



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee

23rd January 2025

Report of the Director of Social Service, Health and Housing

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All wards

Unpaid Carers Ombudsman Report

Purpose of the Report

This report presents the finds of the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales' ("PSOW") own initiative investigation into the administration of unpaid carers' needs assessments within local authorities in Wales, which included Neath Port Talbot (NPT) and highlights the ongoing action plan to address identified issues.

Executive Summary

The PSOW undertook an own initiative investigation into the administration of unpaid carers needs assessments across four local authorities; Caerphilly, Ceredigion, Flintshire and Neath Port Talbot, between July and September 2024. The report examines the efforts and challenges faced in assessing and supporting unpaid carers, highlighting areas for improvement and providing recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these assessments.

Background

In July 2024 the PSOW assessments. The investigation was driven by concerns over the low rates of assessments and support plans provided to unpaid carers between April 2016 to March 2021, which suggested significant gaps in identifying and addressing unpaid carers needs.

The PSOW collected and analysed data from four local authorities, conducted surveys and interviews with unpaid carers and key stakeholders, and reviewed relevant policies and procedures. The goal was to identify systemic issues and provide recommendations to improve the support and resources available to unpaid carers, ensuring that their contributions are recognised, and they receive the necessary support to carry out their caring roles effectively.

The PSOW's investigation considered

- Whether the local authorities being investigated were meeting their statutory duties under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and its Code of Practice and The Care and Support (Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2015.
- Whether those entitled to a carer's needs assessment were being made aware and understand their right to request a carer's needs assessment.
- Where carers' needs assessments are commissioned, whether those assessment services are being delivered appropriately and whether local authorities appropriately monitor the contracting arrangements.
- Whether carers' needs assessments, including those completed by commissioned service providers, are undertaken in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The investigation aimed to foster better collaboration between health services and local authorities, enhance data collection and utilisation, and improve the quality and consistency of unpaid carers' needs assessments across Wales.

Key Findings

- **Low Assessment Rates**

In the 2021 Census, it was identified that between the four local authorities, 60,717 people (over 5 years old) identified as an unpaid carer. Of which, between 2022/23 only 1,710 (2.8%) unpaid carers had their needs assessed by the investigated Authorities or their commissioned service providers. Of those, only 900 (1.5%)

assessments led to a support plan. No breakdown per local authority was provided in the report.

- **Early Identification**

There is a need for improved early identification of unpaid carers to provide timely support and prevent long-term negative impacts on their health and well-being.

- **Collaboration with health services**

Enhanced collaboration between health services and local authorities is necessary to effectively identify and support unpaid carers. Joint training programmes and shared data systems are recommended to facilitate this collaboration.

- **Data collection and utilisation**

Improved data collection and use of equality data are essential to better understand unpaid carers' demographics and needs, allowing for more tailored services.

- **Quality Monitoring**

There is a need for better monitoring of the quality and consistency of unpaid carers' needs assessments through regular audits and feedback mechanisms.

- **Training for staff and organisations**

Appropriate training on unpaid carers' rights and assessment procedures is necessary for both staff and contracted organisations to ensure unpaid carers receive consistent and effective support.

Recommendations for Neath Port Talbot

Amend the unpaid carers' needs assessment.	Include whether the cared for person has been involved/ consulted and, if not, why not.
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	<p>Explicitly address and record the question of the extent to which the carer is able and willing to provide care.</p> <p>Explicitly address and record the questions of whether the carer works, or wishes to work and whether they are participating, or wish to participate, in education, training or leisure activities, unless these considerations are not relevant, in which case the reason for this should be recorded.</p> <p>Include whether the carer has been offered a copy of their assessment and the response recorded.</p> <p>Include whether carers are satisfied with the assessment process and the outcomes identified to meet their needs and whether they are satisfied that the identified outcomes, at that point, will fully meet their needs, allowing their views, and any disagreement, or areas of unmet need, to be recorded</p>
Develop an unpaid carers factsheet	<p>Ensure it has a carer's needs assessment factsheet that includes the process of assessment, the role of commissioned service providers (where applicable), what carers may expect from the assessment and real-life examples of how carers have been supported, following an assessment.</p> <p>The factsheet should also be available in Easy Read format (a picture-based system to assist comprehension by those with learning difficulties), in Welsh and in other languages.</p>
Develop a letter template to share the outcome of the unpaid carers assessment.	<p>Ensure it has a letter template to include when sharing the completed assessment with the carer, which includes an outline of the outcomes of the assessment and an explanation of what the review arrangements are (or are not) and how carers can make contact to request a review or a re-assessment.</p>
Staff Training	<p>Provide training to IAA / Social Work staff to refresh knowledge of carers' rights, reinforce the role they play in identifying and promoting carers' rights, outline the process and the role of commissioned service providers (where appropriate) and to outline the types of support, including Direct Payments, that may be available to carers</p> <p>Provide awareness training to wider council staff who, through the nature of their roles, come into contact with carers, to reinforce the role that other council departments play in the identification of carers.</p>
Equality data recording	<p>Review and prepare an action plan for improving the recording of equality information relating to carers.</p>
Collaborative working	<p>Confirm and share a plan for improving collaborative working with health services, including GPs, hospitals and pharmacies</p>

Young carers assessments	<p>Improve the recording of young carers' needs assessments.</p> <p>Amend the assessment forms to allow the exploring and recording of the outcomes that the person(s) with parental responsibility for that child wish(es) to achieve for them.</p>
Quality Assurance and audit	Design and implement a process for auditing completed carers' needs assessments for both adults and young carers, including when carers' needs are incorporated into Integrated Assessments.

