

# Review of councils' online services for unpaid carers in the ADASS East region

March 2025



# About Mobilise

Mobilise is the leading provider of digital services to carers and empowers those that care to thrive. We provide a range of digital and AI enabled support services that deliver results that matter to Local Authorities and five-star service to carers - all grounded in research and tested with carers across the UK.

## Project team

**Joe Legate** | Director of Product and Marketing | Project Lead

Joe has 17 years experience in digital marketing and digital products, with the last five working to support unpaid carers

**Vicky Sargent** | Digital Review Consultant | Principal Consultant

Vicky previously ran the Better Connected programme reviewing council websites and undertook website reviews in 2022

**Dr Lamorna Spry Web** | IA and UX Specialist

Lamorna researches and advises commercial and Government organisations on how to improve the customer journey

**James Townsend** | CEO and Co-founder

**Dom Taylor** | Head of Partnerships

**Elle Walmsley** | Account Manager

We are very grateful to all local authorities across the region for their time, insight and valuable contributions to this research.

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# Why does this report matter?

Information on council websites has become increasingly vital. CQC assessments show that the availability of (and clear structure for) information about available services are a significant challenge across multiple authorities. Even in areas with comprehensive support services, carers often struggle to find information on what is available.

The ONS reported in 2020 that **92%** of UK adults were internet users, rising to **99%** for those under 44<sup>1</sup>. Health information seeking online doubled between 2009 and 2019, reaching 63%<sup>2</sup>, with likely further growth following the coronavirus pandemic.

Well-structured, high-quality information from authoritative sources is essential to counter misinformation on social media and adapt to technological changes including AI adoption.

## Background

In February 2022, Mobilise presented to ADASS East a report evaluating online information and services for carers across the region's councils. This assessment involved testing the 12 council websites from a user perspective.

An independent reviewer scored each site on its ability to answer typical support questions, and the overall user experience.

The current report presents findings from a similar review conducted in late 2024, identifying changes in website provision and performance since the initial review.

Additionally, Mobilise has conducted interviews with each council to explore how they commission, manage and evaluate their online provision, and their future development plans.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2020#:~:text=1.-,Main%20points,aged%2075%20years%20and%20over](https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2020#:~:text=1.-,Main%20points,aged%2075%20years%20and%20over)

<sup>2</sup> [arc.net/l/quote/fsgxcmec](https://arc.net/l/quote/fsgxcmec)

# Purpose and scope of the review

The aims of the website review and subsequent interviews are to:

Assess how **quickly and effectively** the region's websites connect carers to relevant information

Evaluate use of **language, terminology** and other elements that make websites welcoming

Identify **new technologies** or services in use or being planned - e.g. AI

Identify **in-development features** and planned improvements by individual councils

Highlight examples of **good practice** in co-production, user testing, language, content, user journeys, cross-linking and integration of support information

Explore the extent to which councils have **co-produced** and **user-tested** their web content directly with carers

Identify **improvements** since the 2022 review and the extent to which previous recommendations have been implemented

Identify **key challenges** and **opportunities** across the region for online carer support and recommend regional approaches



# Methodology

The 2024 website survey followed the same user-testing method as the 2022 review. For both reviews, we identified carers' priority concerns using Mobilise's unique data sources:

- In-house expertise developed whilst supporting **over 150,000** carers across the UK
- Analysis of **500 posts** in the Mobilise Facebook group for carers
- Notes from **over 220** individual support calls
- Google search data

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

- ✓ Emotional support
- ✓ Finances and benefits
- ✓ Condition-specific queries
- ✓ Carer's Assessments



When we refreshed this analysis in December 2024 these issues remained, with the addition of concerns around managing incontinence and health issues.

The 2024 question sets closely mirrored those from 2022 to enable direct performance comparison, with some additions to evaluate new features such as online self-assessment facilities.

For testing, we used an Apple iPhone 7 with mobile data, reflecting Mobilise web data that showed mobile devices remain the primary method of web browsing.

The 2024/25 review also included interviews with council staff responsible for carers' online experience. These interviews helped us understand the complex context in which websites operate, recognising that Adult Social Care teams often have limited control over some aspects of web provision, which may be managed by corporate web teams or third-party contractors.

Data from councils showed most visitors arrive at carers' pages via search engines (primarily Google and Bing), with a smaller proportion accessing directly via URLs. Hertfordshire was unique in generating significant traffic from a local referral source - HertsHelp.

# Regional recommendations

## Enhanced content curation and editorial responsibility

A primary recommendation is for councils to take stronger editorial ownership of information for carers across their digital ecosystem. This includes:

- Establishing clear editorial responsibility for the carer journey across both council-owned and third-party platforms
- Implementing consistent content governance to ensure information remains accurate, up-to-date and consistent - regardless of where it appears
- Curating third-party content and connections rather than just linking to external sites
- Creating seamless transitions between council websites and commissioned services
- Where information is duplicated from multiple sources - providing a single reliable source

## Regional AI-ready content strategy

The region should develop a coordinated approach to preparing high-quality, structured content that can be effectively utilised by emerging AI technologies:

- Standardise key information formats across councils to improve AI interpretation and delivery
- Develop shared content guidelines for writing AI-compatible information about carer services
- Create a regional repository of verified, well-structured carer-specific content that AI systems can access
- Collaborate on metadata standards to ensure AI tools can accurately categorise and retrieve carer information
- Share costs and expertise in preparing content for future AI implementation

## Regional collaboration framework

ADASS East should establish a structured approach to foster collaboration across councils for online carer provision:

- Create a formal knowledge-sharing mechanism for councils to exchange best practices and lessons learned
- Position this collaboration as part of broader demand management strategy rather than a standalone digital initiative
- Involve stakeholders beyond digital teams and carer specialists to ensure comprehensive improvement
- Develop regional benchmarks and standards for carer online provision based on the findings of this review
- Establish a regular forum for councils to collectively address common challenges identified in the research

# Positive change for the region

Councils in the region are doing a lot to improve and develop online provision for carers via their websites. As a group, the region's website provision for carers has improved since the original survey in 2022:

**Six councils** achieved a very good performance and three more achieved a good performance. This is a real improvement from just four achieving a good or very good performance in 2022.

## Challenges faced in 2025

The website survey shows the online provision of councils faces significant challenges around the following:

- Integration of carer-specific information and information for people with care needs: in reality both groups are interdependent and need to access the same information
- Commissioning of directories of information and services, whether contracted or in-house
- Quality of online information and advice provided by contracted carer support services
- Integration of information, advice and services from directories, carer support services non-contracted partners and other third parties including ICBs, with council website provision for carers and people being cared for
- Implementation of online self-assessment (for carers and people with care needs) as a true alternative to traditional, Care Act-compliant, social worker-led assessment
- Implementation of AI tools able to gather and push personalised information to carers and people with care needs

# Findings and recommendations from our website reviews




Our website review employed two question sets: one on carer's assessments and emotional support (23 questions) and another on financial support (12 questions).

