CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

CQC ratings explained: how to read a care provider's report

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IN BRIEF

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) registers, monitors, inspects and rates health and adult social care services in England, including home care and live-in care providers. It rates services outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate, overall and for five key questions: safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. Read the full report and check its date, not just the headline rating, and ask the provider about anything that concerns you.



IN THIS GUIDE

1. What does CQC do?
2. What CQC regulates in care at home
3. The five key questions
4. What the four ratings mean
5. How to find a provider's report on the CQC website
6. How to read a CQC report for a home care service
7. CQC's assessment framework and the changes in 2026
8. What an older rating means
9. Other sources of reassurance
10. If you are worried about a service
11. What to do next
12. How we can help
13. Common questions
14. Sources and further information

What does CQC do?

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. For home care and live-in care, it:

- **registers** organisations that provide personal care, and checks they are likely to meet the fundamental standards before they start;
- **monitors** services using information from the public, staff, councils, the NHS and the providers themselves;
- **inspects and assesses** services, and publishes reports and ratings;
- **takes action** when care falls short, from requiring improvements to restricting or cancelling a registration.

The fundamental standards are the standards below which care must never fall. They include person-centred care, dignity and respect, consent, safe care, safeguarding from abuse, enough to eat and drink, good governance, enough suitably trained staff, open handling of complaints, and honesty when things go wrong. Providers must also display their CQC rating where people can see it and on their website.

CQC covers England only. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the rules differ, and care is regulated by the Care Inspectorate, Care Inspectorate Wales and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

What CQC regulates in care at home

CQC regulates personal care: physical help with washing, bathing, dressing, eating, drinking, toileting, oral care and care of skin, hair and nails, or prompting with supervision when someone cannot manage these alone. An organisation that employs or manages carers to give this help must be registered.

Some arrangements fall outside CQC's checks: services offering only companionship or help around the house, introductory agencies that only introduce self-employed carers, and carers employed directly by a family. Our guide to managed or introductory live-in care explains what this means for families.

The five key questions

CQC looks at every service through the same five questions:

- **Safe:** people are protected from abuse and avoidable harm. In home care, look at medicines, staffing, safeguarding and how risks such as falls are managed.
- **Effective:** care achieves good outcomes, helps people keep a good quality of life and is based on the best available evidence. Look at training, consent, nutrition and working with GPs and nurses.
- **Caring:** staff treat people with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect.
- **Responsive:** services are organised to meet people's needs. Look at care plans, continuity, flexibility and complaints.
- **Well-led:** leadership, management and governance make sure care is high quality and person-centred, with an open, fair culture that learns and improves.

What the four ratings mean

Rating	What CQC says it means
Outstanding	The service is performing exceptionally well
Good	The service is performing well and meeting CQC's expectations
Requires improvement	The service is not performing as well as it should, and CQC has told it how it must improve
Inadequate	The service is performing badly, and CQC has taken action against the provider

Each service gets an overall rating and a rating for each key question. Newer reports also show percentage scores, to show whether a service sits near the top or the bottom of its rating band; for example, a score of 63% to 87% is good, and 88% or above is outstanding. Some services show no rating, usually because they registered recently and have not yet been assessed.

How to find a provider's report on the CQC website



1. Go to cqc.org.uk and choose **Find care services**.
2. Type the provider's name, or your postcode, and search.
3. Filter by **Homecare agencies** to see services that provide care at home, including live-in care.
4. Open the service's page. Near the top you will see the overall rating, the date the latest report was published and the rating for each key question. The Registered Manager is listed under "Who runs this service".
5. Download the full report to read the detail, and use "All inspection reports and timeline" to see earlier reports and the direction of travel.
6. If you like, choose "Get alerts when we inspect" to hear about future reports.

If you cannot use the website, call CQC on 03000 616161 and ask for help finding a report.

