

Caring Britain

How care home
reviews are
shaping choice





Foreword

by Will Blackwell

Choosing a care home is one of the biggest decisions a family can make. Beyond regulator inspections and the physical premises, families also need to understand what day-to-day life in a home really feels like.

This focus on lived experience is also shaping care regulation. Across the UK, regulators are placing greater emphasis on the experiences and outcomes of people using services. The CQC's new assessment framework reflects this shift, alongside similar approaches taken by other UK regulators. As a result, verified reviews have become an increasingly important source of evidence, helping ensure the voices of residents and families are reflected through clear, recent and structured feedback.

Verified reviews bring to life the day-to-day realities of living in a care home. Reviews share recent, personal experience from residents and the people closest to them with those looking for a care home. They are not a replacement for regulation, inspections or organising a visit, but can certainly help families move from uncertainty to a more confident shortlist of care homes.

For care providers, reviews are just as important. They show what people notice and what they appreciate. They also point to the parts of the care experience that may need more attention.

This report looks at what carehome.co.uk review data tells us about people's priorities. Overall, the findings paint a positive picture

of care homes, with 44% achieving an overall review score of 9.5 or above out of 10, and a further 20% scoring between 9.0 and 9.5. Some findings will feel familiar – for example, the fact that reviews of staff sit at the heart of positive experiences. Care, kindness, dignity and reassurance come through again and again. Other findings are more challenging. Value for money is consistently one of the lowest-rated areas. The reviews show that activities and food & drink are also areas for improvement because they shape daily life in ways that matter deeply to residents.

The report also looks ahead to how search is changing. Artificial intelligence tools are beginning to present care home information in new ways. In this context, a strong, fresh and trusted review profile is likely to matter even more. That being said, the principles have not changed: reputation starts with the care people experience, and with the trust they place in the information they read.

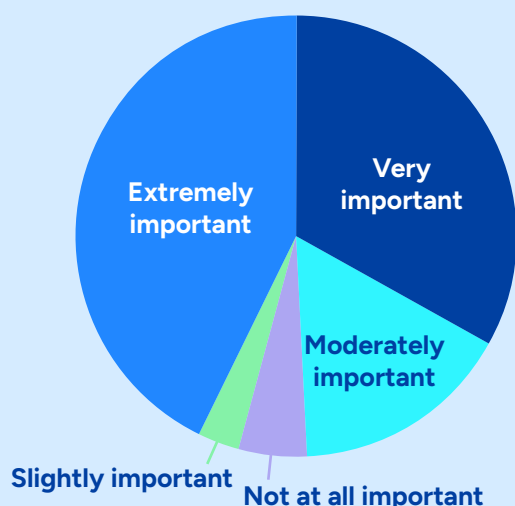
carehome.co.uk has always believed families deserve a full picture, not a filtered one. Verified reviews are a central part of that picture. They help families find care confidently, and they help the sector see what great care looks like through the eyes of the people receiving and experiencing it.

Introduction

Why reviews matter

Families rarely choose a care home based on one source of information. They read inspection ratings, look at prices, speak to homes, compare locations, visit where they can and talk to people they trust. Reviews sit alongside those steps. Polling by carehome.co.uk has indicated that **76% of people looking for care said reviews were extremely or very important to their choice of a care home.**

That lived experience is valuable because care is not only judged in formal systems. It is experienced in the small, repeated moments of daily life. From how staff speak to residents and whether loved ones are kept informed, to whether activities feel meaningful and meals are enjoyable, all these details come together to form a comprehensive picture of what life in a care home is really like.



Importance of reviews to your care home decision

43%

33%

16%

3%

5%

For providers, reviews are a way to see those details through families' eyes. They can show whether the culture a home wants to create is being felt by residents and relatives, and crucially whether that culture is a good fit for the families in question. They can also show where people need more reassurance. A low score for value for money, for example, does not always mean poor care. It may mean people need clearer communication about costs, choices and what is included in the price.

About the research

The data in this report is drawn from verified reviews on the carehome.co.uk website between 2021 - 2026.

carehome.co.uk is the number one website in the UK for helping people find support for their own or their loved ones' older care needs.

carehome.co.uk

Headline findings



Around 76% of survey respondents said carehome.co.uk reviews were extremely or very important when deciding which home to choose



Care home staff consistently receive **higher ratings** than any other aspect of care



Value for money consistently receives the **lowest ratings** of all review categories



64% of care homes are rated highly, with an overall score of 9.0 or above out of 10



Daughters leave 38% of published reviews.
Sons leave 16.5%



Residential homes receive **slightly higher average** review scores than nursing homes



AI search tools increasingly rely on carehome.co.uk to identify the 'best care homes', making verified reviews more important than ever

Section 1

What matters most to residents and their loved ones

The strongest message in our review data is the importance of people. Staff sit at the centre of what families and residents value most. Across all price bands, staff receive the highest average rating of any review category. They also receive the greatest number of five-star ratings, with **56,222 five-star staff ratings recorded between May 2025 and May 2026.**

For care providers this reflects the investment many homes are making in recruiting, training and retaining quality staff at a time when workforce pressures remain one of the biggest challenges facing adult social care. Good care depends on good people. Yet finding and keeping skilled, compassionate staff is difficult and expensive. Against this backdrop, the strength of staff ratings is a clear sign that families and residents recognise the quality, consistency and kindness of the people delivering care every day.

