

Care Contradictions: higher charges and fewer services

Counsel and Care's National Survey of Local Authority Care Charging and Eligibility Criteria 2006

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September 2006

1.1 Introduction

Times are tight for local authorities and older people needing care and support. Budget squeezes in the NHS have driven more people to seek assistance from local authority social services departments to receive help and support in the community. These departments themselves are also experiencing leaner times, with the result that services are spread more thinly and the creation of increased internal competition for individual service user groups within departments.

Counsel and Care's *National Survey of Local Authority Care Charging and Eligibility Criteria 2006* shows that service provision is badly affected for older people as a direct result of this lack of funding. Counsel and Care has identified three main issues from the survey:

1. There is a triple lottery for services: based on where someone lives; how their local authority applies the eligibility criteria for services; and the charging policy of the local authority;
2. Higher eligibility thresholds mean fewer people receive services;
3. There are high charges for services in some areas: older people have to pay up to £315 per week towards their domiciliary care costs.

2 Demographics

The number of older people of state pensionable age is projected to rise from 11.1 million in 2004 to 15.3 million in 2031.¹ There will also be a larger proportion of the very old (over 85 years) within society, rising from 1.9% in 2002 to 3.8% in 2031. These figures show that there is likely to be an increase in the demand for social care services simply due to an increase in the number of people whose needs may require support. Current service provision appears to be creaking under the strain of providing to the existing needs, and there is scope for improvement in services and provision for this group.

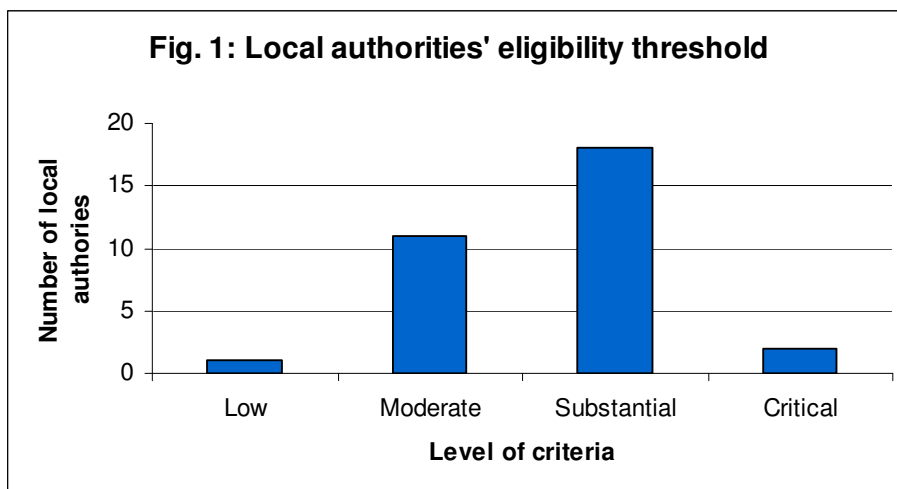
3.1 Thresholds for eligibility

Of the local authorities surveyed, two-thirds now only offer support at the highest criteria levels of critical and substantial – implying that services which offer lower level support are no longer available (see Fig. 1). This means that only those older people who have high dependency needs or have no available support from a family member or other carer are eligible to receive services. (See Appendix 2 for details of the guidance given to local authorities when setting eligibility criteria for social care services.) Those older people who have moderate or low needs do not qualify for services, despite their problems potentially causing a poor quality of life. Earlier in 2006, the Joseph

¹ Office for National Statistics, October 2005.

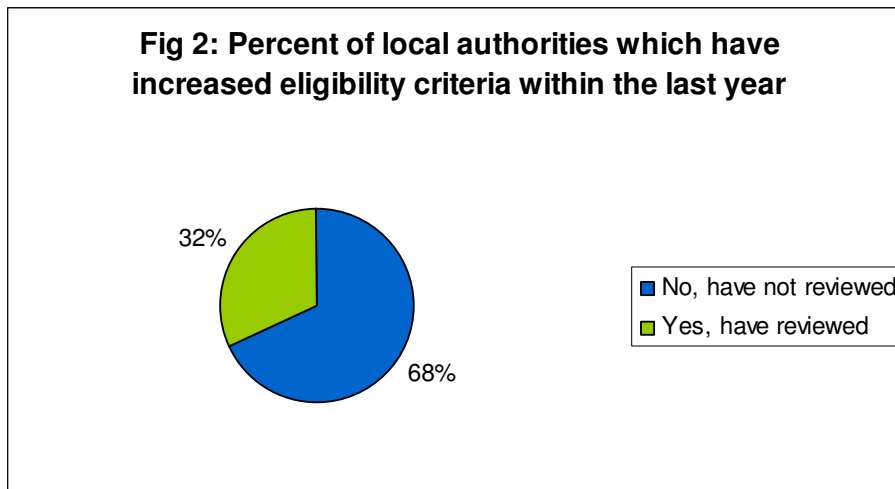
Rowntree Foundation Older People's Enquiry report *That Bit of Help* reinforced that older people value and welcome services which provide a small amount of support for everyday tasks. Services which reduce everyday risk, such as handyman services, etc, are important as a way of maintaining independence, and can enable an individual to remain living for longer in their own home. Counsel and Care is concerned that increasing the criteria for services means that these low level, preventative services are not generally available despite their proven value.

