

Appendix 9 - Evidence relating to Neath Port Talbot Council

Evidence from the Council

1. At Neath Port Talbot Council, services for adult carers are commissioned from Neath Port Talbot Carers Service. Services for young carers are provided in-house. It said that the support provided by the Carers Service was aimed at adult carers and parent carers.
2. Neath Port Talbot Council said that carers were a key priority. It highlighted that it was in a unique position as the local authority area with the highest proportion of carers in Wales, along with high numbers of people registered as disabled and high numbers of deprived areas. It said that the increase in its ageing population placed additional strain on older carers supporting individuals with complex needs, whilst also managing their own health conditions. The Council said that the availability of formal care and increasing pressure on the NHS to discharge people from hospital promptly, compounded the situation.
3. The Council said that, in September 2022, it appointed a Carers Service Manager and a Carers Development Officer to facilitate targeted efforts to assess the existing service approach and enhance collaboration between Adult Services, Young Persons Services and commissioned providers. Neath Port Talbot Council said that several opportunities for system improvements were identified during an internal review of services for adult unpaid carers. These included the reporting and recording of carers' needs assessments and care plans, strengthening the triage process to ensure early access to Information, Advice and Assistance ("IAA"), streamlining the referral mechanisms and reinforcement of transition processes. The Council acknowledged that it needed to understand in detail a carer's 'journey', as there were likely to be points in that journey where the Council could intervene and help, without escalation to crisis. It recognised that, in order to achieve this, it needed to identify carers early and work across the age range by linking in with education and youth services.
4. The Council explained that the second phase of its review will focus on expanding its remit to include young carers and focussed engagement with carers. It explained that it planned a project to help identify carers earlier, strengthen the provision of IAA and improve carer outcomes. The Council said that, coinciding with this work, was the redevelopment of the Social Services recording database. It said that, at present, the system limited what could be recorded for carers, such as their Support Plans. As a result, carers'

needs were recorded and supported via the cared for person's record, which had impacted upon the data collected, as it was unable to report on the number of carers' needs assessments that had led to a carer's support plan (see Table 2). It said that it did not present an accurate picture of the statutory support provided to unpaid carers. The Council said that the redevelopment work provided an opportunity to change and improve this and enable the Council to record and report on carers' support plans.

5. The Council said that it was undertaking a demonstrator project to ensure that carers were properly identified on its systems, as its current option was to either record a carer as a 'carer' or as a 'next of kin'. In addition, the Council said that it had considered the proportionality aspect of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 ("SSWB Act") and, instead of having 1 assessment, it had broken the assessment into 2 parts, the first being about talking to the carer and understanding their needs and strengthening its IAA, by offering carers preventative and early intervention support and the second being a much more detailed conversation with a Social Worker around the statutory requirements resulting in a carer's support plan, if IAA alone was insufficient to meet the carer's needs. The Council said that it had received positive feedback from carers and it had freed up capacity at the Carers Service to provide support services.

6. The Council said that it was also re-developing its Social Services recording database which would include a specific part for carers and the recording of carers' needs assessments and support plans to ensure their standardised recording. It said that this would improve data recording relating to carers and allow data to be extracted and analysed. The Council said that the database would allow individuals to be linked to each other, for example, the linking of the carer to the cared for person.

7. Neath Port Talbot Council said that these developments were the start of a much bigger piece of development. It said that carers don't "want the world"; they just want things that they need to elevate them at certain stress points and make their caring job a bit easier. It said that it was also going to review the use of Direct Payments for carers in their own right and short break provision and build the findings of this investigation into its ongoing review work.

8. The Council said that it did not keep a register of adult carers, but it did have 278 young carers registered.

9. Neath Port Talbot Council said that, if a carer identified themselves as a carer when they contact the Council, they will be informed of their right to a carer's needs assessment and referred to the Neath Port Talbot Carers Service. The Carers Service will then contact the carer and make arrangement to assess their needs. The Council said that, once the Carers Service had assessed the needs of the carer, the Carers Service delivered the support required, for example, a sitting service and access to activities and events. The Council said that, if the Carers Service identified a statutory need, the referral would be sent back to the Council for its Social Work teams to action the statutory element of the support plan. The Council said that, if a carer contacted the Carers Service directly, it would inform them of their rights and offer them support and pass their details to the Council for recording purposes. The Council said that the process was convoluted and it was working with the Carers Service to look at how it could be streamlined.

10. The Council said that, once completed by the Carers Service, each assessment was passed to the Council for sign-off. It said that the Carers Service delivered preventative and early intervention elements of support and Social Workers complete the statutory element, where that was required. The Council said that, if there was a change in the carer's circumstances and they were known to Social Services, the changes would be flagged to the Social Worker working with the carer for re-assessment. It said that any re-assessment could be completed by the Carers Service or the Social Worker. The Council said that, if there was a change in a carer's circumstances and they were not known to Social Services, the carer would need to either go direct to the Carers Service or access the Council's services through its 'front door'.

