



**Ombwdsmon  
Ombudsman**  
Cymru · Wales

## Consultation



### **Proposal: Own Initiative Investigation on carers' needs assessments**

**Closing date: 11 May 2023**

[ombudsman.wales](https://ombudsman.wales)

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.  
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## About us

We have three main roles.

- We investigate complaints about public services.
- We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.
- We drive systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

We are independent, impartial, fair and open to all who need us.

Our service is free of charge.

We can provide a summary of this document in accessible formats, including large print.

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## Overview

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales has powers to undertake 'Own Initiative' investigations where evidence suggests that there may be systemic service failure or maladministration.

Following consultation on the principle of undertaking an investigation into the ease of access for carers to, and the effectiveness of carers' needs assessments and health and local authority complaint processes, the Ombudsman has now considered the responses received.

A range of responses were received, predominantly from carers and local authorities. Responses were also received from advice, advocacy and support organisations, and from independent social care consultants.

After careful consideration of all comments received, the Ombudsman has prepared a specific proposal for the investigation. The proposal is for a focussed and proportionate investigation, involving those local authorities which meet the criteria for Own Initiative investigation, relating to carers' needs assessments only. It is hoped that any learning points identified from this investigation will also be of benefit to other local authorities across Wales.

Comments and responses on this specific proposal are invited.

## How to Respond

Please respond to the proposal:

By post to: Own Initiative Lead Officer  
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales  
1 Old Field Road  
Pencoed  
CF35 5LJ

Or by e-mail to: [OwnInitiative@ombudsman.wales](mailto:OwnInitiative@ombudsman.wales)

**Closing Date & Time:** 11:59pm on 11 May 2023.

For any enquiries, please contact us by email or post to the address above.

## Foreword

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (“the SSWB Act”) came into force on 6 April 2016 and created a legislative framework to bring together and modernise the law governing social care in Wales. The aim of the SSWB Act was to improve 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.

The SSWB Act defines a carer as someone who provides, or intends to provide, unpaid care for an adult or disabled child. The cared for person may be a family member or a friend who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support.

A key aspect of the SSWB Act is that a carer does not have to specifically request a carers’ needs assessment or self-identify as a carer to be offered an assessment. If carers have needs that are eligible for support, the local authority has a statutory duty to plan for and meet those needs by providing a ‘Carer’s Support Plan.’

Where it appears that a carer may have needs for support, Part 3 of the SSWB Act places a duty on local authorities to undertake proportionate assessments to establish whether a carer has needs for support (or are likely to have needs in the future) and, if the carer has such needs, what those are (or are likely to be in the future). The matters which must be considered as part of the assessment process include whether the carer is able, and will continue to be able, to provide care for the person; the outcomes the carer is seeking and to what extent the provision of support, preventative services, information, advice, assistance, or other matters could achieve these outcomes or meet the carer’s needs.

The 2021 Census found that there are 310,751 carers in Wales, representing 10% of the population.<sup>1</sup> Whilst this figure was lower than in 2011, the Census found that the remaining carers were providing more hours of care; it found that 107,000 people in Wales provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week. The local authority with the highest proportion of people who provided any amount of unpaid care in Wales was Neath Port Talbot (12.3%), which also reported the joint highest proportion of disabled people. Neath Port Talbot also had the highest proportion of people who provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (4.5%) and people who provided 20 to 49 hours of unpaid care a week (2.9%).

In 2021, in Wales, the age range of the highest percentage of unpaid carers was individuals aged between 55 and 59 years for females and between 55 and 64 years for males. The older age groups provided the highest number of hours of unpaid care.

According to the 2011 Census, there were 9,076 Black, Asian or minority ethnic carers in Wales. This represented 2.5% of all carers in Wales.<sup>2</sup> There were also approximately 320 unpaid carers who were from 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' communities. This represented 0.09% of the unpaid carer population. There is no data to identify the number of carers whose language of choice is Welsh.

It is recognised that carers have a pivotal role in supporting health and social care in Wales. Many carers are vulnerable because of their age, both young and old, due to their own physical or mental health difficulties, and due to social-economic disadvantage.

