

# Emerging and developing work to support carers across the East of England



# Foreword

In the East of England we are proud of our collaborative work and have put considerable time and effort into our Sector-Led Improvement Programme. This has supported real improvements and innovation both locally and regionally.

Improving our support to carers is a key priority across the East, not only because we want to ensure the region is responding to what matters to carers, the people who are being cared for and their families, but also because it is recognised that carers provide vital care in our communities and should always be well supported and valued by the sector.

The *State of Caring Report*, produced by Carers UK in 2019, highlighted the views and experiences of 8,000 current and former carers. It had the following key findings:

**Caring costs:** almost 2 in 5 carers (39%) responding to the survey said they are “struggling to make ends meet”. Over two thirds of carers (68%) reported regularly using their own income or savings to pay for care or support services, equipment or products for the person they cared for.

**Cuts to support:** 1 in 8 (12%) of carers reported that they or those they support received fewer care or support services during the previous year due to a reduction in the amount of support from social services.

**Carers put themselves last:** 53% of carers said that they are not able to save for their retirement, and almost two thirds of carers (64%) say that they have focussed on the care needs of the person they care for, and not on their own needs.

We want to listen to feedback from carers locally and regionally, as well as other key messages provided through national organisations such as Carers UK, to ensure we are responding to what matters to our carers and their loved ones.

From our ongoing regional assurance process, we recognise that our support to carers is less than we would like. We are committed to supporting improvement in this area and are pleased to share the examples included within this report. We hope that they will support others to drive improvement.

**Nick Presmeg**

*Regional Chair of the Eastern Region ADASS Branch*

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# Introduction

As a starting point, the Carers Network was keen to develop a report which shows the work being undertaken within the region in order to share practice and hopefully avoid duplication. The report responds to the East of England Directors of Adult Social Services annual self-awareness process which highlighted the need for further work in relation to carers. A stocktake analysis including looking at the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats, and observations/discussions was undertaken as part of the Regional Carers Network Meeting which takes a themed approach to improvement. There are further pieces of focused work being undertaken to complement this such as a 'Building Positive Futures' learning group with Bringing Us Together, which will explore reaching out to unpaid carers and include feedback from people with lived experience of adult social care.

The report is split into a number of different categories which are important to improvement work highlighting examples of what local authorities are putting in place in order to respond to the needs of carers. The categories broadly cover the following themes: digital technology, support to care providers, working with the voluntary/ community sector and the NHS and responding to what matters to carers through co-production.

We hope you find the report of interest.



# Innovative approaches to carer identification and support services including digital technology



## Hertfordshire County Council

# Online carer's In Case of Emergency Plan form

We have developed a process for carers to complete an 'In Case of Emergency Plan' via an online portal. The portal allows them to input directly into our records system, ensuring a carer's record is created immediately.

Carers were consulted regarding changes to the forms which have been tried and tested. They also asked us to change from the former name of 'Contingency Plans', as 'In Case of Emergency Plan' made more sense to them. They asked us to provide a completed example of the form on our webpage to help carers understand what sort of information is required.

The portal system avoids our staff having to transfer information from word documents or paper forms and it gives carers another option if they prefer not to arrange a conversation with a Social Worker to complete the form.

The form can be found [here](#).

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## Suffolk County Council

# Video carephones

Suffolk has an ambitious plan around the use of digital and care technologies (Digital Care) which they continue to build on year on year. In the last year, the Council appointed a team of Digital Care Advisors to support social work colleagues with accessing, understanding and assessing for proportionate care technology solutions that provide enhanced outcomes. Suffolk are also at the final stage of appointing a long term partnership to create the necessary infrastructure and environment to build a resilient delivery model for care and digital technologies to support residents, and the wider health and care system.

As part of its Covid-19 response, Suffolk commissioned a technology solution (video carephones) to keep vulnerable residents connected to formal and informal support networks. This project provided significant insight into areas of opportunity and development which will be taken into our long term partnership, as well as having provided critical engagement and support for many people during restrictions.

