



Cùram is Slàinte nan Eilean Siar

Western Isles Health and Social Care Partnership

Western Isles Carers Strategy End of Strategy Progress and Closure Report

Purpose

To capture progress against the Western Isles Carers Strategy, identify key achievements and gaps, and inform the development of the refreshed strategy.

This report should be read alongside:

- **Appendix 1: Examples of delivery and impact (2023–2026)**, which provides case studies illustrating how support for carers was delivered in practice; and
- **Appendix 2: Detailed progress assessment against strategic actions**, which provides the evidence underpinning the progress assessments contained within this report.

Executive Summary

The Western Isles Carers Strategy 2019–2022 was developed to improve outcomes for unpaid carers and support implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. This report provides a retrospective assessment of progress against the Strategy, identifies key achievements and learning, and informs development of a refreshed Western Isles Carers Strategy.

Evidence was gathered from members of the Carers Strategy Group, commissioned services, NHS Western Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and partner organisations. Overall, the review found that significant progress has been made in supporting unpaid carers through information and advice services, training, advocacy, respite opportunities, peer support, community engagement and partnership working.

Of the **35 strategic actions** within the Strategy:

- **15 actions (42.9%)** were assessed as substantially delivered.
- **19 actions (54.3%)** were assessed as partially delivered or ongoing.
- **1 action (2.9%)** was assessed as not delivered or where insufficient evidence was available.

Key strengths identified through the review included improved awareness and recognition of carers, continued delivery of support services across the Western Isles, development of

respite and short-break opportunities, support for carers' health and wellbeing, and strong partnership working between statutory and third-sector organisations.

The review also identified a number of ongoing challenges, including workforce capacity, recruitment and retention issues, access to respite and replacement care, identification of hidden carers, implementation of Young Carer Statements, transition arrangements for young carers, and the need for improved performance monitoring and data collection.

The findings suggest that the priorities identified within the existing Strategy remain relevant and should continue to inform future planning. Particular attention should be given to carer identification, information and advice, health and wellbeing, respite and short breaks, support for young carers, involvement in decision-making, financial wellbeing and ensuring services remain accessible across rural and island communities.

This report, together with the accompanying case studies and detailed action assessment, will provide the evidence base to support consultation, development and implementation of a refreshed Western Isles Carers Strategy.

Methodology

This report provides a retrospective assessment of progress against the Western Isles Carers Strategy 2019–2022.

The assessment is based on evidence submitted by partner organisations, members of the Carers Strategy Group, Health and Social Care Partnership services, NHS Western Isles and commissioned services during June and July 2026, together with available performance information and organisational records.

Examples of delivery and impact were identified from partner returns, Carers Strategy Group discussions, commissioned service reports and activity reports submitted by voluntary sector organisations during the reporting period.

It should be recognised that the reporting period spans several years and predates a number of changes in organisational structures, personnel and governance arrangements. As a result, evidence was not available for every action, and some assessments are based on collective partner feedback and professional judgement rather than formal performance reporting.

Progress ratings reflect the collective assessment of evidence received and are intended to support organisational learning, future strategic development and service improvement rather than performance management. Where evidence was limited or inconsistent, actions have been recorded as partially delivered or requiring further review.

Future Priorities

The following themes have emerged from the review of evidence, partner returns, service feedback and discussion within the Carers Strategy Group during the preparation of this End of Strategy Report. These priorities are presented for consideration and further discussion

with the Carers Strategy Group and stakeholders and will help inform the development of the next Western Isles Carers Strategy.

Emerging Priorities for Consideration in the Next Carers Strategy

1. Improve identification, recognition and early support for unpaid carers, particularly hidden carers, young carers and those who do not self-identify.
2. Strengthen support for carers' health, wellbeing and resilience, including access to preventative support, peer support and wellbeing initiatives.
3. Improve access to short breaks, respite opportunities and replacement care across all island communities.
4. Improve access to information, advice, advocacy, training and financial wellbeing support.
5. Improve support for young carers and young adult carers, including Young Carer Statements and transition arrangements into adulthood.
6. Ensure carers are recognised as equal partners in care and are meaningfully involved in assessment, care planning, service design and strategic development.
7. Improve data collection, performance reporting and evidence of outcomes for carers.
8. Address workforce sustainability and service capacity challenges that affect carers' access to support.