The reviewer evaluated whether each website satisfactorily answered these questions and rated the overall journey on a scale of 1-4, with an additional bonus point available for exemplary experiences worthy of recommendation to other councils.

This created a maximum possible score of 10 per website, with scores of eight or over considered very good, six to seven good, and below six indicating at least partial unsatisfactory performance.

## Our findings

The table shows that, in 2024, half of the council websites have achieved very good performance. Three more achieved a good performance. This compares with just four that reached this level in 2022, showing real improvement.

	2024	2022	Council
<b>Key:</b>   Improved since 2022   Improved from unsatisfactory to good/very good since 2022   Declined or remained unsatisfactory since 2022	10	8	A
	10	4	E
	10	4	I
	10	5	L
	8	10	D
	8	5	G
	7	5	B
	7	8	J
	6	2	C
	5	4	H
	5	10	K
	3	2	F

The relative performance of the region's websites has changed. The table shows some sites have improved significantly since 2022 while others have declined, one of them significantly:

- Three sites have improved significantly to enter the top third in terms of regional performance.
- One further site has improved from poor to good (these four sites are in green in the table above).
- Two sites have moved from being partly unsatisfactory to good or very good (purple).
- One previously top performing site has declined significantly, and one other remained in the unsatisfactory/poor zone (pink).
- Three sites have maintained - or nearly maintained - a very good performance and one unsatisfactory site (H) slightly improved.

Thoughts on how individual websites have delivered improvement or otherwise will be explored in individual feedback sessions offered as part of this project. We'll focus on more general observations that may inform actions by ADASS East.

## Recommendations from the website reviews

### Enhance self-assessment offerings:

Expand online self-assessment capabilities to include clear waiting time information, explicit benefits, and a pathway to support that doesn't require an in-person assessment - following Suffolk's comprehensive model.

### Deep integration:

Create seamless connections between carer support, cared-for information, and financial guidance to reflect the reality that these needs are interlinked.

### Editorial ownership:

Establish clear responsibility for the entire carer journey across all platforms, with consistent governance of information - regardless of where it appears.



## Website reviews in detail

# Questions most websites answer well

Our independent reviewer tested each website on a mobile phone using a set of 35 questions (see appendix) to see how quickly and easily information, advice, guidance and interactive services could be found.

Things that council websites are getting right include:

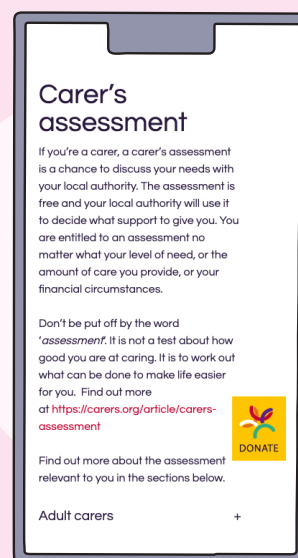
## Plain English and a friendly tone

Within each question set we asked: Was the content concise, in plain English and free of jargon? And regardless of their performance in resolving requests, did pages present as friendly and welcoming?

Councils performed well on this test in 2022 although six were identified as falling short. This time around, just three councils still have work to do.

### Feedback from the website reviewer:

*I noticed a reference on one website to 'Care Act Assessment' and I thought the inclusion of the word 'Act' could be off-putting. I liked this presentation that specifically states that the word 'assessment' is not about judging you.*



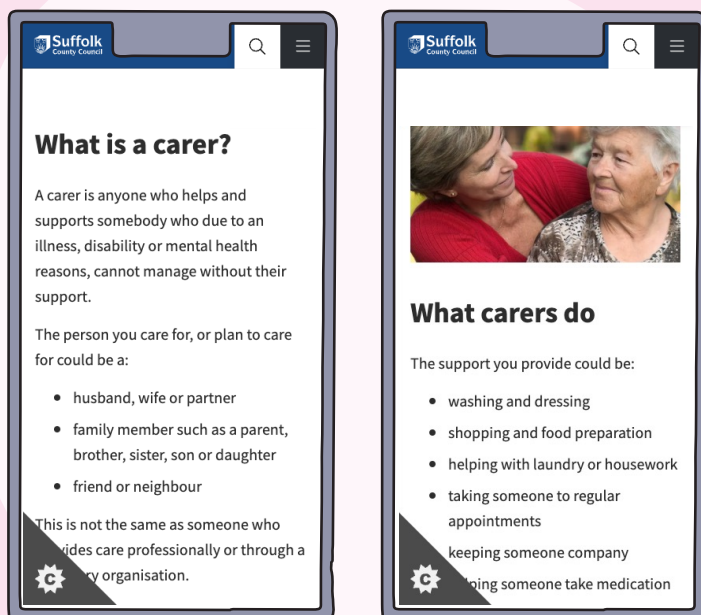
### Referring to a different website our reviewer commented:

*I really liked the way the content referred to a 'Carer's Conversation'. Sounds so much more friendly than 'assessment'.*

## Acknowledgement of carer role/situation

Eleven out of the twelve council websites scored 'yes' on this question.

Suffolk County Council had a good example of clear, friendly presentation.



## Accessible via Google Search

As in 2022, every council's carer's assessment information appeared prominently in Google search results using the query "carers assessment + name of council without 'council' "

Where councils have contracted out carer support services, non-council providers sometimes rank higher in search results. For example, Carers Matter Norfolk appeared above the council in our reviewer's search. This arrangement works effectively when relationships between the council and contractors are transparent, and both sites clearly direct carers to the appropriate resources for resolving their queries.

## Information on carer's assessments

Eleven out of the twelve council websites scored 'yes' on the following two questions:

1. From the page can you quickly find information about Carer's Assessments?
2. Does the information about the Carer's Assessments make it clear that any carer is entitled to ask for an assessment, it is not means tested?

## Finding health-specific information

Ten out of the twelve council websites scored 'yes' on the following question:

- Can you find or link to information about health condition-specific information and support including organisations specialising in support for specific conditions?

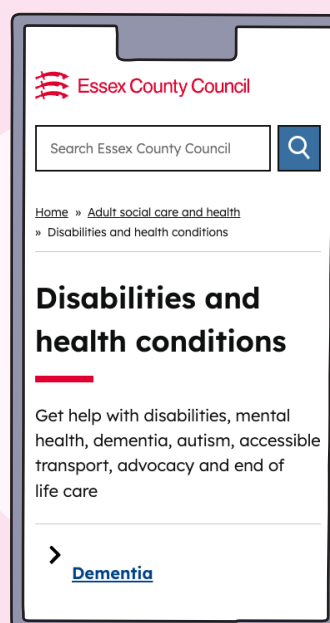
Eleven out of the twelve council websites scored 'yes' on the following questions:

- Choose a health condition-specific service found. Does the contact link go to a meaningful page (i.e. not fundraising) with useful information?

