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WELCOME EXTRA FUNDING DOES NOT REMOVE NEEDS, DEMANDS, INCREASED COSTS AND DIFFICULT DECISIONS IN ADULT SOCIAL CARE, SAYS ADASS

Despite welcome extra funding and councils protecting and planning to spend more on adult social care budgets, difficult decisions and more cuts need to be made in the service, according to a survey of 151 adult social services directors in England.

Research published today by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) reveals that the proportion of council spending on adult social care is set to increase by 1.3 per cent – from 35.6 per cent in 2016/17 to 36.9 per cent this year. However, councils are still having to make 8 per cent cuts in overall budgets for a second year in succession due to increasing costs and demand.

Directors plan to make further savings of £824 million in 2017/18, taking cumulative savings in adult social care since 2010 to £6.3 billion. But with a reported overspend of £366 million against 2016/17 budgets, Directors are finding it increasingly hard to implement planned cuts in practice.

Despite a welcome £2 billion in extra funding being made available to help alleviate adult social care pressures, only 31 per cent of responders are fully confident that planned savings for 2017/18 will be met, falling to 7 per cent in 2019/20.

Margaret Willcox, President of ADASS, said:

“Councils are determined to protect adult social services budgets as much as possible, which is reflected in their planned increase in spend on adult social care.

“The welcome £2 billion in funding will help close the funding gap facing adult social care, yet councils still plan to make further savings of £824 million this year which will impact on those who receive care.

“This is because more older and disabled people are living longer and with increasingly complex support needs, as well as financial pressures caused by the welcome national living wage and other cost pressures, including emerging ones from the NHS such as fines for delayed transfers of care.

“For the first time, financial pressures due to the increasing care needs of younger adults with disabilities or mental health problems are greater than those due to supporting older people.

“The opportunity to invest in prevention to reduce future demand is being hampered by the need to help those with greatest and immediate need – those who we have a statutory duty towards.

“With providers continuing to close or return contracts back to councils, more people are struggling to access the care they need and depend on. To help remedy this worrying situation, the new Government needs to tackle the chronic underfunding of adult social care which still remains on a cliff edge.”

Two-thirds of Directors funded their overspends last year from council reserves (67 per cent) and by underspending in other council departments (66 per cent).

The overall net budget for adult social services has risen by 8 per cent this year to £14.2 billion, from £13.1 billion last year.

Despite this, less than 7 per cent of Directors feel at all optimistic about the future financial state of the local health and care economy in their own areas.

The survey also found:

- Directors have major concerns about the sustainability of the care market. Failure within the provider market has affected at least 69 per cent of councils in the last 6 months, while 74 per cent of responders believe that providers are facing quality challenges
- In almost all areas, the existing Better Care Fund (BCF) is providing no more resources in real terms than the existing NHS transfer to adult social care in 2014/15
- The increasing needs of working age adults are having an increasing financial impact. This year's older people's services account for 1.1 per cent of the total 2.8 per cent reported pressures on adult social care budgets, while those for working age people account for more, at 1.7 per cent
- Reduced budgets are making it harder for councils to manage the tension between spending on statutory duties, and prevention and early intervention – the most important priority area to make savings and reduce future need. But spend on prevention forms 6.3 per cent of budgets this year, which is less than last year.

Margaret said: "The need for a long-term solution to establish a strong and sustainable health and care system in the most fair and affordable way has never been more urgent or vital.

"We urge the Government to honour its commitment to the Green Paper, which is key to the solution to ensure certainty and continuity of personal, dignified care for those who need it now and those who will do so in increasing numbers in years to come."

ENDS