

## “No wrong doors for young carers” – An insights briefing

A briefing providing an overview of the findings from a Carers Trust review of the implementation of “No wrong doors: working together to support young carers and their families” template Memorandum of Understanding which was last updated in 2015 to reflect the requirements of the Care Act 2014 and Children and Families Act 2014. The review found how “No Wrong Doors” only appears to be active in 7% of local authorities and to have fallen off the radar for the vast majority of local councils and key stakeholders.

The briefing calls for local authorities, Integrated Care Boards and other key stakeholders to show their support for the forthcoming “No Wrong Doors” refresh to improve whole-system working relating to identification and support for young carers. There are a series of [recommendations](#) set out at the end.

### What is “No wrong doors”?

[“No wrong doors: working together to support young carers and their families”](#) is a template for a local memorandum of understanding (MoU) between statutory Directors of Children’s and Adult Social Services. The MoU promotes a ‘[whole-family](#)’ approach both in relation to assessments and support for young carers. It covers key areas such as identification, information-sharing and safeguarding.

No Wrong Doors was introduced back in 2009 because young carers highlighted the importance of joint working in order to stop them having to tell their story multiple times. Young carers have also talked about the difference that timely and effective support for them and their families can make. Too often young carers reported that this was not happening in practice and services worked in silos.

The template was designed to help promote working together between Adult’s and Children’s social care services and also encourages stronger partnership working with health and third sector partners. By creating a template as opposed to a fixed agreement which cannot be changed, it enables adaptations to suit local contexts and commissioning arrangements. For example, we have already heard from one local council who would like to use the national template for young carers to embed a “No Wrong Doors” MoU for carers of all ages.

The template offers a framework which professionals can use to develop and embed joined up support for young carers and their families. It was originally published by ADCS and ADASS in 2009, with subsequent updates in 2012 and 2015 which also included co-badging by Carers Trust and The Children’s Society.

The intention behind the MoU was that the local, tailored version of the template would be co-signed by the respective Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and then embedded as part of ‘business as usual’ activity, bringing in relevant system partners such as education, health and the voluntary sector.

## Why is “No Wrong Doors” needed for young carers?

Latest estimates suggest there are likely to be more than 1 million young carers in the United Kingdom.

The England and Wales 2021 Census figures showed there to be a minimum of 15,000 children caring for 50 or more hours a week, including over 3000 children aged 5 to 9.

There is increasing evidence highlighting the impact of caring responsibilities on the education, mental health and life opportunities for young carers and young adult carers:

- 1 in 3 ‘always’ or ‘usually’ struggle to balance caring with education<sup>1</sup>
- Young carers are significantly more likely to report severe psychological distress, self-harm, and make attempts on their own life<sup>2</sup>
- Young Adult Carers are 38% less likely to achieve a university degree, and significantly less likely to enter employment.

Despite the scale and the potential impact, young carers often go years without any support. A snapshot survey by the Young Carers Alliance<sup>3</sup> found that on average young carers are caring for more than three years before being identified, with some caring for over ten years.<sup>4</sup>

The Department for Education [Child in Need Assessment data](#) also suggests a significant under-identification of young carers where they care for a parent.

<b>Factor identified</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Alcohol misuse: concerns about parent	64,380	67,250	72,620	73,690	70,310	71,580
Drug misuse: concerns about parent	62,260	64,620	70,870	72,080	67,010	67,000
Learning disability: concerns about parent	12,660	12,660	13,810	13,410	13,330	13,550
Mental health: concerns about parent	129,230	135,330	156,140	157,600	158,330	161,250
Physical disability or illness: concerns about parent	23,240	23,850	25,360	23,970	24,530	24,870
Young carer	16,100	16,520	18,670	17,520	18,110	18,040

<sup>1</sup> “Being a young carer is not a choice; it’s just what we do” Carers Trust, 2023

<sup>2</sup> COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study: Wave 1, 2021-2022, Sutton Trust, 2022

<sup>3</sup> The Young Carers Alliance is a network hosted by Carers Trust, bringing together more than 190 organisations and 500 individuals seeking to improve support for young carers.

<sup>4</sup> From caring to support – we still need to close the gap for young carers” Young Carers Alliance, 2022.

## A review and refresh

To date there has not been any national review or data collection as to how many local authorities have adopted and embedded the “No Wrong Doors” memorandum of understanding. Most importantly, there is little evidence of the extent to which the document is ‘live’ and actively improving the identification and support for young carers and young adult carers.

Partners in Care and Health (a partnership between the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Local Government Association (LGA)) and the ADASS Carers Policy Network have commissioned Carers Trust to undertake a national review, refresh and relaunch of the “No Wrong Doors for Young Carers MoU and accompanying practice guidance. These will be launched in February 2024.

As part of this work, Carers Trust have undertaken a review of current practice, combining desktop research with consultations with key stakeholders such as local authorities and young carer services.

