

# Elderly at risk as care homes close with days' notice

**Chris Smyth, Health Editor**

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MPs are warning that the shock of eviction from care homes could seriously harm the health of frail older people JONATHAN BRADY/PA

Care homes are closing with as little as nine days' notice, forcing hundreds of vulnerable residents to scramble to find somewhere to live.

Dozens of homes closed last year with less than three months' notice and there are warnings that the shock of eviction could seriously harm the health of frail older people.

Many “zombie” homes are teetering on the edge of bankruptcy as councils force down the rates they pay for care, according to an investigation. It comes as the Commons public accounts committee condemns a key government policy to join up care as a trick to take cash from the NHS to bail out councils.

Hundreds of thousands of older and disabled people are going without help at home as councils cut spending on social care. NHS bosses have warned that this is piling pressure on hospitals as they end up in A&E departments.

A £5 billion government scheme known as the Better Care Fund was meant to help cut hospital admissions and get people home sooner by pooling NHS and council budgets.

However, MPs say in a report published today that it has “failed to achieve any of these objectives”. The report says: “In practice, the fund was little more than a complicated ruse to transfer money from health to local government to paper over the funding pressures on adult social care.”

Separately, figures gathered by *Channel 5 News* under the Freedom of Information Act found that 59 per cent of councils that responded had recorded care home closures in 2016. Of the 144 home closures, 58 happened with less than three months’ notice.

Caroline Abraham, director of Age UK, said: “It is worrying that so many care homes are closing and especially a high number at such short notice. If people have to move abruptly from the place they know as home it obviously will cause huge distress and could also seriously undermine their health.”

She said that it was becoming very hard to find a decent care home place in many parts of the country, adding: “It is appalling in a civilised society that we are failing to provide a life worth living for older people.”

Nadra Ahmed, chairman of the National Care Association, which represents small and medium-sized homes, said: “Providers are doing their best to give adequate notice. But once you’ve given notice what generally happens is it’s very, very quick. Within weeks you start to lose your staff, you start to lose your residents and it becomes even more of a challenge to keep a home open.”

Simon Boughey said that he was given just nine days to find a new home for his sister Ruth, who has severe cerebral palsy, when the Harbour Close home in Runcorn closed last year.

“She was ripped away from the very close associations with the carers she had developed over the previous seven to eight years or so, who loved her and she loved them back,” he said.

Scope, the charity which ran the home, said that inspectors had found problems which made shutting it the best option, and residents had been helped to find new homes.

4 comments

For comment

Christian Wilse

Be more creative and sensible with packages of care to keep people who can be at home, at home. Aim to keep people safe and inspired. There is no problem with in-home care if there is a willingness to share the work and assign tasks properly.

George Donkin

When organisations like Scope are forced to close homes there is clearly much wrong with the funding mechanisms. Continuing care must become an NHS responsibility and charging introduced using the current criteria.

Only then can decisions be made on relevant criteria and the temptation removed from local authorities to go slow on transfers, thus delaying costs.

The NHS is used to running large and small hospitals, why not create long stay units, with individual rooms, on the same sites.

E Post

So the "Better Care Fund" is deemed by "*the Commons public accounts committee condemns a key government policy to join up*

*care as a trick to take cash from the NHS to bail out councils" and the report states "*

*"In practice, the fund was little more than a complicated ruse to transfer money from health to local government to paper over the funding pressures on adult social care."* But surely the NHS Continuing Healthcare law, regulations and guidance demands that the NHS pays for Complex Care Packages? If you look at the Decision Support Tool and other NHS Continuing Healthcare guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-framework-for-nhs-continuing-healthcare-and-nhs-funded-nursing-care>, people with dementia, paralysis or many complex conditions are entitled to NHS funded care. The NHS commissioners merely appoint Local Authorities as care service providers to deliver that care. The problems stem from inadequate and unsuitable care services being commissioned by the NHS. Irrespective of whether NHS, Local Authority or private companies are given the contracts, they should all still meet the CQC regulations.

Mrs Pauline Royston

Sounds way too complex and above the pay grade of some of these decision makers. Many cases quoted here in the times of rejections for care by these same committees. None of whom want to grant the care packages, as it is a Peter and Paul situation. No wonder care homes are folding. Imagine the time required to apply and achieve this extra funding for their clients. Only the toughest families obtain this funding, and they are the highly intelligent aware ones.