

Dawn Bowden MS  
Minister for Children and Social Care

12 February 2026

Dear Minister

Thank you for attending our meeting on 22 January to provide evidence as part of our inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers.

We have now concluded our evidence-gathering and will be producing a full written report in due course. In advance of that, however, the Committee has taken the decision to write to you to express our deep concerns about the lack of support and services for unpaid carers.

As part of our inquiry, we heard directly from unpaid carers about the extreme hardships they face on a day-to-day basis in their caring role, and the struggles they have in accessing any form of support. Carers' charities confirmed that the carers we spoke to are not the exception, and that the experiences they reported are typical of what they hear from carers on a day-to-day basis. It is evident that too many carers are reaching crisis point without any support.

The picture carers have painted for us is one of isolation and despair. And this is not a new picture. It is clear from the evidence from carers' charities and carers themselves that this situation has persisted for years and that, far from improving, it is only getting worse. Carers described the desperation they often feel, saying they now have to "fight" and "beg" for help, both for the people they care for and for themselves.

Their evidence was powerful and, at times, harrowing, and I have included below some direct quotes so that you can get a sense of their distress:



"My experience has often felt like being in a maze and not finding the way out easily. (...) I often feel depressed and almost in despair about the task in front and ahead of me."

"I didn't actually know I was a carer... all through these last 23 years, I've had to fight and struggle to find things out—what questions to ask, who to ask, where to go. There's very, very little help out there."

*[On being a constant caregiver]*, "I feel like I'm in the middle of an ocean and I can't get out."

"I worked fulltime throughout my life about 37 hours a week with weekends off and about 4 weeks holiday a year. Now I work over 80 hours a week, 7 days a week and 52 weeks a year. I could not plan for the attrition of this on my own wellbeing".

"I have tried to get respite. [...] There is next to nothing available and certainly nothing on a regular planned basis. I don't know how to keep going as the work gets harder as his health declines. I know what I need to keep going - time to recharge mind and body - but it is not available".

"When you reach out to the services and say 'I'm having a mental breakdown' and they say 'there is nothing we can do' and you're stuck there thinking 'I'm drowning and you're telling me there's nothing available'. It needs to change."

These issues are not limited to people providing care later in their lives. We heard from parent carers with young children, and from young carers, about the struggles and pressures they face in their caring roles, and the lack of support available to help them:

"(...) you're running on empty, and as a young carer who wasn't noticed for a decade, it was pure manic. I had no coping skills, I had no support..." *(young carer)*

"it's really difficult for me to socialise in my position (...), because I feel very isolated in my caring role, especially at home. I'm always housebound. I never get the opportunity even just to go out in my local town. (...) I don't get those opportunities because I'm just so stuck at home and there's no-one to take on my caring role." *(young carer)*

*[my caring role is]* "making me really debate in my mind whether I'm going to be able to pursue further education and am I going to be able to go on to university (...) because there's no-one who can take over from me." *(young carer)*

Of particular concern to us was the clear mismatch in the evidence we heard from local authorities compared to the testimony from young and adult carers. Local authorities assured us that they are meeting their statutory duties relating to carers, but that simply does not tally with the lived experiences of the many carers we heard from, or with the other reviews and investigations that have been conducted in this area.

We were left deeply concerned that local authorities are not meeting their statutory duties and, moreover, do not grasp the scale of the problem and the urgency required to deliver the necessary improvements. When we raised this point with you during our recent evidence session, you told us "this is absolutely the same concern that I have", and you further said:

*"I know that there are instances where those statutory obligations are not being met"* (RoP, 22 January, paragraph 17)

According to the 2021 Census, more than 310,000 people (one in 11) in Wales said they were providing unpaid care (10.5%). Carers Wales estimate that there could be as many as 500,000 carers in Wales.

The Welsh Government's official statistics illustrate how few carers are currently being assessed and supported by local authorities. In 2023-24 only 7,510 new assessments were completed for adult carers and 1,468 new assessments for young carers in total across Wales. On 31 March 2024, only 3,186 adult carers and 1,728 young carers had a support plan.

