



counsel + care   
for older people, their families and carers

guide

Information from Counsel and Care: 19

## Care Homes: what to look for

Leaving your home and familiar surroundings to move into a care home is a big step. It is important to consider your choices carefully before making a decision about where to move.

All care homes in England are registered and inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), formerly the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The CQC regulates health and adult social care services in England. CQC carries out inspections to make sure that each care home is meeting essential standards of quality and safety.

This guide aims to help you make an informed decision about the care home you would like to live in.

Counsel and Care is the national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. If you have found our service helpful, please consider making a donation or leaving a legacy in your Will. You can arrange either by telephoning 020 7241 8555 or using the secure service on our website [www.counselandcare.org.uk](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk).



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Your donations, legacies and payroll giving enable Counsel and Care to get the best care and support for older people, their families and carers

Counsel and Care is a national charity; however the creation of the Scottish Parliament, and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies means there are differences in the ways each region cares for and supports older people. The information in this guide applies essentially to England although there may be similarities with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We also produce five separate guides for both Scotland and Wales covering the assessment of need process; paying care home fees and making a complaint which are the key areas where the policy and legislation differ significantly to England. All of the guides we publish can be downloaded from [www.counselandcare.org.uk/helping-you/guides](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/helping-you/guides) or posted to you by calling our guide orderline on 0207 241 8522.

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# 1 Community care assessments

Local council adult social care services departments are responsible for ensuring older people receive appropriate care. Before you begin looking for a care home, your first step should be to contact the social care services department of your council, or the hospital social worker if you are in hospital. The care manager or social worker will talk with you and your carer and assess your individual needs. This process is a **community care needs assessment**. See guide **12: Assessment and services from your local council in England** for further information about this (see also guide **50: Assessment and services from your local council in Scotland** and guide **70: Assessment and services from your local council in Wales**).

The type of care offered in care homes can vary. Some care homes simply offer companionship and cooked meals for older people who are active, although this type of care is now limited. Other care homes provide personal care for more dependent people. This might include help with washing, dressing, bathing, toileting needs, taking medicine and ensuring that an adequate diet is provided.

Some homes offer nursing care as well as personal care, for example, they may be able to assist people who:

- Are unable to walk or stand on their own
- Have continence problems
- Are experiencing dementia

- Have an illness or disability which is severe, and care can only be provided by a trained nurse.

Once the local council social care services department has assessed your individual needs, they will carry out a financial assessment to see whether you can afford to pay the care home fees yourself. The financial assessment should always take place after a care needs assessment has been carried out.

If you are paying your own fees you can make your own arrangements to move into the care home, but we strongly recommend that you still have your individual needs assessed by your local council social care services. Even if you are going to pay your own fees the local council social care services cannot refuse to assess your needs or provide you with a statement of your needs. This is because social care services has a duty to provide everyone with an assessment of need if it appears they may be in need of services or support. Social care services will be able to provide advice about what to do if you can afford to pay your own care home fees, and it is important that they know if you are likely to spend down your funds so that they are near the capital limit currently set at £23,250. This is when social care services has the duty to take responsibility for the fees of a care home placement.

If the financial assessment determines that social care services should pay your care home fees, less whatever you are able to afford to pay towards them, then the social worker or care manager should provide you with a written statement of your individual needs, known as your care plan. It is

very important to have a copy of your care plan in order for you to be able to find the best care home to meet your assessed needs.

For more information on the financial assessment, see guide **16: Care Home Fees: paying them in England**, or the relevant Scottish and Welsh guides: **52: Care Home Fees: paying them in Scotland**, or **72: Care Home Fees: paying them in Wales**, which cover the same issues.

Some people with complex health needs are entitled to have their care home fees paid for in total by the NHS. For more information, see guide **27: Continuing Healthcare: should the NHS be paying for my care?** To understand more about the assessment process for NHS continuing healthcare, see guide **40: Continuing Healthcare: understanding the assessment process**. If you are assessed as needing care in a nursing care home, please see guide **16: Care Home Fees: paying them in England**, or the relevant Scottish and Welsh guides (see above) for information on the NHS nursing care payment.

## 2 How to find the right home

There are a number of ways to find out about care homes. If you have been assessed by a social worker they should provide you with information about care homes, but this might not cover all the homes in your area. The Elderly Accommodation Counsel (tel.: 0207 820 1343, [www.housingcare.org](http://www.housingcare.org)) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (tel.:03000 616161, [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)) can provide detailed information about care homes and all other types of accommodation for older people in the UK.

