

BRIEFING	TO:	Health and Wellbeing Board
	DATE:	3 rd September 2026
	LEAD OFFICER	Katy Lewis Carers Strategy Manager Katy.lewis@rotherham.gov.uk
	TITLE:	The Borough That Cares All-Age Strategy 2026-2031 and Carer Connect Update

Background

- 1.1** The Borough That Cares All-Age Carers Strategy 2026-2031 was approved by Cabinet on 15 December 2025 and formally launched in June 2026.
- The Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board has requested an update on progress during the first quarter of the strategy's implementation.
- A presentation will be delivered that provides an overview of the launch of the strategy, and the co-design process undertaken with partner organisations to identify key actions.
- Members will also receive an update on the progress of Carers Connect, the new digital tool for carers funded by the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF).
- This item is being presented on behalf of Adult Social Care by the Carers Strategy Manager, who leads on the delivery of the strategy.

Key Issues

- 2.1 Strategy Launch**
- The Strategy was officially launched during Carers Week, on June 9th at an event held at New York Stadium.
- The event brought together voluntary and community organisations and frontline professionals in health and adult social care, who were taken through the commitments in the Strategy and given a demonstration of the Carer Connect website and Robin the integral AI Assistant.
- The event was well attended by 84 key stakeholders chosen for their ability to play an important role in supporting the delivery of the strategy's objectives, contributing to the achievement of its strategic outcomes, and championing the benefits of accessing Carer Connect. In addition 16 partner organisations hosted marketplace stalls to showcase their services for carers and professionals. 20 feedback surveys were received, overall feedback from the event was positive, comments included:
- 'Brilliant session, very informative and interesting to hear of the statistics and research behind the set up of the strategy and the app. Good work and well done to all of those involved!'*

	<i>'The demonstration of the carer app which appears to be a fantastic tool for carers and professionals. The stalls were relevant and focused on additional support available to carers'</i> <i>'The overview of progression, the new Robin interactive assistant is amazing. And we love the name'</i> <i>'To listen to the development and how we can support this fantastic innovation to grow our communities to be resilient and stronger through the community actions'</i>
2.2	Carer Connect Carer Connect is a new web-based digital tool which provides a single place for carers to access information and services relevant to them and their situation, is available via WhatsApp and designed to support unpaid carers 24/7 in any language. The tool has been developed regionally (South Yorkshire) but provides local information dependant on where the carer lives. The digital assistant - <i>Robin</i> - has been named by our local carers, within the development process and designed to allow them to have an 'always available' advisor in their pocket. By using WhatsApp (which over 90% of carers in South Yorkshire said they used regularly) carers have the ability to <i>'have a conversation'</i> with trusted information and advice whenever they need it. From how to use a hoist or where the local carer cafe is, to carer benefits and discounts, the digital assistants are on hand to support 24/7. In addition the digital assistant will keep in touch with carers, sending proactive messages aimed at improving wellbeing, and providing information on new local services and respite care, to ensure Rotherham's carers are better supported. Communication Campaign A multi-channel communications campaign was delivered throughout Carers Week to raise awareness of Carer Connect and encourage engagement from carers, partners and the wider community. Activity included targeted social media content across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, supported by newsletter promotion, storytelling featuring an unpaid carer and an elected member, and targeted media engagement through local press releases. The campaign achieved a total reach of 134,000, generating 30,600 views, 135 link clicks to Carer Connect, and 74 comments and likes across social media platforms. Further promotion was secured through the Rotherham Roundup e-newsletter, which reached over 10,000 subscribers and generated an additional 31 clicks to the Carer Connect webpage. Targeted media engagement resulted in coverage in <i>The Star</i> and the <i>Rotherham Advertiser</i>, while additional exposure was achieved through BBC Radio Sheffield, where Angela Jameel was interviewed about Carers Connect and the support available to unpaid carers across South Yorkshire.

2.3	First Quarter 2026/27 Activity During the first quarter of 2026/27, activity has focused on: - improving the advice, information and guidance contained in the Carer's Directory and the Carer Information Hub to increase the sources and pathways of information for the AI Assistant to navigate; - Collaborating with the Adult Social Care Regulatory Assurance Board as part of the CQC Improvement Action Planning process to identify and prioritise actions that improve outcomes for carers. A review of the Carers Strategy has been undertaken to identify areas of alignment with the CQC improvement priorities. The resulting actions will be progressed through an internal CQC Working Group, providing a coordinated approach to embedding carer-focused improvements, monitoring progress, and ensuring that carers' needs and experiences are reflected across Adult Social Care transformation and quality assurance activity; - RDaSH enhanced its internal induction arrangements to improve carer identification and support. Carers are encouraged to complete a Wellbeing Passport and engage with the Carer Network, which has now reached its first anniversary. In addition, a training package and supporting toolkit have been developed to increase staff awareness of carers' needs and support staff to connect carers with available support services across Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber area. - The Engagement and Inclusion Lead for Patient Experience at The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust developed a programme of staff training to identify carers and produced a carer information pack, incorporating the Carers Directory and links to Adult Social Care support. A dedicated volunteer resource was secured to produce the packs at scale and support their distribution across hospital wards. - Family Action developed a toolkit of resources to support the identification and engagement of young carers. The toolkit is available through the Rotherham Young Carers website. During Carers Week, Family Action also delivered a series of webinars to help frontline professionals recognise young carers and connect them with appropriate information, advice, and support.
Key Actions and Relevant Timelines	
3.1	Carer Connect - June 2026 to April 2027 – pilot use of the tool by carers and other stakeholders - April 2027 – July 2027 – formal evaluation by CC2i - the funded partner - End July 2027 - ARF funding ends and decision of future funding of the tool required (licences)
Implications for Health Inequalities	

4.1	The Borough That Cares All-Age Carers Strategy will progress a range of key priorities that will address the inequalities that impact carers in the community. Carers are recognised as having a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and the Council holds a firm commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty.
Recommendations	
5.1	To note the actions taken to commence implementation of the strategy and the launch of the digital tool, a key element to the multi-channel approach to advice, information and guidance for carers.