

Old Grey Matter article submitted for this Saturday's EADT

Elder Care Concerns

Recent reports by Suffolk County Council (SCC), Future East and the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) indicate a continuing concern in too many cases for the quality of services offered to the elderly and infirm whether in their own home or in a recognised residential home for the elderly. Though some are getting a great service tailored to their needs, this is by no means universal and many are not receiving the care to which they are entitled.

The national health regulator, the Care and Quality Commission (CQC) reveal that 2,206 residents live at good or outstanding care homes in Suffolk, whilst 1,943 are living in underperforming care homes. CQC rates 29% of residential and nursing homes in the county as 'require improvement' and another 8% are judged as 'inadequate'. Britten Court in Lowestoft is one of the 10 new homes outsourced by Suffolk and built for CareUK that requires overall improvement but with no inspection by CQC since June 2015 it is difficult for people to judge if these have taken place!

SCC obviously have some extra work to do and are pledging to launch a dedicated team to help care homes improve to investigate concerns raised by residents and families. The council says it is developing an expanded contracts team to monitor more services proactively and help identify concerns and issues and bringing together teams for quality improvement and dignity support.

However, having planned to outsource their Suffolk care homes to private owners several years ago now, a process that is now completed, this monitoring function of the council is something that should already have been in place to prevent such findings of a national body such as CQC to discover.

A further concern for the families of elderly relatives, pointed out by the NPC, is that CQC itself has announced it will be operating with fewer resources over the next five years. They will carry out fewer inspections despite a third of existing establishments nationally being classified this month as below standard according to their website, so there is all the more reason for county council monitoring to be effective and comprehensive across the board. Also, worryingly, around 75% of UK councils are unacceptably allowing 15 minute home-care visits despite official guidance recommending staff should spend at least half an hour on home visits to provide a dignified service. The NPC quoted one carer who said, "I had to visit a lady who is 102 for a shower, help her get dressed, make food, tidy her kitchen, give her medication and put her bins out all in 20 minutes!"

A recent email from Future East, reported on Britain's Pensioner Care Scandal. Secret filming shown on Channel 4 Dispatches revealed such grave issues in a home run by Sevacare which looks after over 8,500 people around the country. The home, in the London Borough of Haringey, was ordered to close down its service by CQC.

Despite very high fees for residents many profit-making home providers are pleading their finances cannot stand the strain of affording staff the basic living wage and residents and their families are caught in this unseemly struggle which did not exist when homes were under local authority control.

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