Local authority data suggests that many carers are not having their needs assessed or receiving the support needed. Of those that are invited for an assessment, just under 50% refuse that assessment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Strategy for Unpaid Carers EIA - Welsh Government](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Adults assessed by local authority and measure \(gov.wales\)](#)

Carers Wales, an organisation representing carers in Wales, published its 'Track the Act Briefing 5'<sup>4</sup> in 2020, as part of its annual programme monitoring the implementation of the SSWB Act. It found that 85% of 620 respondents from across all 22 local authorities had not had a carer's needs assessment in the year before March 2020; 41% had not heard of a carer's needs assessment before completing their survey and only 10% of carers had received information or advice services from local authorities.

The Caring National Survey for Wales, published by Welsh Government in March 2021,<sup>5</sup> found that people between the ages of 45 and 74 were the age group most likely to be carers. It also found that people living in social housing were more likely to be carers than owner-occupiers and people living in the most deprived 20% of areas were more likely to be carers than those living in the 20% least deprived areas. In contrast to the data collected by StatsWales, in which it was found that as many as 50% of carers turn down assessments, only 8 % of carers in this survey turned down an assessment, with many of those responding stating that they did so as they did not see the value of it.

In March 2021, Welsh Government launched its Strategy for unpaid carers<sup>6</sup>. The strategy outlined what Welsh Government will do to improve the recognition of and support of carers. It recognised that early intervention and prevention was critical and that there was a need to embed the preventative aspects of the SSWB Act more effectively in public services and move key providers of services, including the third sector, towards an improved model of support for unpaid carers. It said that, if it failed to address those key issues, more unpaid carers and the people they care for, would reach crisis point before accessing vital support. It said that this, in turn, would increase the pressure on NHS and social services. The strategy identified 4 priorities: to identify and value unpaid carers,

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[4 Carers Wales Track the Act Briefing 5 – Monitoring the 4th year of implementation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 \(2000\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Caring \(National Survey for Wales\): April 2019 to March 2020 | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Strategy for unpaid carers | GOV.WALES](#)



to provide information, advice and assistance, to support life alongside caring, and to support carers in education and the workplace.

A report published by the Social Care Institute for Excellence for Social Care Wales in June 2021 identified barriers and enablers to accessing carers' needs assessments in Wales.<sup>7</sup> These included a lack of information, delays in accessing assessments, no definitive prescribed timescale to complete the assessment process. It also identified that some groups were more at risk of not accessing information, for example, those caring for children with additional support needs, young carers and carers of people living with dementia, those with language barriers, sensory impairments and limited internet access. The report also identified that carers in rural areas may have specific problems with social isolation, poverty, lack of transport and inaccessibility making it more difficult to identify and support people who may need help with their caring roles.

A report published by the Carers Trust in November 2022<sup>8</sup> found that in a UK-wide survey, 46% of unpaid carers said that they had not had an assessment of their needs as an unpaid carer in the last year. Of those who had not had an assessment in the last year, 68% said they had not been offered one. 71% of the respondents who lived in Wales and had not had an assessment in the last year, said that they had not been offered one. Carers Trust told us that access to assessments had improved since its previous survey, which took place during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, it said that there was still a concern that not enough unpaid carers were having their needs assessed as local authorities are over stretched.

The Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 ("the 2019 Act") empowers the Ombudsman to undertake 'Own Initiative' investigations,<sup>1</sup> which do not need to be prompted by an individual complainant. The Ombudsman now proposes to investigate the ease of access for carers to, and the

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<sup>7</sup> [Review of evidence relating to unpaid carers' needs assessments in Wales | SCIE](#)

<sup>8</sup> [I feel like I've disappeared - Carers Trust](#)

effectiveness of, carers' needs assessments. Specifically, this would consider whether local authorities are administering carers' needs assessments properly, fairly and openly, and whether they are making people aware of their right to a carer's needs assessment.

## The proposed investigation

It is proposed that the Ombudsman will consider the following:

- Whether the local authorities being investigated are 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 are 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 reason for the investigation

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of carers to health and social care in Wales. Despite the SSWB Act being in place since 2016, the evidence indicates that carers are not aware of their rights and that it is likely that many individuals who provide care to their family and friends are unaware of the support available to them.

Therefore, the investigation will consider whether the local authorities investigated have done enough to ensure that carers are aware of their rights, whether they provide appropriate and timely information, advice and assistance to carers and that carers' needs assessments are completed in a timely manner to ensure that they are accessible and effective.

An open consultation inviting comments on conducting a wider Own Initiative investigation relating to the ease of access to, and effectiveness of, carers' needs assessments received 76 responses. Almost half of the responses were from carers. Responses were also received from local authorities, health boards, advice, advocacy and support organisation and independent social work consultants providing a wide cross-section of views. Comments made by carers during a focus group held in conjunction with Carers Wales further informed this investigation proposal.

