

# A Healthier West Wales

## West Wales Carers Development Group

### Annual Report, 2022-2023



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## Introduction

### The Needs of Carers in West Wales

In June 2022, the West Wales Regional Partnership Board (RPB) published a new Population Needs Assessment for West Wales. A significant amount of information about the needs of the population was gathered through direct citizen engagement. This was further enhanced with the data and citizen feedback collected during our previous work to develop a Regional Carers Strategy for West Wales.

The main source of published data supporting the Population Needs Assessment was the 2011 Census. The 2021 Census results have been released since its publication and offer the most up-to-date data on the population in Wales. In total, around 311,000 people of all ages in Wales reported that they provided any amount of unpaid care in a typical week in 2021. At 10.5% of the population, this represents a 2% decrease in the number of carers reported on the 2011 census.<sup>1</sup>

While the overall number of people reporting themselves as unpaid carers in Wales has decreased since 2011, this is primarily driven by a substantial decrease in the proportion of people providing 19 or fewer hours of unpaid care per week. Most carers in Wales (44%) provide fewer than 19 hours of care for week, but 34% provide 50 or more hours of care a week, with little change in this figure since 2011 (Figure 1).

Carers Wales' 2022 report estimates that the total number of carers in Wales is closer to 500,000; this gap of 189,000 carers represents 'hidden carers', who may not recognise themselves as carers and therefore may be missing out on support.<sup>2</sup> Experts have calculated that Welsh carers contributed the equivalent of around £8.1 billion to the Welsh economy in each year. Most people who spend only very limited time on caring will not require any additional support. However, Wales has the

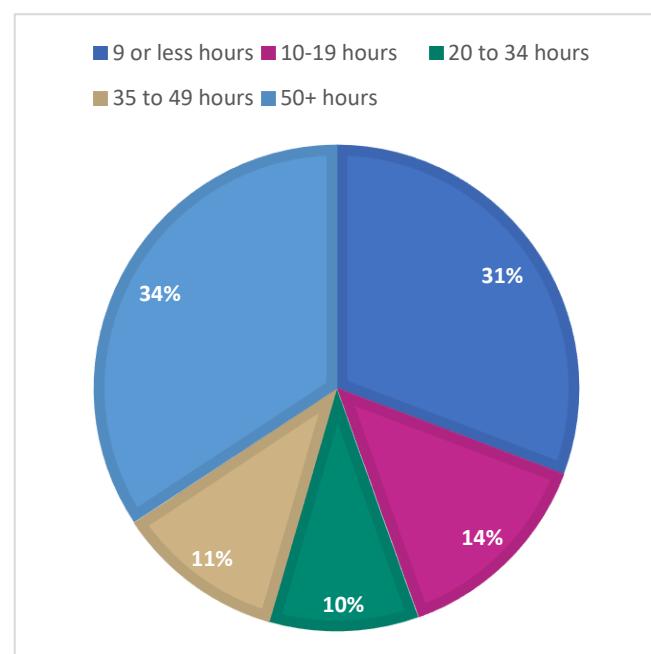


Figure 1: Weekly hours of care provided by unpaid carers in Wales (2021 census)

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2023) Health, disability and provision of unpaid care in Wales (Census 2021). <https://www.gov.wales/health-disability-and-provision-unpaid-care-wales-census-2021-html>

<sup>2</sup> Carers Wales (2022) State of Caring in Wales 2022: a snapshot of unpaid care in Wales.

highest proportion of older carers and carers providing more than 50 hours of care a week.

40,535 people in West Wales identified themselves as carers on the 2021 Census. Like national trends, this represents a 1.5% decrease in the proportion of the population identifying as carers since 2011; the breakdown by hours of care provided also aligns to the national picture, with most carers in West Wales providing 19 or fewer hours of care per week. Approximately a third of carers of all ages in West Wales provide over 50 hours of care per week; however this rises to 51% of the over-65 population of carers who provide over 50 hours of care per week. Data from the Office of National Statistics illustrates that the number of people aged over 85 is projected to increase by 27.8% between 2021 and 2031, whereas the working aged population is projected to fall by 3.1% over the same period. This is likely to place increasing pressures on the need to identify and support unpaid carers. Age Cymru's 2022 Older Carers Survey highlighted the following themes amongst carers aged 50-89:

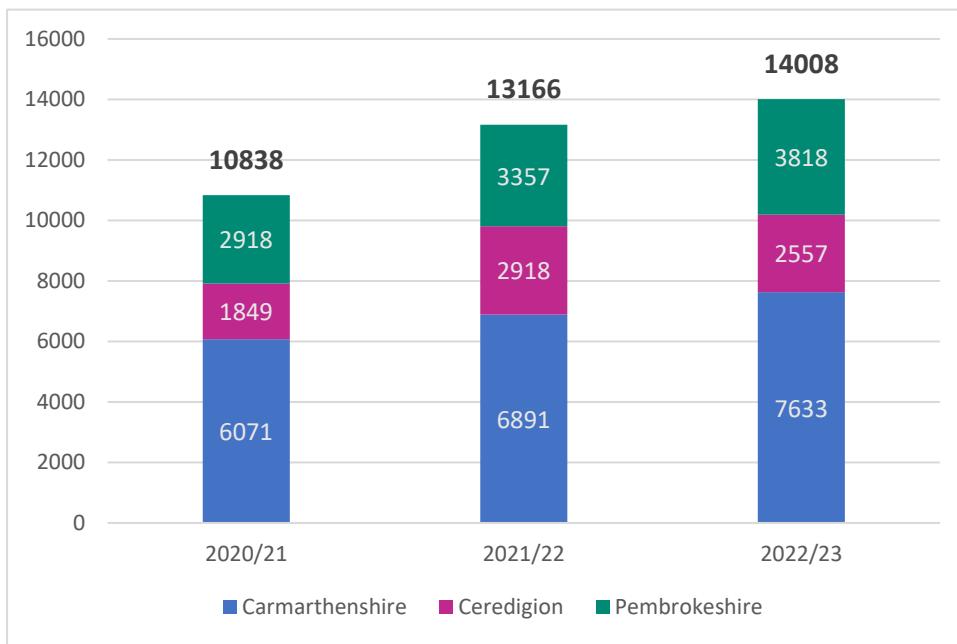
- Average self-assessed wellbeing score decreased as the number of hours caring per week increased, with an average score for those caring for more than 50 hours a week at only 36 out of 100.
- 72% of carers who completed the survey reported they do not currently receive support for their caring role.
- Lack of access to carers' services in Welsh.
- The oldest age group (80-89) had the highest levels of reporting that information for carers isn't easily accessible. This may be linked to digital inclusion, as this age group were most likely to use physical documents as a source of information and reported the lowest rates of social media usage at 11% (compared to 53% amongst those aged 50-59).
- Access to respite (34%) and financial help (27%) were areas that most respondents felt would make their lives easier.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2 shows the number of unpaid carers supported through Carers Information and Support Services each year. The services saw significant increases in the numbers of requests made for support during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to additional initiatives to identify carers as part of support being delivered throughout the pandemic. From 2021/2022 to 2022/23 there was a 6% increase in the number of carers supported across the region. This reflects positively on work across the region to improve identification of carers.