11. For young carers, Neath Port Talbot Council said that they are often identified through education or through the involvement of Social Services within the family home. The Council said that its recording of a young carer's needs assessment was based upon the impact of their caring role on day-to-day activities, rather than a formal assessment format. It said that the main conversations with the family about its situation as a whole were recorded by the Social Worker, but not as an individual young carer's needs assessment. The Council said that the young carer's needs were identified through this process, and they were offered support and activities. The Council acknowledged that its process for young carers was not as clear and structured as it was for adult carers and that there were opportunities to streamline and improve the process. The Council said that, if there were significant changes in the young carer's circumstances, the Council would work with the individual, complete a carer's needs assessment and refer the young person to its Youth Service to determine

whether any additional support was required. The Council said that it did not have a formal process for monitoring whether the outcome of a young carer's assessment continued to meet their needs.

12. The Council said that, if a young carer declined an assessment, it was recorded on the cared for person's record. Similarly, it said that if a young carer declined an assessment, it would be recorded by the Social Worker.

13. Neath Port Talbot Council said that, where a cared for person lived within its area, but the carer lived outside the area, the Council would offer a carer's needs assessment and preventative services. It said that the team with oversight of the cared for person's care and support would usually take responsibility for completing the carer's needs assessment.

14. The Council acknowledged that supporting the transition of young carers and young adult carers into further education, employment or training was an area requiring development and strengthening. It recognised that it was a critical point for young carers and further support was required.

15. The Council said that any additional needs to allow a carer to fully participate in their assessment would be identified by the Single Point of Contact ("SPOC") team and it would look into identifying support to facilitate their participation, for example, the use of sign language and interpreters. It said that staff would also seek advice and support from other Council officers, e.g., mental health staff or the Autism Spectrum Disorder ("ASD") team, on how to work with individuals.

16. In terms of training, the Council said that its Social Workers were qualified and its 'front door' staff were either qualified Social Workers or working towards their qualifications. The Council said that it did not have a current training programme for carers' needs assessments.

17. The Council said that it was working across Council teams to raise awareness of carers' rights and the support services and activities available. It said that its Local Area Co-ordinators worked closely with carers and help to identify carers; it said that people often don't self-identify as carers and the Local Area Co-ordinators can explain their rights and signpost them to support services. The Council explained that it also planned to work with GPs to identify those with caring responsibilities early to utilise early intervention

and prevent circumstances reaching crisis point. The Council said that it wanted carers to have a stronger voice to self-identify as carers and for them to feel safe to come forward and talk about the impact their caring role was having upon them.

18. Neath Port Talbot Council explained that it did not undertake any quality checks or audits on carers' needs assessments completed by the Carers Service. It said that this was, however, part of the ongoing review of carers' services. The Council said that it did not undertake quality checks on the young carer assessments completed but its staff from the Youth Service had already expressed concerns that the tick box forms completed (examples of which were provided to this investigation) were not suitable and it was working to develop a more structured, thorough and relevant assessment. The Council also said that, historically, it had not sought any feedback from adult carers or persons with parental responsibility for the young carers in terms of their satisfaction with the assessments completed and their outcomes. The Council explained that, as part of the review work being undertaken, it had started a survey to gather people's views and opinions about carers' services being delivered and it was reviewing approximately 300 responses. The Council said that its Youth Service sought feedback from young carers to ensure that the services provided met their needs.

19. Neath Port Talbot Council said it was working in partnership with the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board which had identified priorities in terms of carers; these included a review of carers' needs assessments, information and the consistency of information across the region, and the promotion of carers' rights. The Council said that it was also a member of the All-Wales Carers Learning and Improvement Network ("COLIN"), which it said had been helpful, positive and supportive during its review of carers' services and for the sharing of different models of delivery in other local authority areas. It said it had been helpful to obtain collective viewpoints and have somewhere to go with questions. The Council said it had also worked collaboratively with Public Health Wales and Swansea University and engaged with Scottish colleagues in relation to carers' services.

20. The Council provided the investigation with copies of its contract monitoring reports for Neath Port Talbot Carers Service and said that its commissioning team met with the Carers Service on a monthly basis to discuss any issues being experienced. The Council also provided copies of its young carer information leaflets and its young carers assessment guidance and Manual of Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes.

21. Neath Port Talbot Council explained that advocacy support was provided by Neath Port Talbot Carers Service for adults and that it commissioned adult-focussed,

independent, professional advocacy from 'Mental Health Matters'. It said that its Local Area Co-ordinators often acted as advocates.