Evidence provided by carers suggested that they were not aware of their right to a carer's needs assessment and that they had to request them rather than being proactively offered one by local authorities. The responses also indicated that carers' needs assessments were not explained to carers, with carers not being given any information to prepare for an assessment or informed of their right to advocacy; carers told us that sometimes they were not even aware that they were being assessed. The evidence gathered also indicated that the carers' needs assessments completed did not always accurately reflect their needs, or what was discussed, and carers were not provided with a written copy of the assessment. In addition, the evidence indicated that there was a failure to recognise communication needs to enable carers to effectively engage in carers' needs assessments. There was further evidence that carers were experiencing delays in receiving a carer's needs assessment and experiencing further delays between the assessment being undertaken and a support plan being agreed.

Evidence received from local authorities provided a mixed picture in terms of barriers to receiving a carer's needs assessment; some indicated that there were no barriers to carers receiving needs assessments, while some identified difficulties due to backlogs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the social care crisis. It was apparent that several local authorities commission third sector organisations e.g. North East Wales Carers Information Service (NEWCIS), to deliver carers' needs assessments. Local authorities that responded to the

consultation said that information and advice for carers was available on their websites. Information received in relation to one local authority indicated that carers' needs assessments tended to be covered in the 'integrated assessment' rather than as a stand-alone carers assessment. It was also said that, in a fair number of cases in this local authority, following consideration by its Management Reference Group, the services provided to the carer did not reflect the assessed outcomes/needs. Conversely, in other local authority areas, it was indicated that both joint and individual assessments were offered in line with statutory requirements.

An investigation would provide an opportunity to consider whether those local authorities investigated are administering carers' needs assessments in an effective and timely manner, providing an opportunity to identify any barriers or obstacles, and enable any good practice identified to be shared.

Evidence from both carers and local authorities indicated that, in many local authority areas, carers' needs assessments are outsourced to third sector organisations. Many carers reported delays after the needs assessments completed by third sector organisations were provided to the local authority for consideration. An investigation would provide an opportunity to explore how commissioned assessment services are delivered on behalf of local authorities' to meet their statutory duties and to examine how local authorities monitor compliance with contractual arrangements.

Our investigations would also provide an opportunity to take a holistic approach to reviewing the effectiveness and ease of access to carers' needs assessments. It would allow those benefiting from and those administering carers' needs assessments to share their experiences and suggestions, supporting improvements in service delivery.

## Does the proposal meet the Ombudsman's published criteria?

The Ombudsman has published criteria for Own Initiative Investigations:

- **Public interest**

Public interest is generally accepted to be “something which is of serious concern and benefit to the public”. We consider it to be something that impacts upon the public, rather than a matter the public finds of interest, or a matter that impacts upon an individual (even though it can affect an individual more directly than the wider public). ‘Public’ in this context can refer to a distinct section of the public or the entire population of Wales.

10% of the Welsh population identify themselves as carers. It is also likely that many more do not realise that they provide care for a family member or friend. It is reasonable to consider that carers, and those being cared for, are more reliant on public services than those who are not, due to their own needs as carers or their needs as someone being cared for. Issues relating to the accessibility and effectiveness of carers’ needs assessments are capable of affecting a wide group of individuals across Wales and have the potential to impact upon wider public services and communities.

Although the number of carers in Wales has fallen in recent years, the number of carers providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week has increased. It is reasonable to state that this subject is far reaching and affects many; not only those providing care, but also those being cared for.

- **Reasonable suspicion of systemic maladministration**

The evidence considered indicates that many carers are not having their needs assessed or receiving the support needed. There is evidence that carers are not being provided with timely information, advice and assistance and are

experiencing delays in being addressed. There is also evidence that carers are sometimes not aware that they are being assessed and are not provided with a written record of their assessment. In addition, there is evidence that some local authorities conduct joint needs assessments alongside those being cared for, despite a carer's right to an individual carer's needs assessment. The evidence therefore suggests that there may be systemic maladministration in the administration of carers' needs assessments.

Additionally, there is some concern about the outsourcing of needs assessments to third sector organisations in terms of how local authorities monitor their contracted obligations.