## Findings from desktop research

Carers Trust have reviewed the websites and (where available), Carers Strategies (whether that be a young carers strategy or an all-age strategy) of every local authority in England. We reviewed 153 council websites/strategies in total. Where strategies were not available, we sought to review Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and papers from relevant meetings (e.g. Scrutiny Committees and Health and Wellbeing Boards) and other relevant documents (such as consultations on Carers Strategies). This desktop research is designed to give an indication of the extent to which No Wrong Doors has been embedded<sup>5</sup>.

Based on our review, we adopted a traffic-light system to reflect the current position for different local authorities.<sup>6</sup>

RAG	What it means	Percentage of councils (Number of councils)
Red	No reference to No Wrong Doors or joint working between children’s and adults; or document is 5 years out of date	82% (125)
Yellow	Documents out of date; some reference to joint working	11% (15)
Green	Specifically mentions No Wrong Doors/clear references/actions around joint working	7% (13)

<sup>5</sup> We are mindful that this approach may not reflect every current example of use of the MoU, for example we know that some local Carers Strategies are in the process of being updated so not published, or the principles of No Wrong Doors may be reflected within commissioning of local carer services.

<sup>6</sup> Carers Trust does not propose to publish a list of local authorities by RAG rating, but individual local authorities can contact Carers Trust to find out the evidence for their council.

## **Red Rating**

More than 80% of councils (125) were rated within this category<sup>7</sup>. The vast majority of councils made no reference to “No Wrong Doors”, the ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ or how children’s and adult services will work together to identify and support young carers using a whole-family approach. There were however some councils who reference ‘multi-agency working’ and ‘whole-family approaches’.

Whilst many local authorities had Carers Strategies which were either in-date, or set to expire in 2023, there were a number of areas where the strategy was more than three years out of date, with a handful with strategies dated back as far as 2017/18. There were also multiple areas where we could not find a local Carers Strategy. Many also use 2011 census data. This presents an opportunity for those councils updating their strategies to ensure that No Wrong Doors for Young Carers is reflected in their new or updated strategy.

It is clear from the research that for some local authorities, ‘No Wrong Doors’ had been embedded early on, but has subsequently fallen off of their radar since it was last updated in 2015. For example, one council’s Carers Strategy until 2018 had No Wrong Doors fully embedded and clearly referenced with actions; their current strategy now makes no reference to No Wrong Doors.

Many councils listed relevant legislation, strategies and policy frameworks within their Carers’ Strategies, but No Wrong Doors was not included.

Through this desktop review we also discovered that since the last launch of “No Wrong Doors”, there have been new products also titled “No Wrong Door”; one council had a website for “No Wrong Door” but it was about domestic violence, whilst for another it was a webpage about being able to find council services. One of the conclusions is that the refresh will need to make explicit what is meant by “No Wrong Doors for Young Carers” to avoid unnecessary confusion.

## **Amber Rating**

For the 15 councils with an amber rating, whilst they haven’t adopted the No Wrong Doors MoU, a number of them did acknowledge the need for children’s and adult services to work more closely but did not set any actions to achieve this. Other websites/strategies identified specific actions linked to the No Wrong Doors principles. These included:

- Updating an MoU specifically in relation to transitions for young adult carers
- Increasing number of young carers identified by Adult Services
- Developing a joint approach with all providers of health and adults and children’s social care to support carers of all ages for the lifetime of their caring role.

One of the amber-rated councils did have plans for annual implementation reports, which is a welcome concept – but the last document to reference this was released in 2015 and we could not find any evidence of these implementation reports occurring.

There were also councils who referenced No Wrong Doors in “Further reading” but contained no reference as to how they were implementing it locally.

### **Green rating**

There were 13 councils who were rated green for having evidence to suggest they have adopted/embedded ‘No Wrong Doors’ or where their strategies contained multiple clear actions and commitments relating to joint working across different strands of the MoU (e.g. identification and transitions). The scope of this review was limited to whether ‘No Wrong Doors’ was referenced in strategies and equivalent information; further exploration is required as to whether this commitment is being reflected in practice and the difference it is making. Some examples from areas rated green include:

**Leeds City Council** have recently signed off the MoU across adults and children’s services, but also the Integrated Care Board.

The **South Tees Carers Strategy (Middlesbrough; Redcar & Cleveland)** references the need for integrated working between not just Children’s and Adults social care services, but also early help, education, health and commissioned young carer services.

**Ealing’s** Carers Strategy states how an MoU for young carers has been agreed between adults and children’s, but also the mental health trust and adult substance misuse services.

**Manchester City Council** also highlight in their strategy their legal duty to work together, and the need for particular joint working in relation to safeguarding young carers who are suffering, or are at risk of suffering significant harm.