The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator responsible for regulating and improving the quality of health and adult social care services in England and looking after the interests of people whose rights are restricted under the Mental Health Act. The CQC is responsible for regulating and inspecting residential care homes and home care agencies against essential standards of quality and safety. It took over this role from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in April 2009.

If you live in Scotland you can contact the Care Commission (SCRC) (tel.:0845 603 0890, [www.carecommission.com](http://www.carecommission.com)), and if you live in Wales you can contact the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) (tel.:01443 848450, [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)).

The CQC can provide you with a copy of its latest inspection report on any specific care home. The inspection report should give you full details of the extent to which the care home has met the essential standards. The CQC aims to protect people's safety, dignity and rights when they use care services. To this end in addition to the essential standards that each care service must meet, the CQC has also set out a list of good outcomes that it expects people to experience if the care provider is compliant with the regulations. In this way, the inspection process should not just be a checklist of whether or not a care service has met a certain level of quality but also consider whether the care provided has resulted in positive outcomes for the person using the service.

For example, outcome 1: 'Respecting and involving people who use services' states that that people who use services should:

- understand the care, treatment and support choices available to them
- can express their views, so far as they are able to do so, and are involved in making decisions about their care, treatment and support
- have their privacy, dignity and independence respected
- have their views and experiences taken into account in the way the service is provided and delivered.

You may wish to view further information on the essential standards of quality and safety that CQC must ensure each care home is in compliance with:



<http://www.cqc.org.uk/guidanceforprofessionals/introductiontoregistration/howthenewregistrationsystemworks/complyingwithnewregulations.cfm>

In addition, CQC has a quality star rating system to help you make informed choices about residential care homes. Following a key inspection, CQC will publish a star rating which will indicate the quality of care the care home provides. The ratings scale is:

- 0 stars – poor
- 1 star – adequate
- 2 stars – good
- 3 stars – excellent.

There may also be books and directories in your local library that list available care homes, and a number of websites that give information about care homes, for example, [www.carehomes.whereforcare.co.uk](http://www.carehomes.whereforcare.co.uk), which invites people to rate care homes. You need to be aware that some websites only list homes owned by one provider, so you may not obtain a full list.

It is suggested that you, a close friend or a relative, makes an appointment to visit your preferred homes to see what they are like and the facilities that are available. When visiting the home you may not have a lot of time to decide if it is suitable so it is a good idea to prepare the questions you want to ask before you get there. The following pages provide a checklist of things to consider in relation to the fees, contract, care practices, staff, accommodation, meals and leisure.

### 3 The fees

You may wish to consider the following when thinking about care home fees:

- Always find out from the local council social care services what they usually pay for the type of care you need in a care home (their 'standard' or 'usual' rate). Some care homes charge cheaper rates if an older person is being paid for by the council.
- If you have enough capital savings to pay for your own care home fees (if you have more than £23,250 in savings), you may wish to look for a care home that charges the same or very near to what the local council social care services department usually pay (their 'standard' or 'usual' rate). This means that if your capital reduces and you need financial support from social care services, you are living somewhere they will consider paying for.
- If you cannot find a suitable care home at the rate that the social care services department is willing to pay for you, please contact Counsel and Care's advice service for information (tel. 0845 300 7585; [www.counselandcare.org.uk](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk)), and see guide **17: Care Home Fees: third party top-ups**.
- Will your relatives be expected to make up any difference between the fees and what the council will pay? If your relatives have been asked for a contribution to your care home fees, please contact Counsel and Care for advice (see above), and see guide **17: Care Home Fees: third party top-ups**.

- How often does the care home increase its fees? Will you be able to afford regular fee increases? Will you have to move out if you cannot pay?
- Do you have to pay a deposit or any fees in advance?
- What percentage of the fees would you still have to pay if you had to move out for a short time (for example, for a holiday or to go into hospital)?
- What services does the fee include?
- Is there an extra charge for:
  - Laundry
  - Hairdressing
  - Chiropody
  - Extra care
  - Leisure activities
  - Incontinence pads
  - Newspapers
  - Toiletries
  - Physiotherapy?
- If you have nursing care needs, make sure that the care home does not charge for these needs. Nursing care should be provided free of charge, under the NHS-funded nursing care payment of £108.70 (standard rate) or £149.60 (high band rate). The care home will receive this payment from the NHS each week to pay for your nursing needs. See guide **16: Care Home Fees: paying them in England** for more information. (See also guide **52: Care Home Fees:**

paying them in Scotland or guide 72: Care Home Fees: paying them in Wales.)