- **The matter impacts upon a wide group of citizens, to such an extent that they appear likely to sustain injustice or hardship in consequence of the matter being considered for investigation**

There are 310,751 carers in Wales. A review of our case records shows a low number of complaints from carers about needs assessments. The level of complaints received from carers falls below the number that may be reasonably expected, given that 10% of the Welsh population identify themselves as carers. The absence of such complaints suggests that carers and those being cared for do not understand or may not be aware of their right to a carer's needs assessment and the avenues available to them raise concerns, or they may have more pressing priorities.

Many carers are vulnerable because of their age, both young and old, and their own physical or mental health difficulties. An Own Initiative investigation of those local authorities which meet the criteria for Own Initiative investigation by the Ombudsman could lead to wider lessons being learned across Wales and the Ombudsman is therefore well placed to conduct this investigation.

- **The weight of evidence**

There is considerable evidence relating to the proposal and the specific issues identified. Whilst evidence gathered during the open consultation was informative, the focus group with Carers Wales and the Ombudsman's complaint information together with evidence from numerous other sources was also considered. These included:

- Welsh Government legislation and statutory guidance
- Welsh Government Strategy for unpaid carers, its delivery plan and annual report
- Welsh Government Caring (National Survey for Wales)
- Other relevant research and guidance documentation from Carers Wales, Social Care Wales, Audit Wales and third sector organisations, such as Carers Wales
- Information published by [StatsWales](#) and the Office of National Statistics
- Media Reports.

- **The persuasiveness of the evidence**

As the evidence we received was predominately from individual carers who outlined their recent personal experiences, those who support them and individuals who work in the sector, it is, in our view, credible, reliable and suggestive of potential systemic maladministration in the administration of carers' needs assessments by the local authorities which meet our criteria for Own Initiative investigation.

**In the light of this analysis, we consider that all these criteria are met.**



## Which bodies will be included in the investigation?

All 22 local authorities in Wales have a duty to offer carers' needs assessments. Even if all local authorities met our Criteria for Own Initiative, investigation, it would not be reasonable or proportionate to investigate all 22 organisations. In view of this, we have identified those local authorities which meet the threshold for an Own Initiative investigation having given careful consideration of both the qualitative and quantitative evidence available.

Together with the evidence provided during our open consultation, we have had regard to evidence arising from our casework and: :

- The proportion of carers in each local authority.
- The number of assessments of need for support for carers undertaken, and of those, the number that led to a support plan.

The most recent data available in the table below shows the 5 local authorities with the largest proportion of carers<sup>9</sup>:

Local authority	Proportion of population
Neath Port Talbot	12.3%
Caerphilly	11.4%
Torfaen	11.4%
Blaenau Gwent	11.3%
Merthyr Tydfil	11.3%

In relation to the number of hours of unpaid care provided in a typical week, the largest proportion of people providing 19 hours or less of unpaid care a week lived in Monmouthshire and Ceredigion – both at 5.3% of the population. A larger proportion of people in Neath Port Talbot, 2.9% provided 20 to 49 hours unpaid

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<sup>9</sup> [Unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

care a week compared to all other Welsh local authorities. Neath Port Talbot was also the local authority with the largest proportion of people providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week, at 4.5%.

The table below shows the number of adult carers' needs assessments completed by local authorities during 2018-2019<sup>10</sup> and, of those, the number that led to a support plan:

Local Authority	Number of assessments of need for support for carers	Of those, the number that led to a support plan	% of assessments that led to a support plan
Flintshire	498	478	96%
Swansea	700	516	74%
Pembrokeshire	277	185	67%
Carmarthenshire	1256	765	61%
Conwy	350	199	57%
Wrexham	108	52	48%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	246	84	34%
Isle of Anglesey	563	186	33%
Newport	71	22	31%
Monmouthshire	152	41	27%
Merthyr Tydfil	92	19	21%
Powys	271	55	20%
Vale of Glamorgan	227	42	19%
Denbighshire	234	35	15%
Gwynedd	25	3	12%
Ceredigion	213	24	11%
Torfaen	133	11	8%
Bridgend	387	19	5%
Caerphilly	176	4	2%
Neath Port Talbot	287	6	2%
Cardiff	843	2	0.2%
Blaenau Gwent	152	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7261</b>	<b>2748</b>	

<sup>10</sup> [Adults assessed by local authority and measure \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/adults-assessed-by-local-authority-and-measure)

The table below shows the number of young carers' needs assessments completed by local authorities during 2018-2019<sup>11</sup> and, of those, the number that led to a support plan:

Local Authority	Number of assessments of need for support for Young Carers	Of those, the number that led to a support plan	% of assessments that led to a support plan
Denbighshire	27	27	100%
Gwynedd	38	38	100%
Isle of Anglesey	34	34	100%
Merthyr Tydfil	24	24	100%
Swansea	6	6	100%
Bridgend	57	53	93%
Wrexham	79	73	92%
Carmarthenshire	59	53	90%
Caerphilly	67	58	87%
Conwy	92	77	84%
Blaenau Gwent	5	4	80%
Newport	43	34	79%
Torfaen	39	29	74%
Flintshire	83	54	65%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	71	43	61%
Pembrokeshire	11	6	55%
Neath Port Talbot	63	32	51%
Monmouthshire	40	8	20%
Ceredigion	13	2	15%
Vale of Glamorgan	16	2	13%
Powys	26	2	8%
Cardiff	2	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>895</b>	<b>659</b>	

<sup>11</sup> [Assessments by local authority and measure \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

When considering the evidence available we have had regard to the practices in local authorities across Wales: the north, south and west Wales regions as well as considering the contrasting demographics in terms of urban and rural communities. Notwithstanding the Ombudsman's remit on systemic maladministration and injustice, our aim is also to identify any good practice we find during our investigations. Some of our consultation responses suggested that we should focus on local authorities which have outsourced its arrangements for carers assessments and we have had regard to a local authority with a high proportion of carers' needs assessments leading to a support plan, with the intention of establishing whether this is the result of good practice and, if so, how that might be shared.

In accordance with the Welsh Language Standards we have also take into account opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and the need for the Ombudsman and all public services in Wales to avoid treating the Welsh language less favourably than the English language. Factors such as the prevalence of the Welsh language and socio-economic issues in each local authority were taken into account. The information we have considered supports the inclusion of the 4 local authorities selected in the investigation to enable the investigation to take account of the Welsh Language Standards duties in areas with differing levels of Welsh speakers.

Qualitative information in the form of personal/reported experiences was also considered. We have been mindful of the fact that some of the quantitative data available is relatively outdated and we have therefore placed greater weight on the qualitative data arising from our open consultation which was based on the recent experiences and practices.

Consequently, the 4 local authorities which meet the Criteria and which we propose to investigate are:

## Caerphilly County Borough Council

- Caerphilly County Borough Council is the local authority with the second highest proportion of people who provided carers in Wales.
- Caerphilly County Borough Council also has a high proportion of disabled people and a high proportion of localities classified as most deprived in Wales, making it one of the most deprived areas in Wales. It is appropriate to consider how the demographic influences the provision of carers' needs assessments in this local authority.
- Evidence gathered during the consultation indicated that carers' needs assessments tended to be included in the integrated assessment rather than a stand-alone carer's needs assessment.
- Evidence gathered during the consultation indicated that in a fair number of cases the services provided do not reflect the assessed outcomes/needs.
- Evidence received from carers in response to the consultation indicated a distrust in the local authority and a fear that services would be removed, and that carers' needs assessments were not being routinely offered to carers.
- Only 2% of adult carers' needs assessments led to a support plan, however, 87% of young carers' needs assessments led to a support plan. It is appropriate to examine this disparity.
- In the light of the information above and the published criteria, it is proposed that Caerphilly County Borough Council is one of the local authorities included in the investigation.

## Ceredigion County Council

- Ceredigion County Council is one of the local authorities with the largest proportion of people providing 19 hours or less of unpaid care a week at 5.3% of the population.
- A relatively low proportion of adult and young carers' needs assessments led to a support plan at 11% and 15 % respectively.
- Ceredigion County Council works in partnership with Porth Gofal, a partnership between Ceredigion County Council, Hywel Dda University Health Board, and third sector organisations, to undertake adult carers' needs assessments and with Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers for young carers' needs assessments. It is appropriate to examine how the use of a third sector organisation works in practice, given general concerns raised by carers about commissioned carers' needs assessments during the consultation.
- Ceredigion County Council is a largely rural authority situated in west Wales. More than half of its population are Welsh speakers (57%).<sup>12</sup>
- Examining how the rural nature and use of the Welsh language may impact upon the support available to carers will be an issue we propose to consider.
- In the light of the information above and the published criteria, it is proposed that Ceredigion County Council is one of the local authorities included in the investigation.