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<sup>3</sup> Age Cymru (2022) A Report on Age Cymru's 2022 Older Carers Survey.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/carers-project/carers-survey-report-final-v9.pdf>.



*Figure 2: Number of carers supported through Carers Information and Support services*

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, a total of 12,260 carers were registered at GP surgeries. This is a 6% increase on the number of carers registered at end of March 2022 (11,505). However, when compared to the 2021 census figures, this means only 30% of people in West Wales who self-identify as carers are registered with their GPs. This highlights a gap between self-identification and registration with services that can offer support to carers.

The Population Needs Assessment highlights the following gaps and areas for improvement to support carers in the region:

- Continuing improvements in the consistency of approach, information, advice, and assistance provided across the region, within a more integrated system
- Reviewing information provided to carers to ensure it is current, relevant, more accessible and easier to find
- Extending use of social media and technology to identify and provide information to carers and maintain regular contact, particularly for young carers
- Developing a single point of contact to help people navigate the system
- Ensuring respite care fits the needs of both the carer and the cared for
- Addressing the challenges of accessing support in rural areas
- Improving the statutory carers assessment process, which can be challenging, often takes too long and may not always consider carers needs appropriately
- Improving delivery of the “active offer” through the medium of Welsh. Carers want to feel comfortable using their preferred language of choice, including languages other than English and Welsh.

The Carers Wales' 2022 report highlighted the stark impact of the cost-of-living crisis on carers and the need for additional support for carers to manage their finances and access hardship funds. The Income Maximisation project launched in 2022/23 will continue into 2023/24, as this is a key project which has been prioritised by the West Wales Carers Development Group.

Another priority for the Carers Development Group in 2022/23 was to continue reviewing the support offered to young carers and engaging young carers in this process. Carers Trust Wales' 2020 report *Support Not Sympathy* found that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant impact on young and young adult carers, with 35% reporting that they care for more people than they did before the pandemic. Young and young adult carers reported higher levels of stress and poorer mental health. The report identified that young and young adult carers want and need:

- Support for their emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Help to stay connected to friends and their communities
- Breaks from their caring role and the support of specialist young carers services
- More help to balance caring, education and employment
- Support to stay fit and healthy.

## Our West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025: Improving Lives for Carers

During 2020/21 significant engagement was undertaken with carers, initially via regional and local authority based workshop discussions and then moving to the development of an online survey in response to the pandemic. 558 carers responded to our online survey including 18% who were young carers under the age of 18.

The West Wales Regional Partnership Board published Our West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025: Improving Lives for Carers in November 2020. The Strategy has established four key priority areas which take a longer-term view and set the vision for the future. These priorities were reviewed in 2023, and the Carers Development Group added “confident” to priority 4 (formerly “Support Carers to become digitally included”) to reflect that the priority was broader than getting people connected.



This report summarises the activity of the West Wales Carers Development Group (WWCDG) during the period 1st April 2022–31st March 2023. The WWCDG is a formal subgroup of the West Wales Regional Partnership Board which includes representatives of Hywel Dda University Health Board, the three local authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, and Pembrokeshire, as well as third and voluntary sector organisations, and the service users and carers representatives of the RPB have an open invitation to attend meetings.

This report provides an overview of the work which has been taken forward utilising a range of funding to ensure that carers priorities are embedded in services across the region in line with the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Funding sources include: a carers' grant provided by Welsh Government, the Regional Integration Fund and core funding from partner organisations. Welsh Government set out their expectation that health, local authorities and the third sector will work in partnership to support carers under the Act to deliver the four national priorities set out their "Strategy for Unpaid Carers" (March 2021):

- Identifying and valuing unpaid carers
- Providing information, advice, and assistance
- Supporting life alongside caring
- Supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace.<sup>4</sup>

Responding to the requirements above, and the priorities set out in the West Wales Regional Carers Strategy, form the basis of this 2022/23 Annual Report, which provides evidence of progress against each of these areas and the benefit experienced by unpaid carers.

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<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government (2021) Strategy for Unpaid Carers. <https://www.gov.wales/strategy-unpaid-carers-html>

## Investors in Carers Scheme (IiC)

On behalf of the West Wales Carers Development Group, Hywel Dda University Health Board has continued to roll out the regional Investors in Carers scheme. In addition to funding an Investors in Carers Lead Officer, the Health Board commission regional support for the IiC scheme which is delivered through Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales. The IiC scheme provides the foundation for work with health professionals in primary, community, and acute hospital settings to raise awareness of the needs of carers. The IiC scheme has been designed to be utilised by a wide range of settings including schools, libraries, local authority teams, Job Centre Plus and third sector organisations. Statutory partners are also including participation in the scheme as part of commissioning contracts with third sector providers of direct and indirect carer support.

The IiC Scheme enables settings to progress through three levels; bronze, silver, and gold and since the pandemic settings have been encouraged to collate and submit their evidence electronically. A core element of the IiC scheme is providing a simple system that enables unpaid carers to register as a carer with their GP, and the option for a referral to their local Carers Information Service who can provide information and additional support.

### What's been achieved during 2022/23

- **6** settings achieved a new Investors in Carers Award (**5** achieved their Bronze level) **3** settings also achieved their bronze revalidations and **1** at silver level.
- 64 settings are currently working on awards including **20** settings working towards Silver and **6** working towards their Gold.
- In total (since March 2013) **115** settings have achieved bronze IiC awards, **12** Silver and **3** at Gold.
- **12,260** Carers have registered with GP surgeries across the health board, and increase of 2.4% on the total registered on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 (11,973).
- **697** Carers were referred to the Carers information service via the GP surgery registration and referral process.