This points to the everyday reality of care. Families deeply appreciate kindness and reassurance, and they notice whether staff know their loved one as a person.

Most common positive
words in reviews



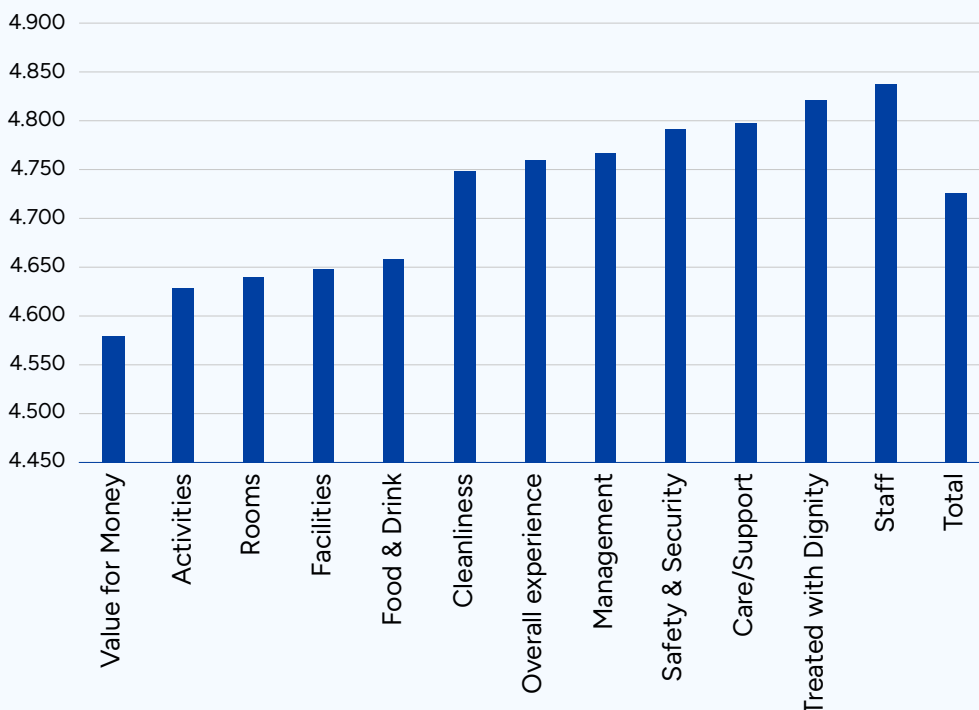
The language in positive reviews supports this. In the sentiment analysis, **“staff” is the most common positive word, with 1,198 mentions.**

The data also shows where the sector has more work to do. Value for money is one of the weakest areas overall and is the lowest-rated category across price bands.

This is an emotionally charged measure. While the average daily cost of a residential care home is broadly comparable to the average price of a hotel room in England, families are paying for far more than accommodation alone. They are weighing up whether the care, staffing, safety, support and quality of life their loved one receives justify what is often one of the largest financial commitments they will ever make, often at a difficult time.

They may also feel frustration that more care is not publicly funded, or anxiety about savings and inheritance being used to meet costs. At the same time, providers are facing higher staffing, training, energy, food and operating costs. The result is a difficult balance: families want to feel confident that fees reflect the quality of care received, while providers are working to maintain standards in a highly pressured market.

carehome.co.uk review scores by review category



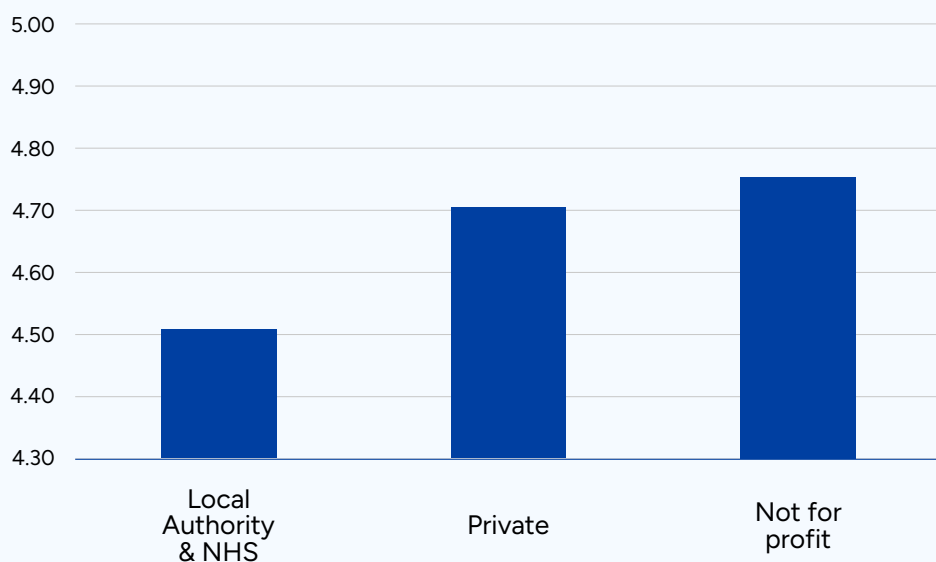
Review scores are rated out of 5.

Activities also sit among the lower-rated areas with an average rating of 4.64, the second lowest of all categories. This deserves attention because activities are not an optional extra. A meaningful activities programme can support mental wellbeing, physical movement, relationships, and confidence. It can also signal that a home is person-centred, not just safe.

