Give us your views on National Carers Strategy

The government’s much anticipated new ten year National Carers Strategy, “Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities”, has now been published.

It includes £255m of new money for carers, including local health trusts receiving £150m over the next two years for breaks and respite.

However, while the national carers charities - Princess Royal Trust for Carers, Crossroads and Carers UK – have all welcomed the increases in funding and new ideas they have expressed their disappointment to government that the Strategy does not make any promises to raise Carers Allowance or other benefits straight away.

Instead, the government says it will reform all benefits over the next few years and will talk to people about how best to do that. (See page 4)

The Strategy is asking for your views on whether this should be the new definition of “carer” used by all of government: “A carer spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family or potentially friends. This could be caring for a relative, partner or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems.”

This suggested definition will not immediately affect assessments or benefits – at the moment, it is a suggestion for people to think about.

The Strategy says: “Our vision is that by 2018, carers will be universally recognised and valued as being fundamental to strong families and stable communities. Support will be tailored to meet individuals’ needs, enabling carers to maintain a balance between their caring responsibilities and a life outside caring, whilst enabling the person they support to be a full and equal citizen.”

By 2018, the Strategy promises that:

- carers will be respected as expert care partners by paid workers and be supported 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;
- children will be protected from inappropriate caring and be supported to learn, develop and thrive

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On the whole, the Strategy is a positive document, with a range of useful commitments backed up by new money. The Strategy commits the government to spending these amounts over the next two years:

- £150m to local health trusts for flexible breaks, meeting the needs of both carers and the people they support.
- Up to £38m to help carers stay in work or re-enter the job market.
- £6m to ensure young carers are protected from inappropriate caring and receive support.
- The government had already announced £22m for emergency planning and support for carers.

There is no pledge to raising benefit levels, with the Strategy saying that the best way to make sure carers can enjoy a reasonable income “is if they, where possible, combine paid employment with their caring role.” This will be achieved “through the provision of better services for the person being supported, increased break provision, easier access to training and skills and encouraging more flexible working opportunities.”

The government also wants to reduce the numbers of children relied upon for inappropriate caring by supporting parents and families with disabilities or illnesses better.

Have your views heard

Some questions you might want to comment on:

- Will the new suggested definition of “carer” work?
- Which bits of the Strategy do you most welcome?
- What’s missing from the Strategy or should be changed?
- What needs to happen in your area to make the government’s vision for carers into reality?
- Will the Strategy do enough to make sure local carers’ services get more help from councils, health trusts and government?

We can help you have your views heard by government. Give us your views and we will pass them on to The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads nationally. You can call us on 0118 950 5177, write to us at FREEPOST PRT Carers Service or email us at helpline@prtberks.plus.com. You can also post your comments on the carers’ message board at www.carers.org/forums.

Copies of the Strategy are available from www.dh.gov.uk/publications or dh@prolog.uk.com

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New service for carers in Lower Earley

A new carers drop-in service to help our service to be even more accessible starts on September 4 at the Chalfont Surgery, Chalfont Close, Chalfont Way, Lower Earley, Reading, Berkshire, RG6 2HZ.

It will be held on every first Thursday of the month between 10am and midday. Next dates are October 2, November 6 and December 4.

If you have any questions about your caring situation or just want some support and the opportunity to talk, please call in at the surgery between those times. You do not need to be registered with the surgery to attend.

If you require any further information, please contact Susan Iacobucci on 0118 950 5177 or email susan@prtberks.plus.com.

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Nominate caring GPs for award

The Simplyhealth Caring Awards 2008 are your opportunity to vote for the UK’s most caring GP, GP surgery and health board.

In a recent study up to 80 per cent of carers say that their health and well-being is worse off as a result of caring. Often the person that carers turn to for support is their GP. This support can vary greatly from practice to practice and yet it can make all the difference to carers.

The Awards, held in partnership with The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, are now in their fifth year and look to celebrate and recognise the fantastic work carried out by individual GPs, GPs surgeries and health boards that support unpaid family carers across the UK. These Awards are a way of rewarding all their hard work and of highlighting some of the best practice that is happening across the country.

There are three awards to take part in this year:

Simplyhealth Caring Surgery Award

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Simplyhealth are inviting GPs to enter this award by telling us more about how they support carers in their practice. There will be three winners; Gold (£2,000), Silver (£1,000) and Bronze (£750). We ask the winning surgeries to put at least half of the money back into carers support.

