



# Our strategy.

2025–2030.

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## About us.

Kingston Carers Network (KCN) is an independent charity providing information, advice, advocacy and support to unpaid carers of all ages who are caring for someone with an illness, disability or substance misuse problem.

Our adult carers services include counselling, peer support groups, benefits advice, tribunal representation, mental health support and complementary therapies. Our young carers service includes term time youth groups, holiday respite activities, school outreach, one-to-one mentoring and targeted family support.

With a 30-year track record of delivering carers services and support across Kingston, KCN acts as a strategic lead for unpaid carers in the borough. We co-chair the Kingston Carers Partnership Board and are commissioned to undertake statutory carer assessments and reviews on behalf of the local authority.

We are a network partner of the Carers Trust and member of Carers UK.



## **Our vision.**

A future where unpaid carers are recognised, valued, and enabled to live and care well.

## **Our mission.**

To provide tailored information, advice and support to unpaid carers, advocating for better local services that meet their needs.

# Our values.

## Compassion.

We bring an empathetic and caring approach to our work and ensure that carers are treated with compassion and care by others.

## Authenticity.

We stand with carers and use our independence and lived experience to challenge injustice and champion carers' rights.

## Representation.

We are proactive in putting unpaid carers at the heart of our decision-making so that carers' diverse perspectives are seen, heard and shape our services.

## Expertise.

We recognise carers as experts in their loved ones' needs, bringing innovation to our services through co-production and listening and learning from feedback.

## Relationships.

We build and strengthen peer support and community among carers and proactively create partnerships across the wider care system.

## A carer.

**Someone of any age who provides unpaid support to a family member or friend who could not manage without their help.**

**They may be caring for someone who has a disability, a physical or mental illness or a substance misuse problem.**

# Introduction.

Taking on caring responsibilities is arguably the most selfless act of love there is. However, it can come at significant personal cost – to a carer’s own health and wellbeing, their education, their financial security and career prospects.

Because caregiving largely takes place at home and is often considered a family duty, carers often remain unseen, unheard and unsupported in our community.

## **We want to change that.**

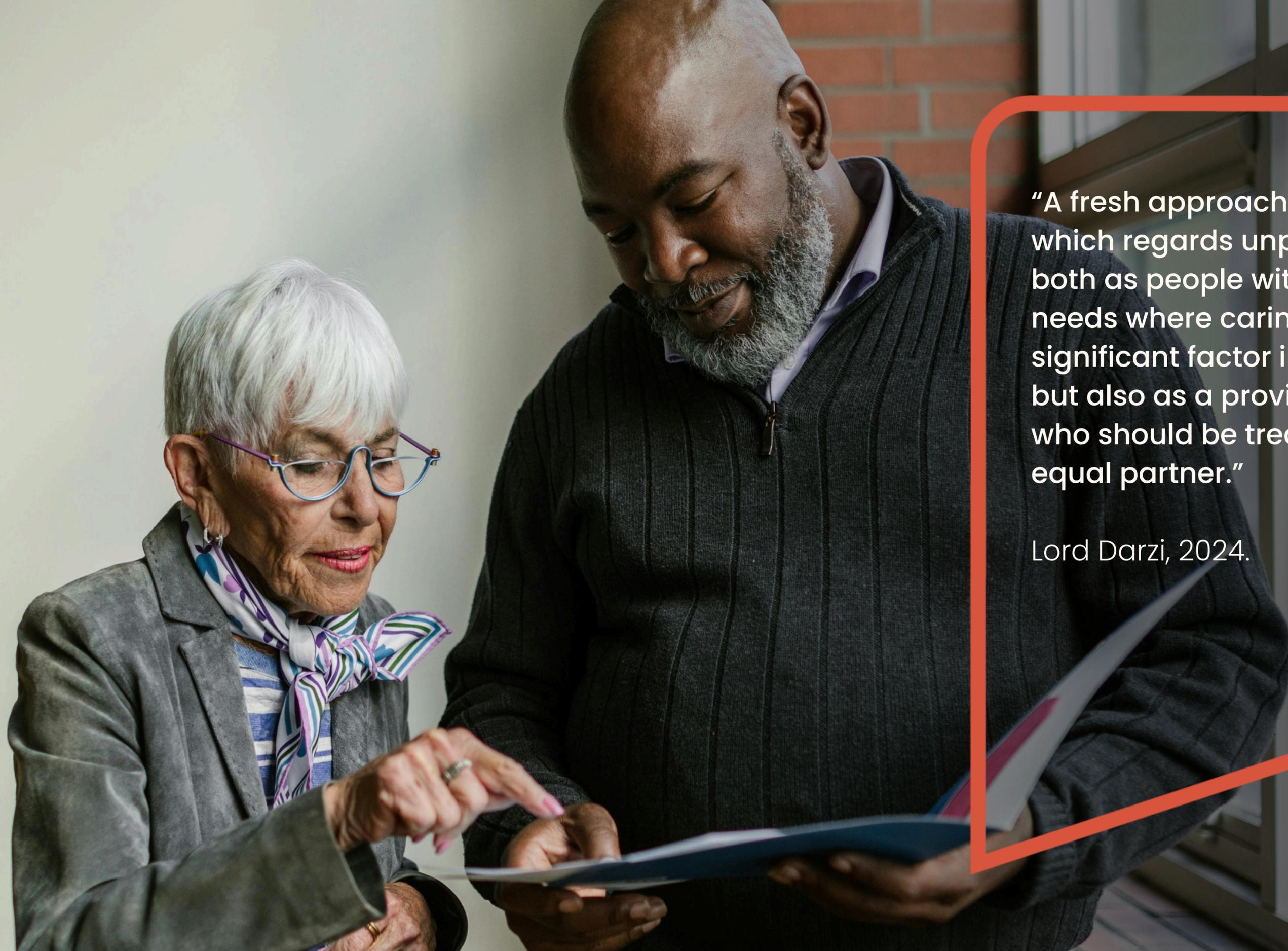
Our vision is a future where carers are recognised, valued and enabled to live and care well. It is a future where carers are supported to provide care safely, have their own health needs addressed and are treated as equal partners in the care of their loved one.

