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Scrutiny Review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee
Final Report

February 2026

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Dunedin House
Columbia Drive
Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 6BJ

Contents

Select Committee – Membership	4
Acknowledgements	4
Contact Officer	4
Foreword	5
Original Brief	6
1.0 Executive Summary	8
2.0 Introduction	13
3.0 Background	14
4.0 Findings	16
➤ Local carer landscape and impact of caring	16
➤ Development of the local Adult Carers Support Service	17
➤ Health sector considerations around carers	25
➤ Engagement with / feedback from carers	29
➤ Young carers transitioning into the adult offer	32
➤ External carer-related SBC scrutiny	34
➤ Other approaches to / good practice in supporting carers	36
5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations	39
Appendix 1: Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service: Newsletter (Autumn 2025)	44
Appendix 2: External carer-related SBC scrutiny	48
Glossary of Terms	53

Select Committee – Membership

Councillor Marc Besford (Chair)
Councillor Nathan Gale (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Stefan Barnes
Councillor Carol Clark
Councillor John Coulson

Councillor Lynn Hall
Councillor Jack Miller
Councillor Vanessa Sewell
Councillor Sylvia Walmsley

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- Graham Lyons (Service Manager) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Rebecca Gray (Service Manager, Direct Services) – SBC
- Carol Malham (Service Manager, Assessment (Early Intervention)) – SBC
- Alistair Mathieson (Senior Carers Advisor) – SBC
- Paula Swindale (Head of Commissioning, Community & UEC) – NHS North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB)
- Rebecca Warden (Head of Primary Care, Tees Valley) – NENC ICB
- Victoria Cardona (Head of Patient Flow, Out of Hospital Care) – North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT)
- Melanie Cambage (Associate Director of Nursing) – University Hospitals Tees (UHT)
- Tracey Hamilton (Trust Manager) – Eastern Ravens Trust
- Nicole Chiu (Account Manager) – Mobilise

Contact Officer

Gary Woods (Senior Scrutiny Officer)
Tel: 01642 526187
Email: gary.woods@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

Unpaid carers are the backbone of our community. Every day across Stockton-on-Tees, thousands of people quietly dedicate their time, energy and compassion to supporting a loved one. Their contribution is immeasurable, and our responsibility as a Council is clear: to ensure that carers are recognised, valued and supported in ways that genuinely improve their lives.

This review has allowed the Committee to look closely at the work being done across the Borough, and I am proud to say that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) is delivering an offer that stands out both in quality and impact. Since bringing the Adult Carers Support Service in-house in 2018, SBC has built a service shaped around compassion, early intervention, and practical support. The growing number of carers who register with the service each year is testament not only to rising need, but to the confidence carers have in the support the Council provides.

Among the strongest examples of good practice is the LiveWell Dementia Hub. The Committee's visit reaffirmed just how vital this space has become for carers – providing a warm, welcoming environment, expert guidance, and a community of peer support that many carers described as a 'lifeline'. The Hub embodies what excellent local care should look like: accessible, humane, and centred around real people's lives. Its role in supporting families navigating the challenges of dementia cannot be overstated, and it remains one of the most valued assets within the Council's wider support system.

Our review also highlighted the importance of recognising and supporting young carers, many of whom shoulder responsibilities well beyond their years. Their transition into adult services represents a critical moment, and the evidence we received from Eastern Ravens Trust makes clear that young people need reassurance, continuity, and an offer that feels relevant and age-appropriate. SBC's close working relationship with Eastern Ravens, alongside plans to strengthen awareness and improve the pathway into adult support, demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that young carers are not forgotten, but are instead empowered as they enter adulthood.

Initiatives such as the Time Out service, the partnership with Mobilise, and the commitment to continuous co-production with carers all demonstrate SBC's determination to innovate, listen, and evolve. The service is not only delivering meaningful support today, but is actively planning for the needs of tomorrow, recognising growing demand, improving identification of carers, and strengthening links with health partners. There is always more to do, and this report sets out clear recommendations to help further strengthen the support available. But the message from carers, partners, and evidence gathered is consistent: SBC is delivering high-quality, person-centred support that is making a significant difference to people's lives.

On behalf of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee, we would like to thank every carer, regardless of age, who shared their experiences with us, and every member of staff across the Council, NHS, VCSE sector, and the Dementia Hub who work each day to support them. Their dedication ensures that Stockton-on-Tees remains a place where carers are seen, heard, and supported.



Cllr Marc Besford
Chair
Adult Social Care and
Health Select Committee



Cllr Nathan Gale
Vice-Chair
Adult Social Care and
Health Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028 priorities:

- *Priority 2: Healthy & Resilient Communities:* We recognise the invaluable role that carers play to support their loved ones in communities, and we will ensure they receive the support they need to maintain their own independence and wellbeing.

The Carers Support Service has also had some initial involvement with the transitions programme as part of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) *Powering Our Future* (POF) initiative.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

The Care Act 2014 gave carers the same legal right to assessment and support as the person they care for. The most recent Census 2021 found that there were 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK (an estimate of over 20,000 of those living within Stockton-on-Tees), with 1.7 million of these people providing 50 or more hours of care per week.

In 2019, Carers UK revealed that one in seven people within employment were also in a significant caring role, and that 2.6 million had quit their job to care. This created a significant cost to the UK economy from both the loss to the labour market, the cost of recruiting and training, and the impact on benefits claims. Elsewhere, it has been reported that carers were more than twice as likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health (as well as financial hardship) than their non-caring counterparts, with one third of people in a caring role report feeling often or always lonely ([Carers UK: State of Caring 2024](#)).

Carers play a substantial and vital role in meeting social care needs. The cost of replacement care locally for Stockton-on-Tees has previously been estimated to be around £464 million annually ([Stockton JSNA: Carers](#)). From an early intervention and prevention perspective, addressing the needs of carers enables SBC to delay or possibly avert the need for complex and costly social care interventions, and by sustaining carers within their caring role, the stability of local adult health and social care services is supported. Identifying and providing support to these individuals is not just mandated by the Care Act 2014 but a sound economic and socially responsible decision (which may also prevent carers themselves needing services in their own right). By providing information, advice and support to carers we are able to ensure they promote their own wellbeing, prevent carer breakdown, and establish resilient communities.

The local Adult Carers Support Service was brought in-house to SBC in January 2018 and works with adults who are providing informal care and support for adults across the Borough. Since then, the service has developed significantly, with over 5,000 referrals during this time. As of June 2025, it was working with 3,200 unpaid carers within Stockton-on-Tees, offering ongoing advice, information and support alongside statutory carers assessments, support planning, carers personal budgets, and time-out support. SBC are also supporting nearly 2,000 carers with a direct payment which amounts to a projected spend of £550,000 for this provision in this financial year.

Whilst this offer is considered to be effective, it would be of benefit for the service to be scrutinised to provide assurance around its current delivery. It is also hoped that this review will help highlight any gaps in the service and, in turn, help shape future developments for local provision.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What support does the local Adult Carers Support Service offer / provide? How is it resourced (funded and staffed) and what does it cost per annum (including changes over time)? How did the pre-2018 arrangements differ from the current offer (what prompted it being brought in-house)?
- How is the service promoted and how do individuals access it? Are there any restrictions (e.g. is it time-limited) and have there been any reports of barriers in receiving help?
- How many individuals does the service support and what types of support do individuals receive? How has this changed over time, and what are the predicted future demands on the service (i.e. is it sustainable)?
- How does the 'Time Out' service work?
- How does the Council and its partners identify individuals who may be eligible for support? Is this effective / consistent?
- Is feedback on the service sought from carers – if so, how / how often? What are those receiving support saying about their experience of the service and what plans are in place to develop the offer further?
- What are the benefits to being a registered carer? How are these being promoted across the Borough?
- What considerations are given to young carers transitioning into the adult carers service? How is this managed, communicated and promoted?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:

- Primary: To understand the impact of the carers service on promoting the wellbeing and needs of unpaid carers. Identifying where the service is reaching its objective and where future focus needs to be concentrated to improve service delivery and satisfaction for carers
- Secondary: To understand and identify where partnership working can be improved to promote the rights and needs of carers, ensuring they are being treated as expert partners and identified for support when required.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's scrutiny review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service.
- 1.2. The Care Act 2014 gave carers the same legal right to assessment and support as the person they care for. The most recent Census 2021 found that there were 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK, with 1.7 million of these people providing 50 or more hours of care per week ([Key facts and figures | Carers UK](#)).
- 1.3. Carers play a substantial and vital role in meeting social care needs, with the cost of replacement care locally for Stockton-on-Tees having previously been estimated to be around £464 million annually. From an early intervention and prevention perspective, addressing the needs of carers enables Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) to delay or possibly avert the need for complex and costly social care interventions, and by sustaining carers within their caring role, the stability of local adult health and social care services is supported. Identifying and providing support to these individuals is not just mandated by the Care Act 2014, but a sound economic and socially responsible decision (which may also prevent carers themselves needing services in their own right). Providing information, advice and support to carers ensures they promote their own wellbeing, carer breakdown is prevented, and resilient communities are established.
- 1.4. The local Adult Carers Support Service was brought in-house to SBC in January 2018 and works with adults who are providing informal care and support for adults across the Borough. Since then, the service has developed significantly, with over 5,000 referrals during this time. As of June 2025, it was working with 3,200 unpaid carers within Stockton-on-Tees, offering ongoing advice, information and support alongside statutory carers assessments, support planning, carers personal budgets, and time-out assistance. SBC are also supporting nearly 2,000 carers with a direct payment, which amounts to a projected spend of £550,000 for this provision in this financial year.
- 1.5. Whilst the existing offer was considered to be effective, it was felt that it would be of benefit for the service to be scrutinised to provide assurance around its current delivery. It was hoped that this review would help highlight any gaps in the service and, in turn, help shape future developments for local provision. Also, the Committee's work could lead to the following efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:
 - **Primary:** To understand the impact of the carers service on promoting the wellbeing and needs of unpaid carers, identifying where the service was reaching its objective and where future focus needed to be concentrated to improve service delivery / satisfaction for carers.
 - **Secondary:** To understand and identify where partnership working could be improved to promote the rights and needs of carers, ensuring they were being treated as expert partners and identified for support when required.
- 1.6. Caring for someone, particularly for those with greater needs, can be incredibly hard. It has the potential to have a profound and lasting impact which can affect an individual's physical and mental health, and compromise their ability to hold down employment (previous Carers UK research found that around 600 people per day were giving up work to care) or enjoy leisure / social activities. As well as the stress and worry over supporting a person close to them, caring roles can also result in adverse financial implications for those involved.

- 1.7. The Committee found that national estimates on the number of those carrying out an unpaid caring role vary (the most recent Census 2021 suggested that there were 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK), and it is well acknowledged that ascertaining an accurate figure is challenging given many individuals do not view their support of a loved one as 'providing care'. That said, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) stated that there were approximately 20,000 unpaid carers across the Borough, which represents around 10% of the total population of Stockton-on-Tees. Given there were a total of around 3,500 carers open to the local Adult Carers Support Service in 2024, there appears to be significant potential for an increase in demand for the existing offer should a proportion of these people seek help.
- 1.8. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service is a key feature of the Council's offer of support for the Borough's adult carers. Annual referrals have continually escalated from around 450 in 2018 (when SBC made the decision to bring the service in-house) to nearly 700 in 2024, with a subsequent increase in associated funding to manage this demand. The service provides a range of bespoke support, is widely promoted across the Council's various print and electronic platforms, and also works with external organisations to emphasise the importance of supporting carers and how SBC can assist. A crucial and much appreciated element of the local offer is the 'Time Out' service which gives carers up to eight hours of ad-hoc support per month free-of-charge, allowing them a break from their caring role.
- 1.9. The Council's ongoing work with Mobilise (the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers) was highlighted to the Committee which had helped to provide a range of free online services, as well as identify hidden carers. Given the recent decision to extend this partnership beyond the current contract deadline of April 2026, SBC will need to ensure it has the necessary quality and performance controls in place to monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement. Moving forward, SBCs work around its digital offer for clients and their carers will provide an opportunity to review any future arrangements with external providers with regard to this support.
- 1.10. In terms of wider health considerations around carers, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) personnel drew attention to the legal requirement (under the Health and Care Act 2022) for the NHS to involve unpaid carers in decisions about the care and treatment of the individuals they supported (this included participation in the planning and delivery of care, as well as in discharge planning from hospital settings). Whilst the ICB did not have any direct responsibilities in this area, it did work collaboratively at a local level with Local Authority and 'system' partners (including operational teams to ensure clinical pathways considered carers) to support the adult carers agenda, and the NENC ICB / ICP Joint Strategy specified a key programme aim of 'working to identify and support more people who are providing unpaid care within the region'. From a general practice perspective, 4,741 individuals had been identified as a 'carer' or 'cares for a relative' – the Council should consider how best it can promote the local Adult Carers Support Service within these settings, as well as being mindful that improvements in carer-identification may ultimately result in more demand on the existing offer.
- 1.11. North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) provided extensive evidence on the ways in which it considered carers (recognising them as partners in care) and promoted local support services. The recently implemented 'Carers Charter' was an encouraging development which should now be embedded and continually reinforced to staff and patients. NTHFT also highlighted the need for thinking around how the Trust's community services / teams were targeted in relation to carers, particularly given the number of people involved in a caring role was likely to continue increasing.
- 1.12. The Committee fully supports the acknowledgement from SBC of the need for an open culture to encourage engagement and listening with carers, and several examples were given demonstrating this endeavour. Whilst the response rate to the latest annual carers consultation survey was limited, important themes were nevertheless identified (including the value of peer

support), and the Committee look forward to learning more about how the actions taken in light of this feedback have enhanced the local offer.

