

POLICY BRIEFING

The National Strategy for Carers
Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities
June 2008 UK

The long-awaited National Strategy for Carers was published on 10th June 2008, signed by seven Government departments. In total the Strategy commits £255 million to create additional support for carers. It also sets out medium and long-term plans aimed at transforming the way that society treats carers. This briefing sets out the recommendations in the Strategy and Carers UK's initial reaction to them.

We would be very interested to hear your views on the Strategy, how you think it will be implemented and what you feel are the major gaps. Please email policy@carersuk.org with any comments.

Introduction

We believe the Strategy represents an important step forward for carers. We had urged Government to make the Strategy a cross-government effort, and to focus on a ten-year period. Both of these aims were achieved and the final report is signed by seven Secretaries of State (Health; Communities and Local Government; Work and Pensions; Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; Children, Schools and Families; Government Equalities Office and Innovation, Universities and Skills).

The Strategy was informed by a major consultation exercise with carers, including an online consultation and events around the country. Carers UK also held events to consult carers on their priorities for change, including the first ever National Carers Summit in November 2007. Government also set up four task forces covering income, equalities, employment and health and social care. Carers UK was represented on each of the taskforces. It is expected that the individual taskforce reports will be published in the next few weeks.

Whilst there are many policies that will make a real difference to carers' lives, we see this Strategy as the beginning of a process of improvement. It certainly does not deliver everything that carers want or need. However, the increased funding for breaks and employment support will make an immediate difference to those carers who benefit.

There are gaps in the Strategy - in particular it makes no changes to carers' benefits. This is very disappointing, especially since during the consultation process many carers had told the Government that this was their number one priority and we know that many carers are living in poverty. Carers UK had pressed for immediate changes to Carer's Allowance. Instead, the Government has promised a major review of carers' benefits.

The Vision

The Strategy contains a bold vision which the report says is a shared vision and responsibility between central and local government, the NHS, third sector, families and communities. Delivering this vision would mean genuine equality and recognition for carers, and it echoes our own call for a new 'social contract' which makes it clear what the state, employers, and others will provide and what individuals have to contribute.

The Strategy says that by 2018:

- *carers will be respected as expert care partners and will have access to the integrated and personalised services they need to support them in their caring role;*
- *carers will be able to have a life of their own alongside their caring role;*
- *carers will be supported so that they are not forced into financial hardship by their caring role;*
- *carers will be supported to stay mentally and physically well and treated with dignity; and*
- *children and young people will be protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive, to enjoy positive childhoods and to achieve against all the Every Child Matters outcomes.*

Short term commitments

In order to work towards achieving this ten year vision, the Strategy makes some short term recommendations (i.e. over the next 3 years) and also sets out longer term priorities, or issues which require further consideration. This section sets out the main recommendations made in the Strategy, along with Carers UK comments about them.

Where does it cover?

The funding announced in the Strategy only applies to England. Although representatives from Wales and Scotland were involved in the Strategy, none of the recommendations covering areas which affect the whole of the UK (for example benefits policy) were included in the final Strategy.

If there are changes to the benefits system arising from the review then they will apply to the whole of the UK. The right to request flexible working also applies to the whole of the UK so any changes to the definition of carer would benefit carers in all the nations.

Care services

Getting access to practical support is a key priority for carers. Too often services are not available or do not deliver what carers want.

- **Training for professionals** in local authorities for their day-to-day dealings with carers and decisions about services. It will bring together professionals in their local area to facilitate more joint working. *This should help ensure that professionals understand carers' needs.*
- **Better integration of services** through the development of a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to share relevant information between agencies and encourage close working between councils, the NHS, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector. *This will mean that carers do not have to repeat details so many times.*

- There will be funding over the next 3 years for **third sector services** at a local and national level to support their work with carers. *This is important because the third sector can often reach carers who are not in touch with their social services department.*
- In the longer term, consider **extending flexibility** in the way personal budgets and direct payments can be used. *This should mean that families have more choice about the care they receive.*

The Strategy must be seen in the context of a wider review of care and support services which Government launched last month (see <http://www.careandsupport.direct.gov.uk/>). This will be the main programme of reform for social care, which we know is at crisis point. An initial six month consultation is currently underway looking at issues such as the balance of responsibility between the individual, families and the Government and the principles for funding social care (e.g. should it be the same for everyone or should it vary based on their needs). There will then be a Green Paper setting out options for reform. Carers UK will be ensuring that carers' views are fed into the consultation so that we get a care and support system that takes into account how services impact on the whole family.

