

Written evidence from Anonymous (HCS0052)

During lockdown in March 2021 my 92 year old mother and her fellow residents were given three months' notice to leave their care home.

Pre-covid, she had lived happily in this charity-run home. Late in 2020 the charity's trustees announced that the home would be sold, but residents and staff were assured that the buyer would continue to run it as a care home. However, on March 8th 2021, three days after the sale completed, the residents were told that the home was closing and that they would have to move out by May 31st. The new owner wanted to rebuild the home to cater for high-dependency residents.

When my mother pointed out that it was very short notice, the interim manager replied that in fact they only had to give one month's notice according to the end of tenancy clause in the contract she had signed with the care home in 2015. We had never considered the possibility of closure, as the charity had been operating the home since the 19th century and had received consistently good reports.

At the time of the eviction residents and their families went to the press and there was considerable media coverage. We contacted our MPs. At my request, mine contacted the Secretary of State for Social Care who in turn suggested that we should contact the local council. As my mother was self-funding we understood that there was little the council could have done for us beyond providing a list of homes in the area.

Relatives also sought legal advice. A solicitor suggested we could try to delay the eviction, given it was during a pandemic. We felt this would have prolonged the stress for these already vulnerable people. Most were in their 90s; four were over 100 years old. No one wanted to stay in that home under the new owner any longer than they had to. I also discovered via an internet search (so it is a matter of public record) that the interim manager employed by the new owner had been struck off from managing a care home in the recent past but had been reinstated after five years. I did not want my mother to remain in that home under the new ownership any longer than was necessary.

The owner's decision to evict was particularly egregious, given that there was a moratorium on evictions of private rental tenants before May 31st 2021.

My mother and her friends were heartbroken. They had expected to spend the rest of their lives together. They were also distressed at the prospect of losing their carers, to whom they had grown very attached. In my mother's words: "I was in shock for many days, even weeks, not sleeping, feeling unsteady and as if a pit had opened at my feet. My friends are scattered and my feeling of security gone."

Covid restrictions made research into other homes for my mother extremely difficult and stressful. She had been confined to the home since March 2020, apart from medical day appointments. After each of these she had to isolate in her room for 14 days, later reduced to ten days (I revert to this in my second point below). Going out on viewings would have resulted in her having to spend the rest of her days in the home in virtual isolation. Furthermore, restrictions limited how much we could see of other homes. It was impossible to form a realistic picture of any of the places we researched. Normally, prospective residents go to stay in a home for a few days' trial; again, restrictions made this impossible.

In the end we chose supported living accommodation, which proved unsuitable for our mother as the other residents had dementia, something we had not been able to ascertain before she moved. My mother felt lonely and isolated and fell into depression, a condition that has never previously affected her. She also developed alarming physical symptoms which led her to call an ambulance four times over the summer. She went to A&E on three of these occasions. Before the eviction she had good health, apart from arthritis, some deafness and macular degeneration. In August she was told she had an irregular heartbeat which needed investigation. She has become noticeably more forgetful and confused and has been given a diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment. She feels that her physical and mental health have deteriorated as a direct result of the eviction.

One of her friends had a stroke and died in April 2021, a few weeks after the eviction; another died in the summer. It is of course impossible to establish a causal link between these deaths and the eviction. However, stability is obviously vital to people reaching the end of their lives. We would like the committee to consider whether fragile security of tenure in care homes in general and eviction during a pandemic are violations of residents' human rights.

In September we moved my mother again, to supported accommodation with extra care. Although it is barely adequate for her needs, three residents of her former home have also moved there, so she has some familiar company. We are loath to move her to a home offering full care until she absolutely needs one because of the current restrictions on movement, visits and outdoor exercise.

This brings me to my second point concerning the rights of care home residents. In the home that closed my mother was regularly deprived of fresh air and exercise for up to two weeks at a time.

She and other residents were confined to the premises from March 2020 until its closure in spring this year, except for medical appointments. After these appointments, even day visits, they had to isolate in their rooms for 14 days, eventually reduced to 10 days. My mother was having monthly injections at [REDACTED] and found spending almost half her life in isolation extremely stressful. She begged the management of the home to allow her half an hour's exercise in the grounds each day while the other residents were at lunch. "Even maximum security prisoners are allowed exercise," she argued. They refused. When I raised this issue with the management they allocated her a very small stretch of corridor (ten paces) in which she could walk for an hour a day. She said that was useless as the corridor was enclosed, with no windows or fresh air. When she finally left the home in April 2021 she had become notably frailer through lack of exercise.

We would also like the committee to consider whether depriving care home residents of fresh air and exercise is a violation of their human rights.

13/01/2022