Pembrokeshire Libraries receiving their Silver level certificates



Carmarthenshire Safeguarding team receiving their bronze level certificate

## Carer Lead events

All organisations, teams and departments participating in the IiC scheme have an identified Carer Lead. Regular Carers Lead events have been delivered throughout the year to bring different settings together providing an opportunity for peer support, joint learning and updating on new local initiatives. During the year 72 sessions have been delivered via MS teams with a total of 811 attendees. During Carers Week and Carers Rights Dy a 'showcase' session was added to the online event which enabled other organisations to talk about the support they can give to carers. Some quotes included:

*"All the showcase presentations were so useful to me. Excellent. I really got a lot out of the session and feel better able to support and sign post the clients."*

*"Thank you for the training, very informative and good to have a better understanding of the current situation."*

On some of the session attendees were asked to score their knowledge before and after the training, this illustrates an increase in knowledge:

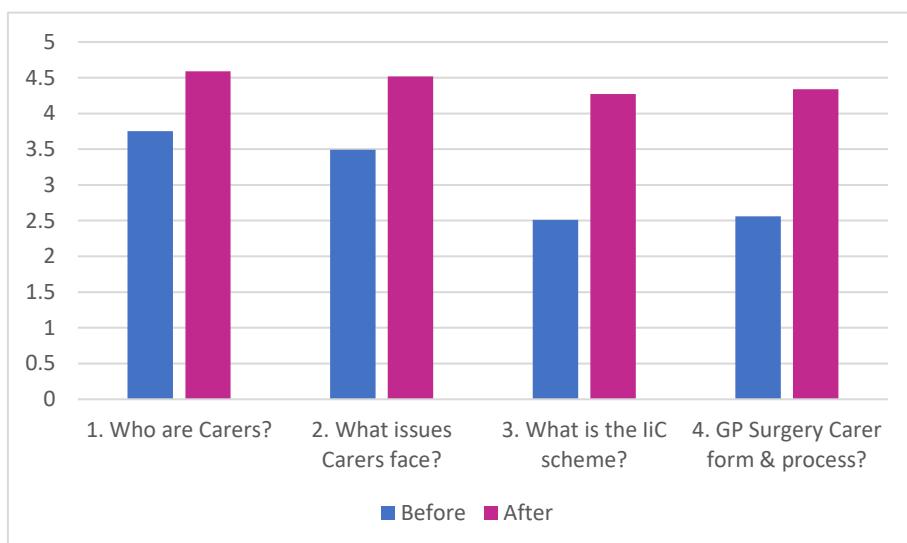


Figure 3: Feedback from Investors in Carers Carer Awareness Sessions- 156 attendees

For the first time since the pandemic, the IiC team delivered three 'in person' carer lead events attended by 87 people. 98% of participants found the event useful.

Feedback from participants included:

- *Maintain links with people I have met today.*
- *Think more collaboratively and encourage collaborative working within the team.*
- *Use Carer Lead directory and network more.*

*Importance of open communication, building trust.*

*It reinforced the importance of having an informal conversation and asking questions, such as how are you, etc.*

## Links to statutory and commissioned services

Hywel Dda University Health Board has a small, dedicated core budget to support the commissioning of specific support for unpaid carers, in line with the statutory duties set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. In Hywel Dda, support for unpaid carers is primarily provided by third-sector partners and the Health Board acknowledges the additional social value that working collaboratively with the charitable organisations can bring.

Carers Information Services have continued to take referrals and provide one-to-one support for unpaid carers across Hywel Dda. This year in Ceredigion, the Carers Unit merged with the Community Connectors to form the Carers and Community Support Team. This increased capacity within the team to reach a wider audience, including unidentified carers. All the Connectors are trained in carers issues to carers pathways and work closely with the Carers Development Officers to ensure when carers are identified they are supported to identify their needs and access services.

Illustrated below is an overview of the activity from commissioned services based on contract monitoring data for 2022/2023.

### Overview of support provided by Carers Commissioned Services (April 2022 – March 2023)

"I found the information pack very well laid out and it is a massive relief there is someone I can call upon if I need to"

"There feels like there is a light at the end of the tunnel, I am so grateful for this support"

"I really do appreciate your support, it feels so nice to feel that someone is actually in our corner"

A summary of data from our commissioned services:

- **Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales** - Information, Outreach and Young Carers Service
  - **Adferiad Recovery** - Pembrokeshire Carers Service
  - **Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers** - Outreach Service and Young Carers Service
  - **Action for Children** – Young Carers Service in Pembrokeshire

"Thank you for spending your time listening and talking to me about how my life has changed since becoming a Carer".

#### What our Carers say



#### Key Figures



**1583** new Adult Carers made contact with our services

**3311** Adult Carers were actively supported.

**287** new Young Carers made contact with the Young Carers Service.

**1332** Young Carers were actively supported.

## Planning for discharge from hospital

Hywel Dda University Health Board and its local authority partners have taken a whole system approach to support and engage carers in the discharge planning of patients and ensure active provision of Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA). Carer Officers (who are third sector employees) have been assigned to each hospital since January 2020 to support carers and staff. The Carers Officers have a specific role in supporting staff to identify carers earlier, enabling improved involvement in the discharge planning process and active provision of information and support. This service is part of a broader continuum of support that is offered to unpaid carers, who need support to manage pre-admission care, as well as post-discharge care.

The Carers Officers also work closely with the Family Liaison Officers in each hospital who refer patients and their families to the Carer Officers for carer specific support. When access to the hospitals was restricted during the pandemic training and support was undertaken remotely making the best use of digital technology. This included promoting the uptake of the Carer Aware e-learning training. Key figures from the project for 2022/23 are shown in the infographic here.



A multi-professional project team was formed to participate in the Health Board's Enabling Quality Improvement in Practice programme (EQiP) to also look at how staff and wards can improve the involvement and experience of unpaid carers during the hospital stay and discharge. Baseline data has been gathered so far from carers and staff as well as the electronic patient record using quality improvement techniques. It is hoped that solutions for improvement will be implemented in 2023/24 and then spread and scaled to other wards and hospitals.

## Supporting young carers

The early identification and self-identification of carers of all ages plays an important part in ensuring that they can access the support for their own health and wellbeing. The national Young Carer ID card was introduced in all three local authority areas in 2021/22. The card was created to enable young carers to identify themselves to GP surgeries, hospital settings and schools. Work has continued across the region to promote uptake of the card. At the end of the last financial year, a young carers' bilingual information directory was created. Over 3000 copies were distributed directly to young carers in 2022/23.