Information

Carers often find it difficult to find out what their rights are and what services are available locally. This can mean that it takes longer to get the right support. The Strategy makes several recommendations aimed at improving information and commits additional funding.

- There will be funding over the next two years to give carers comprehensive, easy to access and up to date **information about services in their local area**. This will complement the national website and information helpline for which funding has already been committed. *Local information is vitally important as carers often don't know where to find the services they need. The helpline needs to be up and running as soon as possible so that carers can get the information they need.*
- Develop national information and advice on housing and related areas such as care and finance, ensuring it links to the carers' helpline.

Services for carers

One of the biggest announcements in the Strategy is the increased funding available for breaks. Getting a break is crucial for enabling carers to look after their own health and wellbeing and remain in employment. Carers tell us that they don't get enough breaks, and that the provision for breaks is sometimes not good quality. This makes them reluctant to use them.

Other services, e.g. leisure services, can make a real difference to carers and some local authorities choose to spend some of their Carers Grant on such services for carers.

- An **increase of £150m in the amount of money available for breaks**. The money will be allocated to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) who will be required to work with local authorities to publish joint plans for the provision of breaks. *Giving*

the money to health bodies will mean that they have to work better with local authorities. We need to ensure that it doesn't create additional bureaucracy, but this policy could mean that carers can access breaks more easily.

- Caring with Confidence, a **training programme for carers** (formally known as the Expert Carers Programme), will begin in August 2008. *This programme is aimed at supporting carers in their caring role and helping them to access their entitlements.*
- **Pilots looking at existing provision of breaks** and encouraging innovative approaches to break provision and how personal budgets can be used to provide breaks. *These pilots should help develop breaks that meet the specific needs of the carer and cared-for person.*
- Consider how the **relationship between local authorities and third sector** and carer-led organisations can be developed to make greater use of their expertise and provide carers with greater choice and control over services. This includes examining how best to use the Carers Grant to benefit carers. *This suggests that Government is considering transferring all or part of the Carers Grant to local voluntary-sector organisations, but the Strategy does not give any more details about their intentions.*
- Work with local authorities to spread good practice around **discount cards** for leisure and transport.
- In the longer term, explore using a **lead professional** to help carers access services and ensure early intervention.

Health

Many carers find that their health suffers because of caring. As well as the physical and mental strain of caring, carers can find it difficult to find the time to look after their own health.

- Pilots of annual **health checks** for carers in a number of PCTs. *Carers UK has been calling for health checks for carers for a number of years and some PCTs are already doing this.*
- Pilots to provide a **training programme for GPs** to help them better understand carers' needs. If successful, it may be rolled out nationally. *GPs can be an essential first point of contact for carers. The GP should be able to offer appropriate support and guidance.*
- Government is considering making projects offering **emotional support** to carers a priority category for funding.
- Pilots looking at how the **NHS** can better support carers. They will look at involving carers in diagnosis, care and discharge planning as well as greater support for carers in GP practices and hospitals. *Currently health professionals often ignore carers and do not respect their knowledge or opinions. These pilots should help spread good practice.*

Employers

Currently, more than 3 million people – one in seven of the workforce in the UK – juggle the responsibilities of caring and paid employment. The Strategy makes clear that employers have a responsibility to recognise carers among their staff and that it makes good business sense to offer them support.

- An **awareness raising campaign** to ensure carers and employers are aware that carers have the right to request flexible working. *This is important because we believe that awareness of the right is currently low. Carers need to understand how to make a request and what to do if it is turned down.*
- Government to work with business to produce a **good practice guide** for all employers on the benefits of recruiting carers. It will include case studies and focus on the business case for employing carers. *Carers UK has already produced a guide for employers, but Government backing should ensure wider distribution.*
- Review the definition of carer in the **flexible working regulations** to consider extending it to the 20% of carers who currently miss out. *These are carers who are not a close relation of the person they care for or do not live with them. We believe extending the right would be simpler for carers and employers, as well as benefiting those who are currently excluded.*

To coincide with the publication of the Strategy, Carers UK has teamed up with some major employers to launch **Employers for Carers** as a membership forum. A leadership group including BT, Unum Provident and Listwood will work with Carers UK to develop a service for employers seeking to support the one in every seven members of the UK workforce who are also carers.

The new membership forum is for employers who want to support the people in their workforce who are carers. Its purpose will be to:

- Identify and promote the business benefits of supporting carers in the workplace.
- Influence employment policy and practice to create a culture which supports carers in and into work.
- Work with Government to deliver the commitments promised in the National Strategy for Carers.