The problems facing unpaid carers are not new. In addition to other reviews, including the [2023 Rapid Review by ADSS Cymru of Unpaid Carers' Rights](#), they were clearly identified by our predecessor Committee in its [2019 report on the impact of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#). That report highlighted the plight of unpaid carers, saying that so many felt "desperate, undervalued and that they are treated with little respect". It called for a strong national focus and leadership, and prompt and decisive action to ensure the rights and support promised by the Act are delivered. In fact, a great many of the same issues we have been hearing about in evidence recently were picked up in that 2019 report, including the need to improve identification of carers and signpost them to information, advice and assistance; the need to provide training for health and social care professionals to improve carers' experiences; the need to capture information about gaps in provision of respite care; the need to strengthen guidance for schools about identifying and supporting young carers; and the need for a stronger approach to national data collection on carers. It is clear that very little has changed for the better since that report was published.

Unpaid carers are the backbone of our social care system. They act out of love for the people they care for, and their actions save the social care sector from collapse. Yet despite all they give, they are being let down. They should be properly valued and receive meaningful support, but instead they are too often overlooked, undervalued, and left to struggle alone.

Our report will make recommendations to both the current and the next Welsh Government. But given the clear lack of progress since our predecessor's report, and the urgency and severity of the situation facing unpaid carers, we are writing to you now to call on you to take immediate action.

We therefore ask that you address the following points:

1. Following your confirmation (during our general scrutiny session on 4 February 2026) that you have received responses from all local authority leaders to your letter of 12 December 2025 about compliance with their statutory duties, can you now provide us with details of your analysis of those responses, including:
  - assurances about the numbers of local authorities that are complying with their statutory duties;
  - details of any local authorities that you assess to not be meeting their statutory duties, and
  - details of the specific actions you intend to take as a result of your analysis.
2. During our session on 22 January, you told us that, if you are not satisfied with the responses from local authority leaders on compliance with their statutory duties, you would issue a "clearer direction to Care Inspectorate Wales that this has to be a specific element of their inspection of local authorities" (*RoP, 22 January 2026, paragraph 17*). Given the long-standing issues with statutory support for carers, will you commit to issuing such a direction without delay, as a means of delivering improvements in the longer term;
3. Will you provide us with your assurance that, in the Welsh Government's assessment, sufficient resources and capacity exist within the relevant statutory bodies to deliver on their legal duties under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act;
4. Further to this, and in light of the evidence from carers and carers' charities about the scale of the challenge and the urgency with which improvements need to be seen, will you commit to issuing a direction to all local authorities to establish a clear expectation of demonstrable improvements in support for unpaid carers (including carers assessments, support plans and provision of respite care), with fixed milestones for monitoring and measuring progress, and that failure to meet these duties is a legal breach;
5. Will you set out any additional specific actions to support unpaid carers that you will commit to for the remainder of your term, and the anticipated benefits of this;
6. Will you set out the cross-portfolio actions that the Welsh Government will commit to in support of unpaid carers for the remainder of its term;
7. Will you identify the actions that you believe will be necessary for the next Welsh Government to prioritise in this area.



Separately, during our evidence session on 22 January, you agreed to come back to the Committee with further information in a number of areas. For convenience, I have set these out below:

8. To provide an update on progress against the improvement work and action plan being led by ADSS Cymru, to be completed in March of this year;
9. Further to the above, to provide details of how this improvement work will ensure that carers' legal rights to be 'willing and able' to provide care will be fully upheld by statutory services across Wales, especially during planning in health settings;
10. To provide an update following your commitment to engage with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care on improving carer identification within primary care (*RoP, 22 January 2026, paragraph 130*);
11. Re. barriers to the provision of young carer ID cards, you told us that "if this very small amount of money is the only barrier, then I'm quite happy to go back and have a look and see whether we can find a bit more money" (*RoP, 22 January 2026, paragraph 141*). Can you provide an update on this position, and will you commit to making additional funding available specifically for provision of young carer ID cards;
12. Re. provision of respite, we asked whether you would consider taking urgent measures or providing targeted funding in this area, and you said you would write to us with further information once you had been able to analyse the responses from local authorities (*RoP, 22 January 2026, paragraph 153*). What update are you now able to provide, and what additional measures will you commit to?

We ask that you respond to this letter **by 3 March 2026**, so that we can consider your response before the end of this Senedd.

Yours sincerely



Peter Fox MS  
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.