There is a demand for these services, as the calls to the Counsel and Care advice line demonstrate. The service receives enquiries from people who need support and help in their own home, but who do not know how to access this. Many of these services are not available through a local authority, and so individuals will need to pay privately for the support they need.



3.2 Criteria tightening

One-third of local authorities surveyed had reviewed their eligibility criteria within the last year, increasing the threshold at which people are eligible for services (see Fig. 2). The trend is therefore to increase the restrictions on the level of needs which qualify for the provision of support services. This is despite guidance to local authorities which states that attention should be given to those people whose presenting difficulties appear to be low, but are likely to become more serious over time².



4.1 Local authority charges

Local authorities are authorised by legislation to charge for the support services they provide to individuals. For older people, this particularly relates to domiciliary support services, such as meal on wheels, transport, and personal care which can all incur a charge. Local authorities have to ensure that their charging procedures comply with guidance, which state that charges made must be 'reasonable'.³ These charges are known to be different according to local area, due to the flexibility given to individual local authorities. The charges that local authorities make for their services affects the take-up of services, the range and scope of support available, and ultimately can increase the demand for services which offer a greater level of support.

² *Fair Access to Care Services*, 2003, section 21.

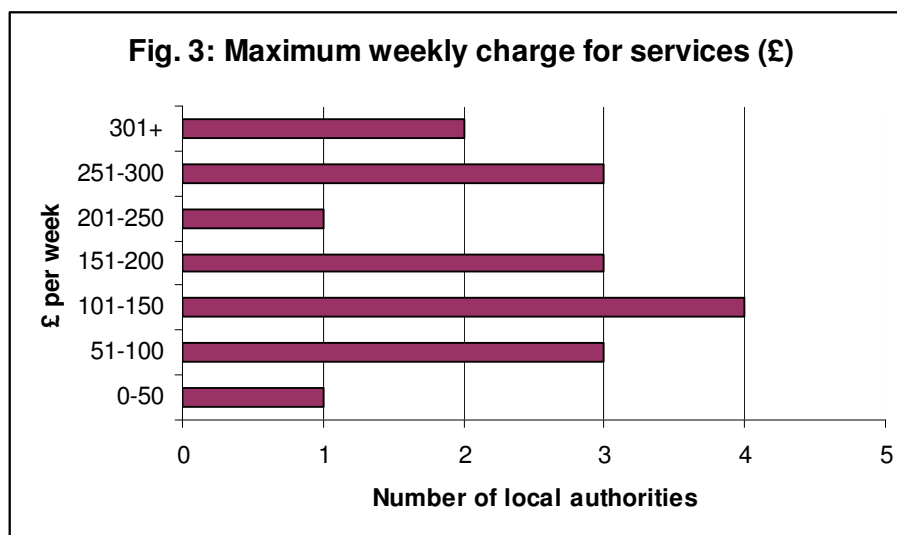
³ *Fairer charging policies for home care and other non-residential social services: guidance for councils with social services responsibilities*, September 2003, section 5.

4.2 Charging for services

The survey highlights the differences that occur between local authorities in terms of the charges they make for services. A small minority (3% of those surveyed) do not charge for home care services, the vast majority choosing to do so. The arrangements within the remaining authorities for collecting money from service users varies. This is because guidance to local authorities says that individual charging procedures should meet particular objectives, but the design of the individual policies is at the discretion of each authority.

4.3 Weekly charging

Of those surveyed, 39% of the authorities do not have a maximum weekly charge for their services. This will clearly result in those people with the highest level of needs and the most support being charged the most for services. Of those services who have a maximum weekly charge, this ranges from £3.91 per week to £315.90 per week (see Fig. 3 below). The average weekly charge made across all those surveyed is £161.64, meanwhile the average weekly income for pensioner households is £306.⁴ With pensioner poverty increasing in importance for the political and policy agendas, this drain of income on support services must be considered by policy-makers.