The closing date is October 10. For more information, see www.carers.org
Simplyhealth Carers’ Choice Award

Are you an unpaid family carer that has an amazingly supportive GP? Then you may want to say thank you for all the help that they have given you by entering them in this award. This year’s prize is £250 each for the winning GP and for you. To nominate, all you need to do is write a letter about how your GP supports you as a carer. It is very important to focus on the support they have given to you, not just the person you care for.

Please e-mail gpawards@carers.org or write to:

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers,
Freepost RRRY-JLXK-GZCG,
Unit 14, Bourne Court,
Southend Road,
Woodford Green,
IG8 8HD.

You need to remember to include contact details for both yourselves and your GP.

New opening hours for Reading drop-in

The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service has made some important changes to its opening hours which are already benefitting carers who prefer to drop-in during the afternoon.

The office in Cross Street, Reading, is now open to carers to drop-in without making an appointment every on Wednesday between 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm and on a Friday morning between 10am – 1pm.

Chief Executive John Shaw said the new opening hours are aimed at making the service more accessible by opening in the afternoon and will ensure it is making the best use of its resources.

At other days and times, staff will be available by appointment at the centre or through a home visit. The helpline – 0118 950 5177 is available every day (except Thursday) between 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm.

Thank you to everyone who replied to our survey asking for your views on our opening hours. Congratulations to Mrs C K of Wokingham who won a £20 Marks and Spencer voucher in the prize draw.

Use the bleep!

A new bleep system for people with learning/multiple disabilities has been introduced by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust for when they attend outpatient appointments.

This initiative means that the patients and their carers do not have to remain seated in the clinic waiting area but are free to move around the hospital, using the facilities and other waiting areas (such as the courtyard gardens), until they are bleeped to let them know that the doctor or nurse is ready to see them.

If you would like to know more about how the bleep system works, telephone PALS on 0118 322 8338 or call the Learning Disabilities Co-ordinator on 0118 322 8159.

Carers Week 2008 in pictures

Reading Mayor Peter Beard joined local carers to enjoy a Strawberry Cream Tea Extravaganza as part of the celebrations to mark Carers Week in June.

The theme was ‘Carers Can’t Afford to be Ill’ and carers enjoyed healthy refreshments, relaxing music and were able to have their blood pressure taken as well as having a hand massage.

The event was held at The Kennet Room, Civic Centre, Reading.
Berkshire Local Pension Service

The Berkshire Local Pension Service provides a free, confidential visiting service for people aged 60 or over to check their benefit entitlements. They can give information on Attendance Allowance, Disability living Allowance, Carers Allowance, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. They are also able to help to complete benefit application forms.

If you would like a home visit, please call 01344 744912.

Last year, in Berkshire the benefit awarded as a result of their work amounted to £5 million.

Welfare Reform Consultation

The government has issued a consultation document on plans to make some major changes to a number of unemployment and incapacity benefits. The consultation “No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility” can be found at www.dwp.gov.uk/welfareremform

It proposes that people who are currently receiving Income Support (IS) will be moved to Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and that IS will eventually be abolished. It is suggested that carers may be initially exempt from this transfer, but that where it does happen, this will not affect the amount of money carers get, nor will it affect Carers Allowance.

The reforms would ask job seekers to do more in order to continue to receive JSA, but the government has given assurances that whilst carers will get better access to support to get back to work if they need it, they will be exempt from having to accept work focused interviews, take up offers of employment or the other measures that will be made more stringent for job seekers. Couples will be required to make joint claims for JSA, and it will be harder for one partner to claim where the other is judged to be available to work, but again carers will be exempt from this.

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The Princess Royal Trust for Carers recognises that the current benefits system does not work for carers and that change is needed. We welcome the government’s clear commitment to ensure that carers do not lose out through the proposed changes and that they are not asked to comply with unreasonable requirements in order to claim benefits. However, we remain very concerned about the thousands of carers who do not meet the Department of Work and Pensions definition of “carer” which is of someone eligible for Carers Allowance, a benefit that excludes most carers of people with mental health and substance misuse problems. The new system must put in place a more intelligent definition of “carer” to avoid continuing this injustice.

