

'It feels rushed and undignified'

Most councils in England are imposing unreasonably short time limits on care for the elderly at home, a survey by the UK Homecare Association has found.

Carers report feeling "pressurised" into rushing through appointments.

Jayne Kirwan is the kind of person you'd want looking after you if you were vulnerable, and feeling your age.

She became a carer because she wanted to do something rewarding, and her passion for her job is unmistakeable.

She's determined to ensure that every elderly person she visits gets a bit of love and attention as well as the basics of care.

But she finds it harder and harder to fit all that into her tightly packed week.

Jayne works in Leicestershire, visiting as many as 15 different people a day. She says she feels increasingly as if she's working against the clock.

When I meet her, she's about to see Joyce Friend, who's in her eighties, and needs help with washing and dressing.

Joyce's face lights up when we walk in. While Jayne gets to work running her bath, Joyce tells me how much she values her visits.

"Some days I only see Jayne," Joyce says. "She's fantastic - always cheerful. We get on famously. I've really picked up since I've been seeing her."

There's a great rapport between the pair, and Jayne makes sure she has time for a proper chat before we leave.

"To see the smile on someone's face, to know they're being properly looked after - that means a lot to me," she tells me as we head for her next visit.

Joyce's visit is over half an hour long, but Jayne does sometimes have to be in and out of someone's house within 15 minutes.

"You can't do anything in 15 minutes," she says. "You go in, say hello, log your arrival by phone, read the care plan, have a chat, and the 15 minutes is gone before you get around to doing any care at all."

That's why the company which employs her, Help at Home, has stopped accepting council requests for 15 minute calls.

They say they've had more and more requests for short visits, many of which they say are entirely unrealistic, especially for people with dementia.

"The whole care service feels rushed and undignified," says Jayne Young, business development manager for Help at Home. "Carers feel pressurised to hurry people, and it takes away their independence - it takes away their trust."

But Leicestershire County Council say they commission shorter calls because they used to find themselves paying for longer visits than people needed.

"It's important that we get the payments to the agencies right," says Mick Connell, adults and communities director at Leicestershire County Council.

He says the system is flexible. "If the carer said there was insufficient time, we would look at it and provide more time," he tells me, adding that financial pressures on council budgets mean he has to make difficult decisions.

It's people like Jayne Kirwan who see the consequences of those decisions. But she remains determined not to pass her stress onto the people she cares for.

"You'd never leave someone half dressed because you've run out of time," she says. "Sometime you do feel pressured, but I don't rush. I like to give quality of care - that's what it's all about."

Story taken from BBC News