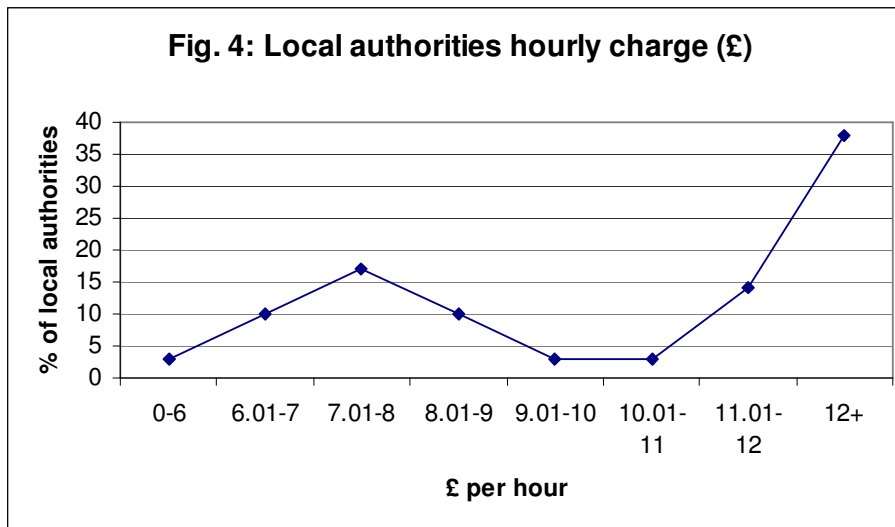


⁴ Clerical Medical Pensions Report, 2006.

4.4 Hourly charging

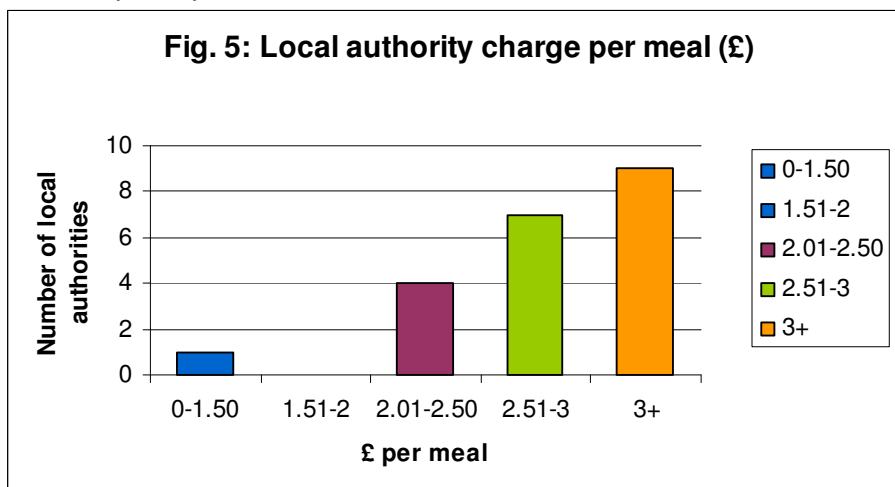
Of the respondents who charge for services, 87% make an hourly charge for home care support. The lowest charge is £5.15 per hour, rising to the highest charge of £16.50 per hour (see Fig. 4). The average hourly charge for services is £10.39.

These figures again have implications for those pensioners on lower incomes. Charges for services may prevent some people taking up the required support services due to financial pressures.



4.5 Fixed charges

Some services offered by social services departments are charged at a fixed price per unit, for example, meals on wheels, or community transport services. The average charge for meals on wheels is £2.59 per meal, but can range from £1.50 to £4.10 per meal (see Fig. 5). Community transport is charged up to £2.50 per trip.



5 The policy vision for older people

The survey asked whether local authorities had published an older people's strategy, which would outline how the local authority plans to develop and improve services for older people, as well as the timescales and means for carrying out this work. Nearly one in five of the authorities did not have an older people's strategy, and of these, half had no plans to put one in place.

Whilst the presence of an older people's strategy does not necessarily mean that operational issues are without problems, the lack of a strategy for older people is a key indication that the particular needs of an ageing population are not being given due consideration within a local area. In view of the increasing proportion of older people in the total population, it is essential that local authorities, as the key providers of services, are attuned to the needs of their local population. It is only through a specific focus on services for older people that services can be improved and developed with any strategic focus for the future. This strategic focus is vital to ensure that services are sustainable and effective.

It is, however, positive that 79% of local authorities do have an older people's strategy in place. Key to ensuring the success of these documents is continued involvement of older people to ensure that services continue to meet needs.

6 Recommendations

1. Underfunding leads to inconsistency in services: there needs to be not only an increase in funding, but a more strategic approach to the way funds are used.
2. Funding of preventative services has to be addressed, as more local authorities raise criteria to the highest levels. This works against the Department of Health intention to move more health services closer to the community, along with the specific aims of the recent Health and Social Care White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*. Independence, control and choice are elements which characterise the system the Department of Health hopes to achieve for social care users, but these aims are currently far from reality.
3. Independent advice and information services are key so that older people, and their families and carers, are able to navigate the social care system. The pressure on social services staff means signposting and assistance to arrange services for an individual is often overlooked. This is particularly important for those people whose needs have been assessed as below the criteria for eligibility. They may wish to set up their own provision, but need to know how to do this.