During the project Suffolk made some reflections, that relatable case studies are needed to give carers and carer organisations the confidence to actively promote these offers. Take-up across the county was really slow to start with. The Council also learned that upon receipt of the phones families needed further support to set up the basic functions, such as entering family contact details, otherwise there was a risk that the phone would remain unused. It wasn't enough to make a compelling case for having a phone, people needed practical support to make it happen. Similarly, care providers and other providers needed to experience using a phone in order to be able to confidently promote it to suitable people.

As a result of the project, there has been a significant reduction in levels of loneliness and increased mental health and wellbeing for carers and people being cared for through the help of digital technology. It is anticipated that this project will help keep people independent and away from acute services, and more costly social care services interventions, for longer.

Further information can be found [here](#).

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## Norfolk County Council

# Keeping in touch with carers during the pandemic

Norfolk County Council have undertaken the following as part of winter planning and Covid-19 second lockdown response:

- Sent text messages to ALL carers registered with GP surgeries across the county, to make them aware of the new Carers Service and Emergency Planning Offer.
- Sent a text to 14,000 people who were shielding, to raise awareness of the Carers Service and Emergency Planning Offer.
- Sent leaflets via our Carers Service and Emergency Planning Offer to ALL pharmacies in the county.
- Shared information with staff in the acute, mental health and community health settings to ensure the provision and access to timely advice and information to carers.
- Set up a group to specifically focus on digital inclusion for carers of all ages.

Evaluation of the project is currently underway but it is expected that a high percentage of carers will be reached by a number of services and professionals, and have their awareness raised regarding support and services available. This in turn will enable them to access timely support and reduce the risk of carer breakdown.

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## Bedford Borough Council

# Moving to a range of virtual methods of contacting and supporting carers during the pandemic

In 2020 Bedford Borough Council worked with carers in Bedfordshire to respond rapidly to the pandemic by immediately moving to a range of virtual methods of contact and support. Staff were redirected from carers' lounges, cafes and support groups to undertake proactive calls to all carers with the most vulnerable receiving more regular calls or video calls where preferred. Video conferencing meetings allowed carers to continue to share peer support and attend virtual seminars as well as support groups and activity groups. This included young carers. In addition to this range of options, websites and social media channels started to be more fully utilised, including YouTube channels offering a range of options for carers to engage in a way they were comfortable with. Targeted postal information and phone contact was immediately implemented for those without email along with 'door step' visits where allowed under local and national restrictions.

This work has continued and the Council has continued to monitor engagement levels to ensure that carers can access support if required. Many carers were impacted by the initial closure of day centres, and as a result care management teams took direct action to contact those carers to discuss their current needs and what support was available. The offer has also changed and reacted as the pandemic has moved through its various stages, and will be kept under constant review as we move forward together.

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## Norfolk County Council

# A carer's Social Impact Bond

Norfolk's enhanced Carers Matter Norfolk service was launched on 1 September 2020. This five year contract is being delivered via a Social Impact Bond (SIB) model, supported by up to £4.1m from the Life Chances Fund focussed on delivering outcomes based contracts through a SIB. The contract involves delegation of statutory duties so that the carer's service can provide a dynamic carers assessment supported by a toolkit of interventions rather than it being managed by the Council. It is the first SIB focused on carer support in England and Wales. Commitment to a five year programme of transformation that will provide an evidence base of national interest for investing in carer support to reduce the costs of carer breakdown.



The Institute for Public Care (IPC) is evaluating the project but it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of carers known to the Council; the project will improve organisational and individual understanding of the role of carers and the support that is available to them; it will enable a seamless carer pathway – from universal access to specialised services that prevent carer breakdown; help to achieve accurate and timely identification and recording of risk to carers wellbeing; accurate recording and understanding of the carer pathway; increased understanding and knowledge of the interventions required to support the wellbeing and maintenance of the caring role – reducing the incidence of avoidable carer breakdown; innovation and creativity in developing services and support that prevent the incidence of carer breakdown; improve carer satisfaction with the Norfolk carer support offering; provide evidence and funding to identify the optimal investment in carers; generate long term social care savings through improved demand management.