- 1.13. The Committee undertook its own engagement with local carers by visiting the LiveWell Dementia Hub in November 2025. The importance of being able to easily access carer-related services (aided by up-to-date contact details) and having the opportunity to share experiences with those who are going through the same challenges was reiterated, and it was clear that the ability to meet in-person (within a welcoming environment which provided an excellent source of carer-related information) was hugely valued, as was the Council's Time Out service. Regarding the latter, the Committee note the request from carers for more flexibility around the booking process (currently having to give over a month's notice which could be difficult as personal appointments were not always predictable), though commends the new 'Time Out Together' element which has the potential to benefit a greater number of those in a caring role (allowing multiple carers to have a break at the same time whilst their loved one partakes in group activities / games). Ensuring the Time Out offer is as efficient and effective as possible should be a cornerstone of the future service moving forward.
- 1.14. Recognising the Borough's young carers and the importance of their transition into adult support services, the Committee was pleased to receive a very informative contribution from Eastern Ravens Trust (a local charity supporting young carers within Stockton-on-Tees). Feedback from young carers highlighted concerns about dealing with change, how appropriate the local Adult Carers Support Service was for young adults, and a lack of knowledge of such an offer after they had reached adulthood – this suggests there is work to do to promote the options available to them once they reach the end of their time with Eastern Ravens (this should be helped through the already established relationships between the young carers and adult carers services), as well as making this offer as appealing as possible for those transitioning into it. The creation of some form of dedicated 'young adult' carers service / element may be more justifiable if there is an increase in the number of individuals aged 18-24 requesting / accessing support (as of early-November 2025, just 38 out of the 3,100+ carers open to the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service were in this age bracket).
- 1.15. In October 2025, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) published its final report following the late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services, and carer-related commentary was shared with the Committee for the purposes of this review (as was relevant feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) peer assurance challenge of SBC Adult Social Care that was undertaken in July 2024 in preparation for the anticipated CQC inspection). The regulator's findings, whilst broadly positive, did highlight some concerns around the availability of information on support for unpaid carers, as well as the Council's own acknowledgement of the need for further work to both identify these individuals and fully understand their needs. Clarity around improvements to the information and advice offer for people who were funding their own care, and in relation to the ongoing work to reshape the Council's 'front door', was also noted.
- 1.16. The CQC report also referenced national data from the Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE, June 2024) which showed that:
 - 90.7% of carers found information and advice from SBC helpful (better than the England average of 85.22%)
 - 75% of carers engaged with the Local Authority said they found it easy to access information and advice (significantly better than the England average of 59.06%)
 - more carers in Stockton-on-Tees (47.83%) were satisfied with support they received than the England average (36.83%)

However, there were also areas to work on, with outcomes from the same survey indicating:

- more could be done to improve the respite offer to unpaid carers
- more carers locally (34%) were unable to maintain paid employment because of their caring duties compared to the England average (26.7%)
- only 25.19% of carers said they were accessing a support group or someone to talk to in confidence (which was worse than the England average of 32.98%)

Encouragingly, the CQC concluded that the Council had 'a clear vision and strategy for adult social care which sought to improve outcomes for people with care and support needs, unpaid carers and reduce inequalities of experience and outcomes for people in the local area'. The Committee is therefore keen to understand how SBC proposes to respond to the regulator's feedback and, in related matters, encourages the Council to continue efforts to raise the profile of those staff working on the frontline / 'front door' of these support services.

- 1.17. Wider research demonstrated a range of approaches and initiatives regarding support for adult carers across the UK, some of which are already a feature of the local offer. Several carer-related good practice guides were also brought to the attention of the Committee, with the Council's Time Out service highlighted by the Carers Trust as a positive example in providing short breaks for carers. Increasing acknowledgement of the importance and role of unpaid carers will likely encourage the publication of further material which SBC should seek and consider as part of the ongoing development of the local support service.
- 1.18. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service is clearly a highly valued and crucial element within the Council's adult social care offer, attracting wider recognition and appreciation for what it provides. That said, evidence collected as part of this review has flagged areas for attention in relation to carer-identification, signposting to / promotion of support, transitioning of young carers into the adult service, the ability to meet demand as more carers request / require help, and the need for continuous evaluation of the local offer. Unpaid carers save local organisations a vast amount of money – as such, despite the ongoing financial limitations on the Council, they must be supported as much as possible. Those accessing the service have reported very positive experiences – the challenge is ensuring this can be of benefit to a greater number of carers, many of whom remain hidden.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) In terms of general Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service development, SBC should:**
 - a) Ensure measures are put in place as part of the review of the Council's 'front door' to strengthen identification of carers and the promotion of the local support offer (including the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service).**
 - b) Ascertain and consider the findings from the London School of Economics and Political Science (Care Policy and Evaluation Centre) research project on what support combinations help improve carers' lives and what works to facilitate availability of and access to this support.**
 - c) Consider ways to increase the response rate for its annual carers consultation survey.**

(continued overleaf...)

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

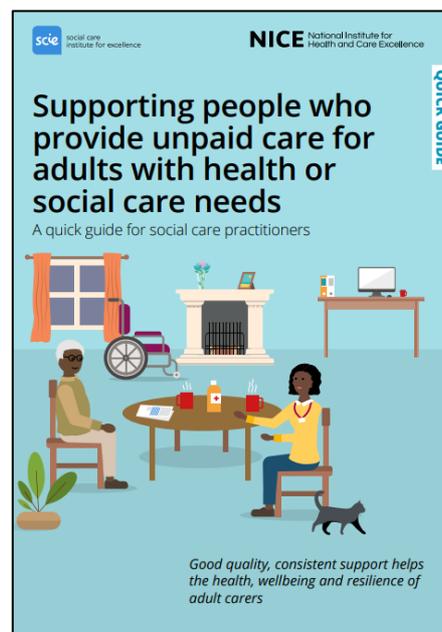
- 2) Regarding the partnership with Mobilise (the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers), SBC should:**
 - a) Develop its own in-house digital support offer for local carers to build on / complement the services available through this external provider.**
 - b) Ensure it has the necessary quality and performance controls in place (including the need to report on measurable targets) to monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement.**
 - c) Seek to understand any separate arrangements that Council's outside the North East have with Mobilise and whether these enhance the offer to carers more than the ongoing partnership with the 10 North East Local Authorities.**
- 3) In relation to the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service 'Time Out' element, SBC should:**
 - a) Complete an internal review of the booking system to identify ways of creating more flexibility for carers when requested a break from their caring role.**
 - b) Consider whether it would be appropriate to introduce a standing / means-tested charge for the service to broaden this for more carers going forward, enabling greater sustainability of its provision and importance (as identified via the LGA Peer Assurance Challenge of SBC Adult Social Care in July 2024).**
- 4) Promotion of the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service offer to young carers should be strengthened so they are more informed about the support available to them when they reach 18.**
- 5) Consideration should be given to the ways in which the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service can build on what appeals to young carers when they approach / reach 18 so they are more compelled to seek support in their caring role when they become young adults.**
- 6) The new carers awareness e-learning module be rolled out to SBC staff, Members and external partners.**
- 7) SBC further considers how the local support offer for carers can be promoted within the wider health system (including general practices and community settings).**
- 8) SBC provides a response to the Committee on the carer-related commentary included within the Care Quality Commission (CQC) final report on SBC adult social care (published in October 2025).**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's scrutiny review of Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service.
- 2.2. Whilst the existing offer was considered to be effective, it was felt that it would be of benefit for the service to be scrutinised to provide assurance around its current delivery. It was hoped that this review would help highlight any gaps in the service and, in turn, help shape future developments for local provision. Also, the Committee's work could lead to the following efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:
 - **Primary:** To understand the impact of the carers service on promoting the wellbeing and needs of unpaid carers, identifying where the service was reaching its objective and where future focus needed to be concentrated to improve service delivery / satisfaction for carers.
 - **Secondary:** To understand and identify where partnership working could be improved to promote the rights and needs of carers, ensuring they were being treated as expert partners and identified for support when required.
- 2.3. The Committee identified the following key lines of enquiry:
 - What support does the local Adult Carers Support Service offer / provide? How is it resourced (funded and staffed) and what does it cost per annum (including changes over time)? How did the pre-2018 arrangements differ from the current offer?
 - How is the service promoted and how do individuals access it? Are there any restrictions (e.g. is it time-limited) and have there been any reports of barriers in receiving help?
 - How many individuals does the service support and what types of support do individuals receive? How has this changed over time; what are the predicted future service demands?
 - How does the 'Time Out' service work?
 - How does the Council and its partners identify individuals who may be eligible for support? Is this effective / consistent?
 - Is feedback on the service sought from carers – if so, how / how often? What are those receiving support saying about their experience of the service and what plans are in place to develop the offer further?
 - What are the benefits to being a registered carer? How are these being promoted?
 - What considerations are given to young carers transitioning into the adult carers service? How is this managed, communicated and promoted?
- 2.4. The Committee took evidence from key personnel from within the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate, the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT), Mobilise (an external organisation working with SBC), and Eastern Ravens Trust. In addition, the Committee considered the recently published Care Quality Commission (CQC) report following the late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services, as well as other Local Authority approaches / good practice in supporting carers. Committee Members also visited the LiveWell Dementia Hub to engage with staff and carers.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Care Act 2014 gave carers the same legal right to assessment and support as the person they care for. The most recent Census 2021 found that there were 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK, with 1.7 million of these people providing 50 or more hours of care per week ([Key facts and figures | Carers UK](#)).
- 3.2 Carers, the caring role, and the impact of caring has gained increased recognition over time:
- **2019:** Carers UK revealed that one in seven people within employment were also in a significant caring role, and that 2.6 million had quit their job to care. This created a significant cost to the UK economy from both the loss to the labour market, the cost of recruiting and training, and the impact on benefits claims ([Research: More than 600 people quit work to look after older and disabled relatives every day | Carers UK](#)). A more recent report found that unpaid carers were finding it increasingly difficult to afford day-to-day living costs, with the worry and anxiety of this further affecting their mental health and wellbeing. Most carers were now cutting back on social connections, which often provide a vital lifeline helping people to balance caring responsibilities with their own wellbeing ([Carers UK: State of Caring 2024](#)).
 - **2020:** National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published [Supporting adult carers](#) guidelines covering support for adults (aged 18 and over) who provide unpaid care for anyone aged 16 or over with health or social care needs. It aimed to improve the lives of carers by helping health and social care practitioners identify people who were caring for someone and give them the right information and support. It covered carers' assessments, practical, emotional and social support and training, and support for carers providing end-of-life care. In 2022, NICE / Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) issued a quick guide for social care practitioners titled [Supporting people who provide unpaid care for adults with health or social care needs](#).
 - **2022:** On the 74th anniversary of the National Health Service (NHS), Carers UK highlighted [new rights for unpaid carers following the introduction of the Health and Care Act 2022](#).
 - **2025:** A resource for health and social care professionals was developed by the Carers Partnership (Carers UK and Carers Trust) as part of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance to support health and care systems in England to improve the inclusion, support, and involvement of unpaid carers. [Identifying and supporting unpaid carers in England to improve integrated system working](#) brought together statutory duties and best practice resources developed by the Carers Partnership (2022-2025) to help health and care professionals reduce the health inequalities carers face, better identify unpaid carers, and drive transformative change.
 - **2025:** Carers UK published its [A fresh approach to supporting unpaid carers](#) report detailing unpaid carers' experiences of the NHS in England, along with a vision for transforming how the NHS interacts with and supports unpaid carers through the delivery of the NHS 10-Year Plan.



- 3.3 Carers play a substantial and vital role in meeting social care needs, with the cost of replacement care locally for Stockton-on-Tees having previously been estimated to be around £464 million annually. From an early intervention and prevention perspective, addressing the needs of carers enables Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) to delay or possibly avert the need for complex and costly social care interventions, and by sustaining carers within their caring role, the stability of local adult health and social care services is supported. Identifying and providing support to these individuals is not just mandated by the Care Act 2014, but a sound economic and socially responsible decision (which may also prevent carers themselves needing services in their own right). Providing information, advice and support to carers ensures they promote their own wellbeing, carer breakdown is prevented, and resilient communities are established.
- 3.4 The local Adult Carers Support Service was brought in-house to SBC in January 2018 and works with adults who are providing informal care and support for adults across the Borough. Since then, the service has developed significantly, with over 5,000 referrals during this time. As of June 2025, it was working with 3,200 unpaid carers within Stockton-on-Tees, offering ongoing advice, information and support alongside statutory carers assessments, support planning, carers personal budgets, and time-out assistance. SBC are also supporting nearly 2,000 carers with a direct payment, which amounts to a projected spend of £550,000 for this provision in this financial year.
- 3.5 In related matters, the Adult Carers Support Service has also had some initial involvement with the transitions programme as part of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) *Powering Our Future* (POF) initiative – a new way of operating for the Council which seeks to work with partners and communities to put in place new and innovative approaches, allowing SBC to not only save money but also reshape what it does for the better, and in the best interests, of local residents.

4.0 Findings

Local carer landscape and impact of caring

4.1. In September 2025, the Committee heard that there were approximately 20,000 unpaid carers across Stockton-on-Tees out of a population of around 200,000. Whilst not everyone would identify as a carer, any person might find themselves in a position of having to support a family member, friend, neighbour, colleague or, as part of their employment, a service-user. It was therefore important for everyone to be mindful of this eventuality, have conversations around this topic, and help identify those people in need of support.



4.2. A host of well-known issues were associated with unpaid caring, ranging from financial hardship and social isolation to poor physical and / or mental health, and stress, worry and feelings of anger, guilt and frustration. Difficulties in accessing primary care / other universal services and challenges in getting information / support were further experiences. As such, local carers had identified several elements which they would find helpful, including access to mental health support and counselling, health and wellbeing support, information and signposting, regular 'check-ins', practical assistance, and visible communications and support from senior leaders. Being able to work flexibly in order to facilitate their caring role was also highlighted, as was raising awareness with managers on carer tools / guidance, the creation of a Virtual Carers Network, and focusing on outcomes rather than presence.

4.3. Continuing the theme of working carers, it was noted that, nationally, one-in-five employees was a carer, 90% of whom were over the age of 30. One-in-six people would leave their employment due to the pressure of the caring role, resulting in a knock-on annual cost to the UK economy of £5.3 billion. In light of this, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) had a Staff Carers Network which met online bi-monthly, provided peer support, advice and signposting, and played a role in steering the plans / objectives of the local Adult Carers Support Service.

Identifying Carers

4.4. All the Council's social care staff had a duty to identify and support carers to access help where appropriate. The Carers Team regularly promoted the support offered to internal teams and they were all made aware of how to refer.

4.5. SBC had close working partnerships with other organisations, including health, GPs, pharmacies, Cleveland Fire Brigade, Citizens Advice, Welfare Hub, Age UK, Catalyst, Memory Clinic, Eastern Ravens, and many others. The Carers Team provided support and carers awareness training to many third-parties to help them identify and support carers. SBC also assisted businesses on request to help them improve their support to carers in their employment, and had worked closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus in the past to help them support their own staff (and individuals who utilised their services who may be in a caring role).

4.6. SBC used / attended events and activities in the community to promote carer services, and regularly hosted its own events during Carers Week, Carers Rights Day, Happy Hippy Shake, etc. SBC used social media, the Council website, Stockton Information Directory (SID) and its own email bulletin and newsletter to try and spread information / advice for carers and also identify new carers where appropriate. Work was also undertaken with the SBC Communications

Team to ensure promotional materials such as pull-up banners, posters and leaflets were regularly distributed throughout the Borough, including in libraries, leisure centres and other community hubs. Parking tickets and electronic screens throughout the Borough had previously been used to promote the service.

- 4.7. Work took place with the Council's libraries teams, learning and skills, health and wellbeing librarian, customer service and First Contact teams, Hartlepool and Stockton Health (HASH), Tees Active, and other partners to promote carer services. There was also a hospital-based Carers Advisor at the University Hospital of North Tees whose role was to engage carers within the hospital environment, ensuring they were accessing support where required, supporting carers through the discharge process, and raising awareness of carers and their needs with hospital staff / wards.
- 4.8. The Committee highlighted the significant increase in the number of identified carers across the Borough which the updated SBC Adult Social Care Strategy needed to acknowledge / plan for.

