

Cabinet

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 25 th September 2024
Report Subject	Flintshire Micro-Care Project
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We, like many local authorities, face pressures in meeting the increasing demand for social care, with a growing older population and care agencies finding it difficult to recruit and retain employees. Delivering care into more rural parts can be particularly problematic.

The Flintshire Micro-Care project was initially a pilot project funded through Foundational Economy, Cadwyn Clwyd, and Flintshire County Council, to support small enterprises and sole traders to deliver direct personal care and well-being services to people in Flintshire. Micro-care enterprises are defined as small companies with five employees, many of which are sole traders, providing care or care-related services to the citizens of Flintshire. Now in its fifth year, the project has successfully embedded itself into the social care offer in Flintshire, as well as providing an additional employment route into social care, with 54 people now working in this area of the sector.

This report will give an update on the position of Micro-Care in Flintshire, some key successes of the previous 18 months, and the future direction of the project.

Following an early evaluation of the scheme it has been identified that Micro-Care in Flintshire is already making a significant contribution to the care market. It is creating sustainable jobs and more localised care solutions for people. Feedback from clients, families and council officers has been extremely positive to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That members note the progress made in the Micro-Care project and the contribution the scheme is making in meeting demand for care in Flintshire.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE MICRO-CARE PROJECT IN FLINTSHIRE
1.01	<p>Pressures on the social care sector are well documented. Flintshire's older population continues to rise significantly, and it is reasonable to assume the number of people with significant health and social care needs will also increase.</p> <p>The care sector in Flintshire is working within an increasingly challenging environment because of a range of factors, including an increase in the complexity of need, an ageing population, rising costs, increasing expectations and regulation, as well as difficulties with recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. As a result of these pressures there is limited resilience in the sector.</p>
1.02	<p>A Feasibility study carried out by Social Firms Wales on behalf of the Council examined the potential for developing Micro-care enterprises in Flintshire. Following the report in January 2019, approval was given to set up a Pilot Micro-Care project in Flintshire. By growing Micro-Care businesses, the Council are creating additional options for meeting the growing demands for care as well as expanding choice. It was hoped that the scheme would help to divert crisis in the care sector as a preventative measure, whilst delivering care which is efficient, effective and person centred. The project also aims to provide opportunities to build resilience in communities through developing local, bespoke solutions to people's care needs and help create sustainable careers in care.</p>
1.03	<p>Micro-Care enterprises are defined as small companies with five employees, many of which are sole traders, providing care or care-related services to the citizens of Flintshire. The project's core aims are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen the care market and raise the profile of care as a career choice.• Bring new people into the care sector or bring back those that had left it.• Develop local bespoke person-centred care solutions across the county.• Expand choice for people looking for care or well-being services.• Help micro-carers to set up and build sustainable businesses.• Create new employment opportunities.
1.04	<p>Micro-Care Current Position</p> <p>There are currently 54 active Micro-Care providers who have been accredited by Flintshire County Council, which is an increase of 24 over</p>

the last 18 months. In that time one Micro-Care provider has ceased trading due to health reasons.

Since establishing the pilot in 2019, the project has successfully supported 62 people to establish their Micro-Enterprise. Two providers have expanded their businesses beyond the scope of Micro-Care and have registered with Care Inspectorate Wales as a domiciliary agency, while six have ceased trading over that time the reasons include three health related, one return to education and return to employment and one who repurposed their business as it wasn't for them.

During the 2023/24 financial year 44 people were supported to explore their ideas for setting up a Micro-Care enterprise. There are currently 15 people being supported to setup as a Micro-Carer by the project team, with enquiries being received on a weekly basis.

There was an initial concern that Micro-Care would appeal directly to those currently employed in the domiciliary care sector, creating a destabilising environment. Therefore, one of the key objectives of the project was to ensure that Micro-Care was able to attract a new cohort of worker into the social care sector, or support those who had left to return. Positively, those objectives are still being met with 79.5% of the enquiries for support to setup as a Micro-Carer coming from people not already working in the sector.

Another key objective was to ensure that the project was focused on helping address the demand for domiciliary care. As a result, the vast majority (83%) of Micro-Carers currently deliver personal care services in people's homes, acting as a pillar of support to the wider care sector and an alternative option for people looking for support.

In terms of service delivery, we surveyed 17 Micro-Care providers on their current activity. This cohort of the workforce are providing 490 hours of support to 102 individuals across Flintshire, per week. Projecting this across all enterprises it can be estimated 1,200-1,500 hours of care and support are being delivered to potentially 300 citizens across Flintshire. 62% of services were for personal care, and 55% of work was purchased using a direct payment. Most support was delivered to older people, in particular supporting people with dementia and their families. However, we have seen Micro-Care delivered innovatively to support people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health difficulties, and children and families.