Emerging issues and national developments for consideration

The following issues were identified by partners as likely to influence future strategic planning and service delivery and should be considered during development of the refreshed Strategy.

1. Implementation of the Right to Breaks agenda.
2. Recruitment and retention difficulties across the health and social care workforce.
3. Availability of respite care and replacement care.
4. Increasing complexity of caring roles, particularly in relation to dementia care.
5. Rising demand for services and increasing reliance on unpaid carers.
6. Rural and island delivery challenges, including transport and workforce availability.
7. Improving identification and recording of young carers.
8. Learning from national organisations and good practice emerging across Scotland.

Overall Reflections

Key Achievements

Significant progress has been made in supporting carers across the Western Isles through a combination of statutory and third-sector provision. Throughout the period of the Strategy, carers continued to receive support through information and advice services, carer events, training opportunities, respite provision, outreach services and peer support initiatives. Organisations including WICCF, Crossroads, Cobhair Bharraigh, NHS Western Isles and Comhairle services have played an important role in supporting carers to continue in their caring roles.

Carers Week, local engagement events and awareness activities have helped increase recognition of carers and improve access to support. Information and signposting services have expanded, providing carers with improved access to local and national resources.

A range of respite and short break opportunities have also been developed, including Short Breaks Grants, self-catering breaks, respite through residential services, home support, befriending and day care provision. Evidence received consistently highlights the positive impact these opportunities have had on carers' wellbeing and ability to continue caring.

Partnership working between statutory services and third-sector organisations has strengthened and is consistently identified as a key contributor to positive outcomes for carers. For example, The Western Isles Community Care Forum introduced the biannual *Shining Stars* newsletter for young carers in 2024, helping to raise awareness, support young carers, and identify previously unknown young carers. In addition, the HS Carer Card was launched during Carers Week 2025, with 231 cards issued during its first year to help unpaid carers identify themselves as carers and access local benefits and discounts. Training opportunities available to carers were expanded to include First Aid training, with 26 unpaid carers participating between 2023 and 2026. Further examples of how support was delivered and the impact on carers are provided in Appendix 1.

Key Gaps / Areas Not Delivered

Evidence suggests that while many front-line support services were successfully delivered, several strategic actions were only partially implemented or lacked sufficient evidence of completion.

There was limited evidence of formal review of eligibility criteria, completion of communication and engagement planning, development of consistent pathways across services, and implementation of agreed timescales for Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements.

Progress in relation to Young Carer Statements, transition arrangements for young carers moving into adulthood, and recording of young carers across services has been variable and remains an area requiring further development.

Some actions within the Strategy were difficult to evidence retrospectively due to changes in staffing, service structures and governance arrangements throughout the lifetime of the Strategy.

Key Challenges

Workforce capacity emerged as the most consistently identified challenge across partner returns. Recruitment and retention difficulties have impacted the ability of services to meet increasing demand and, in some cases, have contributed to delays in support being available to carers.

Availability of respite care, replacement care and care home respite beds was also identified as a significant challenge. Several organisations reported concerns about carers reaching crisis point where alternative support is unavailable.

Partners also highlighted rural and island delivery challenges, transport limitations, financial hardship experienced by some carers, and difficulties identifying hidden carers and young carers.

Key Learning for Future Strategy

The strongest learning from the previous Strategy is that partnership working produces better outcomes for carers. The most effective support is delivered collaboratively between carers, statutory services and third-sector organisations.

Evidence also demonstrates that carers benefit most from flexible, personalised support that responds to individual needs rather than standardised approaches.

Early identification, timely access to information and support, meaningful involvement in service planning, and availability of regular respite opportunities all contribute significantly to carers' ability to continue caring safely and sustainably.

Young carers are best engaged through trusted relationships and established support networks, and future approaches should build on this learning.

