

What is the Choice of Accommodation Policy for?

When it's time to choose a care home, Suffolk County Council is here to help you make the right choice. The policy helps the council and you to reach decisions about care homes in ways that are consistent and fair. We want to give people greater clarity about what care home options the council can offer, and how we can support people to meet their care and support needs.

Who does this policy apply to?

Older adults and younger adults with long-term care needs, where we have assessed that a care home placement can best meet those needs.

When does this policy apply?

This policy will apply when a person is in one of these situations:

- Is moving into long-term care for the first time
- Is moving from one care home to another
- Has become eligible for council financial support after being a private payer ('self-funder') before
- Has been funded previously by another organisation (e.g. the NHS) and this funding has ended.

Who has been involved in producing this policy?

The council has spoken to groups of people including practitioners and senior managers in Adult Social Care, providers of care homes around Suffolk, colleagues from the NHS, and stakeholders who joined in web-based drop-in sessions to discuss their ideas and feedback for the policy. The council has also asked Healthwatch Suffolk to monitor how well the policy works for people.

What kinds of accommodation is this policy about?

This policy is about all care homes that offer 24-hour care and support for older people. These people may have residential care needs or nursing needs.

What sort of choice will this policy give me?

This policy helps the council to offer you care options in a clear order, starting with trusted providers under contract, then accredited homes, and finally, your own preferred choice if it meets the criteria.

I already live in a care home and pay privately. If I need social care funding, can I remain there?

The council will speak to your care home and find out if they can accept the council's rate of funding. If they can accept, then your placement will continue, though remember you will likely be needed to contribute to this with your own money. If they cannot accept, then a decision will be made based on

your needs in your care and support plan and may include a choice of alternative homes or paying a “top-up” payment to stay in your current care home.

What is a “top-up” payment? Who can make them and when?

If your preferred care home costs more than what the Council covers, someone—like a family member—can choose to pay the difference. This is called a top-up payment. The person living in the care home cannot make this payment themselves – only someone else, known as a “third party”. There are other types of top-up, but your practitioner will discuss these with you as and when appropriate.

The council has offered me some care homes to choose from. What happens if I want to choose a different care home?

The council has a duty to offer you care homes that can meet your care and support needs, and that will be of suitable quality. Homes like this will be part of your offer. But, if you want to choose an alternative home, we will need to check it meets some conditions we set in the policy. If it does, we can support your choice either with our funding or combined with a top-up payment.

What does a “block bed” mean within the first offer in the policy?

By “block beds”, we mean care home beds that the council has contracted to buy from care homes, on a longer-term basis. This means that the council will use these beds as its first preference.

What does “accredited with Suffolk County Council” mean within the second offer in the policy?

This means that a care home has met certain requirements that the council has set and assessed. These requirements will be about safety, financial stability, quality and legal conditions, and other areas that the council can check to make sure a home is suitable for us to use.

My close family members don't drive. How does the council decide on a location to offer me a care home?

In most circumstances, we look for care homes in a location that your family or loved ones are able to reach and visit regularly. This can include suitable access to public transport nearby.

The policy says I have 72 hours to decide between the homes I am offered. What if I or my family need longer to decide?

We aim to help you choose within 72 hours. If you need more time, our practitioners will support you in deciding over a further 7 days – because we know this is a big decision.

How can I be sure you are offering me care homes that are safe and of good quality?

We put all our offered care homes through an accreditation process (see above), and we use care homes that are assessed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to be of a Good or Outstanding rating. The council will only offer homes rated Requires Improvement if it is confident that the homes are safe and have overcome the factors that led to that rating.

How will Suffolk County Council monitor the policy to make sure that people are satisfied and receiving good care?

The council will work with Healthwatch Suffolk to gather feedback and experiences about the impact of the policy. Healthwatch will be independently speaking to people who use care home services, people who are likely to use care homes, and their friends, families and advocates. They will ask how well the policy has worked, and feed back their findings to Suffolk County Council.