This strategy sets out what we will do over the next five years to help make this vision a reality.

We have developed our strategy within the context of a new NHS 10-year plan. It is an ambitious plan which sets out commitments to roll out a neighbourhood health (and social care) service, underpinned by a focus on prevention, community-based care and digital transformation. We believe that a systems-wide approach to supporting unpaid carers will be critical to its success.

The priorities set out in this strategy have been developed by staff, trustees and carers across the network. Locally, we have drawn on data, carers surveys and issues identified by the Kingston All-Age Carers Partnership Board. Nationally, we have drawn on research and analysis from our network partners.

We remain conscious of an ever-changing landscape for NHS, social care and education provision, not to mention an ever-uncertain funding environment. We therefore commit to taking an adaptive approach to implementing this strategy and to responding to the evolving needs of unpaid carers in the borough.



“A fresh approach is needed, which regards unpaid carers both as people with their own needs where caring is a significant factor in their lives, but also as a provider of care who should be treated as an equal partner.”

Lord Darzi, 2024.

# Carers in Kingston: a profile.

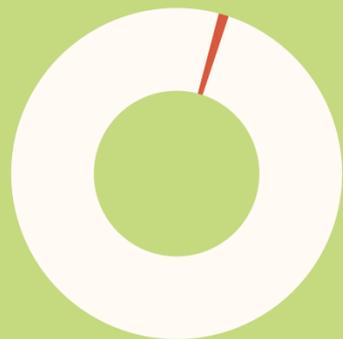
## Number of carers.

Over a fifth (22%) of people are currently providing unpaid care in the UK. This means that there could be as many as

**37,477 unpaid carers in Kingston.**

There are 11,514 self-reported unpaid carers in Kingston, representing 6.9% of the borough population.

The latest Schools Census in Kingston identified only 355 young carers in the borough; whereas health data shows



**Only 1% of carers are recorded as having caring responsibilities by their GP.**

## Age, gender and ethnicity of carers.

The majority of self-reported carers in Kingston are female (60%). They are also concentrated in the 50-64 age group (35%). 71% of self-reported carers are white, with 17% identifying with Asian and 2% with Black ethnicities.

## Caring, disability and additional needs.

**22%** Over a fifth (22%) of carers in Kingston are registered disabled.

## Time spent caring.

One in five carers in Kingston are undertaking

**20-49 hours of care per week.**

One in four carers in Kingston are undertaking more than 50 hours of care per week. National data shows an upward trend in the intensity of caring, with 52% reporting their time spent caring has increased in the past year.

### Carers and employment .

A significant majority (72%) of carers in the borough are of working age (25-64 years). Yet nearly half (42%) of carers in Kingston are not in work. National figures show that 35% of carers have reduced their hours and more than one fifth (21%) have taken on a lower paid or more junior role to fit around their caring responsibilities.

### Caring and finances.



### Caring and health.

28% of carers in Kingston report that they are neglecting their own health needs, in terms of getting enough sleep or eating well. National data reveals that:

**43%** of carers report they had a mental or physical health condition develop or get worse as a result of caring.

**58%** of carers report they face disadvantages in looking after their own physical and mental health.

**40%** of current carers report they have postponed or cancelled a medical appointment, test, scan, treatment or therapy because of their caring responsibilities.

### Value of unpaid care.

The value of unpaid care provided in Kingston-Upon-Thames is estimated at

**£336 million.**

Providing care to a loved one is an almost universal human experience.