Benefits to being a Registered Carer

- 4.9. The benefit of being a registered carer was being able to access support throughout an individual's caring journey and beyond in a way that was meaningful to them. This could be from accessing information, advice and guidance in a format that was suitable to them (in-person, via post, online, email, etc.), accessing peer support, respite, carers budgets and carers emergency cards, and also just having someone who was there to listen to them as a carer and ensure they were prioritising their own wellbeing and needs, enabling them to continue in their caring role.
- 4.10. Being recognised as a carer could also help with other aspects as the Carers Team would assist with access to other services, providing referrals to organisations and teams (including therapy and psychological services), technological support from places like SBC OneCall, Occupational Therapy, the Falls Team, debt advice, and benefits advice (amongst many other things).
- 4.11. In addition, the Carers Team would help carers to plan for contingencies and emergencies, and often supported with future planning and through the end of the caring role. It assisted carers to enter or remain in employment, volunteering or training. Carers education courses / carers awareness was provided to help carers develop their skills to support in their caring role (and develop this into an employment opportunity should they wish), as well as their hobbies and interests. Other support was offered in areas such as menopause, caring for someone else's dental hygiene, lifting and handling, first aid, transition support, finances, dementia awareness, IT support, and more general things such as reiki, seated yoga, reflexology, wreath-making, meditation, one-pot cooking, and many more.

Development of the local Adult Carers Support Service

- 4.12. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) had developed an online 'Carers' Hub' to support all informal / unpaid carers and cared-for people across the Borough. The hub provided access to a range of options for those undertaking a caring role, including:
 - Carer's assessment
 - Join our carers' register
 - Apply for a carers' emergency card
 - Carers' Connect (free friendship service)
 - Support for carers
 - Information for carers on our directory (Stockton Information Directory)

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council website. It includes the council logo, navigation links for 'Our Council', 'Our People', 'Our Places', and 'Our Economy', and buttons for 'Create a My Council account' and 'Sign in to My Council'. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home • Our People • Health and Social Care'. The main heading is 'Carers' Hub'. A sub-heading reads: 'We are here to support all informal and unpaid carers and cared-for people in our Borough.' The page contains several paragraphs of text defining an informal carer, explaining how one might become an unpaid carer, and discussing the emotional challenges of caring. It also provides contact information for the Adult Carers' Support Service, including a phone number, email address, Facebook page, and Twitter account.

Background

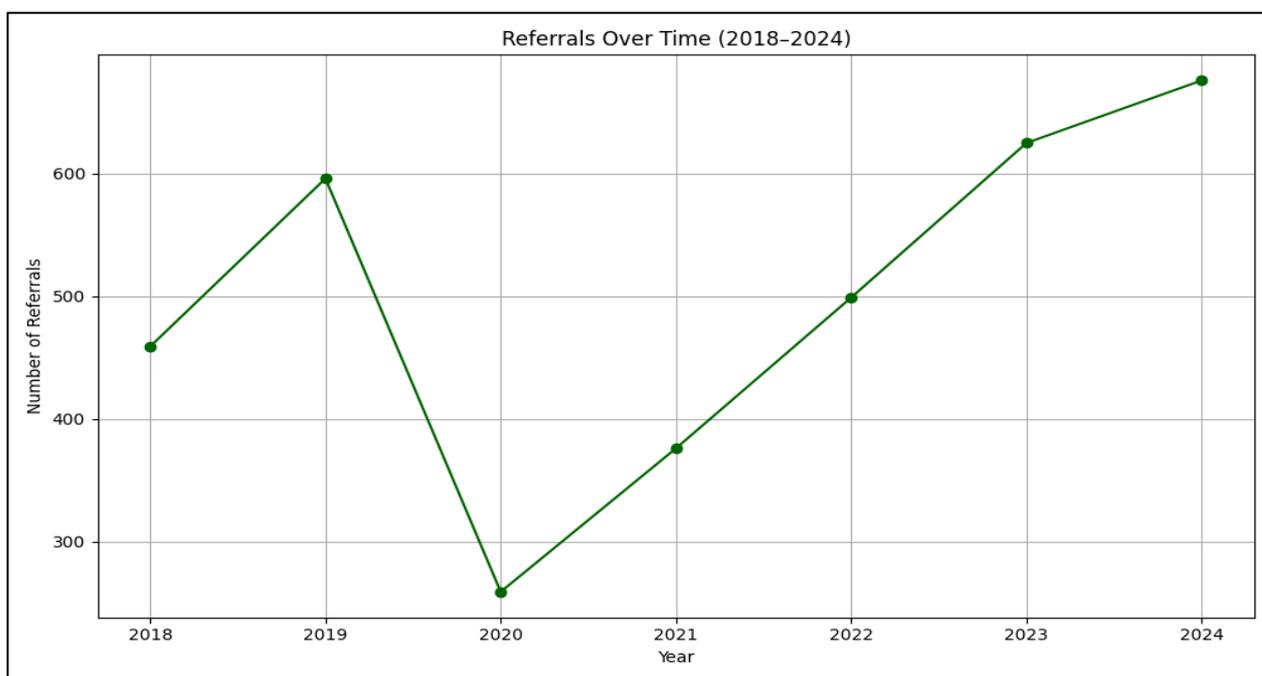
- 4.13. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service was a key part of the support offer for local carers (see <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/support-for-carers>) and was brought in-house by SBC in 2018. Previously provided by a commissioned organisation (Sanctuary), the service was not meeting its objectives, and carers, generally, were reporting that they were unhappy with the level of support given. The organisation was also not commissioned to provide statutory carer's assessments, so these were done by SBCs social work teams (creating additional internal pressures).
- 4.14. SBC went out to consultation with carers when the contract was due for renewal. Feedback indicated a desire for all services to be provided by one organisation / team and for a commitment from the Local Authority to continue supporting carers. The Council then took the decision to bring the service in-house (due, in part, to the success of the direct payment service which had done the same thing previously), and this was subsequently brought into SBC Adult Social Care for significantly less budget. The numbers of carers registered went from 104 to the present figure of 3,300 (although there have been around 6,000 carers registered throughout the years since it came in-house), with the existing offer benefitting from close links with adult social care and other support services, as well as providing employment and training opportunities for the Borough's carers.

Referrals

- 4.15. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service had an open referrals system – approaches could be through self-referrals, from third-party professionals or organisations, or via social care. Referrals were made via phone, email or online, and carers could also access the Livewell Hub in-person.
- 4.16. Being a carer was self-determined (in line with the Care Act 2014), so if someone believed themselves to be a carer then they could access support from the Local Authority. This included

getting information, advice and guidance, attending peer support and carers awareness sessions, accessing a carers emergency card, and various other options. The Care Act assessment could be accessed by anyone who believed themselves to be a carer, however, the level of carers budget they generated via this would differ depending on the impact of the caring role on the carer's everyday life and wellbeing. This was similar for accessing the Time Out service.

- 4.17. All services were bespoke to the carer and what they wanted or needed at the time, so not all referrals would result in a carer's assessment as this may not be the choice or need of the carer. They may choose just to access information and support (i.e. attend peer support or go onto the Council's mailing lists) – they do not need an assessment to do this.
- 4.18. Referrals to the service totalled around 450 in 2018, dipped to below 300 during 2020 (COVID-impacted), but then continually escalated to nearly 700 in 2024 (see below graphic).



The cumulative number of carers open to the service, meanwhile, had continually increased from almost 500 in 2018 to 3,500 in 2024 (those accessing it remained open to the service and could come back at any time).

- 4.19. In November 2025, demographics in relation to those using the service (as of 7 November 2025) were provided to the Committee (see below graphic).

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Total
Male	11	111	197	397	214	158	228	1316
Female	27	45	82	126	714	478	375	1847
White British	33	147	260	477	886	613	585	3001
Asian/ Asian British	4	5	14	29	25	13	6	96
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	4
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
Pakistani/British	0	0	1	0	0	0		1
Other	1	2	1	6	3	6	1	20
Prefer Not To Say	0	0	1	0	1	0		2
Not specified	0	1	0	9	11	3	9	33
Total	38	156	279	523	928	636	603	3163

Finances

- 4.20. In terms of finance, the service budget increased from £319,109 in 2022-2023 to £394,207 in 2023-2024 following the introduction of the 'Shared Lives' (<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/shared-lives>) element – this then rose to £396,522 for 2024-2025. An associated Carers Personal Budget fund had increased from £479,716 in 2022-2023 to £495,490 in 2024-2025.

Service Offer

- 4.21. A wide range of support was provided by the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service, including statutory carer's assessments, person-centred support planning, one-to-one support, carers education sessions, welfare calls, a hospital-based Carers Advisor, and support for external organisations to increase their support for adult carers. Other communication and engagement mechanisms existed via online services, newsletter and email bulletins, social media presence, drop-in sessions, weekly / monthly peer support groups, and the Carers Connect service (<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/carers-connect>).

- 4.22. Further detail was given on several of the service's key aspects, including statutory assessment (carers had a legal right to an assessment of need, support to meet that need, and access to information and advice) and personal budgets (it was noted that the previous use of pre-payment cards had created issues – SBC was now looking at direct payments into individual accounts). The Carers Emergency Card (helping to prepare / plan for emergencies) was also highlighted, as was the Time Out offer, which gave carers up to eight hours of ad-hoc support per month free-of-charge, allowing them a break from their caring role.



- 4.23. Attention was drawn to the Council's work with Mobilise, the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers. This partnership was in to its second year and helped to provide a range of free online services, as well as identify hidden carers. Thus far, carers had engaged over 2,000 times through Mobilise's actions or tools (such as its e-support subscription), been supported over 1,000 times with deeper actions like its Personalised Guide to Caring, and been enabled to apply for over £363,550 in eligible Carer's Allowance support. Developments in relation to a mapping exercise of carers across the Borough (potentially aiding targeted support) were ongoing.
- 4.24. Responding to the submission from the SBC Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate, the Committee emphasised the importance of enabling carers to have some occasional time to themselves, including the facilitation of access to community groups (where desired). Members felt it would be useful for the Council to seek the views of carers on the benefits of providing this relief from their caring duties.
- 4.25. Regarding the help given to external organisations to increase their support for adult carers, the Committee was informed that this was happening across all locations within the Borough, and that raising awareness of carers and the caring role was a key part of the local service.
- 4.26. Returning to the theme of respite, Members praised the ad-hoc nature of the Time Out support and asked about take-up. It was confirmed that around 120 people accessed this offer, though there were only nine support workers (providing up to 75 hours per week) to facilitate demand. Positive feedback had been received from those using this element of the overall service, with the Council having success in employing current and ex-carers to deliver it in the home and community (it was noted that this was not domiciliary support, though).

4.27. Acknowledging the financial challenges that carers often endured, the Committee queried whether the local Adult Carers Support Service liaised with the Council's A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees department. SBC officers stated that there was an established link between these two entities (including The Bread and Butter Thing initiative), and that the former also worked with the in-house Welfare Rights Team to ensure carers were aware of the support available to them. A number of carers were reluctant to admit to financial hardship – the established newsletter was therefore a useful resource to promote assistance for carers without the need for them to physically approach the service.

Mobilise

4.28. Mobilise was an online business led by carers, for carers, which provided weekly digests of carers' top tips, community support, and a space to connect with people in similar positions. It had been working with SBC since 2024 to provide a range of free online services to support local carers and was therefore approached to provide views on this scrutiny topic. In November 2025, the respective Account Manager presented the organisation's submission, key features of which included:

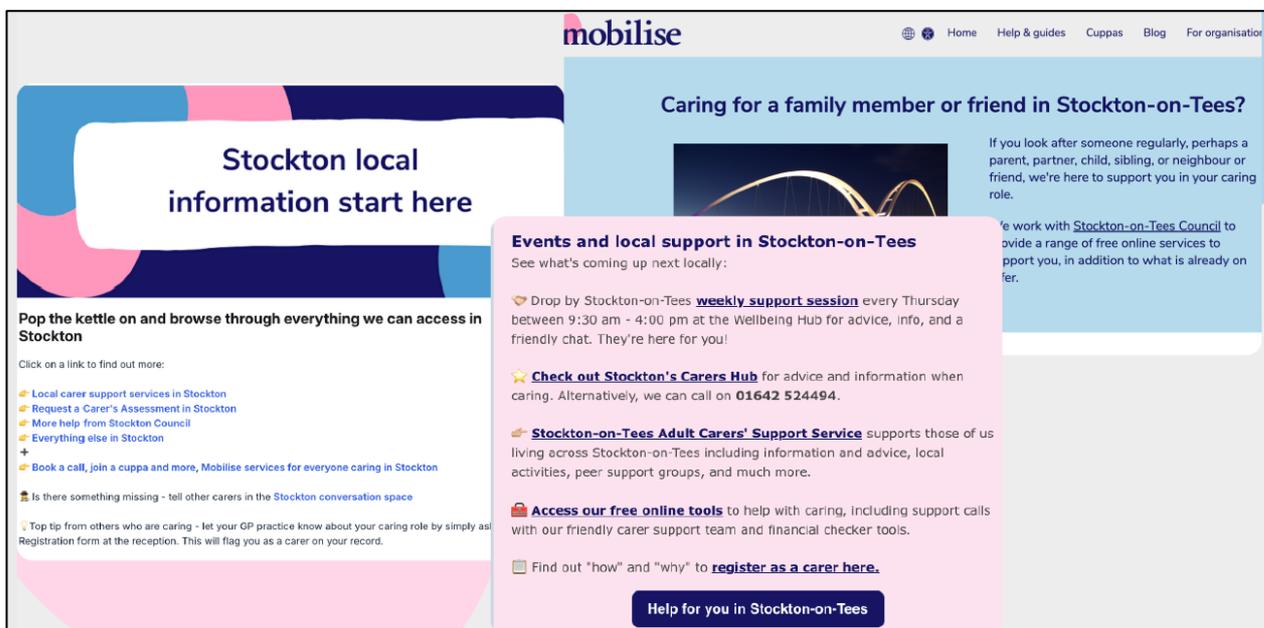
4.29. **About Mobilise:** Mobilise helped Councils engage unpaid carers (aged 18+) earlier and more effectively – preventing, reducing and delaying the need for intensive adult social care. It did this through digital innovation (AI tools, targeted web ads, and a 24/7 online peer community), scalable / light-touch support (information, advice and guidance available anytime), and human connection (lived experience carer support team for one-to-one help). The Mobilise offer complemented existing services, reached / identified hidden carers, addressed Care Quality Commission (CQC) priorities, and supported the NHS plan for community-focused preventative carer support.

4.30. **Core principles:** The organisation had three core principles – focusing on upstream prevention (finding carers early and giving them support / guidance as and when they needed it), technology to bring people together, and mobilising carer knowledge / wisdom / expertise.

4.31. **Identification and initial engagement:** Online adverts allowed carers to sign-up to Mobilise's personalised guide to caring (Facebook), whilst a variety of caring topics and the Carer's Allowance tool was accessible via internet searches. The Mobilise app had a range of features to help carers, including the Mobilise Assistant (answering questions and signposting), an online community (safe and moderated space for emotional and peer support), online events, data and insight (understanding needs / trends of carers within the Borough), and digital resources. Alongside these online options, the Carer Support Team was also available if a person-to-person conversation was required / preferred.