Carmarthenshire County Council's Children Services have been working in partnership with Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales to promote the Young Carers ID card, including a scheme which included provision of a LoveToShop voucher on registration for the card, to encourage uptake. The Council issued 82 Young Carer ID cards this year. Several day trips and activities were delivered for young carers in Carmarthenshire including activities such as pantomimes, bowling, and Winter Wonderland; and visits to Heatherton World of Activities, Margam Park, and the All-Wales Young Carers Festival. A total of 34 young and young adult carers participated in the activities. For many of the participants these were new experiences and feedback gained highlighted the value of these activities for providing social outlets and reducing isolation for young and young adult carers.

### Case study

In November, Carmarthenshire Young Carers Service took a group of young people to Heatherton World of Activities, Pembrokeshire, where they had the opportunity to participate in a range of indoor and outdoor activities, including go-karting, water-walking, and archery. This included a vulnerable young person, 'L', who lives with her mother, father, and 4 sisters. One of her siblings has an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis, and mum received a cancer diagnosis in 2021 and has suffered various health complications resulting from treatment. While 'L' is not the main carer, her anxiety and stress around the family situation leaves her often highly dysregulated and she has been known to abscond from school when she feels she cannot cope. Due to this risk, she is considered extremely vulnerable, and currently she is not attending school as she is waiting for a place to open at a PRU. Outside of school she has a limited social life due to her parents' concerns about her safety and putting herself in risky situations. Following a robust individual risk assessment, funding enabled the team to provide an extra staff member so that 'L' could be supervised, and her safety ensured throughout the course of the day, thus enabling her to enjoy a break from home and a valuable social experience.

Ceredigion County Council has continued to promote the Young Carers ID Cards to enable the self-identification of young carers, and since launching the Young Carers ID Card, 150 new young carers have signed up to the Carers Information Service. 43 Young Carer ID cards were issued this year.

Pembrokeshire County Council has continued to promote uptake of the Young Carers ID card, and has created a padlet which provides a single location for young carers to access information and support: [Pembrokeshire Young Carers Padlet](#).



*"I can show the [Young Carers] card to teachers and reception staff if I'm late and I don't have to explain out loud what it's for. The teachers see the card, ask if everything is okay, and then I can just get on with my day."*

-Young carer, Pembrokeshire

## Milford Haven Community Society – Young Carers project

Funded via the Supporting Community Action Fund (see page 18), this project delivered a schedule of events to support 40 young people with a caring role who would benefit from opportunities for positive engagement, and the opportunity to improve physical and mental wellbeing. The project's main objective was to offer opportunities for young carers to develop life skills, increase confidence, self-esteem and take a break to improve wellbeing.

The project helped to improve the mental health and support system for young carers with one of the recipients stating that their most enjoyable experience from the project was "*meeting new people and all of the activities*". Young carers were given the opportunity to take a break from their essential but difficult responsibilities and access support from local authorities and charities.

As a direct result of the project, there is now a weekly support group set up in Milford Haven School where young carers can go to access support, speak to others in a similar position to themselves or speak to a trained professional who is on hand to help them with referrals, signpost to further support and offer the opportunity for someone to talk to.

Added benefits of the project were to continue seeing the carers involved flourish and mix with others, socialise, and explore different skills and activities while still feeling safe in a familiar environment, or with familiar members of staff.

## Carers' resilience

Innovative and creative solutions have continued to be made available for carers with support from our third sector partners, to enable carers to access small grant pots for home improvements, resilience funds for sessional or overnight breaks away, funds to overcome barriers to accessing a break such as equipment and transport, funding support for carers events and opportunities delivered by the third sector and community led groups.

The image shows two versions of a promotional leaflet for a self-help course. The left version is in English and the right version is in Welsh. Both leaflets feature a woman sitting on a sofa, looking relaxed. The English version has a green ribbon at the top that says 'NEW'. The Welsh version has a green ribbon at the top that says 'NEW TOO'. Both leaflets include text about the course being free, available online, and designed for unpaid carers aged 18 and over. They also mention that it's available in English and Welsh. There are QR codes for scanning and websites for more information: [www.ceredigion.gov.uk/carercourse](http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/carercourse) and [www.ceredigion.gov.uk/cwrsgefaliwr](http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/cwrsgefaliwr). Logos for Ceredigion County Council and the National Assembly for Wales are at the bottom.

Ceredigion County Council

As a follow-on from previous work around carers resilience & wellbeing, Ceredigion County Council have written a **self-help toolkit for unpaid carers**. This free online course is designed to help all unpaid carers, aged 18 and over, at any stage of caring, to find ways to manage the stresses and strains of everyday life. The course launched in spring 2023 and is designed in 5 parts for carers to complete at their own pace.

<https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/resident/social-care-wellbeing/support-for-carers/self-help-toolkit-for-carers/>

**Carmarthenshire County Council** has continued to commission the Carers Resilience Project in partnership with Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales, providing a single point of access for carers seeking support with their caring role. The project links carers with a dedicated key worker to identify opportunities to promote their wellbeing and provide support to maintain their caring role. The project provides a pathway for low, intermediate, and high level needs to be identified and the key worker coordinates a full range of options such as preventative solutions delivered by third sector partners, technology solutions, respite and resilience grants, and pathways to statutory services. Carers in Carmarthenshire continued to access the Carers Exceptional Circumstance Direct Payment. This typically provides funding of up to approximately £250 and provides an avenue to support carers overcome barriers to maintaining their wellbeing through purchasing practical items associated to the caring role, or short breaks. Some of the items funded in 2022/23 included a contribution towards a specialist conference, visits to family members outside the county, Welsh classes, leisure activities and short breaks, driving lessons, and purchasing household items such as

white goods. A total of 66 carers benefitted from these payments, all for things they would not have been able to do or purchase without this funding.

Carers also accessed the Carers Exceptional Respite Direct Payment. This is a discretionary payment that provides solutions to carers' where they do not have an eligible need for respite but where the social work professional considers it would be appropriate to help the carer, by helping them with respite arrangements or associated costs. This would be in circumstances where it cannot be met by the carer themselves or from their own resources, or within the community. A total of 73 carers benefitted from these payments.

