

# Concern growing over care home company

**CHRIS BURATTA** on why the financial fortunes of Southern Cross Healthcare could affect the county's elderly

CONCERN is mounting for the financial future of a company that runs six Oxfordshire nursing homes.

Civil servants are in talks with Southern Cross Healthcare, which provides care home beds for 30,000 elderly residents nationwide.

It is feared that if the firm were to go out of business, the owners of its care homes could repossess them,

which could see thousands of people needing to be rehoused.

Residents at the six Oxfordshire homes run by the company include 170 placed there by Oxfordshire County Council. It said it was monitoring the situation.

A council spokesman said: "This council, like other local authorities elsewhere who have clients in care homes operated by Southern Cross,

is aware of recent coverage surrounding the care home provider.

"Officers have been and will continue to be in close contact with Southern Cross. We will monitor the situation and will ensure that our statutory duties towards our clients in the care of Southern Cross continue to be met."

The local homes are: Brookfield, Oxford; Longlands, Cassington;

Mill House, Witney; The Albany, Headington; The Crown, Didcot; and The Triangle, Wheatley.

House of Commons leader Sir George Young told MPs officials were in discussions with Southern Cross about plans to "address their financial difficulties".

There have been reports that the firm might break its banking covenants.

A statement released by the company's chief executive, Jamie Buchan, said: "Our plan is to seek to renegotiate the terms of our leases by July of this year. Whilst we cannot guarantee success, our banks continue to support us and I am working hard to encourage commissioners, residents, relatives and other stakeholders to work with us as we shape our future."