

Calls for shake-up of care home complaints after 95-year-old woman was abused

By Katie Morley

THE Government is under pressure to overhaul the way complaints about care homes are dealt with after the family of a 95-year-old abuse victim waited four years for compensation.

Last night, competition watchdogs said the current system needed urgent reform and called on Matt Hancock, the Health and Social Care Secretary, who is due to publish a Green Paper on reforming the care sector, to consider giving greater powers to relatives poorly treated by care homes.

At present, families must first address concerns to care homes themselves, before having their case heard by an ombudsman with no powers to enforce punitive compensation.

This newspaper today reveals a shocking case of abuse of a dementia patient in Cornwall.

Audio recordings obtained by the *The Daily Telegraph*, document abuse of Betty, 95, a care home resident with dementia in 2015.

Her carers can be heard talking

about having put soap in Betty's mouth as a punishment and refer to her as "minger", "disgusting little reprobate" and "horrible" while in her presence.

Despite the harrowing evidence and a police report concluding there were wider failings in the care home, her family have had their requests for compensation ignored for four years.

Following *The Telegraph's* involvement, they have now been offered a six-figure payout and written apology from the home's management, which has since changed hands.

Norman Lamb, a former care minister, said Betty's case showed the need for a stronger mechanism for families to have their complaints heard.

He said: "There are a whole load of horrors that go on in the care sector and public policy needs to be aimed at how you avoid those things happening in the first place."

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan, a Labour MP who is campaigning for care home reform after finding her own 76-year-old father bruised and bleeding in a home, said: "It's unacceptable for companies

to operate in an irresponsible manner, and they're getting away with it because the current complaints system is simply not fit for purpose. Often people don't know where to go. The whole system needs a complete overhaul."

A Competition and Markets Authority spokesman said: "Our in-depth study of the care homes market found that residents and their families often find it difficult to make complaints, or worry about the consequences of raising concerns at all.

"It is essential that there are effective systems in place for people to complain and, where necessary, have concerns about charges and services acted upon. That's why we called on regulators to take a greater role in protecting residents and hold care homes to account where needed."

A Department of Health spokesman said: "Abuse of people in care is abhorrent and we're determined to stop it."

Read more about Betty's story in our new Katie Morley Investigates column: Money, Page 4

D Telegraph 2 1.8th May 2019