The consultation period began on 21 July and runs until 22 October 2008.

Carers Service AGM date announced

The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 17 October in Newbury. The meeting will start at 11am in The Chamber, Newbury Town Hall. If you need help with transport in order to attend, please contact us in good time and we will do our best to help.

We are looking for new members living in the West Berkshire area. Membership enables you to attend meetings, have a vote and thereby a say in how PRT Carers Service is run. Please call us if you would like to receive the straightforward application form. Professionals in West Berkshire who would like to attend the A.G.M. are requested to put the date in their diary.

Formal invitations will be sent nearer the time. The Carers Centre will be closed for the day and the telephone helpline will be unavailable.

For further information, please call us on 0118 950 5177.

Email helpline for carers

Carers can seek information and support via a new email helpline, which has been set up by The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service.

It is hoped it will particularly benefit carers who are working, who are unable to visit or telephone one of our offices or who would simply prefer to email their enquiry.

The aim is to provide personalised information on all aspects of coping with caring.

The address is helpline@prtberks.plus.com. We aim to reply within 48 hours.
Are you entitled to a council tax discount?

Many carers are missing out on benefits they may be entitled to. The following are some general guidance about claiming for council tax rebates. However, as individual circumstances affect eligibility it is best to seek advice when making a claim.

There are two schemes for reducing council tax bills that might be relevant to you as a carer.

**The Disability Reduction Scheme**

You can get a disability reduction if you or any other resident in the house is ‘substantially and permanently disabled’ and one of the following conditions is met: i) have an additional bathroom or kitchen needed by the disabled person; ii) have another room (other than a bathroom, kitchen or toilet) needed by and predominantly used by that person or iii) you have enough space in your dwelling for that person to use a wheelchair inside.

**The discount scheme**

is applied to dwellings where less than two adults are resident. There are certain people who are disregarded when counting the number of residents in the house. This includes:

- **People who have a severe mental impairment**, such as Alzheimer’s or dementia. There must be a severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning which appears to be permanent; the person has a certificate from a registered general practitioner confirming this; is entitled to a disability benefit, the list of which includes disability living allowance (DLA), middle or higher rate care component, attendance allowance (AA) and incapacity benefit.

- **Carers** if you provide care for 35 hours a week; are resident in the same building as the cared for person; are not the partner of the cared for person; are not the parent of the cared for person if they are aged under 18 and care for a person who is entitled to the higher rate care component of DLA, higher rate AA or constant attendance allowance.

- **People in hospital or a care home** (people who are resident in hospital are disregarded)

The rules are complicated. If you think any of these discounts might apply to you, please contact your local Council Tax Team.

**Contact Numbers:**

- If you live in Windsor, Ascot & Maidenhead, telephone 01628 796036.
- If you live in Reading, telephone 0118 939 0656.
- If you live in Wokingham, telephone 0118 974 6022 or 6597.
- If you live in West Berkshire, telephone 01635 519520.
Free courses for carers

If you live in Wokingham Borough why not try free courses aimed at helping carers who enjoy a well-earned break?

The courses are run by Bracknell and Wokingham College working in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council.

Find your way around the computer keyboard – develop your confidence and improve your IT skills. Woodley Hill House. Monday September 15 until 20 October from 10am – 12 noon.

Festive fun with your computer – create your own cards, letters and calendars for the festive season. Woodley Hill House. Thursday November 6 until December 11 from 1pm – 3pm.

T’ai Chi – enjoy this Chinese exercise for health and well-being. Barkham Day Hospital. Wednesday September 17 until October 22 from 1pm – 2.30pm.

Yoga – enjoy the gentle activity and relaxation techniques. Barkham Day Hospital. Wednesday November 12 until December 17 from 1pm – 2.30pm.

Festive crafts – have fun making festive cards, decorations and small gifts. Crescent Community Resource Centre. Wednesday November 5 until December 10 from 12.45pm – 2.45pm.

Introduction to Spanish – enjoy learning the basics of a new language. Woodley Hill House. Monday November 3 until December 1 from 1pm – 3pm.

To book a place, call 0118 984 7600.

For the latest information about events in the local area, see www.carers.org/berkshire

Emergency scheme aims to gives peace of mind

A scheme to help carers plan what would happen to the person they care for in the event of a crisis is aimed at giving people peace of mind.

