A Charge on Caring?

Analysis of the Use and Impact of Charges by Councils Providing Support to Unpaid Carers
Carers Trust

About Carers Trust
Carers Trust is a major new charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

We do this with a UK wide network of quality assured independent partners, through our unique online services and through the provision of grants to help carers get the extra help they need to live their own lives. With locally based Network Partners we are able to support carers in their homes through the provision of replacement care, and in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individual tailored support and group activities.

Our vision is of a world where the role and contribution of unpaid carers is recognised and they have access to the trusted quality support and services they need to live their own lives.

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Executive summary

The Care Act (Department of Health, 2014a) permits local authorities to charge unpaid carers for the support they provide to help them in their caring role, as was the position under previous legislation. Councils are discouraged from exercising this power, however, by the Care Act Statutory Guidance (Section 14, Department of Health, 2014b) which states that implementing charges is likely to be a false economy and will send the wrong message about the extent to which councils value unpaid carers.

Despite this, Carers Trust has been concerned to hear that a number of local authorities have started to introduce charges. We sent a freedom of information (FOI) request to all councils in England with responsibility for social care to establish how many councils are using charges, how are they are being applied, and the impact they are having on carers.

Our findings

- 8 of the 132 councils who responded to our FOI request are charging carers for their own support. An estimated 5% of carers in England therefore face the possibility of being charged for support they are assessed as needing to enable them to care for someone else unpaid.
- All charging councils use a financial assessment before applying charges.
- Councils are not collecting sufficient data on the impact of charges on carers. Only two councils provided an estimate of the average amount carers are being charged. Their figures ranged from £3 to £16.98 per week.
- In the next 12 months, 23 councils will be debating introducing charges.

Carers Trust’s view on charging carers for their own support

Carers Trust opposes charging carers for their own support for the following reasons:

- It is wrong in principle: Carers provide support, unpaid, which would otherwise need to be provided by others, potentially from public funds. The role and importance of unpaid carers needs to be celebrated and they should be given more, not less support.
- Charging risks discouraging carers from accessing the support they need: Our social care system relies on the UK’s seven million unpaid carers.¹

¹ UK Census 2011. Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.1.0. The Census identified 6.5 million carers in the UK, including 178,000 young carers in England and Wales. However, we know from research that young carers are vastly underidentified by the census – BBC research in 2010 suggested there may be 700,000 young carers under 18 in the UK. Carers Trust believes it is important to recognise young carers as they are too often invisible. We therefore use an estimate of in the region of seven million.
If they are put off applying for the support they need to continue caring, they are more likely to become physically or mentally unwell, or less able to continue caring in the long term. People in need will then depend on our overstretched health and social care services.

- **Charging puts carers at financial risk**: Carers are more likely than average to face financial difficulties. Expecting them to pay for essential support services will increase those pressures.

- **Charging is not cost effective**: Although charging could have a big impact on each individual carer, the cost to the council of administering a charge is likely to exceed the amount awarded to the carer.

**Our recommendations**

We make the following recommendations to both central and local government:

- Any council charging carers for support should reverse that policy and ensure that support provided for carers under the Care Act is offered free of charge.

- Councils considering introducing charges should consider the impact that decision will have on carers’ wellbeing. Any action which reduces the ability of carers to continue caring is likely to have a detrimental effect on the health of the person they care for and on the stability of our social care system.

- Councils debating introducing charges should conduct a public consultation and seek opinion from carers and carer support organisations. Should it emerge that charges will have a negative impact on carers’ wellbeing or finances it should be concluded that charging is counterproductive.

- The government should make it mandatory for councils to record data on the number of carers being charged for support and the amount that they are being charged.

- The Department of Health should conduct a study in April 2016, one year after the introduction of the Care Act, on the impact charges are having on carers. Should it emerge that charges are having a detrimental impact on carers, we would urge the government to consider amending the Care Act so that councils are no longer permitted to charge carers for their own support.