In a cost benefit analysis of direct payments, it was identified that in one week Direct Payments supported 689 hours of care and support through Micro-Care and the difference in the current weekly cost of Direct Payment Micro Care and potential weekly cost of commissioned agency domiciliary care is £3,822.56 per week. Over 12 months this would equate to a cost avoidance of £198,773.12. See appendix 1.

In addition to this work there are a substantial number of privately funded hours carried out by Micro-enterprises both supporting the wider sustainability of the businesses and contributing significantly to the prevention and early intervention priorities of the Council.

1.05	<p>Recent Successes of Project</p> <p>Flintshire’s Micro-Care project has recently been accredited and featured on the Global Database of Age-Friendly Practices, facilitated by the World Health Organization. This aims to recognise projects across the world that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>promote health and build and maintain physical and mental capacity across the life course; and</i> • <i>enable people, even when experiencing capacity loss, to continue to do the things they value.</i> <p>Being featured on the Global Database is a great credit to the work being undertaken by Micro-Carers for older people across Flintshire and recognises the Council’s commitment to providing progressive age-friendly practices.</p> <p>The project was recognised as a “Highly Commended Finalist” in the 2024 Social Care Accolades. This achievement was recognised within the “Working in Partnership” category, reflecting the cohesive and positive partnership that exists in Flintshire between Micro-Carers, people receiving services, professionals, third sector partners, and the project team itself. Two Micro-Carers and a representative from partners Social Firms Wales attended along with council officers the awards ceremony in Cardiff to receive this recognition.</p> <p>In May 2023 a “Micro-Care Celebration Event” was held to recognise the work undertaken by Micro-Carers across Flintshire. This had over 40 people attend, which consisted of mainly Micro-Carers and strategic partners, to hear about the positive work undertaken by Micro-Carers in their community, the successes people had made of their enterprises, and for the Council to express their gratitude for the service of Micro-Carers.</p> <p>In November 2023 Social Services had a visit from Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer for Wales. As part of this visit the minister was able to meet two Micro-Carers who had recently joined the programme to discuss why Micro-Care was an exciting career change for them and how they were supported by Flintshire’s approach to Micro-Care.</p> <p>As part of the service wide inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales in November, four Micro-Carers formed a focus group to discuss with inspectors the way the project is run by the Council. The project was reflected positively in the inspector’s final report and highlighted as positive practice.</p>
1.06	<p>Direct Commissioning</p> <p>As part of the key objective to ensure Micro-Care was utilised to support demand for domiciliary care, particularly in rural areas, the team have successfully established a “Quality Framework” to enable direct commissioning of micro-carers by the Council. This additional requirement on those Micro-Carers requires further evidence of work they have already done in the community and an initial monitoring exercise on fundamentals such as recording, business continuity and risk assessment. They are also</p>

	<p>then subject to a yearly monitoring by the contracts team to ensure standards of care are being maintained.</p> <p>There are currently ten Micro-Care providers who have signed a contract with the Council to enable the commissioning of social care services. This means that Micro-Care providers can be utilised as an off-framework option for care and support where this is not available through our agency providers. There are a few scenarios where Micro-Carers may be commissioned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No provider can be found on the domiciliary care framework due to capacity, type of support required, or location of the person. - There is an emergency drop in market or provider capacity and Micro-Carers can be used as a short-term contingency. - A person has requested their support be delivered by a Micro-Carer but is unable to manage a direct payment. <p>Five Micro-Care providers have been commissioned by social services to deliver personal care services. This includes a day service, emergency care over a weekend, and a bespoke flexible care package. In addition, housing have commissioned Micro-Care providers to deliver well-being support across sheltered accommodation and warm hubs in Flintshire.</p> <p>The Council worked with a provider on an open-book accounting exercise to ensure our fees for Micro-Care providers were fair but were also sustainable for the Council. Due to the decreased overheads and management costs this fee offers a saving on the current hourly rate for agency run domiciliary care.</p>
1.07	<p>Feedback on the Project</p> <p><i>“The Council are good to work with. I can have really honest conversations with the project officers. The whole team are easily accessible and truly work in partnership with other agencies. They really put the person needing care at the centre of designing whole packages. Flintshire are a listening authority. I feel I am a true partner with them and not just a Third Sector organisation”.</i></p> <p><i>“Project officers have been amazing, could not be faulted. So much to learn at the beginning, they are always on the end of the phone or an email. I don’t feel alone providing Micro-Care. Both are very approachable.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support provided by the officers seems to be at the right level for most people. Thorough, yet not overpowering”.</i></p> <p><i>“The service is proving itself, Flintshire have smashed it!”</i></p> <p><i>“Being a micro-carer has changed my life”.</i></p>
1.08	<p>Feedback on Micro-Carers</p> <p><i>“This support has saved our family”.</i></p>

“My husband is so much better now he has a little independence and can get out and about without me and meet new people. It also means I can take my mother shopping.”

“My Micro-carer is a real lifeline. Without him I would not see anyone.”