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## Essex County Council

# Thinking Ahead, Family to Family Programme

Essex County Council commissioned the Thinking Ahead, Family to Family Programme which is a niche service that has been developed by two key partners within the Essex Carers Partnership. It provides practical planning support to family carers of young people and/or adults with a learning disability and/or autism. There is a guide which offers support around making choices, planning for the future and keeping safe, housing support and emergency planning. The delivery partners have been working with a group of eight family carers in Essex to train them up to deliver the guidance to further families in Essex, enabling the development of peer support networks and the growth of their own capabilities, skills, resilience and confidence. The training enables family carers to develop their skills, utilise what they have learnt in the caring role to share with others, provide them with new skills for delivering workshops and communicating effectively with others, help others to take on board what they have learnt in the sessions and feel confident at answering questions and guiding others.

Carers using the service reported increased confidence and knowledge with the use of the guides. Working with the provider to look at how the model can be scaled up to reach more carers, and utilised by carers of elderly people/people with dementia/people with mental health issues. Social care staff in the Learning Disabled and Autism teams use the guide in conversations with family, to provide guidance and support around key areas of economic, social and personal wellbeing and planning for emergencies.

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## Information, advice and support services for informal adult carers

Thurrock Council commissions an information, advice and support service for informal adult carers. Due to Covid-19 the service has adapted and managed to respond by moving many of its services to a digital platform. They have supported and encouraged carers to utilise technology during this period resulting in a larger number of people engaging digitally – this is an unforeseen consequence of the pandemic. It has been very successful and has helped reduce social isolation by moving peer support groups and social activities online – including a virtual garden party in the summer and a Christmas party as well as regular quizzes. The Council is looking to build on this and improve technology enabled care solutions to carers and is exploring options to further enhance digital offer/solutions. In addition to this the carers' service has regularly kept in contact with carers over the telephone – a weekly chat has been a lifeline to many carers and has made a real difference to people's wellbeing.

In conjunction with the carers service, social workers and support planners prioritised carers' needs at the beginning of the pandemic. The needs of carers have been paramount and social workers have had detailed conversations with the people they support and their families about receiving ongoing/resumed/alternative support whilst balancing risk. With the closure of services or an increase in risk, this has also meant Adult Social Care working with providers and sometimes doing things in a different way e.g. home or community based respite rather than group/building based respite.

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# Innovative approaches to working with carer provider services



## Carers' Covid-19 response group

Bi-weekly meetings were put in place, consisting of adult social care and mental health commissioners, adult social care operational (including dementia) community support teams, various carers support providers, learning disability support, Age Concern and care co-ordination services, to facilitate quick responses to supporting carers during the pandemic.

This was a great way to open up communication channels, not only to share information, such as most recently on flu vaccinations, but also to get things done at pace such as communications in 'one voice' to carers at the beginning of the crisis. Every meeting starts with "what carers are telling us" and we work together to solve any issues quickly.

It has already resulted in speedy implementation of change, such as temporarily changing Carers Emergency Response Service criteria for carers so more could access it more quickly and easily. This decision was made in about 10 minutes rather than the days, weeks and months that it would previously have taken.

As a result, more carers have received support even though budget restrictions have been a challenge, but the response has been helpful at peak crisis times and there has been useful learning for future commissioning. In addition, the "what carers are telling us" section within the group meetings has resulted in working with a provider that offers a short term grant, to amend their offer to be out in the community (rather than at the leisure centre which is not very easy to access during restrictions), and focus their offer on carers who have been isolated/shielding with their cared-for the past six months – their cared-for can come along as well.

Click [here](#) for a downloadable template that carers can use to develop their own emergency plans.

