

[Press release: Major care home group drops 'after death' fees following CMA action](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has welcomed Maria Mallaband Care Group's decision to stop using a contract term requiring the payment of one month's fees following the death of a resident who paid for their own care.

The move comes as part of an ongoing consumer law [investigation by the CMA](#) into fees charged by a number of care home providers, and its [year-long study](#) of the residential care home market where the CMA made clear its concerns that it is unfair to continue to charge fees for an extended period after a resident has died.

Maria Mallaband, together with its sister company, Countrywide Care Homes, operates 64 residential care homes in England and Northern Ireland. In response to intervention by the CMA, the group has agreed to amend its contract terms at these and any future care homes it operates so that fees will only be charged up to the date of death.

As part of its work, the CMA found that charging fees after death was widespread across the sector and that practices vary. In order to ensure that care homes take a consistent and lawful approach, the CMA will be publishing compliance advice for the sector as a whole. It has today launched a [public consultation](#) seeking views on its draft advice, so it can reach a final view on whether it's fair to charge fees after death and, if so, for how long.

Michael Grenfell, Executive Director for Enforcement at the CMA, said:

It is important that care home residents, and their families, can be confident they will be fairly treated, especially during the difficult period after a family member has died.

We are pleased that the Maria Mallaband Care Group has been responsive to our concerns about fees charged after death, and has taken clear and positive steps to make changes ahead of our public consultation on such fees. We expect other care homes to make any necessary changes in line with our final views when published.

We now want to hear from families and care homes as part of our consultation.

The consultation includes a [draft of the CMA's compliance advice](#) and will run for 4 weeks, closing on 16 February 2018. The CMA will then publish a final version of the compliance advice and a summary of the responses received.

For further information see the care [home case page](#).

Notes for editors

1. During its [market study](#) into the UK residential care home sector, the CMA announced that it had opened an investigation into a number of care homes providers due to concerns that some of the contract terms and/or practices they use may breach consumer law. The investigation is currently focused on the requirement for fees to be paid for an extended period after a resident's death and the charging of large, upfront fees. The CMA also made clear that if it identified serious concerns regarding potential breaches of consumer law on these, or other issues, it might decide to open further investigations.
 2. In addition to these two issues, the CMA's market study identified a number of other consumer law concerns. The CMA will consult on comprehensive consumer law compliance guidance, covering the range of concerns identified in the market study report, in Spring 2018.
 3. Whilst the Maria Mallaband Care Group has co-operated and constructively engaged with the CMA, and agreed to make changes voluntarily to its previous terms and practices, it does not consider that its previous terms or policies were unfair. However, in light of the CMA's concerns, it has decided to make changes that require fees to be paid only up to the date of death in contracts for care concluded with self-funded residents. It also confirmed that no additional charges or fees will be applied, irrespective of when the room is cleared of the resident's possessions. These changes apply to both to the Maria Mallaband Care Group and its sister company, Countrywide Care Homes Limited and came into effect on 1 December 2017
 4. The final decision on whether a term or practice infringes the law rests with the courts and no such finding has been made in this case.
 5. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for enforcing consumer and competition law and carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries. For more information on the CMA see our homepage, or Twitter account [@CMAgovuk](#), or [Flickr](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) pages. Sign up to our email alerts to receive updates on markets cases.
 6. Enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or 020 3738 6337.
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News story: Bat conservation panel appointed

Natural England has appointed a new expert panel to help shape the future of bat conservation in this country.

As Natural England considers an innovative approach to licensing across a range of species, it is looking at how the implementation of protected species legislation could be improved in its delivery for conservation and ensuring that regulation is applied proportionately. The Bat Expert Panel will provide a forum for generating ideas and testing Natural England's thinking with the aim of securing better outcomes for bats and stakeholders.

