

At a meeting of the Health and Adults Care Scrutiny Panel held on Friday, 11 March 2011 at 7:00 pm at the Committee Room 1, Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow.

Present:

Councillor Shantanu Rajawat (Chair)

Councillors Melvin Collins, Pamela Fisher, Liz Mammatt, Barbara Reid and Peta Vaught

Cooptee – Bob Hardy-King (Hounslow LINK)

Also present – Councillors Sam Hearn, Paul Lynch, Gerald McGregor and John Todd

1. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Ajmer Grewal, and also Rea Mattocks.

2. Closure of Chiswick and Bedfont Day Centres (and related issues)

The Chair welcomed the Panel Members, the Executive Lead Member, other Members, officers, Third Sector representatives and other members of the public present. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to enable Panel Members to have a full and open discussion with the Director of Community Services and the Executive Lead Member for Health and Adult Care about the decision-making and consultation processes relating to the proposed closure of Chiswick and Bedfont Day Centres. He referred those present to the report of the Assistant Director, Scrutiny & Performance and accompanying appendices (pages 1-33 of the Agenda pack).

He then welcomed the following witnesses:

Laura Sophie Ware – daughter of service user

Jennifer Tobey – daughter of service user

Ian Hatchard – son of service user

Nick Drum – service user

David Drum – father of service user

Jaspal Vilkh – service user

Jennie Whitford – Alzheimer's Society

Cherna Crome – Carers UK

Stephen Hawkins – Age Concern

Eileen Butler – Age Concern

Councillor Gurmail Lal – Executive Lead Member for Health and Adult Care

Mimi Konigsberg – Director of Community Services

Martin Elliot – Assistant Director, Older People and Intermediate Care

Sue Witcher – Service Manager, Regulated Services

Laura Sophie Ware (daughter of service user)

Ms Ware thanked the Panel for what she considered to be a very fine report that reflected her own views. She said that the way that a country treated its elderly and infirm was a mark of its civilisation. She asked if the proposal to close Chiswick Day Care Centre could be described as "civilised".

She Quoted what the Director of Community Services had said in September 2010 in “Putting People First in Hounslow – Strategy Document”: *“Where people do need help to get their needs met, we want them to be at the centre of saying what their needs are, deciding how best they can be met and in making sure they get the best possible deal for their money.”*

She had felt very excited when she first read those words, she said, but she had now gone from being excited to being very disappointed. She felt that no consideration had been given to herself as a carer. She pointed out that her mother would not get a personal budget because she did not qualify, and there was nowhere else for her to go if Chiswick Day Care Centre was closed.

She pointed out that at the second consultation meeting at the Day Centre the staff had talked about using the Centre for reablement. She felt that the Council needed to get to the bottom of what it actually wanted to provide and then work with the service users and carers to achieve this collectively.

Jennifer Tobey (daughter of service user)

Ms Tobey said that her family’s first contact with this process had been the general public consultation document, which her mother filled in. This made no mention of the closure of Chiswick Day Care Centre, she said, although it was very specific about other cuts, and she considered this a little bit dishonest. She pointed out that at the consultation meeting on 9th February, she and her mother were told that the decision had already been made, so there was no point in objecting. She stressed that her mother, who was nearly 91, would not be able to get to and benefit from the alternative universal activities that were envisaged (such as a book club and yoga classes). She felt that anyone who could write a consultation document like that knew nothing about the needs of service user groups that attended Chiswick Day Care Centre.

Ian Hatchard (son of service user)

Mr Hatchard (who was Ms Tobey’s brother) added that he had no idea what had happened to the notes that were made at that meeting. He shared Ms Tobey’s concern about a consultation meeting where service users and their carers were told that the decision that was the subject of the consultation had already been made.

