

The West Sussex Joint Commitment to Family and Friend Carers 2026–2031

“We will recognise, value, involve and support the role carers play including when they are patients themselves or are our colleagues” (a co-produced vision)

This joint strategy has been developed in partnership by West Sussex County Council and NHS Surrey and Sussex

July 2026



Surrey and Sussex

Foreword



We want West Sussex to be a supportive and friendly place to enable family and friend carers to live well and thrive. The Health and Wellbeing Board therefore reaffirms its commitment and determination to help carers continue caring, if they are willing and able, as well as support their own health and wellbeing.

This strategy is for everyone. It's about the future that we all want for ourselves. At some point in our lives, it is likely that we will become a carer, if we are not already, or rely on care provided by family and friends to support us through the physical and emotional challenges that may occur.

The needs of carers are multifaceted and often unseen by those who have few or no caring responsibilities; it is essential therefore to have a collaborative approach together with a public commitment to understanding and supporting those needs.

The voices of carers are at the heart of this strategy, and I am incredibly grateful to every one of them who have shared their experiences of what caring is like, what helps them to continue and what can add difficulty or stress to their role. Through the dedication and commitment of the West Sussex Young Carers Service and Carer Support West Sussex, we have been able to reach out and engage with carers of all ages, which has been helpful and greatly appreciated.

Thanks must also go to the many health and social care staff and other professionals, a number of whom are carers themselves, who have contributed their views and opinions to the process of reviewing our joint strategy.

This document provides evidence of what carers and young carers need and outlines some steps to support them in their role and promote their health. We must not lose sight of this through what is a period of significant change and restructuring for both local government and the NHS.

Moving forward, in the interests of prevention and integrated care, we must consider family and friend carers in all that we do. A family or friend carer's involvement when supporting a vulnerable resident, is very often a key preventative factor and contributes to better outcomes. Carers must therefore always be actively involved as partners in the implementation and delivery of any service developments across health and social care.

With a shared, concerted effort, we can build supportive neighbourhoods in West Sussex that not only provide excellent health and care for our vulnerable residents, but also, in time, can become the most carer-friendly that they can be. Something that we all want to see.

Richard Bates
Cabinet Member for Adults Services

Background

This joint strategy builds on previous strategies and work undertaken by partners which sought to give the 72,000 carers in West Sussex the recognition and support they need to provide invaluable care for loved ones.

This document has been informed by carers of all ages and the professionals who work with them. The content has also considered the legislation and key policy documents such as the NHS 10 Year Plan. It also draws from established best practice both locally and nationally.

It is, essentially, a resource to help promote working together between Adult Social Care Services, Children and Young People's Services, NHS commissioners and providers, primary care, education, and sector partners to ensure an effective and integrated approach. We could not deliver this strategy without all the great voluntary, community and social enterprise partners that we work with.

A secondary purpose of this document is to provide clarity around the needs of carers and ensure consistency around the language of care and caring to enable better working together and joined up approaches; especially around points of transition.

What do we mean when we say carer?

A carer is anyone, including a child or an adult who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid.

The term 'carer' includes the many different types of carers:

Young Carers. A child or young person who provides regular, ongoing care and emotional support over and above 'helping out'

Young Adult Carers. An adult aged between 18 and 25 years of age who is caring for another adult or child

Parent Carers. A parent or guardian who provides care to a degree greater than would be usually expected in a parenting role

Adult Carers. Anyone aged 18 and over, caring for another adult

Dual Carers. Those with caring responsibilities for different generations, for example both children and parents

End-Of-Life Carers. Carers of any age providing care and support to someone in their final months or years.

There has been demonstrable progress under the previous strategy, despite growing pressures across the health and social care system.



Better identification and early support

West Sussex is identifying and supporting more carers and young carers than ever before. Each year carer registrations have grown with over 300 new carers coming forward for information, advice and support every month.

A Primary Care project, to promote best carer practice, has had a significant impact on referrals from GPs and support offered. It saw 48 surgeries complete a baseline review of practice and receive action plan support.

Better practice by educational establishments to identify and support young carers.

As of January 2026, nine schools have achieved the 'Young Carers in Schools award', one school holds the advanced award, and 11 schools are working towards accreditation.

The annual school census data demonstrates the growing the number of Young Carers identified year on year in the county and compares favourably with the national picture.

'*Making Carers Count Training*' has been developed and is being accessed by hundreds of professionals.

An emotional wellbeing e-platform for young carers and young adult carers has been co-produced [Young Carers & Mental Health - e-wellbeing](#)

High quality assessment and support planning

Assessment capacity has been maintained thereby ensuring short wait times for a carer assessment. The current wait time (June 2026) is 1.5 weeks after receipt of referral; with nearly 100% of Carer Assessments completed within 28 days.

84% of carers who had a carer assessment said that the support provided has helped them to feel more able to continue in their caring role.

More carer contingency/emergency plans in place

The total number of Emergency Contact Cards issued, to carers of all ages, at the end of 2020 was 6,000. By the end of 2025 this figure had risen to 8,200. An increase of 37%.

Better reach to carers of all communities and faiths

9% of carers registered are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, an improvement over recent years. A target of 10% remains - which reflects West Sussex Census data.

A new Carer Benefits Advice Service

Over the past 5 years, over £6 million of unclaimed benefit/income has been identified.

Consultation and Co-design

Against a backdrop of collective progress, despite growing demand, we understood the need to maintain momentum and review and refresh our approach. We used a series of engagement processes to speak with many different types of carers of all ages. We also liaised with health and social care colleagues and voluntary and community sector partners about the biggest issues and concerns faced by carers. Three key questions were explored with carers:

- What has made the biggest difference to you, and why?
- Are there any areas where you still feel unsupported or overlooked as a carer?
- What change(s) would make the biggest positive difference to your life as a carer in the coming years?