The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service and Reading Crossroads are working in partnership with Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils to ensure unpaid carers have access to a local Emergency Respite Scheme, which will ensure they can summon help if they become ill or have an accident. The scheme is being funded by Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

The emergency plan will outline what should happen and who will help to ensure the person cared for – a husband, wife, friend or neighbour – is safe in the event of the carer becoming ill, having an accident or personal crisis such as a funeral, a transport delay or a last minute appointment.

The scheme does not only have to be used in a crisis. For example, it can even help if you had made plans for a friend or neighbour to sit with the person you care for so you could go to the hairdressers but they let you down at the last minute.

Carers will be able to ring a dedicated helpline so staff from Crossroads can implement the plan any time of the day or night, 365 days a year. When necessary, Crossroads will send a fully trained carer support worker to the cared for person or will summon other support as indicated in the emergency plan.

A carer can also carry an Emergency Card, which will identity them to the emergency services, who will contact Crossroads to implement their plan.

For further help and information about the emergency scheme, please contact the Reading Crossroads Emergency Care Line on 0118 945 4209 or the Carers Service on 0118 950 5177.
Accessible French holiday accommodation

A new project in France is offering accessible and supported holidays for disabled people.

An English couple, who have been living in France for five years, have converted an old cotton mill on the banks of the River Jaudy in La Roche Derrien in Brittany.

The specific aim is to be able to offer a fully accessible environment where disabled people could come and stay, as individuals, groups or as a family and everybody could enjoy themselves and relax.

Equipment hire, adapted transport, support workers is also available.

The Cotton Mill has been transformed into six light and airy apartments, all with level access showers, raised toilets, grab rails, wheel under sinks, the garden itself is also accessible with large seating areas, bbq’s, children’s play area, etc too. With off road parking it is an ideal setting for anyone who wishes to visit the area.

For further information see www.ineedaholidaytoo.com or Freephone: 0800 949 6801 (from UK)
Our services at a glance

The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service provides a number of services and support groups.

Asian Carers Support Group
The group meets at the Sun Street Community Centre, Reading. The next meetings are September 25, October 30 and November 27. For further information, please call the Carers Line on 0118 950 5177.

Emmer Green Support Group
The group meets at St Barnabas Church Hall, St Barnabas Road, Emmer Green, Reading from 2.15pm – 4pm. The group will meet on Monday September 15, Monday October 20 and Monday November 17. For further information, please call the Carers Line on 0118 950 5177.

The Reading and Wokingham Mental Health Carers Club
The club meets at the Wesley Methodist Church Hall, Queens Road, Reading from 11am – 2pm. The next meetings are Thursday October 2, Thursday November 4 and Thursday December 2. For further information, please call the Carers Line on 0118 950 5177.

Carers Support Group, Wokingham
The group meets at Wokingham Methodist Church, Rose Street, Wokingham from 10.30am to 12.30pm. The next meetings are Wednesday September 10; Wednesday October 8 and Wednesday November 12.

Daily drop in
Carers Centre, 6 Cross Street, Reading. Come and talk through any issues with a member of staff or just drop in for a cup of tea and a chat. We are open on a Wednesday from 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm and on a Friday morning between 10am – 1pm. Staff are able to help with filling in Carers Allowance forms, Attendance Allowance and Disability Allowance forms.

Counselling Service
A trained counsellor is available to offer sessions to carers. We can usually offer eight 50 minute sessions at our Reading office on a Friday morning. Please contact us to make an appointment on 0118 950 5177 (there may be a waiting list).

Working for excellence
The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service is committed to providing a quality service to our carers and funders. We work hard to ensure we provide an efficient and effective service. However, if you are unhappy about the service you have received, you have the right to choose how, where and with whom in the organisation you wish to raise your concerns. We also have a formal Complaints Procedure. We positively welcome your comments and suggestions.

The Princess Royal Trust Carers Service
6 Cross Street
Reading
RG1 1SN

Carers Helpline: 0118 950 5177
Email: helpline@prtberks.plus.com
General enquiries: 0118 950 3941

Drop-in without an appointment Wednesday 10am-1pm and 2pm-4pm; Friday 10am-1pm. Appointments available at other times.

www.carers.org/berkshire

Write to us at Freepost PRT Carers Service
(No need to write anything else on the envelope and no stamp required)