



Council website review

Research Findings - February 2022

 mobilise

About Mobilise

Mobilise is the tech startup that harnesses the collective knowledge, wisdom and expertise of unpaid carers and empowers those that care to thrive. We provide a range of online support services, grounded in research and tested with carers across the UK.

Project team

James Townsend CEO and Co-founder

Dom Taylor Head of Partnerships

Joe Legate Head of Growth and Engagement | Project Lead
Joe has 15 years experience in digital marketing

Claire Unwin Digital Solutions Designer | Consultant
Claire has over twenty years of developing digital products for a range of users. She is a carer for her parents.

Vicky Sargent Digital Review Consultant
Vicky previously ran the Better Connected programme reviewing council websites.

Dr Lamorna Spry Web IA and UX specialist
Lamorna researches and advises commercial and Government organisations on how to improve the customer journey

Research associates

Shirley Islam

Clare Nuthall

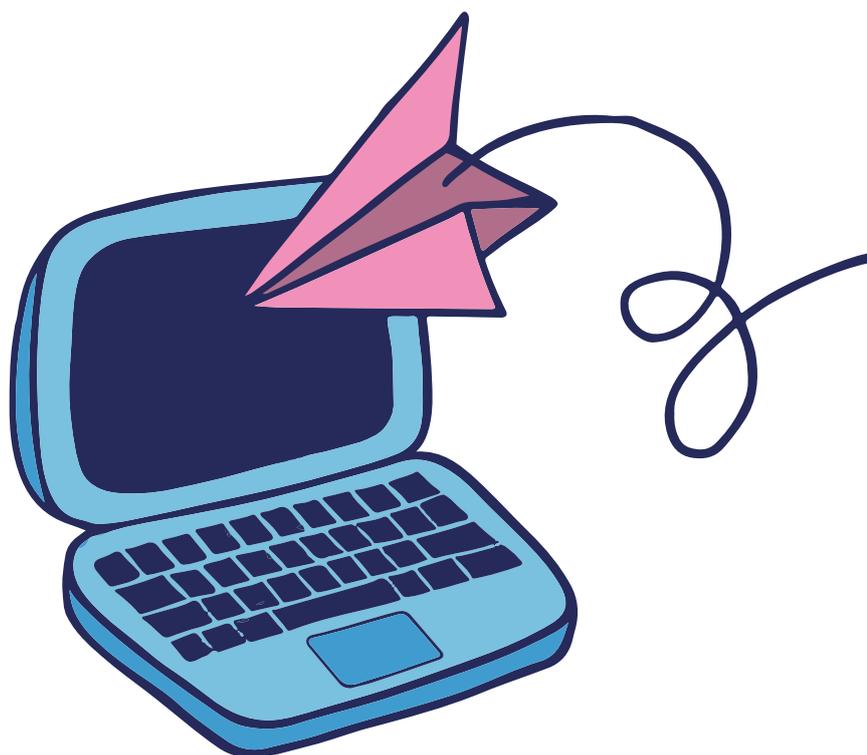
Council website review

Research Findings - February 2022

Brief

The overarching aim of this report is to advise member authorities of the ADASS Eastern Region on effective approaches for improving the information and advice given to carers through their websites to:

- Develop a stronger understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of online carers information and advice within the region
- Identify any priorities for development and potential regional collaboration in the future





Methodology

In response to the brief, the project team collected data on the regular challenges and queries experienced by carers, to inform a list of 'Carer Top Tasks' for which authority websites might be used.