David Drum (father of service user)

Mr Drum, whose son attended Leaders Employment Resource, expressed his deep concern about and strong opposition to the proposal to close this facility. He considered the proposal to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding, not just of Leaders and the nature of its work, but also of the alternative employment services for vulnerable adults available in the Borough. He was of the view that the consultation was flawed, and that the flaws had not been spotted until it was almost too late. He described Leaders as a unique resource in Hounslow that supported people with learning disabilities and mental health issues to get employment and then help them retain employment. It was a continuing lifeline and link to other support services, he said. The alternatives to Leaders did not provide the specific services that Leaders did, he continued, and the consultation did not point out that the alternatives only put people in work and left them there. He believed that the proposal had been neither thought through properly nor risk assessed and, if that proved to be the case, he would consider it unforgivable.

He went on to say that Leaders had worked successfully with Glaxo-Smith-Kline and Virgin Media, among others, and OFSTED had spoken very highly of it. He said that Leaders had

improved many lives, it had thrived for 20 years, and was a unique and irreplaceable resource. He questioned the ethics, propriety and legality of agreeing a budget before the consultation process had been completed, however flawed that process might be.

Jaspal Vilkhū (service user)

Mr Vilkhū said that he attended the Acorn Centre to undertake cookery classes, and that he liked it for the following reasons:

- It was a good place to meet people.
- He could pay for the cookery classes on the day rather than weekly.
- Class sizes were smaller than at college, so he could concentrate, and students could help one another.
- He had a key worker who went with him to the mobility shop to help him purchase cooking utensils.

If Acorn closed, he said, he would have none of these benefits.

He went on to say that he also attended Leaders Employment Resource, and had been doing so for at least two years. He explained that the previous week he had attended a job interview and Leaders had gone with him and given him one-to-one support. On the way home, he said, Leaders had gone through the bad points of the interview, and the following week would help him improve his interview techniques.

He said that Members wanted Leaders clients to go to employment agencies, but these were not very supportive, and Remploy was far away in Waterloo. By contrast, he said, Leaders was located in Central Hounslow, had disabled access, and its staff were very supportive.

He stated that no-one from the Council had helped him go through the consultation document, and no-one had explained what would happen. He had been given insufficient time to work out what to say, he said, and he had found the letter that he had received confusing.

Jennie Whitford (Alzheimer's Society)

Ms Whitford expressed her deep concern about the following aspects of the consultation:

- There had been no involvement with members of the Third Sector.
- No-one had engaged directly with the 1,432 people with whom the Alzheimer's Society worked in Hounslow.
- There was an over-reliance on Putting People First (PPF).
- There were insufficient details as to how the transition process would be managed.
- The consultation document had not been written in terms that people living with the experience of dementia (PLWED) could understand.
- Advocates had been barred from the consultation meeting for carers.

With regard to the proposals, Ms Whitford voiced particular concern about transporting PLWED across the Borough from Chiswick to Heston, as this would amount to a bus journey of 1.5 hours. She pointed out that research had shown that journey times in excess of 40 minutes were harmful to PLWED, and might create difficult situations that transport staff would need special training to handle. She considered that the Council was lighting a blue touch-paper that could lead to challenging behaviour. She also voiced concern about the environment at Heston Day Care Centre, which she did not regard as fit for purpose.

She felt that the consultation had been flawed from the start and the Council needed to go back and do it again. The detail was not there, she said, the figures did not add up, there was no reference to research or experts, and the Equality Impact Assessment was still incomplete. She stressed that dementia was very much on the increase, and that it affected younger people as well as the elderly. She believed that the impact on PLWED would be very severe. The Alzheimer's Society was totally opposed to the proposed closures, she said, unless the Council could demonstrate that there was adequate alternative provision that was geographically proximate.

Cherna Crome (Carers UK)

Ms Crome felt that the Council had put the cart before the horse. While she accepted that cuts had to be made, she considered that the change management process had been appalling. She noted that Carers UK and its sister organisations had not been consulted or involved, and that the data were very incomplete. She was of the view that had Third Sector organisations been involved, the proposals could have been owned and introduced by all actors, not just the Council.

