

THE LIVES of vulnerable pensioners are being put at risk by the removal of sheltered housing wardens, a Scottish Sunday Express investigation has found.

Cuts have led to the loss of resident wardens, who look after elderly people, across Scotland.

The loss of these round-the-clock carers has even been linked to cases of death and injury.

A dying man pleaded yesterday with his local council not to take away the warden of his sheltered home as the vital service is gradually withdrawn.

And his furious MSP accused the council of "appalling" behaviour and slammed its actions as "illegal" because officials did not consult tenants on the removal of the warden service.

North Ayrshire Council plans to withdraw wardens from 27 sheltered homes housing more than 500 people, who pay nearly £200 a month rent. It means if residents need help in the future they'll have to phone a call centre.

In his sheltered flat at Dreghorn, near Irvine, Richard Davidson, 69, said: "I came here because it was safer for me and cheaper for the council. If I'd stayed at home under their new system the council would have had to put in a stair lift and a ramp for my mobile scooter - all very expensive. Here, there's a warden who is around to look after us."

He sighed "It might not affect me a lot longer, but in the end I might not be the only one to die."

Retired businessman Mr

## SCOTTISH EXCLUSIVE

By Graham Mole

Davidson, who suffers from terminal illness Chronic Obstructive Disorder, is now part of a committee campaigning to retain wardens and has the backing of MSP Kenneth Gibson.

Mr Gibson, who has raised the matter with Communities Minister Stewart Maxwell, said: "These are very elderly frail people and they're now quite traumatised. The council has quite clearly acted illegally by not consulting them and I think their behaviour is quite appalling."

He added: "The council talks about alert pens, but people go to sleep on them, they go off intermittently and even if someone comes out to them it's not someone they know."

Two years ago the Scottish Sunday Express told how more than 200 elderly people staged a rent strike after their local authority axed night wardens at eight sheltered housing complexes in East Renfrewshire.

But now the situation is spreading across the country as councils withdraw wardens in a bid to save cash.

Ann Ferguson, from Age Concern, said: "This is becoming widespread and the number of wardens has reduced drastically. Those tenants who have been used to having wardens valued seeing a friendly face."

Pensioner Jim Morrison, who

also lives in sheltered accommodation in Dreghorn, said "The council tried to keep this quiet saying that because it was a budgetary matter it could be dealt with confidentially. Then the cat came out of the bag and now there's unprecedented protest."

Duncan McMaster, 72, had to move into sheltered housing with his wife Morag, 70, after she slipped and badly injured her legs. At home they couldn't fit a stairlift so sheltered housing was the only option.

Duncan said: "The people here are frankly just terrified. We're the youngest but some of them are in their 90s."

"The council claim new technology will help summon assistance. But we've sent them a huge list of the times it's failed."

"In one case a lady aged 87 who was distressed by the soaring temperature in her flat was told to go to the boiler room and fix it herself. In another, a lady who had difficulty walking but desperately needed the toilet had to wait more than two hours for help."

Now, in a highly unusual move, Provost Bobby Rae revealed that he will exercise his power to call a special council meeting in a bid to reverse the decision.

Mr Rae, an SNP member of the council, said: "I've never done it before but the council has to change its mind on this. Wardens are crucial to these tenants' lives. If they do nothing else they take away the old folk's loneliness."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "We are investing record sums in local government - for the first time in many years local government spending as a share of total spending is increasing in each year of the forthcoming spending period."

"In 2008-09 North Ayrshire will receive funding from the Scottish Government of £291.2million. This includes an increase of almost £9million or 3.85% in core funding for local services."

A spokesperson for North Ayrshire Council said: "The Council is aware of its obligations and believes it has fully complied with the statutory requirements."



SECURE: The Dreghorn accommodation is due to lose its wardens