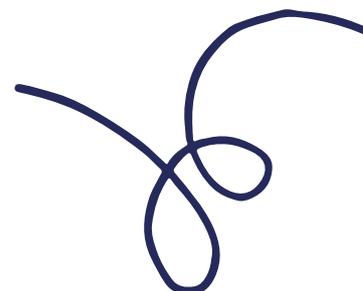
The team drew on:

- Mobilise's in-house expertise (developed whilst reaching over 150,000 people with carer support across the UK),
- analysis of 500 posts in the Mobilise Facebook group for carers
- notes from 220 individual support calls
- Google search data

This process identified four primary areas of interest for carers accessing support websites:

1. Emotional support
2. Finances and benefits
3. Condition specific queries
4. Carer's Assessments

The set of Carer Top Tasks, informed a structure and flow of questions, drawing on experience from the [SOCITM Better Connected](#) programme, for the researcher to review and assess the 12 council websites.



Emotional support was comfortably the most prevalent area carers raised. The project team considered that it was unlikely this would be a primary task for which a carer would approach a council. More likely emotional support would be something that would be raised alongside another concern - for example finances. As a result this was divided into two areas:

- Carer's assessments and wider support
- Financial support

Question sets were developed to probe each site (and sites they referred to), to determine how well they met the needs of carers.

Mobilise web data showed that Mobile Devices are the dominant device for browsing the web. As a result an Apple iPhone 7 using mobile data was used.

It's important to highlight that what follows is a reflection of the experiences of the project team reviewing the listed council websites. It may be that the information does exist but that researchers haven't found it on this occasion.

Key context

From the data provided by Local Authorities the main carer support pages of a council website get between 47 and 650 visits per month. Most traffic came from people searching on Google or coming to the council website directly.

Councils who responded to our questionnaire indicated that they have a third party to provide certain elements of their carer provision.

Findings and recommendations

Region-wide recommendations

1. Develop a region-wide approach to creating your own top tasks list
 - a. What data points could you use to understand demand?
2. Develop a better understanding of the connectedness between carer and cared for to establish how best to integrate the two personas and needs across all benefits and services provided.
3. Joint creation of video or other assets to assist carers in accessing or engaging with support. For example: carer's assessment, financial support, support available to those being cared for?
4. Language - building on the work of the NIHR and also local surveys and panels develop a common guidance across the region for the inclusion of languages
5. A common directory of voluntary or paid for local regional services that could be helpful to carers may be a better use of time than establishing this locally. For example if you are in Southend there may well be voluntary services in Essex you could access.
6. Regional opportunity for vastly increasing the early identification of carers and provision of light touch support. Mobilise could provide this. The benefits of a regional digital offer include:
 - a. More efficient use of time and resources - e.g. commissioning/procurement
 - b. Increased effectiveness - avoid duplication, build and deploy once
 - c. Consistent approach from a carer perspective
 - d. Opportunity for carers from across the region to connect
 - e. Develop assets that can be used region wide (e.g. video)

Findings and recommendations

The project team identified significant variances in the approaches of councils, and consequently in the ease by which a carer might access support through digital channels.

In some cases neighbours, who are in different council areas, might have drastically different experiences. Whilst provision might differ in each local authority area, needs remain fairly consistent and so best practises in terms of information architecture and content could be shared across the region.

Google friendly	10
Mostly mobile friendly	11
Function vs human touch	13
Carer's Assessments	14
Financial help - going beyond Carer's Allowance	16
Integration of carer and cared-for needs	18
Greater clarity about the role of other organisations in carer support	20
It can be hard to make a complaint	21
Education and courses	22
All carer related content should be accessible from the main carer page	23
Better directories	24
Giving up work	25

Google-friendliness

Start in Google: carers assessment + name of council without 'Council'

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Search for Carer Support + Local Authority name excluding the word 'Council'

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

- Most sites were very easily accessible for the queries we used.
- Though the picture for carers is often more complicated by the presence of CSOs and other charities. Try for yourself: carer support + local authority (e.g. carer support essex)

Recommendation

A large proportion of residents will access council websites and services by using a search engine (most likely Google). Council web analytics teams will be able to identify exactly what proportion of users are coming to a council’s site using ‘Source of Traffic data’