Food and drink also require attention. Mealtimes can be among the most important parts of the day for residents. They offer nutrition, routine, comfort and social contact. Food and drink performs as one of the lowest rated categories. For providers, that makes mealtimes a practical and visible area for improvement.

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) highlights the importance of both meaningful activity and mealtimes in its Living Well in Care Homes report. It states: "Keeping active is essential to living a fulfilling life. That applies to everyone, especially older people living in care homes." The report also stresses that mealtimes are about far more than nutrition, saying: "Mealtimes are an important part of the day. They are about more than just food and drink – they are an opportunity for social interaction, enjoyment and maintaining independence."

Average review rating by care home ownership



Review scores also vary by ownership type. Not for Profit homes have the highest average score, at 4.76, followed by private homes at 4.71. Local authority and NHS-owned homes score lower, at 4.51. This should be interpreted carefully, as ownership type may reflect wider differences in funding, resident needs and the mix of self-funded and publicly funded placements. Even so, it suggests reviews can help highlight where people experience care differently across the market.

Pawel Wisniowski, Home Manager, MHA The Homestead, Carterton, Oxfordshire, said

"Reviews on carehome.co.uk are incredibly important to us at MHA The Homestead because they provide an honest reflection of the experiences of those who know our home best. Every review, whether positive or constructive, helps us understand what we are doing well and where we can improve.

"Not only that, but it also enhances and reflects our reputation of providing top-quality support and care for those who choose to live with us, and the trust families place in us. The 10/10 score means so much to us. We can show prospective residents and their families genuine feedback when they question our reputation.

"In addition, the scores we receive reflect the reputation our colleagues have. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism are reflected in the positive feedback we receive. Constructive feedback is equally valuable, as it encourages us to reflect, learn, and continually enhance the quality of care, support, and experiences we provide.

"We actively encourage residents, relatives, friends, and visitors to share their thoughts, knowing that every comment helps shape the future of our service. Feedback has led to meaningful improvements across many aspects of the home, from the environment and activities to communication and the overall resident experience.

"Maintaining a 10/10 score is not our end goal - it reflects our ongoing commitment to providing person-centred care of the highest standard and maintaining our reputation for doing so. We will continue striving to exceed expectations, creating a warm, welcoming community where every resident feels valued, respected, and truly at home."

Sarah Lander-Scott, Barchester's Director of Customer Experience, comments:

"Feedback from our customers and their loved ones is incredibly important to us, we look at and act upon every single review and comment we receive. As well as providing the much-needed reassurance for customers looking for a care home and a sense of what our homes provide, reviews gathered via carehome.co.uk from existing customers help us shape our business and continue to improve many aspects of life in our homes and hospitals.

"We share reviews received regularly with our senior leadership team to make decisions, for example it was customer feedback about the impact of outings on our residents and patients that led us to invest heavily in our minibus fleet. Every Barchester home now has access to a minibus in order that residents can enjoy many more days out to visit all kinds of different places of interest.

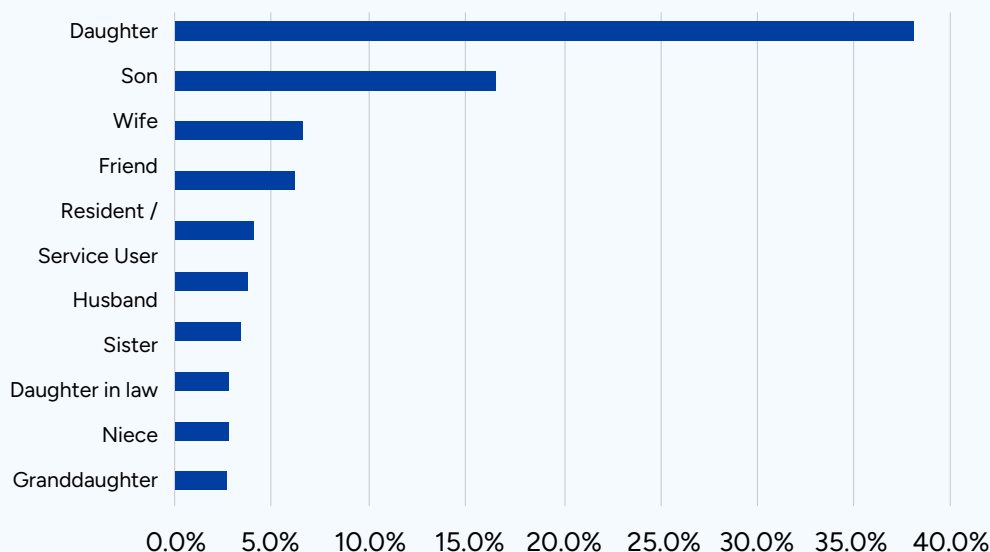
"We also use reviews to celebrate success, so as well as changing our proposition, reviews help us to reward those working in our services through our employee recognition schemes. We are constantly listening to find out how we can improve and carehome.co.uk provides a vital feedback tool."

