

News

Elderly at risk as care homes close with days' notice

Chris Smyth Health Editor

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 lit-

tle 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 be-

comes 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.