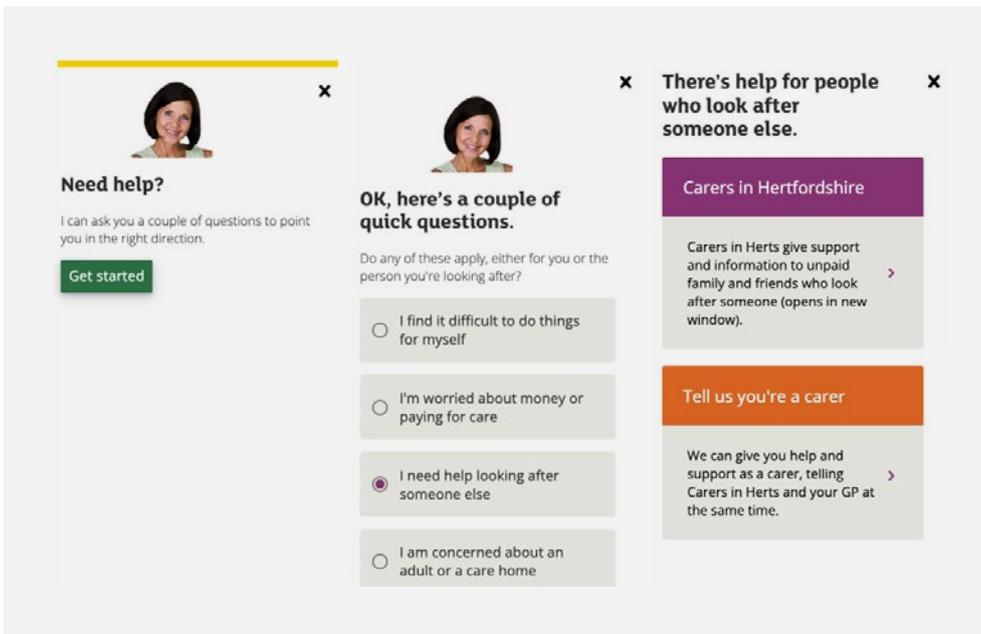
Ask your web analytics team for the source of traffic to your main carer page, over the last six months.

Search engine results page are competitive and cluttered. Prominent competing sites can be identified by searching for “carer support + local authority (without council). E.g. Carer support Essex. Take a look at the top five results (excluding any ads).

Mostly mobile friendly

- Most websites were found to be fast and easy to use on a mobile device.
- Some websites still relied on PDFs for information and were marked down as they are generally not mobile friendly.
- Other sites had PDF application forms - these should be avoided as a primary method of collecting information as they immediately assume access to a printer and therefore could be seen as a blocker.
- Some sites used captcha (or “I am not a robot” turing tests) which the researcher found to be a blocker on mobile and which aren’t thought to be widely accessible.

Hertfordshire have a very helpful widget to help determine what a user might need.



Need help?
I can ask you a couple of questions to point you in the right direction.
[Get started](#)

OK, here's a couple of quick questions.
Do any of these apply, either for you or the person you're looking after?

- I find it difficult to do things for myself
- I'm worried about money or paying for care
- I need help looking after someone else
- I am concerned about an adult or a care home