22. The Investigated Authorities were also asked to provide the investigation with their recorded equality data for carers who had had their needs assessed in 2022/2023. Neath Port Talbot Council provided data relating to gender, language preference, religion and ethnicity for adult carers and gender, disability and ethnicity data for young carers. In terms of gender, 75% of adult carers were female and 25% male and, for young carers, 72% were female and 28% were male. Where ethnicity was recorded, which was for 36% of the adults whose needs were assessed, 67% were recorded as White and 33% as Welsh. For young carers, 6% were recorded as non-white British. Language preference was recorded for 29% of adults whose needs were assessed, with the majority preferring English and a small proportion preferring Welsh.

Evidence from Neath Port Talbot Carers Service

23. [Neath Port Talbot Carers Service](#) is a charity that receives funding from the local authority and the Regional Integrated Fund held by West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board.

24. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service told us that it provides services to adult carers in the Neath Port Talbot Council area. It explained that, since 2009, it had received core funding from Neath Port Talbot Council and Swansea Bay University Health Board to provide an IAA service to unpaid carers in the Neath Port Talbot area. It said that it was never commissioned by Neath Port Talbot Council to deliver carers' needs assessments. It said that, following the implementation of the SSWB Act, it was required to undertake 160 carers assessments within the existing funding allocation for 2016/2017. It said that unpaid carers were to agree to an assessment prior to being referred by Social Services.

25. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that, in July 2017, the local authority manager reported to the Board of Neath Port Talbot Carers Service that all carers' assessments would be sent to its service. The Board had concerns as the demand was exceeding capacity and, by November 2017, the number of assessments was adversely affecting the Information and Advice sessions that could be offered. It said that this was an ongoing issue that had not been resolved and carers were waiting longer than it would like to be assessed, causing delays in eligible needs being identified. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that, although carers

were provided with Information, Advice and Support while waiting a formal assessment, its IAA service had also been impacted by the demand for carers' needs assessments.

26. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service welcomed the appointment of a new Principal Officer at the Council who had taken responsibility for unpaid carers. It said that it was working closely with the Council to review the whole process, as it was clear that Neath Port Talbot Carers Service was undertaking most carers' needs assessments with limited capacity. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service considered that the process for carers' needs assessments required streamlining with carers being placed in its centre.

27. Neath Port Talbot Carers service informed us carers were referred to its services from Social Services SPOC using the 'Oracle' computer system and without the need to speak to a Social Worker. It said that, if carers contacted the Carers Service directly, they were signposted to the SPOC before being directed back to the Carers Service – this was to ensure their details were recorded on Oracle before having their needs assessed. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service raised concerns about carers having to repeat their information and circumstances many times to different staff before having their needs assessed.

28. The Carers Service said that the referral page was already populated when it was received, but the equality information fields would not be populated. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that it used 'Charity Log' and had updated this system to include equality information. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that, if a carer declined an assessment, it was recorded on Charity Log, as there was nowhere available to its staff on the Oracle system to record this.

29. It said that many carers do not understand the meaning of a carer assessment and can be put off when informed that the information they provide will be included on the Council's Social Services system. It said that carers were worried that they were being assessed as carers rather than being supported. It said that some Social Workers say that a carer must have an assessment before they can access Direct Payments or respite.

30. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that outcomes were identified during an assessment. If the outcome was a service provided by Neath Port Talbot Carers Service, the carer was referred straight away, for example, for counselling, sitting service, help with benefits forms or a short break. However, if the outcome was a service from Social Services, it was highlighted and sent to the relevant Network Team Manager at Social Services to be

actioned. It said that it did not receive feedback on when the service was actioned or provided by Social Services and it was working with Social Services to rectify this.

Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that it had staff and services that specifically supported parent carers, the transition of carers from the Council's Children's Services to Adult Services and staff and services to support those caring for loved ones with dementia.

31. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that each assessment its staff completed was checked and signed off by a manager, but there was no oversight from the Council itself and it received no feedback from the Council about the service it provides.

32. In terms of monitoring whether the outcomes of an assessment continued to meet the needs of a carer, Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that it had no formal review process, but it did complete wellbeing calls to carers and distributed information about its events and activities. It said that it could only follow up on support it had agreed to provide and was unable to follow up on any support referred back to the council, e.g., Direct Payments. It said that carers could also request a review, should their circumstances change.

33. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that some of its staff were qualified to NVQ Level 3 or 4 while others were working towards a qualification. It said that staff were also trained in safeguarding and dementia awareness. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that new staff shadow other staff completing carers' needs assessments before doing their own assessments.

34. The Carers Service said that it had Welsh speaking staff, should carers wish to have their needs assessed in Welsh and it was able to access interpreter and translation services for any carers whose language of choice was not Welsh or English.

35. Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that it identified carers with additional needs in several ways. It said that, when it received a referral from a health professional or organisation, they would often share whether the carer had additional needs and they liaise with the health professional or organisation before contacting the carer. It said that its support workers were also trained and able to identify potential additional needs when they make initial telephone contact with the carer and when they meet them to complete the assessment. It said that, once identified, it looked for solutions and sought advice from organisations that may specialise in any particular additional need. It said that Llais Cymru, Independent Professional Advocacy Neath Port Talbot, Your Voice Advocacy and

Citizens Advice, all provide advice and advocacy services to support carers to participate in their needs assessment. It said that it also encouraged carers to bring with them a friend or advocate to support them during their carer's needs assessment. It said that this had been identified as a gap on its referral form and it will be included going forward.

36. In terms of identifying carers, Neath Port Talbot Carers Service said that it attended events to raise awareness of carers' rights, distributed its newsletter to GP surgeries, pharmacies and partner organisations and holds awareness sessions with the Council's Area Coordinators. It said that it was also working to improve its website. It said that it runs engagement events with carers to keep up to date with the services they want. It said that it was also a member of the Carers Trust and that it was already seeing the benefits of membership with details of support services available to carers. It said that it had identified that carers who also work struggle, as they were unable to attend support groups during the working day, so it was working with the Primary Care Clusters in its area with a view of establishing a Carers Hub where it may be possible to run evening events.

37. Neath Port Talbot Carers service provided copies of its contract monitoring reports and compliments it had received from carers who have used its services.

Evidence from staff

38. Details of local authority staff who provide IAA and who conduct carers' needs assessments were provided by each of the Investigated Authorities. Staff from the commissioned service providers, Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers, NEWCIS, Adferiad and Neath Port Talbot Carers Service, were also asked to participate in the investigation and provide evidence. The evidence was sought via online surveys. A reasonable adjustment¹ was made to allow 1 member of staff to provide their evidence orally.

¹ A change made to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability.

39. The table below summarises the number of staff surveyed, and the number of responses received:

	Local Authority area	Number of staff surveyed	Number of responses received (*)	Response rate (**)
Information, Advice and Assistance staff	Caerphilly	16	5	31%
	Ceredigion	22	19	86%
	Flintshire	10	7	70%
	Neath Port Talbot	6	0	0%
Staff where carers' needs assessments are part of their role	Caerphilly	168	92 (8)	55% (50%)
	Ceredigion	42	20 (2)	48% (43%)
	Flintshire	14	9	64%
	Neath Port Talbot	227	31 (11)	14% (9%)
Commissioned service provider staff who complete carers' needs assessments	Caerphilly***	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Ceredigion	3	2	67%
	Flintshire	10	9 ²	90%
	Neath Port Talbot	4	3	75%

* Incomplete responses

** Completed questionnaire response rate

*** No commissioned services

Information, Advice and Assistance staff

40. No responses received.

Carers' needs assessment staff

41. Respondents working with young people said that they would complete a young carer needs assessment and that it was offered as part of a Child and Young Person assessment. Respondents working with adults said that they would refer the carer to Neath Port Talbot Carers Service. Some respondents working with adults said specifically that they would not complete carers' needs assessments.

² One on maternity leave

42. The majority of respondents said that they had not received any specific training in relation to carers' needs assessments and several did not think it was required as they did not complete carers' needs assessments in their roles. A few said that they had attended training sessions to raise awareness of support available to carers in the community.

43. Staff showed an awareness that carers were entitled to have their needs assessed in their own right. Staff said that when officers identified adult carers, they would automatically refer them to the Neath Port Talbot Carers Service to arrange an assessment and discuss a range of support and services available to them. Staff said that the Social Worker could also complete the carer's needs assessment if there was a waiting list at the Carers Service and the assessment needed to be prioritised or a more comprehensive assessment was required.

44. Staff said that, where they identify a young carer who was thought to be eligible for the young Carer Service, which provides a Youth Club and 1-2-1 support, a referral would be made to the Early Intervention Panel and a young carer needs assessment completed. They said that, for families not known to Social Services, referrals were made to the SPOC for a young carer assessment and a referral and assessment was sent to the Early Intervention Panel and the young carer was allocated to the Council's Youth Service and invited to access the Young Carers Support Service.

45. A few respondents said they had little understanding of the carers' needs assessment process, other than it was undertaken to look at the needs of carers. They said that they would refer carers to the Carers Service. A large proportion of respondents said that they knew where to find the process for carers' needs assessments and that it was easily accessible and understandable. A few said that they were unsure and would seek advice from management. Others said that they did not know where to find the process and they were unsure if there was a supporting document.

46. Respondents said that carers can select to use Welsh as their language of choice as part of the Active Offer and there were staff available to provide the service in Welsh. They said that there was a list of Welsh speakers within the Council which was easily accessible on the intranet. Respondents said that assessment documentation could also be completed in the Welsh language. A few respondents said that they were unsure, or had a limited understanding, of the measures available for carers who wished to use the service in Welsh. A few other respondents said they would access interpretation/translation services.