How to read a CQC report for a home care service

1. **Check it is the right service.** A company may have several branches, each with its own rating, so check the branch that would provide your care.
2. **Check the dates.** Note when the service was last inspected or assessed and when the report was published.

3. **Look at all five key questions,** not just the overall rating. For care at home, the safe and well-led ratings are especially telling.
4. **Read the summary,** then the detail. Look for what people using the service and their families said.
5. **Look for breaches and action.** Reports say whether the provider broke any regulations and what CQC required it to do. Check later reports or updates to see whether things improved.

Then ask the provider about anything you read. A good provider will be open about its report, including any criticism and what it changed as a result.

CQC's assessment framework and the changes in 2026

Since late 2023, CQC has assessed services using an assessment framework in which each key question is broken down into "quality statements", describing what good care looks like, alongside "I statements" that reflect what people say matters to them. Evidence is gathered under six categories, including people's experiences, feedback from staff and partners, observation and processes.

After independent reviews of CQC's work in 2024, CQC consulted on improving how it assesses and rates services. In 2026 it published draft frameworks written for each sector, including a separate framework for adult social care, and its consultation on them closed on 12 June 2026. CQC has said it plans to publish the final frameworks and start using them from the end of 2026.

For families, the important points stay the same: the five key questions and the four ratings remain, and a rating means the same thing whichever framework produced it.

What an older rating means

CQC decides when to look at a service based on risk and the information it holds, so a service with no concerns may go several years without a new inspection. An independent review of CQC found that, as of July 2024, the average age of ratings across all locations was 3.9 years, and around 19% of the locations CQC can inspect had never been rated.

An older rating is not a warning sign in itself, but it tells you less about how the service is today. If a rating is a few years old, these questions help:

Ask the provider	A reassuring answer	A worrying answer
What has changed since your last inspection?	Specific changes to staff, systems or services, good and bad	“Nothing, really”
How do you check the quality of care yourselves?	Regular audits of care records and medicines, manager visits and feedback surveys, with recent dates	“We would hear if something was wrong”
What did your last survey or feedback show?	Real results, including what people wanted improved	No survey, or only praise
How many complaints have you had this year, and what changed?	A number, examples and the lessons learned	“We never get complaints”
Is the Registered Manager named on CQC still in post?	“Yes”, or a clear account of who manages the service now	Uncertainty about who is in charge

You can also ask to see the provider’s complaints procedure and a blank copy of its care plan, so you know what to expect.

Other sources of reassurance

A CQC rating is one piece of the picture. Others include:

- **The assessment visit:** how the provider listens to the person and answers your questions.
- **The provider’s own checks:** audits of care records and medicines, supervision and visits to the home by managers.
- **Professionals:** district nurses, GPs and social workers often know local providers well.
- **Council quality monitoring:** councils check providers they contract with.
- **Memberships:** belonging to a local or national care association shows engagement with the sector.
- **Recent, specific reviews,** and how the provider responds to criticism.

If you are worried about a service

1. **Raise it with the manager.** Many concerns are put right quickly once the right person knows.
2. **Make a formal complaint in writing** if needed, with dates, names and what you would like to happen. Keep copies.
3. **Go to the Ombudsman** if you are not satisfied with the final response, or have had no response within a reasonable time. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (0300 061 0614) looks at complaints about adult social care, including privately funded care, usually within 12 months of you knowing about the problem.
4. **Tell CQC** about poor care you have seen or experienced, using the Give feedback on care form, even if you have also complained elsewhere.
5. **If someone is at risk of abuse or neglect,** contact the council's adult safeguarding team straight away, or call 999 in an emergency. See safeguarding and scams.

A short example of a first complaint:

> Dear [manager's name], I am writing about the care my father, [name], receives from your service. On [dates], [what happened]. This has caused [effect]. Please could you look into this, tell me what you will do to put it right, and reply within [14] days. I would be happy to meet to discuss it. Yours sincerely, [name, relationship, phone number]

What to do next

1. Look up each provider you are considering on the CQC website.
2. Read the full report, check the date and note any questions.
3. Ask each provider to talk you through its report and what has changed since.
4. Use the checklist in how to choose a care provider to compare them.