- 4.32. **Mobilise and ARF:** The North East and North Cumbria Mobilise Digital Carer Service was developed through the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) to address the gap in accessible and proactive support for unpaid carers. Many carers across the 13 Local Authorities reported limited knowledge of available services, with 81% having never accessed support for their caring role before.
- 4.33. **Mobilise and the North East:** During the November 2022 – March 2024 period, successful pilots were completed across four North East Local Authorities (Durham, Middlesbrough, Northumberland, and South Tyneside). After this, directors of 13 Local Authorities committed to a strategic digital carer service through a partnership with Mobilise and £990,000 of ARF money – this was a two-year (April 2024 – March 2026) regional initiative for identification and support of unreached carers across the Integrated Care Board (ICB) region, with a view to business-as-usual sustainability post-ARF. The North East Councils supported by Mobilise would exceed targets and reach over 150,000 carers, with 30,000+ new carers registered by March 2026.
- 4.34. **So far in Stockton:** Mobilise had engaged carers 2,667 times through actions or tools (e.g. e-support subscription), supported carers 1,507 times with deeper actions like its Personalised Guide to Caring, and enabled unpaid carers to apply for over £500,000 in eligible Carer's Allowance support (via the online calculator). Mobilise had also developed heat-maps of identified carers across the Borough to potentially assist targeted support / action.
- 4.35. **In Stockton-on-Tees we know:** During engagement with local carers, Mobilise had found that 82% had not previously accessed support before, 79% cared for over 35 hours a week, 66% were of working age, 64% used Mobilise services outside of working hours, and 29% of Mobilise users were male.
- 4.36. **Signposting to local support:** The Mobilise website (<https://support.mobiliseonline.co.uk/stockton-on-tees>), its social media platforms, and its newsletter all highlighted and provided links to the local Adult Carers Support Service.



- 4.37. **Future in Stockton-on-Tees:** Currently, the future of Mobilise across the North East ICB region was being discussed at director, commissioner and carers lead level within each Local Authority. Mobilise had presented a discounted model to each Local Authority based on population size, and was committed to working closely with adult social care teams to ensure that carers were informed and empowered to choose the support they needed at the right time. Using paid digital

marketing techniques, Mobilise had been able to register nearly 2,000 carers in 18 months (using carer-led data to target carers at home) and, over the past 18 months, had provided detailed insights and impact from real carers across Stockton-on-Tees.

- 4.38. **Existing challenges to be considered:** Identifying carers earlier in their journey (particularly those who did not self-identify or who were balancing work, family and caring responsibilities) remained a key challenge, with early identification allowing for lighter-touch, preventative support before carers reached crisis. In addition, Mobilise would welcome opportunities to collaborate on measuring outcomes for carers, not only in terms of service uptake, but also wellbeing, confidence and sustainability in caring roles.

In terms of the future service, developing a hybrid offer (which balanced digital accessibility with in-person intensity where needed) would benefit carers who felt empowered through community, peer-learning and having access to knowledge they could control, as well as those requiring structured, face-to-face interventions (particularly those in crisis or with complex caring situations). Mobilise's national experience showed that a blended model enhanced choice, increased reach, and promoted self-sustaining carer networks.

With one-in-seven employees juggling work and care, there was also a need to support carers in less traditional ways. Mobilise's 24/7 digital carers service could support Stockton-on-Tees' ambitions to help carers remain in work – this was particularly important given the local economic cost of carers leaving employment. Furthermore, using a co-production approach (involving carers in shaping what 'good' looked like) would ensure that future developments in the Borough's carers offer remained meaningful and data-informed.

- 4.39. **Summary:** Since May 2024, Mobilise had supported 1,780 unpaid carers in Stockton-on-Tees with 4,174 actions, 82% of whom had not accessed support before. This had been done through paid media advertisement to allow carers to receive 24/7 digital support. Mobilise was working closely with SBC Adult Social Care to create a seamless transition of the carers most in need, giving carers the choice to access more formal in-person support. Whilst the contract was set to end in April 2026, Mobilise celebrated the successes in partnership with SBC, and endeavoured to support the Council's strategic priorities around unpaid carers.
- 4.40. Regarding the data provided on the number of Stockton-on-Tees carers that Mobilise had engaged with thus far (2,667), it was stated that further detail could be provided around engagement (if required) following a Committee query on whether this represented the amount of individual carers or the total number of times Mobilise's services had been used (i.e. a single individual may have accessed the offer on multiple occasions).
- 4.41. Whilst being a digitalised service, Members asked if Mobilise was able to support individuals on a face-to-face basis. It was confirmed that Mobilise was fundamentally a digital offer, though the organisation did work with in-person services and could go into these to highlight its own support platforms. Although some people were cautious around using technology, Mobilise was able to help them access its services where required.
- 4.42. Continuing the theme of digital reluctance / exclusion, the Committee drew attention to those carers not accessing information online and questioned how contact with the local Adult Carers Support Service was being promoted. Members heard that a portal had been developed where a carer could get in touch with the Council's offer – assurance was given that the portal was secure / data protected.
- 4.43. Switching focus back to those who preferred digital means of support, the Committee felt that services such as Mobilise's were vital for assisting those carers who did not want to reveal themselves to social care at this point. When thinking about future provision in relation to local carers, it therefore seemed prudent to ensure both digital and in-person help was available.

Update (January 2026)

- 4.44. Further to Mobilise's presentation to the Committee in November 2025, SBC officers relayed an update on the situation regarding Mobilise in January 2026 which noted the Council's very recent move to renew its contract with this external organisation:

'The decision to extend the use of Mobilise into 2026-2027 had been influenced by recent decisions and work to digitally enabled adult social care front door and ensure technology-driven entry point for people, including carers, seeking information, advice, or access to adult social care services that complement our traditional phone or face-to-face contact.'

'Mobilise would be used across 10 of the North East Local Authorities and the SBC commissioning team would progress the contract to ensure the Council had the relevant quality and performance controls in place.'

- 4.45. Reflecting upon this development, the Committee requested confirmation on when the extended contract with Mobilise was now due to expire, as well as the cost to SBC of this decision. A subsequent SBC statement was provided as follows:

'Stockton-on-Tees, as part of North East Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), has collaborated with the other Local Authorities in the North East to renew the contract with Mobilise for a further year (commencing 1 April 2026). This joint approach has provided a more cost-effective outcome for this contract (£27,000).'

'We will continue to work with Mobilise to ensure that we get the best outcomes for our carers in Stockton-on-Tees. Mobilise forms only a part of the overall offer we provide to our carers and we continue to work with our partners and carers to develop and improve these services. It is important that we have a range of service types and offers available to reach the maximum number of carers and ensure they are able to access the support they need.'

- 4.46. It was also subsequently clarified that 11 of the 12 North East Local Authorities had now collectively signed up to Mobilise for 2026-2027 (the exception being Newcastle City Council).

Future Service Demand

- 4.47. SBC knew that there were approximately 20,000 carers in the Borough. However, referral levels to the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service had remained fairly consistent for a number of years. The service continued to promote itself to carers in a variety of ways to ensure that carers could access support as early in their caring journey as they needed it – this included online systems (Facebook, X, Instagram, Council website, SID, online Carers' Hub, etc.), via drop-in activities in the community (i.e. GP surgeries, community hubs, events and activities), and through creating links with community organisations, health and social care, and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.
- 4.48. As an early intervention and prevention service, the aim was to reach as many carers as possible to offer support and prevent carer breakdown. SBC knew that each carer who was caring for over 35 hours per week saved the Local Authority in the region of £24,000 per annum. If this was scaled up, the cost of replacement care in Stockton-on-Tees would be around £480 million. Even if just the current registered carers were to experience breakdown, this could cost the Local Authority approximately £79.2 million per annum in replacement care.

Health sector considerations around carers

NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB)

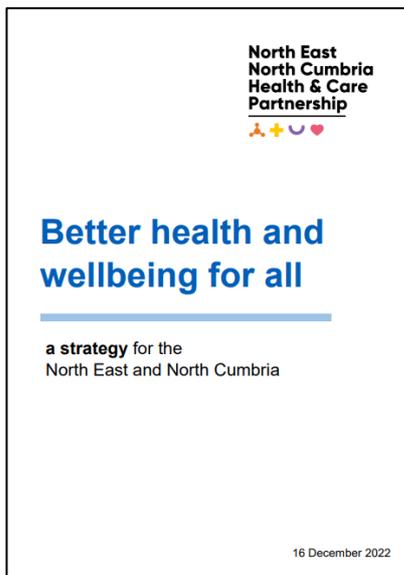
- 4.49. Responding to the Committee's lines of enquiry, a report was presented by the NENC ICB Head of Commissioning, Community & UEC in October 2025 containing the following:
- 4.50. The NHS, under the Health and Care Act 2022, was legally required to involve unpaid carers in decisions about the care and treatment of the individuals they supported. This included participation in the planning and delivery of care, as well as in discharge planning from hospital settings.

The current NHS long-term plan highlighted best practice in identifying carers and providing them with appropriate support (including encouragement to record whether someone was a carer in their GP record). For primary care (general practice), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), as part of its inspection framework, looked at how effectively carers were supported (including involving people in decisions about their care and that this was responsive and personalised to their needs).

- 4.51. Whilst NENC ICB did not have any direct responsibilities in this area (there was no ICB strategy as such, as it did not have direct responsibility for the commissioning of services), it could demonstrate collaborative work at a local level with Local Authority and 'system' partners to support the adult carers agenda.

The ICB Local Delivery Teams worked in collaboration with Local Authorities in the development of Better Care Fund (BCF) plans, which specifically included reflections on, and services for, carers. These plans were developed based on local need across each Local Authority and the ICB collaborated to support the design of these plans. The ICB was a member of each Health and Wellbeing Board, plus it held Place Sub-Committees where there was the ability to discuss health and social care challenges and opportunities (acting as a forum for partnership working).

- 4.52. Locally, the NENC ICB / ICP Joint Strategy ([integrated-care-strategy-better-health-and-wellbeing.pdf](#)) specified a key programme aim of 'working to identify and support more people who are providing unpaid care within the region' (see below graphic). This was a challenge as some individuals often did not see themselves as a carer / fulfilling a caring role.



8.1.5 Supporting unpaid carers

Unpaid carers are a very diverse group. It includes Young Carers - children and young people who support family members, usually one or both of their parents or their siblings, who have additional caring needs. This might result from a long-term disability, long term condition or an acute illness. It also often relates to social circumstance, for example children of drug or alcohol dependent parents. Young carers often experience multiple disadvantage, through reduced time available to focus on their education, or to build peer social groups, and often also experience other features of socio-economic deprivation.

Adult Carers include parents providing support to their children and adult children, including those with physical care needs, learning disabilities or severe and enduring mental illness. It also includes carers providing support for older adults, particularly elderly family members who need support for the normal functions of daily living, for example due to a significant cognitive impairment or dementia. Carers themselves often experience poorer health outcomes, and consistently report that the experience of care for their loved one, and indeed for themselves, could be improved.

We will become better at identifying carers and provide more support to them in terms of their own health and wellbeing, and to the people for whom they care.

- 4.53. Looking ahead, carers, and their role across health, would be picked up in emerging Neighbourhood Health Plans which were being led by Local Authorities. The ICB would again collaborate and contribute towards these plans, and had a requirement to pull together a population health improvement plan which would reflect local Neighbourhood Health priorities amongst a range of other ICB priority areas. For now, from a NENC ICB perspective, it was felt that Stockton-on-Tees did a superb job around the whole carers' agenda.
- 4.54. Reflecting on the report, the Committee considered the influence of the NENC ICB in relation to those providing unpaid care and wondered whether the organisation was somewhat detached from patients / carers. Members were reminded that the ICB did not commission carer services, nor did it have a regulatory capacity. However, it was able to promote / encourage the promotion of carers (e.g. noticeboard displays in general practices) and did work collaboratively with operational teams to ensure clinical pathways included considerations around carers.
- 4.55. Noting a shared 'We Care You Care' link (which highlighted Newlands Medical Centre in Middlesbrough achieving carer-friendly status – see <https://wecareyoucare.info/articles/newlands-medical-centre-becomes-first-in-middlesbrough-to-achieve-carer-friendly-status>), the Committee queried if any data existed for primary care services within the Borough which demonstrated how many carers had been identified (as a proportion of its patient list) by a particular practice. This was followed up with relevant NENC ICB personnel after the meeting who provided the following:

'There are national 'SNOMED' codes agreed which practices use. These codes allow clinical information, such as a diagnosis, finding, or procedure, to be recorded consistently and accurately. In relation to carers, the following SNOMED codes exist:

- 224484003 – Carer
- 302767002 – Cares for a relative
- 199361000000101 – Is no longer a carer

Across Stockton-on-Tees, 4,741 individuals have been identified as being coded with 'carer' or 'cares for a relative' which is 2.3% of the total registered population in Stockton [203,574], and 930 individuals have been coded as 'is no longer a carer' which represents 0.5% of the total registered population for Stockton.'

- 4.56. Given some of the Committee's lines of enquiry did not appear to be addressed within its submission, examples / links on how the NENC ICB had highlighted / raised awareness of support for adult carers (either to the public or the organisations within its umbrella) was requested, along with any examples / knowledge of good practice within the NENC ICB footprint around adult carers support (outside Stockton-on-Tees). The NENC ICB Head of Commissioning, Community & UEC subsequently responded as follows...

'We don't generally hold this information as an ICB and given that there will be significant variation as to the commissioning of services across NENC. In order to respond to the questions in relation to carers I would suggest using an FOI approach – this will ensure a co-ordinated response.'

- 4.57. Whilst not included within the NENC ICB submission, its May 2024 promotion of a new strategy launching a vision to improve lives of Gateshead caregivers was highlighted to the Committee (see <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/news/new-strategy-launches-vision-to-improve-lives-of-gateshead-caregivers/>).

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT)

4.58. In October 2025, the NTHFT Head of Patient Flow, supported by the NTHFT Associate Director of Nursing Experience & Involvement, gave a presentation which addressed several lines of enquiry it had received from the Committee. This included:

4.59. **What roles / responsibilities in relation to adult carers?:** Under the Care Act 2014 (England), NTHFT had specific responsibilities in supporting the identification of adult carers when providing short-term treatment to patients (i.e. people who provided unpaid care to someone with identified care needs). These were met through communication with / involvement of carers at every stage of the journey (with the patients' consent), recognising carers as partners in care, and through education and training (e.g. moving and handling / medication administration). Discharge planning (a line had been added to the 'assessment of need' document to recognise carers) and supporting carers within the hospital environment (e.g. signposting / referral for further assistance (including to the Adult Carers Support Service), meal vouchers, John's Campaign) were also important features.

A 'Carers Charter' (visible in the main University Hospital of North Tees entrance) had also been developed by University Hospitals Tees (UHT) (partnership between NTHFT and neighbours South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (STHFT)) to demonstrate its commitment to carers of all ages (see above graphic) – this was being reinforced with staff and patients.



4.60. **How does the Trust identify carers?:** This was achieved via the nursing admission process, involvement / discussion in discharge planning, and during inpatient care episodes. However, people did not always recognise themselves as carers, and the Trust needed to keep asking this throughout contact with services as an individual's situation may change.