She pointed out that no mention had been made of contingency plans for those who fell through the gaps, despite the previous assurance from Sue Witcher that those wishing to continue to use day centres would be able to do so. She felt that it would probably prove necessary to send people out of the Borough, as there was insufficient provision in Hounslow to meet need. They would have to go to Fulham or Staines, she said, though there was very little provision in Staines. She stressed that charities would not be able to provide the services withdrawn by the Council. She asked for an explanation as to why this decision had been taken and what the alternatives were, and for an assurance that there would be progress towards better change management.

Stephen Hawkins (Age Concern)

Mr Hawkins said that his members were very concerned by the proposals. He pointed out that neither Age Concern nor other leading Third Sector actors had the specialist capacity to provide the services for vulnerable people that the Council was proposing to discontinue. He added that some older people were carers themselves and their needs were often neglected.

He also pointed out that since the refurbishment of Bedfont Day Centre had started in July 2010, Age Concern had been getting an increase in referrals.

Eileen Butler (Age Concern)

Ms Butler reiterated what Mr Hawkins had just said, and added that the Age Concern day centre in Feltham would not be able to cope with the additional service users that would be released by the closure of the two Council day centres.

She said that Bedfont users displaced by the refurbishment had been sent to Heston, which was then asking Age Concern Feltham to take them back, but this was not possible as there was not enough capacity.

Mimi Konigsberg

Ms Konigsberg prefaced her remarks by pointing out that Britain was in a very difficult economic climate and that every LA would have to find very considerable savings over the next four years. She stressed that the matters under discussion were proposals and that no decisions had yet been taken. This had been set out very clearly in the consultation document, she said.

Ms Konigsberg went on to explain that the way in which adult care services were delivered was changing. This meant that there would be a greater focus on individuals and choice, she said, and it would not always be necessary for people to receive services in buildings. She said that the Council had to apply eligibility criteria, which entailed looking to see who was the most vulnerable and what could be done with the resources available. Those with low or moderate needs, she said, would normally be dealt with by the voluntary sector. The Council was undertaking assessments and reviews to find out what carers' needs were, and these would be completed in the next four weeks, she said.

Martin Elliot

Mr Elliot first of all advised those present that the minutes from the consultation meetings had been published on the Council's website, and he apologised if people had not been made aware of this. He said that information about the Equality Impact Assessment was currently being posted on the website, but this could not be finished until the consultation was complete. He added that PPF had been around for a long time, and the Sandbanks development had still to be progressed. It was all part of a very big picture, he stressed.

Sue Witcher

Ms Witcher, in response to what previous witnesses had said about the consultation as it related to Chiswick Day Care Centre, stated the following:

- (1) She understood that everyone living with the experience of dementia had been sent a consultation document, and it had been addressed to their carer.
- (2) No-one had been barred from attending the consultation meeting.
- (3) Work was being done on the transition arrangements and journey periods, and staff were being consulted.

Ms Whitford pointed out that an increasing number of PLWED lived on their own, and would not have carers to receive the consultation document. She reiterated that Third Sector organisations were told that they would not be welcome at the consultation meeting, and she had found this shocking. She said that this was a true claim and that she had evidence to prove it.

Ms Witcher stated that she had not previously been aware of environmental concerns about Heston Day Centre.

Ms Whitford said that she had discussed it with the Council in 2010. She pointed to the size of the unit, the wall separating the sitting and dining areas, density, access to the grounds, safety, and the ability of transit staff to cope with service users on long bus journeys crossing the Borough. She also pointed out that if there was a change to structure then there would need to be a change to staffing to take account of that. She said that the Council was not yet in a position to do this, and she felt that a person-centred approach to planning was not being taken.

Ms Witcher responded that the Council would not put any more clients in Heston than it could accommodate. Once everyone was assessed, she said, the actual numbers would be known. She stated that she shared Ms Whitford's concern about transit staff, and pointed out that the Council owed a duty of care to its staff as well as its clients.