For more information visit <http://www.carersuk.org/Employersforcarers>.

Getting into work

As well as ensuring that employers understand the needs of carers, carers and former carers have told us that they need more support to get into work. In particular, Jobcentre Plus has not been good at helping carers to access training or replacement care, to start the process of returning to work.

The Strategy says that Government will try to ensure that all carers who want to work will be able to do so, and commits £38 million of additional funding. This is a welcome recognition that carers should not be considered a 'free resource' to provide care at the expense of their own career and income. Government now recognises that as well as being good for carers this is also good for the economy.

- There will be a **Care Partnership Manager** in every Jobcentre Plus district. They will be aware of care services that are available in the local area so can ensure that carers are offered appropriate support.
- Improvements in **training for Jobcentre Plus advisers**.
- Funding replacement care for carers participating in approved **training**.
- DWP and Jobcentre Plus will investigate the feasibility of providing **return to work support** through third sector organisations. *This is an exciting prospect since the third sector has the expertise to tackle the real problems that carers face in returning to work.*
- Government will encourage more **flexible learning opportunities** to be made available to carers.

Young carers

The Strategy recognises that support for young carers needs to be centred on the family and the person they care for, but it must also make sure that young carers do not miss out on educational and other opportunities. In total, the Strategy contains measures worth £6m aimed at supporting young carers.

- Action to build effective **joined-up support** around the family and the person cared for and to shift systems of support towards active prevention.
- An extended programme of **training** on whole-family working for staff in local services.
- Funding to embed support and **guidance** for young carers through the Healthy Schools Programme. *This should ensure staff have the resources they need.*
- Funding for **awareness-raising** across schools and other children's settings.
- Research on what sort of **project-based support** works best for young carers.
- Materials for **GPs and hospital discharge teams** to build awareness and skills in dealing with young carers.

Information about carers

Accurate data about carers is essential. Knowing what support carers need and how best to target them ensures that funds are spent wisely. As a result of the 2001 Census, we know more about carers than ever before, but there are still gaps in our knowledge. The Strategy contains a number of welcome recommendations in this area.

- Government will develop a **carer experience survey** for local authorities to undertake on a voluntary basis in 2009-10.
- Review the things that local authorities are measured on ('the **National Indicator Set**') in their support for carers, to ensure that they capture carers' experiences.

- The question on carers will be included in recommendations for the **2011 Census**. *This was committed prior to the Strategy following Carers UK's Keep Counting Carers campaign*
- Government to fund a module on carers in an **Omnibus Survey** in 2008-09. *This is an important development as it will give us data on a wide range of areas, for example employment, income and housing.*

What is missing?

Income

The Strategy acknowledges that income was one of the biggest issues raised during the consultation and that carers are more likely to be on lower incomes than the general population. The vision for 2018 says that carers should not be forced into financial hardship by their caring role. It therefore pledges to review the current structure of benefits so that they better support carers' needs and can adapt to carers' different circumstances. This review will take place in the context of wider benefit reform and the review of care and support (i.e. looking at how elderly and disabled people are supported to live independently). Carers UK will be pressing Government to set out a timetable for the review as soon as possible.

The Strategy says that the principles used to guide this reform are:

- to recognise the contribution that carers make to society;
- to make it easier for carers to combine caring with work, or preparing for work;
- to reflect the diversity of carers' circumstances and caring responsibilities.

Carers UK is very disappointed that there are no immediate changes to carers' benefits. We had recommended that Government make the following changes to Carer's Allowance:

- Change it to a two tier benefit for all carers providing 35 hours per week, irrespective of age and raised to the level of the State Pension (currently £87.30)
- Introduce a higher level for carers who cannot work.
- Make it flexible to recognise the different circumstances of carers and the impact that caring can have on people's lives. This includes the hours spent caring and the number of people being cared for.
- Give financial incentives that help carers combine work and care.
- Remove of restrictions on the hours carers can study.

Our research has shown that carers are living in poverty, particularly those with very heavy caring responsibilities or who have been caring for a long time. We have called on government to begin the review of benefits immediately and will be stepping up our Real Change not Short Change campaign (see below) to ensure that change is delivered.

Equalities

Another gap in the Strategy is the lack of any commitments to promote equality between carers and non-carers. We believe that carers are discriminated against in employment and other aspects of daily life so are disappointed that no plans were announced to

include carers in the forthcoming Single Equality Bill. This is an issue which Carers UK will continue to campaign on.

Implementation

Standing Commission

The Standing Commission on Carers is an advisory body set up by the Prime Minister last year to advise on the Strategy and address the long-term challenges which will affect carers. It is chaired by Dr Philippa Russell, an advocate and campaigner for carers. The Strategy recommends that the Standing Commission should maintain a strategic overview of the carers' agenda at a national level. It will advise the Government on progress on implementing the Strategy, including a specific review on equalities issues. Government will also create a programme board to complement the work of the Standing Commission which will ensure that the immediate measures are implemented and that the preparatory work is undertaken to meet the long term priorities.

Resources

Although £255m over 3 years is a significant amount of money, it is not enough by itself to transform carers' lives. The existing Carers Grant paid to local authorities is £224m per year, so the increase in funding is less than half again. As well as ensuring that existing money is spent wisely and on things that make the biggest difference, the work must begin now to secure additional funding for carers in the next spending review covering the period 2011-14.

Involvement of carers

There has been an extensive programme of consultation over the last year, both by the Government and Carers UK, which ensured that carers' priorities are reflected in the Strategy (with the major exception of income). That process of engagement must continue as the Strategy is implemented, with efforts to target carers who are not currently in touch with services. Government should use the voluntary sector and other organisations such as the newly created Local involvement networks (LINKs) which are designed to involve people in shaping the services and priorities of health and social care bodies in their areas.

Inspection/regulation

The regime of inspection and regulation of services to carers need to be reformed to reflect the outcomes of services and the quality of them, rather than simply counting the number of carers who have an assessment. Carers UK is lobbying on the Health and Social Care Bill, which will create the Care Quality Commission to replace the Commission for Social Care Inspection and the Healthcare Commission, to ensure that it sees carers as a priority and understands their needs.

What next?

Over the coming months and years, Carers UK will aim to address the gaps in Strategy and look ahead to delivering the vision set out by the Strategy by 2018. Our major campaigns will continue to focus on the issues that matter to carers.

Back me up and Right care, Right deal

We will continue to influence the reform of our care and support system. We want better care services so that elderly/disabled people and their carers can have independence,

choice and control over their lives. We believe that more money is needed for care, but that services also need to be reformed. Through our Right care, Right deal campaign with Counsel and Care and Help the Aged, we are trying to raise the profile of social care and make it one of the top political issues.

Government wants to make services much more personal and encourage greater use of direct payments and individual budgets. This has the potential to benefit carers considerably, provided that they are given the right support to manage them, and we will be publishing research on direct payments later in the year.

Real change not short change

We had real hopes that this Strategy would deliver some immediate improvements to carers' incomes. Whilst we are disappointed, we are also determined to continue our campaign. The Government has promised a review of carers' benefits – we believe the system needs to be radically overhauled and made fit for the 21st century. We will work to ensure that the review meets the challenges of giving carers recognition of their contribution to society, keeping them out of poverty and meeting their diverse circumstances.

Make Work Work

The Strategy acknowledges that carers should be supported to combine caring with paid work and makes some welcome recommendations, but more work is needed. In particular we need care services which are geared up to support carers to work and local services to work together to support carers – this means Jobcentre Plus linking with social services and other local government services. We will be working to ensure that the Government's welfare reform agenda recognises the specific needs of carers and does not try to treat them in the same way as other people who are not in paid work.

More information

The Strategy '*Carers at the heart of 21st Century families and communities*' can be downloaded from:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/SocialCare/Deliveringadultsocialcare/Carers/NewDealforCarers/index.htm>

For more information about Carers UK campaigns, visit www.carersuk.org. If you wish to be kept up to date with developments on the Strategy, sign up for our free newsletter via our website.

Carers Training and Consultancy

Both Local Authorities and the NHS will need to interpret and implement the new initiatives included in the strategy. This will have implications for your policy and service development and also for staff development.

Carers UK, the only UK wide organisation for carers, has unique knowledge and experience of carers' needs, as well as understanding of the legislative, issues and policy framework in relation to carers.

Carers UK contributed to the development of the National Carers Strategy, with representation on all four of the Taskforces. Our Carers Training and Consultancy

service can provide the expertise to support you, to help your organisation to lead the way and achieve successful implementation.

For an informal discussion please contact Sam Lloyd now on 0845 241 2537, or e-mail consultancy@carersuk.org

Carers UK policy contact:

Kate Groucutt, Senior Policy & Public Affairs Officer
Kate.groucutt@carersuk.org or 020 7490 8818

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