- Are you claiming all the benefits you are entitled to? For example, if you are self-funding your care home fees and are eligible, you will be entitled to receive Attendance Allowance if you are over 65. See guide 3: Disability Benefits: Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance for more details. Contact the Benefits Enquiry Line (tel. 0800 00 99 66) for further information on the benefits you may be entitled to.

## 4 Information and contracts

All care homes should produce a 'statement of purpose' to help you make a choice about the home you want to move into. The statement should set out the objectives, philosophy of care, services provided, the facilities and terms and conditions of the home. The home should also provide a service user's guide written in plain English and made available in a language and/or format suitable for intended residents which includes:

- A statement of the home's aims and objectives
- A description of the individual accommodation and communal space provided
- The range of services available and the range of service users' needs which the services are intended to meet
- Details of any special care or facilities it offers, for example, care of people with a mental illness such as dementia, or care for people with particular cultural or religious needs.
- Relevant qualifications and experience of the registered provider, manager and staff
- A copy of the complaints procedure
- Service users' views of the home.

A copy of the latest inspection report should be available for you to look at. If it is not, you can request a copy from the Care Quality Commission (tel.:03000 616161) or download a copy of the report from their website ([www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)). If you live in Scotland you can contact the Care Commission (SCRC) (tel.:0845 603 0890; [www.carecommission.com](http://www.carecommission.com)),

and if you live in Wales you can contact the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) (tel.: 01443 848450; [www.cssiw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cssiw.wales.gov.uk)).

If you have selected a care home you should be provided with a statement of terms and conditions at the point you move in or a contract if you are paying all the fees yourself.

You should also check the terms of any contract you have to sign and find out:

- Rooms to be occupied
- Under what circumstances could the home ask you to leave and how much notice will they give you?
- How much will you have to pay if you are away from the home for any reason?
- Who would be responsible for finding you somewhere else to live?
- How much notice do you need to give the home if you want to move out?
- Is there a non-refundable deposit?

If you are unhappy with any aspect of the contract you are being asked to sign, you could also contact your local Trading Standards Office (their details will be available in the telephone directory or at [www.tradingstandards.gov.uk](http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk)) or Consumer Direct (tel.: 08454 04 05 06; [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk)). An independent advocate can support you to do this (see guide **25: Independent Advocacy** for more information).

See also section 13 of guide **16: Care Home Fees – paying them in**

England.

## 5 Care practices

You may wish to consider about the type of care home you want to live in:

- Will you be involved in making decisions about your care?
- Will the care home involve your relatives or other carers in looking after you? The home should only involve your relatives or carer with your permission.
- Can the care home support your care needs?
- Do they have all the equipment necessary for your care?
- Would the care home be able to support your needs if they increased?
- Will you be able to look after yourself as much as possible to maintain your independence, including being in charge of your own medicine?
- Would the care home handle your personal matters in a private and confidential way? Or inform you of the independent advocacy support that is available in your local area?
- Does the care home approach bathing, incontinence and giving medicine in a sensitive way?
- Can you entertain visitors at any time?
- Can you see visitors in private?
- How much freedom do you have to use the facilities and resources of the home?
- Can you go out when you want?



- What services do they provide, for example, physiotherapy, chiropody and hairdressing?
- Do the residents get the chance to take part in making decisions about general life in the care home?
- Is there a residents' committee?
- Will the care home make it possible for you to vote in elections?
- Will the care home regularly look at your needs and at how you are progressing?
- Can you take part in planning and reviewing your own care?
- Can you look after your own personal affairs (such as money and benefits), and will the home give you privacy to do this?
- Will you be able to spend time alone in your room if you wanted to?
- Is there a choice of food available on the menu?
- How does the home serve meals (for example, do they use table cloths, use tongs to serve cakes and sandwiches, are the meals hot when they should be) ?
- Can you be provided with drinks when you need them?
- Can you have your meals provided to you in your room?