**Pembrokeshire County Council** delivered a Cost-of-Living Support programme this year, to support anyone experiencing financial hardship and in need of support, including carers, recognising the disproportionate impact of the cost-of-living crisis. 73 grants were issued to carers in Pembrokeshire this year for a range of items to support carers in their caring role. Pembrokeshire Community Hub acted as single point of contact for anyone with concerns or in need of advice and signposting to partners as appropriate. New initiatives included but not limited to:

- Keep Warm, Keep Well – various schemes
- Pembrokeshire Community Support Network being reinvigorated to promote conversations about how communities can support local people

### Carers Cards

All three local authorities now offer carers cards and are looking at how they can be used regionally across county boundaries for access to leisure, health, and social benefits, and are considering developing a standard design so that cards are easily recognisable. Counties also have emergency cards which are linked to crisis response schemes and a consistent regional approach to this is being explored.

	Carmarthenshire	Ceredigion	Pembrokeshire
<b>Carers cards issued 2022/23</b>	68	224	493
<b>Total carers cards issued</b>	662	600	1674

In Ceredigion, carers who hold a carers card can now access free membership to the council-run leisure services. Other benefits added this year include discounted access to CADW sites and other leisure destinations in Ceredigion, such as free travel on the cliff railway in Aberystwyth. In Pembrokeshire, carers can now access an annual Scolton Manor pass and the Passport to Leisure scheme, which provides a 6-month free Pembrokeshire Leisure membership.

## Pembrokeshire Supporting Community Action Fund

The **Supporting Community Action Fund** is a joint scheme supported by Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS), Pembrokeshire County Council and Welsh Government. The fund is open to constituted voluntary and community groups and social enterprises with established governance structures. The 2022/23 round of the Living Well This Winter funding recognised the ongoing challenges and pressures to providing activities and services to support vulnerable people during the winter months. The fund aimed to directly establish local activity to help alleviate demands, create additional capacity/activity, or extend existing activity. One of the 4 key priorities of the fund was supporting unpaid carers – e.g. ways to help unpaid carers take a break, ensuring unpaid carers can access information and support they need.

11 projects supporting unpaid carers were funded with just over £25,000 awarded. Projects included:



- A series of fully funded pottery and painting courses for unpaid carers, and community-based craft sessions in a community hall
- Entrance tickets to local attractions, craft materials and staff of weekly peer support sessions for young carers at a local secondary school
- Free admission for carers to a local castle and gardens
- Social activities and community cohesion for older people rebuilding lost social groups and supporting new friendships.
- Therapy dogs and robot pets for wellbeing benefits
- Community hot meals and cookery demonstrations with support and advice through the cost-of-living crisis.

## Income Maximisation project

In November 2022, Carers Wales published their 'State of Caring' report, based on survey responses to the Carers UK State of Caring online survey between July and September 2022. Over 1,000 carers in Wales took part, and the responses highlighted the unprecedented pressure that the cost-of-living crisis is having on carers. 87% of carers said that the rising cost of living is one of the main challenges they would face in the coming year, and 26% said they were cutting back on essentials such as food or heating.

Recognising this challenge, the West Wales Carers Development Group launched the Income Maximisation project in 2022/23. This project aims to provide support for carers to access financial information, advice, and support to alleviate some of the day-to-day pressures involved in providing care and help to minimise the impact of the caring role. The project was delivered in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion in 2022/23.

In Carmarthenshire, the funding enabled Carers Trust Crossroad West Wales to deliver a Money Matters Project, supported by a full-time Money Matters Carers Officer who sits within, and complements, Carmarthenshire's welfare benefits service. The purpose of the role was to ensure that carers maximise their income through grants, discounts, and concessions. This sought to bridge the gap between the welfare benefits service and the Carers Information and Outreach Service by providing an enhanced, holistic support service to address financial challenges faced by carers.

In Ceredigion, the funding enabled Gofalwyr Carers Ceredigion to extend their specialist Financial Advice Outreach worker for carers post, deliver outreach work to carers focused on finances, buy in specialist financial support services for case work as and when needed, and delivering events focused on maximizing income for carers.

The West Wale Carers Development Group recognise that this is an ongoing priority area for activity in 2023/24 and additional actions will be to:

- Establish an equivalent service in Pembrokeshire
- Maximise the use of the Regional Carers Website to promote and deliver the service
- Continue rolling out tools and resources that support carer resilience, such as the Money Saving Hints and Tips booklet
- Explore mechanisms to make the service more sustainable, such as upskilling people with lived experience to become peer mentors who could support carers groups with raising the profile of the financial health of carers to promote early intervention.

## Carers Breaks project

The Carers Breaks project was launched this year, seeking to develop a new vision for respite and short breaks in West Wales, coproduced with unpaid carers. The project developed a range of person-centred breaks for unpaid carers of all ages across the West Wales region, with the aim to improve the carers wellbeing, supporting them to have a life alongside caring. These have included:

- short breaks and holidays
- access to therapies and spa treatments
- gardening related activities and purchases
- sports, fitness, and outdoor activities
- meals out
- pursuit of hobbies and entertainment

Feedback from participants included:

*"Thank you so much for this, [young carer] is extremely excited...she's over the moon."*

*"Coming to the Carers group every Weds has changed my life. I have something to look forward to every week, something different."*

In addition to the benefits seen by carers, this project has provided a huge amount of information about what a 'break' looks like to different carers. Staff involved in the project said:

*"It's so important to carers that although it is a huge piece of work that takes a lot out of us, we want to do it. It gives us an opportunity to find out how carers are really coping and to reach out to carers who are struggling but haven't previously asked for help."*

This feedback highlights that the more adaptive and responsive short breaks model is more administration heavy and there is further work to be done to explore how this can be delivered ways which are sustainable for the organisations involved. A total of 1527 carers in West Wales benefitted from this project (Figure 4).

