Buckinghamshire All-Age Carers Strategy

2025 -2030

Foreword

Hi I'm Ricardo, and I am a young adult carer.
Being a carer has challenged me and helped me to grow.

Sometimes, young carers like myself feel overwhelmed as we need to balance our responsibilities with growing as a young adult, attending education and having a social life.

The Buckinghamshire Council All-Age Carers Strategy is very important to me, as it identifies the unique role and pressure that young carers like me face. It recognises this and supports people to understand it and addresses it.

Being involved in the development of this strategy has been exciting as it allowed me to have a voice and share my experiences. I am proud to have acted as ambassador for all young carers, to support real changes, better quality support, and improved lifestyles for all carers and everyone around them.

The message of the strategy is positive and empowering. My ambition and hope for this strategy, and all actions that follow, is that every young carer in Buckinghamshire will recognise themselves in their caring role and feel supported.

Ricardo, Young Adult Carer Buckinghamshire

Introduction

We are delighted to present our strategy which has been co-produced with partners and carers of all ages in Buckinghamshire.

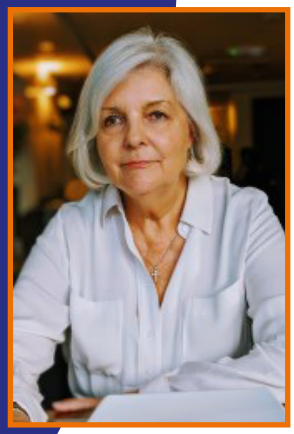
There are so many carers who we do not know about and many who do not recognise themselves as a carer. We have a great opportunity to reach and support more carers through our delivery work with partners.

This strategy matters, as it's vital that we have a clear set of priorities and actions to drive forward improvements with and for our unpaid carers.

For all carers who are reading this, thank you for everything you are doing in providing care and support to another person. Please do reach out to us if you need more support and we will do all we can to work with you to help.

Angela Macpherson

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing



Anita Cranmer

Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services

Our Vision for Carers

'We want every carer in Buckinghamshire to be recognised and valued, being able to access the information, support, and resources they need to live fulfilling lives, alongside caring'.

Summary

This strategy is for everyone who provides regular unpaid care and support to another person, whether they are a friend, parent, sibling, wider family member, child with additional needs or a combination of these people. The reason for care and support could be due to an illness, disability, a mental health problem or addiction. In this strategy we will use the term 'Carer', when referring to all age unpaid carers.

The dedication and commitment shown by every carer in Buckinghamshire is exceptional. Our formal statutory services would be overwhelmed without this hidden support that is provided each and every day by unpaid carers across our county.

Carers support people to stay as independent as possible for as long as possible in their own homes, helping to prevent or delay the need for formal statutory services. Parent carers help their child and young person to reach their potential.

In developing this strategy, we spent a lot of time talking with adult and young carers to find out what is important to them, and the priorities and actions we have identified reflect that feedback.

This strategy has been co-produced by the Buckinghamshire Carers Partnership Board – with representatives from across Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust, Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, Oxford Health, Carers Bucks, Healthwatch Bucks and Families and Carers Together.

This strategy sets out our joint commitment to our carers of all ages in Buckinghamshire, to ensure they are valued and supported.

A partnership owned action plan will underpin delivery of the strategy, with the Carers Partnership Board overseeing implementation.

We would like to thank everyone who has helped to develop this strategy and continues to support in its implementation to ensure all our Carers in Buckinghamshire are able to live fulfilling lives, alongside caring.

