

Elderly sent to care homes 450 miles away

More than two-thirds of English councils say they have sent people needing care to facilities huge distances from home

Caroline Wheeler and Nicholas Hellen

One in five care home residents have been sent out of their local area, with some stranded more than 450 miles from families and friends, according to official data revealed under freedom of information (FOI) laws.

In the worst cases, frail or vulnerable people are being taken from five local authority areas in London and southern England to Glasgow and northeast Scotland, because beds are unavailable at home or cheaper elsewhere.

More than two thirds of the local authorities which responded to the FOI request said they had sent somebody at least 125 miles away.

Barbara Keeley, Labour's shadow minister for social care, who found the information, said: "This makes a mockery of the government's claim that they want people to receive care at home."

The human cost of the policy was described as "heartbreaking" by Judy Downey, chief executive of the charity Relatives and Residents Association. On average, one in 10 care home residents never receive any visitors.

"If [friends and family] can't get there, frankly it doesn't matter if it is five miles away or 500," she said. "Often people have more information about their weekend break in Paris than they are ever going to get on what goes on in a care home."

Martin England, chief executive of Care England, which represents independent social care services, said: "Local authorities just look for where they can find a bed ... It's a really huge issue because people should not be removed from their communities or their families."

The figures are based on responses from 111 out of 152 care-commissioning local authorities in England, which moved nearly 28,500 people in residential care outside their area in 2017-18. Of

this number, 17,220 were aged over 65.

Not all are sent away against their wishes. Downey said she was helping families living in Sussex and Somerset who wanted their elderly relatives to move closer to them from their care homes in London.

While the capital is most affected, no area in England is immune. In the north-east, almost half of under-65s are moved out of their local authority area.

John Shuttleworth, an independent county councillor in Co Durham, said his mother, Patricia, 83, died within 13 weeks of being moved out of a small care home where she knew half the residents from childhood and where he visited her every day. He blamed the Labour-run council for closing her care home in Stanhope, a market town in Weardale, for her decline when she was moved 12 miles away.

"My mother had Parkinson's and dementia. When they moved her she was howling and screaming. She didn't say another word to me. I always knew if you moved these people they would die," Shuttleworth said.

The Department of Health and Social Care said: "Local authorities have a duty to ensure people receive appropriate care and support – we have given them access to up to £3.9bn more dedicated funding for adult social care this year, and a further £410m is available for adults and children's services. We will set out our plans to reform the social care system at the earliest opportunity."

@cazjwheeler @nicholashellen



Patricia Shuttleworth: died soon after being moved from local care home