47. For carers whose language of choice was something other than Welsh or English, the majority of respondents said that they would access interpretation or translation services to support carers. One respondent said they could contact the Vulnerable Learners Service for Children in Education for support. A few respondents said they were unsure of the measures in place to support carers whose language of choice was not Welsh or English.

48. In terms of carers with communication difficulties, respondents said they would adapt their communication style and use visual aids, flow charts, diagrams or pictures, simplified or Easy Read (a picture-based system to assist comprehension by those with learning difficulties) documents and Picture Exchange Communication Cards. They said that they would simplify their speech and avoid jargon, assess their pace, recap and check the carer's understanding. They said that they would also take into consideration any hearing difficulties by using mobile hearing devices and explore with the carer or their family how best to communicate with the carer. Respondents also said that they could access British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and the Speech and Language Therapy Team and Sensory Team for advice and support. Respondents said that all Social Workers had regular training to support them in working with people with cognitive impairment or learning difficulties. A few respondents said that they could offer carers the support of an advocate. A few further respondents said that they were unsure of what services were available to support carers with communication difficulties.

49. A few respondents did not feel that there were any barriers to carers having their needs assessed. Other respondents identified the following barriers to carers having their needs assessed:

- Carers were not aware of their rights until they come into contact with professionals/service.
- Young carers fear becoming isolated from their peers and feel guilty for doing something for themselves.
- There was a perceived stigma attached to receiving help to provide care.
- The caring role may not be recognised at school or in the community.
- Young carer assessments were lengthy and were focussed on physical caring needs rather than emotional needs.
- The Carers Service was short staffed which cause delays to assessments being completed as the assessments were prioritised, according to need.
- Social Workers forget to offer needs assessments to carers when assessing the cared for person.

- An increasing number of individuals need urgent care and support in more complex circumstances, for example, hospital discharges and safeguarding, which were prioritised over carers' needs assessments which affected the ability to complete carers' needs assessments in a timely manner.
- Services to support carers were not always available to meet the identified needs, for example, for day services.
- Carers did not see themselves as having needs or think they are asking for too much.
- Concerns that their caring ability was being called into question and the possible implications for the cared for person if it was deemed that the carer was not coping.
- Young carers and their families were fearful of the Social Worker completing the assessment and worried they would be viewed negatively.
- The line between carers' assessments and parenting assessments was blurred with parent carers not necessarily knowing the difference.

50. In other comments, respondents said that the Youth Service was always considerate and supportive of the referrals made. They said that referrals to Neath Port Talbot Carers Service used to have to be made through its SPOC team, but they have now been told they can refer carers directly to the Carers Service. Respondents said that it would be helpful to know the outcome of their referrals to the Carers Service. Respondents said that it would be helpful to have a prompt for carers' needs assessments in the paperwork being completed. Others said that more awareness of the procedures involved would be helpful, with some saying that they had a limited knowledge of what support was available and they were uncertain of the role of the Health Board and primary care.

Neath Port Talbot Carers Service

51. Respondents said that they received internal training, shadowed experienced staff completing assessments and read through completed assessments. One respondent said that they had also received training in relation to dementia. They said that the training received assisted them somewhat in relation to their role of undertaking carers' needs assessments.

52. Respondents said that carers were referred to the Carers Service and Support Workers contacted the carers to arrange to have their needs assessed. Respondents said

that it was their role to identify what support may assist the carer or what services may be appropriate for them. They said that, if the assessment highlighted any statutory services that the carer wished to explore, the matter would be referred to a Social Worker for further assessment. Respondents said that if no statutory support was required, the Council was not informed of the outcome of the assessment.

53. Some respondents said that they had not seen a formal process for carers' needs assessments or they were unsure where to find it. One respondent said that they knew where to find the process for carers' needs assessments and it was easily accessible and understandable.

54. Where a carer's language of choice was Welsh, some respondents said that a member of staff who spoke Welsh would assist with the assessment, or an interpreter would be used. Similarly, where a carer's language of choice was not Welsh or English, respondents said that an interpreter would be used to facilitate the assessment. One respondent said there were no measures in place to allow a carer whose language was not English to have their needs assessed.

55. In terms of communication difficulties, respondents said that they would firstly identify any communication difficulties and that they may be confident enough to assist. Respondents said that communication difficulties should be highlighted on the referral to ensure the carers service could accommodate their needs. They said that they may ask the carer's family member or friend to assist with an assessment. They said that a BSL interpreter could be used for carers with hearing difficulties. Some respondents were unsure what specific measures the Carers Service had in place to assist carers with communication difficulties. One respondent said there were no measures in place to assist those with communication difficulties to have their needs assessed.

