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Council refocuses social care services to help more people stay independent

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Devon County Council has set out how it wants to refocus its social care services on helping more people stay or become independent.

A national survey on attitudes towards ageing in the UK found that above all else, the two greatest concerns that people have are 'ill health', and 'losing independence' or 'becoming dependent upon others'.

Evidence also shows that most people would like to stay as independent as possible for as long as possible; and that when people do develop health or social care needs, they'd prefer to get help, where it's available, from family, friends and trusted local voluntary and community services rather than from statutory authorities.



In a report to Cabinet today, (Wednesday 14 June), Tim Golby, Devon County Council's Head of Adult Commissioning and Health, says that for a long time, Devon has provided more formal social care packages to people than they might have received in other areas.

He says that the Council has tended to over-provide, and that when people have asked social services for help and they've been eligible, they've received packages of care that have not always helped to build on their strengths or regain their independence and in some cases have actually ended up making them more reliant on care services.

In other words, that there's not been enough focus on early intervention, short term help and support, or services that help people to maintain their optimum levels of independence.

With an ageing population and a growing number of people needing help and support, the Council has become acutely aware that it needs to change its approach.

It has been looking across all of its social care services – those for young adults with disabilities, people with chronic health conditions and those for older people – to consider how best to support people in the future and how effective the Council is at using its limited resources to best effect.

This has prompted changes in the way the council commissions care from other providers for example, with more expectation now for providers to deliver support that aims to help people who can to become more independent, regain personal care skills and do more for themselves.

The new strategy will see more investment in short term and preventative services that help avoid or reduce the need for more complex care later on. By building on and extending the reach of existing short term services such as 'Reablement', the Council expects to support more people to remain independent and in their own home, which is what people say they want.

The strategy does not signal a change to the council's duties or statutory responsibilities and the Council will continue

to provide support to everyone who is eligible to receive it. However – there is now increased emphasis on working with people, communities and partners to promote independence.



Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Councillor Andrew Leadbetter, the Council's Cabinet Member with responsibility for adult social care, said:

"Getting old or sick and losing our independence is one of the people's greatest fears. We all want to be and stay independent and it is wholly right that we should do all we can to help people do this wherever possible."

"This does not mean a change to our duty to care for those that need our support and we will always support the most vulnerable people in our society. What we are saying is that we should always try to help people be as independent as they can be, to build on their strengths, and help them make the most of the support of family, friends and the support within their local community."

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"This means changing the way that we work and working much closer with health colleagues, with providers of care services and with communities to develop the skills and local resources to support people better and in ways that promote their independence."

"This is not about cutting spending on social care. It's a reminder that our role is as much about supporting people to live as independent and fulfilled lives as possible as it is about ensuring that the right care is available to the most vulnerable people with complex needs."

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