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Agenda Item: 17.

Integration Joint Board

Date of Meeting: 22 April 2026.

Subject: Unpaid Carers.

1. Purpose

1.1. To present an update on recent work undertaken to support unpaid carers, for Members' scrutiny.

2. Recommendations

The Integration Joint Board is invited to scrutinise:

2.1. Progress made to deliver the Milestones and Actions in the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy 2024 – 2026, the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2022 – 2025 and the Strategic Delivery Plan 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report, in order to obtain assurance.

3. Background

3.1. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 (the Act) promises to 'promote, defend, and extend the rights' of adult and young carers across Scotland. The Act commenced on 1 April 2018.

3.2. The principle behind the Act is to enhance and extend the rights of carers, and young carers, to improve their individual outcomes, whilst adopting a more consistent approach across Scotland. The Act requires that it is considered when preparing health and social care services, as well as within the context of other social care and health legislation, such as Self-Directed Support.

3.3. Scottish Government Guidance clarified that section 33 of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 requires that a local authority and the relevant Health Board produce and publish a local Carer Strategy, by the next date after 1 April 2018, when the corresponding integration authority is required to review its Strategic Plan and review the Strategy regularly thereafter, or at least every three years.

3.4. The Orkney Unpaid Carers' Strategy 2024 – 2026 was approved by the Integration Joint Board on 21 February 2024.

3.5. The Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028 was approved by the Integration Joint Board on 30 April 2025.

3.6. The Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26 was approved by the Integration Joint Board on 30 April 2025.

4. Findings of the Unpaid Carers Update Report

4.1. The Unpaid Carers Update Report, attached at Appendix 1, provides a comprehensive update on the various goals featured in the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy 2024 – 2026, along with the Milestones and Actions, derived from these goals, and which featured in recent iterations of the Strategic Plan Delivery Plans.

4.2. Below is a summary of some of the findings from Appendix 1:

4.2.1. The Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2022 – 2025 timeframe overlapped with that of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy. Of the four Milestones and Actions featured in the Plan, three were completed. The uncompleted Action was amended and included in the Strategic Delivery Plan 2025/26.

4.2.2. On publication of the new Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028, the Partnership decided to produce annual Delivery Plans, henceforth. This delivered the opportunity to include the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy as the Milestones and Actions in the new Delivery Plan.

4.2.3. The Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26 included six Milestones and Actions, one of which was completed, with one partially completed and four uncompleted.

4.2.4. Of the four uncompleted Actions, all are to be included, with appropriate revisions, in the new Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2026/27, with two of the uncompleted Actions expected to be completed very shortly.

4.2.5. Of the additional goals from the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy which have not been included in the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan, there have been some notable successes, not least around the delivery of short term respite solutions, by Crossroads Care Orkney, as well as the very recent appointment of a dedicated Carer Lead.

4.2.6. Whilst most of the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy have been achieved, or are expected to be achieved very shortly, they have taken longer to achieve than originally estimated.

4.2.7. On reflection, early successes, not least with the first Unpaid Carers Conference, encouraged officers to set ambitious targets for broadening support to carers, at least in terms of the timeframes anticipated to deliver on those targets.

4.2.8. The appointment of the new Carer Lead, shortly to be supported by the Carer Support Worker, allows renewed confidence that significant improvements in the support of Orkney's unpaid carers can be achieved, over the coming months and years.

5. Contribution to quality

Please indicate which of the Orkney Community Plan 2025 to 2030 values are supported in this report adding Yes or No to the relevant area(s):

Resilience: To support and promote our strong communities.	Yes.
Enterprise: To tackle crosscutting issues such as digital connectivity, transport, housing and fuel poverty.	No.
Equality: To encourage services to provide equal opportunities for everyone.	Yes.
Fairness: To make sure socio-economic and social factors are balanced.	Yes.
Innovation: To overcome issues more effectively through partnership working.	Yes.
Leadership: To involve partners such as community councils, community groups, voluntary groups and individuals in the process.	Yes.
Sustainability: To make sure economic and environmental factors are balanced.	Yes.

6. Resource and financial implications

6.1. There are no resource or financial implications arising directly from this report. Any actions arising from strategies and/or delivery plans must be met from within existing approved budgets.

7. Risk, equality and climate change implications

7.1. The main risks to the effective implementation of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy 2024 – 2026, and the unpaid carer elements of both the Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028, and the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2026/27, arise from the current funding constraints and the level of savings that the Board will be required to realise over the course of the respective Strategies and Plans.

7.2. Both an Equality Impact Assessment and an Island Communities Impact Assessment were undertaken in respect of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy 2024 – 2026 and the Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028. Impact Assessments are not required when reporting on performance.

7.3. The responsibilities of the Integration Joint Board under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the subsequent Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015 were considered during development of the Plans and Strategies.

8. Direction required

Please indicate if this report requires a direction to be passed to:

NHS Orkney.	No.
Orkney Islands Council.	No.

9. Escalation required

Please indicate if this report requires escalated to:

NHS Orkney.	No.
Orkney Islands Council.	No.

10. Authors and contact information

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11. Supporting documents

11.1. Appendix 1: Unpaid Carers Update Report.



Unpaid Carers Update Report

April 2026

Contents

Unpaid Carers Update Report.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy.....	2
Strategic Delivery Plan 2022 – 2025.....	2
Commentary.....	3
Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26	3
Commentary.....	4
Orkney Unpaid Carer Strategy Actions Not in the Delivery Plans.....	6
Innovation in Respite.....	6
Referral Processes for Orkney Money Matters	8
Dedicated Carer Lead and Carer Support Worker Roles	8
Summary and Reflection	9

Introduction

The Minister for Social Care and Wellbeing, Tom Arthur MSP, acknowledged in late March 2026 that unpaid carers save £13.1 billion a year in social and health care costs. You can read his letter [here](#). This means that, here in Orkney, the support given by unpaid carers is estimated to be worth £52.4 million.

Unpaid carers are, therefore, essential to the provision of care and support for the vulnerable in Orkney. This was recognised by the Health and Social Care Partnership in one of the six Strategic Priorities included in both the current and previous editions of their Strategic Plan.

The Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy

The Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy 2024 – 2026 was published in the spring of 2024. This Strategy was largely informed by consultation with unpaid carers, both at the Carer Conference held in November 2023 and in subsequent surveys.

Whether hearing directly from carers at the conference, or reading their responses to the Partnership's surveys, the messages were consistent and can be summarised, as follows:

1. Almost all carers said they are looking for a break, with many saying they just needed a little time to themselves. Some just wanted an hour or two to pop into town or meet a friend for coffee.
2. The next most common response was that many of our carers have concerns around their job, especially whether they can continue in employment whilst maintaining their role as a carer.
3. Many carers said they needed help with their mental health, which was often linked to the opportunity for a break – simply looking forward to a break was enough to keep some people going.
4. Another common theme was that a lot of carers lack the time and energy to do the small jobs at home, like Hoovering, or even doing the washing-up.
5. Perhaps the most consistent message learned on the day of the conference was that many people, including carers, their families, their friends and even support professionals, knew someone who provided care for a family member or friend, but who were unaware of the support services available to them.

In response to this feedback, the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy articulated how the Partnership would provide support for carers. This support was broken down into specific Milestones and Actions, included in each edition of the Partnership's Strategic Plan Delivery Plans.

In the following section, we look at the work done by Officers to deliver each of the Milestones and Actions, reflect upon what has and has not been achieved and what will be done over the coming months and years to deliver better support for our Unpaid Carers.

Strategic Delivery Plan 2022 – 2025

The previous Strategic Delivery Plan covered a three-year timeframe and overlapped with that of the new Carer Strategy. The Milestones and Actions were as follows:

Milestone	Action	Status
Hold an Orkney Carer Conference, where the essential role of unpaid carers in delivering social care support, in Orkney, will be highlighted and celebrated.	Hold the Carer Conference during Year One.	Completed
Consult and engage with unpaid carers, following the conference,	Undertake a post-Carer Conference Survey.	Completed

Milestone	Action	Status
learning what it is we need to do so that they feel supported in their lives.		
Use the responses and information gained from carers through this engagement to draft a new Carer Strategy that properly reflects the needs and aspirations of unpaid carers.	Prepare and publish new Carer Strategy before the end of Business Year 2023/24.	Completed
We will reach more people delivering care to family or friends, who have not sought carer services, and measure that number.	Increase the number of unpaid carers contacting Crossroads Care Orkney, for support, from 78, in the 2022-23 financial year.	Not Completed

Commentary

As we have seen, the first three Milestones were completed, resulting in the publication of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy.

The final Milestone, pursuing an increase in the number of unpaid carers seeking support, fell short of the target, with 77 people contacting Crossroads Care Orkney for the first time, in 2024/25. Whilst this was 77 new carers who were unaware of, or not accessing, support services previously, this figure is actually one lower than the previously reported figure.

This was a disappointing outcome and persuaded officers to renew this Milestone, with an increased target, in the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26.

Strategic Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26

With the adoption of an annual Strategic Plan Delivery Plan, to coincide with publication of the new Strategic Plan, in 2025, the opportunity arose to include the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy as the Milestones and Actions in the new Strategic Plan Delivery Plan. They were as follows:

Milestone	Action	Status
Hold a second Orkney Unpaid Carer Conference.	Hold the conference before the end of 2025.	Complete.
Offer an assessment to all unpaid carers seeking support and measure that number.	Increase the number of carers offered an assessment from 33 in 2022, to 60 by the end of 2025.	Not Completed.
Prepare and publish a dedicated Young Carer Strategy.	Young Carer Strategy will be approved and published, by March 2026.	Not Completed.

Milestone	Action	Status
Deliver an Unpaid Carer-Friendly policy for staff employed by Orkney Islands Council (OIC).	Prepare and publish an OIC Unpaid Carer-Friendly policy by the summer of 2025.	Partially Completed.
Begin training frontline workers throughout statutory and third sector organisations, making them “carer-aware”.	Undertake training of at least 100 frontline workers by the end of March 2026.	Not Completed.
We will reach more people delivering care to family or friends, who have not sought carer services, and measure that number.	Increase the number of unpaid carers contacting Crossroads Care Orkney, for support, from 78, in 2022, to 150, by 2026.	Not Completed.

Commentary

Carer Conference 2025

A second Carer Conference was held in November 2025. With the first conference having focused upon celebrating the role of unpaid carers, the second conference sought to focus upon the services and support available to carers in Orkney.

With support from across the statutory and third sectors, as well as input from key stakeholders, including young carers, post-conference feedback was largely positive, with many people reflecting that they were unaware of the scope and breadth of services available locally.

However, attendance was just under 100, down on the 2023 conference. Some feedback indicated more of a reluctance to venture out in November, so future editions of the conference will be held in the late spring/summer.

Carer Assessments

All people identified as carers are offered an assessment, as a matter of course. However, our existing systems are unable to properly capture this information.

The number of recorded assessments in 2025 was 21; however, services believe this figure to be significantly higher. Furthermore, services believe the number offered to be higher still, but the inability of systems to capture this information is preventing this figure from being accurately reported.

Officers are currently working with Council IT colleagues and Civica, the supplier of our PARIS record management system, to identify how this information can be captured, as a matter of course. Indeed, this will be one of the Milestones in the new edition of the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan.

Young Carer Strategy

An initial draft of a dedicated Young Carer Strategy was prepared some months ago.

Officers are keen to ensure that young carers are actively involved in the preparation of the Strategy, so efforts have been ongoing for some time to seek input from the Orkney Young Carers Group.

It must be acknowledged that securing young carer input is proving more difficult than originally anticipated. However, officers are currently working with the Orkney Young Carers Group to undertake a dedicated session.

Once this is complete, it is anticipated that the finished Strategy will be ready for publishing very shortly afterwards.

Unpaid Carer Friendly Policy

As we learned from the Carer Conferences, many unpaid carers are concerned about their ability to maintain both a full-time job and their caring responsibilities. Many said that whilst their employers are supportive, they feel uncomfortable requesting the flexibility they need in their working hours, to be able to continue both their job and their caring role.

Officers are keen to promote the benefits of adopting a carer friendly workplace policy but, as the largest employer in the county, officers felt it was important that Orkney Islands Council have a dedicated Carer Friendly Policy, themselves.

Officers have been working with Council HR colleagues to draw up a policy that reflects the desired flexibility needed by employees with caring responsibilities. Whilst a draft has been prepared, this is currently with Trade Union representatives, for their comment.

In common with several other Milestones, this process has taken much longer than originally anticipated. Nonetheless, the final draft is expected to go before the Human Resources Sub-committee in May 2026.

Following adoption of this policy, Officers will be working with the Council's Organisational Development colleagues to promote the Policy throughout the Council.

Training Frontline Workers

We have learned that many unpaid carers simply do not know about the support that is available to them. The best opportunity to help those not currently seeking help and support is when our frontline workforce, and the workforces of our statutory and third sector colleagues, are with service users, in their homes, at school or anywhere else that staff are face to face with people in Orkney.

Becoming "carer aware" is relatively straightforward; an elementary understanding of who unpaid carers are, what support is available to them and where to seek that support, will equip anyone dealing with the public to help carers get the support they need.

Officers have identified a short video that covers all aspects of identifying unpaid carers and what support they can get, which is currently available on the NHS Turas platform. Working with the Council's Organisational Development colleagues, Officers had anticipated having launched this video on iLearn, by now. However, advice from Organisational Development was to launch this at the same time as the Council's Carer Friendly Policy, which it is hoped will secure maximum exposure and take-up.

This is considered a sensible approach, so the training video will be launched, as advised, at the same time as the Carer Friendly Policy.

Increase the Number of Carers Seeking Support

As we have seen, increasing the number of people seeking support in their role as an unpaid carer, has been a priority for some time. Crossroads Care Orkney and statutory services are aware of around 300 people who are unpaid carers. However, Officers believe that the actual number of unpaid carers in Orkney is likely to be nearer 3,000. This means, of course, that around nine out of 10 unpaid carers are not accessing the help and support to which they are entitled.

To this end, Officers and third sector colleagues have undertaken regular publicity campaigns, on social media, in the print media and on the radio, to highlight the vital role played by our unpaid carers and, principally, to raise awareness of carers. This has been supported by colleagues from Crossroads Care Orkney, who regularly visit social and faith groups to talk about unpaid carers.

These efforts have seen some success, with the number of carers seeking support for the first time, increasing to 96, in 2025. However, this falls disappointingly short of the original target, of 150.

Nonetheless, Officers and third sector colleagues will continue with their efforts to raise the profile of unpaid carers. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the introduction of frontline worker training, the Council's Carer Friendly Policy and, not least, the appointment of a dedicated Carer Lead (more of which, below) will see this number continue to climb.

Orkney Unpaid Carer Strategy Actions Not in the Delivery Plans

The previous edition of the Strategic Plan Delivery Plan included most of the Actions from the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy, as one of the Milestones. However, there were three that were not included. What work has been undertaken to address these?

Innovation in Respite

Unpaid carers will soon have the legal right to a break, on implementation of the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025, which will make changes to the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, delivering the right to personalised short breaks support for carers who cannot currently access "sufficient breaks" from caring.

Providing sufficient respite, or short breaks, for carers has been extremely challenging over the last few years, as we shall see, below, so other opportunities to help carers to access a break from their caring responsibilities have been explored, with some notable examples realised by our commissioned carer support partner, Crossroads Care Orkney.

Time to Live Fund and Vouchers

Crossroads Care Orkney are the designated delivery partner for the Time to Live (TTL) Microgrant fund. This year on year funding is provided by the Scottish Government through Shared Care Scotland, and enables adult, parent and young carers to access funds and support to help them take short breaks. This is achieved by providing small, flexible grants, to support bespoke respite opportunities, commonly referred to as breaks.

TTL was conceived to ensure carers have more opportunities to enjoy life outside of their caring role, so that they will feel better supported in sustaining their caring responsibilities and, alongside the cared-for person, will experience an improved sense of wellbeing.

Some examples of how carers used their microgrant include the purchase of garden furniture, art and craft kits, magazines, Pickaquoy Centre subscriptions, relaxation and beauty treatments, fiddle lessons, an iPad and trips away from the islands.

For those who need to take longer away from their caring role, Crossroads Care Orkney can deliver the practical support, through the provision of a Support Worker, to undertake the tasks of the carer, whilst they are away. This allows the carer to be assured that the person they support is safe and cared for in their absence.

As well as the TTL scheme, Crossroads Care Orkney also provide vouchers. This is particularly useful when a carer has identified what sort of break they would like. Recently, Kirkwall Business Improvement District (BID) vouchers have been given to carers. One carer used her voucher to pay for wedding make-up for their grandchild's wedding, commenting that having her make-up done for the wedding meant there was more time to relax, be pampered and to experience something completely new.

Another carer used their voucher to have lunch out with a friend. They said they went to a hotel that neither of them had been to before, resulting, again, in a new experience and feelings of satisfaction.

The application process to the funding is straightforward, with some questions about the applicant and who they care for, before being assessed by Crossroads Care Orkney staff. Applicants are then notified and the funds can be paid directly into their bank account, or via a cheque.

Crossroads Care Orkney are exploring more ways to support carers and aim to develop more localised "Respitivity". Respitivity combines respite, hospitality, leisure and tourism, and is also supported by Shared Care Scotland. They will soon approach local businesses to determine if they are prepared to support carers with

the donation of a meal, short stay in a hotel, local sightseeing tours and reduced or free rates at events, in return for the opportunity to promote their business.

Crossroads Care Orkney are committed to continuing their promotion of the TTL scheme, alongside developing local respite. Carers who have benefitted from the fund say they feel valued for the care they deliver, whilst promotion of the scheme will strengthen awareness of carers in Orkney.

Residential Respite

Opportunities for bookable respite have been extremely limited since the COVID-19 pandemic. Carers have repeatedly stated how knowing they have a break to look forward to has kept them going.

To address this, the Integration Joint Board has recently approved the principle of utilising the vacant Brinkies Wing at Hamnavoe House, as a 10-bed facility for respite provision. Challenges remain around implementing this service, not least around identifying funding for staffing and, of course, recruiting to the required care roles. Nonetheless, this is a significant first step in the process of delivering residential respite care.

Referral Processes for Orkney Money Matters

Many unpaid carers find themselves in a difficult financial position, often because they have had to reduce their working hours – or even give up paid work altogether – because of their caring responsibilities.

The Orkney Money Matters initiative was developed by Voluntary Action Orkney, Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, THAW, Orkney Islands Council and other partners, to ensure that people get the best opportunity to access the cash-based support that they need.

Partnership services, along with Crossroads Care Orkney and other third sector partners, have developed processes for assisting carers to access this funding, where appropriate.

Efforts to develop this support further will be made by services over the coming months and years.

Dedicated Carer Lead and Carer Support Worker Roles

One of the greatest challenges around delivering the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carer Strategy, as well as the Milestones and Actions in recent Strategic Plan Delivery Plans, have been around staff resourcing. To address this, the appointment of a dedicated Carer Lead, tasked with delivering the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carer Strategy and the Strategic Plan, was considered essential, by the Partnership.

An appointment has now been made to this role, with the appointee expected to take up the role imminently. They have extensive experience of delivering such a role, having previously been the Carer Lead for a Health and Social Care Partnership in central Scotland.

One of the first tasks on arrival of the new Carer Lead will be to recruit to a Carer Support Worker position. This role will deliver support to unpaid carers in Orkney, including assisting referral(s) to third sector support and practical advice, as well as assisting social work colleagues to expand and undertake carer assessments.

Officers are confident that appointment to these roles, perhaps above all other initiatives and actions, will enable the Partnership to deliver its commitment to support unpaid carers in Orkney.

Summary and Reflection

There have been many challenges in delivering both the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy and the Strategic Plan. Early successes, not least with the first Carer Conference, encouraged officers to set ambitious targets for broadening support to carers, especially around identifying carers who were not currently accessing support.

Most of the goals of the Orkney Unpaid Carers Strategy, as well as the Milestones of the recent Strategic Plan Delivery Plans, have either been achieved, or are expected to be achieved, very shortly, whilst those not achieved are to be included in the new Strategic Plan Delivery Plan for 2026/27. The appointment of the new Carer Lead, shortly to be supported by the Carer Support Worker, allows renewed confidence that those goals and Milestones will be achieved.

It is especially disappointing that services have been unable to reach more unpaid carers and make them aware of the help and support available to them. Nonetheless, it must also be acknowledged that the numbers seeking support have increased in recent years, with, in the last year alone, 96 unpaid carers now receiving some form of support, for the first time.

It is increasing this number, alongside providing new and innovative ways to support carers to take a break, that will remain at the heart of the goals that the Partnership sets itself over the coming months and years.