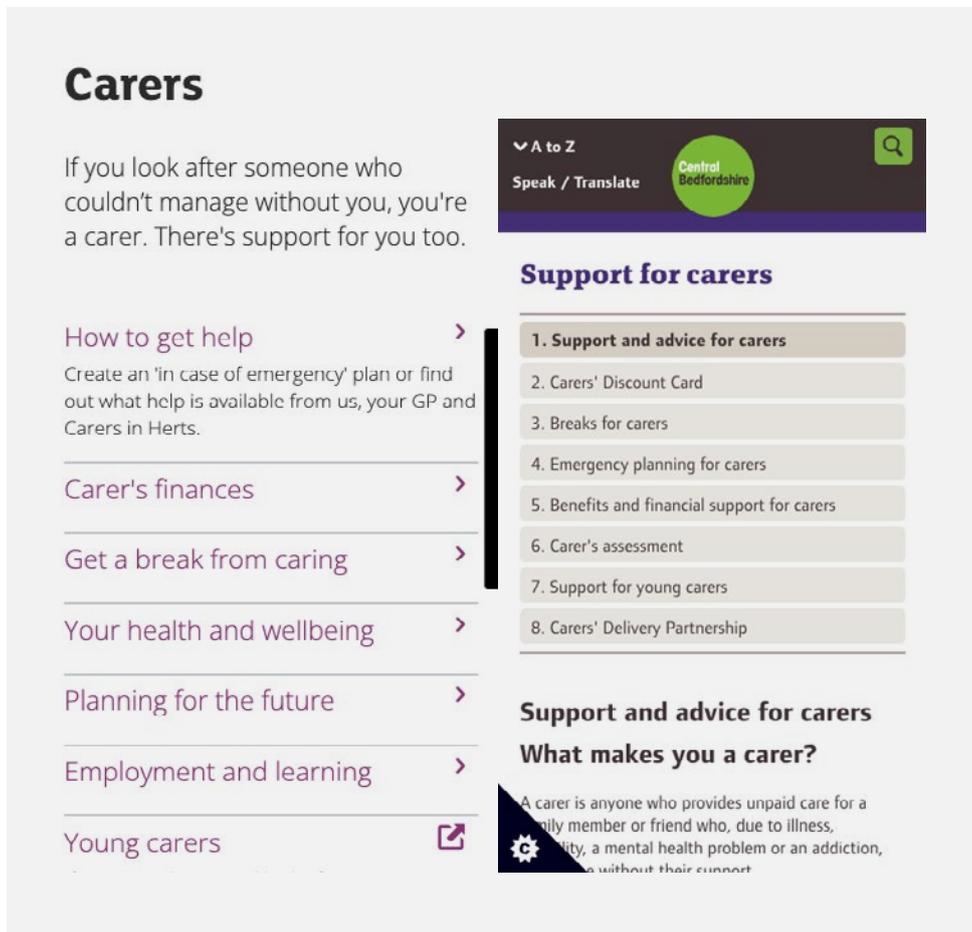
There's help for people who look after someone else.

Carers in Hertfordshire
Carers in Herts give support and information to unpaid family and friends who look after someone (opens in new window).

Tell us you're a carer
We can give you help and support as a carer, telling Carers in Herts and your GP at the same time.



Compact navigation helps users on both the Hertfordshire and Central Bedfordshire websites:



Recommendation

Service providers should assume that users are highly likely to use a phone when searching. When reviewing user journeys (either for Council services or for suppliers), testing a new feature on a website or reviewing an outgoing email, good practice is to use a smart phone.

Function vs human touch

Regardless of their performance in resolving requests, did pages present as friendly and welcoming?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L
Green	Green	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red

Is the carer role described and acknowledged on the main carers' page?

There should be some acknowledgement of the challenges and reassurance about the existence of services that can help.

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L
Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green

Most of the sites reviewed were jargon free and excellent examples of great use of simple language. There was a good example of the use of simple language on Hertfordshire's website. Instead of talking about financial assessments they said 'once we've worked out what your care needs are we'll move on to money matters'

Many of the websites reviewed were very functional in nature and whilst they did acknowledge the hardships that carers face, the priority appeared to be getting people to the right place quickly (which is good practice).

Recommendation

Using elements of video, photography or case studies might help carers understand how to navigate the services available to them - or example explaining Carers Assessments. These assets could be commissioned regionally.

Tone is very important here. NIHR research highlights that rather than say "are you a carer?" you could use something like "we're here to help your caring role".

Source: NIHR SSCR (2021) [Online Advice to Carers: An Updated Review of Local Authority Websites in England](#), Research Findings 163, NIHR School for Social Care Research, London.

