

Choosing a care home



Some questions to ask



Is there an alternative?

Care homes are the right choice for a lot of people, but many prefer the greater independence of living in their own homes with support or in some kind of sheltered accommodation with a scheme manager on hand.

It's important to think about the possible alternatives before finally deciding on living in a care home. If you are sure living in a care home is for you, it's a good idea to visit at least two or three homes to help you compare the services and see how well they suit you.

Set out below are some questions to ask to help you decide on which care home is best for you. After each section there is a space called 'My questions' to add your own questions.

Paying for a place in a care home

Care homes fees vary from home to home depending on where they are and the services provided. People with very high nursing or health needs may qualify to have their care fully funded by the NHS.

If you are a Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames resident, and you think you may need help towards the cost of a care home, you should contact us, Community Care Services. Our contact details are on the back page of this publication. If you are paying your own care home fees there may be certain welfare benefits you could apply for.

Our leaflets '**Paying for a place in a care home**' and '**Understanding care home financial assessments**' offer some general information and advice on paying for a care home. Contact us to ask for your free copy. You may also wish to contact one of the organisations listed on the back page of this publication.

Who should go to look?

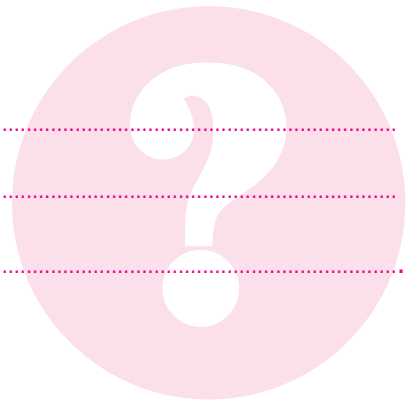
- Where possible, you, the person looking to live in a care home, should go to look at the home yourself.
- Where this is not possible, someone who knows you well should visit on your behalf, always remembering that they are making a choice for you and not for themselves. It may be useful for you to write down the things that are important to you so that the person visiting various homes on your behalf has a good guide for what to look out for!
- If you are looking on behalf of someone else, try and involve them as fully as possible.

Before you go

- Think about the things that are important to you.
- What in your life and in your home has made you happy or sad?
- What are your hopes and fears?
- Do you prefer a smaller, quieter home or a larger home with lots of things going on?
- If you are looking on behalf of someone else, ask the person these same questions.

My questions:

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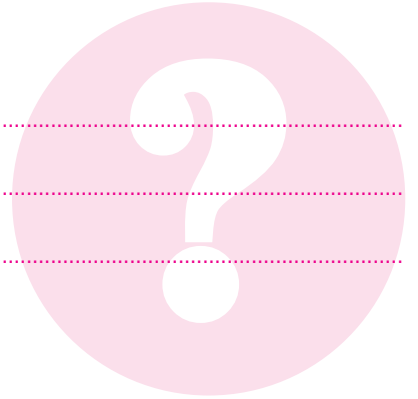
Arranging to visit

- When phoning to arrange your visit, how long did it take for the phone to be answered?
- Was there a person or answer phone machine at the end of the line?
- How helpful was the person taking your call?
- How easy was it to arrange a time to visit?
- Is there a waiting list or a current vacancy?
- Does the home have a website where you could look up more information?

- Can you arrange for an extended visit or trial period to make sure the care home really suits you?
- Before you move into the care home, can you go there for a meal to see what it is like?

My questions:

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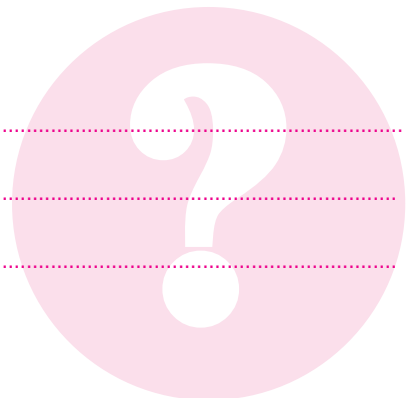


Looking around the home

- How do staff receive you when you knock on the door/visit?
- Is there a homely atmosphere or does the home feel like an institution?
- Do residents look relaxed and contented?
- Are there photographs on the walls showing residents involved in recent home activities or outings?
- What are your first impressions of the home? What does it look like? How does it smell? What can you hear going on?
- When you are discussing your particular needs, is this done in private?
- Is the time given to you by the home manager to talk things over enough or did you end up feeling rushed?