4.61. **How aware are Trust staff of the local Adult Carers Support Service offer?:** Awareness of the local offer was aided / promoted through the Integrated Discharge Team, as well as the Frailty front-of-house service and staff operating within the Trust's elderly care wards.

4.62. **Feedback regarding Stockton Carers service:** Positive feedback from the Home First Team, the Discharge Clinical Care Co-ordinator, and the Frailty Co-ordinator was relayed. It was noted that, for some individuals, the local carers service had prevented additional care packages from having to be implemented.

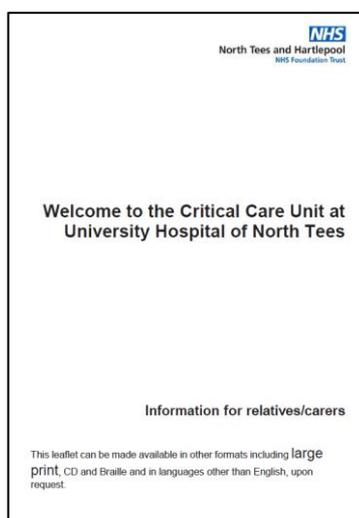
4.63. **Working with SBC with regards the local carers support offer – how does this operate; is this effective; is there anything that could strengthen current arrangements?:** Partnership working included carer identification and liaison, the supply and promotion of information / advice / guidance, education and training for hospital teams (staff forums, team meetings, preceptorships), and transition and discharge support (involving regular liaison with team leads). Trust staff had given positive feedback about existing arrangements with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC), and some had benefitted personally from the local service (recognising that they needed to look after themselves in order to carry out their own role). Moving forward,

continuous education around the local offer was required, as was a need to think about how the Trust's community services / teams were targeted in relation to carers, particularly given the number of people involved in a caring role was likely to continue increasing.

- 4.64. **What are the implications for NTHFT of the new 10-Year Health Plan for England in relation to support for carers? What plans are / will have to be in place to fulfil any obligations?:** The new 'Fit for the Future: 10-Year Health Plan for England' advocated stronger NHS support for unpaid carers, although there were no specific targets. From a local standpoint, future planning would be undertaken across the UHT footprint (as opposed to an individual Trust perspective), with promotion of the Carers Charter, input from those with lived experience, and a tightening-up on the identification of carers to be developed. Assurance was given that the NTHFT Director of Nursing was well sighted on carer-related issues.
- 4.65. **Any views on key areas of future focus relating to this scrutiny topic (e.g. existing challenges that need to be?:** Continued promotion across all health and care services, including primary care, to promote the identification of carers and signposting to available support.
- 4.66. The Committee began its response by focusing on the Carers Charter and the need to embed this across the Trust (particularly given carers knew much more about the person they cared for than professionals). NTHFT officers gave assurance that this was promoted widely via the Trust's various communications mechanisms and was highlighted as part of staff inductions. It was intended for the charter to also be included within future workforce training.
- 4.67. Continuing with the communications theme, the Committee was pleased to hear that the Trust was listening to carers and expressed interest in seeing any public-facing literature that NTHFT was using to raise the profile of carers within hospital settings. NTHFT subsequently shared a number of leaflets / guidance / photos (see examples below), and noted the following...

'In terms of Stockton carers...

- *Carers info leaflets are displayed in outpatient reception areas, discharge lounge, EAU, outside ward 40, on small table near retail carts and in security office.*
- *Posters are displayed on ward patient information boards, toilet doors near main entrance, EAU, A&E, Macmillan cancer support office, car park office.*
- *Pop-up banner is in main entrance by car park pay machine.*
- *Hopefully we will get more literature and information on the TVs too.*
- *Feedback is the budget for literature is very small.'*



- 4.68. To maintain staff awareness of the help available for local carers, Members also suggested increased presence from Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service personnel on wards.
- 4.69. NTHFT was asked how it would go about incorporating lived experience into its carers-related work. Members heard that a Patient Involvement Facilitator was working across University Hospitals Tees, and that an 'Involvement Bank' was giving patients and carers an opportunity to contribute to the future development of services. 'Experience of Care' meetings (involving local Healthwatch) also enabled input and reflection from patients and carers.

Engagement with / feedback from carers

4.70. In September 2025, officers from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate provided an overview of how the Council involved carers themselves in shaping future service delivery, emphasising the importance of a warm and open culture which encouraged engagement and listening. Several subsequent quotes demonstrated very positive carer views on the existing offer:

'I hardly know how to thank you for your kindness and help today. You have lifted a burden and I no longer feel that I am on my own with this. Thank you seems so inadequate.'

'Having someone else visit my mum so that I can have a couple of afternoons a month to myself to focus on my own children and grandchildren and catch up with my own household tasks is an absolute lifesaver.'

'I don't think I could do without it now.'

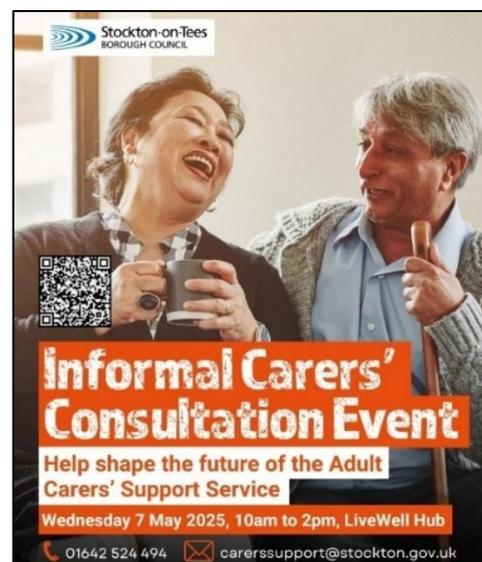
'Marvellous service – can't fault the staff and how friendly, kind and considerate they all are.'

'He's like one of the family. He treats Joe as his friend and it's as if they have known each other for years.'

4.71. SBC officers were asked to provide further detail on the results of recent consultation with carers regarding the local support offer. Led by a SBC Development Officer, and supported by the relevant SBC Service Manager and SBC Service Manager – Direct Services, a presentation was given in December 2025 which included the following:

4.72. **Carers Consultation (Spring 2025):** SBC received 70 responses to its Carers Consultation Survey 2025. Three key themes were identified (carers requiring information and communication earlier; hospital and healthcare support; carer support groups and peer connection), with a number of actions already taken in light of carer feedback.

4.73. **Open communication channels:** A range of mechanisms were in place to engage with carers, including social media platforms, fortnightly email bulletins, a quarterly carers newsletter, an online feedback form (which was also handed out during groups / events), and requests for carers to volunteer with recruitment. Carers were also involved during the late-2024 CQC assessment of SBC adult social care services.



- 4.74. **LiveWell Hub Activities:** Numerous sessions were held at the LiveWell Dementia Hub to support carers and those living with dementia, and there was close working with Stockton Libraries and Stockton Learning and Skills, Age UK, and Young at Heart to facilitate workshops and groups. Each group provided a welcoming space for carers to connect and participate in enriching activities, as well as access the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service and Dementia Service.
- 4.75. **In the community:** Carers consistently told SBC what was helpful, what needed improving and what made caring easier. The Council responded by adding new activities, signposting or arranging links with other services, and developing new resources when carers highlighted gaps.
- 4.76. **Staff Carer Peer Support Group:** SBC staff who were carers themselves were supported by the Council in several ways. By recognising their vital role in providing unpaid care, staff could benefit from access to advice, guidance and wellbeing resources, balance caring responsibilities by working flexibly, access peer support and networks, and undertake a Carer's Assessment to discuss their role and its impact upon them. SBC had also introduced a Carers Passport for staff (included within the papers for this meeting) which recorded their caring responsibilities and agreed workplace adjustments – this helped ensure consistent support if they moved roles or managers, promoted understanding, and reduced the need to repeat their story.
- 4.77. **Carer involvement in the CQC assessment:** Carers were actively involved in the co-production process for the recent CQC inspection. They supported the self-assessment document by sharing their experiences and feedback, gave honest reflections about the support services they received, shared lived experience to demonstrate impact, and highlighted strengths and areas of development. They also attended a session with CQC assessors during the on-site visit to talk about their experiences of co-producing with the Council, with their voices helping to demonstrate how the service valued partnership-working and continued improvement.
- 4.78. **Making It Real Board:** SBC actively promoted the Making It Real Board with carers and shared updates about any involvement opportunities in the carers newsletters.
- 4.79. **Co-Production Champions:** Monthly update meetings were held with the SBC Co-Production Champions (who also joined the Co-Production Week celebration in June 2025).
- 4.80. The Committee welcomed the information provided and was particularly encouraged by the support offer for SBC staff who were involved in giving unpaid care. With reference to the recently published CQC report on SBC adult social care services, Members asked if there had been any carer-related developments in response to the CQCs findings. SBC officers stated that contact lists had been simplified (depending on a carer's requirements), and links had been reinforced with the health sector (including hospitals, GPs and pharmacies), as well as internal SBC teams, to promote the carers agenda.
- 4.81. Members praised the Carers Passport concept and queried how many staff had taken this up – officers have since confirmed that this cannot be ascertained as this is a confidential document between manager / employee.
- 4.82. Noting the Committee's recent visit to the LiveWell Dementia Hub as part of this ongoing review, Members spoke of how highly the carers they met valued informal peer support (e.g. WhatsApp groups), but also the need for better bereavement services. Regarding the latter, it was stated that a carer whose partner had passed away was now running a support group for those who had suffered the loss of a loved one.
- 4.83. Discussion ensued around the concept and composition of the Making It Real Board, with the Committee encouraging the Council to ensure it was as representative of clients and carers across the Borough as it could be. Members heard that, whilst there was never the intention for

the Board to have a large membership, it was an evolving entity which could be developed further now it was established. Importantly, several co-production groups (involving a host of other individuals) fed into the Board which meant a greater number of people with lived experience and expertise were helping shape local services. In related matters, efforts had also been made to ensure an item about the Board was always included in Stockton News.

- 4.84. Finally, the Committee noted the reference within the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) Annual Report 2024-2025 (considered earlier in the December 2025 meeting) to a local Lived Experience Forum, and felt that care was needed to avoid too many groups being initiated with similar purposes (potentially causing confusion). Regarding carers, it was stated that SBC was trying to be smarter with how it communicated with these individuals and did not want to bombard them with information.

Committee Visit: LiveWell Dementia Hub

- 4.85. The LiveWell Dementia Hub was a community-based service that provided dementia information, support and training for anyone living in Stockton-on-Tees. This included people with dementia, their families, their carers, and anyone who would like to learn more about the condition. To carry out their own engagement with carers, Committee Members undertook a visit to the Hub in November 2025.

4.86. Observations

- Bright, airy reception area and spacious meeting rooms that were warm and inviting.
- Very helpful and friendly reception staff.
- Large amount of printed information on display (included leaflets / booklets on various health conditions and wider local / national support services that could be taken away).
- Pack of carers-related information provided – included:
 - a weekly Hub timetable detailing sessions held within the Hub and in the community
 - posters regarding forthcoming events at the Hub
 - Adult Carers Support Service leaflets
 - Adult Carers Support Service newsletter (see **Appendix 1**) – included two supplements on Time Out Service (FAQs) and the Carers' Connect Service

4.87. Feedback from engagement with carers

- Bereavement support group for carers and a chat group both held at the Hub, and hugely helpful.
- Important to be able to share experiences with those who are going through the same challenges.
- Hub is a lifeline for carers.
- Alison Watson-Shields of Young at Heart is 'brilliant'!
- Busy schedule of events at the Hub – also have speakers coming in on specific topics.
- Age UK uses the Hub for dementia support session (attracts the largest attendance).
- Adult carers training really useful and informative.
- Would be helpful if the Time Out Service was more flexible – have to book over a month in advance, and personal appointments not always predictable / given much notice.



4.88. Other

- Specific link within SBC Communications Team to promote the Hub / Carers Support Service.
- Adult Carers Support Service currently has a waiting list (will indicate to anyone wishing to access it what the waiting time is likely to be as part of the initial response).

- Time Out Service is initiating a 'Time Out Together' element (starting later in November 2025) – based at the Hub, this will allow multiple carers to have a break at the same time whilst their loved one partakes in group activities / games).
- Can be wasted appointments within the Time Out Service (e.g. carers booking a slot and then not cancelling it if they are unable to use it) – could this be more efficient (e.g. call / text the day before to remind them of their booking or to cancel it)?
- Discussion around feasibility of incorporating volunteers within the Time Out Service to potentially expand its capacity.

Young carers transitioning into the adult offer

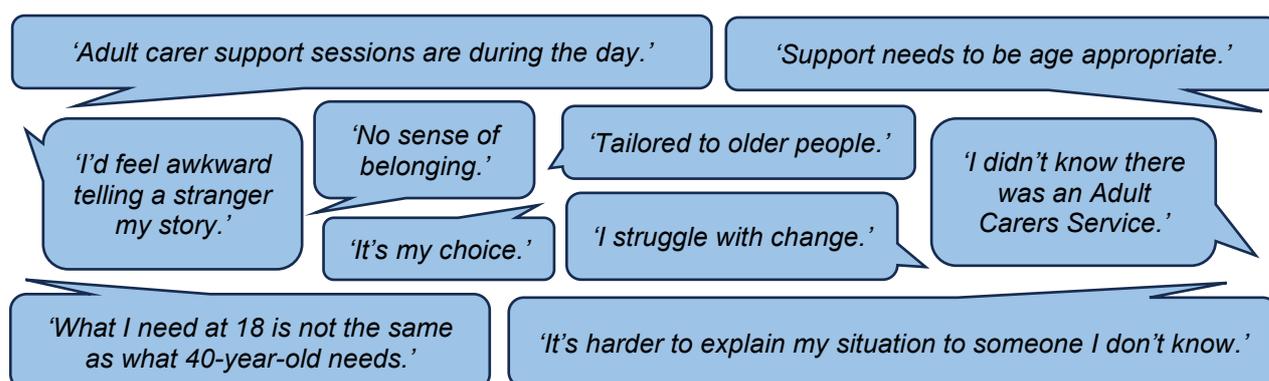
Eastern Ravens Trust

- 4.89. Recognising the Borough's young carers and the importance of their transition into adult support services, Eastern Ravens Trust (a local charity supporting young carers within Stockton-on-Tees) was asked to contribute to this review. In November 2025, the Trust Manager gave a presentation which covered the following:
- 4.90. **Eastern Ravens Trust – Supporting Young Carers (timeline):** Following the commencement of action research within the Borough in 1998, the first young carers group was launched on 1 April 2000, with Eastern Ravens Trust commissioned to work with 30 young carers per year. In October 2023, the Trust became a strategic partner to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) for young carers support, and between November 2024 and October 2025, assisted nearly 300 young carers.
- 4.91. **Young Carers Definition:** The term 'young carer' included children and young people under 18 who provided regular and ongoing care and emotional support to a family member who was physically or mentally ill, disabled, or misused substances.
- 4.92. **Stockton-on-Tees Context – Unpaid Care:** 2021 census data indicated that there were 1,500 young carers under the age of 25 locally – of these, 725 carried out their caring role for under 19 hours per week, 350 for 20-49 hours per week, and 175 for 50 hours or more per week (the remainder did not specify the time). It was felt that the number of young carers identified via the census did not reflect the actual total (which could potentially be four times as many) as some were hidden and others did not want to identify themselves as a carer.
- 4.93. **Reasons for Caring Roles:** The main factors leading to the onset of caring responsibilities were physical illness and / or disability, mental health illness, sensory / hearing loss, alcohol / drug dependency, and learning difficulties. Young people were sometimes carrying out multiple caring roles, taking on numerous additional tasks that went beyond what was considered 'normal' for their age-range.
- 4.94. **What do Young Carers do?:** Young carers were involved in practical tasks (e.g. cooking, housework, shopping), providing emotional support, giving / reminding about medication and collecting prescriptions / accompanying to medical appointments, managing finances (e.g. family budgeting, collecting benefits, banking), and interpreting. Assistance with physical (lifting, transferring) and personal (dressing, washing, toileting) care was also given, and there was sometimes a need to look after a younger sibling. All things considered, it was remarkable what some young people were doing across the Borough.
- 4.95. **Impacts of Caring:** Young people could be adversely affected as a result of their caring roles in a variety of ways. In terms of education, reduced attendance, lateness, struggling to cope within lessons and / or completing homework, worry, not having the correct uniform, and lower

attainment (decreasing future life chances) were potential possibilities. Socially, young carers could experience loneliness and isolation, become victims of bullying, and have increased risk of criminal and child sexual exploitation. Personally, their wellbeing may suffer (e.g. poor mental health, worry, stress and anxiety, lack of sleep, reduced time for exercise, shame, challenging behaviour), as might their physical health (injury, illness, developmental delay, lack of opportunities for exercise, healthy eating).

