

Millionaire in move to save care homes

Lothian operator to
take on 11 Southern
Cross properties

■ IAN SWANSON
Political Editor

A LOTHIAN care home operator has stepped in to save 11 homes run by trouble-hit Southern Cross – but the move has sparked fears that the company's most profitable homes will be creamed off, leaving local councils to deal with the rest.

Multi-millionaire Robert Kilgour, who runs three homes in Edinburgh and Musselburgh, said he had been approached by landlords of the properties to ensure continuity of care after Southern Cross, which ran the homes, announced it was to close.

He said he expected to be making further announcements about additional Scottish homes in the near future.

Mr Kilgour pledged the 11 homes, which together have 500 beds and 800 staff, would be kept open and he announced plans for a seven-figure investment. Nine of the homes are in Aberdeenshire, one in Fife and one in Edinburgh, but he said he could not name either the homes or the landlords involved for legal reasons.

Southern Cross owned 752 homes including eight in the Lothians. Uncertainty still surrounds the future of around a third of them.

In 1989 Mr Kilgour founded Four Seasons Health Care, building it up over ten years into a UK-wide group with more than 100 care homes, which he then sold.

His current homes, run under the Renaissance Care brand, are Milford House and Glencairn in Edinburgh and Levenhall in Musselburgh, together offering 80 beds and employing 120 staff.

Explaining his move to step into the Southern Cross crisis, Mr Kilgour said: "It has become apparent that many landlords do not have the experience and track-record to provide the high quality of care that residents and their families expect and deserve.

"We're receiving a steady stream of enquiries from other landlords looking for help in ensuring a smooth transition away from the difficulties

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experienced by Southern Cross and I expect we'll be making further announcements about additional Scottish homes in the near future."

But Labour voiced concerns about the move to break up the chain of homes. A spokesman said: "What is of concern is if a situation is arising where the most profitable homes are creamed off by private providers and it becomes a cherry-picking process.

"Local authorities will then be left to step in and deal with less profitable ones or ones that need investment."

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Care homes

'We are seeing some light at end of tunnel'

THE collapse of Britain's biggest nursing home operator was always going to take months to sort out.

No-one expected alternative care for Southern Cross's 31,000 residents to be organised quickly, but finally it seems we are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Multi-millionaire city businessman Robert Kilgour has become the latest healthcare entrepreneur to wade into the crisis, taking over 11 Scottish homes and hinting that more will follow.

His move follows the huge deal struck by Dr Chai Patel, founder of the famous Priory clinics, last week to rescue 249 homes.

Mr Kilgour made a large part of his fortune by building up the Four Seasons Health Care chain in the 1990s, before branching out into other business interests and medical philanthropy.

It is reassuring that someone with his track record sees a bright future for the industry somewhere down the line.

But despite this progress, the future of a third of Southern Cross's 752 homes still hangs in the balance, including homes in the Lothians. Among them are sure to be those homes with the deepest problems.

If local authorities are to end up stepping in to care for their residents, then they must be told so that they can draw up their contingency plans.

If that information is not forthcoming from the financially stricken company, then the Scottish Government has a duty to intervene to ensure that the continuity of care is as smooth as possible.