Carer's Assessments

Does the information about the Carer's Assessment include information about what sort of support, including financial support, might be available to carers from this process

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Is it possible to apply for a Carer's Assessment online?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Half of all websites reviewed did not have the ability for someone to request an assessment online - or if they did it was not easy to find.

Most councils could do a much better job of explaining the carers assessment process

- Who it is for
- That carer's have a right to an assessment
- It is not means tested
- What the current waiting time is
- What might they expect from it and what support might be available after it

Thurrock and Cambridgeshire were good examples of clear information provided.

Thurrock carer's assessments

A carer's assessment gives you a chance to share your feelings and needs as a carer. It does not judge your ability as a carer, but you can talk about things that might make being a carer easier.

Any carer over the age of 18 is entitled to a carer's assessment. The assessment is free and is carried out by a carers support worker. It looks at how being a carer affects your everyday life, including:

- your health
- time away from caring
- work and leisure activities
- help and support you can get

During your assessment, the support worker can suggest ways of get support that could help you. They can also assist in organising support, if both you and the person you care for agree.

The benefits of having a carer's assessment

Benefits of a carer's assessment include:

- a dedicated support worker
- emotional and practical support
- help to find services and support groups
- receiving regular information specific to you from [Thurrock Carers Service](#)

You may also be eligible for a carer's [Personal](#)

16:10
📶 🔋

What happens during an assessment?

We will have a conversation with you to help us to understand what matters to you and the physical, emotional and practical impact that caring has on your wellbeing. If you wish, your assessment can be carried out at the same time as a social care assessment of the person you care for.

You can prepare for this conversation by asking yourself the following questions:

- what do I want to achieve?
- if I can achieve this, what difference would it make to my life?
- what support do I have in place already?

Your carer's assessment may indicate that your caring role is having an impact on your wellbeing and preventing you from meeting some of your own needs. This will be discussed with you along with the options available to you, including any support identified to meet your needs, and you will receive

© cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Recommendation

There is a lot of myth and rumour surrounding carer's assessments and they are conducted differently in every local authority.

To improve clarity around the process, authorities might wish to:

- Take time to demystify and set reasonable expectations for carers.
- Be clear about lead times and who conducts carer's assessments as well as what the carer might be able to access as a result.
- Use video and case studies to help explain complex topics.

Financial help - going beyond Carer's Allowance

From the page you land on can you quickly find clear information about eligibility for financial support from the council for people with care needs.

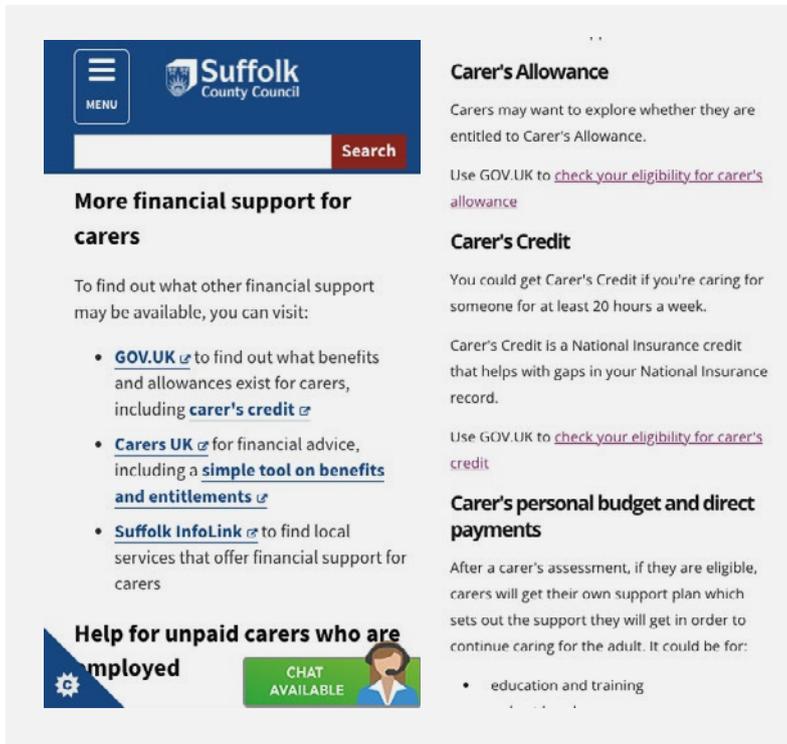
Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Can you find information for people who are caring and may need to give up work because of caring responsibilities and what financial support they may be able to get.