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<sup>12</sup> [Annual Population Survey - Ability to speak Welsh by local authority and year \(gov.wales\)](#)

## Flintshire County Council

- Flintshire County Council has been identified as the local authority with the highest percentage of adult carers' needs assessments leading to a support plan.
- Examining how this has occurred, whether best practice is exemplified at this local authority and whether any lessons could be learned to share with other bodies, is worthy of further consideration.
- In contrast, evidence gathered from carers who lived in this local authority area indicated that the support plans offered did not meet their assessed outcomes/needs and that there was a limited range of support options offered.
- In addition, evidence indicated that carers' communication needs were not recognised to enable effective engagement in carers' needs assessments.
- Carers' needs assessments are commissioned to North East Wales Carers Information Service at Flintshire County Council. It is appropriate to examine how the use of a third sector organisation works in practice, given general concerns raised by carers about commissioned carers' needs assessments during the consultation.
- In responding to the Consultation, Flintshire County Council said that it did not consider that it had a systemic service failure or maladministration issue. However, it has recently voluntarily agreed to settle a complaint made to the Ombudsman's office relating to carers' needs assessments. It had failed to provide a copy of the carers' needs assessments and subsequently agreed to provide this. It also agreed that it had not offered carers' needs assessments to the complainants in their own right.

- In the light of the information above and the published criteria, it is proposed that Flintshire County Council is one of the local authorities included in the investigation.

## **Neath Port Talbot Council**

- Neath Port Talbot Council is the local authority with the highest proportion of people who provide any amount of unpaid care. Neath Port Talbot Council also has the highest proportion of people who provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week at 4.5% and people who provide 20-49 hours of unpaid care a week at 2.9%.
- Neath Port Talbot Council also has the joint highest proportion of disabled people and has a high proportion of localities classified as most deprived in Wales.
- Neath Port Talbot Council works in partnership with Neath Port Talbot Carers Service to undertake carers' needs assessments, with this service also providing some support services and others that are not offered by Neath Port Talbot Carers Service being forwarded to relevant social services teams. It is appropriate to examine how the use of a third sector organisation works in practice, given general concerns raised by carers about commissioned carers' needs assessments during the consultation.
- A relatively low proportion of adult carers' needs assessments led to a support plan at 2%.
- The high number of carers in this local authority compared with the low proportion of adult carers' needs assessments leading to a support plan is worthy of further investigation.
- Evidence presented in response to the consultation indicated that carers' needs assessments took a considerable effort to arrange, that it was routinely recorded that the carer declined an assessment, and there



was a lack of awareness amongst staff regarding the statutory right to a carer's needs assessment.

- In the light of the information above and the published criteria, it is proposed that Neath Port Talbot Council is one of the local authorities included in the investigation.

## **The investigation process**

An outline of the general process to be undertaken during this investigation:

### **Stage 1 – Investigation start and evidence gathering**

- a) Local authorities selected for inclusion in the investigation will be notified that an investigation is being started. Those local authorities will be asked to provide relevant information; this may include relevant policies and procedures, relevant documentary evidence (e.g. examples of completed assessments), relevant statistical data as well information and comments from relevant members of local authority staff and staff of commissioned services. Evidence may also be requested from relevant members of local authority staff and staff of commissioned services.
- b) Calls for evidence – evidence could be gathered from other bodies, stakeholders and service users in the form of witness evidence and lived experience evidence. Interviews may be held with third parties and service users.
- c) Relevant legislation and national guidance, and Welsh Government documentation, including policies, guidance and it strategy for unpaid carers will be reviewed.
- d) Review of media articles relating to carers' needs assessments.

## Stage 2 – Investigation start and fact finding

- a) Analysis and review of the information gathered.
- b) Identification of themes and/or trends including any evidence of maladministration and/or service failure and any good practice identified.

## Stage 3 – Investigation report

- a) Share draft report with investigated authorities to allow them an opportunity to comment on the investigations findings and any proposed recommendations and timescales for implementation.
- b) Share draft report with and invite comments from any other relevant parties for which the Ombudsman may make suggestions to improve provision of public services relating to carer needs assessments.
- c) Issue report.

## Stage 4 – Post investigation monitoring

- a) Monitor compliance of investigated authorities with the agreed recommendation within the agreed timescales.
- b) Monitor response of other relevant parties with any suggestions made within the investigation report.
- c) Monitor the longer-term impact of the investigation and its findings.

## The proposed timescale for investigation

It is proposed that the investigation is commenced in **May** and should be completed within **36 weeks** of the investigation start date.