An example of a project funded from this fund, the People Speak Up Hybrid Day Centre Creative Service, can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/d71sN6DC5eo>

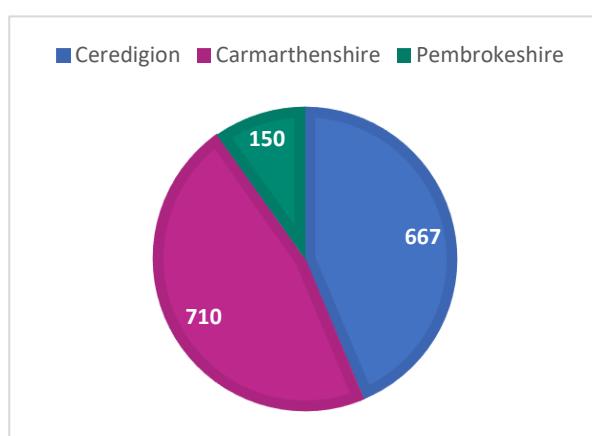


Figure 4: Project beneficiaries by county

### Short Breaks for Paediatric Palliative Care patients

Hywel Dda University Health Board's Paediatric Palliative Care and Community Nursing Service has continued to co-ordinate a short breaks scheme for carers of children with life-limiting conditions and complex caring needs. This includes young carers and parent carers of babies, children, and young people aged 0 to 25 years old. The scheme funds short breaks and family days out. Short breaks are also arranged for bereaved families where a palliative child or young person has died. Key links have been built with corporate departments in Bluestone, Folly Farm and Snowdrop mobility who go '*above and beyond*' to ensure the palliative children and young people and their families to have a stress-free break.

The all-consuming experiences and demands of caring for someone with palliative care needs can cause physical and/or mental health problems for parents, carers, or siblings from the point of diagnosis through to end of life, death, and bereavement. Short Breaks to Bluestone improve wellbeing for the whole of the family, parents, siblings, grandparents and can contribute to avoiding carer's crisis points. Families are central to the design of the break to ensure it is personalized to the needs of everyone within the family.

Folly Farm subsidises bi-annual family days out for all palliative children and young people, families, and their carers. The family days are organised and supported by the paediatric palliative care team. In recognition of the cost-of-living challenges, food vouchers are included as part of the day out. These days give the children and young people and families the opportunity to share similar experiences as their children are life-limited and threatened, often going through 'near death' episodes. Most importantly, they can spend time together and experience opportunities of being a 'normal' family in exceptional circumstances.

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*"[R] is severely disabled and has to have 24-hour care which requires a lot of my time and attention every day. With these small breaks we get away as a family. This means I get to unwind not have to worry about appointments and meetings. We get away from our everyday life for few days. We get to spend time together just doing normal family things, just simply being able to go for walks is amazing as a family we don't get to do much. The time we have at Bluestone lets us be a proper family without stress and worries. I don't know what we would do without these small breaks. These mean the world to us. My kids love when we go and smile from ear to ear and that makes me very happy"*

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## Working together to support carers

The **Carers Provider Forums** in each **county** continue to meet on a regular basis with good attendance from statutory partners, third sector providers and commissioners, to share best practice and encourage collaborative working in developing services for carers.

The Carer Aware e-learning launched in November 2018 by Social Care Wales has been cascaded out to staff working in statutory and non-statutory services via a variety of means. Hywel Dda University Health Board have been monitoring the completion of the course by its staff and during 2022/23 **182** staff completed the e-learning.

A **peer support group** for **Hywel Dda University Health Board staff** who have a caring role has been running for several years. Sessions provide an opportunity for informal peer support as well as topics presented by guest speakers e.g. introducing the Carers Policy, mindfulness session and advocacy. The Health Board's Diversity and Inclusion Team have been working together with Carers Information Services to engage with the Gypsy and Travelling community, helping to raise awareness of unpaid caring roles. This included signposting to the Carers Discharge Support Services when a lady needed support when her dad came out of hospital. The team have also been looking at new ways to raise awareness of unpaid carers within other vulnerable groups such as Armed Forces Veterans, and individuals with sensory loss and substance misuse.

**Carmarthenshire County Council** previously delivered a training course in partnership with **Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales** to **raise the profile of unpaid care**. The sessions helped staff to recognise unpaid care, the potential impact of a caring role and how they can support carers by signposting them to carers services. While capacity has impacted upon the ongoing delivery of this training, there are plans to deliver sessions during Carers Week 2023.

**Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS)** have proactively supported the delivery of a range of projects, including leading on the creation of a regional carers platform which officially launched in November 2022. **Carers Support West Wales** (see page 26) is a website which provides a single online front door for carers to access advice and support to help them in their caring role regardless of where they live in the region. A Regional Carers Platform Steering Group, including representation from Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, and Pembrokeshire County Councils was formed and partners work together to support the website. Carers have also been involved in the coproduction of the website.

## Employers for Carers (EfC)

The West Wales Carers Development Group participates in the Carers Wales Employers for Carers (EfC) scheme through an umbrella membership. Each individual partner organisation has taken forward specific actions, in addition to their collaboration as part of a regional Steering Group.

Initiatives taken forward by **Hywel Dda University Health Board** include:

- Gained the Employers for Carers Confident Level 2 with exemplary feedback.
- Continued to communicate of the Health Board Carers Policy and passport for staff.
- Targeted awareness raising training with workforce staff who support managers and employees.
- Encouraging staff with caring responsibilities to share their views and experiences Continuation of Staff Carer Peer Support Group sessions.
- Promoting awareness through sharing of personal stories; A member of this group gave her story conjunction with Carer Rights Day 2022: [Anwen's Story - YouTube](#)

The Health Board annual staff survey was launched on Carers Rights Day in November 2022. The survey and feedback provided by the 112 staff who responded provided a “temperature check” and valuable insights into the impact of caring roles for our staff who self-identify as unpaid carers. 46% said their job is negatively affected by their caring role. 30 people said that they had agreed flexible working arrangements and 9 said they had been issued the carers passport. The carers staff survey report will be used by the Health Board’s Carers Strategy group to identify further actions which can be taken to strengthen support for staff with caring roles, for example working with the Culture and Change Managers and Workforce teams.

**Carmarthenshire County Council** recruited a Lead Officer for carers in the Commissioning team. The Lead Officer is involved in raising the profile of support available to staff employed by the local authority who also have an unpaid caring role. The Lead Officer also takes part in arranging and delivering ‘Carers Matter’ Training jointly with Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales for staff employed by the county. The Lead Officer has maintained a presence at staff carer sessions on a regular basis which include Carer Champion Meetings (in the workplace), Carers Week and Carers Rights Day. The Lead Officer also has access to the EfC portal to access material to support staff. In 2023/24 the Lead Officer will be looking to introduce the Passport for Carers within the workplace and start the Bronze Award for Investors in Carers.