The panel is chaired by Natural England's Chief Scientist, Dr Tim Hill, and includes experts with a strong track record of research or achievement in bat conservation from across academic, commercial, NGO and statutory sectors. It will shape Natural England's bat reform programme and help to ensure the reform projects are informed by the best available evidence, and based on sound judgement of what is achievable. In this way it will play an important role in developing consensus and partnerships for bat conservation.

Dr Tim Hill said:

The number of licence applications for bats received by Natural England is greater than for other species groups and is increasing. The panel will look for ambitious change to improve bat conservation and where evidence allows, make it work positively for everyone that it affects.

The legal protection of bats commenced following the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and was further strengthened by the Habitats Directive and subsequent Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations. Since this legislation has been in place, national monitoring data suggests populations of most bat species have been stable or increasing although this is recognised as being set against large-scale historic declines. This improvement for certain bat species may be due in part to successful implementation of this legislation.

Over this time period considerable change has happened. The bat conservation movement has developed enormously and survey technology has moved on, advancing our understanding of bat ecology.

The members of the panel are:

- Professor Kate Jones – Professor of Ecology and Biodiversity, University College London
- Professor Paul Racey – Emeritus Professor, University of Aberdeen

- Dr Matt Zeale – Research Associate and Lecturer, University of Bristol
 - Professor Fiona Mathews – Professor of Environmental Biology, University of Exeter
 - Dr Stuart Newson – Senior Research Ecologist, Population Ecology & Modelling, British Trust for Ornithology
 - Dr Carol Williams – Director of Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust
 - Paola Reason – Technical Director, Arcadis
 - Jean Matthews – Former Mammal Ecologist, Natural Resources Wales. Retired.
 - Dr Stephanie Wray – President of CIEEM, Partner at Tyler Grange
 - Dr Peter Shepherd – Partner at BSG Ecology
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[News story: Continuing cuts to forensic science threaten criminal justice](#)

In [the report](#), which was published today (Friday 19 January), Regulator Dr Gillian Tully warns that the cuts highlighted last year have continued in the sector, with serious consequences.

Already, scientists have been required to give expert advice based on interim forensic reports because some police forces have refused to pay for the scientists to produce an admissible statement of evidence in court. Often there is little time left for practitioners to prepare reports on complex cases or keep up with scientific developments.

At the same time, police are spending less on their own forensic science practices. With the tendering process for commercial services being focused heavily on costs, more and more money is taken out of the system.

Further pressure is being put on individual scientists by the delay of many organisations in starting the process of attaining the required quality standards, the Regulator states.

However, the Regulator also highlights that despite the challenges, significant progress has been made in the sector and that many organisations have achieved the required standards, or are well on their way to demonstrate objectively that their methods are scientifically valid and their staff competent.

Forensic Science Regulator Dr Gillian Tully said:

There are a lot of hard working and committed forensic scientists doing their best, but they are not always supported by the system

they work in.

A year ago I warned that funding was too tight, and now even more money has been taken out of the system. We cannot continue on this path.

I urge the government to put the role of the Regulator on statutory footing now, to enable me to ensure that all organisations providing forensic science evidence in the criminal justice system, meet the high standards required.

The failure of some police forces to give sufficient priority to achieving quality standards in their own forensic science work, is of great concern to the Regulator. Whilst it is understandable that senior police leaders have a wide range of priorities, if quality cannot be sufficiently prioritised, it may become unsustainable for some forces to continue to carry out their own forensic science case work.

The Regulator also highlighted that a number of small forensic businesses have chosen, for financial reasons, not to move towards reaching the required standards. For these reasons, statutory powers are urgently needed so that the Regulator can ensure that all providers of forensic science deliver work to quality standards that are fit for the criminal justice system.

[News story: Dstl announces support of 2018's Year of Engineering](#)

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is proud to announce its support of the Government's pledge to make 2018 the [Year of Engineering](#). As a key campaign partner, Dstl will be promoting its state-of-the-art engineering work to demonstrate the creativity involved in designing solutions for military and security customers. With many internationally recognised subject experts, Dstl's skilled scientists and engineers are fantastic role models who can help young people, and their parents and teachers, see the potential of a future career in engineering.