Essex County Council has an excellent page on [Disabilities and Health Conditions](#).



**Idea:** An additional consideration could be to have a link from the Carer's menu as well as from the main Adult Social Care and Health Menu.



## Making it easy for people to complain

In 2022 we noted that some websites make it difficult to complain. Asking the same question this year, only one site fell short.

# Questions websites struggled to answer

The region's councils show significant room for improvement in their online provision for carers across four key areas:

- ✓ Carer's Assessments
- ✓ use of directories
- ✓ integration of information between carers and care recipients
- ✓ clarity around available financial support.

## 1. Carer's Assessments

### **No council provides information about the waiting time for a Carer's Assessment (Q 5a)**

This was a new question for the 2025 survey. In some cases the lack of information may be because Carer's Assessments have been contracted out to third-party carer support services.

But it may be more likely to reflect high, or fluctuating, levels of demand, which is understandable from a council's perspective, but frustrating for the carer.

Four councils offer an online self-assessment option which could alleviate this and provide other benefits.

Information provided about the Carer's Assessment has improved – eight councils as opposed to six in 2022 scored a 'yes' to the question: 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? One council was marked down on this question, with our website reviewer commenting:

*"It does have a section on personal budget, but a section just describing the overall kind of support someone can get would be helpful."*

## Only 50% of councils offer online Carer's Assessment applications (Q6)

There has been no net improvement in this metric since 2022, with two councils adding this facility while two others removed it. The practice of offering online applications without providing expected waiting times creates a frustrating experience for carers. Many councils and their contracted carer support services continue to primarily direct carers to telephone numbers for assessment enquiries.

## Four councils appeared to provide a Carer's Assessment online (Q6a)

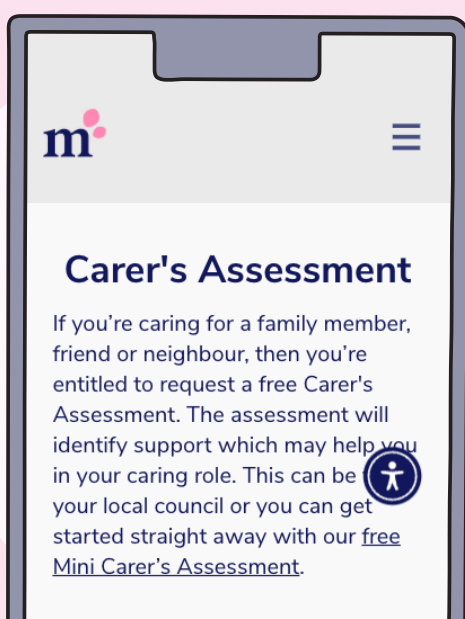
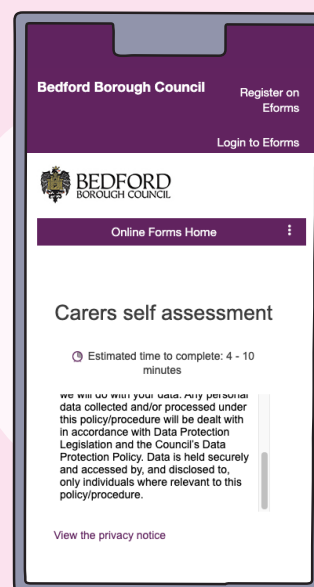
Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Suffolk Councils offer some form of online self-assessment for carers:

### Bedford Council's online Carer's Assessment

If a user completes the form next steps are clear: the form will be forwarded to one of our Adult Social Care teams who will aim to respond to you within 2 working days. However, at times of high demand, it may take longer.

Reassurance is given about confidentiality: This form will be sent in a secure/encrypted format and will only be accessed by the relevant Adult Social Care staff.

No information is given about the benefits of doing the online assessment, although it does give a qualified commitment around response time, which is not in place for the traditional, in-person carer's assessment.

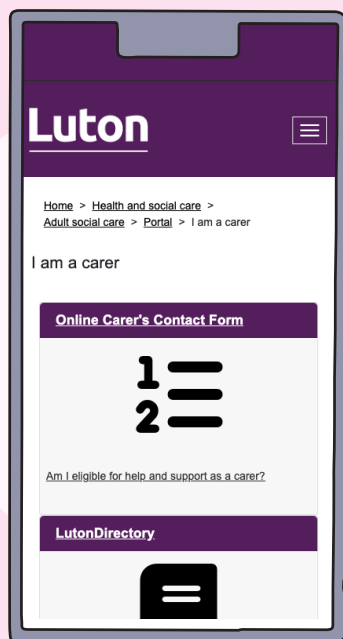


### Central Bedfordshire's page on Carer's Assessments

Users are invited to: Find out more about the carer's assessment on the Mobilise website. The link goes to a page with this content:

### Luton Council's page on [Carer's Assessments](#)

There is a prominent link to 'online carer's assessment' but when you arrive there it is described as a 'contact form'. No information is given at this point about what will happen after the form is submitted, and only by registering would we have been able to see the 'next steps' information.



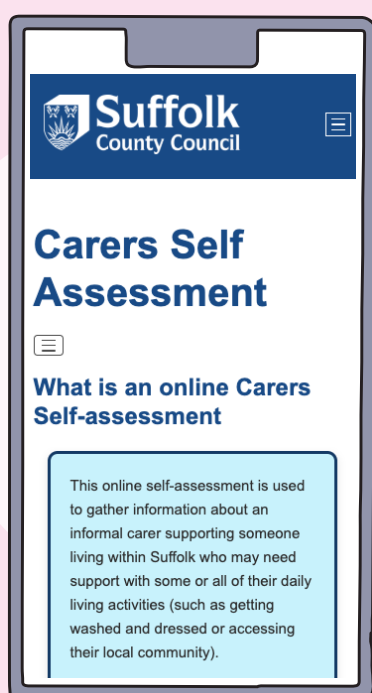
The form appears to collect information for triage, similar to that collected by the Bedford Council form.

On a separate page called 'Getting a Carer's Assessment' additional information is provided:

There is now a quick and easy way to see if you are eligible for support from the council. Carers can use the [online self-assessment](#) to answer questions to tell us what they might need support with. The self-assessment will then let you know if you are eligible for support from the council, even if you're not eligible the assessment will be able to tell you about other organisations in Luton who might be able to help.

### Suffolk County Council's page on Carer's Assessments

Under the heading 'How to request a Carer's Assessment' it says: you can contact Adult Social Care (Customer First) to request a Carer's Assessment. Alternatively, you can complete an online assessment.



The page provides comprehensive information about the two-part online carer's self-assessment as follows:

- part one, the wellbeing questionnaire; is a chance to consider your situation through a set of targeted questions. Upon completion, a range of advice and information will be provided for you to consider and explore.
- part two, if you wish to proceed, asks a number of in-depth questions relating to your daily life.