**Ceredigion County Council** issues a monthly carers newsletter by email to all staff, containing relevant information to those who are carers. This launched in July 2022. In

conjunction with Carers Wales, courses for managers are being delivered about the carer's passport; these include 'Starting the Conversation' and 'Carers rights for carers in employment'. Staff who are carers continue to access monthly drop-in sessions, in person and online. Some are run jointly with the Carers Wellbeing Officer and focus on specific themes such as Carers Week or cancer.

**Pembrokeshire County Council** recruited a Commissioning and Contracts Management Officer in January 2022 who took the lead for unpaid carers within the local authority. The member of staff has signed up to the EfC portal to access material to support staff and has attended Carers Wales training as a Wellbeing Champion. The Council are members of the regional EfC working group; this enables staff to work collaboratively and share their views and ideas with the overall aim of supporting carers in the workplace. The Social Care Commissioning team is working towards Investors in Carers Bronze award, and Pembrokeshire Library Service and Action for Children were awarded Silver Investors in Carers award in January 2023 ([Pembrokeshire Libraries scoop Silver award for commitment to unpaid carers - Pembrokeshire County Council](#)).

## Digital inclusion

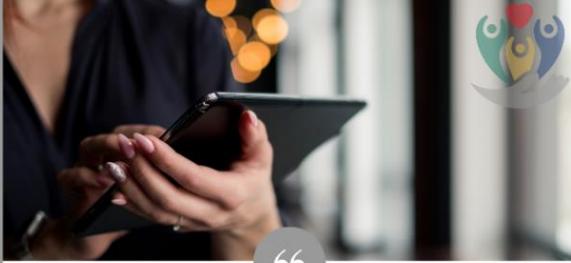
The West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025 identified digital inclusion as one of 4 key priorities for unpaid carers in the region based on feedback from a survey of 558 carers from across West Wales in 2019/2020. The survey identified that in a rural area like West Wales, for some carers limited public transport can create challenges when trying to access services. Digital inclusion has been a key aspect of the Regional Partnership Board's Transformation Programme and Carers Officers provide a key link to signpost unpaid carers to support to help them to become digitally included. The pandemic encouraged people of all ages to develop new digital skills to stay connected with friends and families. Some carers accessed increased support during the pandemic due to the increased availability of services online. Others used technology to access health appointments, access useful services such as the delivery of food or medication, access financial benefit advice, apply for benefits such as Carers Allowance, attend training courses or continue education and training. Hywel Dda University Health Board's Education Programme for Patients (EPP) team created a Padlet which holds a wide variety of useful information and support for unpaid carers. This digital system is also available via social media and promoted to everyone attending a course delivered by the EPP team: [EPP Carers Information Padlet](#).

The West Wales Carers Development Group has agreed to adapt the focus of strategy priority 4 to become "Support Carers to become digitally included and confident." This reflected the group's recognition that digital confidence, meaning knowledge and skills of how to use technology safely and effectively, is a key factor in people's ability to become digitally included and connected.

### Support for carers to become digitally included and confident

All three counties received RIF funding to support unpaid carers to overcome barriers to getting online, by funding digital equipment for their use. This funding was used differently in the counties to complement existing provision.

In **Pembrokeshire**, the existing tablet loan scheme administered by PAVS was extended to focus on tablet loans for unpaid carers. 45 tablets were purchased, and the loan scheme was promoted by the Pembrokeshire Community Hub and Community Connectors, by the commissioned carers service (PCISS) and by Carers Support West Wales social media pages and the new regional Carers website. By the end of March 2023, 26 carers had a tablet out on loan and feedback has been very positive. This year in Pembrokeshire, Carers Grants also supported some carers to purchase IT equipment to support them in their caring role. All opportunities for carers in Pembrokeshire are promoted via social media and on the Carers Support West Wales website, carers email distribution list and via the [Dementia Supportive Communities padlet](#).



**“**

I am currently unemployed and care for my grandmother. The loan of a tablet has really helped us as a family as I have been able to access a variety of information covering job opportunities and carers benefits. We have also moved utility providers for both my house and gran's with the new company giving us a great app to monitor our usage.

TONY Hakin

**Cymorth Gofalwyr  
Gorllewin Cymru**  **Carers Support  
West Wales**  
CARING FOR CARERS



**“**

I'm an unpaid carer who cares for my father in law. He has had mobility issues for over 20 years. He requires support on a daily basis which myself and my husband provide. We use the tablet to communicate with him from afar using apps like WhatsApp. The video calling has been amazing!

REBECCA Camrose

**Cymorth Gofalwyr  
Gorllewin Cymru**  **Carers Support  
West Wales**  
CARING FOR CARERS

In **Ceredigion** this year, 52 carers were given resources to enable them to be access or increase their digital activity. These included tablets and laptops, Kindles, mobile smart phones, and Fitbits. The majority of applicants cited how connectivity would enable them to feel more included and they felt their own health would be improved with this technology. In addition to this, Digital Inclusivity training was held in partnership with Cwmpas (Digital Communities Wales) as part of a Welsh Government project to improve digital inclusivity across Wales. Carers attended along with 3 trainers, who provided 1:1 support, and a Digital Connector from the Council's Carers and Community Support Team. Feedback during the event highlighted that people are being left behind due to the 'digital by default' issue, lacking digital skills to access digital support, and that transport issues in rural areas along with access to venues restrict access to digital training. As a result, Ceredigion County Council are currently developing a county-wide action plan to improve digital accessibility to carers and those they care for.

“As a new carer, I was pleased to attend the Digital Taster Session for carers last Tuesday, in Aberaeron. It was nice to meet new young people so enthusiastic in their subject and to be given ideas of equipment and websites that might be of use to us. Our neatly boxed lunch was tasty and very fresh. Thank you to all involved in the occasion.”

In **Carmarthenshire**, third sector partners signpost people who require or would benefit from digital support to available services and support in the county, tailored to their needs and personal circumstances. The Delta Wellbeing CONNECT project also supports people through access to tablets and services through the technology enabled care pathway.

