

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 24 February 2026**

#### **Oxfordshire Unpaid Carers Strategy Report of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered how Oxfordshire County Council supports Unpaid Carers in Oxfordshire under the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2023, and the Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028 at its meeting on 15 January 2026.
4. The Committee would like to thank Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Isabel Rockingham, Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well, and Jordan Marsh, Commissioning Officer for preparing and introducing the report, and for attending to answer questions.

## SUMMARY

5. The People Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Oxfordshire Unpaid Carers Strategy, welcoming officers' emphasis on the essential contribution unpaid carers make to the health and social care system. The Committee noted that, despite carers providing an estimated 7.9 billion hours of care nationally, fewer people identify themselves as carers, limiting the Council's ability to offer statutory assessments and support. Strategic priorities presented to the Committee included improved identification across health and community settings, clearer information and guidance, and more personalised support plans to enable people to live independently at home for longer.
6. In discussion, Members explored the barriers that unpaid carers face in accessing support, including inconsistent recognition across GP practices, limited awareness of entitlements such as congestion-charge exemptions, and challenges for those who are digitally excluded. The Committee also highlighted differing needs across age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and rural or urban communities.
7. The Committee were informed that a new contract with Carers Oxfordshire, who deliver the core support to unpaid carers, was currently in the procurement phase. Officers reported that, working alongside Carers Oxfordshire, progress had been made with closer GP partnership and community led engagement. Members of the Committee expressed their interest in seeing the proposed carers strain index by Carers Oxfordshire as part of the new contract.
8. The Committee welcomed improvements to hospital discharge processes, strengthened feedback mechanisms, and the development of flexible support offers.
9. The Committee makes two recommendations focused on reviewing the timing of support sessions, exploring lifestyle-offer schemes linked to Carers ID cards, and ensuring consistent GP-level outreach.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

10. Members of the Committee reported feedback from unpaid carers that many cannot attend support sessions scheduled around mealtimes, medication routines, school runs, or bedtime, even when they are otherwise motivated to engage. While some daytime provision works for a subset of carers, a significant cohort needs evening, early-morning, weekend, or drop-in/on-demand options to participate. Officers confirmed that flexibility varies and acknowledged that timing is a barrier to uptake, particularly for those juggling employment alongside caring.

11. The Committee also noted that “asynchronous” support (e.g., recorded workshops, bite-size videos, messaging forums, and resource libraries) can meet carers where they are, without obliging them to choose between care duties and support. Given the Council’s strategic aim to intervene earlier and more personally, underpinned by the new contract’s carers strain index, the Committee considers that aligning availability with real-world caring patterns is central to achieving better outcomes and preventing crisis.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council Carers Oxfordshire to review the timings of the support on offer, to ensure support is available outside of main caring duty times and to consider what asynchronous support could additionally be provided.**

12. The Committee discussed the potential for the Carers ID card to confer practical recognition and access to benefits that tangibly ease day-to-day pressures. Members observed that national programmes like the Blue Light Card are currently restricted to paid professionals, yet unpaid carers shoulder substantial responsibilities and could benefit from similar recognition and modest cost-of-living reliefs. Officers referenced existing discretionary payments and noted that any expansion must be evidence-led, value-for-money, and integrated with the core offer delivered through Carers Oxfordshire.
13. The Committee therefore considers it appropriate for the Council to develop a structured appraisal of options (e.g., participation in established lifestyle-offer schemes, local partnership discounts, or enhanced uses of the ID card in health and care settings), including equity, administrative feasibility, and measurable benefit to carers, then reported back with a clear rationale for joining or not joining such schemes. This would provide transparency to carers and ensure consistency across the system.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council gives further consideration to the use of the Carers ID card and its participation in lifestyle-offer schemes.**

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

14. The Committee does not intend to revisit this item during this municipal year, however, retains a strong interest in the Council support of unpaid carers in Oxfordshire due to their significant contribution to society. The issue of unpaid carers remains high on this Committee’s interests and priorities. The Committee recognises that it cannot bind next year’s Committee but hopes that the work arising from recommendation 2 would be scrutinised during the 2025/26 municipal year.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

15. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power:  
‘Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a

formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.

16. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2.3 (v) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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