- The government must increase the overall level of funding provided to councils for social care. Presently, councils are predicting that a £4.3bn gap in social care funding will emerge by 2020. Unless they are provided with increased funds now, we are concerned that more councils will feel compelled to introduce charges.
Introduction

The Care Act 2014 and support for carers

Under the new Care Act (Department of Health, 2014a), which came into force on 1 April 2015, all carers, regardless of their level of care or financial situation, are entitled to a needs assessment provided or arranged by their local authority.

These needs assessments are used to determine whether the carer meets the new national eligibility criteria for receiving support to help them perform their caring role. If they are deemed eligible then the local authority is required to provide the carer with a support plan detailing the type of support they will be able to offer.

This is vital support. Carers often struggle with poor mental or physical health as a result of caring for someone else. Many rarely get a break and often find it difficult to juggle staying in work alongside caring. 42% of carers have not taken a break of more than two days since they started looking after the main person they care for (The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, 2011). Many become isolated as they lose touch with friends and family. The relatively small amount of support provided is not a ‘nice to have’ – it is essential in enabling carers to stay well and therefore able to carry on caring.

The types of support a carer could expect to receive will vary according to their assessed needs, and will depend on their personal preference and what they think will help them most, for example:

- It might include funding for breaks to enable a carer to take time away from their caring role, do something for themselves, spend time with others who matter to them and stay socially connected, or money to attend social groups and evening classes, or for a laptop to stay connected to family members.
- It might also include funding for relaxation or yoga classes or a gym membership to help the carer keep physical and mentally fit.

Policy on charges

As under previous legislation, local authorities are permitted to charge carers for the services they provide to carers, but historically few have done so.

There are a number of key stipulations that are made in the Care Act relating to charges.

Firstly, if the support provided to the carer is given directly to the person with care needs but is put in place for the benefit of the carer, then the carer cannot be charged. If a charge is to be imposed then it will fall on the person with care needs.
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This could apply, for example, if the person with care needs spends time in residential care in order to give the carer a break.

Secondly, if a local authority decides to introduce charges then it must carry out a financial assessment of the carer to ensure that they are able to pay. The assessment must also consider the likely impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the carer that charging for support might have.

Thirdly, the charge must only cover the cost that the local authority incurs in providing those services.

The political context

Although charges are permitted by the Care Act, the statutory guidance on the Care Act (Section 8.50, Department of Health, 2014b) discourages the application of charges to carers. It states that applying charges is likely to be a false economy because it could discourage carers from accessing support, potentially meaning they are less able to continue in their caring role – thereby requiring that the local authority steps in to provide support for the person they were caring for, bringing with it additional costs and resource requirements. The guidance also states that local authorities should consider how charging will reflect on the extent to which they value unpaid carers and the role they perform for their families and local community.

Methodology

Carers Trust set out to establish:

a) How many local authorities are currently charging carers for the support they receive and at what rate; and
b) How many local authorities are considering introducing charges within the next 12 months.

On 2 July 2015 Carers Trust submitted an FOI request to the local authorities with Adult Social Services Responsibilities (CASSRs) asking them about their policies on charging carers. A full transcript of that FOI request can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

Of the 152 councils with responsibility for social care, five were omitted from our FOI request. This was on request from Carers Trust Network Partners based in those areas who stated that they would prefer to find out the information we were seeking using their own means and contacts.

In total, we received 132 responses from local authorities.
Using the information we received back from local authorities, Carers Trust then contacted local Carers Trust Network Partner to check that the answers provided reflected their understanding of their local authorities’ charging policy and practice. In all cases where responses were received the Network Partners we contacted confirmed that the responses from councils regarding their policies on charging were what they understood the local policy to be.

The results of the FOI requests and our contact with Network Partners is presented in the following pages of this report.

Our findings

Number of councils charging for support

Out of the 132 councils for whom data was obtained, eight are currently charging carers for the support that they offer them.