Buckinghamshire Council

CarersBucks
Dedicated to supporting carers

NHS

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB

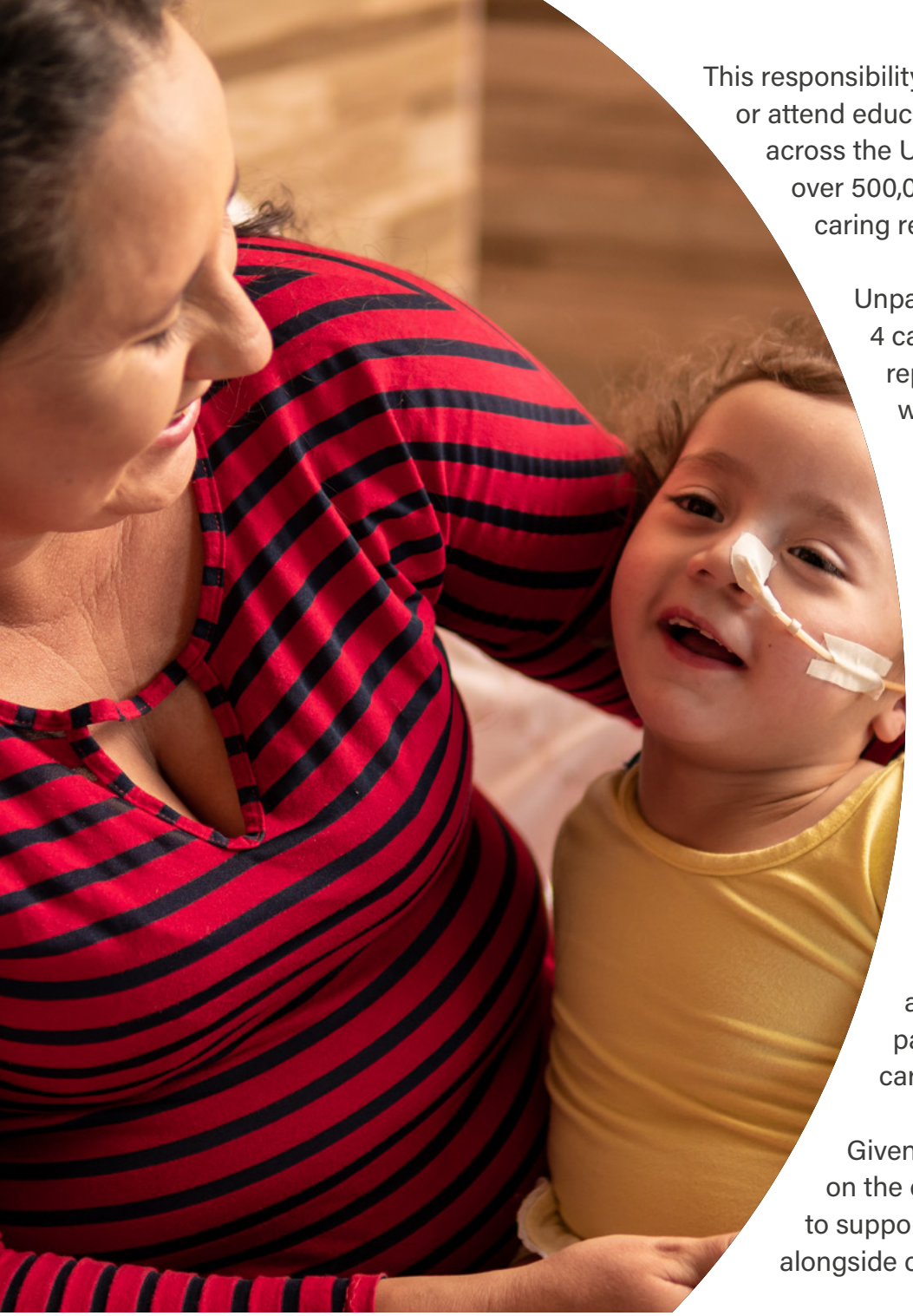
Who is an Unpaid Carer?

Carers UK define unpaid carers as 'anyone who cares for someone who is ill, disabled, older, has mental health concerns or is experiencing addiction and is not paid by a company or local authority to provide care and support'. (Carers UK.)

Carers can come from a range of backgrounds, situations and age groups. Some carers move in and out of the role many times and provide various types of care, often to more than one person. Caring can be very rewarding, and carers provide invaluable assistance to those depending on it.

The support provided by carers can include dealing with care services, assisting with personal care, attending appointments and collecting medication, looking after others in the family, providing companionship, carrying out household duties as well as dealing with crises at short notice. Carers also provide emotional support to the cared for person, the affect this has on the carer should not be underestimated. It is also important to acknowledge that many people become a carer overnight, due to sudden accident or diagnosis of illness.

The time taken to provide support is variable and can range from a couple of hours per week to 24-hour care. In 2021 census, Buckinghamshire saw an increase of 37.9% in those providing 20-49 hours of care per week and an increase of 25.9% in those providing more than 50 hours of care per week.



This responsibility can impact the carer to such a degree that they are not able to work or attend education; Carers UK estimate on average, 600 people a day leave work to care across the UK, with the number of people leaving work to provide care being recorded as over 500,000 in 2019. Many young carers are also missing out on education due to their caring responsibilities.

Unpaid carers also face significant disparities in health and wellbeing, with 1 in 4 carers feeling stressed or anxious, 1 in 2 feeling depressed and over a quarter reporting their mental health as bad or very bad. Physical health is also affected with 1 in 5 reporting injuries as a result of their caring role.