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

There was often little or no information on the many benefits and financial help available for carers other than the carer's allowance - for example Carer's Credit.

Some examples of areas which mentioned further financial support



The screenshot shows the Suffolk County Council website with a search bar and a navigation menu. The main content area is titled "More financial support for carers" and includes a search bar, a "MENU" button, and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there is a section titled "More financial support for carers" with a sub-heading "To find out what other financial support may be available, you can visit:". This section lists three bullet points: "GOV.UK" to find benefits and allowances, "Carers UK" for financial advice, and "Suffolk InfoLink" for local services. To the right, there are three sections: "Carer's Allowance", "Carer's Credit", and "Carer's personal budget and direct payments". Each section provides a brief description and a link to check eligibility. At the bottom left, there is a "Help for unpaid carers who are employed" section with a "CHAT AVAILABLE" button and a chat icon.

More financial support for carers

To find out what other financial support may be available, you can visit:

- [GOV.UK](#) to find out what benefits and allowances exist for carers, including [carer's credit](#)
- [Carers UK](#) for financial advice, including a [simple tool on benefits and entitlements](#)
- [Suffolk InfoLink](#) to find local services that offer financial support for carers

Carer's Allowance

Carers may want to explore whether they are entitled to Carer's Allowance.

Use GOV.UK to [check your eligibility for carer's allowance](#)

Carer's Credit

You could get Carer's Credit if you're caring for someone for at least 20 hours a week.

Carer's Credit is a National Insurance credit that helps with gaps in your National Insurance record.

Use GOV.UK to [check your eligibility for carer's credit](#)

Carer's personal budget and direct payments

After a carer's assessment, if they are eligible, carers will get their own support plan which sets out the support they will get in order to continue caring for the adult. It could be for:

- education and training

Help for unpaid carers who are employed

CHAT AVAILABLE

Recommendation

Mobilise have found that often people search for financial support, for example carer's allowance, before they access other services. This finding could be used to facilitate carers accessing support earlier.

Integration of carer and cared-for needs

From the pages about 'paying for care' can you find links to information about financial support for Carers Including Carers Allowance?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Can you find information on employment rights for people caring for someone with suggestion of issues eg taking time off, flexible working

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Carers tell us that their lives depend on those they care-for and that the benefits and services for those being cared for have a direct impact on carers.

Recommendation

More work needs to go into the understanding of the connectedness between carer and cared-for to establish how best to integrate the two personas and needs across all benefits and services provided by local authorities.

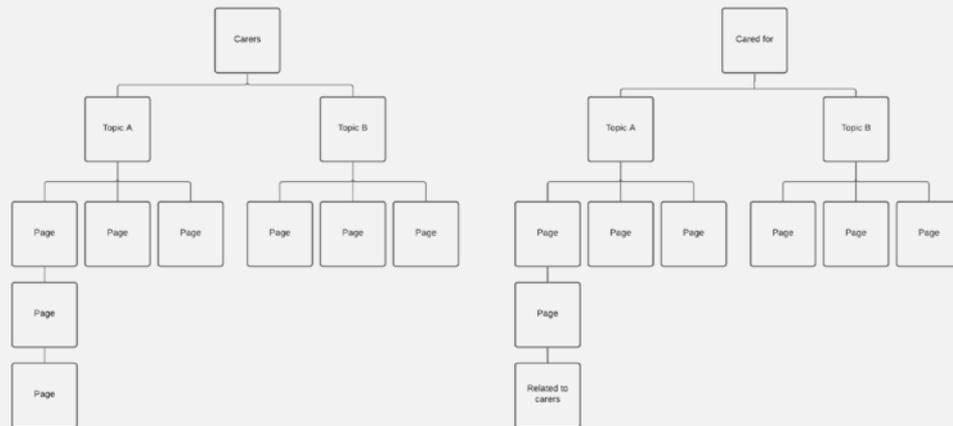
This could be done at a regional level to avoid duplication and get a wider selection of views.