My questions:

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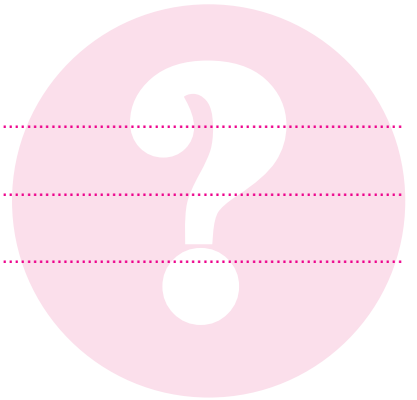
Information

- Ask to see the home's 'statement of purpose'. This should set out the objectives, philosophy of care, services provided and the facilities and conditions of the home.
- Ask to see a copy of the Commission for Social Care Inspection's annual report which should be readily available.
- How is important daily information communicated to residents, for example, outings, trips and staff changes?

- The home should also provide a service user's guide which includes a statement of the home's aims and objectives, the range of facilities and services it offers, details of any special care or facilities it offers. These could include facilities for people with mental health needs such as dementia, or care for people with particular cultural or religious needs.

My questions:

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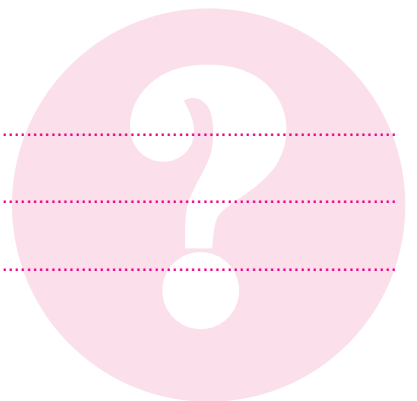


Fees and contracts

- How much is the fee and what does it include? Is there an extra charge for laundry, hairdressing, chiropody, extra care, social and leisure activities, incontinence pads, newspapers, toiletries, physiotherapy?
- 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 have to pay if you had to move out for a short time (for example, for a holiday or to go into hospital)?
- Under what circumstances could the home ask you to leave and how much notice will they give you?
- 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?

My questions:

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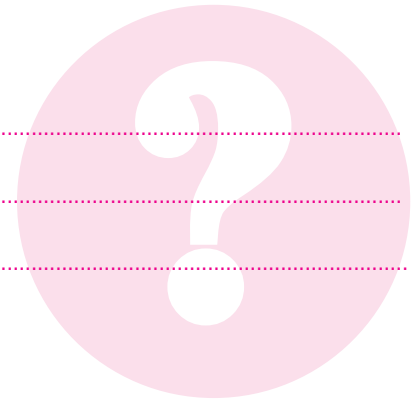
Location

- Is the home near relatives and friends?
- If the home is outside your home town, how easy is it to travel to for people visiting you from far away?

- Is it convenient for shops and other local facilities?
- What are the surroundings like? Is it peaceful and quiet or would you prefer something a little livelier?

My questions:

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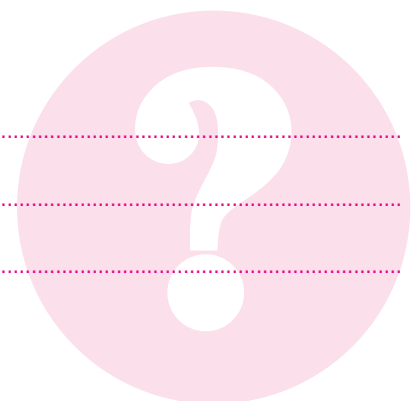


The staff

- Do the staff look like they get on with each other?
- Does it look as if there are enough members of staff?
- How many staff are available at night?
- Do the staff help residents to do things for themselves rather than doing things for them?
- When the staff are helping a resident, do they explain what they are going to do?
- Do the staff look like they are taking the time to offer a proper service?
- Do staff have the time to talk to residents and to help them do personal tasks such as tidy a draw, put photos in albums and other small things that may mean a great deal to an individual?
- Do staff treat the home residents with respect and dignity?
- Are the staff friendly?
- Is there a high turnover of staff?
- What training is available to the staff? Are staff trained in safe handling techniques, for example, turning and lifting residents?
- Does the home make sure that its staff have been checked against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) register and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) register?