The assessment questionnaire asks about

- Your details
- Your life as a carer now and how it might change for the better
- The care and support you provide
- The care and support you are able and willing to provide on an ongoing basis
- Your health and well-being
- Staying safe
- Your support networks
- Identity verification

Completing part one of the assessment (no registration required) leads to the provision of information and links which can also be found from the care pages of the website.

Part two of the assessment requires registration and is outside the scope of this study.

We are therefore unable to say whether completing part two is regarded as the direct equivalent of having a traditional carer's assessment leading to support, including for example, a personal budget to meet eligible needs.

## 2. Directories

Only half of the region's websites meet the criteria: "Can you easily find a directory of local voluntary and community services that can support carers with a range of services, including paid care, meals, activities, etc." (Q18).

While this shows progress from 2022, when only four sites had easily discoverable directories, there is still room for improvement. Our interviews revealed that 10 councils maintain directories (some having multiple), suggesting that the primary issue is visibility rather than availability.

This visibility gap is significant, given that most councils across the UK recognise community-based support and self-help resources as essential strategies for meeting growing demand from both carers and those needing care. Additional insights on directory provision are in the '[Findings from interviews](#)' section of this report.

### Feedback from the website reviewer:

*When there were directories they weren't always easy to find because some were on third-party websites.*

### Directory Content

Few council directories address incontinence management, despite it being a top concern for carers, according to Mobilise's data. It is reasonable to expect information on this issue within council service directories.

Our review found that of the six councils with accessible directories, only two provided useful information on incontinence support - a significant gap in meeting carers' needs.

### 3. Integration of information for carers and people with care needs

#### Few councils signpost carers to support for people with care needs from the main carers' page (Q9a)

In 2022, our report identified an opportunity for councils to better support carers by integrating information about services for people with care needs into carers' webpages.

To track progress, our 2024 survey included a new question to assess if councils were directing carers to information about support services for those with care needs.

This year, only four councils included prominent links to such information on their main carers' pages, missing an opportunity to provide carers with easy access to essential resources - especially since many council teams had indicated they were implementing this recommendation from the 2022 report.

#### Carers' visibility on council websites

Only two councils mention carers on the council home page (Q1 from the financial question set).

We also asked if the term 'carer' appeared on the home page. Given the limited space and the fact that some individuals may not identify as 'carers,' this is a significant ask. We were pleased to find that two high-performing sites in this review do include a reference to carers on their home page.

#### Feedback from the website reviewer:

*Councils often put a strap line under their menu items as a navigation aid so it could be relatively easy to add the term 'carers'*

#### Recognition of carers' financial needs

From the 'paying for care' pages, which understandably focus primarily on the person receiving care, we examined whether councils provided links to financial support information specifically for carers, including Carer's Allowance.

When we assessed this in 2022, only two councils offered such connections. In this year's review, the situation remains unchanged, with just two councils providing these important links. Notably, only one council has maintained this good practice across both reviews.

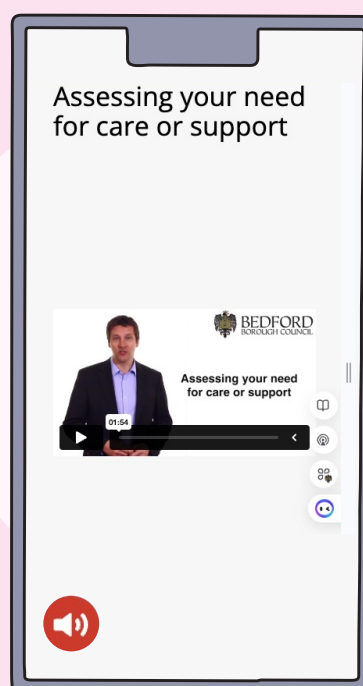
## 4. Information on financial support

Only four councils satisfied our reviewer that the financial assessment process and how to apply is explained clearly – two fewer than in 2024 (Q4 in the financial question set).

### Feedback from the website reviewer:

*There was a lot of information about the financial assessment but at the end it wasn't clear how you apply for it. I assume you just call?*

Our reviewer found the [page and video](#) on Bedford Council's website met expectations.



### Information on Carer's Allowance

Only half of the region's councils provide information about Carer's Allowance and how to apply from the main carers' page (Q10 in the financial question set).

Mobilise data shows that Carer's Allowance is one of the top concerns for carers, so links to information about Carer's Allowance should be prominent on the main carers' page - even if it is not a council-delivered benefit.

# Usability

## Google friendly

Webstats provided by the region's councils show the source of most referrals to the carer pages come from search engines – predominantly Google and Bing, with other sources coming directly to the website (likely where pages have been bookmarked).

As in 2022, we started both question sets by testing the findability of information from a Google search. Councils performed uniformly well with appropriate links to the sought information always appearing on the first page of results.

Those managing websites do need to keep an eye on the role of search. This can ensure people are guided to the right place now councils may contract out key services like carer's assessment to third parties.

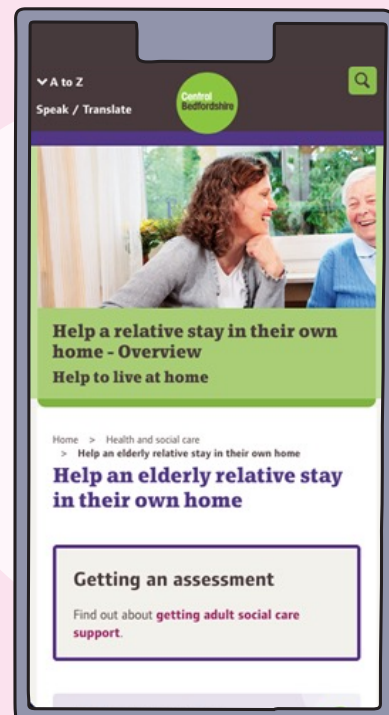
Another challenge is search engine's introduction of AI-generated responses to queries. These are increasingly appearing at the top of results pages. .

## Mobile friendly

As in 2022 most sites were found to be fast and easy to use on a mobile device.

### Feedback from the website reviewer:

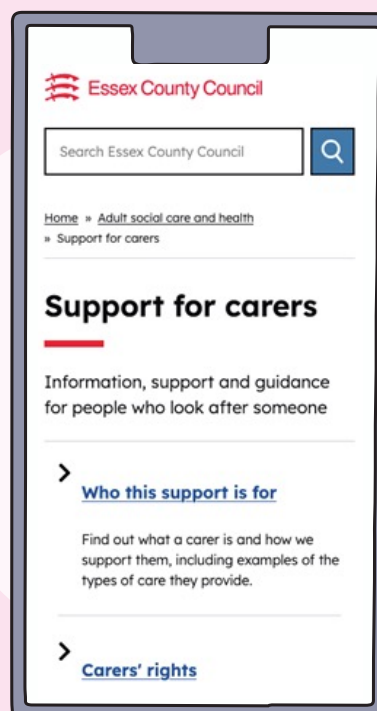
*The site architecture needs to be good for mobile users and not just people on laptops or desktops. One page that I thought was an example of a good menu page was at Central Bedfordshire.*



The **Essex County Council** website was a particularly strong example of being mobile friendly:

**Feedback from the website reviewer:**

*The site is incredibly easy to navigate even for mobile users. Links to third-party websites are in context so when people get onto other sites they don't have to start searching again (Essex CC).*



Our reviewer found other sites had frustrating user experience when accessed from a mobile.