Supporting carers to remain in their workplace or school, to avoid social exclusion, remain healthy, as well as fulfill their potential and avoid financial hardship, is vital and a key commitment of this strategy.

The most recent census and ONS data in 2021 estimated that the number of unpaid carers across the UK is 5.7 million. However, Carers UK research in 2022 estimated the number of unpaid carers could be as high as 10.6 million, with many not recognising that they are a carer and therefore remaining unregistered. (Carers UK, Carers Week 2022 research report).

For young carers, the 2021 census estimated the number of young unpaid carers, aged 5-17 years in England, being 120,000, though it is widely acknowledged that this is underestimated. At present over 70% of schools nationally report having no young carers at all, however it is estimated there are 2 young carers in every class (Carers Trust). This strategy aims to help partners across schools, health and the wider community to identify our young carers earlier and provide them with the support they need.

Given the national and local evidence of the adverse impact of caring responsibilities on the quality of life, health and employment of carers it is vital that we take action to support carers effectively and assist them to maintain their role, whilst having a life alongside caring.

Carers Rights

All unpaid carers have rights set out in law:

- The right to choose whether to be a carer.
- The right to choose what support you are willing or able to provide.
- The right to have your views considered by Health and Social Services when assessments and care plans are being completed for the person you care for, including hospital discharge.
- The right to a carer's assessment, which identifies and supports your own needs and helps to measure the impact of the caring role on your wellbeing.
- The right to request flexible working from your employer.
- The right to have up to one week of unpaid leave from work each year, if providing or arranging care for someone with a long-term care need.
- The right to engage in employment, education, training and leisure activities.

Alongside the above, Young Carers also have;

- The right to a carer's needs assessment which determines whether it is appropriate for you to provide, or continue to provide, care to another person.
- The right to have your needs and wishes considered.
- The right to participate in education or training.
- The right to work.

These rights are outlined in the Children's Act 1989, the Work and Families Act 2006, the Equality Act 2010, the Care Act 2014, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Health and Care Act 2022 and the Carers Leave Act 2023.

Carers in Buckinghamshire

In Buckinghamshire an estimated 55,000 people are providing unpaid care. In the 2021 census just over 41,000 identified themselves as carers, however it is estimated carers account for 10% of the population. With Buckinghamshire's population of 553,100, it is likely the number of people providing unpaid care is approx 55,000.

Each person provides vital support to family and friends. This unpaid work is often invisible, and yet our county's health and social care system would collapse without it.

Carers living in Buckinghamshire

75% of adult carers registered identify as female and 25% male, whilst for young carers 56% of people registered identify as female and 44% male.

Working age Carers

6,249 carers registered in Buckinghamshire are between the ages of 18 – 64. With an estimated 2,619 carers balancing their caring role with paid employment, including parent carers.

Since April 2023

15,490 unpaid carers of all ages have accessed support from the Council or one of our partners; an 8% increase from 2022/23 when the Council supported 14,349 carers.

The 2021 census

highlights that over 10,000 carers in Buckinghamshire are providing more than 50 hours of unpaid care a week, with 292 of those being young carers under 24.

Young Carers

There are 1,927 young carers aged 17 and under in Buckinghamshire registered with the carers support service.

What Support is Currently Available?

Adult and Young Adult Carers

Financial support with Carer's Allowance is available for those who are eligible, of up to £81.90 per week where care is being provided at least 35 hours per week and carer does not earn more than £151 per week.

Carer's Assessments are available for carers over 18 years old who are looking after another adult over the age of 18 who is disabled, ill, elderly. The assessment helps to identify any support needed.

The Council is piloting an additional digital offer, which provides community support, e-learning courses, online support sessions and more for all adult carers.

Carer's Bucks (commissioned by Buckinghamshire Council) supports the health and wellbeing of all unpaid carers, support includes:

- information, advice and guidance
- short breaks including carers lounge at Stoke Mandeville Hospital
- support for parent, young adult and older age carers
- support GP and hospital services and schools
- provide training and information sessions
- work closely with other Voluntary Sector organisations to increase the early identification of carers across Bucks

Child Carers age 5-17

Schools provide local support for young carers in schools, by way of peer support groups and mental health support.

Carer's Bucks (commissioned by Buckinghamshire Council) supports the health and wellbeing of all unpaid carers, including **support for young carers**

- club nights with others
- targeted Support
- group Activities
- one-to-one sessions
- school support
- support for young carers with additional needs
- transitions support

Voluntary sector organisations providing support to young people include:

- Action for Children
- MYTIME Young Carers
- Buckingham and Winslow Young Carers Youth Club
- Action4Youth
- Young Minds
- Mentally Healthy Schools
- The Children's Society

The above reflects support available as of January 2025.