## Regional Carers Website – Carers Support West Wales



Acting on behalf of the West Wales Carers Development Group, Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) was awarded funding to develop a bilingual regional carers online platform. The website supports the provision and accessibility of consistent information, assistance, and advice for unpaid carers in the three counties, which unpaid carers told us was important to them. The website, named Carers Support West Wales (CSWW) by carers, is a one-stop shop for carer specific information. The website design, branding and content has been coproduced with unpaid carers and providers throughout the region. <https://carerssupportwestwales.org>

The website was officially launched on Carers Rights Day in November 2022. Judith Hardisty, Hywel Dda University Health Board Vice Chair and Carers Champion who is also Chair of the West Wales Regional Partnership Board said:

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*"I am delighted that the Carers Support West Wales website will provide a bilingual 'one stop shop' for unpaid Carers helping them to easily find information to support them in their caring role. The website will include details of local groups and activities, as well as relevant and timely help and support on benefits and financial entitlements. We know that people don't always recognise themselves as unpaid carers, so won't be aware of the help and support which is available to support them in their caring role, therefore this new website will be a valuable resource for everyone. The Regional Partnership Board are grateful for the contribution of all our unpaid carers who care for family and friends in their own communities and are committed to ensuring that the needs of unpaid carers are addressed."*

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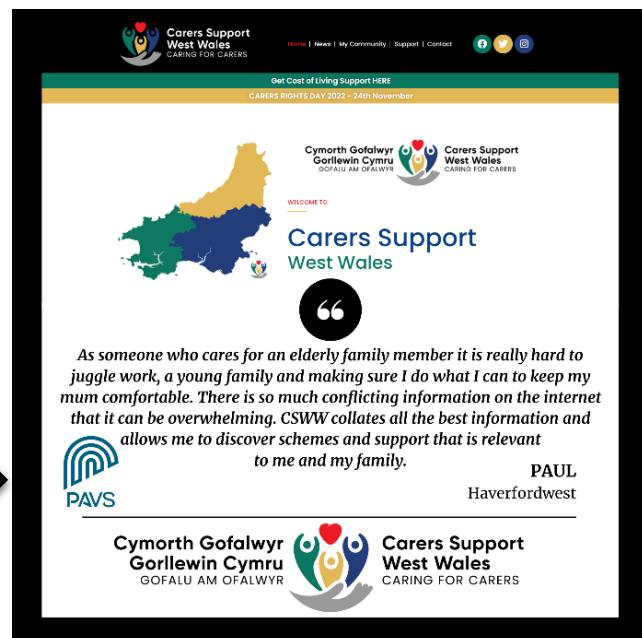
Carers Support West Wales is divided into three distinct sections, allowing carers to easily navigate the platform and explore information locally and regionally. The website has been widely promoted across the region, with promotional materials delivered to GP surgeries,

libraries, hospitals, and other public buildings, for display. The website has been promoted at events during Carers Week, Carers Rights Day, summer community shows and events.

		<h2>News</h2> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div data-bbox="987 480 1060 669">  </div> <div data-bbox="1076 480 1289 669"> <p><b>Gor Sir Gâr</b> <b>Carmarthenshire</b> <b>County Council</b></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1305 480 1384 669">  </div> </div> <p>Celebrating Carer's Week – Carmarthenshire</p> <p><a href="#">Read More »</a></p>
<p>In the 'My Community' section, carers will find local offers, promotions and discounts that can support them in their caring role in their community. An interactive map provides a quick visualization of any activities close by as well as the relevant contact details.</p>	<p>The 'Support' section provides support that is felt could benefit them as a carer such as how to register as an unpaid carer with your GP and how to register for a Carers Recognition Card. Using a filter system to navigate this, carers will be able to search local and national organisations to find the information they need.</p>	<p>The 'News' section shares essential information that is timely and relevant, from a list of support with cost-of-living crisis to carers magazines providing local and national information that may be useful to carers and professionals.</p>

Traffic to the website and social media interactions have shown to be increasing and we have been proactive in ensuring regular posts go up on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. PAVS are monitoring the number of visits to the website and the number of interactions on social media. These are all showing an upward trend.

@carerssupportww  
#caringforcarers  
#gofaluamofalwyr



## Priorities for 2023/24

The key actions of our Regional Carers Strategy are based on the views and feedback from carers and key stakeholders, gathered during the development of the refreshed 2022 Population Needs Assessment which confirmed that the existing priorities in the Regional Carers Strategy remained relevant. The West Wales Carers Development Group will continue to work to implement the priorities outlined in the Carers Strategy and:

- Address key requirements, gaps and improvements identified through the West Wales Population Assessment and the objectives within the Area Plan.
- Respond to Ministerial priorities for supporting carers.
- Complement and integrate a range of carers' initiatives across the region to increase the visibility about the needs of unpaid carers.
- Ensure that the needs of carers are represented through the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund programme.

The West Wales Carers Development Group agreed the following priorities for 2023/24\*:

1. Continue the development and uptake of carers' cards and the benefits that these offer, to encourage carers of all ages to self-identify themselves and access additional support which is available via carer's information and outreach services.
2. Map the support offered to young carers in West Wales and engage young carers in the process to ensure a best practice innovative service is provided.
3. Actively promote the regional Employers for Carers membership, focusing on working collaboratively with other public sector services as well as small and medium size enterprises (SMEs).
4. Continue to encourage involvement in the Investors in Carers accreditation scheme and support progression through the award levels.
5. Support carers to be digitally confident through training and access to technology.
6. Develop an annual carers' survey to understand carers' experiences and what is important to them.
7. Explore the use of consistent carers' outcome measures within carers services across the region.
8. Continue to develop short breaks offers within the localities.
9. Agree an approach to develop, promote, and maintain the carers' website and evaluate its impact.

\*Priorities 1 through 5 are carried forward from 2022/23, with some adjustments, as while there has been progress against these which is reflected in this report, the group recognises the need to continue to keep these at the top of the agenda.

## Conclusion

Carers and the carers' agenda will continue to feature within the refreshed West Wales Area Plan due for publication in 2023, which the West Wales Carers Development Group has contributed to. The Regional Partnership Board adopted carers as an integral priority, particularly recognising the cross-cutting impact and links across all its key programmes of work, including the new Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund.

We are facing unprecedented challenges in health and social care and with an ageing population, a cost-of-living crisis, and the need to deliver services differently as we respond to continued pressures on statutory services. The West Wales Carers Development Group is committed to working together to deliver support for carers in our communities in new and innovative ways, and to ensure that the needs of carers are considered at every stage of caring.

This Annual Report has provided an overview of the wide range of activity which has been ongoing in West Wales to improve outcomes for carers. Whilst the focus of the report has been on the work lead via the West Wales Carers Development Group and how the Welsh Government funding, RIF and core funding of partner organisations has been utilised to support this work, it is acknowledged that there are many other organisations and groups within West Wales who also provide valuable support and services to carers.