In 2017, Dstl recruited 80 graduates and 27 apprentices across our divisions, who work on some of the UK's most exciting and interesting science and technology programmes, many of which have international and well as national implications. Engineers at Dstl work in a wide range of engineering disciplines including mechanical, electrical, materials and software. Every day they are working on a range of high-profile and exciting engineering projects including the Queen Elizabeth class of carriers, the F-35 Lightning II, unmanned aerial vehicles, ballistic protection and cyber security.

The Year of Engineering activities will build on Dstl's current Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) outreach programme with schools and universities, which sees its STEM Ambassadors out and about meeting as many young people as possible to help inspire the next generation of engineers.

Dr Bryn Hughes, Dstl Technical Director, said:

At a national level, there is a general shortage of well-trained and qualified engineers. If not addressed, this will have a long-term impact not only for defence and security, but also the prosperity of the UK. At Dstl, we encourage our engineers to meet young people as part of the STEM Ambassador programme, and raise the profile of the exciting opportunities offered through engineering in all its forms.

To this end we look forward to the opportunity in 2018 to really focus our efforts. We'll be working alongside other employers with the aim to inspire the next generation of engineers to join us in solving some of the UK's most critical problems with inventive engineering solutions both now and in to the future.

[Press release: HS2 reveals Colne Valley viaduct concepts](#)

The concept was developed by independent specialist architects Martin Knight in consultation with the [Colne Valley Regional Park Panel](#), and the [HS2 Independent Design Panel](#), consisting of architects, designers and experts in sustainability.

The viaduct concept document explores a range of options and ideas for how it can be sensitively and aesthetically sited within the Colne Valley, whilst addressing the technical demands of the project. It will help to inform further design work and technical development by Align, the main civil engineering contractor for HS2 between the Colne Valley viaduct and the northern portal of the Chilterns Tunnel. Align will engage the local community on these designs in spring 2018.

The concept has been developed around 14 key criteria, which were set by HS2 in consultation with the HS2 Independent Design Panel. These include whether the design fits the landscape, maintains views and landscape 'flow', is well proportioned and elegant.

The area of the Colne Valley through which HS2's route passes features a series of woods and lakes that developed when farming and quarrying ended,

and sits alongside the Chiltern railway.

Chair of the Colne Valley Regional Park Panel, Jim Barclay, said:

The construction of the Colne Valley HS2 viaduct will have a significant impact on the Colne Valley area. The Colne Valley Panel which is drawn from local stakeholders, is very pleased to have been consulted and through a series of workshops, Panel Members have been able to understand the design principles for the viaduct. The Colne Valley Regional Park Panel looks forward to further engagement with HS2 and Align over the actual viaduct design.

As well as the viaduct itself, the concept document also explores innovative ideas for additional elements such as transparent noise-reduction barriers with vertical lines which are visible to bats and wildfowl to reduce possible impacts, whilst creating a slimmer side profile of the viaduct.

Sadie Morgan, chair of the Independent Design Panel, said:

We are delighted that this imaginative and carefully-considered concept has been published, and can form the basis for wider discussions with the communities around the Colne Valley and all those who value and use the spaces and amenities within it.

The Independent Design Panel will continue to work hard to ensure that the viaduct's final design respects its location and communities, whilst being a shining example of great design that Britain can be proud of.

Construction partner Align will be responsible for developing the final design and constructing the viaduct according to technical specifications and within an agreed cost envelope.

HS2 programme director, Mike Hickson, said:

The Colne Valley viaduct will be one of the longest viaducts in the UK, and one of HS2's best-known structures. We are pleased and grateful for the work done by Martin Knight Architects, the Colne Valley Regional Park Panel and the HS2 Independent Design Panel to produce this potential scheme design. We have every confidence that our contractor, Align, will continue this collaborative approach and engagement, as they now develop their own scheme and then detailed design of this significant structure.