‘Unprecedented’ elderly population boom in rural England pushes local services to breaking point, councils warn

Wednesday 17 January, 2018

Embargoed until 00.01am on Wednesday, January 17, 2018

The number of elderly people in county areas has risen by half a million in just three years alone, and council leaders warn this population boom is creating ‘unprecedented’ pressure on local services due to ‘outdated’ government funding.

Figures from the County Councils Network (CCN), which represents all 37 county councils in England, shows that the that the over 65s population growth in those areas rose on average by 10% between 2013 and 2016, higher than any other part of England and the national average, and ten times steeper than average county population growth of 1.74%.

In total, the over 65s population has swelled in rural county areas by 485,648 in that period, with Northamptonshire seeing the highest percentage increase of 12.5%. This has helped fuel the current NHS ‘winter crisis with hospital and social care services under intense pressure. In total, 28 out of 37 counties have a higher over 65s population increase than the national average.

But because this population boom is not recognised in the way government funding is distributed to councils, county leaders are warning their residents will face ‘disproportionate cuts’ compared to England’s urban areas, as they are being left tens of millions short to keep up with demand. This is forcing many of them into considering introducing new charges for social care and cutting other services elsewhere, such as children’s centres and libraries.

CCN is calling for the government to provide additional resource to close an estimated £2.54bn funding gap for county councils by 2021, which is due to present and projected demand for services, including from a rapidly ageing population. The network argues that the Department of Health & Social Care should set out steps to ‘fairly’ fund county social care services as part of its green paper this summer.

Over the next two years, residents in counties will receive just £161 of core funding per head by the end of the decade compared to an England average of £266 and £459 in London, and their funding from government will almost half over that period.

County leaders say that the way funding is distributed to local authorities is ‘outdated’, as it does not take into account population growth since 2013, because the formula that the government use was frozen that year.

The government has recognised that its methodology funding for councils needs updating, and is currently consulting on a new system, scheduled to be implemented in 2020.

CCN welcomes this, but warns that unless the new methodology recognises elderly population growth, and adequately funds local authorities based on their growing populations, any new system will be ‘unsustainable’, with money failing to meet demand, putting at risk local services in future.

Councillor Colin Noble, health & social care spokesman for the County Councils Network, and leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“We are dealing with an elderly population boom on an unprecedented scale, creating significant pressure at a time when we can scarcely afford it, with counties facing severe financial difficultly that threatens existence of highly-valued public services and means we have to reluctantly consider charging for other life-critical services.

“Of course, people living healthier and longer, not to mention choosing to live in our historic counties, should be celebrated. But this growth – and therefore extra demand - is not reflected in the way that our councils are presently funded. This is outdated, unfair, and unsustainable in the long-term.

“Fortunately, the government recognises this. We want to work with Ministers on the fairer funding review to devise a new methodology and new ways that sustainably funds councils based on what they need to

Related Sectors:

Government ::

Related Keywords:

County Councils Network :: CCN :: CCN Conference :: Fairer County Funding :: Counties :: County Council :: County Councils ::

Scan Me:

deliver services. Elderly population growth should be a key indicator in this.

"At the same time, if social care services are to become sustainable, the forthcoming green paper must set out a variety of options to fund services, including tax, spend, and insurance options."

Dan Bates, from Pixel Financial Management, who helped collate the data, said:

"Population data, the most significant driver in funding formulae, won't have been updated for seven years by the time the local government funding is recalculated in 2020/21.

"Over this same period, there have been significant demographic shifts particularly in respect of older people which have not been fed through to local authority funding allocations.

"Looking forward, a fair funding system needs to be sufficiently dynamic to reflect changing population patterns so that increasingly limited resources are targeted according to needs."

Top five counties facing elderly population boom

- Northamptonshire – 12.5% (against a total population increase of 3.2%)
- East Sussex – 11.9% (against a total population increase of 2.5%)
- Cheshire East – 11.8% (against a total population increase of 0.6%)
- North Yorkshire – 11.7% (against a total population increase of -0.11%)
- Worcestershire – 11.6% (against a total population increase of 2%)

Elderly population growth by local authority type

County council – 10.11%
Unitary authority – 9.18%
London – 8.98%
Metropolitan authority – 6.98%
England average: 9.11%

Notes to editor

- CCN is the national voice for England's county councils. It represents all 27 county councils and 10 county unitary authorities. Collectively, they represent 26 million people, or 47% of the country's population. It is a special interest group of the Local Government Association. For more information, visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk
- For a full list of all 37 counties' population growth, contact Ian Burbidge, CCN's communications officer on 020 7664 3018 or email ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk

Company Contact:

County Councils Network

T. 07595425375
E. ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk
W. https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk

Additional Contact(s):
Ian Burbidge - Media and Communications Officer - ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.pressat.co.uk