56. In terms of barriers to having their needs assessed, some respondents raised concerns that there were not enough staff to manage the number of referrals received, which resulted in long delays for carers' needs assessments. They said that carers' needs assessments were not the sole purpose of the charity but, due to the volume of referrals received, it was what took up most of their time. One respondent said that there were no barriers to carers having their needs assessed.

57. Some respondents raised concerns that, when carers were being referred to the Carers Service, carers were not being made aware of what a carer's needs assessment was, nor what it was for. They said that Social Workers often sent urgent referrals to the Carers Service, when the support it was able to offer was not suitable to meet the carer's needs, resulting in the Carers Service having to liaise with Social Workers. They said that, in some cases, the carer's circumstances had already reached crisis point, but the Social Worker had very little or no involvement with the carer.

58. Some respondents raised concerns that many carers were juggling work, their own families, mental health issues of their own and financial strain and a lot of carers were expected to continue caring, even though they had mentioned to their GP or Social Worker that they were experiencing difficulties. They said that waiting times for care packages or NHS appointments also put a strain on carers. Respondents raised concerns that some carers were unable to attend to their own health, for example, to attend GP appointments, as they were unable to leave their cared for person alone. Some respondents said that they had experienced carers having to fight for everything from the local authority, local health board or housing associations.

59. Some respondents raised further concerns about the limited number of carers' needs assessments being completed by the Council. They said that any support put in place by the Council tended to be recorded in the records of the cared for person and even though the carer's needs were being met, they were not linked on the system.

Evidence from those with lived experience

Carer N – Neath Port Talbot

60. Carer N cares for his partner. Carer N said that he became aware of his right to a carer's needs assessment in 2018, when searching the internet for information about Carers Allowance. Carer N self-referred to Neath Port Talbot Carers Service on the first occasion and his assessment was arranged quickly. He said that he was provided with information that having his needs assessed could result in him receiving more help with his caring responsibilities. Carer N said that he was reminded in 2022 of his right to a needs assessment when his partner's health professionals sent a referral to the Neath Port Talbot Carers Service for a re-assessment. Carer N said that it took a while for the Carers Service to contact him, due to a miscommunication, but an assessment was arranged quickly, following

contact. He said that he was under that same impression the second time, that an assessment could result in practical support with his caring role.

61. Carer N said that he was given the impression that his needs were assessed in his own right, but as his partner was present during both assessments, the discussions centred on his partner's difficulties.

62. Carer N said that, following the first assessment, he was wary of accepting practical help, as he felt he ought to be able to provide the care needed himself. He said that his burden was financial, and he requested help with this, but he didn't gain much. Carer N said that, during the second assessment, it was explained that practical support was not a possible outcome and, if he needed help with caring, then it would have to come from Social Services in the form of Direct Payments, so that his partner could hire a paid carer. Carer N said that he was offered therapy/counselling as an outcome of his second needs assessment, but he has yet to receive any.

63. Carer N said that he felt disappointed with the outcome of his assessments. He said that he engaged with the process, as he was struggling, but the lack of a tangible outcome meant that his difficulties were not alleviated. He said he had been hopeful that he may have received some help with funding or with arranging respite, but an open invitation to the Carers Service events felt like an empty platitude for the want of something more useful. Carer N said that his assessments felt like a waste of time and that he had completely failed to convey just how desperate and exhausted he sometimes became. Carer N said that his needs were not met and the support offered did not meet his needs.

64. Carer N said that it would have been helpful to know what support may have been available or to see case studies to obtain a better idea of how the Carers Service had helped other carers, so that carers could relate to those situations and be able to make a more focussed request for support during their own assessment.

65. Carer N said that the assessments were conducted in his language of choice and that he was not offered an advocate, but it was not necessary. Carer N said that he was told that he would receive a copy of his first assessment, but it never materialised. He said he was provided with a copy of his second assessment.

Carer O – Neath Port Talbot

66. Carer O cares for her husband, son and parents. Carer O said that she stopped working to provide care for her husband and son which impacted upon the family finances. Carer O said that, following a medical emergency involving her husband, a Social Worker became involved with the family and informed Carer O of her right to a carer's needs assessment and about the services of Neath Port Talbot Carers Service.

67. Carer O said that the Social Worker referred her to the Carers Service and her first assessment was completed within a month. She said that her needs were assessed, alongside her son. Carer O said that, as a result of the assessment, a volunteer took her children out to give them a break from caring for her husband and being in the house. Carer O said that she was informed of some support groups, but she was unable to attend these as they took place during her working hours.

