review meetings, demonstrates that the service is well-run, meeting or exceeding some performance expectations and achieving positive outcomes for carers. Work is planned with the provider to improve outcomes where they have not been

⁴ Carer responses from Carers Oxfordshire feedback forms

reached and these will complement the All-Age Unpaid Carers Strategy action plan. We fully expect that a good quality service will be delivered for the additional two years if the option to extend is approved.

Options analysis (see Annex A for full options appraisal)

Preferred option

- 36. The preferred option is Option 2B: **Extend the contract for two years from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026**. This option will maintain a successful specialist service which has demonstrated high quality delivery and will take advantage of the current provider’s planned innovations and actions from the Strategy as well as external funds leveraged by the current provider.
- 37. This approach could be easily actioned. A further two years will allow us to refine in more detail how to evaluate impact. The provider will look for greater efficiencies to improve outputs.

Cost estimate of preferred option

- 38. The cost for a further two years of funding this contract is shown in the table below. This has been provided for in the current budgets. There are no opportunities to make savings in this contract. There has been no uplift to the costs since the start of the contract and by taking up the option of extending, we are securing two further years at the rates tendered in 2020 before a period of significant inflation. There will be a separate set of recommendations in relation to Carers Personal Budgets.

Carer Support Service

Year	Cost to OCC	Cost to IBC
Year 4: 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025	£428,824	£408,478
Year 5: 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026	£428,824	£408,478
Total	£857,648	£816,956

Corporate Policies and Priorities

- 39. The continuation of the Carer Support Service for a further two years supports the council’s Strategic Plan 2023-2025. Many of the nine priorities have an impact on carers, and specifically number 4 which is to support carers and the social care system. The commissioned Carers Support Service supports carers so that they can continue in their caring role and the providers are involved in the action plan for the All-age Unpaid Carer Strategy 2023-26.

Financial Implications

- 40. The funding required for the two further years in the contract from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026 has been identified by both Oxfordshire County Council and

Integrated Care Board and will be funded jointly through the Age Well pooled budget.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

41. The current contract for the Carer Support Service expires on 31 March 2024 and contains the option to extend for a further two years until 31 March 2026.

Comments checked by:

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Staff Implications

42. There are no new or additional staffing implications. The contract with Action for Carers Oxfordshire is adequately funded for the staffing resource required.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

43. As stated in the report, carers experience issues of inequality leading to poor health outcomes and additional financial pressures. With equality and diversity issues at the forefront, the service model was designed and co-produced with carers. Feedback is sought from carers about how satisfied they are and how using the service has made an impact on their lives. This is monitored and evaluated to ensure that the commissioned service is making a positive difference to carers and helping them to continue in their caring role. Carers are involved in achieving the action plans for the All-Age Unpaid Carer Strategy.

Risk Management

44. **Critical success factors summary table**

Critical success criteria	Option 1	Option 2A	Option 2B
Savings achieved	2	1	1
Least reputational risk	1	2	3
Least user risk	1	2	3
Strategic aims achieved	1	3	3
Total	5	8	10

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Annex: Annex 1: Options Analysis for Carers Oxfordshire service

Background papers: Nil

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September 2023