**Feedback from the website reviewer:**

*Sometimes I got a bit lost in the navigation as once you are in the (third-party) website you can't navigate back to the council website. This is particularly frustrating on a mobile.*

It was navigation that was the most challenging, particularly using a mobile.

It's not always obvious how to get back to the main council website if you are in the portal or the directory. Additionally some of the menus were long and you had to click on 'show more' for important areas. I found myself having to navigate via links within the content but then getting entirely lost.

More thought needs to be given to the user experience. If I had been the person requiring care and looking for financial support, I would have struggled.

I would have preferred [the information] not to be in a pop up box. These can be quite frustrating for mobile users.

## Handover and handback

When councils use third-party websites for information, they must ensure their own site offers a coherent overview and clear links to external content.

Users quickly become frustrated when forced to navigate between sites with varying interfaces, cookie notifications, and pop-ups - particularly on mobile devices.

Effective return navigation is also crucial. Luton provides an excellent example, while other councils created frustrating experiences. For example, our reviewer was redirected to multiple charity sites, each requiring cookie decisions and presenting different interfaces. This disjointed experience increases the risk of users missing critical information.

## Information architecture

Breadcrumb trails are useful, particularly for mobile users navigating complex customer journeys. At least one website in the cohort lacked a breadcrumb and it was missed.

## Dealing with lots of information

The complexity of social care makes designing intuitive yet concise navigation challenging. Effective cross-referencing between related areas - such as linking carer information to resources for those being cared for - and prominent access to frequently used services are essential.

The sheer volume of information means user experiences can vary significantly depending on their chosen navigation path, potentially leading to inconsistent access to critical resources.

### Feedback from the website reviewer:

*If you navigate from the adult social care menu to 'Help to find the right care and support for you' followed by the menu item 'If you are a carer for an adult', You can read some brief content about being a carer. However, if you choose to go into the Adults Portal, then there is a menu item 'Support for Carers' and much more information. I nearly missed this.*

## Cookies

Cookies get irritating if you're directed to various different third-party websites. On one website reviewed, we noticed users have no option to reject cookies.

## Chatbots and AI assistants

When implemented effectively, chatbots offer users immediate assistance without requiring emails or phone calls, potentially reducing wait times and providing 24/7 support for common queries. This can be particularly valuable for carers seeking information outside office hours.

However, our reviewer found chatbots on only one council website and several third-party sites, with mixed experiences. The implementation challenges include:

- Screen space on mobile devices obstructing other content
- Persistent reappearance after dismissal, creating frustration when navigating between pages
- Potential for generic responses to complex social care queries
- Inconsistent user experience across different platforms

Councils considering chatbot implementation should focus on ensuring they genuinely enhance, rather than hinder, the user journey - particularly for mobile users. They also need to be monitored to ensure they draw from accurate, up-to-date information that addresses carers' specific needs.

# Findings from interviews

## Purpose of interviews

The interviews were undertaken to understand the context for the performance of the region's websites as revealed through the survey.

The findings will inform feedback about improvement to individual councils, as well as our recommendations about region-wide improvement measures.

## Recommendations from the interviews

### **Establish clear ownership for carer online experience:**

Create designated responsibility for the entire carer journey across council websites and third-party platforms to address the current fragmentation across multiple stakeholders.

### **Frame online services as demand management:**

Position website improvement as a strategic approach to managing demand on council services, with clear goals for self-service resolution.

### **Consolidate information:**

Address the challenge of overlapping information from multiple sources, including directories, by developing integrated approaches to directory provision and maintenance - alongside the provision from third-parties.



## Responsibility for carer's online experience is dispersed

Interviews with council staff reveal that there are many professional stakeholders within the council teams who are responsible (to a greater or lesser degree) for the online carer experience.

These include carers leads; commissioners of carer services; corporate web and digital professionals; adult social care managers; information, advice and guidance specialists; performance managers; project managers and so on.

For each council we met between one and three people from a variety of these backgrounds, all with different perspectives. None were managing all the moving parts that affect the carer experience on council website.

That's also before considering a host of other people and organisations whose work also affects the experience of carers online. These include providers of care and health related directories, contracted and non-contracted carer support services, and digital products such as self-assessment tools, that are now becoming part of carers' online experience.

## Staff turnover is a factor and will affect corporate memory of what works

Interviews revealed there is a significant turnover in staff with responsibilities for the online carer experience. A number of those interviewed had joined after the Mobilise 2022 report was published and were not aware of the report until it was circulated ahead of the interview.

Although most of the recurring questions in the website survey were answered better than they had been in 2022, some were answered less well, suggesting that some 'things that work' were no longer in the corporate memory.

## Role of the corporate web team

We asked: To what extent do you work with the corporate web team on issues like navigation, image use, search, mobile-friendliness, plain English and other 'site wide' considerations. In all the region's councils, the team within adult social care managing the carer online experience works in collaboration with their corporate web team.

The split is typically that the corporate web team manages accessibility, readability, navigation, image selection, mobile-friendliness, and corporate style compliance. Adult social care/carers teams are responsible for content creation, quality and strategic direction.

This really means that the carers/ASC team is broadly leading on content and the corporate team is broadly leading on user experience. Or does it...?

Our web survey showed that carers seeking information are frequently led off into third party sites commissioned by carer/ASC teams. On these sites the user experience, including look and feel, language, navigation, and search - things tightly controlled on the council website - may be completely different. This can create a very disjointed user experience.

## Recent updates, reviews and testing of carers' pages

Our interviews showed there is a lot of recent, ongoing and planned activity that will be impacting carers' online experience via the region's council websites.

In answer to our question When was the most recent review/overhaul of the carer pages five councils reported significant reviews/updates to the carer pages on their website in the last 12 months.

Others had reviewed in 2023 or said they do ongoing updates. Only two councils had not reviewed in the last two years.

**“We’re doing a systematic review of the content at the moment to make sure that what we’ve got on there is true and trusted.”**

In answer to the question What testing/feedback activity has been done recently on the carers' pages/facilities councils mentioned various activities including engagement via carers' workshops every three months; specific updates co-produced with carers; external user research via Healthwatch, Curators of Change; user testing sessions with carers, including dementia support groups; engagement with carers' forums.