Solutions could be brainstormed at a regional level to leverage wider experience.

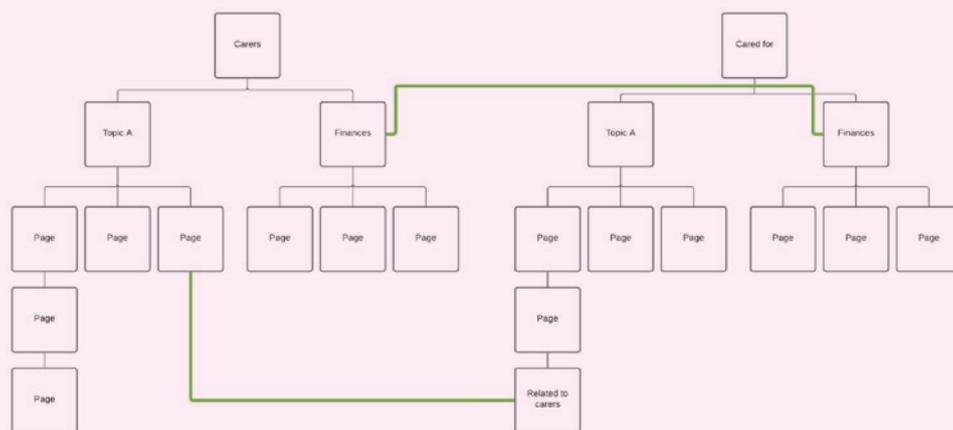
The project team recommends reviewing council pages for carers and cared-for (or potential cared-for) and ensuring that they have adequate and appropriate interlinking (between pages).

The project team found examples of 'walled gardens' - pages which can only be accessed from a single point of entry - i.e from the homepage -, but which might be relevant in lots of different scenarios. This was particularly true of the handover between content for carers and cared-for. Councils and providers should ensure that pages are adequately linked to from multiple locations, so that they can easily be found.

Current situation



Better linking between critical pages



Greater clarity about the role of other organisations in carer support

All the Local Authorities that replied to the project survey indicated that they work with an existing partner to provide carer support.

Recommendation

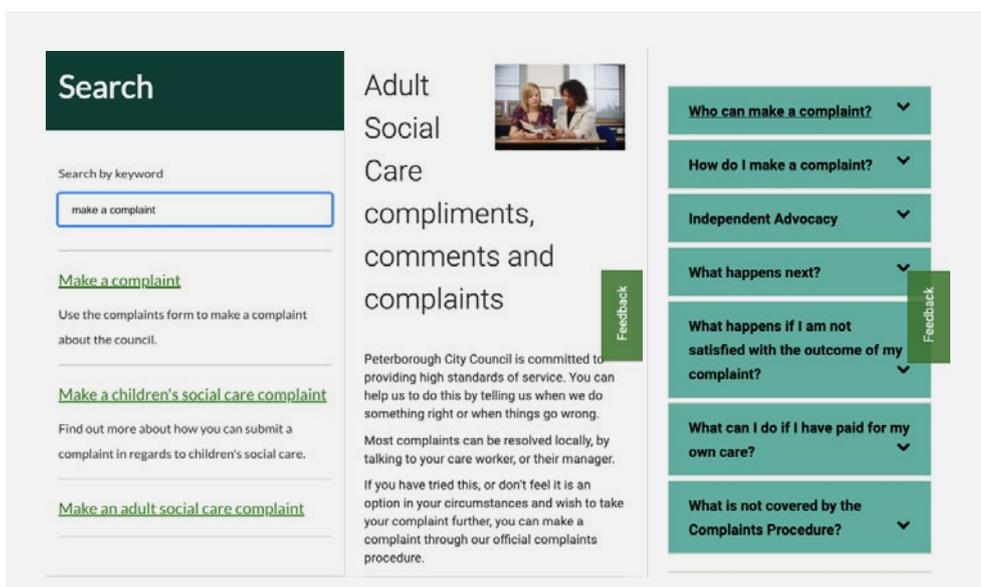
Navigating the various organisations who can help a carer can be time consuming. Help carers to identify the organisations that are best placed to help them by including a clear description of what they provide and for whom alongside a link. For instance, if you're signposting to the NHS content, make sure you list a few of the benefits that might be available. Obviously, deep links are preferable to home pages.