Section 2

Who leaves reviews and how review behaviour is changing

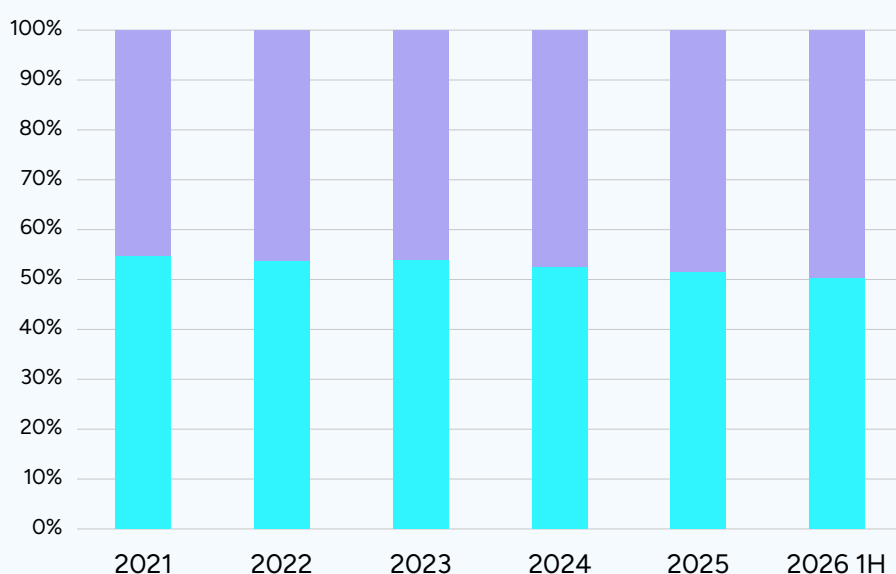
Our review data also shows who is most likely to share their views. **Daughters leave 38% of published reviews on [carehome.co.uk](https://www.carehome.co.uk)**, whereas sons account for 16.5%. Wives, friends, residents or service users, husbands, sisters, daughters-in-law, nieces and granddaughters make up the remaining top ten reviewer connections.

Reviews published by connection



This finding will be familiar to many providers. Daughters are often deeply involved in finding care, visiting regularly, speaking with staff and monitoring the quality of care their parent or relative receives. In carehome.co.uk's previous report, we found that nearly two thirds of people seeking care for a parent are daughters. Over the last few years, the data points to other family members and loved ones becoming more present in reviews data. Nevertheless, daughters remain a central point of contact in the care journey.

Proportion of reviews collected via Care Home Cards



The route people use to leave reviews is also changing. Online reviews are slowly rising. Online reviews accounted for 45% of reviews in 2021, rising to 49.5% in the first half of 2026. **Physical review cards which residents and loved ones can fill out within a home still account for 50.5% of reviews in the first half of 2026**, so they remain important.

We would encourage all care providers to make review collection as accessible as possible. Some residents and relatives are comfortable online, while others prefer writing down their thoughts or sharing them through conversation. Providers should make it easy for people to leave honest feedback in the way that suits them.

Angela Early, Care Seeking Daughter, said

"I was Googling care homes and came upon carehome.co.uk and for me, reviews were a huge reason for using the site. My sister and I were able to search for care homes near to us and find out what was available.

"Knowing they had good reviews was very important to us. It was especially useful to read that the care staff were kind and good. This really put us at ease and made us more confident about the care home we chose. Our dad has dementia so didn't really understand what was going on but our mum who has also moved into the home found reading the reviews very reassuring and a huge comfort."