However, whilst the impact of having caring responsibilities tended to be negative, there were some positives in relation to enhanced family belonging / relationships and personal resilience. Indeed, young carers across Stockton-on-Tees had very strong characters, with the older cohort currently supported by Eastern Ravens all in either education, employment or training (a trend that had been observed for some time).

- 4.96. **Current Service Provision:** Currently supporting 141 young carers aged between five and 18 years-old (and, on occasion, beyond 18), Eastern Ravens offered a flexible / bespoke approach which covered whole family working, one-to-one assistance, respite breaks, and school holiday programmes. Referrals were received from a variety of sources including family members, schools, social workers, the SBC Early Help service, and other charities, and it was vitally important to have a 'no wrong door' policy to ensure timely access to the service. Eastern Ravens was also trying to build capacity and raise awareness of the importance of identifying and supporting young carers with schools (something that had become an Ofsted requirement).
- 4.97. **Young Carers Transitions:** The 2014 Care Act placed a duty on Local Authorities to provide young carers with a 'transition assessment' before they turned 18 years-old (this duty was delegated to Eastern Ravens in the service specification in 2023). The Trust's transition assessments involved conversations with young carers to obtain their views, wishes and feelings (as opposed to form-filling / paperwork), though this approach may change moving forward.
- 4.98. **Stockton Adult Carers Service & Stockton Young Carers Service:** Eastern Ravens had a very positive working relationship with the local Adult Carers Support Service which involved regular communication and the exchange of carer-related information and good practice. The Trust undertook an initial whole family assessment when support was requested for a young carer, with a referral made to the adult service should an adult within a household also be identified as having a caring role. Transition discussions took place between the two services, with targeted awareness-raising initiatives, joint events (e.g. Carers Week), and co-production of a forthcoming e-learning staff training module on carers further examples of this partnership.
- 4.99. **Young Carers Feedback:** Young carers who were coming up to, or had just turned, 18 years-old were asked for their views on the cessation of support from Eastern Ravens and the use of the adult service. Feedback highlighted concerns about dealing with change, how appropriate the local Adult Carers Support Service was for young adults, and a lack of knowledge of such an offer after they had reached adulthood. Ultimately, it was an individual's choice to be referred to the adult service.



- 4.100. **The Future:** Several factors were proposed when considering future provision for those transitioning into adult carer services, including the creation of a dedicated young adult carers service for 18-25 year-olds, and an offer that was open to all irrespective of caring for a sibling or an adult. Other important features were the inclusion of social opportunities at appropriate times, life-skill projects (e.g. managing money / cooking on a budget), and wellbeing support. Identifying unknown young adult carers should be a further priority.
- 4.101. Concluding the presentation, a video was shown to the Committee which demonstrated the support provided by Eastern Ravens and the extent to which young carers across the Borough valued its offer.
- 4.102. Welcoming the information provided by Eastern Ravens, the Committee queried why a change in the approach to transition assessments was being considered, particularly given the stated reluctance for young people to complete paperwork. In response, Members were informed of the need to establish a framework around carer identification / referrals.
- 4.103. The Committee asked what could be implemented to further strengthen the partnership between the young carers and adult carers services. The Trust Manager highlighted the ongoing development of the co-produced e-learning training module for staff – this would be made available to both the adults and children’s workforce, and needed to be promoted to increase awareness of carers and the caring role (SBC officers stated that this training would be part of future staff induction requirements). Members requested that the e-learning package be rolled out to all Councillors, too.
- 4.104. Emphasising the importance of selling the local Adult Carers Support Service offer to young carers (something relevant SBC managers could promote by going along to Trust events to engage with young people), the Committee noted the appreciation from young people within the video (which followed the presentation) of the ‘fun’ / ‘exciting’ service provided by Eastern Ravens – it was therefore clear that the adult carers offer needed to foster similar feelings / enthusiasm.
- 4.105. A final question was raised on the number of referrals received by Eastern Ravens from schools. The Trust Manager commented that schools were currently the fourth-highest referrer (this changed from year-to-year), though it was anticipated that referral rates would increase given the work being undertaken to support schools with their responsibilities around young carers. The Committee was informed that young people with caring roles often had exemplary school attendance records as their educational setting offered a safe space and a break from their home environment (they also had a tendency to ‘coast’ and were reluctant to ‘raise their head above the parapet’).

External carer-related SBC scrutiny

- 4.106. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) published its final report in October 2025 following the late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services. For the purposes of this review, commentary relating to ‘carer’ / ‘carers’ was highlighted for the Committee’s attention, as were any carer/s-related references from the preceding Local Government Association (LGA) peer review that was conducted and reported on prior to the CQCs visit (see **Appendix 2**).

LGA: Peer Assurance Challenge of SBC Adult Social Care (July 2024)

- 4.107. Undertaken in preparation for the anticipated CQC inspection of SBC adult social care services, the final report was published in August 2024 and considered by SBC Cabinet in October 2024 (<https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/documents/s8762/Peer%20Assurance%20Challenge%20of%20Adult%20Social%20Care%20by%20the%20LGA%20and%20CQC%20Assurance%20Update.pdf>). Comments from the peer review team included:

Case File Audit

- 'The voice of the person and the carer was apparent throughout.'
- 'There is good engagement with carers, but a limited reference to offer of carers assessment or other carers support services. Often carers are not recorded formally, despite being evident in notes.'

Lived Experience Feedback

- 'Staff were described as supportive, understanding and wanted to work together with people and carers.'

Theme 1: Working with People

- 'Carers support service has good uptake and provides meaningful, person-centred intervention for carers that they have a voice in.'
- 'The peer team were very impressed by the range and quality of these services and agreed with a staff member of the carers team – "what we do is real early intervention!"'

Theme 4: Leadership

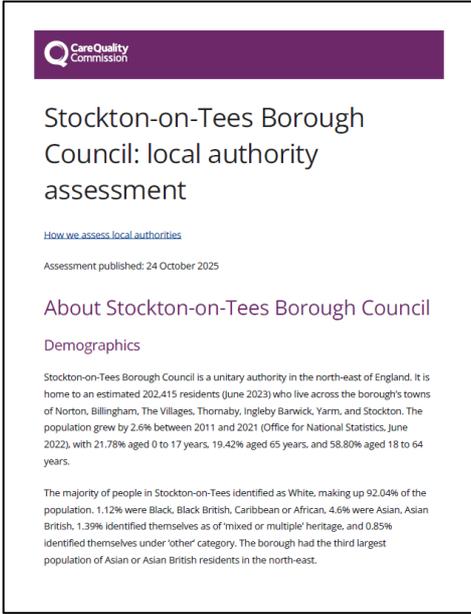
- '...the peer team felt that there were opportunities to charge for some services that are currently provided free of charge to the public and therefore create a further income stream. In particular, the provision of carers 'Time-Out' service was felt to have opportunity in this area, either with a 'standard charging model applied or 'means tested'. This may create opportunity to broaden this for more carers going forward enabling greater sustainability of its provision and importance.'

CQC: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Local Authority Assessment (late-2024)

- 4.108. In late-2024, the CQC undertook an inspection to look at how SBC was meeting its duties under [Part 1 of the Care Act \(2014\)](#). Its final report was published in October 2025 (see <https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/stocktonontees-1025>), with the summary section including the following carer-related observations:

Summary of people's experiences

- 'The needs of unpaid carers were recognised as distinct from the needs of the person they cared for and assessment and support options were available. Carer's feedback was mixed. Some carers gave positive examples of support, for example, some said they had an allocated local authority worker they could contact. However, others said they would have found more information about the support available useful. People spoke highly of the timeout service, and said it supported them in their caring role. The local authority acknowledged that further work was needed to fully understand unpaid carers' needs and maximising support opportunities to support carers was a priority.'



The screenshot shows the title page of a CQC report. At the top left is the Care Quality Commission logo. The main title is 'Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council: local authority assessment'. Below this is a link 'How we assess local authorities' and the date 'Assessment published: 24 October 2025'. There are two sub-sections: 'About Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council' and 'Demographics'. The 'Demographics' section contains text about the borough's population and ethnic diversity.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is a unitary authority in the north-east of England. It is home to an estimated 202,415 residents (June 2023) who live across the borough's towns of Norton, Billingham, The Villages, Thornaby, Ingleby Barwick, Yarm, and Stockton. The population grew by 2.6% between 2011 and 2021 (Office for National Statistics, June 2022), with 21.78% aged 0 to 17 years, 19.42% aged 65 years, and 58.80% aged 18 to 64 years.

The majority of people in Stockton-on-Tees identified as White, making up 92.04% of the population. 1.12% were Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, 4.6% were Asian, Asian British, 1.39% identified themselves as of 'mixed or multiple' heritage, and 0.85% identified themselves under 'other' category. The borough had the third largest population of Asian or Asian British residents in the north-east.

Summary of strengths, areas for development and next steps

- ‘Assessment and support arrangements were in place for unpaid carers, but the local authority acknowledged the need to improve this and to improve ways to identify unpaid carers, particularly younger carers. The local authority was also seeking to improve the information and advice offer for people who were funding their own care. Some work had been undertaken to reshape the front door, but this was a work in progress and the impact had not yet come to fruition. There was a lack of clarity amongst the staff we spoke with about the next steps or timescales for the work.’

Other approaches to / good practice in supporting carers

4.109. Examples of carer-related support offers elsewhere across the UK were identified for the Committee’s information:

- **East Riding of Yorkshire Council:** Newsletter for Carers (Winter 2025)
<https://downloads.eastriding.org.uk/ersab/carers-and-cared-for/we-care-newsletter/We%20Care%20Newsletter%20-%20Winter%202025.pdf>
- **Action for Carers Surrey:** Adult Carers (featuring carers stories)
<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/who-we-help/adult-carers/>
- **Swindon Carers Centre:** Adult Carers (featuring ‘Frequently asked questions’ and an ‘Events and activities’ section)
<https://www.swindoncarers.org.uk/support-for-unpaid-carers/adult-carers/>
- **Gateshead Council:** Support for adult caregivers (includes carers stories and a ‘carers passport’ initiative)
<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/15878/Support-for-adult-caregivers>
- **Devon County Council:** Supporting you to look after someone (includes free training courses available to training and a ‘Carer Ambassador’ concept)
<https://www.devon.gov.uk/adult-social-care/carers-support/>
- **Suffolk Family Carers:** Adult Carers (includes ‘technology to help your caring role’ section)
<https://suffolkfamilycarers.org/who-do-we-support/adult-carers/>



4.110. Carer-related ‘good practice’ guidance was also shared with the Committee, with attention drawn to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) update given to the National Scrutiny Officer Network in March 2025 on its two-year programme of baselining to determine how well Local Authorities were meeting their social care duties under part 1 of the Care Act – this included an emerging theme around a need for improvement in supporting unpaid carers, particularly the personalisation of support in differing needs dependent on age and needs of the person being carer for (i.e. adult carer of a young person, children caring for adults):

- **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE):** Supporting adult carers (Jan 20) <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng150>
- **Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS):** Supporting Carers Hub (including 'Explore great practice from across the UK' section) <https://www.adass.org.uk/supporting-carers-hub-homepage/>
- **CQC Local Authority Assessments:** Update to National Scrutiny Officer Network on two-year programme of baselining to determine how well Local Authorities are meeting their social care duties under part 1 of the Care Act (Mar 25)
- **Carers Trust:** Time away from caring: Good practice in carer breaks (2023) (note: includes section on SBC Time Out service (page 23-24). <https://carers.org/downloads/carers-trust-carer-breaks-hwa-report2.pdf>

Emerging themes



- **Support for unpaid carers** is an area where there is a need for improvement including:
 - better identification,
 - improved range and capacity of services,
 - more timely assessments
 - personalisation of support in differing needs dependent on age and needs of the person being cared for (i.e. adult carer of a young person, children caring for adults)



4.111. Further to considerations around young carers transitioning into the adult carers support services, a number of related documents / links were highlighted to the Committee:

- **The Children's Society:** Young carers' transition to adulthood – a pathway for all practitioners (revised 2023) https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/MCB315_Young-Carers-Pathway_Linked.pdf
- **South Tyneside Young Carers:** Carers in Transition <https://www.southtynesideyoungcarers.org/young-carers-in-transition-16-24/>
- **Durham County Council:** During 2022-2023, Durham County Council undertook and completed a strategic review of its support offer for all unpaid carers. Following engagement and consultation with young carers and young adult carers, it was clear this cohort required and wanted bespoke support that helped them reach their aspirations and goals, and that they were supported to ensure their caring role(s) did not impact on their future. https://www.adass.org.uk/campaign_articles/young-adult-carer-support-service/
- **Carers Trust:** Developing young adult carer services – a practical guide (2024) <https://carers.org/downloads/good-practice-guided-developing-young-adult-carer-services--a-practical-guidehr.pdf>



Developing young adult carer services – a practical guide



CARERS TRUST



- 4.112. From an academic perspective, a 2025 [London School of Economics and Political Science \(Care Policy and Evaluation Centre\)](#) research project sought to identify what support combinations helped improve carers' lives and what works to facilitate availability of and access to this support (see https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/research/projects/unpaid-care/COSAC-Combinations-of-Support-for-Adult-Carers?utm_source=Dynamics%20365%20Customer%20Insights%20-%20Journeys&utm_medium=email&utm_term=N%2FA&utm_campaign=Health%2C%20adult%20social%20care%20and%20ageing%20bulletin%3A%20December%202025&utm_content=Health%2C%20adult%20social%20care%20and%20ageing%20bulletin%3A%20December%202025#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=e043fe42-db07-49e5-b006-bcace5260300).
- 4.113. Finally, complementing the [CQCs](#) findings following its late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services, the Committee was informed of the regulator's view on the eleven characteristics of 'good' and 'outstanding' Local Authorities in adult social care (see [CQC: What good and outstanding looks like in adult social care | Local Government Association](#)). Based solely on analysis of CQC-published Local Authority assessment reports, carers was one of the key areas outlined:

7. Carers and families
 Carers are recognised as partners and system stabilisers. Co-produced strategies, discharge toolkits, rapid assessments, flexible breaks, financial and wellbeing advice, and primary care liaison are in place. Authorities track and improve carers' wellbeing and employment outcomes year on year.