Where are we now?

Over the last few years, we have worked with partners to deliver improvements for our carers. Achievements to date include:

- 15,490 carers received support from the Council or one of our partners in 2023/24.
- Established a Carers Partnership Board, to design and develop an All-Age Carers Strategy and action plan.
- Increased the number of carers assessments accessed through Adult Social Care by 5% from 589 in 2022/23 to 691 in 2023/24.
- Coproduced a new adult carers assessment process, guidance and wellbeing plan with carers, due to launch early 2025.
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust launched Carers passports
- Launched a pilot digital support offer for carers which provides a range of free online services.
- Worked together with Carers Bucks to redesign the Carer's Contingency Plan, supporting carers to consider what would happen in an emergency.
- Coproduced strategy with adult and young carer representatives.
- Buckinghamshire Council successfully implemented a Carers Charter for staff with caring responsibilities, alongside a Carers staff network.

Held 169 carers events in 2023/24, with 1,017 carers attending. These included support groups, forums and online sessions.

Whilst the above activity has helped to move us in the right direction, we know that there is much more to be done to ensure carers are better supported in Buckinghamshire. This strategy and action plan will help us to make further improvements and strengthen the support offer currently available and move towards a whole system approach to support.

What Carers Told Us

Whilst the role carers play is one to be celebrated, providing care often comes at great personal cost to those sacrificing their own time, energy, and money.

For many, caring can have a detrimental impact on physical and mental wellbeing, with 60% of carers reporting long-term health conditions or disability, compared to 50% of non-carers (Carers UK, analysis of GP patient survey 2021). Many are required to give up a lifestyle and opportunities that non-carers take for granted. Over a quarter of carers also report feeling lonely often or always (Carers UK, state of caring 2022).

During the coproduction of this strategy, feedback from carers has included statements such as:

Adult Carers said:

'My health and wellbeing has to come last as I feel no one understands my caring role'

'I feel lonely at times, as carers get lost as the focus is always on the cared for person'

'There is a fundamental disconnect between what is needed to help carers and what is available'

'I am unable to study or work due to cared for persons needs deteriorating'

Young Carers said:

'Thinking about all the problems at home means I lose focus at school'

'Other kids will say things like you're so lucky you have time to play, but caring is not just time out'

'Being a carer generally feels very awkward! I feel like its something that I am ashamed of when people are talking about their home lives and I cannot relate'

'It is good to be a young carer, but it can feel like the world is on your shoulders'

Key Feedback Themes

From all the feedback received from carers in Buckinghamshire, the key themes for improvements identified were:

Early Identification of Carers:

For all organisations to recognise unpaid carers and understand the carer role and their needs, including identifying those hidden carers and under-represented groups, resulting in better communication and support.

Health and Wellbeing Support:

The need for health and wellbeing support, including taking breaks from caring, signposting to appropriate NHS and public health services, and connecting carers to each other for informal support.

Access to Information and Guidance:

Finding the right information, guidance and support at the right time, that is easy to access and understand, with a carers assessment being completed at the right time which identifies needs and develops a support plan.

Employment and Financial Support:

Supporting Carers to remain in the workplace, with flexibility to retain employment alongside their caring role. Access to information about financial support and benefits.

Our Pledge to Carers

To support our commitment to improve the lives of all unpaid carers across Buckinghamshire, we pledge to:

- Hear your voice of those with lived experience, to ensure coproduction of any future strategy and support.
- Value and respect you, recognising the expertise you have on your life and the person you care for.
- Help you access information, advice and support that's right for you, at the right time.
- Improve transition support as young carers move into adulthood.
- Improve system join-up to reduce the need for you to repeat your story to different professionals or organisations.
- Support your wellbeing by helping you to get breaks and to have a life alongside your caring role.
- Ensure training is provided to staff and services to improve support carers.
- Support you to access education and employment opportunities alongside your caring role.

Our Priorities

In response to what our carers have told us, our priorities driving this strategy are:

Priority 1:

To provide a system that best works for carers, by joining up services and identifying carers at the earliest stage.

Priority 2:

To ensure carers can find information and advice they need easily, when they need it.

Priority 3:

To support our carers' health and wellbeing, helping them to access support, make connections with other carers and prepare for the future, balancing their life outside of their caring role.

Priority 4:

To support carers to minimise the financial impact of caring.

How Will We Achieve Our Priorities

Priority 1: To provide a system that best works for carers, by joining up services and identifying carers at the earliest stage.

