

# The role of local authorities in supporting hospital discharge

## Response to the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry

February 2025

### Carers Trust

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its network of local carer organisations (ten in Wales) to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy.

Carers Trust's vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

#### **Context: Unpaid carer support through hospital discharge**

The point of discharge of a patient from hospital is often when many people become unpaid carers for the first time, or when their caring responsibilities become greater or more intense. Following the patient's discharge from hospital, unpaid carers need support in the community to ensure both the cared-for person has access to appropriate social care support, and that they as unpaid carers have the support they need to sustain them in their caring role. As such, the integrated working between local carer organisations, local authorities and health boards is an essential component of effective hospital discharge.

#### **Legislative context**

People who are caring, or intending to care for someone, including those who are supporting someone being discharged from hospital, have rights under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act) places legal duties on local authorities to uphold the rights of unpaid carers. Recent secondary legislation

to strengthen partnership arrangements under the Act now mean that health boards, via Regional Partnership Boards, are more strongly implicated under the Act's duties and are required to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver the Act's intentions.

Under the Act, unpaid carers have the right to:

- Access information, advice and assistance
- Be assessed if it appears they have a need for support, and to have all eligible needs met through a local authority support plan

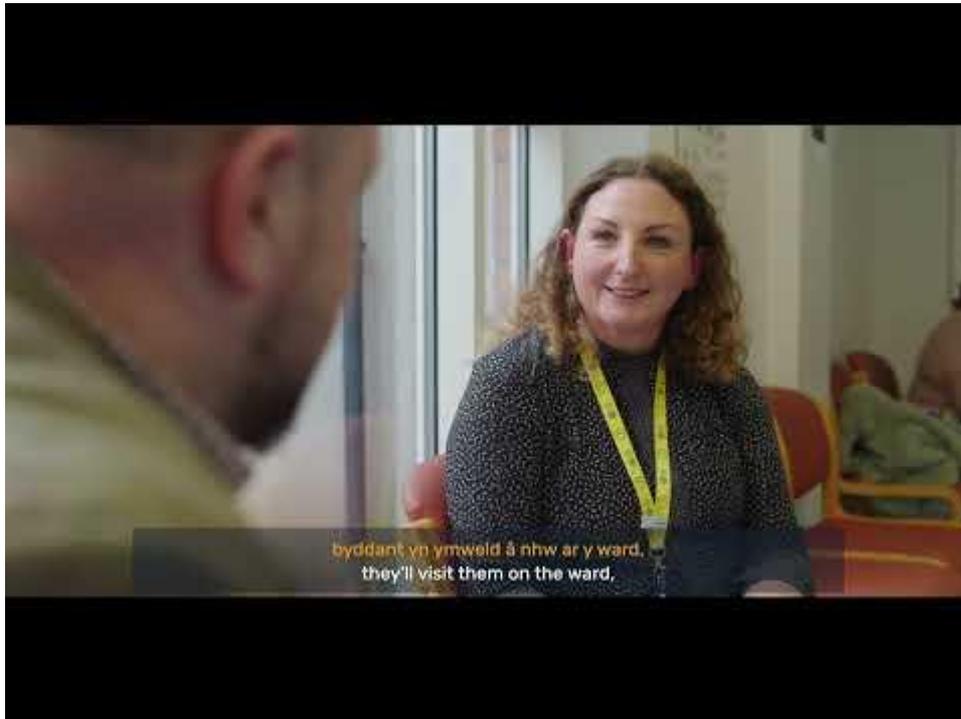
The Act is clear that a person must be "willing and able" to provide care. The extent to which a carer is able to provide care and willing to do so is assessed as part of the formal statutory Carer's Needs Assessment undertaken by the local authority, including when they have been identified within a health setting at the point of discharge from hospital.

### **Integrated working between local carer organisations, health boards and local authorities**

Local carer organisations across Wales are commissioned by statutory partners – primarily health boards or Regional Partnership Boards – to deliver services that support unpaid carers who are caring for someone who has been admitted to, and subsequently discharged from, hospital. These are predominantly funded through by Regional Partnership Boards through the Regional Integration Fund or through the allocation of annual funding to health boards from Welsh Government (this has been to the total value of £1m across all seven health board areas for the past decade). In recent years, this funding has had an explicit focus on facilitating support for unpaid carers through hospital discharge.