F. Carers
 Design features:

- Co-produced carers strategy linked to local wellbeing plans.
- Standardised carers' discharge toolkit in all hospital pathways.
- Rapid assessments and flexible breaks available on demand.
- GP liaison roles embedded in every neighbourhood.
- Carers' wellbeing, employment, and inclusion data reviewed quarterly.

Illustrative Good/Outstanding thresholds:

- No/limited waiting lists for carers' assessments.
- Improved year-on-year outcomes in carer wellbeing, financial resilience, and employment.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1. This review focused on the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service which offers local help for those providing unpaid care and support to a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour who is disabled, has an illness or long-term condition, or who needs extra help as they get older. Although the current service is considered to be effective, there was a desire to establish any potential areas for improvement to further strengthen support for the Borough's much-valued carers.
- 5.2. Caring for someone, particularly for those with greater needs, can be incredibly hard. It has the potential to have a profound and lasting impact which can affect an individual's physical and mental health, and compromise their ability to hold down employment (previous Carers UK research found that around 600 people per day were giving up work to care) or enjoy leisure / social activities. As well as the stress and worry over supporting a person close to them, caring roles can also result in adverse financial implications for those involved.
- 5.3. National estimates on the number of those carrying out an unpaid caring role vary (the most recent Census 2021 suggested that there were 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK), and it is well acknowledged that ascertaining an accurate figure is challenging given many individuals do not view their support of a loved one as 'providing care'. That said, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) stated that there were approximately 20,000 unpaid carers across the Borough, which represents around 10% of the total population of Stockton-on-Tees. Given there were a total of around 3,500 carers open to the local Adult Carers Support Service in 2024, there appears to be significant potential for an increase in demand for the existing offer should a proportion of these people seek help.
- 5.4. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service is a key feature of the Council's offer of support for the Borough's adult carers. Annual referrals have continually escalated from around 450 in 2018 (when SBC made the decision to bring the service in-house) to nearly 700 in 2024, with a subsequent increase in associated funding to manage this demand. The service provides a range of bespoke support, is widely promoted across the Council's various print and electronic platforms, and also works with external organisations to emphasise the importance of supporting carers and how SBC can assist. A crucial and much appreciated element of the local offer is the 'Time Out' service which gives carers up to eight hours of ad-hoc support per month free-of-charge, allowing them a break from their caring role.
- 5.5. The Council's ongoing work with Mobilise (the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers) was highlighted to the Committee which had helped to provide a range of free online services, as well as identify hidden carers. Given the recent decision to extend this partnership beyond the current contract deadline of April 2026, SBC will need to ensure it has the necessary quality and performance controls in place to monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement. Moving forward, SBCs work around its digital offer for clients and their carers will provide an opportunity to review any future arrangements with external providers with regard to this support.
- 5.6. In terms of wider health considerations around carers, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) personnel drew attention to the legal requirement (under the Health and Care Act 2022) for the NHS to involve unpaid carers in decisions about the care and treatment of the individuals they supported (this included participation in the planning and delivery of care, as well as in discharge planning from hospital settings). Whilst the ICB did not have any direct responsibilities in this area, it did work collaboratively at a local level with Local Authority and 'system' partners (including operational teams to ensure clinical pathways considered carers) to support the adult carers agenda, and the NENC ICB / ICP Joint Strategy specified a key programme aim of 'working to identify and support more people who are providing unpaid care within the region'. From a general practice perspective, 4,741 individuals had been

identified as a 'carer' or 'cares for a relative' – the Council should consider how best it can promote the local Adult Carers Support Service within these settings, as well as being mindful that improvements in carer-identification may ultimately result in more demand on the existing offer.

- 5.7. North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) provided extensive evidence on the ways in which it considered carers (recognising them as partners in care) and promoted local support services. The recently implemented 'Carers Charter' was an encouraging development which should now be embedded and continually reinforced to staff and patients. NTHFT also highlighted the need for thinking around how the Trust's community services / teams were targeted in relation to carers, particularly given the number of people involved in a caring role was likely to continue increasing.
- 5.8. The Committee fully supports the acknowledgement from SBC of the need for an open culture to encourage engagement and listening with carers, and several examples were given demonstrating this endeavour. Whilst the response rate to the latest annual carers consultation survey was limited, important themes were nevertheless identified (including the value of peer support), and the Committee look forward to learning more about how the actions taken in light of this feedback have enhanced the local offer.
- 5.9. The Committee undertook its own engagement with local carers by visiting the LiveWell Dementia Hub in November 2025. The importance of being able to easily access carer-related services (aided by up-to-date contact details) and having the opportunity to share experiences with those who are going through the same challenges was reiterated, and it was clear that the ability to meet in-person (within a welcoming environment which provided an excellent source of carer-related information) was hugely valued, as was the Council's Time Out service. Regarding the latter, the Committee note the request from carers for more flexibility around the booking process (currently having to give over a month's notice which could be difficult as personal appointments were not always predictable), though commends the new 'Time Out Together' element which has the potential to benefit a greater number of those in a caring role (allowing multiple carers to have a break at the same time whilst their loved one partakes in group activities / games). Ensuring the Time Out offer is as efficient and effective as possible should be a cornerstone of the future service moving forward.
- 5.10. Recognising the Borough's young carers and the importance of their transition into adult support services, the Committee was pleased to receive a very informative contribution from Eastern Ravens Trust (a local charity supporting young carers within Stockton-on-Tees). Feedback from young carers highlighted concerns about dealing with change, how appropriate the local Adult Carers Support Service was for young adults, and a lack of knowledge of such an offer after they had reached adulthood – this suggests there is work to do to promote the options available to them once they reach the end of their time with Eastern Ravens (this should be helped through the already established relationships between the young carers and adult carers services), as well as making this offer as appealing as possible for those transitioning into it. The creation of some form of dedicated 'young adult' carers service / element may be more justifiable if there is an increase in the number of individuals aged 18-24 requesting / accessing support (as of early-November 2025, just 38 out of the 3,100+ carers open to the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service were in this age bracket).
- 5.11. In October 2025, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) published its final report following the late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services, and carer-related commentary was shared with the Committee for the purposes of this review (as was relevant feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) peer assurance challenge of SBC Adult Social Care that was undertaken in July 2024 in preparation for the anticipated CQC inspection). The regulator's findings, whilst broadly positive, did highlight some concerns around the availability of information on support for unpaid carers, as well as the Council's own acknowledgement of the need for

further work to both identify these individuals and fully understand their needs. Clarity around improvements to the information and advice offer for people who were funding their own care, and in relation to the ongoing work to reshape the Council's 'front door', was also noted.

5.12. The CQC report also referenced national data from the Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE, June 2024) which showed that:

- 90.7% of carers found information and advice from SBC helpful (better than the England average of 85.22%)
- 75% of carers engaged with the Local Authority said they found it easy to access information and advice (significantly better than the England average of 59.06%)
- more carers in Stockton-on-Tees (47.83%) were satisfied with support they received than the England average (36.83%)

However, there were also areas to work on, with outcomes from the same survey indicating:

- more could be done to improve the respite offer to unpaid carers
- more carers locally (34%) were unable to maintain paid employment because of their caring duties compared to the England average (26.7%)
- only 25.19% of carers said they were accessing a support group or someone to talk to in confidence (which was worse than the England average of 32.98%)

Encouragingly, the CQC concluded that the Council had 'a clear vision and strategy for adult social care which sought to improve outcomes for people with care and support needs, unpaid carers and reduce inequalities of experience and outcomes for people in the local area'. The Committee is therefore keen to understand how SBC proposes to respond to the regulator's feedback and, in related matters, encourages the Council to continue efforts to raise the profile of those staff working on the frontline / 'front door' of these support services.

5.13. Wider research demonstrated a range of approaches and initiatives regarding support for adult carers across the UK, some of which are already a feature of the local offer. Several carer-related good practice guides were also brought to the attention of the Committee, with the Council's Time Out service highlighted by the Carers Trust as a positive example in providing short breaks for carers. Increasing acknowledgement of the importance and role of unpaid carers will likely encourage the publication of further material which SBC should seek and consider as part of the ongoing development of the local support service.

5.14. The Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service is clearly a highly valued and crucial element within the Council's adult social care offer, attracting wider recognition and appreciation for what it provides. That said, evidence collected as part of this review has flagged areas for attention in relation to carer-identification, signposting to / promotion of support, transitioning of young carers into the adult service, the ability to meet demand as more carers request / require help, and the need for continuous evaluation of the local offer. Unpaid carers save local organisations a vast amount of money – as such, despite the ongoing financial limitations on the Council, they must be supported as much as possible. Those accessing the service have reported very positive experiences – the challenge is ensuring this can be of benefit to a greater number of carers, many of whom remain hidden.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) **In terms of general Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service development, SBC should:**
 - a) **Ensure measures are put in place as part of the review of the Council's 'front door' to strengthen identification of carers and the promotion of the local support offer (including the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service).**
 - b) **Ascertain and consider the findings from the London School of Economics and Political Science (Care Policy and Evaluation Centre) research project on what support combinations help improve carers' lives and what works to facilitate availability of and access to this support.**
 - c) **Consider ways to increase the response rate for its annual carers consultation survey.**
- 2) **Regarding the partnership with Mobilise (the UK's digital platform for unpaid carers), SBC should:**
 - a) **Develop its own in-house digital support offer for local carers to build on / complement the services available through this external provider.**
 - b) **Ensure it has the necessary quality and performance controls in place (including the need to report on measurable targets) to monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement.**
 - c) **Seek to understand any separate arrangements that Council's outside the North East have with Mobilise and whether these enhance the offer to carers more than the ongoing partnership with the 10 North East Local Authorities.**
- 3) **In relation to the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service 'Time Out' element, SBC should:**
 - a) **Complete an internal review of the booking system to identify ways of creating more flexibility for carers when requested a break from their caring role.**
 - b) **Consider whether it would be appropriate to introduce a standing / means-tested charge for the service to broaden this for more carers going forward, enabling greater sustainability of its provision and importance (as identified via the LGA Peer Assurance Challenge of SBC Adult Social Care in July 2024).**
- 4) **Promotion of the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service offer to young carers should be strengthened so they are more informed about the support available to them when they reach 18.**
- 5) **Consideration should be given to the ways in which the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service can build on what appeals to young carers when they approach / reach 18 so they are more compelled to seek support in their caring role when they become young adults.**

(continued overleaf...)

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

- 6) The new carers awareness e-learning module be rolled out to SBC staff, Members and external partners.**
- 7) SBC further considers how the local support offer for carers can be promoted within the wider health system (including general practices and community settings).**
- 8) SBC provides a response to the Committee on the carer-related commentary included within the Care Quality Commission (CQC) final report on SBC adult social care (published in October 2025).**

Appendix 1

Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service: Newsletter (Autumn 2025)

Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers' Support Service Newsletter

Autumn 2025 | Issue 20

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service Newsletter

As the leaves turn and the nights draw in, we'd like to take a moment to thank you for everything you do in your caring role. Autumn is often a busy time, but it also brings opportunities to pause, reflect, and connect.

In this edition, you'll find updates on new groups and events, practical tips to support you through the colder months, and information about where to find advice, support and wellbeing activities. We've also included some dates for your diary, so you don't miss out on what's happening locally. We hope this newsletter gives you helpful ideas, reminders, and a sense of connection with other carers across Stockton-on-Tees. Remember, you are not alone, and support is always here when you need it.

New Carers Group - Time Out Together

We're excited to launch a brand-new group for Time Out carers only, giving you the chance to take a well-earned break while your loved one enjoys a safe, friendly space.

Time Out Together will run on the last Wednesday of every month (excluding December 2025) at the LiveWell Hub, starting on Wednesday 26 November 2025.

This is a relaxed session in a welcoming space. We'll have music, activities, and plenty to keep everyone engaged to give you a break. You are more than welcome to stay at the LiveWell Hub and have a refreshment!

Spaces must be booked from 9am on the first working day of each month for the following month, so please make a note in your diary.

This is your time to recharge, connect with others, and take a well-deserved breather.

For more details or to book, please contact the Adult Carers Support Service on **01642 524494**.



Time Out Together
A welcoming space with music and activities to enable carer respite

1:30pm to 3:30pm - last Wednesday of the month
The LiveWell Hub, Thornaby, TS17 8AP

For Time Out carers only
Get more information
☎ 01642 524494

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers' Support Service Newsletter | Autumn 2025 | Issue 20 | 1

Appendix 1

(continued)

You said, we did - strengthening our community presence

In our spring carers consultation survey, many of you told us that you'd like the Adult Carers Support Service to be more visible in your local community, at places and events you already attend.

We listened to your views and, going forward, we'll be strengthening our presence at local community venues and events across Stockton-on-Tees. This means you'll be able to find us more easily, ask questions face-to-face and connect with support without needing to travel far. Whether it's a local community event, a drop-in session, we want to make sure carers have more opportunities to meet us in person, get information and feel supported right where you are.

Upcoming events and activities

- Adult Carers Support Service drop-in at the Wellbeing Hub in Wellington Square, Stockton, 9:30am to 4pm every Thursday. Pop in for support and information, or simply a chat about your caring role.

- Winter Health and Wellbeing Festival at Thornaby Pavillion, 10am to 2pm on Thursday 23 October. The Adult Carers Support Service, Dementia Service and Shared Lives Service will be hosting a stall. Pop along and see us!
- The LiveWell Hub is open 9am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday. If you need a welcoming space for any support or advice, our team are always on hand.

Thank you to everyone who shared their views. Your feedback is helping us shape the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service.



Carers Rights Day 2025

This year, Carers Rights Day takes place on Thursday 20 November 2025 - a national awareness day that shines a light on the vital role of unpaid carers. It's an important reminder that every carer is entitled to know their rights and access the support available to them.

Here in Stockton-on-Tees, we'll be marking the day with information, advice, and resources to help carers feel informed and supported in their caring role. Keep an eye on our social media pages and the Carers Bulletin for details on our market stalls in Stockton Hight Street and

Thornaby Town Centre, drop-in at the Wellbeing Hub, and activities you can get involved in.

Carers Rights Day is about making sure no one misses out on help they're entitled to - whether that's financial support, practical advice, or simply knowing where to turn when you need a listening ear.

