

Police look into care home claims

Greg Hurst Social Affairs Editor

Police are investigating up to 12 deaths of residents at care homes run by a private company after allegations were raised about a lack of care.

West Sussex council has suspended the placement of elderly people or adults with learning difficulties at eight of the 20 homes run by Sussex Health Care and offered residents the chance to move.

On Friday police met families whose relatives' experiences are the subject of its inquiry and told them that the investigation was at an early stage.

Sussex police said that concerns had been raised about alleged lack of care and safeguarding for 43 residents, 12 of whom had died. It added that no criminal offences had been established.

The local authority has identified two of the residential homes involved, the Laurels and Orchard Lodge, both in Horsham, about which it said it had "significant safeguarding concerns".

Until last month the local politician in charge of social care policy, Peter Catchpole, was a paid adviser to Sussex Health Care. He has since stepped down as deputy leader of West Sussex county council, which said that he had not been involved in decisions or briefings relating to the company.

Sussex Health Care did not respond to a request to comment but has previously said that it had put measures in place to ensure residents' safety and appointed an independent expert to review its procedures at all levels.

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