This represents a low percentage of councils with adult social care responsibilities – 6% of the responses we received. This indicates that the vast majority of councils recognise the potentially damaging impact that charging carers could have on their wellbeing and on their ability to carry on caring, or that the process of implementing charges is not regarded as cost effective given the small amount of money per carer and the cost of administering this.

![Graph 1: Council’s policies on charging](image-url)
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It should be borne in mind, however, that although only eight local authorities have declared that they are currently charging carers for their own support, this still means a significant number of carers could potentially be subject to charges. Using the 2011 Census data on Health and Provision of Unpaid Care (UK Census, 2011b) we estimate that there are 247,539 unpaid carers living in the eight authorities where charging is in place. That means nearly 5% of the total number carers in England live in authorities where they face being charged if they have a carer’s assessment and are deemed to have eligible needs and meet the financial threshold and they wish to take up this support.

How charges are being applied

Across the eight authorities that are currently charging carers for support there is general consistency in how these charges are being applied.

Each of the authorities indicated that they conduct a financial assessment of a carer before charging them for support, in line with the stipulations of the Care Act. This is designed to ensure that the carer has the financial resources required to meet the costs of the support package they are offered. With the exception of one council which only applies charges for sitting services when that service is put in place to give respite for the carer, the councils who responded to our FOI all apply charges to all forms of non-residential support.

Amount carers are charged

Since the Care Act only came into effect in April this year, most of the councils were unable to provide data on the average amount that carers are being charged.

From the responses that we received this lack of data is indicative of the fact that councils generally are not recording information on the impact that charges are having on carers.

We therefore recommend that the government requires councils that are charging carers to record how many carers are assessed as having to pay for their own support, how many subsequently take up that support, and how much these amounts are. This data will enable councils to assess if charges are discouraging carers from accessing support that they have been assessed for.

Only two councils were able to provide an estimate as to the average amount that carers are being charged. One council’s estimate was based on those carers that are receiving support both as a carer and as someone with their own individual support needs – 69 people in total. They estimate that these carers, on average, face a charge of £16.98 per week for the services they receive but it was unclear how much of this related to their own needs compared with their needs as a carer.
The second council estimated that carers are charged an average of £3 per week for the support they receive.

Since these averages are based on a very low number of carers, it would not be wise to use these figures to estimate the amount that carers are being charged across England. However, some general points can be drawn out.

Firstly, £16.98 – or £67.92 per month – is a considerable amount of money for an individual carer. Existing research shows that carers are more likely than average to face financial difficulties, largely due to the extra expenses associated with caring and the fact that they might have had to give up work or reduce their hours in order to care. In an online survey of 800 carers conducted by The Princess Royal Trust for Carers in July 2010 53% said they had borrowed money as a result of their caring role and 41% had used overdrafts (The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, 2010). To these carers, an extra £67.92 per month, or even the £18 per month figure quoted by one council, could easily force them into financial difficulties.

Secondly, these figures cannot tell us the number of carers who are being put off applying for essential support because they know they will have to pay for it. For any carer already struggling financially, knowledge that they will have to pay an additional sum even of £3 per week might be enough to prevent them applying for support that could make a difference to their life.

In light of these uncertainties, we urge the government, one year after implementation of the Care Act, to conduct a full review of the impact of charges on carers. That review should take account of the number of carers being charged and the amount as well as the financial, emotional, and psychological impact they are having and assess whether or not charges are reducing carers’ willingness to access support.

**Number of councils considering introducing charges in the next 12 months**

In the current financial climate, it is understandable that councils will be looking at all the options available to them to reduce expenditure. Carers Trust is concerned that the financial pressures being placed on councils could result in more councils deciding to charge carers for support.

The results of our FOI request suggest that this might be the case. Of the 132 councils who responded to our request, 23 (17% of total respondents) indicated that they will be reviewing their policy on charges in the next 12 months and debating the introduction of charges. Although it is not necessarily the case that all these councils will introduce charges, were they to do so that would represent a 2.5 times increase in the number of carers being charged.
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Such a trend would be reflective of wider developments in social care which is seeing funding cut and support reduced. Local authorities in England have cut funding for social care by 8.7% over the last four years. This has meant that services have been scaled back. The number of people accessing social care services has fallen by 25% since 2010 (The King’s Fund, 2015).