Mr Elliot pointed out that not everyone who used the Chiswick Day Care Centre lived in Chiswick. He said that transport was being looked at, and it was a bit more complicated that people having to travel further.

Ms Whitford said that service users would be subject to a bus journey of 1.5 hours, where good practice suggested a 40 minute limit. She believed that the Council would eventually have to pick up the bill for the additional damage that would be done to clients by these long transit journeys. She felt that the use of impact assessments in addressing these issues (and the stage in the process at which they were used) was unclear.

Pauline Hunt (Chiswick resident)

Ms Hunt introduced herself as a former Council employee who had run "Pensioners Alone at Christmas" in Chiswick for 25 years. She said that Chiswick Day Care Centre had a proper kitchen that she could use to cook for pensioners, and if the Centre were closed, vulnerable people would be sitting at home every day of the week, and many would have to end up in residential care. She described Chiswick Day Care Centre as a "wonderful, wonderful service", and pleaded with the Council not to close it.

Councillor Collins prefaced his remarks by pointing out that while the Council had a statutory duty to set a budget by 31st March, it also had a statutory duty to look after vulnerable residents. He felt that the closure of two day centres would be a massive change, not a peripheral one. He challenged the consultation process, considering it to be too short and too narrow. He believed that the time length should be 12 weeks, not two, and that all stakeholders ought to be involved. He went on to express concern that the Equality Impact Assessment did not differentiate between critical and non-critical, and paid too little attention to the impact on carers and when they would get respite. He felt that alternative services for carers needed to be based on what was actually there, and assessments also needed to consider alternative services.

He went on to say that buildings were what vulnerable people needed as a place to communicate and meet each other. He pointed out that there was no guarantee that the Star Centre would continue to exist after 31st March, and wondered where service users would go if and when it closed. He asked that officers go back and assess the impact on carers and work out what alternative provision was available. He said that the Savings Consultation Brief had talked very briefly about risk assessment, but he had yet to have sight of a risk assessment of this particular consultation. He begged the Council to produce an actual risk assessment before the consultation was completed. Without one, he said, the consultation would be fundamentally flawed, and the process would be legally challengeable.

He went on to refer to CS Savings Proposal 3 on the Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Unit and asked where people would get their welfare advice if this service were discontinued.

Ms Konigsberg responded that consultation flyers had been displayed at the Chiswick Community Day Centre on 27th January, and that was followed by eight weeks of consultation, including very specific meetings at all centres, some very well attended. She said that there had been a very good response to the consultation events, and the Council would hold more events when asked. She went on to say that once the individual assessments were completed, the Council would look to see what it could provide instead. This would be done in

negotiation with alternative service providers, she said, so that the range of alternatives that the Council wanted to put in place reflected the views of clients.

Councillor Todd pointed out that the closure of Chiswick and Bedfont Day Centres was mentioned nowhere in the public consultation document. He therefore challenged the claim that 55% of respondents agreed with closure. He considered this misleading to Executive Members. He also questioned Ms Konigsberg's statement that closure was only a proposal. He said that the Chief Accountant had advised him that in order to change the budget it would be necessary to go back to the Borough Council. He asked who funded personal budgets, the Council or central government. He noted the 3,000% increase in charges and wondered how this fitted in with the closure proposals.

Mr Elliot responded that Savings Proposal CS 13-15 stated specifically that four sites would be reduced to two.

Councillor Todd rejoined that it did not say that in the public consultation document. He asked why Canal House was not included in that document.

Mr Elliot responded that it did include everything.

Councillor Todd said that it did not.

The Chair asked if officers had any more to say on this point.

Ms Konigsberg responded negatively.