**“[We do] engagement with local groups and carers through in-person feedback sessions.”**

## Co-production is claimed to be a part of most website creation and support commissioning

We asked: Has co-production been used in connection with any review/development/planning on carers' pages/facilities?

Two councils said no, two said co-production work was planned. More than half of councils said yes, citing various forms of engagement including workshops, surveys, and direct response to feedback.

Two councils said they had used the Working Together for Change process on website reviews/development.

It is out of scope of this project to evaluate whether the forms of co-production used would meet TLAP definitions of co-production.



**Idea:** One way of co-producing websites with carers is by involving them in the sort of testing we used for the website survey carried out for this project.

Council teams could work with carers to develop a question set based on the things carers most need to do or to find out about, test how quickly the website can answer those questions, and then find and test improvements.

## New third-party contracts for directories ongoing or in prospect

In answer to our question about whether and when councils would be commissioning or recommissioning directories, five councils reported this would be happening within the next 12 months. Two were waiting to see the outcome of an ICB-commissioned directory project. Three said there was no activity planned because contracts were recent or still had time to run, and others were not aware of what might be happening.

- "We're getting ourselves involved in an ICB wide initiative...a website. for mostly professionals in health, and they want social care as well."
- "Yes, our goal is to consolidate existing directories,"
- "New VCSE and self-help group directory under development."

We also asked about new or recently changed contracts with third party carer support services including online support. Five councils said they had recently let contracts and six councils were reviewing or anticipating new contract tenders this year or next.

- "New commissioning expected in 2025; digital services remain a priority."
- "Future specifications to increase digital support offer."

## Commissioning of AI-enhanced tools and chatbots

In response to our question about plans to commission AI tools that assess carers' needs and push appropriate information, advice and services to carers, some councils said they were already using AI tools from Mobilise and Bridgit.

Others had secured funding to develop projects around this or were keeping a close watch on what other councils were doing, aware that many councils are running projects around this topic:

*"Under consideration, with Adult Social Care Reform (ARF) funding secured we're just investigating what that's going to be at the moment."*

*"There's lots of development going on nationally around this. I would love to see that a bit further embedded on the website as and when we can."*

*"Recently a senior manager was seconded to Buckinghamshire to see the use of their AI and report back."*

Four councils said they had no current plans in this area. We also asked about the use of AI assistants, or chatbots. The website review had identified only one council (Hertfordshire) with an AI assistant in place, presenting as a site-wide facility.

Some third-party contracted sites, like Carers in Bedfordshire and Luton Supporting You, have their own bots.

Testing these bots was outside the scope of this research, but in interviews we did ask whether councils planned to commission bots or AI assistants to help carers find what they need from the website.

Some councils were looking to existing AI supported tools, such as those from Bridgit and Mobilise, to deliver as AI assistants. Others were discussing the chatbot concept, often with corporate colleagues. Some councils said they were not looking at chatbots because there was no funding for it, there were data/privacy concerns, or that it was just 'out of scope' for carers.

One interviewee made the important point that ahead of commissioning chatbots, they needed to focus on upgrading information on the website so that anything delivered to users was up to date and accurate.

*"We can use [chatbot] data to help to inform what goes on to our website of what carers need the most."*

*"One of the reasons we're doing such an overhaul of our content is to make sure it's up to date.....we're very aware that we're not just going to bang [AI] on the front end and hope for the best."*

## Is managing demand for social care seen as a key strategic driver for online provision for carers?

One of the interview questions was: What is the purpose of the web pages/ tools provided by the council for carers?

Not surprisingly, answers provided most often focused on practical delivery issues like access to information, details about entitlements and signposting, recognition of the carer role as distinct from that of people being cared for, and empowering carers by providing access to self-service tools.

The question prompted few answers around the role of online carer support in managing potential demand on council social care - both currently and in the future. This was the prime issue we were hoping would be explicit in responses.

That said, some interviewees did talk about the role of carers' webpages in providing timely support to avert crisis prevention and the need to foster peer support and community connection, but not always in response to this question.

*"In adult social care we're currently in the process of a new target operating model, which is changing our front door."*

*"The idea is that our website would function for about 70% of engagement."*

*"We're trying also to shift from carer assessment to self-help – it's really difficult to get the balance right."*

We asked whether the role of the website was explicit in the council's carers' strategy. Where it was not, interviewees said that it was implied.

## What are the top areas of information and advice for carers that should be covered on the council website?

We asked interviewees what they thought were the three most important areas of information and advice that should be covered by the council website:

1. Support available and how to access it
2. Information about financial support and benefits
3. Information around Carer's Assessments

A way behind these three came information about what to do in a crisis and signposting to VCSE and peer support.

Also mentioned were respite care options, health and wellbeing information (for both the carer and cared for person), and information about the role of a carer.

## Providing a directory well integrated with the rest of the website is challenging – and recognised as such

Our reviewer commented that “The council’s website has some information but there’s also a portal or third-party website. You end up wondering which one to use because each has different content.”

This prompted us to ask interviewees a number of questions about the commissioning and implementation of directories where carers might find useful information and advice.

We asked: Do you provide a directory of services (e.g. covering VCE delivered services, self-help groups, and other things carers may find helpful) commissioned from a third party?

Ten councils say they have directories (some have several) although our website reviewer was able to find a directory on only six of the region’s websites.

In our interviews, councils said that directories were provided in different ways, including:

- commissioned with or run by other council departments, such as children and family services, and therefore providing services beyond adult social care
- provided by commissioned carer support services like Carers in Bedfordshire or Carers First in Southend
- commissioned by the NHS and including VCSE services (eg the MiDos: Directory commissioned by the BLMK ICB therefore covering several of the region’s council footprints)

Some directories, perhaps better described as listings of services (sometimes limited to contracted services for quality control purposes) are maintained in house.

Responsibilities for keeping directories up to date varied. In some cases it is a requirement of the service commissioned to provide the directory. In others, listed organisations are expected to keep their own details up to date.

Councils mentioned the significant resource implications of using their own teams to keep information up-to-date.

User experience of directories, once found, is not just about ‘up-to-dateness’. If carers are referred to a directory they want to be linked directly to a page relevant to their enquiry. Not sent to a home page and left to search for their destination.

We highlighted earlier comments from our website reviewer on the usability issues frequently met when going back and forth between the council website and third party services, such as directories.