Several of the local carer organisations that are part of the Carers Trust's network in Wales are commissioned to deliver Hospital Facilitators or Hospital Discharge Support services in this way. While these services vary locally, they all aim to improve the identification of, and support for, unpaid carers who are caring for someone in hospital. This is with the view that support for the unpaid carer will improve patient flow through the system by facilitating better, safer and more sustainable discharge of the patient.

Support from local carer organisations includes attendance at Multi-disciplinary team meetings, working with Discharge Nurses, Hospital Social workers, referral to social services for a Carer's Needs Assessment and facilitating communication with the carer. Unpaid carers say the impact of the service is invaluable to them. As part of the Welsh Government funded Carer Aware programme, this short film captures elements of the integrated working between local carer organisations in Swansea Bay UHB and Betsi Cadwaladr UHB:



### **Carer's Needs Assessments**

Local carer organisations' Hospital Facilitator Services will often provide support for the carer within the hospital and help to arrange the support the carer may need once the patient is discharged into the community. This commonly includes a referral to the local authority for a Carer's Needs Assessment, in line with the unpaid carer's rights under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

It is acknowledged nationally that there are considerable waiting times for Carer's Needs Assessments. The [ADSS Cymru Rapid review of unpaid carers' rights](#) summarised its findings thus in relation to Carer's Needs Assessments across the country, based on research undertaken in 2023:

“There are waiting lists for carer's assessments in most areas, which prevents carers having the support they need. Many carers are not being offered assessments.”

A Task and Finish Group has been established by the Welsh Government Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers to respond to this report's recommendations. While this work is underway, unpaid carers may continue to face delays in accessing statutory assessments to meet their needs.

In some areas of Wales, local carer organisations are commissioned to undertake Carer's Needs Assessments on behalf of the local authority, particularly with a view to bringing down existing waiting lists for assessment. In some instances, the same local carer organisation provides a hospital facilitator service for the health board and is commissioned by the local authority to undertake Carer's Needs Assessments. This has the double benefit of ensuring that carers in the area have consistent support at a time when they may be particularly vulnerable and minimises the number of agencies unpaid carers are referred to.

While the commissioning out of Carer's Needs Assessments to local carer organisations often leads to a more meaningful conversation about 'what matters' in the assessment with carers, local carer organisations report that the funding allocated to them is not always sufficient to resource meaningful assessments. As a result, some local carer organisations will no longer take on contracts for Carer's Needs Assessments from the local authority where the contract value does not reflect the true cost of service delivery. In line with recent guidance through the National Commissioning Framework, local authorities must work to understand an appropriate formula for costing the undertaking of Carer's Needs Assessments if these are to be meaningful exercises for unpaid carers that lead to appropriate support.

### **Community capacity**

Sustainable discharge services rely on the existence of community services infrastructure to provide wrap around support needed by unpaid carers and the cared for person on their return to home. Preventative community services should include specialist unpaid carer support as part of a Multi-disciplinary team that offers home aids and adaptations, advocacy, social work and reablement. This preventative service is an essential component of maintaining safe discharges and should be funded consistently, by local authorities or Regional Partnership Boards, as part of their statutory duties under the Act.

### **National resources and guidance**

The ADSS Cymru review also concluded that:

“While the Act relates to social services, identifying unpaid carers is not their responsibility alone. GP surgeries and other health services, including hospitals, should play a much bigger role as part of a more integrated health and social care system.”

As part of the Carer Aware programme, funded by Welsh Government and delivered in partnership between Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales, a series of resources

to support unpaid carers through the hospital discharge process have been produced to support the health and care workforce:

- [Policy guide for NHS service planners and managers](#)
- [Practical guide for health care professionals](#)
- [Good practice principles for Social Workers](#) (section on hospital discharge)

These resources, coproduced with health and social care professionals, local carer organisations and unpaid carers from across all areas of Wales provide a framework for consistency of approach across the country. Working within Regional Partnership Board structures and in meeting their statutory duties under the Act, local authorities should make use of these resources to support service planning at a strategic level and to support staff training and development.

### **Further information**

Dr Catrin Edwards, Head of External Affairs, [cedwards@carers.org](mailto:cedwards@carers.org)