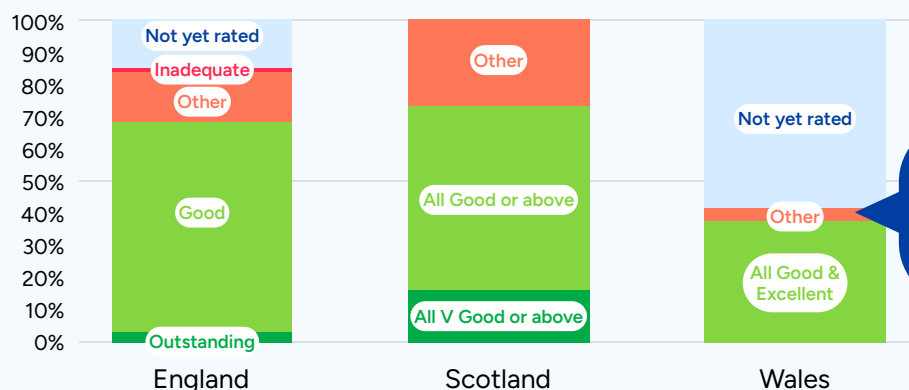
Section 3

Reviews and regulator ratings

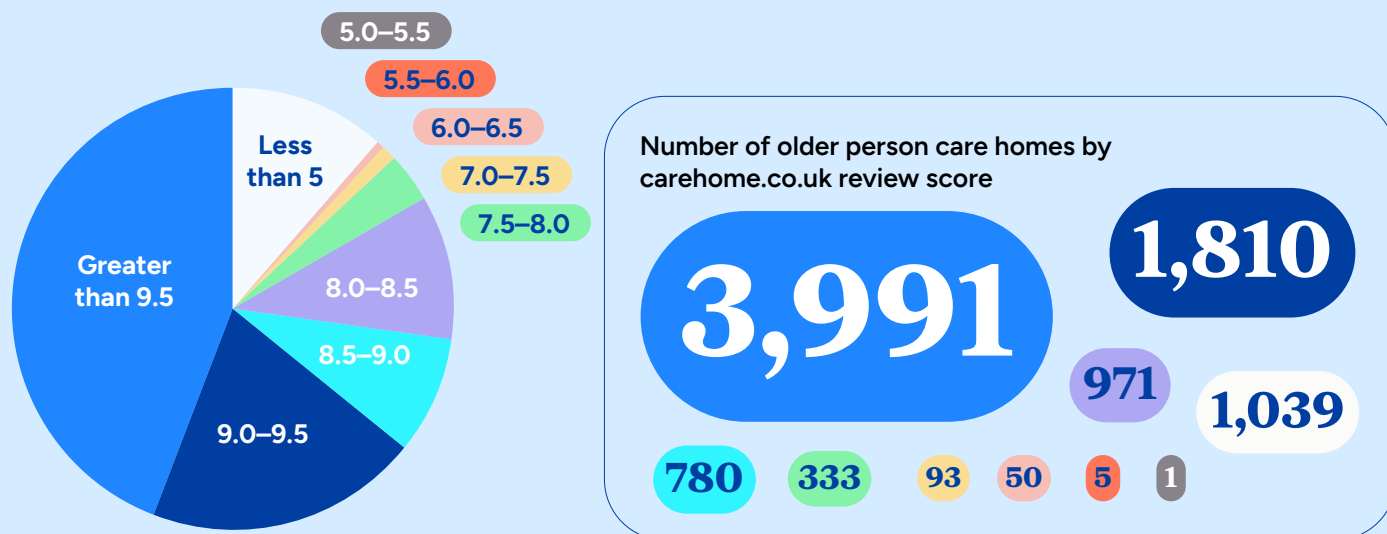
Regulator ratings and reviews do different jobs. Care regulator ratings provide an independent assessment of whether a care home meets national standards for safety, care and leadership. They are essential. But they are not always recent – our last report found over 50% of care homes in England have not been rated in the last four years – and they cannot show every part of daily life in a home.

Reviews add a different layer. They show recent, real-world experience that can capture whether families feel informed, whether residents are happy, whether meals are enjoyed and whether staff are kind and consistent. They can also show how a home is changing between inspections. Taken together, both regulatory ratings and carehome.co.uk care home reviews provide a similar positive picture of the care home landscape in the UK, with just under 70% of homes rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the regulator.

Number of older person care homes by regulatory rating; 31st Dec 2025



CIW's new rating system was introduced on 1st April 2025. 41% of care homes had been rated by 31st Dec 2025

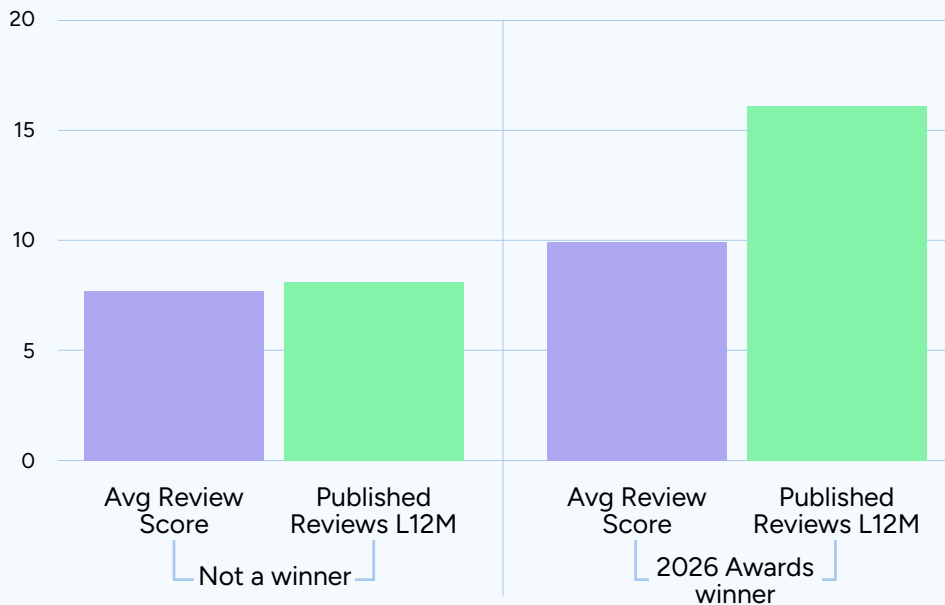


Out of more than 9,000 older person care homes listed on carehome.co.uk, carehome.co.uk's analysis of their reviews paints a positive picture of the sector. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of care homes have an overall review score of 9.0 or above out of 10, with 44% achieving 9.5 or higher.

Data from carehome.co.uk shows that homes rated Outstanding by CQC collect more reviews per home and have higher overall review scores than lower-rated homes. This suggests that high regulatory standards are often reflected in residents' and families' experiences.

The review data also shows a strong pattern among the top 20 carehome.co.uk award winners. Award-winning homes have an average review score of around 9.9, compared with around 8.1 for other homes, and collect roughly 16 reviews per year on average, compared with around 8 for other homes. Their underlying rating score is also higher. This reinforces the value of regular, recent feedback alongside formal inspection ratings, giving providers another way to evidence the day-to-day experience of care.

