

NHS Highland	
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Meeting: Health and Social Care Committee
Meeting date: 4th March 2026
Title: Carers Strategy Update
Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: Arlene Johnstone, Chief Officer
Report Author: Michelle Keir, Carers Services Development Officer.

Report Recommendation:

The Health and Social Care Committee is asked to:

- a) **note** the overview provided in respect of services and support provided to Unpaid Carers in line with the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Carers Strategy 2025-2028.

1 Purpose

This is presented to the Committee for:

- Assurance

This report relates to a:

- 5 Year Strategy, Together We Care, with you, for you.
- Carers Strategy 2025-2028
- Carers (Scotland) Act (2016)

This report will align to the following NHSScotland quality ambition(s):
 Safe, Effective and Person Centred

This report relates to the following Strategic Outcome(s)

Start Well		Thrive Well		Stay Well	x	Anchor Well	
Grow Well		Listen Well		Nurture Well	x	Plan Well	
Care Well	x	Live Well	x	Respond Well	x	Treat Well	x
Journey Well	x	Age Well	x	End Well	x	Value Well	x
Perform well	x	Progress well		All Well Themes			

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

This report provides an update and describes the level of performance to the Health and Social Care Committee regarding the implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, progress relating to the Carers Strategy 2025-28, and related activities for adults within North Highland over the last 12 months since 1st March 2025.

This report is being brought to the Committee to provide awareness and assurance on the activities being delivered.

2.2 Background

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 establishes statutory requirements for local authorities, health boards, and integration authorities to support unpaid carers in Scotland.

Progress on Implementation

NHS Highland has made significant strides in aligning its services and procedures with the requirements of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. Key actions undertaken include:

- **Identification and Support of Carers:** Continued emphasis on identifying unpaid carers at the earliest opportunity, particularly during patient admission and discharge processes. Efforts have been made to improve staff awareness and training, enabling frontline staff to signpost carers to available support.

Since June 2025 employee knowledge and training has been a targeted piece of work undertaken by the Carers Team. This will continue into 2026, with one aim being to have Carer Awareness included within Mandatory Training.

- **Carer Involvement:** Carers are actively encouraged to participate in the planning and decision-making for the individuals they support. Carers support has been introduced in two Acute settings during the year – Raigmore and Caithness General Hospitals to raise awareness and support to encourage carer involvement in the discharge process.
- **Access to Information:** NHS Highland has updated its website and literature to provide clear information about carers’ rights, available supports, and how to access Adult Carer Support Plans. A Carers Toolkit has been developed and is being rolled out within services to aid as an opening discussion with practitioners and carers. We are currently in discussions with Highland Council to ascertain the possibility to align with their website to ensure consistency of information.

- **Adult Carer Support Plans:** Collaboration with the Carers Centre continues to ensure carers are offered Adult Carer Support Plans in accordance with statutory requirements. A proposal has recently been agreed which will enable carers to have a choice of how they receive their Adult Carer Support Plan, which will include access 24/7 via AI enabled technology.
- **Carers Wellbeing Fund:** The Carer Wellbeing Fund has continued to provide breaks to carers in a way that is meaningful to them. Funds are currently accessible to all carers with access being completion of an application form.

The fund received a total of 153 applications within the reporting period. A total of £167,333 of funding has been awarded to carers. In April 2025 it was agreed to review the fund and following a short life working group, a proposal has now been submitted for consideration. This proposal includes ensuring that person centred breaks are available when required but also to enable ongoing infrastructure and development of carers services to reach as many of the Highland population as possible. This work is timely as there has been a decline in the amount of funds being distributed via this route due to reduced applications.

- In addition there has been a 42% increase in funding from Scottish Government provided to Carers Centres via Shared Care Scotland.

Partnership Working

The Carers Team works closely within NHS Highland, Highland Council, 3rd sector organisations, and other local authorities to deliver integrated support to unpaid carers. Joint initiatives include carer awareness campaigns, drop-in sessions, and collaborative training for health and social care staff. This partnership approach seeks to foster a more carer-friendly culture across all services.

As described above a Short Life Working Group was set up to evaluate and plan the Carers Wellbeing Fund. The group comprised of colleagues from the Carers Team, Finance, Income and Transactions, Social Work and the 3rd Third Sector including representatives from Connecting Carers, Community Contacts and the Community Partnership Officer from the Highland Hospice.