Councillor Mammatt said that it looked as if the Council had first made a decision, then had done the research to back it up. This appeared to her to be putting the cart before the horse and a lot of stress had been caused to carers as a result. She pointed out that the public consultation document had spoken of "reconfiguration", which was not the same as "closure". She said that closure had been "slipped in", even though it had not been used in the consultation document. She considered that the Acorn Centre was very impressive and helped people gain confidence. She said that people there were worried and did not believe that alternatives were available. She believed that there was a great muddle surrounding the Bedfont Day Centre, and considered it a dreadful situation. She did not know if it was still open and asked for clarity on this point. She said that people were upset about the whole set of circumstances, and she asked what use was going to be made of Sandbanks. She wondered if Heston was going to be moved into Sandbanks, or if Sandbanks was just going to lie there. She said that in June 2010, she had been told specifically that 40 places would be available at Sandbanks and the build would be going ahead. The Council needed to take the proposals back to the drawing-board, she said, and re-consult properly.

Ms Witcher responded that Bedfont Day Centre would be moved to Heston, not Sandbanks.

Ms Ware said that she, personally, had done the Council's job for it by circulating the Council's consultation poster around Chiswick, which was why people attended the meeting. She asked if officers had investigated how her mother's carers would be able to go out to work full time without the Day Care Centre, and if the impact on the benefits system had been considered. She wondered if these factors had been taken into account when the Council took its decision.

Ms Konigsberg responded that she did not have an answer because the assessments had only just started.

Mr Elliot said that the purpose of the consultation was to have a conversation, and the independent assessments would follow this.

Ms Ware asked how officers would persuade the Council to change its mind about closure if, at the end of the consultation, the figures did not add up.

Mr Elliot responded that he did not consider that it would cost more to make alternative arrangements. He stated that the indication was that the alternative services would not cost more.

Ms Ware said that not one assessment of a service user or carer at Chiswick Day Care Centre had happened yet.

Councillor McGregor asked what the Budget Strategy was, and if it was Members or officers who were in charge of the process. He described the consultation document as a piece of toilet paper to protect the Council's bottom, and wondered if it was actually useful. He asked if GPs and strategic partners had been informed of these proposed changes. He considered that officers were being hung out to dry by their political masters.

Ms Konigsberg responded that the Budget Strategy was to be found in the Executive Business Plan 2010/13, which was on the Council's website, and set out the Council's vision for carers. She explained that there were two parallel consultations: a general public consultation and a service specific consultation, and both finished on 31st March. She pointed out that the service specific consultation contained a note about the closure of the two day centres.

Councillor McGregor asked why the Council had not written to GPs.

Ms Konigsberg responded that the Council did not treat GPs differently from other members of the public. She nonetheless confirmed that the Council would be meeting with GPs to discuss these issues.

Councillor McGregor asked about NHS Hounslow.

Ms Konigsberg responded that PCT officers were consulted, since the PCT was a strategic partner.

Councillor McGregor asked again if it was Members or officers who were in charge of the process and wondered if anyone had an answer.

Councillor Vaught said that she was in favour of keeping day centres. She felt that day centres should be part of the local community so that people would know where they were before they needed them. She believed that day centres attracted a mix of pensioners of different ages who would be able to help each other and be less of a strain on their carers. She said that there were plenty of people willing to help a frail neighbour get to a day centre, but not across the Borough. She feared that day centres, instead of being centres of the community, would become a refuge for the very elderly and very disabled. She asked if there had been any costings done with respect to the shift in the kind of service user. She wanted to know if it was all just for people with high need as opposed to those with a mix of needs.

Ms Konigsberg responded that currently people were transited around the Borough to different day centres. She said that some of the service reviews had been undertaken, and there was also a review of the way in which the eligibility criteria were used. She stressed that what was under discussion was how to deal with people with low to moderate needs.

In response to Councillor Todd, she said that funding for personal budgets came from central government, and that they were means tested.

Ms Konigsberg then adverted to the Leaders Employment Service. She agreed that it was a very “valued” service and confirmed that she and her colleagues were looking at alternative options for providing employment services for vulnerable people. She considered that Leader’s was not a cost effective service. It was very expensive, she said, and helped a small number of people. She stated that she and her colleagues were looking to provide employment services to many more people.