These valuable insights, together with consideration of best practice locally and further afield, legislation and key policy documents were reviewed in order to drill down on six priority areas to focus our efforts on what matters most.

The new joint strategy sets out the main priorities for health and social care in support of all carers. It lets local people know how our approach will be developing.

It is also, crucially, an invitation to all our partners and stakeholders to join us in our efforts to deliver the best outcomes we can for our county's carers and the people they care for.



"I recently attended a carer group held at my GP surgery. It was good to see this being offered"

"As carers, we have to give up so much that we cannot get back. We can't get our careers back, or our social contacts as we had to give those up to care"

"There's a lot of information, but it's scattered in different places"

Strategy Aims

Carers of all ages and from all communities are to be identified, recognised and regarded as core partners in care

Isolation is limited and emotional wellbeing supported by encouraging and enabling carers and young carers to have an active life outside their caring role, including fulfilling their education, employment, and training potential

Technology is harnessed to make the lives of carers easier. Non-digital alternatives to prevent exclusion will also be supported

We will ensure that more carers understand the out-of-hours options available and have an emergency plan in place for when they need it

The financial hardship of carers is to be recognised and limited where possible

Social Care and the NHS are to lead by example in supporting their own workforce who provide unpaid care

Enablers (that help turn our direction into action)

Workforce

Co-production

Partnership
Working

Data and
Insights

Education &
training

Carers of all ages and from all communities are to be identified, recognised and regarded as core partners in care



We will...

Identify carers, of all types and ages, at the earliest opportunity to enable the right approach at the right time

Ensure that carers are actively engaged in discharge planning to support safe, timely, and sustainable transitions from hospital to home / intermediate care / care home

Ensure that carers are considered in the development of Integrated Community Teams wrapped around our neighbourhoods

Continue to work with carers, of all ages and backgrounds, in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services

Proactively work with parent carers through their child's transition to adulthood

Promote and embed a toolkit to enable carers to spot signs of deterioration in health

Ensure effective coordination between the West Sussex young carer services and adult carer services in order to identify adult carers early in their caring journey

WSCC will work with partners to adopt and embed the "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" Memorandum of Understanding. ["No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" - Carers Trust.](#)

WSCC will also develop associated training for all services including adult social care, children's services, libraries, and fire and rescue services to promote awareness of young carers. Any training or products that are developed are to be co-produced to ensure carers of all kinds are recognised.

Technology is harnessed to make the lives of carers easier. Non-digital alternatives to prevent exclusion will also be supported



Simple digital self-serve opportunities will be developed, tested and improved to better support carers.

Artificial Intelligence solutions will be explored to reduce recording time/burden for workers and free up more worker time to enable greater human access to support by carers.

Digital exclusion is a risk for carers. We will help carers to become more digitally able through training and targeted support.

Isolation is limited and emotional wellbeing supported by encouraging and enabling carers, and young carers, to have an active life outside their caring role; including fulfilling their education, employment, and training potential



We will proactively contact registered carers throughout their caring journey.

We will provide NHS Health Checks, mental health support, and access to social prescribing.

We will provide carers with information and guidance to enable them to sustain their caring role without sacrificing their own health.

We will invest in peer networks and community-based initiatives to reduce loneliness and build resilience in carers of all ages.

We will work with carers to encourage them to seek education, employment, and social opportunities.

We will work with schools/colleges to support them to identify young carers and promote high aspirations and support more schools to achieve the Young Carers in Schools Award.

We will engage with minority carer groups via a new community worker.

We will ensure that more carers understand the out-of-hours options available and have an emergency plan in place for when they need it



We will ensure that carers are aware of the value of emergency planning, in the event of sudden illness or accident, and the peace of mind that a plan can bring.

Through regular promotional activity we will increase year-on-year the number of carers and young carers that have an emergency contingency plan in place.

The financial hardship of carers is to be recognised and limited where possible



We will actively promote The Carer Benefits Service and will support carers in maximising their income and the income of those they care for.

We will maintain and promote a cost-of-living information toolkit for carers.

Through partners, we will work with West Sussex employers to raise carer awareness and encourage carer-friendly employment practices.

Efforts will be made to reduce the risk of carers being scammed via training and alerts.

WSSCC and the NHS are to lead by example in supporting their own workforce who provide unpaid care outside of work



The NHS and WSSCC as employers will recognise and support staff who are unpaid carers, embed carer-friendly policies, including flexible working and wellbeing support.



Monitoring Delivery and Impact

WSCC and the NHS will monitor the progress being made against the commitments and goals set out in this strategy. The Carers Strategic Partnership Group (made up of commissioners and providers) will lead on the delivery of the strategy, review progress, identify gaps and work together with carers and other stakeholders to find solutions.

It is important that we assess whether our efforts are making a real difference to the outcomes for carers and young carers, therefore a carer-led board has been developed. This is known as the Carer Involvement Group and it will feed into the Carers Strategic Partnership Group.

To get involved or find out more, contact our key partner:

Carer Support West Sussex at info@carersupport.org.uk
or call 0300 028 8888

or
carercommissioning@westsussex.gov.uk



Acknowledgements



Thank you to our partners and stakeholders who have supported the development of this strategy and will be instrumental in ensuring its successful delivery.

Age UK West Sussex Brighton & Hove
Carers Strategic Partnership Group
Carers Short Breaks Provider Forum
Carers Support West Sussex
Carers Voice Network
Guild Care
Impact Initiatives/Impact Workability
Independent Lives
NHS Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board
St Peter & St James Hospice
Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Tapestry Day Club
TüVida
The Care Pod - Buddies Day Centre
West Sussex Mind
West Sussex Parent Carer Forum
Young Carers Service