7 About the survey

In May 2006, Counsel and Care sent a short survey to all local authorities in England and Wales, 172 in total. 33 returns were received, representing 19% of local authorities. See Appendix 1 for the full survey.

The survey questioned each authority about their charging procedures and levels for home care services for older people. Minimum and maximum limits were asked for, as well as whether the criteria for services had changed during the previous year.

Counsel and Care was looking for evidence about whether services for older people had been reduced or tightened due to budget pressures from central Government. The advice service has received an increasing number of enquiries from people who have experienced a cut back in services, or a lack of provision in their area.

With figures and statistics to support our argument, Counsel and Care wants to highlight the problems that these cuts in services cause to older people, and the effect it can have on their quality of life.

8 About Counsel and Care

Counsel and Care is a national charity that aims to get the best care and support for older people, their families and carers. We work with older people and their carers to ensure they are aware of and receive their rights and entitlements, and promote choice and control in later life. We operate an advice service which deals with 25,000 enquiries per year, through telephone calls, emails, letters and our website. The frequency of contact we have with older people and the issues raised through this service are used to inform our campaigning and lobbying work.

The advice service is an expanding part of the organisation as ever-increasing numbers of people are in need of advice and guidance about issues affecting older people, particularly on care and support. Enquiries are answered in detail and are followed up with a tailored letter which emphasises the options available in each case, and which provides a resource which people can revisit for guidance.

Counsel and Care has published the 'Care Home Guide' and 'Brief Care Home Guide' which have both proved to be an extremely popular resource for older people and their relatives who need more information about moving into a care home.

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Appendix 1

Counsel and Care Local Authority Charging Survey September 2006

1) How many people over 60 live in the area covered by your local authority?

2) In numerical terms, how many older people does your local authority support to live at home?

3a) After applying the Fairer Charging means-test, **what do you charge** for the following services?

Meals on Wheels: £.....per meal/week (please delete as appropriate)

Community transport: £.....per journey/week (please delete as appropriate)

3b) Do you have an hourly charge for other home care services?

YES / NO

3c) If YES, what is this charge per hour? £.....

4) Do you have a **maximum weekly charge** for care services?

YES / NO (please delete as appropriate)

4a) If YES, what is this figure? £..... per week in 2006-07.

4b) If NO, does this mean service users are charged a total sum for the hours of care received?

.....
.....

4c) Please send us a copy of your homecare charging policy.

5a) What level of criteria do you use when deciding who is eligible for social care services? (eg, low, moderate, critical, substantial)

.....
.....

5b) In the last year has your local authority reviewed the level of need required to be eligible for social care services according to the **Fair Access to Care** policy guidance? (for example, from substantial to critical)

YES / NO

5c) If YES, please give details

.....
.....

5d) If YES, have you measured the impact of the review? Please give details.

.....
.....

5e) We would be grateful if you would send a copy of your charging criteria with this survey.

6) Does your local authority have an **older people's strategy** in place?

YES / NO (please delete as appropriate)

6a) If YES, when was this developed?

.....

6b) If NO, are there intentions to develop such a strategy?

.....
.....
.....

Appendix 2

Fair Access to Care Services, para. 16

Low – when:

- There is, or will be, an inability to carry out one or two personal care or domestic routines; and/or
- Involvement in one or two aspects of work, education or learning cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- One or two social support systems and relationships cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- One or two family and other social roles and responsibilities cannot or will not be undertaken.

Moderate – when:

- There is, or will be, an inability to carry out several personal care or domestic routines; and/or
- Involvement in several aspects of work, education or learning cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- Several social support systems and relationships cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- Several family and other social roles and responsibilities cannot or will not be undertaken.

Substantial – when:

- There is, or will be, only partial choice and control over the immediate environment; and/or
- Abuse or neglect has occurred or will occur; and/or
- There is, or will be an inability to carry out the majority of personal care or domestic routines; and/or
- Involvement in many aspects of work, education or learning cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- The majority of social support systems and relationships cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- The majority of family and other social roles and responsibilities cannot or will not be undertaken.

Critical – when:

- Life or, or will be, threatened; and/or
- Significant health problems have developed or will develop; and/or
- There is, or will be little or not choice and control over vital aspects of the immediate environment; and/or
- There is, or will be, an inability to carry out vital personal care or domestic routines; and/or
- Vital involvement in work, education or learning cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- Vital social support systems and relationships cannot or will not be sustained; and/or
- Vital family and other social roles and responsibilities cannot or will not be undertaken.