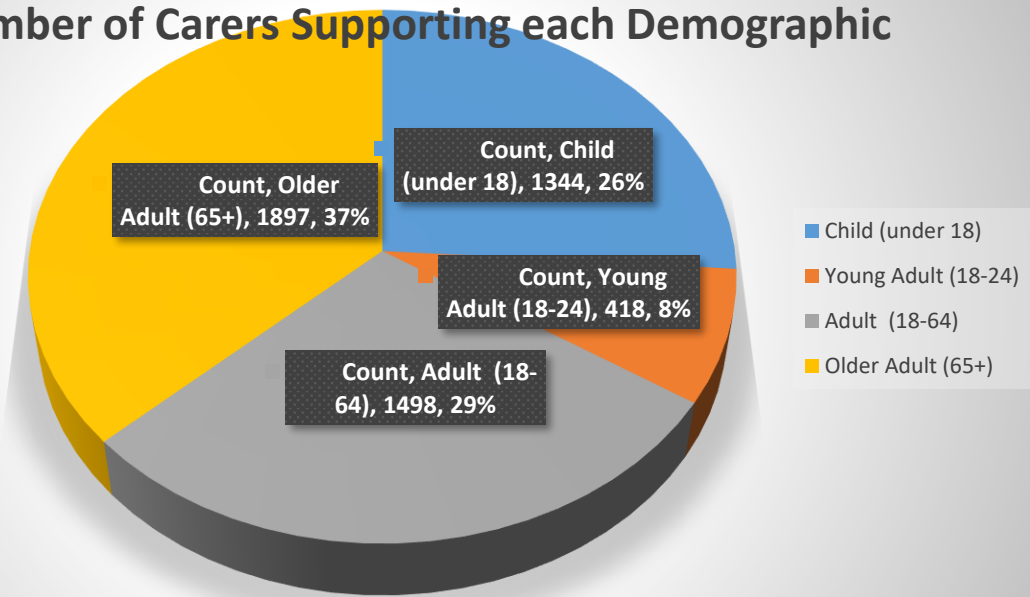
A new project has recently launched in Lochaber called Care to Connect, hosted by Voluntary Action Lochaber (VAL) to address the identified unmet need of carers in the Lochaber area. The carers team worked collaboratively with VAL and the local teams in Lochaber to design and launch this service. Referrals are now being received for the service and support being provided.

Carer Commissioned Services and Projects

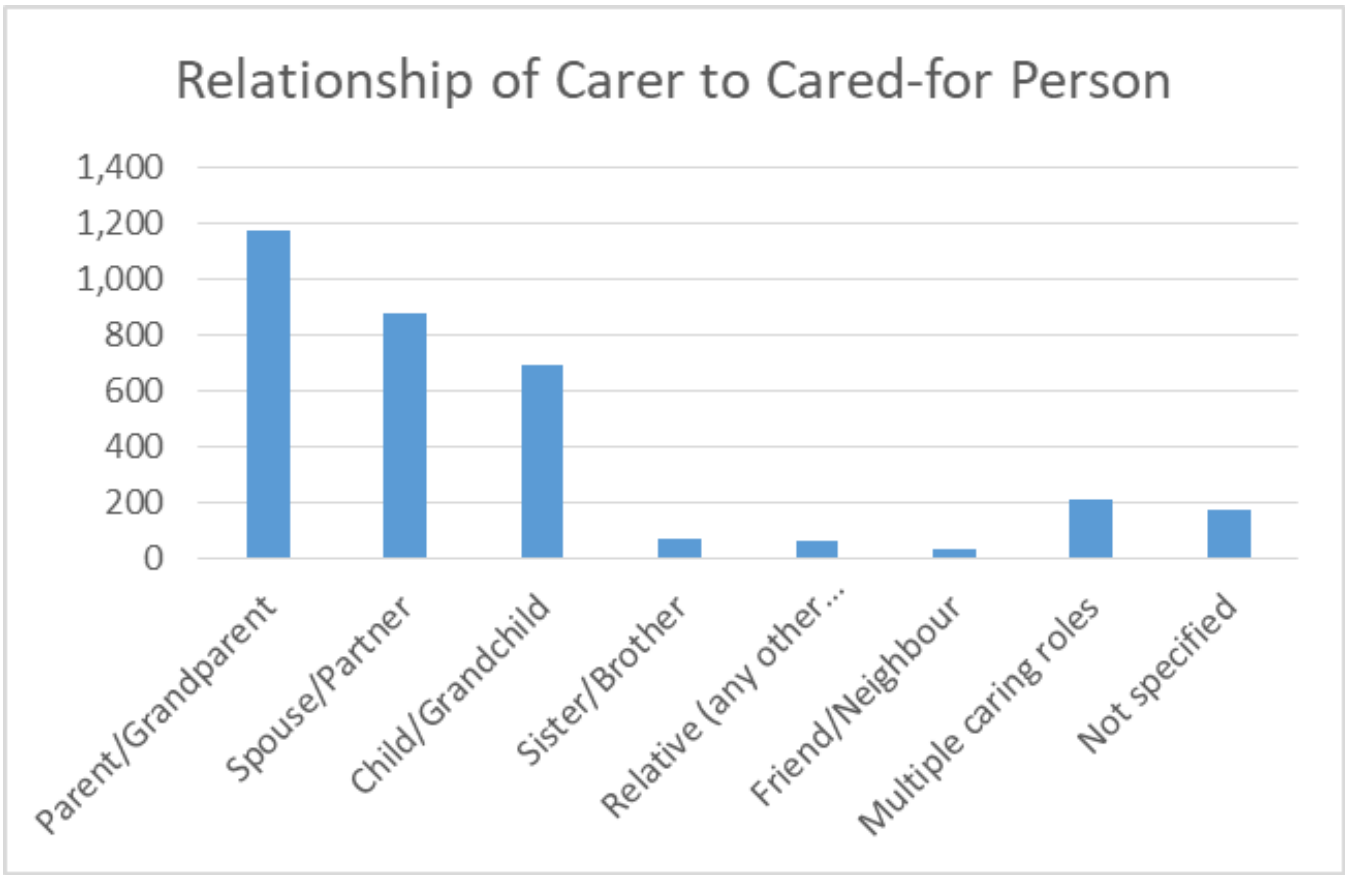
We currently commission three services via Carers Act Implementation Funds, Connecting Carers, Mobilise and Partners in Advocacy. All three commissioned services have contracts going into financial year 2026/27, work is underway regarding the retendering of services.