Carers Said	We Will
• I am unsure if I am eligible to get support. • I have no back up for emergency situations. • I need to keep telling my story to different professionals before being able to access help. • I struggle to find the information I need, when I need it. • I had to request a carers assessment myself. • I feel like I am a statistic to professionals, rather than a knowledgeable and skilled carer. • I feel undermined and not heard. • I don't like the word assessment.	• Promote a carer-friendly system wide approach, helping different services, partners and businesses work together to support carers. • Strengthen emergency planning and crisis support to join up support for carers. • Ensure carers only need to tell their story once. • Raise wider public awareness of the important role carers play in our communities. • Work with partners across the whole system including schools and GP's, to ensure carers of all ages are identified earlier, promoting the benefits of supporting the whole family. • Reach out to carers of all communities, from under-represented and vulnerable groups to ensure they are identified and supported in a culturally sensitive, personalised way; with targeted approach for Opportunity Bucks wards. • Explore the 'No-Wrong-Door' approach agreed by Association of London Directors of Children's Services, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and the Carers Trust. • Where young people are known to multiple services, there will be a joint approach in providing support, to ensure their needs are met.

Priority 2: To ensure carers can find information and advice they need easily, when they need it.

Carers Said	We Will
• I have so little time free to search for answers and solutions to the problems we encounter. • I struggle with accessing online information. • I did not find the assessment process helpful.	• Ensure carers of all ages can find information and advice they need easily, and through a range of ways, engaging with carers to ensure that information is easily to understand. • Develop a range of ways to proactively engagement with all communities to proactively share information, with targeted approach for older carers and those residing within Opportunity Bucks wards. • Invest in training and learning for carers to ensure they can carry out their role safely and with confidence. • Ensure carer assessment is timely and personalised, so carers feel it is of benefit. • Develop the knowledge and skills of partners to ensure accurate information is provided to carers.

Priority 3: To support our carers health and wellbeing, helping them to access support, meet other carers and prepare for the future.

Carers Said	We Will
• I am unsure who to go to for help. I am neglecting my health as I have no time to deal with it. • I find it hard to take a break due to the practicalities, but even harder due to the guilt of leaving the cared for person. • I find it hard to access respite as the person I care for is uncomfortable attending day centres or activities without my support. • I feel invisible as the focus is always on the cared-for person. • I am always thinking about problems at home and so struggle to focus in school. • I feel left out as I find it hard to make social connections with my peers as they do not understand my home life.	• Develop new and effective ways of providing carers with a break from caring and/or keeping in touch with family and friends. • Explore new ways to connect carers with other carers and promote the support of each other. • Raise awareness of the impact of caring on carer mental health and the importance of emotional support. • Actively support carers to plan and prepare for the future. • Work with partners to improve educational, training and employment opportunities for young carers. • Provide peer support and break activities for young carers and young adult carers. • Work with partners to highlight the importance of direct referrals to both NHS and Public Health services to improve the wellbeing of unpaid carers.

Priority 4: To support carers to minimise the financial impact of caring.

Carers Said	We Will
• I am unable to work due to my caring role. • I am not eligible to receive carers allowance. • I am unable to study due to my caring responsibilities.	• Ensure more carers can balance work and care with support to return to work alongside or after caring. • Support carers to minimise the financial impact of caring, through the promotion of good employment practices and awareness of benefits. Work with employers to develop carer friendly employers' policy. • Raise awareness about the needs of carers among employers and support carers to stay in work or get back into work. • Help carers obtain the benefits information and support they need.

Implementation and Measuring Success

To deliver the Buckinghamshire All-Age Carers Strategy 2025-2030 we have developed a partnership action plan with leads identified across the partnership. To ensure delivery of actions to support the strategy a suite of key performance indicators has been developed and will be monitored for impact. These measures are outlined in the action plan.

The Buckinghamshire Carers Partnership Board will oversee delivery of the strategy and action plan. This Board is co-chaired by Carers Bucks and Buckinghamshire Council, with members including senior adults and children's service leaders from the Council, ICB, BHT, Oxford Health, the voluntary and community sector, and carers with lived experience.

For more information visit

Buckinghamshire Council

Buckinghamshire Council 'Supporting Carers'
Provides information, advice and guidance for all age carers in Bucks.

Buckinghamshire Family Information Service
provides information, advice and guidance for young carers in Bucks.

mobilise

Together we care and thrive

Support for unpaid carers in Buckinghamshire
Provides online support, information, resources, peer community access and learning opportunities for unpaid carers in Buckinghamshire.
New service provider July 2026.