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## Suffolk County Council

# Work with care provider services

Suffolk County Council has introduced a new Digital Care Advisory for providers. They met with Suffolk Family Carers and other carers' providers to develop an understanding on the best way to help providers engage more with digital care. A Digital Care forum was formed and a technical demonstration for family care providers took place in January 2020.

During this work, the Council found that providers were not always as tech savvy as they said. Confidence within the organisation could be tempered by a lack of time to develop the skills needed, finding 'old ways' easier to continue with. The pandemic has shown that when faced with alternative choices such as presented by the lockdown, better conditions for innovation can be created. This is about people in the community and their willingness to engage, until they can see the immediate and longer term benefits of adapting to new ways and ideas.

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## Norfolk County Council

# Forging strong links with carers' services to help carer identification

*Please refer to the case study in section B, Social Impact Bond (SIB) ([page 8](#)).*

As part of the SIB, the Council are forging strong links with Carers Service, Carers Matter Norfolk and Carers Voice. The Norfolk Carers Lead attends regular meetings with the services and carer user groups, to support with identification of carers and share information on upcoming initiatives and work being delivered. The Carers Lead is also engaging with young carer and parent carer groups. The Carer Lead has also forged links with the acute, community health and mental health settings; is going to be part of user groups; and has shared information on the new service, to be provided to staff and in turn given to carers; to aid with identification and signposting to support.

This means that carers are reached across all cohorts; provided with access to key details and information and are able to have their voice heard, and shape service developments.

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## Central Bedfordshire Council

# Carers assessments/front door

The Council is working with our commissioned provider Carers in Bedfordshire (CiB), to align the assessment processes for carers and externalise our 'front door'. This will mean ensuring that questions asked in assessments will be agreed across both organisations; systems will need to be linked to allow referrals to be made straight in from CiB to the Council to create a workflow for a social worker, and allow any support plans put in place to be sent back to the provider to enable them to continue to provide full personalised support to the carer.

Central Bedfordshire Council are in initial discussions at the moment, however they have noted that of the c.4500 carers in the county, only c.700 of these are known exclusively to the Council, c.300 are known to both the Council and CiB, and c.3500 are known exclusively to CiB; showing that most people already go to the provider first. This approach will enable a more joined up service for carers.

At this stage the learning has been in looking at the similarities and differences between the assessment processes of the organisations, and the differences in recording. The work will ensure that carers do not slip between the gaps when they are signposted to the Council as it will be a direct referral. It will also ensure better support for carers once a support plan is put in place, and ensure carers only having to tell their story once

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## Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough

# Carers in Bedfordshire triage

Carers in Bedfordshire (CiB) assess everyone who contacts them and triages each carer according to their needs to either level 1, level 2 or level 3. They then allocate their resource accordingly – level 2 will receive quarterly calls and have access to groups and level 3 receive the highest level of support, phone calls every month, potentially a support worker to attend meetings with them, and so on. This means that those carers most in need are not being missed, and both CiB and the Council are assured that the resource is being allocated appropriately.

This has been really positive. Carers are getting appropriate levels of support and are reassessed when needed.

Click [here](#) for further information.

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# Innovative approaches to working with the voluntary/community sector to identify support to carers



## Respite services – carers' vouchers

A Carers Voucher scheme has been operational in Central Bedfordshire for many years and, although Direct Payments to carers are also available, vouchers remain popular because of their simplicity for the customer. Although the focus of the scheme is to offer a sitting service (to allow carers a break) Age UK can also provide gardening and some other services as part of this offer.

Vouchers can also be used alongside other forms of support such as home care and Direct Payments. Although there is sometimes confusion about what the vouchers can be used for, the scheme remains popular with carers as, unlike some other forms of support, it is clearly for the benefit of the carer and can offer them a rare chance to get a break from their role without the feelings of guilt that many would otherwise experience.

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# Innovative approaches to working with the NHS to identify and support carers

(e.g. GP practice, social prescribing)



## Norfolk County Council

# Working closely with the NHS to reach out to carers

Links to Social Impact Bond ([page 8](#)).