Most of us at some point in our lives, will care for or be cared for by someone.

**And yet unpaid care remains the invisible backbone to our society and economy.**



## A simmering crisis...

At KCN, we are seeing carers deal with the fallout of a broken and under-resourced health and social care system. Every day, we support carers trying to navigate a complex and seemingly punitive welfare system. Commitments to reform remain too slow and the positive rhetoric on carers is often not matched with adequate investment or systemic action.

An ageing population in our borough is not only contributing to a growing number of carers – including older carers and ‘sandwich’ carers – it is also contributing to a situation where people are caring for longer periods of time.

Carers are increasingly dealing with their own health needs alongside their caring responsibilities.

While many people still do not identify themselves as carers, they are equally not being identified by the professionals they come into contact with – or by their employers. As a consequence, there remains a significant proportion of unreached carers with unmet needs in Kingston, including those who are hidden in our workforce and in our schools.

We are concerned that without concerted action, carer burnout and carer impoverishment look set to rise and increasingly become the norm.

“There is a real concern that the system in place for supporting carers and enabling carers to look after themselves is insufficient for the actual and potential demand. Carers are essential for providing a flexible response to need that extends beyond clinical intervention and a resource which lowers demand and costs to services.”

Kingston Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2023

## ...or a glimmer of hope?

In spite of these challenges, we choose hope over crisis. We believe change is both possible and necessary.

The universality of caring and its increasing recognition as a social determinant of health presents the opportunity to shift mindsets and practices – whether this is in the workplace, the GP surgery, the classroom or at home.

We believe our vision of a future where carers are recognised, valued and enabled to live well can be achieved through early identification, timely provision of support, and having a genuine choice in the level of care they provide.

A whole-systems approach to carer support would not only be of direct benefit to carers and their families, it would also relieve pressures on our NHS and social care system, as well as bring economic benefits to the local economy by not losing carers unnecessarily from our workforce.



## Strategic Priorities.

As a small, borough-based charity, we're currently facing an unprecedented challenge to do more with less. We're struggling to keep pace with the growing number of referrals and the greater complexity of carers' needs. At the same time, we're navigating an incredibly tough funding environment and rising operational costs.

We recognise that to be sustainable in the long-term, we need to think differently about how we work with and for carers. We want to move our focus away from reactive and crisis-based support to a carer support service centred on early intervention and prevention. We have therefore identified the following shifts we need to make over the next five years:

1.

### **We need to improve our targeting of support to carers.**

This includes better triaging of care, to ensure we are able to provide more timely support to those who need it most. It means investing more in self-directed and peer-based support, including making better use of digital resources. It also means targeted efforts to identify and support those carers who are currently unreached or 'hidden' within our local community and workforce, enabling them to access support before they reach crisis point.

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2.

