

**CABINET – 24 MARCH 2026****DRAFT LEICESTERSHIRE CARERS STRATEGY 2026-2030****JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's approval to consult on the draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026-2030, attached as an Appendix to this report.
2. The report will also explain the development of the Strategy and the priorities for delivery.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - a) The draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026-2030 be approved for consultation.
 - b) A further report be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2026 presenting the outcome of the consultation and the final Strategy for approval.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. A public consultation will enable the Council to reach more carers, people who use services, professional and other interested parties to inform the priorities and implementation of the Strategy. This will build upon the pre-consultation engagement that helped to form the draft Strategy. The public consultation will target seldom heard groups of people. The consultation findings and further developed Strategy will then be presented for endorsement by the Cabinet to ensure the public are aware of the commitment the Council has to supporting carers.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report at its meeting on 2 March 2026. The Committee's comments are set out in paragraph 44 of this report.

6. The outcome of the consultation will be reported back to the Cabinet in September 2026, with a view to the final Strategy being approved at that time.
7. Subject to the Cabinet's approval the Strategy will then be published.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

8. The Adults and Communities Strategy 'Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire' details the ambitions, aims and goals of the Department over the next four years (2025–2029). It reflects the ambitions of the Council's overall Strategic Plan.
9. The Joint Carers Strategy Refresh 2022-2025, Recognising, Valuing and Supporting Carers in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) outlines eight key priorities: carer identification, valuing carers, keeping carers informed, developing carer friendly communities, ensuring carers have a life alongside caring, utilising technology to support caring, accessing the right support at the right time and recognising young carers.
10. The Care Act 2014 gives unpaid adult carers in England the legal right to a support assessment, placing them on an equal footing with the people they care for. If the assessment identifies eligible needs, local authorities have a duty to meet them, such as through respite care or direct payments. Local authorities must focus on the carer's wellbeing, including their physical, mental, and emotional health, as well as their ability to work and have a life outside of caring.
11. The Children and Families Act 2014 was introduced to set out what support local authorities may offer for carers, as well as the cared for person for young people and their families.
12. The Carers Leave Act 2023 came into effect in April 2024 to support carers to balance their work with their unpaid caring responsibilities. This Act gives full time employees the right to take one week (of up to five days) of unpaid leave per year to allow carers to provide or arrange care for a dependent.
13. On 3 December 2025, a meeting of the County Council resolved to:
 - a) Formally recognise carers as a group requiring particular consideration and support, specifically:
 - To ensure carers are consulted and involved in shaping services;
 - To review service delivery to remove barriers for carers.
 - b) Assess future decisions, services and policies made and adopted by the Council to determine the impact of changes on carers.
 - c) Ensure that these commitments are incorporated into the refresh of the LLR Carers Strategy and any other relevant policies and strategies.

Resource Implications

14. In 2024/25 the Council spent £3,547,094 on direct services for adult carers.
15. The majority of this spend was delivered via direct payments enabling carers to have choice and control over their support.
16. Inclusive of the above spend is the contract with Voluntary Action South Leicestershire (VASL) which is commissioned to provide advice and support to carers at an annual cost of £181,260. The existing carers support service that is operated by VASL has been extended until 31 March 2027. Any new commissioned services will be developed to deliver the priorities in the Strategy once finalised. It is expected that some procurement will be necessary. Any future commissioning will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's procurement rules and relevant legislation, with appropriate approvals.
17. The Support at Home service commenced in October 2025 and has acted as a managed service for carers where a direct payment was not wanted or suitable. Support at Home supports people with eligible social care needs who need assistance with non-personal care tasks such as cleaning, grocery shopping and befriending. The service has proved to be very popular amongst carers. The service is a pilot and contracted for a year with an option to extend for a further year.
18. There is a specific Carers Team located within the Customer Service Centre to support carers assessments, and this team work closely alongside VASL in relation to completion of assessments.
19. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report. Delivery of the Strategy will be subject to statutory eligibility criteria, available resources and future decisions of the Council.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

20. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

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PART B

Background

21. The Joint Carers Strategy Refresh 2022-2025, Recognising, Valuing and Supporting Carers in LLR was approved by the Cabinet in November 2022.
22. In the future, it is intended that each authority develop individual carers' strategies tailored to the unique needs and requirements of its respective area. Having a specific Leicestershire Carers Strategy will be reflective of Leicestershire carers and will highlight what they need and how the Council can help carers continue with their caring role. The new Strategy will be aligned with the Council's values and priorities whilst working in partnership with Health (Integrated Care Board, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust and Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust) to ensure that the overall approach to support carers in Leicestershire remains a joint arrangement.
23. The new Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026-2030 will address the areas to improve and strengthen support to carers. This will include actions resulting from the Care Quality Commission's (CQC), Leicestershire County Council: local authority assessment, published in September 2025. The report highlighted areas of good practice and also some areas where improvements can be made.
24. The Census 2021 data indicates a total of 61,300 of Leicestershire respondents, aged five years and above, declaring that they provided unpaid care (9% of population). The highest rate of caring in the population was among those aged 45 to 64 (15%), followed by those aged 65 to 84 (11.3%), with women predominating in all but the eldest (aged 85 years and above) group of carers.
25. There is some geographical variation amongst carers in Leicestershire with the highest rate being in Oadby and Wigston (9.8%) and lowest in Harborough (8.3%), unadjusted for age. The rate of employment among carers is slightly higher in Leicestershire compared to the national average, with a slightly lower unemployment rate (2% versus 3%).
26. In 2024/25, 1,849 carers assessments were completed in Leicestershire. So far for 2025/26, 1,818 have been completed with 267 of these being joint assessments with the cared-for person.
27. There are currently 2,601 carers in receipt of a service from the Council of whom, 1,653 people have a weekly carers direct payment and 907 people have a one-off carers direct payment. In addition, around 2,500 carers are supported by the commissioned carers service per year.
28. In 2025, a total of 116 assessment referrals were received, with 69 full assessments being completed by the young carer team. In addition, 94 young carers passports were issued and a total of 341 have been issued since the

scheme was launched in 2022. The school census data recorded 289 young carers in 2025.

Key engagement activities

29. During the period October to December 2025, a number of key engagement activities have been undertaken across the county. Carers have been offered a variety of ways to get involved and have their say and help shape the new Leicestershire Carers Strategy.
30. The engagement methods have included:
 - *face to face group-based engagement* - this took place at commissioned provider carers groups, community groups and a Carers Rights Day event.
 - *online via Microsoft Teams* - from previous engagement, carers have fed back to say they prefer having an option to meet virtually as they do not have to worry about transport and getting back for their loved ones.
 - online survey.
 - one-to-one engagement with carers.
31. As of January 2026, over 300 adult carers have been involved in the development of the Strategy.
32. The County Council's Young Carers Team have also engaged with young carers via the online survey. A total of 19 young carers provided feedback on what is important to them and how they would like to be supported.
33. Feedback from upcoming scheduled engagement activities due to take place will be added to any future reports and evidence. It is not expected to significantly change the themes already identified or the new Leicestershire priorities.
34. Over 20 people have completed the professionals survey on the Carer's Strategy. Professionals who participated include County Council staff, key partners including Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, GPs and local charities who work closely with carers.

Key themes from the engagement activities

35. The following themes have been identified through analysis of the survey and verbal feedback.
 - a) Recognition of the caring role - Carers want to be recognised and feel valued and appreciated for what they do for their loved ones on a day-to-day basis. Carers are not always recognised. They want to be listened to by all professionals working with them. At times, carers feel their voices are not always heard or professionals do not always understand their caring situation and feel professionals know better than them. They do not want to keep repeating their story.

