

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/DB/0019/25

Peter Fox MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Welsh Parliament

26 February 2026

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter dated 12 February, which reiterated the Committee's concerns regarding the support for unpaid carers, and requested updated information and a response on proposed future actions.

Firstly, I would like to confirm my ongoing commitment to do all we can to support the improved identification, recognition and support for unpaid carers. You know from my attendance on 22 January that I am not fully assured that all local authorities are fulfilling their statutory duties to unpaid carers and I had taken action to bring my concerns to the attention of Council Leaders. I am also driving a national improvement plan through my Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers.

In response to the specific points raised in your letter:

1. I wrote to Council Leaders on 12 December about the importance of local authorities fulfilling their statutory duties regarding unpaid carers and requested an outline of the actions being taken to bring about improvement, specifically regarding access to carer's needs assessments. I sought assurance that local authorities were actively engaging with the improvement plan led by ADSS Cymru and overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers. I also asked them to undertake a review of their respite provision and consider the advantages of taking a regional approach to respite.

We received responses from all local authorities. All leaders committed to engaging with, and implementing, the ADSS Cymru action plan. All leaders acknowledged there were areas for improvement regarding the support for unpaid carers in their local authorities. Most leaders articulated recent development work and plans for further improvement work this year. Some identified aspects of good practice they wished to highlight. Several mentioned recommendations from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) or the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) as a catalyst for improvement. Leaders committed to reviewing respite provision. Some highlighted regional collaboration already in place, while others welcomed the suggestion of considering an increased regional approach to respite.

There was variation in the extent of improvement required and the degree of detail

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

contained in responses. It is not possible or appropriate to assess if a particular local authority is fulfilling its statutory social services function based on a letter alone. We have therefore taken the following action:

- We have carefully reviewed the letter from each local authority, drawing out points for further enquiry.
- We have met with CIW to consider options around their assistance and role in driving improvement.
- We have forwarded all local authority responses to CIW for their review.
- We have agreed with CIW that their next bi-annual meetings with Directors of Social Services/ Heads of Service will include support for unpaid carers as a key line of enquiry. These meetings in April are part of CIW's formal assurance process, and we will agree bespoke questions for each local authority, arising from the response letter received.
- CIW will provide us with their analysis of these discussions, which we will use to determine next steps.
- CIW engage with unpaid carers throughout the year, and we will agree specific questions to be added to these discussions. This will provide further information on the experience of unpaid carers in local authority areas.

These actions will provide a more detailed and informed view of the support for unpaid carers in each local authority across Wales, in the context of their duties outlined in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.

2. If there are concerns arising from any of the meetings with Directors of Social Services/ Heads of Service in April, we will discuss potential further action with CIW. Where CIW have scheduled an inspection of a local authority where we have concerns, CIW will take a specific focus on support for unpaid carers. If inspection of a local authority where we have concerns is not scheduled this year, we will discuss further proportionate action with CIW.
3. The majority of funding for social care is delivered through the annual un-hypothecated local government settlement of over £6.1bn, recognising the deployment of this funding is for elected council members to determine. I recognise the pressure services are under and councils will receive an extra £112.8m for the settlement in 2026-27 to deliver essential services, including social care, through our agreement with Plaid Cymru. This represents a 4.5% uplift, with every authority guaranteed more than 4%. Social care was a priority raised by councils and I would therefore expect them to ensure funding is used to deliver their duties under the Social Services and Well-being Act.

Additional to the revenue support grant, we will also allocate over £175m to deliver our social care and social care policy goals including dedicated funding for unpaid carers.

In 2025-26 we provided £13m of funding specifically for unpaid carers. This comprised:

- £7.35m to Regional Partnership Boards to support services for carers via the Regional Integration Fund (minimum 5% of overall fund).
- £1m of this (£7.35m) ringfenced for support for carers when the cared for person is admitted/discharged from hospital.
- £717,000 to our national carer organisations for programmes and service delivery for carers to promote their wellbeing and provide advice and support.
- £3.5m for the delivery of the Short Breaks Fund.
- £1.75m for delivery of Carers Support Fund.

This funding will remain in place for 2026-27.

4. The letter I sent to all Council Leaders set a clear expectation that leaders seek assurance they are delivering on their statutory duties with a particular focus on carer's assessments and respite. The intention to pursue this further via CIW is appropriate as the regulator and inspector of local authority social services functions, who hold specific powers in this regard.

Additionally, the current improvement action plan led by ADSS Cymru is overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group. The current action plan will complete at the end of March 2026. We will agree the next steps of national improvement work based on the final progress report on this work, and the findings of:

- This Senedd Committee inquiry.
- CIW findings from their scrutiny of local authorities outlined above.
- Information arising from the public consultation on our [Draft national strategy for unpaid carers 2026](#).
- The findings of the Public Service Ombudsman's follow up report.

