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Kirklees Council Faces High Court Challenge Over Dementia Care Home Privatisation

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Families and campaigners have launched a robust legal challenge in the High Court to halt Kirklees Council's decision to privatise its final two long-stay dementia care homes, Claremont House in Heckmondwike and Castle Grange in Newsome. The council's move, finalised in February, has sparked widespread outrage, with residents' families, local councillors, and the wider public decrying the lack of transparency and consultation.

The controversial decision to transfer the homes to private operators has been met with fierce resistance. Eight opposition councillors previously called for scrutiny of the initial proposal, raising serious concerns about the financial justifications provided by the council. Despite this, the Labour-led Cabinet pressed ahead, brushing aside objections. Campaigners, undeterred, have now enlisted Irwin Mitchell's public law and human rights experts to challenge the legality of the move through a judicial review.

Rebecca Chapman, a specialist lawyer at Irwin Mitchell representing the campaigners, stated in a recent interview: "Local authority-run care homes are a lifeline for vulnerable people, especially those with dementia. Families have expressed profound anger and distress at the council's handling of this process. We've heard heart-wrenching accounts of the potential impact on residents, yet the council has persisted with privatisation plans. We've applied for a judicial review to scrutinise the decision's legality."

The campaigners argue that the council's financial rationale lacks credible evidence and that the consultation process was woefully inadequate. This legal action follows a successful 2023 campaign that forced the council to abandon earlier plans to close the homes outright. The group remains steadfast, vowing to fight until the threat of privatisation is lifted.

Among those affected is 90-year-old Brenda Hughes, a resident of Castle Grange for seven years following a fall. Brenda, who has late-stage mixed dementia, relies on the home's exceptional care. Her son, Adrian Pygott, 62, expressed deep concern about the potential consequences of privatisation. In an interview, he said: "My mother has complex emotional and physical needs. Even minor changes can cause her significant distress. The staff at Castle Grange provide outstanding care, and I'm terrified of what privatisation or a potential move could mean for her and others. The council claims this is about financial prudence, but their evidence is riddled with holes. We're fighting for our loved ones' wellbeing, but the council seems indifferent."

Both Claremont House and Castle Grange accommodate up to 40 residents each, offering specialised care for those with dementia. The campaigners' determination reflects a broader unease about the erosion of public services under the current Labour government's watch, with critics arguing that vulnerable communities are being sidelined for questionable financial gains.

The High Court will now determine whether the council's decision withstands legal scrutiny. For families like Adrian's, the outcome could shape the future of care for some of Kirklees' most vulnerable residents.