## 6 Staff

During your visit it is important to consider the staff in the care home, as you will have contact with them on a daily basis.

- Does it look as if there are enough members of staff?
- Do they seem too busy or do they have time to sit and spend time with residents?
- Do staff help residents to do things for themselves rather than doing things for them?
- Do you notice any members of staff talking with or assisting the residents?
- When the staff are assisting a resident, do they explain what they are going to do?
- Do the staff treat residents with respect and dignity?

And you can ask the manager:

- Are the care staff expected to do domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning, or are there separate staff for this?
- What training is available to the staff?
- Which staff have formal care qualifications? For example, do the care assistants have National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and are those involved in nursing Registered General Nurses (RGN) or State Registered Nurses (SRN)?
- Can any of the staff speak your first language if this is not English?
- Are the staff trained in handling techniques, for example, moving and handling residents? If not, the staff are not trained correctly.

- Is the care home compliant with the requirement to check members of staff with the Independent Safeguarding Authority and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in England and Wales? (Or, Disclosure Scotland and the Scottish Criminal Records Office (SCRO) if you live in Scotland.)
- Could you keep your own doctor if you moved into the care home?

## **6.1 Criminal Record Bureau checks and Independent Safeguarding Authority registration**

Every member of staff who works in a care home in England and Wales is subject to a Standard or Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure (often called a CRB check) or Disclosure Scotland check for care staff in Scotland) In addition to this they must be checked against a register which records if a member of care home staff has been involved in issues of elder abuse. From July 2010, with the introduction of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (England and Wales), any person wishing to start work with vulnerable adults in England and Wales should apply for registration with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) (tel.: 0300 123 1111; [www.isa-gov.org.uk](http://www.isa-gov.org.uk)) with a one-off registration fee of £64.00.

When a person seeks employment within a care setting, there will be a legal requirement for the home care agency or care home to check the person is registered with the ISA, which will seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in making checks. If a care worker is matched against the ISA Vulnerable Adults Barred list, they have caused harm to a vulnerable adult in their care and it is against the law to offer

them employment in a care position. It is also an offence for an adult on the Vulnerable Adults Barred list to apply for work with vulnerable adults, and the ISA should be notified of anyone who applies to work with an agency and is found to be on the list.

Until July 2010, new staff or staff changing jobs will not have to apply to be registered with the ISA. ISA-registration does not become mandatory for these workers until November 2010. All other staff will be phased into the scheme from 2011. Please note that existing workers will have to apply for registration on a “staggered” basis from 2011, so it is possible that some workers will not be registered with the Vetting and Barring Scheme for some time.

When considering which care home to choose, you may wish to check that the worker has a Standard or Enhanced CRB Disclosure. You may also wish to check from July 2010 onwards that any new workers have been registered with the ISA, or that the care home has plans to do so with existing workers.

Please also note that an employer’s duty to check against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) list before a person starts work has stopped, as the details of the current POVA list transferred to the ISA and any new referrals made after October 2009 must be made to the ISA.

In Scotland, the introduction of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (Scotland) Act 2007 seeks to protect all vulnerable adults from abuse. Towards the end of 2010, the Scottish Government will introduce a new

membership scheme (the Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme – or PVG Scheme) that will replace and improve upon the current disclosure arrangements for people who work with vulnerable groups

([www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/children-families/pvglegislation](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/children-families/pvglegislation))

## 7 Accommodation

During your visit have a look at the facilities available for your use in the home.

- Do the facilities seem well looked after?
- Do you like the decoration? Would you feel comfortable living there?
- Are the furnishings and fittings homely and in good condition?
- Has the care home got up-to-date equipment for the needs of the residents, for example, a lift, grab-rails, minicom loop system for people with hearing difficulties, bathroom hoists?
- Is there easy access for wheelchairs or frames throughout the home?
- Could you take your pets? (Contact the charity, Cinnamon Trust, for a list of residential care homes where pets are accepted, tel: 01736 757900, [www.cinnamon.org.uk](http://www.cinnamon.org.uk)).
- Who would be expected to provide any extra equipment needed for you, if your needs changed?

### 7.1 Residents' rooms

- Are the rooms available as single or shared occupancy? (If they are shared, how is privacy achieved?)
- If there are shared rooms, did the residents choose to share? Both people in a shared room have to make the choice to share; **you cannot be forced to share.**
- Are any rooms en-suite with bath, shower or toilet?