My questions:

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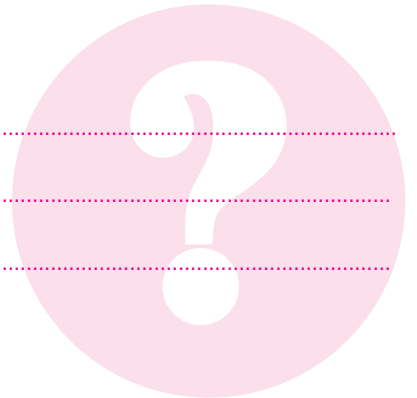


Quality of care

- Can the care home cope with your care needs?
- Does a local doctor visit regularly or can you choose to have your own doctor to visit you?
- Are physiotherapy, hydrotherapy or occupational therapy services available?
- Are there visiting dentists, opticians and chiropodists?
- Are staff available to help you go to hospital if the need arises?
- How are resident's medication needs managed?
- What kind of 'Care Plan' system is in place?
- Are there regular reviews so that any changing needs are catered for?
- If your care needs change, what arrangements are made? Would you need to move to another home?
- How do staff make sure that resident's clothing is treated with respect? Are individual items labelled? Do staff support people to choose what to wear if this is what they want?

My questions:

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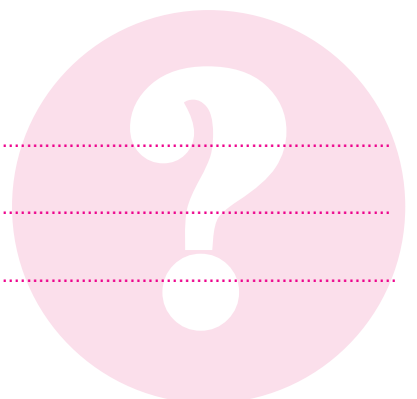


The other residents

- As you will be sharing your days with other residents, how do you think you may get on with them?
- If you are sharing a room, how well do you think you will get on with the person you are sharing with?
- Is there a curtain or partition within the shared room to give you some privacy should you want it?
- How involved will you be in agreeing to a new person sharing the room if a vacancy arises?
- Is there a residents' or relatives' group you can ask for information on what it's like to actually live in the home?

My questions:

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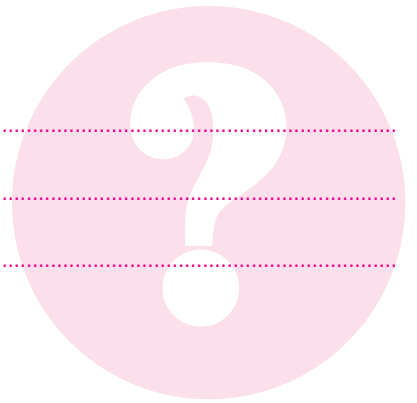


Resident's rooms

- Are the rooms single or shared? If they are shared, how is privacy achieved? (You must be given the choice to share, **you cannot be forced to share**).
- Is the size of the room being offered suitable for your needs?
- Can you bring your own furniture or personal possessions, including any small pets with you? Are these covered by the home's insurance?
- Are there individual heating controls in the rooms?
- Are any rooms en-suite with bath, shower, hand basin or toilet?
- Are the toilets and bathing facilities easy to get to and use?

My questions:

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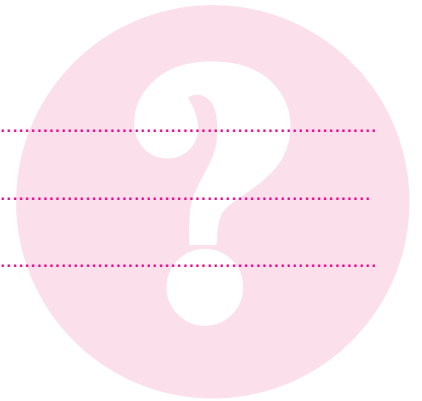
Meals

- Do the meals seem nutritious?
- Is the menu varied and interesting?
- Are residents involved in planning the menu?
- Can you choose **what** to eat? Can you choose **when** to eat?
- How much advance notice do you need to give for your choice of menu?
- Are there plenty of drinks available throughout the day?
- Is there cupboard space to store your own food?
- Can the home cater for you if you have a special diet?
- Is the dining area attractive and large enough?
- Can you choose who you sit with?
- Can meals be brought to your room?
- Can your friends, relatives or guests order a meal to eat with you?