### **Stakeholder consultations**

Carers Trust also sought feedback from a range of stakeholders, including local young carer services, and staff working in both children’s and adult social care. There was an online survey for young carer services and other stakeholders to reply to, and Carers Trust have attended a number of ADASS regional and national carer lead meetings to seek feedback and the perspective from council adult carer leads. There is also a working group for this project which provided insights from a range of individuals, including those who have worked in social care, young carer services and health settings.

The feedback received clearly highlighted that in most areas, No Wrong Doors is neither active nor embedded either in strategy or in practice. There were a number of respondents from young carer services and also within councils who had heard of “No Wrong Doors” but did not know much beyond that.

When we spoke with Council staff who had worked on carers issues for many years, a number of them remembered No Wrong Doors from the last time that it was launched, but acknowledged that it had not been on their radar recently.

The reasons why people felt “No Wrong Doors” had fallen off the radar can be grouped under two overarching themes:

### **1. Personnel changes**

A number of councils reported both significant turnover in staff during and following the COVID-19 restrictions – both in terms of frontline practitioners, and also commissioners/strategic leads. Staff who have joined local authorities in recent years reported how they had never been told anything about No Wrong Doors, and with other changes in personnel many were similarly not aware. A number of councils said there had been changes in portfolios and so new commissioners/strategic leads have taken on the carers brief.

### **2. System pressures/prioritisation**

System pressures during the peak of COVID-19 meant that work on initiatives such as No Wrong Doors were paused, and for the majority of councils, any pre-2020 work has not been revived subsequently. In addition to councils themselves, we received feedback from multiple young carer services who described how attempts had been previously made to embed ‘No Wrong Doors’ but then lack of staff capacity meant that the work was never completed:

*“A workshop event was organised by the council back in 2017/18 to try and get this signed and sealed. It never got finalised or signed or went any further as far as I am aware. We have worked hard to try and get Adult Services and Children’s Services to work together to support young carers, i.e. for example getting heads of both services to do the keynote speech at our conference, and although we have made some progress we find that it is hard to maintain as both services are under immense pressure with caseloads etc that this kind of initiative falls by the wayside.”* **Young Carers service**

We received feedback from councils who had struggled to get senior manager ‘buy-in’, and that the absence of national guidance or scrutiny/accountability meant that “No Wrong Doors” ‘was seen as a nice thing to have’, but not a priority. Councils also said that ‘No Wrong Doors’ does not appear to have been on the radar of either the Care Quality Commission or Ofsted, and that ‘No Wrong Doors’ isn’t currently mentioned in the current [CQC Assurance framework](#) for their assessments of adult social care, meaning councils preparing for CQC assurance are unlikely to have the MoU in their thinking.

There are positive examples where work on embedding 'No Wrong Doors' continues; examples which can be shared as part of the refresh and relaunch.

For example, in Blackburn with Darwen, *'the MoU is in its final stages of being signed off and they have designed a young person-friendly version.'* Similarly in another local authority, *'the Council adopted No Wrong Doors a number of years ago... there are a number of initiatives where no wrong doors is influencing change within the council's Integrated Front Door approach - this includes a new early help portal which is being trialled.'* However, for that particular council, the young carers service highlighted how joint working depended on having *'engaged officers to make links across departments, rather than it being an overall systemic council approach'*.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this desktop review and feedback received through the consultations, Carers Trust makes the following recommendations:

- The refreshed "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" Memorandum of Understanding should require Adult Social Care Services, Children's Social Care and Integrated Care Boards to be signatories as a minimum.
- All local authorities and Integrated Care Boards should ensure that "No Wrong Doors for young carers" and the principles contained within are reflected in their Carer's Strategy and Integrated Care Strategies.
- The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care should ensure that statutory guidance such as 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' includes an expectation that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards should adopt "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers".
- ADASS, ADCS, LGA and NHS England should formally support/endorse the "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" Memorandum of Understanding and encourage its uptake and implementation.
- Care Quality Commission and Ofsted should ensure that they are asking about "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" and whole family approaches in their assurance of local authorities (Children's and Adult Services) and Integrated Care Boards and that it is referenced within their respective assessment/assurance frameworks.
- The Government should ensure that any future national Carers Strategy sets out how the Government plans to improve whole-system working in relation to identification and support for young carers and their families.

## Next steps

The 'No Wrong Doors for Young Carers' working group will refresh the current MoU using the feedback from consultations and to reflect recent legislation such as the Health and Care Act 2022.

The final MoU and practice guidance is set to be published in February 2024.

## To find out more

Contact Andy McGowan, Policy and Practice Manager (Young Carers and Young Adult Carers) at Carers Trust – [amcgowan@carers.org](mailto:amcgowan@carers.org).

© Carers Trust. Carers Trust is a registered charity in England and Wales (1145181) and in Scotland (SC042870). Registered as a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales No. 7697170. Registered office: Carers Trust, 10 Regent Place, Rugby, CV21 2PN.