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Council cuts boost homecare

A report suggests that the use of individual budgets is buoyant and the rise of homecare will continue, writes Julie Griffiths

There has been a huge growth in the take-up of individual budgets, according to research by Cairmeagle Associates. And providers are being urged to do more to be prepared or get caught out.

The report was the result of a survey of 81 local authorities regarding their provision of adult social care. It found that the use of individual budgets had grown by 160% in the first half of the year to September 2009.

Matt Cooksley, author of the report admits he was surprised that the figure was so high. He said the uptake has been far greater than he expected.

'They've been pushed by the Government but this shows it really is happening,' he says.

Mr Cooksley says that many providers are ill-prepared for the increased administration that will be required. At present they have one contract with the local authority.



Matt Cooksley:
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are ill-prepared

'But now they're going to have thousands of customers rather than just one. It will be an administrative nightmare for them,' he says.

The survey also showed that there has been a 66% increase in call monitoring by local authorities. It is often disliked by carers, who resent having to clock in and out by phone at each visit, and service users who do not like their phone being used, says Mr Cooksley. Providers may also come to dislike the practice too since it could have an impact on revenue.

'Local authorities will know exactly how much time is being spent with service users. A company might be meant to be spending

5,000 hours and then are found to have only done 4,800 hours, which is what they'll be paid for,' says Mr Cooksley.

John Jackson, joint chair of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services resources network, says that local authorities were trying to make efficiency savings because money was tight.

'Decisions about outsourcing services are a matter for the individual local authority. Each will want to get the best value in terms of both price and quality from the money they spend on adult social care,' he says.

Some councils are evidently facing greater financial

problems than others. The survey found that local authorities are spending less on older people by an average of 2%. But in some areas, they have drastically cut their spend; a fifth of councils have reduced it by 10%.

'That 10% figure was another surprise,' says Mr Cooksley. 'It's a huge amount.'

Mr Jackson says local authorities were doing what they could to make ends meet.

'Local authorities face significant financial pressures as they seek to manage increasing financial pressures with limited resources. This means that they are all trying to make efficiency savings in the way that social care is provided,' he says.

Councils are also focusing on prevention, says Mr Jackson. That journey has started at different times, which explains why the spend varies from one local authority to another.

'They are looking to reduce the need for social care through the use of prevention, early intervention and re-ablement. The impact of this will vary from one authority to another: local authorities are at different stages in introducing these changes,' says Mr Jackson.

Nevertheless, Mr Cooksley warns that spending is likely to continue to be reduced over the next few years. He also expects the independent homecare market to continue growing at the expense of nursing and residential homes. Last year it grew by 6%. This has been the trend for a while, says Mr Cooksley, and is set to continue for the next few years.