We have the opportunity to prevent this becoming a trend if action is taken now. Carers Trust urges the government to increase the overall funding provided to councils for social care. Presently, councils are predicting that a £4.3bn gap in social care funding will emerge by 2020 (Local Government Association, 2014). Unless they are provided with increased resources now, we are concerned that more councils will feel compelled to introduce charges.

Carers Trust’s view on charging carers for their own support

Carers Trust strongly opposes charging carers for their own support for the following reasons:

Carers deserve more not less support

Carers Trust believes it is wrong to charge carers for the support they need to look after someone. Increasingly, politicians are recognising the invaluable role that carers play and what they contribute to society. As the Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt recently declared: “Carers do a magnificent job, even if they do not always get the thanks or support they deserve.” (Jeremy Hunt, 2015). One way to do that is by ensuring that the support carers depend upon to help them in their caring role is readily accessible to them.

Charging puts carers at financial risk

Charging risks pushing carers into worse financial circumstances. Carers are already more likely than average to face financial difficulties. A recent survey of carers by Carers UK found that almost half of carers are “struggling to make ends meet” (Carers UK, 2015). Three in five carers feel that their financial situation is getting worse as a result of the cumulative impact of cuts to welfare and the ongoing recession. Charging for support will add to that pressure.

Charging risks discouraging carers from accessing the support they need, meaning they may be less able to continue caring

Our social care system relies on England’s 5.5 million unpaid carers (UK Census, 2011). If they are put off applying for the support they need to continue caring, they are more likely to become physically or mentally unwell, or less able to continue
Caring in the long term. This means more people in need will have to depend on our stretched health and social care services.

Carers already contribute £119bn to the UK economy each year, more than the entire NHS budget (Buckner and Yeandle, 2011). It is only by investing in the support given to carers that we will relieve pressure on our health services. It is for these reasons that a report by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) on charging concluded: “There is significant evidence … that suggests that investment in carers’ services to support them in their caring role is financially beneficial for social care and sees a significant return on any investment made” and that therefore “any potential charge to a carer is unlikely to represent value for money.” (ADASS, 2015).

Charging is not administratively cost effective

Although the amounts charged could have a big impact on each individual carer, the costs of undertaking a financial assessment, even a light-touch one, and monitoring the use of a personal budget or direct payment, are likely to exceed the amount awarded to the carer (ADASS, 2015). The cost of administering charges for carers therefore means it is unlikely to be cost effective to do so.

There is a consensus that charges should be avoided

Organisations and individuals from a range of backgrounds have acknowledged that local authorities should avoid charging carers. This includes ADASS and the government itself which used the guidance accompanying the Care Act (Department of Health, 2014b) to urge councils not to introduce charges as these are likely to discourage carers from taking up they support they need.

Our recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, we make the following recommendations to both central and local government:

- Any council currently charging carers for support should reverse that policy and ensure that support provided for carers under the Care Act is offered free of charge.

- Councils considering introducing charges should consider the impact that decision will have on carers’ wellbeing. Any action which reduces the ability of carers to continue caring is likely to have a detrimental effect on the health of the person they care for and on the stability of our social care system.
• Councils debating the introduction of charges should ensure this decision is put out to public consultation and they seek opinion from carers and carer services. Should it emerge that charges are likely to have a negative impact on carers’ wellbeing or finances that should be seen as evidence that introducing charges will be counterproductive.

• The government should make it mandatory for councils to record data on the number of carers being charged for support and the amount that they are being charged.

• The Department of Health should conduct a study in April 2016, one year after the introduction of the Care Act, on the impact charges are having on carers. Should it emerge that charges are having a detrimental impact on carers, we would urge the government to consider amending the Care Act so that councils are no longer permitted to charge carers for their own support.