Service user data from our commissioned services below demonstrates the demographics of who carers are providing support to and the relationship of the carer to the cared for person.

Number of Carers Supporting each Demographic



Relationship of Carer to Cared-for Person



A further six projects are supported via carers funds - Thriving Families, Care to Connect, Community Contacts, Here to Help, Change Mental Health and North Coast Connections. All projects offer a diverse range of carers support open to any adult unpaid carer.

Challenges and Opportunities

While progress has been notable, challenges remain in consistently identifying and supporting carers, especially in two key areas (1) rural and remote communities, (2) perception where providing care is seen as ‘just something you do’ as opposed to providing unpaid carer.

Further work is needed to address gaps in respite provision and ensure equitable access to support services. We are exploring alternative ways of working including digital solutions and enhanced outreach to better connect with hard-to-reach carers.

2026/2027 Priorities

- Strengthening carer identification within primary care and community settings.
- Expanding training for staff on carer rights and support pathways.
- Increasing access to replacement carer and meaningful breaks for carers.
- Monitoring and evaluation of carer experiences to drive continuous improvement.
- Public Tender for Carers Services during 2026/27
- Implementation on ‘Carers Right to Breaks’ / ‘Sufficient Breaks’ following Elections in 2026.

2.3 Assessment

2.4 Proposed Level of Assurance

There is a moderate level of assurance proposed regarding the Partnership’s arrangements to meet duties for adults under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and develop and deliver supports to unpaid carers.

Substantial	☐	Moderate	☒
Limited	☐	None	☐

Comment on the level of assurance

While there has been ongoing and sustained improvement in relation to support to unpaid carers, the above level of assurance would improve to substantial, where in house and commissioned services worked closer to assess carer needs. Additionally, as some of the contract periods are entering their final year, this lowers the assurance level whilst tendering activities are undertaken.

3 Impact Analysis

3.1 Quality / Patient Care

3.2 Workforce

There are no workforce concerns at present. All partners report the ability to fill vacancies when the arise and services have not been hampered due to workforce constraints. It is noted that the Strategy implementation is lead by the Carers Services Development Officer and a Project Officer. The continual delivery and improvement of services requires a whole system approach supported by the workforce.

3.3 Financial

Despite the positive developments in relation to services and support for unpaid carers the budget allocated within the HSCP is under spent this year. This is primarily due to the decline in uptake for the wellbeing fund but there have also been some other planned initiatives that have not been realised this financial year.

3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

3.5 Data Protection

There are no specific data protection issues identified.

3.6 Equality and Diversity, Including Health Inequalities

3.7 Other Impacts

There are no other impacts identified.

3.8 Communication, Involvement, Engagement and Consultation

No specific issues or actions identified.

3.9 Route to the Meeting

4.1 List of appendices

None