Norfolk has worked closely with NHS colleagues to send text messages to carers registered with ALL GP surgeries to make them aware of the new Carers' Service and other support available. The Council is also working with the acute, mental health and community settings, to attend user groups, team meetings and staff engagement sessions to promote #Think Carer.

All services involved are aware of support available, including how to identify a carer and the ability to signpost them to appropriate advice/support.

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## Central Bedfordshire Council

# MacMillan welfare rights

Macmillan Cancer Support and Central Bedfordshire Council are working together to ensure people diagnosed with cancer, as well as their families and carers, can access the support they are entitled to. This includes: identifying benefit entitlements; making applications; challenging decisions; applying for grants; and accessing local support services and equipment.

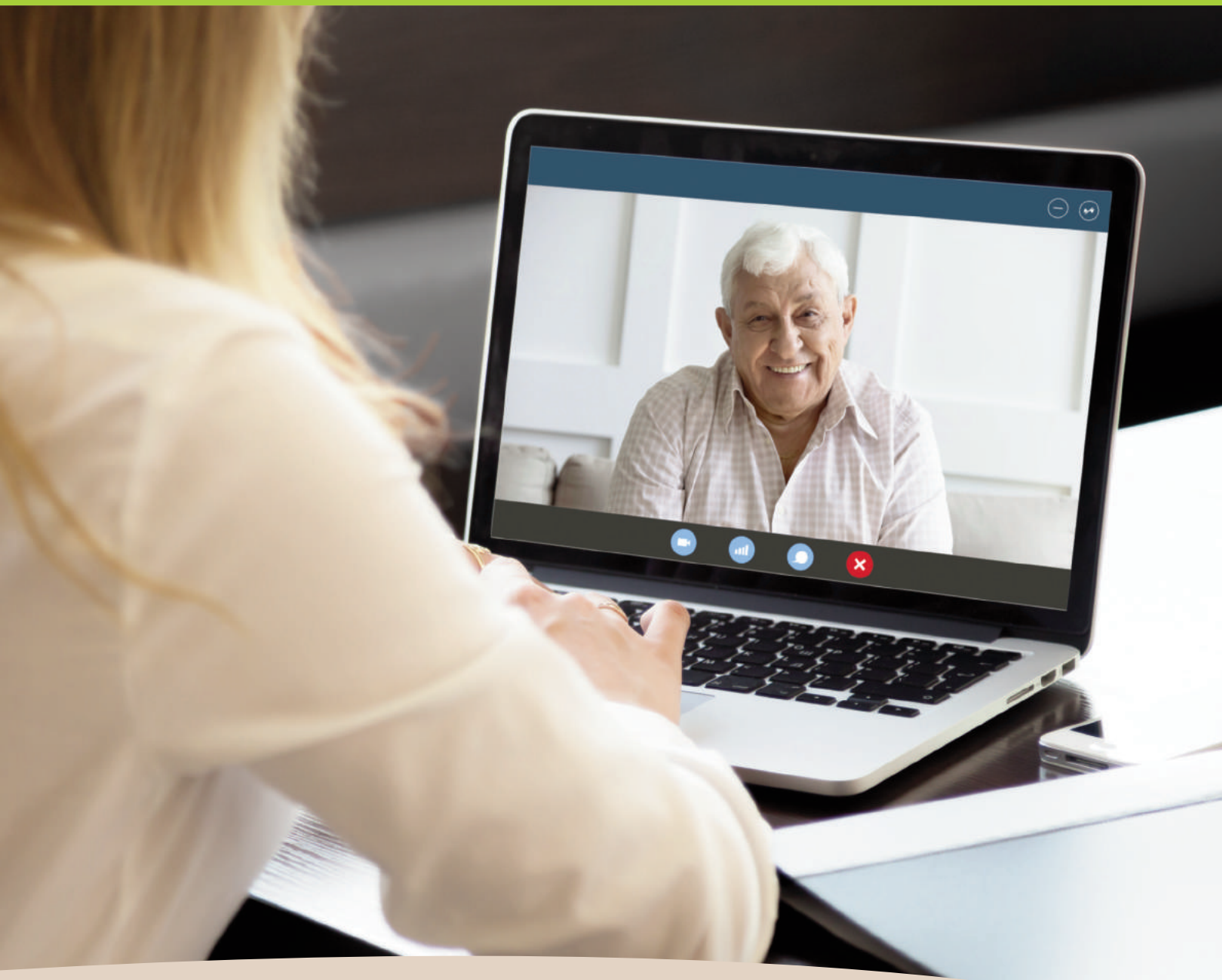
Macmillan Cancer Support and Central Bedfordshire Council are particularly aware that carers supporting cancer patients can see their changes to their income as a result of their caring responsibilities; this is when a benefit entitlement check and advice around entitlements and statutory payments is essential. Carers may be facing extra expenses, such as increased travel costs associated with caring for or supporting a cancer patient, and support to maximise their income can help to alleviate financial hardship they may face. Often people are left wondering how they're going to deal with the benefit system, meet their housing costs, manage the rising costs of heating bills or cover new expenses such as trips to hospital and car parking charges. Access to this advice is invaluable.

