

Nearly half of all care homes are below standard, watchdog warns

By Patrick Sawyer

FOUR in 10 care homes for the elderly do not meet expected standards, the health regulator has warned.

One in three social care facilities is rated as requiring improvement – and a further 7 per cent provide “inadequate” services, according to Andrea Sutcliffe, the Care Quality Commission’s chief inspector for adult social care.

In an article for the *Telegraph* website, Miss Sutcliffe writes: “There are concerns about safety and leadership, and many nursing homes are struggling.

“There is too much variation – yes nearly 60 per cent are good or outstanding, but a third require improvement and 7 per cent are inadequate.”

She added: “In this climate, it is critical that responses from local services to financial pressures do not increase risks to people’s health, safety and well-being.”

Miss Sutcliffe was writing ahead of the Government’s spending review, which will set departmental budgets for 2016-20. Funding for the NHS will be protected, but there are fears that council grants will be cut substantially, increasing pressure on funding for social care services, paid for by councils.

Local authorities say £4.6 billion has been cut from social care budgets over five years, and that George Osborne’s decision to raise the minimum wage to £7.20 an hour, and £9 by 2020, will add to the crisis by driving up costs.

Miss Sutcliffe’s remarks follow a

stark warning about the future of the sector from Guy Hands, head of Terra Firma, the private-equity firm that owns Four Seasons, Britain’s biggest chain of care homes.

He warned, in an interview with *The Guardian*, that care homes will start closing down or being put up for sale next spring if George Osborne does not ease financial pressure on the sector.

He said a quarter of his company’s homes were making a loss, and some would “inevitably” have to close.

“For the last three years, we have assumed the Government would look at the economic effect of their policy and make a decision,” he said.

“I don’t think the effects will be felt this winter, but next April or May is when you will see care homes closing or for sale.”

Separately, the head of a major independent review of the social care system warned that ministers will face a growing “public outcry” when the full implications of the crisis are felt.

Dame Kate Barker said that thousands of elderly people risk being condemned to a “miserable” end to their lives following a government about-turn on capping care costs.

Miss Sutcliffe said cuts in funding, rising costs and demand for care have already placed a huge strain on homes and adult care services. She uses what she calls the “mum test” when assessing institutions, asking “Would I put my own mum in here?”

Andrea Sutcliffe: telegraph.co.uk

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