Overall Progress Assessment

Status Key and Summary of Action Status Ratings	Number of Actions	Percentage
✓ Substantially delivered	15	42.9%
~ Partially delivered / ongoing	19	54.3%
✗ Not delivered or insufficient evidence received	1	2.9%
Total	35	100%

Summary of Progress

Of the 35 strategic actions contained within the Western Isles Carers Strategy 2019–2022, 15 actions (42.9%) were assessed as substantially delivered, 19 actions (54.3%) were assessed as partially delivered or ongoing, and 1 action (2.9%) was assessed as not delivered or lacked sufficient evidence of delivery. Overall, 97.1% of actions demonstrated at least some evidence of progress during the lifetime of the Strategy, although the extent of implementation varied across strategic outcomes.

Assessment Methodology

Progress ratings were determined through review of evidence submitted by Health and Social Care Partnership services, NHS Western Isles, commissioned services, third-sector partners and members of the Carers Strategy Group. Assessments considered evidence of activity undertaken, reported outcomes, examples of impact, continuation of services and stakeholder feedback. Due to the retrospective nature of the review, professional judgement was applied where formal performance data was unavailable.

Criteria for Status Ratings

Status	Definition	Assessment Criteria
✓ Substantially Delivered	The action was largely implemented and evidence demonstrated that the intended activity or outcome had been achieved.	Clear evidence of delivery, ongoing provision of the service or activity, and demonstrable outcomes or impact.
~ Partially delivered / Ongoing	The action was progressed or partially implemented, but evidence suggested that delivery was incomplete, ongoing or inconsistent.	Some evidence of progress or activity, but intended outcomes were only partly achieved, not implemented consistently, or lacked sufficient evidence for a full completion rating.
✗ Not Delivered or Insufficient Evidence Received	The action was not implemented, or insufficient evidence was available to demonstrate meaningful progress.	Little or no evidence of delivery, no identifiable outcomes, or confirmation that the action had not been completed.

A full assessment of each strategic action is provided in Appendix 2.

Interpretation of Results

The findings suggest that the Strategy was most successful in supporting the delivery of practical services for carers, including information and advice, engagement activities, training opportunities, respite provision and partnership working. Actions assessed as partially delivered were generally associated with strategic development work, service redesign, pathway development, governance arrangements, data collection and young carer systems, where progress was evident, but implementation remained incomplete at the end of the Strategy period.

The single action assessed as '*Not Delivered or Insufficient Evidence Received*' related to the development of agreed timescales for completion of Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements. This reflects the absence of evidence to demonstrate implementation of a formal timescale framework during the reporting period.

Further examples of the impact of these services are contained within Appendix 1: *Examples of Delivery and Impact (2023–2026)*.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, substantial progress has been made in delivering practical support for unpaid carers across the Western Isles. Although not all strategic actions were fully delivered or evidenced, the period saw continued investment in carer support services, increased partnership

working, expansion of information and advice services, and wider availability of respite and wellbeing support.

Future strategic development should focus on building on these strengths while addressing workforce challenges, respite provision, young carers, transition arrangements and improved strategic oversight. The refreshed Strategy should retain a strong person-centred approach and continue to place carers at the centre of planning and decision-making.

Strategic Priorities for 2027–2032

1. Recognition and identification of unpaid carers.
2. Sustainable respite and short breaks provision.
3. Supporting carers' health, wellbeing and financial resilience.
4. Improving support for young carers and young adult carers.
5. Workforce sustainability and capacity.
6. Information, advice, advocacy and training.
7. Meaningful involvement of carers in service planning and design.
8. Improved partnership working and strategic oversight.

Key Actions to Carry Forward

1. Embed Young Carer Statements across the Western Isles.
2. Develop clear transition pathways for young carers entering adulthood.
3. Strengthen identification of hidden carers.
4. Improve data collection, reporting and performance information.
5. Increase access to respite and replacement care.
6. Expand carer training opportunities.
7. Improve school and multi-agency awareness of young carers.
8. Promote carers' health, wellbeing and financial inclusion.
9. Continue development of locality-based and community-based support.

Emerging Issues Requiring Further Consideration

The following issues build on the challenges identified during delivery of the 2019–2022 Strategy and will require consideration during development of the refreshed Strategy.

1. Right to Breaks implementation.
2. Workforce recruitment and retention.
3. Burnout risks among unpaid carers.
4. Increasing prevalence of dementia and complex care needs.
5. Financial pressures affecting carers and services.
6. Rural and island service delivery challenges.
7. Future sustainability of unpaid caring arrangements.