“Things are so much better now, I have the help I need to sort things like the garden weeds, my shopping and all appointments, we are off to buy some new shoes today. The Micro-Carer is such a nice person, he is calm and very patient which I find very helpful. My speech is not always understandable to other people, it comes out all muddled up, but my carer tells me to take my time, slow down and think about what I want to say. When I do this, things come out in the right order and make sense.”

1.09

Next Steps

Based on the current demand for Micro-Carers and capacity of those working, there is justification for the project to continue supporting people who have the desire to establish their own enterprise in social care. Therefore, the project will firstly aim to continue to grow the numbers of Micro-Carers in Flintshire. Not only does this have an impact on availability of social care services in the county it also impacts on the economic development with the new business set-ups contributing positively to the local economy.

Secondly the project will look at expanding the numbers of those Micro-Carers who have completed the Quality Framework and can be commissioned. This will require the support of the brokerage team to match available Micro-Carers to those looking for care and support.

There is a need to get smarter and more overt with the marketing of Micro-Care to the community. With resources already being developed from previous financial support from Foundational Economy, a key aim will be to revise the communication strategy to include stronger online marketing through social media, and re-engaging with external services, such as health colleagues, to ensure Micro-Care is an option that can be considered across all areas.

Nationally there is an unclear picture of what Micro-Care is, with Welsh Government undertaking evaluation work to tighten this interpretation and potentially provide a policy position on Micro-Care. The project team is strong on the assertion that the model of Micro-Care utilised in Flintshire is robust, has appropriate due diligence, and acknowledges the limitations influenced on it by social care and employment legislation. Flintshire’s Micro-Care project will look to continue to promote this model to national and regional partners over the coming months and share our good practice with others.

The third evaluation of Micro-Care in Flintshire, undertaken by Social Firms Wales, is due to be published in September 2024. This evaluation, based on the feedback of stakeholders, will give several recommendations that will inform the operational direction of the project in the short, medium, and long term.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>The project was funded through the Foundational Economy Challenge Fund, until March 2024, which provided funding for a full-time officer allocated to Micro-Care, project costs, and seed funding to support new Micro-Carers to establish their business. The Council match funded this with a full time Contracts Officer post, and allocated time from the Contracts Manager and Commissioning Manager.</p> <p>This grant was focused on supporting the establishment of Micro-Care in Flintshire and allowing it to be sustainable without ongoing investment into project costs. Such costs supported through the grant funding have allowed for long term sustainable investments to be made, such as the development of resources for Micro-Carers and marketing resources for the project.</p> <p>The project has now become integrated into our care model and the Council now supports both posts mentioned above. Further funding is being explored to support the development of Micro-Care across the North Wales region, being led by our partners at Social Firms Wales. It is hoped this will bring in the seed funding required to support the initial set up of the small businesses.</p>

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>Officers have contact with established and potential Micro-Carers daily to allow the project to adapt and learn from a newly established element of the social care sector. This also extends to people looking for Micro-Care services and frontline professionals supporting people to look for care and support.</p> <p>Social Firms Wales are near completion of the third evaluation of Micro-Care in Flintshire. This evaluation has canvassed the views of all stakeholders involved with the project, and their views will inform the strategic and operational direction of the project moving forward.</p>

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	<p>Micro-Carers operate under an exemption within the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, which does not require the registration of providers who provide personal care support to less than four people. This does make Micro-Care more accessible as a self-employment opportunity, but lack of oversight from a regulatory body can be seen as a risk.</p> <p>As a mitigation for this, the accreditation and Quality Framework approach in Flintshire offers a level of due diligence and confidence for professionals and members of the public. In cases where individuals are commissioning this support themselves, there is also advice and support available to them</p>

	on the checks that they need to undertake to be satisfied that they are procuring services from a credible and legitimate business.
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5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Direct Payment Cost Benefit Analysis

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>https://www.careatflintshire.co.uk/en/Micro-care/Welcome.aspx</p> <p><i>Micro-Care List -</i> https://digital.flintshire.gov.uk/FCC_MicroCarePortal/Carer</p> <p><i>WHO Global Database for Age-Friendly Practices -</i> https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/afp/micro-care-flexible-wellbeing-and-care-services/</p> <p><i>Social Care Accolades 2024 -</i> https://socialcare.wales/resources/flintshire-micro-care-the-accolades-2024</p>
6.02	<p>Contact Officer: Jane Davies - Senior Manager Safeguarding and Commissioning Telephone: 01352 702503 E-mail: jane.m.davies@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Micro-Care Business/Enterprises – Care businesses providing care services and employing no more than 5 people.</p> <p>Quality Framework – is a document which sets out the core commitment to quality in social care. It is designed to ensure that once all essential criteria are completed a micro-care providers will be trained to a sufficient level and able to undertake care packages via our commissioning team.</p> <p>Foundational Economy Challenge Fund – Funding for a series of experimental projects enable Welsh Government to test how they can support the services and products which every citizen relies, such as care, food and housing.</p>