68. Carer O said that her subsequent carer's needs assessments were not much better, but the second assessment was more relevant to her as a carer than the first assessment. Carer O said that the second assessment was very friendly and relaxed and, after explaining that demand on her as a carer had increased, she was asked what she wanted. Carer O said that she wasn't sure what she wanted and asked what could be provided to support her. Carer O said that she was informed that the assessment did not work in that way and it was for the carer to say what they wanted and for the Carers Service to decide whether it was possible. Carer O said that she told them that she wanted a "completely free life" and for the family to be happy. Carer O said that she asked for support with housework, but she could not afford the cleaning service offered, due to being on a low income. Carer O said that she asked about support groups that her husband could attend to give her a break but was told that there weren't any. Carer O said that she was offered counselling, but there was a long waiting list.

69. Carer O said that, in the meantime, she found another charitable organisation, outside of her local authority area. Carer O said that, here, she was provided with counselling and attends a weekly support group. Carer O said that the Neath Port Talbot Carers Service did not signpost her to the services of this group and that she found the organisation on the [Dewis](#) directory.

70. Carer O said that, in the Neath Port Talbot area, carers' needs were not very well met. Carer O complemented the staff at Neath Port Talbot Carers Service but said that the Carers Service needed to be more in line with Social Services and staff needed to be more aware of services available in the area to support carers, particularly to meet the diverse needs of different carer groups, e.g. young adult carers and carers under the age of 55. Carer O said that she would certainly like to see more 'coffee and chat' groups outside of working hours, as there were so many carers that work alongside their caring role.

71. Carer O said that the assessment was conducted in her language of choice, but she was not offered advocacy services.

Carer P – Neath Port Talbot

72. Carer P cares for her father, whose care needs have increased in recent years. Carer P said that she sometimes felt that she went from one job to another when leaving work, that she never slept well as she listened out for her father and never "switches off". Carer P said that she has had to have time off work due to stress. Carer P said that people don't realise how difficult it is to provide care alongside working full time. She said it was difficult to take calls in work time and she felt as if there weren't enough hours in the day. Carer P said that she became aware of her right to a carer's needs assessment through a Social Worker.

73. Carer P said that the assessment covered various areas including work, support provided by family and friends, mental health and well-being. Carer P said that she was offered a sitting service, but she was still waiting for confirmation. Carer P said that her father also received respite care for 3 weeks a year and had a care package in place. Carer P said that the process had taken months and for her to be listened to and she felt isolated.

74. Carer P said that she was happy with the outcome of the assessment and was glad that her voice was heard and that she was provided with help with respite. Carer P said that the assessment met her expectations. Carer P said that it would be useful if the Council provided an information pack for carers, but praised the services of Neath Port Talbot Carers Service, as its focus was on the carer rather than the cared for person. Carer P also said that it was difficult having to repeat information to different people and it would be helpful if there was one point of contact. Carer P said that it would also be helpful to have proactive, regular reviews of carers' needs to check whether the carer required any additional support.

75. Carer P said that her assessment was conducted in her language of choice. Carer P said that she may have received a copy of her assessment by email.

Carer Q – Neath Port Talbot

76. Carer Q cares for his wife and became aware of his right to a carer's needs assessment and the services available through his wife's Social Worker. Carer Q said that his assessment was arranged quite quickly and was conducted by Social Services as a joint assessment alongside his wife, although she could not take part in the assessment. Carer Q said that, as a result of the assessment, a care package was provided for his wife and he was satisfied with the service received, as the support provided met his identified needs.

77. Carer Q said that the assessment was a good experience, as it explained the available services. Carer Q said that it made him realise that he could not provide all of the services needed to care for his wife, as he was not capable of looking after her for 24 hours a day.

78. Carer Q said that the assessment was conducted in his language of choice and he did not require the services of an advocate. Carer Q said that he was provided with a copy of the completed assessment.

Carer R – Neath Port Talbot

79. Carer R cared for her mother and worked full time. Carer R was a distance carer, meaning that she did not live in the same local authority area as her mother. Carer R said that, as her mother's needs increased, her own health started to suffer.

80. Carer R said that she was made aware of her right to a carer's needs assessment after contacting Carers UK, but it was difficult to find out about specific carers' rights in Wales. Carer R said that it was made more difficult as there was no one standard across Wales and each local authority did its own thing. Carer R said that it was difficult to find the information needed and the "ammunition" when in a "fight" with the local authority, as a carer will not know what support they should be receiving and she often received misinformation from the local authorities involved.

81. Carer R said that she had to fight for her first assessment when she was really struggling. She said that she approached Neath Port Talbot Council and was told that, as she

was not resident in the Council's area, it was her own local authority that was responsible for undertaking the carer's needs assessment. Carer R said that she spoke to a Carer's Champion at her GP practice, but they didn't know her rights and could only signpost her to support in her area. Carer R said that she needed Neath Port Talbot Council to understand that it would need to pick up the pieces when, or if, the carer relationship broke down and the Council needed to understand the impact her caring role was having upon her.