- Can you make your own snacks and drinks? Are refreshments provided outside of mealtimes?
- Can you entertain your friends, relatives or guests to tea? Can staff help you set this up if you need them to?

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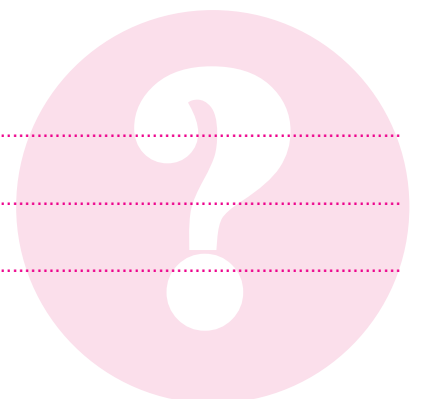


Facilities

- Are there lifts to other floors? Is the lift large enough to take a wheelchair user and a member of staff?
- Does the home have specially adapted bathrooms and toilets for people who find a standard bath or toilet difficult to use?
- Is there easy access throughout the home for people who use wheelchairs or walking frames?
- Are wheelchairs provided by the home for people who need them?
- Is there an induction loop in the home for hearing aid users?
- What support is available for people with visual impairments?
- What support is available for residents who cannot read because of literacy difficulties?
- Is there a separate TV room or are TVs provided in the bedrooms?
- Is there a quiet room?
- Are there any computers available for people to use?
- Are telephones available in resident's rooms? What help is available to help residents use the telephone?
- Can staff help residents write letters if this is their wish?
- Is there a garden? Can you use the garden? Can you get help to tend the garden or get involved in designing how it looks?
- Are there plenty of call alarms to alert staff if you need help?

My questions:

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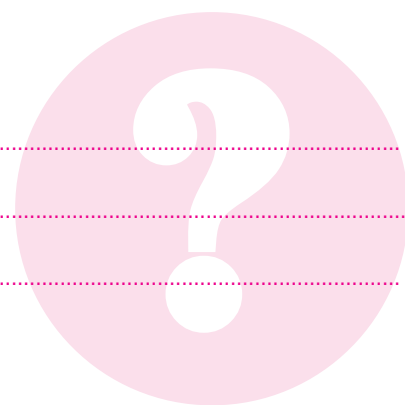


The décor

- Does the home look generally clean and well maintained?
- How long is it since the last painting was done?
- Do carpets and curtains look homely and in good condition?
- Is the furniture in communal areas comfortable and in good condition?
- How often are rooms and communal areas cleaned?
- Are separate cleaning staff used or are care staff expected to do the cleaning?

My questions:

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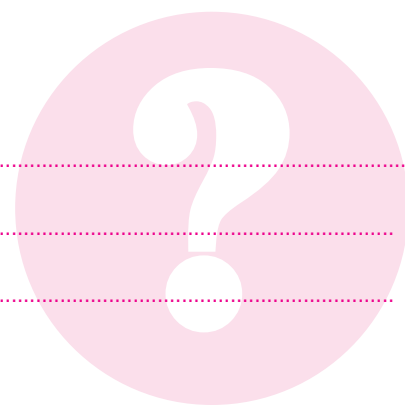


Social and leisure activities

- Are staff available to help you visit local shops and amenities?
- What activity programmes are available in the home?
- Does the home have its own transport for outings?
- Is there a dedicated activities co-ordinator within the home?
- What sort of social activities and outings are organised and how often?
- How would you be involved in planning and organising these activities if you were interested?
- Can you carry on doing the activities that you currently enjoy? Would the staff help you if necessary?
- How easy is it to get newspapers, magazines and other small items on a daily basis?