Workstreams overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group will work to specific objectives and timelines.

5. Other specific actions I intend for us to take prior to the end of term are:
 - I stated on 22 January that I would seek to identify if there was any additional support that could be provided to local authorities, who I was disappointed to hear were not actively operating their Young Carer ID card scheme. We continue to look at this.
 - We will seek the views of unpaid carers and their representatives via the public consultation on the draft National Strategy for Unpaid Carers.
6. Regarding cross-portfolio actions, I am pleased the Cabinet Secretary for Education is finalising a report on the wellbeing and educational experience of young carers. This report is based on findings from the School Health Research Network, which was discussed at the hearing on 22 January. It reflects the first phase of work to improve availability of data and our understanding of outcomes for young carers.

The current [Hospital discharge guidance](#) contains detail for staff to help them identify unpaid carers and provides information on signposting carers to information, advice and assistance. The guidance requires staff to consider the circumstances of an unpaid carer, which must form part of the discharge planning conversations during the patient's stay in hospital. The guidance notes that carer wellbeing is critical to successful hospital discharge.

While positive steps have previously been taken to improve the visibility and importance of support for unpaid carers within our guidance, we will be using the current annual review to further strengthen this where required. The wider review process is underway, and we will consider existing content for update over the coming months and publish by the end of the summer.

We are also working closely with those developing guidance for mental health and learning disability discharges. While this is in the early stage of development, it presents a further opportunity to ensure the profile of unpaid carers, and the support and rights available to them, are adequately promoted in guidance for staff in these settings.

7. The next Welsh Government will publish the new National Strategy for Unpaid Carers following the public consultation. This will clearly lay out the actions and intended

outcomes to improve the identification, recognition, provision of information and advice, assessment and support for our unpaid carers. This is a detailed and comprehensive strategy focussing on the priorities outlined to us in the extensive engagement exercise we undertook with carers and their representatives in the summer. Modifications will be made to the strategy because of the feedback received in the consultation process. The new administration will therefore have a clear and contemporary view of the priorities for unpaid carers.

8. The lead for the ADSS Cymru action plan reports strong engagement from local authorities across Wales, with responsibility for different aspects of the action plan shared across regional partnership board areas. Action taken includes:
 - Audits of the information available to carers on the websites of all local authorities and third sector organisations has identified examples of good practice and recommendations to improve consistency and quality of information.
 - A review of resources available to social care staff on the Social Care Wales website has identified strengths and areas requiring improvement.
 - Work has identified best practice in the recording of carer's assessments and support plans on local authority IT systems, to achieve a clearer and consistent approach. This should improve access to information for carers and professionals and improve the quality of data collected.
 - Work is being undertaken to address inconsistent terminology and communication to improve clarity for carers and practitioners.
 - Mapping of the use of direct payments for carers has identified gaps and inconsistencies. Best practice will be promoted to all local authority areas to increase offers and uptake of direct payments, which can be used to arrange alternative care (respite).
 - A review of training, skills and competence of staff undertaking carers' assessments will make recommendations. In advance of this, additional training videos for social care workers undertaking assessments and providing early information and advice are in production.

I expect a final report on this work by 31 March. The implementation period for some actions will extend beyond this date, given the all-Wales nature of this work. However, I will be seeking a further timeline for the full implementation of these actions, which will be overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group.

9. We are assured that materials being produced as part of the ADSSC action plan include the importance of ascertaining the carer is 'willing and able'.

The current Hospital Discharge guidance states the person must be 'willing and able' to provide care, and that the extent to which a carer is willing and able is part of the formal statutory carer's needs assessment. The 2014 Act makes clear that all professionals encountering people who need care and support are responsible for proportional assessments of a carer's needs.

10. I will be speaking to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care regarding opportunities to raise the profile of unpaid carers within the primary care system. My officials have met with their counterparts in primary care in preparation for this discussion, to identify specific areas where improvements can be made.
11. If we are able to identify any financial assistance this financial year to those local authorities where this will rejuvenate their Young Carer ID cards scheme, we will do so.

12. Most responses received from local authorities outlined a willingness to consider a more regional approach to respite or indicated that regional collaboration was already in place. I have asked my officials to pursue further engagement with individual regional partnership boards and/or regional carer forums to follow through on the potential for improvement based on a more regionalised approach. This is in addition to the key line of enquiry being taken by CIW as outlined at points 1. and 2. of this letter.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some further information and updates to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', with a stylized, cursive script.

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