For more information on Carers Rights Day, visit www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/our-campaigns/carers-rights-day/



Appendix 1

(continued)

Be wise, immunise with a free flu vaccine!

The NHS recommends the flu vaccine to those at highest risk from severe illness and to help reduce the spread of flu. Make sure you and your loved ones stay safe this winter.

The flu virus changes every year, so a new flu vaccine is needed each year.

From 1 October, the free vaccine will be offered to everyone aged 65 and over, and those who turn 65 years by 31 March 2026, people aged 18 to 65 with certain health conditions, carers, and close contacts of people with weak immune systems.

You can book a flu vaccine by using the NHS App, visiting www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/keep-warm-keep-well, or calling 119 for free. If you're eligible, you'll also get an invitation.

The NHS is also visiting housebound patients and people in care homes to give the vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccines will be available from 1 October for:

- adults aged 75 years and over (including those who will be 75 by 31 January 2026)
- residents in a care home for older adults
- people aged 6 months and over who are immunosuppressed

You may also be eligible for other vaccinations, including the:

- pneumococcal vaccine (if you're aged 65 or over)
- RSV vaccine (if you're pregnant, aged 75 to 79, or turned 80 after 1 September 2024)

These vaccinations help protect against serious illnesses that are more common in the winter, including pneumonia.

Don't get caught out this winter - Be wise, immunise.



Service in the Spotlight - Stockton Mobile Library Services

The Stockton Mobile Library Team offer a wide range of services designed to bring books, information, and wellbeing support into the heart of our communities. From mobile libraries visiting schools and local organisations, to the popular home delivery service for people who can't easily get to a branch, the service helps make reading and resources accessible to everyone.

The team also support national health campaigns and provide specialist services such as reminiscence collections, dementia cafés, and health information resources - all aimed at helping people connect, learn, and thrive.

To find out more about what Stockton Mobile Library Services can offer you:

- ☎ 01642 528045
- ✉ mobilelibrary.services@stockton.gov.uk
- 🌐 www.stockton.gov.uk/mobile-library



Appendix 1

(continued)

Here to help



We know it can be even more difficult over the winter months, so want you to know about the support available across the Borough. Our 'Here to Help' guide gives an overview of the support available, including:

- Fuel, energy and housing
- Money and debt
- Food insecurity and poverty
- Winter wellbeing
- Community activities and support such as our Warm Welcome socials

The Here to Help guide is free to pick up from your local library and many community centres and organisations across the Borough.

You can also email FSOT@stockton.gov.uk to request a copy or visit www.stockton.gov.uk/here-to-help-hub

Stay in the loop - sign up to the Carers Bulletin!

Are you a carer in Stockton-on-Tees? Don't miss out on news, support and local events designed just for you!

Our Carers Bulletin is packed with useful updates, upcoming events, wellbeing tips and stories from carers like you.

Email us at carerssupport@stockton.gov.uk and ask to be added.

We're on social media too! Follow us:

 www.facebook.com/stocktononteesadultcarers

 www.instagram.com/sotadultcarers

 www.x.com/sotadultcarers



Priority Service Register

This free support service makes sure extra energy help is there for people in vulnerable situations and offers priority support in emergencies, power cuts and more.

Contact your energy supplier and ask to be added to their register or visit:

www.thepsr.co.uk

Carers' Emergency Card

It's important to keep details like emergency contacts updated so we can support you when you need it most. If your details have changed get in touch.

 **01642 524494**

Appendix 2

External carer-related SBC scrutiny

EXTERNAL SCRUTINY OF SBC ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Local Government Association (LGA): Peer Assurance Challenge of SBC Adult Social Care (July 2024)

<https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/documents/s8762/Peer%20Assurance%20Challenge%20of%20Adult%20Social%20Care%20by%20the%20LGA%20and%20CQC%20Assurance%20Update.pdf>

- Undertaken in preparation for anticipated CQC inspection of SBC adult social care services
- Final report published in August 2024
- Considered by SBC Cabinet in October 2024 (see link above)

Case File Audit

- [Page 12](#): 'The voice of the person and the carer was apparent throughout.'
- [Page 13](#): 'There is good engagement with carers, but a limited reference to offer of carers assessment or other carers support services. Often carers are not recorded formally, despite being evident in notes.'

Lived Experience Feedback

- [Page 13](#): 'Staff were described as supportive, understanding and wanted to work together with people and carers.'

Theme 1: Working with People

- [Page 15](#): 'Carers support service has good uptake and provides meaningful, person centred intervention for carers that they have a voice in.'
- [Page 22-23](#): 'As referenced within the Self-Assessment the Adult Carers Support Service was brought in-house in 2018 and supports adult carers (over 18) in Stockton on Tees who care for another adult. At the point of this transfer there were 103 carers registered with the service. In 2024, this is now recorded at 2436 which is seen as an estimated support to 12% of the unpaid carer's population in the Borough. 100% of carers receiving a service have a direct payment compared to the England average of 76.8%. Whilst support can vary from advice, support and signposting, there are others who have a range of practical levels of support such as the 'Time Out' service which offers up to 8 hours of support per month free of charge for carers to have a break from their caring role. The peer team were very impressed by the range and quality of these services and agreed with a staff member of the carers team – "what we do is real early intervention!"'

Theme 4: Leadership

- [Page 37](#): 'The peer team observed that there is strong oversight of the financial position of the service and a savings target of £1.893m for the council overall to reach a balanced budget position for 2024/25, primarily led through the work of the 'Powering Our Futures' programme. It is clear from what was observed and discussed with the leadership team that there is

increased scrutiny and forward planning being applied to the financial position, but the peer team felt that there were opportunities to charge for some services that are currently provided free of charge to the public and therefore create a further income stream. In particular, the provision of carers 'Time-Out' service was felt to have opportunity in this area, either with a 'standard charging model applied or 'means tested'. This may create opportunity to broaden this for more carers going forward enabling greater sustainability of its provision and importance.'

Lessons learned from other peer challenges

- **Page 40:** 'Councils need an authentic narrative for their adult social care service driven by data and personal experience. The narrative needs to be shared with those with a lived experience, carers, frontline staff, team leaders, middle managers, senior staff, corporate centre, politicians, partners in health, third sector and elsewhere. Ideally this story is told consistently and is supported by data and personal experience - don't hide poor services.'

Care Quality Commission (CQC): Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Local Authority Assessment (late-2024)

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/stocktonontees-1025>

- Inspection to look at how SBC meets its duties under [Part 1 of the Care Act \(2014\)](#).
- Final report published in October 2025

Summary of people's experiences

- **Page 6:** 'The needs of unpaid carers were recognised as distinct from the needs of the person they cared for and assessment and support options were available. Carer's feedback was mixed. Some carers gave positive examples of support, for example, some said they had an allocated local authority worker they could contact. However, others said they would have found more information about the support available useful. People spoke highly of the timeout service, and said it supported them in their caring role. The local authority acknowledged that further work was needed to fully understand unpaid carers' needs and maximising support opportunities to support carers was a priority.'

Summary of strengths, areas for development and next steps

- **Page 8:** 'Assessment and support arrangements were in place for unpaid carers, but the local authority acknowledged the need to improve this and to improve ways to identify unpaid carers, particularly younger carers. The local authority was also seeking to improve the information and advice offer for people who were funding their own care. Some work had been undertaken to reshape the front door, but this was a work in progress and the impact had not yet come to fruition. There was a lack of clarity amongst the staff we spoke with about the next steps or timescales for the work.'

Assessment and care planning for unpaid carers, child's carers and child carers

- **Page 15-16:** 'The needs of unpaid carers were recognised as distinct from the needs of the person they cared for. Staff told us carers assessments were completed alongside, but separately to Care Act assessments for the person with support needs. Carers were also referred to the Carers Hub for support specific to their own wellbeing. Staff were able to explain the processes and pathways for carers to access an assessment. They told us carers were

also signposted to other support services or placed on mailing list so the local authority could maintain contact with them. However, there were some barriers to accessing support. For example, a carer said they were not always able to access support from the Community Livewell Dementia Hub (a centre providing information about dementia, support, and training for those living in Stockton-on-Tees) due to transport costs and was unaware they were able to access this support virtually.

People's feedback on the local authority's approach to carers' assessments, planning, and support was mixed. Some carers gave positive examples of support, for example, some said they had an allocated local authority worker they could contact. However, others said they would have found more information about support available useful. The local authority acknowledged that further work was needed to fully understand unpaid carers' needs and maximising support opportunities to support carers was a strategic priority. This commitment to improving carers' access to support was demonstrated through the local authority's 2024 partnership with a carer-led and designed technology platform that provided enhanced, on-demand services to anyone with caring responsibilities in the region.

Unpaid carers experienced waits for a carer's assessment from the local authority. In June 2024, 83 people were waiting for a carers assessment. There was a median wait of 23 days over the previous 12 months, with a maximum wait of 63 days. Local authority leaders told us variability in time taken to process assessments was due to accommodation of client commitments and choice. At the time of the CQC assessment, there were no outstanding reviews of carers needs.

There was a process to refer young carers to an external organisation which was understood by staff who worked with them. For example, 14 referrals were made for young carers between October 2023 and September 2024. However, leaders told us more work was needed to increase the identification of young carers to meet their specific needs.'

Arrangements to prevent, delay or reduce needs for care and support

- **Page 22:** '... There was an ambition among leaders to make use of community partnerships to better identify and target vulnerable groups such as unidentified unpaid carers, victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and those with substance misuse issues. This indicated a joined-up approach to prevention across adult social care, the wider organisation, and partners.

Consideration was given to supporting unpaid carers and people at greatest risk of a decline in their independence and wellbeing, but more practical support and resources were required to help carers live as they wanted. For example, there was a timeout service in place which provided free short-term respite for unpaid carers and aimed to delay or reduce further need for carers' support. Carers who had accessed this service valued it highly and said it supported them in their caring role. However, there were approximately 20 people waiting for the timeout service at the time of the assessment, meaning that not everyone who could benefit from the service was able to do so.

National data from the Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE, June 2024) showed that 90.7% of carers found information and advice from the local authority helpful. This was better than the England average of 85.22%. However, the same survey also indicated more could be done to improve the respite offer to unpaid carers; only 15.15% of carers in the borough said they were able to spend time doing things they value or enjoy – although this was in line with the England average of 15.97%. In relation to employment, 34% of carers said they could not maintain paid employment because of their caring duties, which was above the England

average of 26.7% (SACE, June 2024). Further work was in train to build on the existing support offer for unpaid carers.'

Provision of accessible information and advice

- **Page 25:** 'People could access information and advice on their rights under the Care Act and ways to meet their care and support needs. For example, people said they were impressed with the range of services provided in Stockton-on-Tees compared to neighbouring boroughs, and 75% of carers engaged with the local authority said they found it easy to access information and advice, which was significantly better than the England average of 59.06% (SACE, June 2024). Additionally, the local authority was aware of feedback from some carers who wanted better access to information and advice, and work was ongoing towards this.'

Direct payments

- **Page 26-27:** 'The effectiveness of arrangements to support people to take up direct payments were reflected in national data. Uptake of direct payments across all age groups was higher than the England average, particularly for those aged between 18 and 64 (49.51% compared to 37.12% for England, Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF), December 2024). Local authority data indicated that 100% of identified carers had also received direct payments in the last year.'

The local authority understood some of the barriers for people using direct payments and took steps to remove them. For example, the direct payment team worked closely with the carers' service to ensure they had a point of contact for support. The local authority also recognised national and local challenges around recruiting and retaining Personal Assistants (PA) and the impact of this on residents in Stockton-on-Tees wishing to employ a PA.

Promotion initiatives for the Personal Assistant role were underway to address recruitment issues in partnership with local carers' services. To further increase awareness and uptake of direct payments, staff attended job centre fairs and community-based parent/carer groups. This was positive action to increase the equity of their direct payment offer and make use of community assets to reach people. This work was ongoing, and leaders told us it evolved according to demand and available opportunities.'

Market shaping and commissioning to meet local needs

- **Page 35:** 'The carer's service was provided in-house. Approximately 73 new carers per month were being identified at the time of the assessment. There was regard for the provision of services to meet the needs of unpaid carers. However, only 25.19% of carers said they were accessing a support group or someone to talk to in confidence, which was worse than the England average of 32.98% (SACE, June 2024). Some carers said they received no support from the local authority despite assurances from staff that they would receive help. The local authority was aware of the need to improve the offer for carers and work was ongoing working towards maximising support available to them. This included entering into a 2024 partnership with an online carer-led platform that offered carers advice, tools, and community networks to support them in their caring roles. In July 2024, the platform had provided 165 carers with support that included emails, a peer support community, and a financial toolkit to help them manage their carers' allowance.'

Ensuring sufficient capacity in local services to meet demand

- [Page 38](#): 'There was consideration for the provision of services to meet the needs of unpaid carers. Significant investment into carers' services had been made by the local authority, and more carers in Stockton-on-Tees were satisfied with support they received than the England average (47.83% compared to 36.83%, Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE), June 2024).

National data showed that 10.77% of carers said they were accessing support or services that enabled them to take a break from caring at short notice or in an emergency, which was in line with the England average of 12.08% (SACE, June 2024). Numbers of carers able to access support enabling them to take a break from caring for up to 24 hours were higher at 19.08%, but still low overall and below the England average of 21.73%. The local authority had plans to review capacity for contingency planning in its carers' support offering.'

Safety during transitions

- [Page 52](#): '...While some people described workers providing support after they left hospital as informative and helpful, some people described a lack of communication between care professionals and limited care coordination or continuity. This had led to key information about people being missed or not communicated to carers and families. Some people said their discharge process was rushed, while others did not receive support with their transition between care services, which affected their wellbeing and that of their family...'

Contingency planning

- [Page 53](#): 'The local authority undertook contingency planning to ensure preparedness for possible interruptions to the provision of care and support. For example, leaders said they worked with community safety agencies and partners to plan for access to alternative support in the event of a community-wide emergency.'

Some unpaid carers said staff worked with them to plan for current and future needs, with one saying they had an emergency carers card detailing a plan in the event they could not fulfil their caring role.'

Strategic planning

- [Page 63](#): 'There was a clear vision and strategy for adult social care which sought to improve outcomes for people with care and support needs, unpaid carers and reduce inequalities of experience and outcomes for people in the local area. The strategy was based on a sound understanding of local priorities and was aligned with the strategic plans of other key agencies, for example health, public health and housing. Adult social care strategy and delivery plans were publicly available, and staff, council members and partners showed a good awareness of them. Additionally, the local authority scored highly in the category of 'Strategic Partnership', among others, in a recent Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Health Check, indicating strong strategic alignment with its partner agencies.'

Glossary of Terms

ADASS	Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
ARF	Accelerating Reform Fund
BCF	Better Care Fund
CQC	Care Quality Commission
ICB	Integrated Care Board
ICP	Integrated Care Partnership
LGA	Local Government Association
NENC ICB	NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NTHFT	North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust
POF	Powering Our Future (SBC)
SBC	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SID	Stockton Information Directory
STHFT	South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
TSAB	Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board
UHT	University Hospitals Tees (NTHFT & STHFT)
VCSE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise