

Carers Community Partnership Group (CPG) Narrative Summary Report Meeting held 25th March 2026

Purpose of the Meeting

The Carers Community Partnership Group (CPG) brought together unpaid carers, voluntary and community organisations, health and social care professionals, and Central Bedfordshire Council representatives to explore the lived experience of caring and identify opportunities to strengthen support for carers locally.

The meeting focused on discussion around the current Central Bedfordshire Carers Strategy, gaps in support, communication and co-production, and how services can become more accessible, responsive and preventative in approach.

The session also introduced the new Blue Sky Carers Support service and reinforced the role of the CPG as a collaborative forum for ongoing partnership working.

Key Themes Emerging from the Meeting

1. Carers Often Feel Invisible Within the System

A consistent theme throughout the meeting was that many carers feel unidentified, unsupported and insufficiently recognised across health and social care services.

Participants described:

- Delays or lack of access to carers assessments.
- Professionals not recognising or understanding the caring role.
- Limited awareness of available support, in particular respite services.
- Inconsistent communication from services and providers.

Several attendees highlighted that carers frequently become the coordinators, advocates and monitors of care arrangements, often without clear guidance or support themselves. One participant summarised this by stating there were *“fine words, but practice is really much worse.”*

2. The Need for Stronger Co-Production and Carer Voice

A significant discussion point centred on the importance of embedding carers more directly into decision-making and service design. Participants expressed strong support for:

- Greater co-production with carers.
- More visible carer representation within strategic boards.
- Joint working between commissioners, providers and carers.
- Lived experience informing staff training and service development.

There was recognition that the CPG model provides an important opportunity to strengthen trust, accountability and collaborative working across the system.

3. Challenges Accessing Breaks, Respite and Wellbeing Support

Many carers described difficulties accessing meaningful breaks from caring responsibilities, particularly where the person being cared for is unwilling or unable to access traditional respite services. Discussion highlighted:

- The importance of flexible and personalised respite options.
- The value of direct payments, sitting services and technology-enabled care.
- The emotional impact of burnout and exhaustion.
- The need to support carers as individuals, not solely within their caring role.

Participants also emphasised that carers' wellbeing directly affects the wellbeing of those they support.

4. Communication, Information and Navigation Remain Key Barriers

Attendees repeatedly highlighted how difficult it can be to navigate services and understand available support. Key concerns included:

- Lack of clear information at the start of the caring journey.
- Difficulty understanding financial processes and eligibility criteria.
- Limited awareness of training, grants and support services.
- Overly complex systems and digital information that can feel overwhelming.

Participants stressed the importance of accessible, practical information and earlier signposting through GPs, social care and community services.

5. Concerns Around Accountability and Service Oversight

Some carers raised concerns regarding the monitoring and consistency of commissioned care services, particularly around communication, delivery of care hours and responsiveness to concerns. Discussion highlighted the importance of:

- Stronger feedback mechanisms.
- Better communication between providers and carers.
- Clear escalation routes when concerns arise.
- Greater transparency and accountability across commissioned services.

There was also recognition that carers themselves are often a valuable source of insight into whether support arrangements are working effectively.

Opportunities Identified Through the Discussion

Participants identified several opportunities to strengthen support for carers across Central Bedfordshire. Key themes included:

- Improving awareness and early identification of carers.
- Strengthening co-production and carer representation within strategic decision-making.
- Providing clearer, more accessible information and communication.

- Developing more flexible and personalised respite and wellbeing support.
- Enhancing staff understanding of carers' rights, expectations and lived experience.
- Creating more joined-up approaches between health, social care and commissioned providers.
- Ensuring healthcare professionals, including social workers, are aware of the Carers Strategy

There was also strong support for continuing the Community Partnership Group model as a constructive space for collaboration, challenge and shared learning.

Overall Reflections

The meeting provided a candid and constructive insight into the realities of unpaid caring across Central Bedfordshire. Participants openly shared experiences of navigating complex systems, inconsistent communication and the emotional pressures associated with caring responsibilities.

Importantly, discussions remained highly solutions-focused throughout. Attendees demonstrated a strong willingness to work collaboratively with commissioners, providers and partners to improve services, strengthen accountability and ensure carers' voices are more consistently embedded within decision-making.

Key themes included:

- The need for earlier support and clearer communication.
- Greater recognition and inclusion of carers across services.
- More flexible and personalised approaches to respite and wellbeing.
- Stronger co-production and partnership working.
- The importance of listening to lived experience when shaping future services.

The meeting also reinforced the value of the Community Partnership Group model itself. Bringing together carers, voluntary sector organisations, professionals and commissioners created a constructive environment where challenges could be openly discussed alongside practical ideas for improvement.

The willingness of participants to engage honestly, challenge constructively and contribute potential solutions demonstrated the significant potential of the group to support ongoing co-production and future service development.

The Community Partnership Group continues to provide an important mechanism for capturing lived experience, identifying emerging issues and shaping future commissioning priorities through collaboration, shared accountability and co-production.