It is anticipated that £2.6m annual equivalent benefits are gained across Bedfordshire in 19/20.

Click [here](#) for further information.

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# Innovative approaches to working with carers themselves to co-produce services



## Norfolk County Council

# Regular co-production sessions with carers

From March 2020, as part of the launch of the Norfolk Social Impact Bond, the Council began holding regular co-production sessions with carers to inform them of the changes to services; why they were occurring and to seek their views about what they wanted from services. The sessions were incredibly useful and helped to improve on existing relationships between service users and carers.

Carers felt included and consulted about key changes to their service delivery.

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## Central Bedfordshire Council

# Working Together for Change – carers' engagement

Central Bedfordshire Council are undertaking carers' engagement for the development of the current carers' offer by working with Groundswell Partnership through a process called Working Together for Change.

This is a citizen-led approach for co-producing changes to services through person-centred commissioning and service development. The approach uses information collected from local people to shine a light on what is working well, what is not working so well and what may need to change for the future, to ensure support is tailored to people's needs and aspirations. Working Together for Change is an 8-step process (prepare, collect, theme, understand, identify success, plan, implement and review), and is designed so that it can be embedded within the core commissioning cycle within an organisation rather than just being used for a one-off/single use.

The approach enables the Council to have a better understanding of the current carers' offer from the perspective of the carer in order to identify current gaps and where improvements need to be made for future commissioning.



The work is anticipated to result in an improved carers' offer for carers in Central Bedfordshire which will enable the carer to be able to better support themselves in their caring role, as well as understanding the needs of the cared-for better. Carers will be supported in accessing the information, advice and guidance available to them, as well as having more awareness of the options and opportunities available to them for support. The Council would also expect to see an improvement in carer's wellbeing, which should also help to prevent carer crisis situations, carer's breakdowns and a reduction in emergency respite and the associated care costs, which would usually occur.

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## Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council

# Supporting and listening to carers

A document has been developed which provides examples of how social care practitioners are having different conversations with carers to achieve better outcomes. These case studies provide evidence that working with carers can have a positive impact on the life of carers and the person they care for.

Some of the practice relates to:

- Listening to ensure the carer feels well supported
- Duty to utilise local and community resources
- Celebrating and recognising the strengths of carers and individuals
- Flexibility about where and when carers are contacted
- People being seen as more than just their carer needs
- Knowing who to contact if things change
- Provision of independent advocacy
- Planning ahead
- Supporting carers to care
- Maintaining carers' own health
- Recognising there is a lot to learn in being a carer and that it is a skilled role
- Income maximisation
- Living with risks
- Importance of relationships

The brochure can be found [here](#).

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