

# Nine care homes 'to be investigated' amid claims of 100 deaths

NINE care homes are being investigated over safety concerns, as family members claim as many as 100 deaths could be examined by police.

The homes, all run by the company Sussex Health Care, are being scrutinised following serious concerns over the safety of patients.

Initially only two homes were named by the local authority, but now seven more care homes at the centre of the police investigation have been identified.

A spokesman for Sussex Police would only confirm it is looking into 43 cases of alleged "lack of care and safeguarding", 12 of which involved a death.

But the relative of one resident said he was told the number of deaths being investigated by police could run to 100. Adrian Tilley's mother Valerie's death is one being investigated. The 79-year-old died after a fall at Longfield Manor in Billingshurst, West Sussex. Mr Tilley said that "the police say the final investigation could be into five deaths or it could be as many as 100; they just don't know".

Last month West Sussex County Council admitted that it had stopped placing people at eight homes, but would reveal the names of only The Laurels and Orchard Lodge. On Monday it confirmed investigations at Beech Lodge, Beechcroft Care Centre, Kingsmead Lodge, Longfield Manor, Rapkyns Care Centre, Rapkyns Nursing Home and Woodhurst Lodge. A meeting between police and relatives, along

with health authorities and the West Sussex Coroner, was held in August. The council says that the nine care homes are "the subject of a multi-agency safeguarding investigation being undertaken by West Sussex County Council, the Care Quality Commission, and Sussex Police. The provider is working with the agencies to provide the information requested".

A Sussex Health Care spokesman said: "We are committed to assisting them in any way we can and positively await the conclusion and the outcome of the investigation.

"Our priority at all times is to provide a high standard of care to every person we support. As a responsible provider, we have always invested in our staff and services to make sure we have the right resources available to provide that care.

"This is reflected in our Investors in People accreditation, by the respected experts in their field that we are proud to have as members of our care teams, and by the awards we have received from professional healthcare bodies over many years. In the past months, we have invested further in our care team, bringing in an independent expert with decades of experience to provide direct support to the teams at our homes and services. We have written to residents and relatives and will continue to keep them up to date on progress."

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