It can be hard to make a complaint

Using site search can you easily find how to complain about an experience with Adult social care services.

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

- If a carer is facing challenges with how their case is being handled by the council or one of its appointed partners it can be hard for them to find information on how to escalate this. In a third of local authorities we found it difficult.
- Peterborough have a very neat site search and provide great contextual information



Recommendation

Carer’s lives are complex and often standard routes don’t result in a good outcome. Providing options for them to let the Council know about their challenges with services or to escalate a problem are crucial to their satisfaction with the local authority overall.

Education and courses

Can I easily find courses or other learning support around the role and challenges of being a carer?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Half of councils could do a better job at directing carers to resources around learning about the role and challenges of being a carer. This could be something like the Mobilise Email Course which introduces the carer to the support they have available or more specific resources like first aid, lifting or personal care.

Recommendation

There may be significant benefit (and efficiency) for the region to pull together a central list of training and resources for carers. This could also include a regionally specific email course (Mobilise has found this approach to be very attractive to carers).

All carer related content should be accessible from the main carer page

Start at Council home page. Can you easily find Adult Social Care?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Our researcher sometimes had to wander round the menu items to find services available to carers and people in need of care. It also needs to be obvious from the carer pages as well as the cared for. "I sometimes found myself stumbling on it and then other times not finding it at all."

Recommendation

So much as is possible, councils should explore whether Adult Social Care and Support for Carers can be accessed from your main home page and navigation. Do not rely on site search.

Better directories

Can you easily find a directory of local voluntary and community services that can provide support for carers via a range of services including paid for care services, hot meals, things to do etc.

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Our researcher found that two-thirds of councils could provide better access and detail of local voluntary and community services that can provide support for carers.

Recommendation

Services might operate over local authority boundaries or people might travel to use them; a region wide directory could be beneficial.

The directory could include:

- Local charitable work
- Sitting services or voluntary respite services
- Places where people can get hot meals
- How to access voluntary assistance from the community - e.g to do the shopping

Giving up work

Can you find information for people who are caring and may need to give up work because of caring responsibilities and what financial support they may be able to get?

Authority A	Authority B	Authority C	Authority D	Authority E	Authority F	Authority G	Authority H	Authority I	Authority J	Authority K	Authority L

Carers who are considering or who have given up work as a result of their caring role, may need more support than most. Alongside the financial change this results in, there can also be big emotional challenges such as loss of identity and self. 60% of councils reviewed could have more in-depth support in this area. Greater provision of support might enable them to continue working and caring which might be a better outcome.

Recommendation

There is a real opportunity to improve the offering from local authorities for carers who would like to continue with, or get back into employment. This could include specialised support including highlighting roles that are open to flexible, remote or part time work.

We're in it
TOGETHER



Mobilise Care Ltd
International House
64 Nile Street
London
United Kingdom
N1 7SR

info@mobiliseonline.co.uk

Company Number: 11896322

mobilise