

NEWS IN BRIEF

Elderly couple were split up because council put contractors first



A husband and wife were separated for ten months because a council failed to put her care needs before its contracts policy with care providers, an enquiry has concluded.

The woman, who is disabled and confined to her bed, was moved to a care facility after an operation because the local authority could not arrange for carers to visit her at home.

She was wrongly placed in a dementia ward where a social worker found that she had locked herself in her room because other residents with dementia were “wandering in and out”. The woman complained of feeling imprisoned, the report said.

Her husband made daily round trips of 30 miles to visit her and both “suffered mental anguish and anxiety about not being at home together”.

The local government and social care ombudsman, to whom the couple complained, concluded that Lincolnshire County Council failed to review the woman’s care needs and should not have placed her in a dementia unit. It also said that she remained in the home, intended as a short-term placement, for too long, causing avoidable distress. The couple, identified only as Mr and Mrs A, complained and the authority was ordered to pay £1,000 to reflect her distress, £750 for his, and to refund his travelling expenses.

The ombudsman instructed the council to review other cases where married couples had been separated because no carers were available to visit them at home. This is understood to apply to a small number of cases.

The ruling comes after a speech in May by Sir James Munby, president of the family division of the High Court, who appealed to council care directors to stop separating couples, for the sake of “simple humanity”. He declared the practice “absolutely shocking and profound indictment of our society”. The case arose after Lincolnshire changed its contracts policy with social care providers in 2015, switching from 75 contracts with different providers to 12 with “prime providers”.

Mrs A was cared for at home but after hip surgery in June 2015 she could not be discharged because the provider in her areas, Bloomsbury Homecare, could not meet her assessed needs for two carers to visit her at home four times a day to help her to use the lavatory, wash, dress and prepare meals.

The council accepted the findings and said “in all cases we worked closely with the family to consider options and find a placement acceptable to them”.

If you would like a free initial consultation to discuss your situation and options open to you then contact me Chris Berry at:

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