- b) Respite from caring responsibilities - When caring for someone daily, it can be overwhelming and lead to carer strain and breakdown. To reduce the impact, carers need time for themselves to take a break and take their minds away from their daily caring responsibilities. Where informal carers can access paid support for a couple of hours during the week, it has helped to allow them to have a break; but not all carers are able to get support in place to take a break. Some carers want long respite for their loved ones at a care home.
- c) Tackling loneliness and isolation of carers - Caring can be very lonely and isolating, especially when there are no family members living locally and no one to turn to. Carers would like someone to call and check in with them occasionally to make sure they are okay and have an opportunity for them to talk to somebody. Sometimes carers do not talk to anyone all day apart from their loved one they are caring for.
- d) Information and advice - Carers are not all aware of the range of support available to them or know what to look for. The information available can be overwhelming and be hard to process, especially when the content is not easy read and contains jargon and acronyms. Some carers feel they are provided with an overload of information/leaflets/booklets which they do not have time to read and understand. Sometimes carers are given information by professionals and expected to get on with caring for their loved ones. Carers want to be provided with all information and advice that is available to them. Sometimes they feel excluded especially with a digital format because not all carers can access online materials.
- e) Easier access to services outside of working hours - It would be helpful to carers to have support where they can find all information and advice in one location. Carers have expressed how difficult and how long it takes them to get through to speak to someone. Carers feel they would like a service which supports carers beyond standard working hours. Often working carers work during normal office hours and by the time they have finished work, the telephone lines are closed thus unable to follow things up.
- f) Carers support groups - Carers have found attending carers groups, both commissioned and non-commissioned support groups, have been a lifeline for them, as they allow carers to be part of a community and to be able to connect with other carers who are in similar situations to them. It has also given carers the opportunity to speak to others to provide mutual support, share information and advice on what has worked for them. This has been particularly useful for carers who do not have a good support network around them.
- g) Cost of support - The direct payment provided to carers, does not always cover the cost of all the support they require, for example, support from a cleaner or a gardener. This means carers have to provide the top up for the service/support.

- h) Access to health services - Carers have struggled at times to get through to their GPs to get an appointment for either themselves or for their cared for person. They have also experienced difficulties with getting repeat prescriptions. There also appears to be some inconsistencies with whether carers are being registered as a carer with their GP.
- i) Young carers often find it difficult balancing their education and caring for their family member. It is important young carers are supported in the right way to ensure they have a bright future ahead of them. Young carers have expressed they would like a break from their caring responsibilities and a way to connect with other carers who are in similar situations and have benefited from attending youth groups. Young carers said they would like to have support with their mental health, especially when they find times difficult.

Proposals

36. As a direct result of the engagement activities, the following priorities have been generated.

Priority	Description
Priority one	Carers are recognised, valued, listened to, and supported to continue caring
Priority two	Carers are provided with accurate, timely and relevant information and advice
Priority three	Carers are supported with their wellbeing and access services when needed

37. The actions to implement the priorities are detailed in the draft strategy.

Consultation and engagement proposals

38. The consultation is proposed to commence on the 20 April 2026 and run for eight weeks until the 22 June 2026. This will ensure the last week of the consultation coincides with 'Carers Week' which is a nationally recognised week of celebration and awareness for carers.
39. The following questions will be asked to determine the reach and impact of the proposed strategy and where it can be improved.
- a) How well, if at all, do you think the draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy accurately reflects carers issues?
- Very well
 - Fairly well
 - Not very well
 - Not at all
 - Don't know
- o Why do you say this? Is there anything you would like to add?

- b) How important, if at all, are the following priorities to you?
- Carers are recognised, valued and listened to and supported to continue caring
 - Carers are provided with accurate, timely and relevant information and advice
 - Carers are supported with their wellbeing
 - Carers can access social care and wellbeing services when needed
- c) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right priorities?
- Strongly agree
 - Tend to agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Tend to disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Don't know
- d) Why do you say this? Are there any other priorities that should be included in the strategy?
- e) Is there anything you particularly like about the draft strategy?
- f) Is there anything you particularly don't like about the draft strategy?
- g) What would make the most difference to your life as a carer?
- h) Do you have any other comments?
40. The public consultation documentation will include a summary and explanation of the strategy, along with appropriate and proportionate monitoring information of protected characteristics.
41. Consultation will take place through online surveys, online meetings and face to face sessions and will comply with UK GDPR and data protection requirements.
42. As part of the consultation, it is proposed that engagement with Parent Carers is undertaken to ensure that the new strategy works to include Parent Carers' needs and roles as carers.
43. In addition to this, key engagement with Health partners will continue to establish those areas to support carers that are deliverable by Health, either solely or jointly with the Council, are integrated within the strategy and action plan.

Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

44. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the approach to the draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026-2030 at its meeting on 2 March 2026. Arising from discussion the following points were made:

- i. Members endorsed the three proposed priorities, highlighting the importance of effective carer flow and clearer information about entitlements and available support. They welcomed the extensive pre-consultation, particularly engagement with over 300 previously unheard carers, and noted ongoing concerns about funding and access to financial support, as well as the significant voluntary contribution made by carers nationally.
- ii. Questions were raised about how identified barriers would translate into practical actions, especially around accessing help at home. Members queried how carers would know what support they were entitled to, how they could access it, and whether a register existed for young carers. Officers reported that carers were often identified through GP practices, though referral processes varied. Improving access to information, advice and guidance remained a priority, particularly for rural carers. The current VASL contract supported around 7,000 carers, but approximately 50,000 more might be without support. The VASL contract aimed to address those gaps, alongside challenges linked to carers not self-identifying.
- iii. Concerns about VASL's geographical coverage were noted. Officers clarified that the Council did not hold a universal carers' register; only those identified or self-referred were recorded, while VASL maintained its own caseload. The new commissioning arrangements would consider reach, and future strategy work would review funding pathways and reshape the carers' offer.
- iv. Members stressed that carers should have a good quality of life themselves and requested that this principle be explicitly reflected in the Strategy. The Director of Adults and Communities confirmed that adult carers had statutory rights under the Care Act 2014, including assessment and support for eligible needs. Those not meeting thresholds could still access support through the independent sector contract.
- v. Clarification was sought on entitlement to respite care and how carers would access it, alongside questions about whether the £3.5m carers support budget was sufficient. The Director of Children and Family Services reported that young carers are particularly vulnerable and were identified through close work with schools and health agencies, ensuring access to assessments and support groups.
- vi. The Healthwatch representative reported that carers frequently felt unheard and highlighted issues including inconsistent home-care staff, challenges with hospital discharge, and the importance of education settings for young carers. Healthwatch commended the engagement with over 300 carers.
- vii. Members raised financial pressures on working age carers, mixed experiences with VASL, and concerns about fragmented support pathways. Variation in GP engagement was noted, and Members hoped the Strategy would strengthen links with primary care. The Director of

Adults and Communities explained that the £3.5m budget mainly covered direct payments, with around £200,000 each for the VASL contract and internal support team. Respite was funded through individual care packages, though figures were difficult to isolate due to funding structures.

- viii. Finally, Members welcomed the work with young carers but requested clearer Strategy content on transition to adult support, particularly for those entering higher education or employment. The Director of Children and Family Services confirmed this would be strengthened in the revised document.

Conclusion

- 45. In conclusion, a public consultation will be a cost efficient measure of what is important to carers and the kinds of support they require. Without this the desired outcomes may not be achieved of listening and supporting carers so they may continue to care for their loved ones as long as they want to.

Equality Implications

- 46. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted to inform the draft Carers Strategy and consultation design and will be updated if a public consultation takes place. The EIA has been approved by the Adults and Communities Departmental Equality Group and is awaiting approval by Children and Family Services and will be included within the further report to be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2026. The consultation design is intended to advance equality of opportunity and foster participation by protected groups.

Human Rights Implications

- 47. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Health Implications

- 48. A Health Impact Assessment has been conducted on the draft Strategy and this will be updated if a public consultation takes place.
- 49. Although it is proposed that the Strategy focuses on Leicestershire a formal group will continue to have an important role in ensuring that partnership working across the geographical system is in place. The group represents both adult and young carers groups with representatives from both adults and children's services across key partners (Integrated Care Board/Council's, NHS community services). The impact on partnership working is therefore considered to be positive.
- 50. A Leicestershire focused governance group will be developed to oversee the specific deliverables of the strategy and actions with associated Key

Performance Indicators and metrics in place and informed by carers throughout the duration of the strategy. This group will include professionals and carers.

Background Papers

- Report to Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 2 March 2026 – Draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026-2030 - <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=8355&Ver=4>
- Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-29 – <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/adult-social-care-and-health/our-approach/policies-and-strategies>
- Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland (LLR) Carers Strategy 2022-2025 <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/Leicestershire-County-Leicester-City-and-Rutland-Carers-Strategy.pdf>
- County Council – 3 December 2025 – Support for Family Carers - <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=7861> – item 48 a)I
- Report to the Cabinet: 25 November 2022 - LLR Carers Strategy 2022-2025 - <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=6751&Ver=4>
- CQC Assessment of Leicestershire’s Social Care Department - <https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/leicestershire-0925> -

Appendix

Draft Carers Strategy for Leicestershire 2026-2030