Councillor Pam Fisher said that she had visited day centres many, many times and knew them well. She pointed out that the public considered the consultation flawed, and she agreed with them. She noted that implementation of PPF in Hounslow was a little behind the target of 30%, so she considered the closure of day centres premature. She considered that the proposals had been put forward too quickly. There had not yet been a breakdown of transport costs, she said, and she wondered if this had been included in the proposed savings. She expressed concern about people moving around day centres, and wondered if capacity was already an issue given the points made by Ms Butler (*supra*). She also asked for the costings relating to Sandbanks, if it was open. With regard to Leaders, she did not consider that clients would get the same level of service without it. She hoped that the Council would reconsider.

Mr Elliot responded that Hounslow was likely to meet its target for implementing PPF, but he accepted that there were issues around collecting the data.

Ms Witcher responded that she had worked with transport colleagues to look at transport costs, and believed that the additional cost of taking clients to Heston would not be great. She said that a transfer of 40-45 users from Bedfont to Heston had been factored in to the calculations, and that the level of demand would determine the capacity required, and this would not be known until assessments had been completed.

Councillor Pam Fisher pointed out that a lot of dementia clients came from Chiswick.

Ms Witcher responded that Heston would house all dementia clients.

Councillor Pam Fisher said that there would not be enough space at Heston if Sandbanks and Chiswick were closed, while still keeping Heston clients at Heston.

Ms Witcher responded that the actual facility at Heston would be sufficient, and that no firm decision over the future of Sandbanks had yet been taken.

Councillor Todd said that Heston had a capacity of 40, while Chiswick had a capacity of 55.

Ms Witcher responded that clients did not attend every day.

Councillor Reid said that the Borough Council meeting on 1st March had been told that 55% of those responding to the consultation had agreed with “reconfiguration”, and 55% with “closure”. She asked if this meant that the original consultation, which used the term “reconfiguration”, did not meet the statutory requirements. She also asked if the “in principle” decision taken at Borough Council was proper and legal.

Ms Konigsberg agreed with Councillor Reid that “configuration” and “closure” were not the same thing, but noted that the questions in the service user consultation were different from those used in the general public consultation. She said that the Borough Solicitor had confirmed that the Council had made a decision in principle.

Councillor Reid asked if Ms Konigsberg was talking about the second consultation.

Ms Konigsberg responded that the term, “reconfiguration”, was explained in much more detail in the attachment to the public consultation, and in Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Reid asked if the 55% response was a response to a general residents’ survey.

Ms Konigsberg responded affirmatively. She said that the statutory requirements referred to reviews carried out with users and carers, not the consultation time period. She added that legal advice had been taken with regard to the way in which the consultation was carried out.

Councillor Lal stressed that at all times the Council had said that service specific consultations would take place alongside the general public consultation, though he accepted that the process could have been handled better. He said that the Council needed everyone on board because, without that, things could not move forward.

Councillor Reid thanked Ms Konigsberg for her reassurances.

Bob Hardy-King (Hounslow LINk) pointed out that the consultation questionnaire contained no questions relating directly to the proposals on which opinions could be expressed. He felt that if the proposals went through, affected residents would be justified in going to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Next Steps

Sunita Sharma (Assistant Director, Scrutiny & Performance) summarised the issues that had been raised as follows:

- Concerns about the first consultation, including the point raised by Mr Hardy-King regarding the lack of specific questions.
- The actual service proposals.
- Alternative services.
- Carers’ needs.
- Formal approaches to stakeholder organisations for their views.

Ms Sharma considered that one of the Panel’s recommendations should be that Third Sector witnesses be asked formally for their views. She said that all the Panel’s recommendations should go to the Executive, officers, Third Sector partners and members of the public who had already contacted Scrutiny.

It was **AGREED** that the course of action suggested by Ms Sharma be followed.

3. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 18th April 2011.

The meeting finished at 9:30 pm.

The minute taker at this meeting was Angus Huck