How we can help

Day and Nightcare (Day and Nightcare Live In Limited) is registered with CQC and rated Good. You can read our report on the CQC website, and you are welcome to ask us any questions about it. We provide fully managed live-in care anywhere in

England from £1,550 a week, and home care visits, waking nights and sleep-ins across Oxfordshire, and 24-hour care with carers working in shifts anywhere in England. Call 01865 715780 to arrange a free initial assessment.

Common questions

Does CQC check introductory agencies and self-employed carers?

No. CQC regulates organisations that provide personal care and have an ongoing role in directing it. Introductory agencies that only introduce self-employed carers, and carers employed directly by a family, do not have to register, so CQC does not inspect or rate them. If you use one of these arrangements, the checks CQC would make, such as on training, supervision and medicines, become the family's responsibility to ask about.

How often does CQC inspect home care services?

There is no fixed timetable. CQC decides when to assess a service based on risk and on the information it holds, including feedback from the public, staff and other organisations, and what providers must tell it. Services where there are concerns are usually looked at sooner, and CQC can inspect at any time. A service that is performing well may not be re-inspected for several years.

Can a provider be rated good overall but requires improvement in one area?

Yes. The overall rating is built from the ratings for the five key questions, so a service can be good overall while one question, such as safe or well-led, is rated requires improvement. Read that section of the report to see what CQC found, then ask the provider what it has changed since. A clear, specific answer, with evidence, is reassuring; a vague one is not.

What is a Registered Manager?

A Registered Manager is a person registered with CQC to manage a regulated service day to day. Together with the provider, they are legally responsible for meeting the regulations. The name of the Registered Manager appears on the service's CQC page. If the manager named there has left, ask the provider who is managing the service now and whether they have applied to register.

How do I tell CQC about care I have received or seen?

Use the Give feedback on care form on the CQC website, or call CQC on 03000 616161. You can share good experiences as well as concerns. CQC cannot take forward individual complaints on your behalf, but it uses what people tell it to decide when, where and what to inspect. To resolve a complaint, go to the provider first, then the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Sources and further information

- CQC: The 5 key questions we ask
- CQC: Our ratings and scores
- CQC: The fundamental standards
- CQC: Our improvement plans for 2026
- CQC: Draft sector-specific assessment frameworks (consultation closed 12 June 2026)
- GOV.UK: Review into the operational effectiveness of the Care Quality Commission (full report)
- CQC: Complain about a service or provider
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: Make a complaint

Read next

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

How to choose a care provider: checklist and questions to ask

A practical checklist for choosing a home care or live-in care provider in England: the questions to ask about training, continuity, out-of-hours support, care plans, reviews, complaints, prices and notice, the red flags to watch for, and how to use CQC reports and reviews.

Read the guide →

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

Managed or introductory live-in care: what is the difference?

Fully managed live-in care, introductory agencies and self-employed carers compared for families in England: who is responsible, CQC regulation, employment status, insurance, cover when a carer is ill, VAT, costs, risks and the questions to ask before choosing.

Read the guide →

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

Care contracts: what to check before you sign

What to look for in a home care or live-in care contract in England, based on consumer law and the CMA's guidance on care contracts: fees and increases, extra charges, deposits, notice, hospital stays, cancellation rights, liability and complaints.

Read the guide →

All guides in the information centre **Check what help you could get**

Talk to our care team: 01865 715780
enquiries@dayandnightcare.co.uk · Out of hours: 07775 686272
Day and Nightcare Live In Limited, 9 Hollow Way, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2NA
CQC overall rating: Good (report published 20 April 2018)

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Information, not advice: please check anything important with the organisation named.