



# Unannounced Inspections: Are You Really Ready — or Just Hoping You Are?

The words “CQC are here” can expose, in seconds, the difference between a service that is ready and one that is simply hoping it is.

Unannounced inspections are not the enemy — they are a mirror.

You know you’re ready when:

- Every piece of evidence is live, current, and accessible.
- Staff understand *why* they do what they do — and can explain it confidently.
- Governance meetings, audits, and action plans

are continuous, not reactive.

- The Registered Manager can demonstrate impact: *“Here’s what we found, here’s what we did, and here’s what changed.”*
- The Nominated Individual already knows what inspectors will find — because they’ve seen it themselves.

### 🗨️ **Ask yourself:**

If CQC arrived this morning, would you spend the first hour welcoming them — or the first hour panicking to find evidence?

## You know you’re not ready when:

- Information is being collated “just in case” an inspection happens.
- Staff can’t link their actions to outcomes or quality statements.
- Audits are tick boxes, not analytical.
- The Reg 17 plan is static or non-existent.
- Conversations about inspection begin with *“I think we’re fine.”*



## 🚩 2. The Signs a Service Isn't Inspection-Ready

When we support providers through PGQ Reg 17 visits or C-

CAF reviews, there are always tell-tale warning signs that readiness is superficial:

Theme	What It Looks Like	Implication at Inspection
Leadership Blind Spots	Managers can't explain current risks or how they're mitigated.	Inspectors lose confidence in leadership oversight (" <i>Well-Led</i> " concerns).
Disconnected Data	Audits, incidents, complaints, and actions exist separately.	Evidence lacks triangulation; improvement can't be demonstrated.
Stale Documentation	Care plans and audits contain historic dates or generic phrases.	Inspectors see a culture of form-filling, not lived governance.
No Reflective Learning	Supervisions and meetings lack evidence of reflection or follow-through.	Suggests reactive culture; undermines Regulation 17 compliance.
Dependence on Individuals	Only the manager can answer key questions.	Risk of enforcement if assurance relies on one person.
Defensive Mindset	Staff or leaders justify instead of evidence.	Seen as poor transparency or limited insight into improvement needs.

In short — if evidence is being created *for* inspection rather than *because of* good governance, the inspection will expose it.

### 3. What if You're *Not There Yet* — But Working on It?

CQC does not expect perfection. What they want to see is credible improvement.

If a service is mid-journey — with a clear Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), SMART actions, and evidence of learning — inspectors recognise this as *leadership in progress*.

#### Positive indicators when you're still improving:

- A live, dated action plan showing progress, impact, and review.
- Evidence that issues are known, owned, and being addressed systematically.
- Managers who speak openly about challenges and can show what's changed since last inspection.
- A governance cycle that demonstrates self-awareness and follow-through.

When this level of transparency and structure exists, CQC sees *intent, capability, and accountability*.

That often prevents escalation and demonstrates “*Good*” leadership — even if outcomes aren't perfect yet.

#### *Reflective Question:*

Can you evidence *movement*, not just maintenance?

## ⚠️ 4. And What If You Believe You're Ready — But Can't Evidence It?

Confidence without evidence is one of the most dangerous positions for any provider.

Inspectors will test what you *believe* with what you can *prove*.

### If you cannot show your working:

- Your governance is classed as *weak assurance*.
- Your risk of enforcement increases — especially under Regulation 17.
- Your leadership credibility is questioned.

Belief must always be backed by evidence — and evidence must be *current, triangulated, and owned*.

### 💭 **Ask yourself:**

Could I defend my confidence with data, records, and outcomes — or only with words?





## 5. The Layered Model of Readiness

Level	Focus	What Readiness Looks Like	What Lack of Readiness Looks Like
<b>Frontline (Seniors/Deputies)</b>	<b>Daily practice, documentation, staff confidence</b>	<b>Real-time records, consistent language, confident answers</b>	<b>Inconsistent records, reliance on memory, poor handover detail</b>
<b>Registered Manager</b>	<b>Governance, culture, oversight</b>	<b>Live action plan, data triangulation, visible leadership</b>	<b>Defensive explanations, outdated audits, reactive responses</b>
<b>Nominated Individual/Director</b>	<b>Organisational assurance</b>	<b>Regular Reg 17 reviews, thematic analysis, system learning</b>	<b>No evidence of cross-service learning, unknown risk areas</b>
<b>Board/Ownership</b>	<b>Strategic accountability</b>	<b>Governance dashboard, independent assurance, active follow- up</b>	<b>Lack of visibility, assurance by assumption, no governance narrative</b>



## 6. Readiness Is Not an Event — It's a Mindset

True readiness is built into daily routines, not triggered by inspection alerts.

It's visible in:

- how staff speak about residents,
- how evidence is stored and used,
- how leaders respond to mistakes, and
- how improvement is documented, shared, and sustained.

A service that *lives readiness* doesn't fear inspection — it welcomes it. Because it knows what's working, what's changing, and what's next.



## 7. The Real Cost of Not Being Ready

Failing an inspection isn't just about ratings. The consequences ripple across:

- **Morale:** staff lose trust in leadership and become defensive.
- **Reputation:** referrals, funding, and confidence decline.
- **Oversight:** increased LA monitoring, conditions, or NOP/NOD.
- **Improvement burden:** reactive action plans drain energy and time.

**Readiness isn't a luxury — it's protection for residents, staff, and the organisation's future.**

## 8. Final Reflection: Readiness Has a Voice

If your service could  
speak, would it say:

- “I’m inspected daily by my own leaders.”  
or

- “I’m waiting for CQC to tell me how I’m doing.”

Unannounced  
inspections don’t expose  
you — they reveal you.

And if readiness is  
authentic, there’s  
nothing to fear.

### PGQ’s Role

At PGQ Care Solutions, we don’t prepare you *for* inspection — we help you build a culture where inspection readiness is a *daily state of assurance*.

Through our Reg 17 Reviews, C-CAF Accreditation, and Governance for Leaders Framework, we support providers to:

- recognise when they’re not ready,
- rebuild systems that embed assurance, and
- evidence meaningful, sustained improvement.



Because when readiness is real, inspection  
day feels just like any other day.



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