- Do the rooms smell fresh and clean?
- Can you lock your room, and if this is not possible, is there a lockable drawer or cabinet within the room for your use?
- How many items of furniture or personal possessions can you bring with you?
- Can you bring your own television with you?

## **7.2 Communal rooms**

- How many are there?
- Are there different sitting areas including quiet rooms?
- Is there a separate dining area?
- Are there toilets within easy reach of all parts of the home?
- Are there smoking and non-smoking areas?
- Are there plenty of easily accessible call alarms to alert staff if you need assistance?
- Is there a television in the communal room?
- Do you have access to a radio or other equipment?

## **7.3 Location**

- Is the care home near to your family and friends?
- Is it convenient for shops, public transport and your doctor?
- What is the surrounding area like?
- Is there an area for you to sit outside if you wish to do so?

## 8 Meals

Meals are an important aspect of the service provided in the care home:

- Can you look at copies of previous menus?
- Do the meals seem nutritious?
- Is the menu varied and interesting?
- Can you choose what to eat?
- Are the residents involved in planning the menu?
- Can they cater for you if you have a special diet? Does this happen for any of the current residents?
- Is the dining area attractive and large enough?
- Can you choose who to sit with?
- Can meals be brought to your room?
- Can your friends, relatives or guests eat with you?
- Are there facilities for residents to make snacks and hot drinks?
- Before you move into the care home, can you go there for a meal to see what it is like?
- Can you be served extra portions if you still feel hungry?
- Are the meals served in the way you would expect?
- Are the meals hot when they should be?



## 9 Leisure

- Are there any organised leisure activities, perhaps by an activity co-ordinator in the care home involving, for example, arts and crafts, games, days out?
- Can you choose to take part in these activities?
- How would you be involved in planning and organising these activities?
- Can you carry on doing the activities that you currently enjoy? Does the care home have the space and equipment to allow you to do this? Would the staff help you?
- Would you be able to take part in any activities outside the home by yourself?
- Would the care home help with transport or staff if you needed it?
- Does the care home have its own transport?
- Does the care home have its own garden?
- Will your religious needs be met, for example, do faith leaders call at the home, or can you be supported to attend a religious service?
- Does the home celebrate days or festivals that are important to you, for example, St George's Day, St Andrew's Day, St Patrick's Day, Diwali, Remembrance Sunday, Passover?
- Are there any volunteers or befrienders who visit?
- Can your friends or relatives help with activities?
- What services does the care home provide, for example, TV, library, the internet or hairdressing?
- Would you be charged extra for any activities or services?

- Would you not be able to take part if you could not afford them?

## 10 Other important points

You should consider whether the home has a waiting list or has a current vacancy available for you. You can also ask whether it is possible to arrange an extended visit or trial period to make sure the care home really suits you.

You should also be visited at home or in hospital by the care home manager to make sure that the care home is suitable and can give you the care that you need, and assist you to plan your move into the home.

### 10.1 Trial periods

If it is decided that you need to go into a care home and you have chosen one, it is important to move in for a trial period to assess its suitability for you. This will give more time to see if you feel you can make this care home your permanent home. If the local council social care services has helped you to move in, they should hold a review meeting after approximately three months to make sure you are happy to stay and that your needs are still being met appropriately.

### 10.2 Benefits and income

If you move into a care home you, or your representative, will need to inform the Pension Service (tel.: 0845 60 60 265; [www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk)), both when the move is temporary and again when permanent. It is also important to ensure that you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to. For example, if you are paying

all the care home fees yourself and are eligible, you will be entitled to receive Attendance Allowance if you are over 65. See guide **3: Disability Benefits: Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance** for more details. If you are receiving Housing Benefit, you are entitled to receive this for up to 13 weeks to allow you time to settle into the care home and decide whether you wish to remain in the care home permanently before selling your home or giving up your tenancy. See guide **22: Council Tax and Housing Benefit**.

Contact the Benefits Enquiry Line (tel. 0800 00 99 66) for further information on the benefits you may be entitled to.

Our advice workers can advise on a wide range of issues affecting older people, their families and carers. Counsel and Care produce a range of guides which can be downloaded from our website [www.counselandcare.org.uk](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk), or requested by calling our guide orderline on 020 7241 8522.

This guide is not a full explanation of the law and is aimed at people over 60.

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