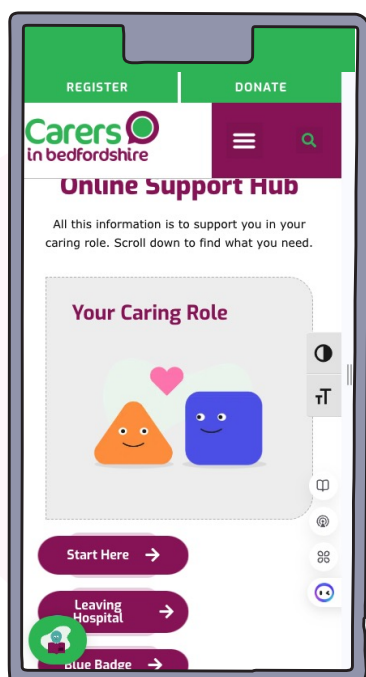
Some interviewees were clear about the shortcomings of current directory provision:

*“We signpost to our provider hub, which if I’m honest is quite difficult to navigate based on feedback we’ve had. It’s quite clunky and I don’t think it has the full range of organisations on there.”*

*“We do try and coordinate to make sure that it doesn’t matter which [directory] you hit, you should find the information. But it is difficult.”*

A good directory can make a big difference for carers. Several third-party providers in the region offer really useful information accessible in a number of formats including video, chat bots and the ability to easily book a call.

Interviews revealed that reviews of directory provision are likely or possible in at least half of the region’s councils in the next 12 – 24 months.



## Councils recognise the challenges around linking to commissioned directories, carer support services and non-commissioned websites

We asked: Who is responsible for ensuring a smooth customer journey to and from the council website and commissioned directories and other online information and services (e.g. self-assessment forms)?

A number of interviewees told us that responsibility for 'usability' including the back and forth between the council website and third party sites was split between different teams.

One council said, a 'contact team' was responsible for signposting and the corporate web team 'ensures usability', another said that the corporate web team was responsible, in collaboration with ASC teams.

How this actually works in different councils may be worth further exploration. For our website reviewer, this was clearly a problem area:

"Seeking a Carer's Assessment I was sent first to a charity site, and then another associated but different site. Each time I had to accept or decline cookies, and navigate other pop-ups, as well as adjust to a different look and feel."

**Some councils are putting considerable effort into getting linking right:**

*"For any of the sources that we link, it should be our responsibility to check that they are correct and up to date if we've linked them off our website. I think it's important that we check that we're sending people to the right place."*

There were a wide range of answers to this question. One council said there was no strict policy, with relevant teams recommending links based on service needs. Another said: "The IAG steering group should oversee, but this has been inconsistent."

Other councils take a stronger line:

- "What we wouldn't do is link to something that we either don't commission or don't know is verified and we're really strong on that."
- "At the moment it's been based on essentially what we directly commissioned to minimise potential confusion. We tend to signpost to the more local offers that we directly commission."

We asked: Who is responsible for ensuring that the information provided by commissioned third party sites is consistent (e.g. if the carer assessment process is described on the council site and on a third party site, the description needs to be consistent)?

Again, answers to this question were varied, ranging from “service providers are responsible for maintaining listings”, “responsibility has not yet been assigned”, “one of our subject matter experts who’s qualified to make to make that judgement call” and “combination of content owners, carers, and service providers”, to “commissioners monitor and review external site links periodically.”

**One council working with AI-driven services said this was a whole new area to master:**

*“A new skill for us to learn is how you tell AI what to pull through. Because there’s a danger that AI goes off and pulls through all sorts of things. So I think one of the things that we recognised in the last meeting was it was pulling through some random companies because it was going off to search Google.”*

## To what extent carer support services are valued for their online offering

The interviews showed that every council in the region commission carer support services.

Many of these services provide online information, sometimes in the form of a directory. In other instances councils are embracing newer technologies like those provided via Bridgit and Mobilise.

Most interviewees felt a strong online offer within these services was likely to become more important in future:

- “Caring is diverse and people have different preferences. I believe digital is the way to go. And at the moment, I don’t think we’re really utilising that at all.”
- “I think we have a huge problem at the moment with the accessibility to services for people who can’t do Monday to Friday 9 till 5:00.”
- “We have to prepare for the future [being] increasingly online.”

## Councils are recognising AI is an opportunity for bespoke information provision

ASC pages on council websites offer a huge range of directories, external links, contracted carer support services leaving carers or other users unsure of where to go for specific information.

AI-driven tools that can gather information from many sources and deliver personalised information provide a new approach to this problem.

Asking councils about future plans to commission these sort of AI tools revealed that some are already using AI tools from Mobilise and Bridgit.

## Only one council appears to take carer self-assessment beyond triage

Our website survey identified four councils that offered carer’s self-assessment online. It was beyond the scope of this research to test these assessments. Based on what we were able to observe, only one of these (that provided by Suffolk) appears to go beyond simple triage ahead of a traditional, person-to-person assessment session.

The Suffolk process appears to provide access to personalised support, in the way that a traditional face-to-face assessment would - without requiring a person-to-person session.

Two councils are looking at online self-assessment available via tools like Bridgit or Mobilise, and others are considering it. Four councils said they were not discussing this possibility.

## Do councils have a clear picture of what good online provision for carers look like?

We asked interviewees to say what they thought their site would score on a scale of 1-10 in the website review.

Four councils were pretty accurate in their prediction.

For the rest it was noticeable that poor performing sites all believed they would do significantly better than they did. Four top performing sites did better than they believed they would, one significantly so.

Part of knowing what good looks like is being able to point to other websites that perform well.

When we asked: Can you name any councils that provide excellent carer web pages/facilities, interviewees were generally hesitant. Suffolk and Hertfordshire were mentioned by two regional councils thought to perform well.

## Learnings from the region's 2022 survey

Interviewees from seven of the region's councils were aware of the 2022 survey and of these, most were able to describe issues called out in the report and their subsequent efforts to resolve them. Areas of action mentioned included:

- Improving navigation for mobile users
- Work on user journeys
- Better integration of information for carers and those with care needs
- Home page visibility for carers
- Clarity in financial information
- Links to commissioned services
- Using accessible language

*"Since 2022 what we've certainly done is respond to the feedback you provided last time and make some changes."*

## The results of our 2024 survey will be widely shared

Just as there are many different teams and individuals involved in planning and delivering councils' online offer for carers, interviewees suggested that the survey results and report would be widely shared:

- “I’ll be taking it out to co-production and speaking with our web team. We’ll be making a plan about how to improve that from there.”
- “We would want to take it to the council transformation group that is looking at IAG, digital and resilience.”
- “[We would present it to] Strengthening Adult Social Care (SASC) Board (includes Director of ASC and Heads of Service) Carers Partnership Board Data & Digital Team for implementation.”

## Councils agree regional sharing of learnings around online provision would be helpful

We asked interviewees if they would find it helpful to attend a workshop on what good looks like in terms of online carer provision.

Representatives from all twelve councils said they would be interested and suggested a wide range of colleagues might attend including Senior Leadership Team, Carers representatives, commissioners, carer support organisations, IAG team members and Corporate Web Teams.

“We need to be sharing as much data and information as we’ve got, particularly in the AI and development space.”