Award winners vs rest: review score and average number of reviews



For providers, the most useful message is balance. Reviews should not be positioned as a replacement for regulation, but as a complement to it. Ratings by the Care Quality Commission, Care Inspectorate and Care Inspectorate Wales tell families about the regulated picture whereas reviews add recent day-to-day experience. As the care regulators' framework places greater emphasis on what people experience and what matters to them, verified reviews can help providers show how care is being experienced and improved between inspections.

Georgie Powell, Home Manager at Marjorie House, said:

"The Top 20 care home award is especially meaningful because it is based on feedback from our residents and their families, whose trust means everything to us. It is a testament to the dedication, compassion and hard work of our wonderful team, who go above and beyond every day to ensure residents feel supported and enabled to thrive in our care."

Abby Symons, Head of Sales and Marketing, Sanctuary Care, said:

"At Sanctuary Care, we know that choosing a care home is one of the most important decisions a person and their family will make. While regulatory ratings are an important part of that process, reviews can provide another valuable perspective by sharing the experiences of residents and their loved ones.

"Reviews can be particularly useful when a home is new and awaiting its first inspection, or where it has recently joined a new provider and is working towards a rating under new ownership. In these situations, feedback from residents and families can offer reassurance and help people understand what everyday life in the home is really like.

"They can also help highlight improvements that have been made since a previous inspection. Care homes are constantly evolving and, while regulatory ratings provide an important benchmark, reviews can offer a more up-to-date reflection of the experiences people are having today

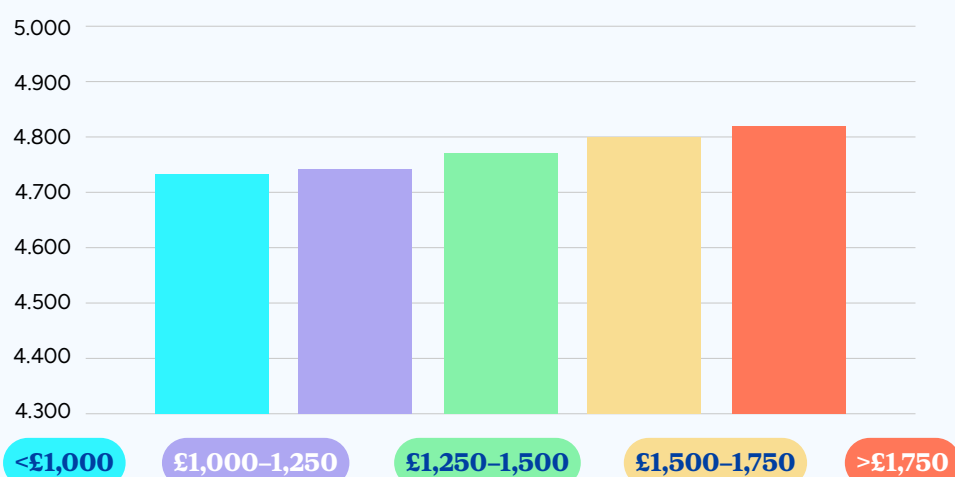
"At Sanctuary Care, we encourage people to look at a range of information when considering care options, including regulatory ratings, social media, provider website, reviews and, where possible, visiting a home in person. Taken together, these can help families build a fuller picture and feel confident in making a decision that's right for them."