### **We need to collaborate more within and beyond Kingston's borders.**

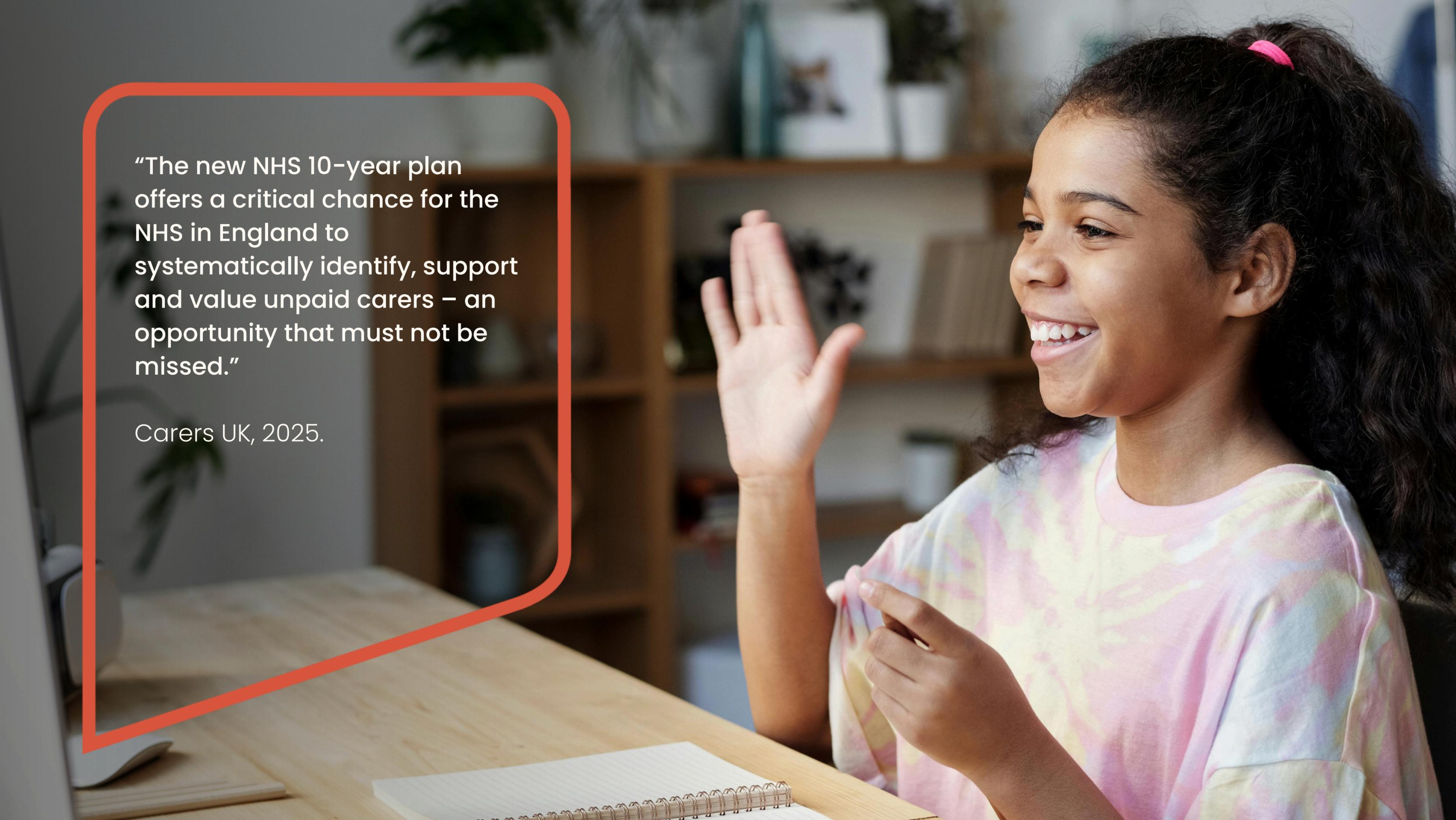
Rather than carers propping up the health and social care system, it is the system that needs to be working for carers. A system-wide approach to carer identification, referral and onward support would mean there are 'no wrong doors' for carers. This requires greater collaboration and coordination between public and community providers, underpinned by greater collective responsibility. We will explore new opportunities to co-locate or co-deliver our services, as well as improve identification and referral pathways between agencies.

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3.

### **We need to centre carer voice and experience in local planning and decision making.**

As a community-based network for carers, we are uniquely placed to ensure carers' needs and experiences are directly informing local planning and decision-making. Ensuring carers have a seat at the table and are genuinely valued as equal partners in health and social care delivery will be essential ingredients for the successful roll out of a neighbourhood health service in Kingston. Young carers' experiences will be equally vital in shaping a carer-friendly education system.



“The new NHS 10-year plan offers a critical chance for the NHS in England to systematically identify, support and value unpaid carers – an opportunity that must not be missed.”

Carers UK, 2025.

# Framework for Change.

The four main pillars driving our work over the next five years will be as follows:



## Carer services and support.

We aim to sustain and grow our services to ensure we keep pace with growing demand and the evolving needs of carers.

### We will achieve this by:

- Developing our specialist support in the areas of mental health and wellbeing, financial hardship and contingency planning
- Designing clear pathways to aid carer identification, referral and onward support across the borough
- Ensuring accredited standards and quality assurance processes form the bedrock of our service planning and delivery.



## Carer voice and governance.

We aim to ensure the diversity of carers' lived experiences are driving the decisions we take as an organisation and those of our partners in health, social care and education.

### We will achieve this by:

- Increasing the number of carers represented in our governance structures
- Creating more structured opportunities for carers to inform the services and support we provide
- Strengthening carer involvement in local planning and decision-making.



## Funding and sustainability.

We aim to build a more sustainable funding base for our organisation.

### We will achieve this by:

- Diversifying our income and building our reserves through increased focus on individual giving, community partnerships and legacies
- Securing multi-year funding partnerships that support our core business functions as well as frontline delivery
- Developing our expertise in capacity-building and technical support to system partners.



## Business operations.

We aim to reduce our operating costs and create greater efficiencies in how we work.

### We will achieve this by:

- Making better use of digital technologies to service carers needs
- Increasing opportunities for people to volunteer with us.
- Capitalising on opportunities to co-locate and co-deliver services with other voluntary and public sector providers.

# Support us.

Our work depends on partnerships both within and beyond the Kingston community, from trusts and foundations through to local businesses and voluntary groups. Whether you are an individual or an organisation, there are a multitude of ways in which you can support our work.

If you are excited by our strategy and want to learn more about our future plans and ways you could get involved, please get in touch using the contact details below:

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*General enquiries and referrals: [admin@kingstoncarers.org.uk](mailto:admin@kingstoncarers.org.uk)  
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**Thank you.**

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