• The government must increase the overall level of funding provided to councils for social care. Presently councils are predicting that a £4.3bn gap in social care funding will emerge by 2020. Unless they are provided with increased funds now, we are concerned that more councils will feel compelled to introduce charges.

Conclusion

There is a growing political consensus about the importance of supporting unpaid carers. That recognition was echoed in the words of Jeremy Hunt’s recent launch of the new Carers Strategy, is found in the text of the Care Act and can be seen in the ambitions of the NHS Five Year Forward View which puts carers front and centre of its plans to reform health and social care in England.

Such ambitions will not be realised, however, if support for carers comes to be seen as a luxury that they should pay for rather than an essential support that they are entitled to.

The use of charges for carer support is currently limited to just a small number of cases but we are concerned that this number looks set to increase in the coming years. It means that support for carers in practice is heading in the opposite direction to the one which the government wishes to pursue in theory.

In order to ensure this trend does not continue, we believe there is a need for the government to conduct a full review of the impact of charges on carers one year after the implementation of the Care Act. If, as this report has already indicated it will, evidence emerges that charges are having a negative impact on carers and the
person they care for, any council considering introducing charges should treat this as a warning sign and decide against taking such a step. However, in order for councils to no longer feel compelled to consider charges, the government must plug the gap emerging in social care funding. The government must recognise that investment in support for carers today will mean they can maintain their own health and wellbeing and continue to look after the person they care for in the future – an outcome that is best for them, the person in need of care, local authorities, and our communities as a whole.
**Carers Trust**

**References**


The King’s Fund, (2015), *The Budget: Health and Social Care Funding* (The King’s Fund).


Appendix 1: Freedom of information request sent to all councils in England with responsibility for social care

Dear Freedom of Information Officer,

This is a request for information issued by the charity Carers Trust under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The information requested relates to the implementation by your council of the Care Act 2014 which came into force on April 1st 2015.

We would like to know:

1. What actions your council is taking or intends to take to ensure it complies with Clause 2.23 of the Care Act Statutory Guidance (“Developing a local approach to preventative support”) which requires a local authority to:

   “…provide or arrange for services, facilities or resources which would prevent, delay or reduce individuals’ needs for care and support, or the needs for support of carers. Local authorities should develop a clear, local approach to prevention which sets out how they plan to fulfil this responsibility, taking into account the different types and focus of preventative support as described above. Developing a local approach to preventative support is a responsibility wider than adult care and support alone, and should include the involvement, by way of example, of those responsible for public health, leisure, transport, and housing services which are relevant to the provision of care and support.”

2. Relating to Clause 14 of the Care Act 2014 (“Power of local authority to charge), whether or not your council:

I. Currently charges carers for their own support, or;
II. Does not charge carers for their own support but intends to either introduce charges or consult or debate on the introduction of charges in the next 12 months, or;
III. Does not charge carers for their own support and has no current plans to introduce charges.

3. If your council does charges carers we would like to know further details of how these charges are applied, specifically:

I. How your council calculates the amount a carer will be charged for the support they receive;
II. The average charge per carer in your local authority; and
III. The support services the charges apply to.
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Carers Trust is a major charity working with and for carers. We are seeking the above information from all local authorities in England so that we can monitor the implementation of the Care Act 2014 and work with councils to ensure that it is implemented in such a way that best supports the carers living in their area.

I would like to receive the response in electronic format at this email address policy@carers.org.

It would be helpful if you were to provide any brief notes which might be necessary to understand the context of the information provided, although I recognise that you are not obliged to do this.

If for any reason you feel this request is unclear, please do not hesitate to contact me at 020 7922 7753.

Finally, I understand that you are required to respond to my request within the 20 working days after you receive this letter. I would be grateful if you could confirm in writing that you have received this request.

Yours faithfully,

Matt Hawkins

Policy and Campaigns Officer, Carers Trust