Section 4

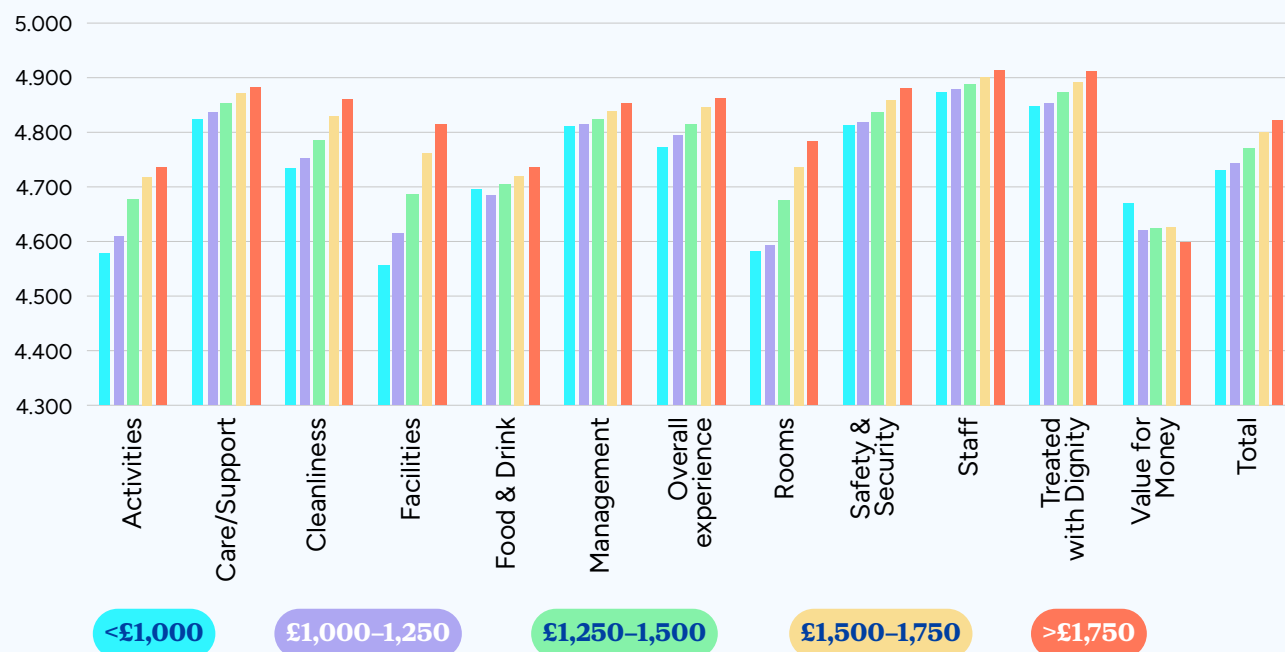
Cost of care and value for money

Cost inevitably shapes how families judge care. It can also shape what they expect from a home. carehome.co.uk data shows that the most expensive homes tend to receive higher total average review ratings. Homes in the under £1,000 weekly fee band have a total average rating of 4.73. Homes in the over £1,750 band have a total average rating of 4.82.

carehome.co.uk review scores by price point of care home



carehome.co.uk review scores by price point of care home



The largest differences between the lowest and highest price bands are in facilities, rooms and activities. For example, the most expensive care homes (>£1,750 per week) score on average 0.25 points higher on the food and drink offer than the most affordable homes (<£1,000 per week). That suggests higher-priced homes may be gaining recognition for the visible parts of the experience: for example, the highly specialised wet rooms, therapy facilities and the overall lifestyle offer. These are the details families can often see and compare.

Perceptions of value for money remain consistently high across all price bands. The average rating falls only slightly, from 4.67 for homes costing under £1,000 per week to 4.60 for those charging more than £1,750 per week, suggesting that families generally feel higher-priced homes still provide good value despite their greater cost. Value for money is also an emotionally charged measure when it comes to care homes. Families are not simply judging the price they pay, but whether their loved one is safe, happy, well cared for and receiving the quality of life they hoped for.

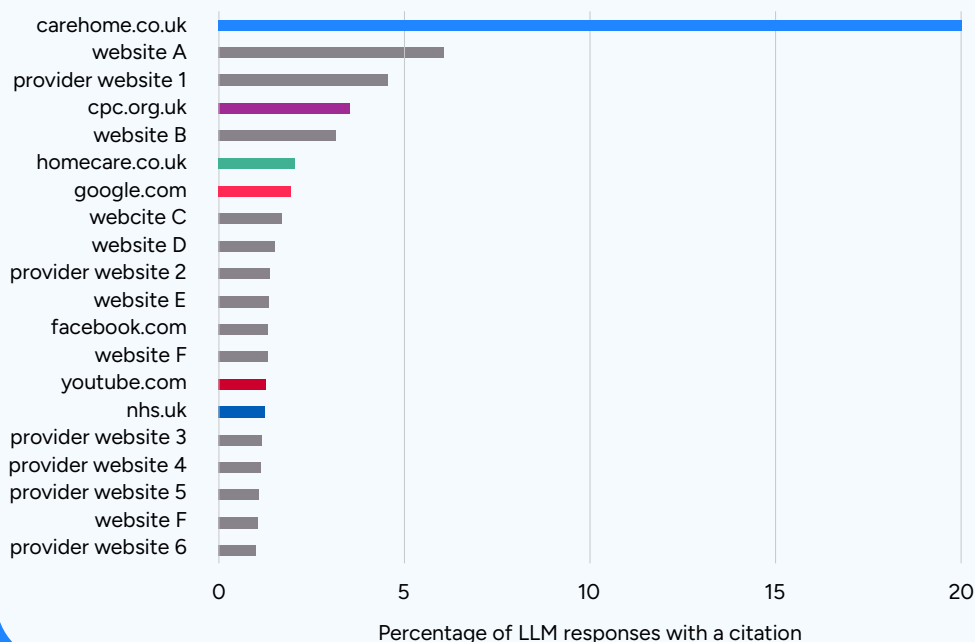
This is a useful reminder for providers. Families may accept that care is costly, but they still want to understand what they are paying for. They want clear communication about fees, extras, staffing, facilities, activities and changes to costs. When those points are unclear, trust can weaken even where the care itself is strong.

Section 5

Reviews, AI search and LLM visibility

A new route into care home search is emerging. Families are beginning to use tools such as ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, Perplexity and other large language model (LLM) tools to ask questions about care homes. This behaviour change is constantly developing, and it is important for providers because these systems may influence which homes are seen, compared and trusted.

Top cited domains on LLMs for top rated / best / ratings / reviews / recommended care homes



Based on a Profound study of 2k prompts conducted in May 2026. Shows citations across ChatGPT, Google AI Mode / Overviews / Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Meta AI, Grok and Perplexity.

Research conducted by Profound for Tomorrow's Guides shows carehome.co.uk is the most cited source in responses to prompts about the top, best, rated, reviewed or recommended care homes. **carehome.co.uk accounts for 20% of cited responses**, which is around 5.7 times more than the CQC, 10.4 times more than Google and 16.3 times more than the NHS for these care home prompts.

In research across 50 locations on Google AI Overviews, Google AI Mode and ChatGPT, **96% of care homes named as among the "best" providers in a location collected reviews from carehome.co.uk.**

Those homes had collected an average 74 total carehome.co.uk reviews, compared with a national average of 26. They also had an average carehome.co.uk review score of 9.2, compared with 7.8 nationally. carehome.co.uk Top 20 regional award winners scored even higher, at around 9.9, with around 85 total reviews on average.