The report acknowledged that even before the PSOW own initiative investigation, efforts to review and enhance support for unpaid carers within NPT were already in progress. It was noted that some data collation issues were expected to be resolved with the transition to the new case management system, Mosaic.

Currently, significant progress is being made to implement the recommendations outlined in the report, as detailed in Appendix 1. This ongoing work aims to ensure that unpaid carers receive the necessary support and resources efficiently and effectively.

Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on Neath Port Talbot following the PSOW own initiative investigation into unpaid carers has highlighted the need for improved processes and support systems for unpaid carers, which may require some investment in training, and service coordination to ensure compliance with the recommendations. This could potentially lead to indirect financial impacts as the Council works to enhance its support for unpaid carers. This will be subject to future reports to elected members where appropriate

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No implications.

Legal Impacts

The PSOW has powers under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 (“the Act”) to undertake ‘Own Initiative’ investigations, where evidence suggests that there may be potential service failures or concerns. That means they can investigate a matter beyond its impact upon an individual and without having to wait for a complaint.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (“the SSWB Act”) came into force on 6 April 2016 with the aim of improving wellbeing outcomes for people who need care and support, and for carers who need support, through better co-ordination and enhanced collaboration between public bodies, including local authorities and the NHS.

Carers are legally entitled to a ‘needs assessment’ if they appear to have needs for support or are likely to do so in the future. When it appears to a local authority that a carer may have support needs, the local authority has a duty to offer a carer’s needs assessment. A carer may also request a carer’s needs assessment if the local authority is not aware of their caring role.

Risk Management

No implications.

Workforce Impacts:

No implications.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation:

That members of the scrutiny committee note the content of the PSOW own initiative investigation and the current action plan ongoing to address any highlighted recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Action plan to address recommendations outlined by the Ombudsman's "own initiative" investigation into the administration of unpaid carers needs assessments.

Appendix 2: PSOW Own Initiative Investigation – Are we caring for our carers?

Officer Contact

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Appendix 1

Action	To Include:	Progress to date
<p>Amend the unpaid carers' needs assessment.</p>	<p>Include whether the cared for person has been involved/ consulted and, if not, why not.</p> <p>Explicitly address and record the question of the extent to which the carer is able and willing to provide care.</p> <p>Explicitly address and record the questions of whether the carer works, or wishes to work and whether they are participating, or wish to participate, in education, training or leisure activities, unless these considerations are not relevant, in which case the reason for this should be recorded.</p> <p>Include whether the carer has been offered a copy of their assessment and the response recorded.</p> <p>Include whether carers are satisfied with the assessment process and the outcomes identified to meet their needs and whether they are satisfied that the identified outcomes, at that point, will fully meet their needs, allowing their views, and any disagreement, or areas of unmet need, to be recorded</p>	<p>Completed</p>

<p>Develop an unpaid carers factsheet</p>	<p>Ensure it has a carer's needs assessment factsheet that includes the process of assessment, the role of commissioned service providers (where applicable), what carers may expect from the assessment and real-life examples of how carers have been supported, following an assessment.</p> <p>The factsheet should also be available in Easy Read format (a picture-based system to assist comprehension by those with learning difficulties), in Welsh and in other languages.</p>	<p>On Track</p>
<p>Develop a letter template to share the outcome of the unpaid carers assessment.</p>	<p>Ensure it has a letter template to include when sharing the completed assessment with the carer, which includes an outline of the outcomes of the assessment and an explanation of what the review arrangements are (or are not) and how carers can make contact to request a review or a re-assessment.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>Staff Training</p>	<p>Provide training to IAA / Social Work staff to refresh knowledge of carers' rights, reinforce the role they play in identifying and promoting carers' rights, outline the process and the role of commissioned service providers (where appropriate) and to outline the types of support, including Direct Payments, that may be available to carers</p>	<p>On track</p> <p>A training program for all staff, that includes information about adult, parent carers and young carers is currently being developed. Once finalised, a rolling training schedule will be implemented to ensure all staff can identify unpaid carers and direct them to the most appropriate support.</p>

	Provide awareness training to wider council staff who, through the nature of their roles, come into contact with carers, to reinforce the role that other council departments play in the identification of carers.	
Equality data recording	Review and prepare an action plan for improving the recording of equality information relating to carers.	On Track Migration to Mosaic case management system will support this action.
Collaborative working	Confirm and share a plan for improving collaborative working with health services, including GPs, hospitals and pharmacies	On Track Regional and local efforts are being coordinated with health services and the third sector. A pilot program is currently underway in the upper valleys, involving pharmacies to support the identification and signposting of all unpaid carers.
Young carers assessments	Improve the recording of young carers' needs assessments. Amend the assessment forms to allow the exploring and recording of the outcomes that the person(s) with parental responsibility for that child wish(es) to achieve for them.	On Track A dedicated manager has been appointed within Children's Services to oversee the assessment and support of young and parent carers. Collaborative efforts with the Youth Service are underway to revise assessment forms and develop a comprehensive pathway for assessment and support.
Quality Assurance and audit	Design and implement a process for auditing completed carers' needs assessments for both adults	Completed

	and young carers, including when carers' needs are incorporated into Integrated Assessments.	
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