My questions:

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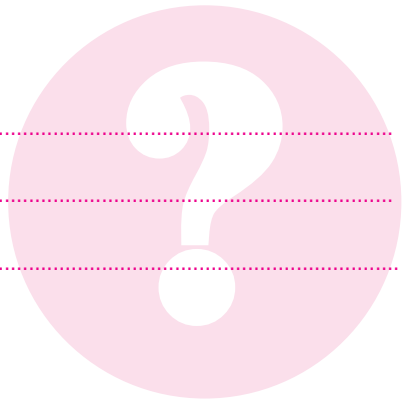


Choice and independence

- Can you go out when you want to?
- What support can staff offer if you need help to go out/visit friends and relatives?
- Can you get up and go to bed when you like?
- Can you choose your own time for bathing?
- Can you spend time alone in your room if you want to?
- What support is available to help you manage and have access to your medication and money, if this is what you want?
- What support is available to help you vote at elections?
- Is there a policy on smoking or alcohol?
- If you have a complaint or concern, how will it be dealt with?
- How does the home involve residents in making decisions about their care and in reviewing their needs?
- Are there residents' and relatives' meetings for you to put your views across about how the home is run?

My questions:

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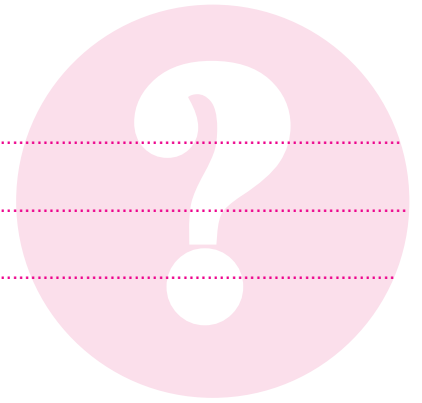


Dignity and privacy

- Is it possible for you to see visitors privately, and can they visit at any time? Are there facilities to stay overnight?
- Can you refuse to see visitors occasionally?
- Do staff knock on the doors of residents' rooms before going in? Do staff wait to hear 'come in' before entering a resident's room?
- What guidelines do staff work to for making sure resident's confidences stay private if this is their wish?
- Can you lock your room or, if not, where can valuables be kept?

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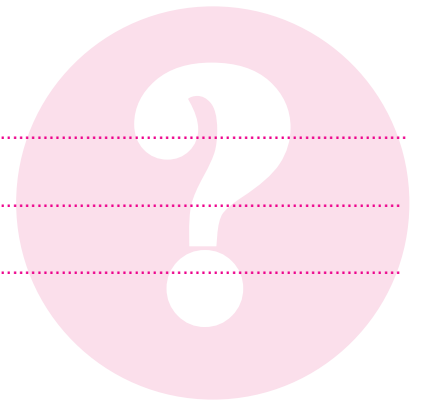


Cultural, ethnic and religious needs

- What help does the home offer to help you carry on attending church or your place of worship?
- Will the home help you to observe religious/important dates in your culture?
- Is the home sensitive to people's cultural needs around dressing and gender issues?
- Are religious/cultural diets catered for?
- Do the staff speak English and are they easy to understand?
- If English is not your first language, do any of the staff speak your language?
- Are there 'cultural awareness' training sessions available to staff?

My questions:

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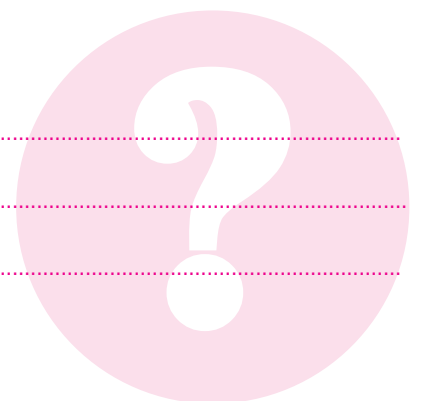


Death and Dying

- How does the home sensitively manage people dying?
- How does the home support people to die in the way they want ?

My questions:

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More information



Commission for Social Care Inspection

Telephone: 0845 015 0120

Website: www.csci.org.uk

Help the Aged

Telephone: 020 7278 1114

Website: www.helptheaged.org.uk

Age Concern

Telephone: 020 8765 7200

Website: www.ageconcern.org.uk

The Relatives and Residents Association

Telephone: 020 7359 8136

Website: www.relres.org.uk

Elderly Accommodation Council

Telephone: 020 7820 1343

Website: www.housingcare.org

Counsel and Care

Telephone: 0845 300 7585

Website: www.counselandcare.org.uk

Office of Fair Trading

Telephone: 0800 389 3158

Website: www.offt.gov.uk

The Pensions Service

Telephone: 0845 6060 265

Website: www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Community Care Services

Telephone: 020 8547 6008

Website: www.kingston.gov.uk/communitycareservices