A review profile on carehome.co.uk is becoming a critical part of what AI systems interpret and surface when people ask for help. Fresh, verified and consistent reviews may therefore support visibility as well as trust.

That does not mean providers should chase AI visibility for its own sake. The foundation is still care, communication and a trustworthy feedback culture and reviews still need to be earned, collected regularly and handled openly.

Section 6

How carehome.co.uk verifies reviews

Trust is what makes reviews useful. Without verification, reviews lose all credibility and no longer act as a clear source of insight for families or as a fairer source of feedback for providers.

carehome.co.uk's review process aims to ensure that reviews are genuine and trustworthy. All reviews undergo a careful process of verification that includes checks against numerous data points, with the reviews team following up on suspicious reviews. Every year over 10,000 reviews are not published as they do not meet the strict quality standards upheld by the platform.

The principles assessed help ensure that only real people leave reviews about their recent experience, free from conflicts of interest. This is important because families deserve to make such an important decision on the basis of insight they can trust. It also matters for providers who can make modifications and improvements to their service based on authentic reviews, rather than those that are fraudulent or misleading.

Mandy Hopkins, reviews manager at carehome.co.uk, said:

"The verification process begins when a review is submitted online or received via a review card and entered into carehome.co.uk's system. Each review is first assessed against the Review Policy to confirm that the reviewer has a genuine connection to the care home, the review is complete, and its content meets the site's publishing standards.

"Reviews that meet these initial requirements then undergo a series of authentication checks. These include identifying duplicate or suspicious information, such as matching IP addresses, names, email addresses or telephone numbers. Where additional verification is required, the Reviews Team may contact the reviewer by telephone or email and request further information to confirm the authenticity of the review.

"Reviews that successfully pass these checks are approved for publication. Reviews that do not meet the required standards or cannot be satisfactorily verified are not published."

Conclusion

The reviews data paints a clear picture of what residents and families value most. Care that feels personal, safe, kind and well-led stands out, with staff playing the biggest role in shaping the overall experience.

For providers, there is immense value within the reviews shared by residents and their loved ones. They should be read in full and where patterns emerge, action should be taken, whether that be sharing praise with staff or responding to concerns. Our sector-wide data suggests strengthening activities, mealtimes, communication and the way costs are explained is the place to start.

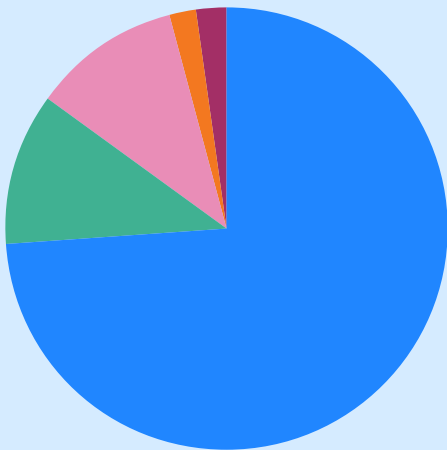
For policymakers and journalists, the data shows why lived experience should be part of any serious conversation about care quality. Regulator ratings remain vital, but they are not the whole picture. Reviews bring the day-to-day reality of care into view at scale.

For families, verified reviews help turn a difficult search into a clearer one. For the wider sector, they show that the story of care is often found in the details: the staff member who listens, the meal that feels familiar, the activity that gives purpose.

About carehome.co.uk

carehome.co.uk is the UK's leading website for finding a care home. It supports families through one of life's most important and emotional decisions: choosing the right care home for themselves or someone they love.

The website lists care homes across the UK and brings together practical information, clear guidance and verified reviews from residents and families. This gives people a fuller picture of what care is really like before they take the next step.



Web Traffic (similarweb; August 2025–June 2026)

carehome.co.uk

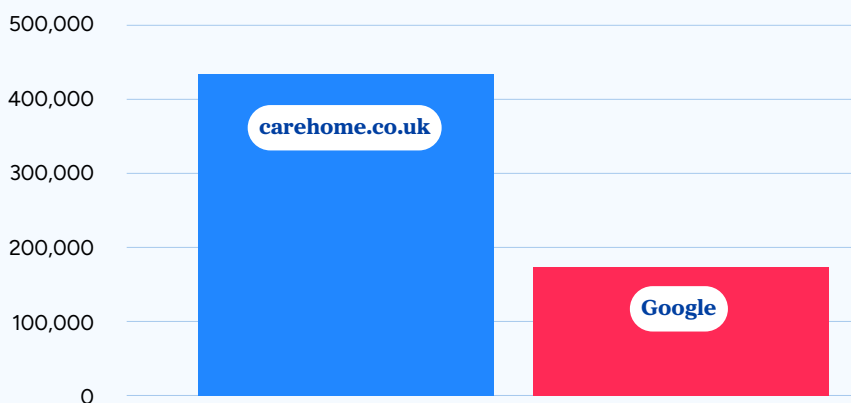
homecare.co.uk

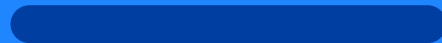
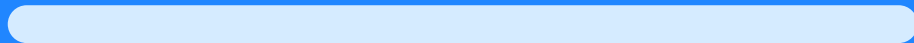
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carehome.co.uk vs Google review publication; 1st July 2026





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