# Appendix 1

## Website review question sets and anonymised scores 2025.

Local Authority	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
<b>Carers' Assessment and wider emotional support</b>												
Start in Google: Carer's Assessment + name of council without 'Council'. Is a relevant result found on page 1 of Google	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
If no result is found on page 1 of Google, search with name of council eg Cambridgeshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
From the Google result page can you quickly find information about Carer's assessments	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Does the information about the Carer's Assessment make it clear that any carer is entitled to ask for an assessment, it is not means tested?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
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	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
Does it suggest how long you'll need to wait for an assessment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Is it possible to apply for a Carer's Assessment online	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Can you do a Carer's Assessment online - that will potentially lead to support	X	X	X	1	1	0	0	X	1	X	X	1
Is the carer role described and acknowledged on the main carers' page	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
There should be some acknowledgement of the challenges and reassurance about the existence of services that can help												
On the carers' main page or other prominent page is there a link to information about support for the person being cared for?	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Link should be something like 'support for the person you are caring for'												
Can you find information and services around carer wellbeing - eg a self-help group, directory or support organisation for carers	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Choose a link and check it - does it land on a page with relevant information	1	1	X	1	1	X	1	1	1	1	1	1

Can I easily find courses or other learning support around the role and challenges of being a carer	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Can you find or link to information about health condition-specific information and support eg link to NHS.UK and charities for dementia, Parkinsons etc	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Choose a condition-specific service found. Does contact link go to meaningful page (ie not fundraising) with useful information	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	X	1	1
Is sufficient information provided and information given to enable immediate contact to be made without eg having to register or jump other hurdles?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Back to the council carers page, does it mention 'respite care' or 'breaks for carers' or similar AND say how these can be accessed	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
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	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
Does a search in this directory quickly produce any useful results for advice/services around 'incontinence' eg in the first page of results	X	X	0	1	X	X	X	0	X	0	0	1
Does a site search for the Carer's assessment return the correct result listed in the first five results?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Using site search, can you easily find how to complain about an experience with Adult social care services. Use search term 'complain' and comment on the experience	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Regardless of their performance in resolving requests, did pages present as friendly and welcoming	1	1	1	1	X	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Was the content concise, in plain English and free of jargon?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Overall, how do you rate the journey plus task completion?	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	3	4	3	3	4

4 = v gd; 3 = gd; 2 = unsatisfactory; 1 = poor; 0 not found/unavailable.

Would you recommend that other councils look at this implementation as an example of good practice?	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
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Local Authority	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
<b>Topic: Financial support</b>												
Start at council home page. Can you find the term 'Carer' by scrolling the home page? You should not need to click on a link or dropdown	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Is it clear that a Care Needs Assessment AND a financial assessment is needed to determine whether financial support is given	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Is the financial assessment process AND how to apply explained clearly	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Is information provided about other social care support that might be available free of charge like eg minor home adaptations, disabilities support grant, home from hospital	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Is there recognition in the text/ presentation that the reader may be a carer rather than a person with care needs themselves?	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
From the pages about 'paying for care' can you find links to information about financial support for carers including Carers Allowance?	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
If N to above, go to carers' main page. Can you find information about Carer's Allowance and how to apply	1	0	1	n/a	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	0	1
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	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
There should be information on benefits, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Credit, Council tax reductions etc and fact that some people may get DPs from council once assessed												

Can you find information on employment rights for people caring for someone with suggestion of issues eg taking time off, flexible working or unpaid carers' leave	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Does a site search for financial support for carers return the correct result listed in the first five results?	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
Was the content concise, in plain English and free of jargon?	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Regardless of their performance in resolving requests, did pages present as friendly and welcoming and supportive	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Overall, how do you rate the journey plus task completion?	4	2	3	3	4	1	4	2	4	4	2	4
<b>4 = v gd; 3 = gd; 2 = unsatisfactory; 1 = poor; 0 not found/unavailable.            2 &amp; below = FAIL so please justify scoring in comment.</b>												
Would you recommend that other councils look at this implementation as an example of good practice?	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1

# Appendix 2

## Interview questions

### About the interviewee

- Name
- Job role
- Responsibilities
- Proportion of time spent on website related work

### Responsibility for the performance of the ASC web pages

- Who has ultimate responsibility for ASC web pages/facilities?
- Who has ultimate responsibility for the carers' pages/facilities within them
- Who else is involved in planning/delivery?
- When was the most recent review/overhaul of the carer pages?
- What testing/feedback activity has been done recently on the carers' pages/facilities?
- Has co-production been used in connection with any review/development/planning on carers' pages/facilities?

### The 2022 survey results and impact

- Was the interviewee aware of the 2022 survey and report prior to being sent it?
- If yes, what actions if any were prompted by the survey results?
- Many of the questions in 2025 are the same as those in 2022, how does the interviewee think their current website will perform on a scale of 1-10 where 10 is the top score?
- When the results of this year's survey are available, who will consider them?
- To what extent do you work with the corporate web team on issues like navigation, image use, search, mobile-friendliness, plain English and other 'site wide' considerations?
- Perceived importance of the web site offer for carers and what it should cover
- What is the purpose of the web pages/tools provided by the council for carers?
- Is this purpose written into eg the Carers' Strategy and who 'owns' it?

### What are the three most important areas of information and advice that should be covered by the council website?

- Who is responsible for the content on the carers pages (preparation and sign-off)?
- Do you provide a directory of services (eg covering VCE delivered services, self-help groups, and other things carers may find helpful) commissioned from a third party?
- If yes, how is the directory commissioned, who is responsible for commissioning and how is the service evaluated
- Does the council commission a carer support service that has an online presence that provides information/advice/guidance/services?
- If yes, what is the name of this service?
- If yes, how is the carer support service commissioned, who is responsible for commissioning and how is the service evaluated?
- How important is the online support provided by an external carer support service when competing offers are compared?
- Who decides what external services should be linked to (eg Ask Sara, Carers UK) and how are these evaluated?
- Who is responsible for ensuring a smooth customer journey to and from the (.gov.uk) council website and commissioned directories and other online information and services (e.g. self-assessment forms)?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that the information provided by commissioned third party sites is consistent (e.g. if the carer assessment process is described on the council site and on a third party site, the description needs to be consistent)?
- What other online resources does the council think carers will go for information?
- Can you name any councils that provide excellent carer web pages/facilities?

### Future plans for the web pages/facilities within context of overall carers programme

Ask specifically whether these are likely to happen in the next 12-24 months

- directory commissioning/re-commissioning
- online self-assessment for people with care needs
- online self-assessment for carers needs
- commissioning of carer support including provision of online information, advice and guidance
- commissioning of AI tools that assess carers' needs and push appropriate information, advice and services to carers
- commissioning of bots or AI assistants to help people find what they need from the website
- Would the interviewee find it helpful to attend a workshop on what good looks like in terms of online carer provision?
- If yes, who in the ASC team should attend?

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

[info@mobiliseonline.co.uk](mailto:info@mobiliseonline.co.uk)



[mobiliseonline.co.uk](https://mobiliseonline.co.uk)