82. Carer R said that she subsequently spoke to her own local authority which categorically told her that the carer's needs assessment was not its responsibility. Carer R said that she then returned to Neath Port Talbot Council and told it that she was not asking it to do anything or signpost her to services but was asking the Council to understand the impact and the caring situation with her mother. Carer R said that the Council finally agreed to complete a carer's needs assessment.

83. Carer R said that a Social Worker completed a lengthy assessment with her and went through everything in relation to her own needs, as a carer. Carer R said that the Social Worker teased out the tasks she was completing as a carer and the time those tasks were taking. Carer R said that it came as a shock to her when she read through the assessment; the words made her realise that she was in crisis and she was subsequently signed-off work.

84. Carer R said that the assessment document was really useful as she was able to share it with her GP and occupational health staff at her place of work.

85. Carer R said that her mother was admitted to hospital on 2 occasions and she had to "get difficult" with the hospital to ensure that her mother was assessed by an Occupational Therapist ("OT") before she was discharged. Carer R said that this resulted in her mother receiving a care package.

86. Carer R said that the pandemic was difficult as she had to increase time with her mother, her mother's needs were increasing and her care package was increased. Carer R said she asked the Council for a re-assessment of her own needs. Carer R said that, by this time, the Social Worker had changed and that receiving continuity of support was really difficult. She said that Neath Port Talbot Council told her again that it was her own local authority that was responsible for conducting a carer's needs assessment. Carer R said that her own local authority agreed to conduct a carer's needs assessment and it was

outsourced to a charity who completed a questionnaire. She said there was no opportunity for a free conversation on this occasion and it didn't help her.

87. Carer R said that her own health deteriorated, and she struggled to control her diabetes, which she had been able to manage using diet and exercise when her mother was stable. Carer R said that her mother's needs increased and she was providing care for 20 hours in a good week and 30 hours on a bad week; she said she was juggling her caring role with work and often wasn't getting home until 9pm or 10pm.

88. Carer R said that, in 2022, the company providing her mother's care package pulled out of the area and the Council could not guarantee continued support. Carer R said that she "went ballistic" as she was working "all hours" and providing 20-30 hours of emotional care and support to her mother. Carer R said that her mother's care package was subsequently increased to 4 calls a day, but Neath Port Talbot Council would not re-assess her own needs, as a carer. Carer R said that she contacted the Welsh Government and was provided with its carers' policy which was clear that the responsibility for conducting a carer's needs assessment lay with the local authority in which the cared for person lived.

89. Carer R said that she was unsure what work the Welsh Government did to ensure that local authorities were adhering to the policy relating to carers. Carer R said that she shouldn't have to find out the information for herself or have to chase local authorities. Carer R was of the view that there should be an All-Wales policy and standard carers' needs assessment forms with a standard format and questions, with a follow-up action plan.

90. Carer R said that, when she was in contact with Neath Port Talbot Council, she was informed that it had refused to complete a carer's needs assessment with another distance carer and she was convinced that she only received what she did because, due to her employment, she was used to dealing with government organisations and having those sorts of conversations. Carer R said that there would be so many people not able to do what she had done.

91. Carer R said that the support she eventually received from Neath Port Talbot Council was good, but the difficulty was pushing through the front door and finding the way in. Carer R expressed that people fall into caring by default and don't realise that they are caring because they're family, particularly if they're elderly and, before they know it, they are in crisis. Carer R was of the view that better or strengthened links between GP practices and

Social Services could improve support, as one of the first places carers tend to go is their GP when their health deteriorates, due to their caring role.

Carer S – Neath Port Talbot

92. Carer S cared for her father from 2009. Carer S became aware of her right to a carer's needs assessment when a Social Worker was allocated to her father in 2022. Carer S said she was struggling and needed help. Carer S said that the assessment was arranged over the phone and she was assessed at her home address. Carer S said that it took many months to be assessed; it was too long as she had already sought help elsewhere by the time she was assessed.

93. Carer S said that the assessment solidified her struggles and showed her how hard her caring role was. Carer S said that it made her realise what a great job she was doing in a hard situation. She agreed with the outcome of the assessment but was of the view that it would have been more beneficial at the start of her caring journey. Carer S said that the assessor was very caring and understood her situation and helped her rationalise the situation and process that her feelings were justified. Carer S said that she did not feel as alone after her assessment and was provided with information about local carers' support groups and knows she can reach out for support if required. Carer S said that she appreciated the assessor's thoughts and guidance.

94. Carer S said that the assessment was completed in her language of choice and there was no need for an advocate. She said that she was provided with a copy of her carer's needs assessment. Carer S said that she has not had her needs re-assessed as her father is in full time private residential care.

95. Carer S said that people performing a caring role should be made aware of their right to a carer's needs assessment and have their needs assessed earlier. She said that her physical and mental health suffered and this may have been avoided if she had known about her rights sooner.