

SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE CONSULTATION ON DAY CENTRES FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to provide a summary of the results of the consultation and communication with people with a learning disability, their family carers and other key stakeholders following the Cabinet Report December 15th 2008. The consultation period covered 12 weeks from January 26th to April 17th 2009. A full set of responses is available for inspection to elected members and the public.

The aim of the consultation was to communicate the key messages from the Cabinet report dated 15th December 2008 and to ensure that all service users, family carers and all interested stakeholder groups had an opportunity to contribute to the consultation during the 12 weeks. Documents were provided in a number of formats, including an easy-read version. The information collected through the consultation is being presented to the Cabinet.

The key messages to stakeholders were

- That there is under-occupancy in the 9 Birmingham City Council day centres
- Options of possible closures of 3 in-house centres, Aldridge Road, Collingwood and Hockley.
- That almost £5 million is spent on independent and third sector day services
- There is a need to reduce inefficiencies and duplication
- That achieving value for money from day services is crucial

The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17th December 2008 made a number of recommendations about how the consultation should be undertaken. These were;

- the consultation would extend to the whole client group and not only to those people at the 3 day centres mentioned in the report
- those carrying out the consultation with service users should include advocacy or be trained in advocacy so that the views of all users and carers are taken into account
- that the consultation outcomes should be available for members to check and validate

Information was circulated in a number of ways, through letters to key stakeholders with copies of the Cabinet report inviting comments, an easy-read guide for people with a learning disability with a questionnaire for easy completion; the City Council web page had details of the consultation and all documents accessible; an email address was provided for people to send in electronic responses and a telephone number was provided for people to record their views or queries.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation process has sought to ensure that service users and family carers are fully engaged and that other key internal and external stakeholders are also

invited to contribute in line with the requirements of the Adult & Communities Overview Scrutiny meeting on 17th December 2008.

SERVICE USERS

During the consultation process a total of 70 meetings were held at the 9 day centres and all service users were invited to participate; over 600 service users actually attended. Out of these around 59% of the service users made comments and actively participated in the meetings. In addition 17 meetings were held at independent sector day services at which 100 people with a learning disability participated. Responses were recorded from 32% of these people.

The consultation process was specifically organised to engage with service users who have different disabilities and take account of their special communication needs and understanding. This was achieved through engagement of the person-centred planning team who are specifically trained in working with people with a learning disability to involve people in making choices and to help them to participate in their assessments. They deployed a number of creative ways of imparting information to both groups and individuals with diverse needs, including using signing and pictures, where appropriate. The consultation documentation was produced in an easy-to-understand pictorial version and questionnaire to aid this process.

Groups for service user consultation were no larger than 10 people in total at any one time. It has to be recognised that skills and sensitivity were needed during the engagement process as many service users expressed a wide range of emotions regarding the prospect of centres closing. Throughout the consultation the facilitators recorded all the comments made and specific advocacy workers were involved, where possible.

2.3 FAMILY CARERS

A total of 529 carers participated in meetings held across the 9 City Council day centres and independent sector day services. These meetings were facilitated by the day services project team and were, mostly, held separately to the service user consultation meetings so that their different perspectives could be captured. Where possible the two carers' champions funded by Birmingham City Council were involved in supporting these meetings. The carers' champion for Black and Minority Ethnic communities, alongside staff members provided interpretation where English was not the first language of carers. The Carers' groups of the Learning Disability Partnership board also participated in consultation.

In addition 7 other public meetings were arranged for carers to meet the Cabinet lead Member for Adults and Communities and the Service Director for Younger Adults to put across their views, to ask questions and to discuss the decision making stages.

Notes were made of key discussion points arising during all carers' meetings.

STAFF

In the 9 Birmingham City Council day centres staff were briefed by the day services project team members and given the opportunity to comment on the key messages

in the consultation. Internal management and team briefings within care management teams for people with learning disabilities have also taken place.

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Elected Members have been invited to participate through a letter sent to the 10 Constituency Committees and an individual letter sent to each member from the Lead Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities. In response to an invitation from Hodge Hill Constituency Committee, members of the day services project team arranged to meet them to discuss the proposals.

We have held monthly meetings with trade union colleagues to keep them informed of the consultation process and invited formal responses from them.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Letters were sent to key external partners including the 3 Primary Care Trusts; all local Members of Parliament, third sector organisations; local carers and advocacy groups.

17 meetings were also held at independent and private day centres which were attended by 100 service users and 93 carers. A specific meeting was held in March for providers and managers within these services.

The Birmingham Learning Disability Partnership Board has been involved in launching the consultation and receiving feedback at its two meetings in January and March 2009. Feedback has also been received from two of the sub groups of the Partnership Board: Carers Incorporated and the Day Services Modernisation Group.

Other communication options

In addition to the letters circulated and the meetings arranged the easy-read version of the consultation included a questionnaire aimed at helping people with learning disabilities to reply. An e-mail address and answer-phone were available as alternative ways for people to submit their views to the consultation process in total.

- 23 letters were received from family carers and organisations
- 31 emails were received, some sent through elected members, and to the Strategic Director.
- 24 phone calls were received.
- 15 letters were received by the Strategic Director, some of which were from elected members and Members of Parliament

ANALYSIS OF THEMES ARISING OUT OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

As meetings were the main way for people to give their views and comments summarising the wide range of different views expressed has been a challenging exercise. Full copies of all notes and of actual letters and written responses have been made available but for the purpose of this summary the responses have been sorted into clusters of similar themes or comments made. The chart at the end of

this summary sets out the key issues recorded during the consultation and the main sources of the responses. The following section provides some commentary to support this.

Key messages from Service Users

A wide range of issues were raised by service users many of whom used single words or symbols to express themselves.

Many service users expressed strong feelings when discussing the proposals. They expressed views about feeling 'sad' and 'upset' about the impact of the possible closures of centres. They frequently expressed concerns about more people coming into their centres. The specific issues they raised were about more noise, lack of space, unavailability of activities, fewer opportunities to use computers, less available transport, and less staff time and attention. Many felt they would be "crowded" and "squashed" in fewer centres.

In contrast many others felt more people coming into their centre would open up additional opportunities to make new friends. Friendships and relationships within day centres featured highly in the discussions with users many of who felt that day centres were a way to meet others that otherwise they may not have if they closed.

Many people expressed a view that they would like to have more community activities provided by day centres.

The most frequently made comments were:

- negative comments about day centres being filled by too many people
- positive comments about new people coming to the centres and opportunities to make new friends
- opposition to closures
- concerns about missing people/friends if centres closed
- concerns about how needs could be met in fewer centres
- views that support is wanted to attend more community activities
- concerns about different staff or staff losing jobs
- concerns about what happens next and future of services
- concerns about transport e.g. if this would be provided in future
- concerns about money and the overspend

The chart at the end of this report lists the other views expressed.

Key messages from Carers

There were marked differences of emphasis between service users and carers. There has been considerable publicity in local press from concerned carers and many via e-mail. Carers were the main contributors to written submissions. Concern was strongly voiced by carers of users from independent sector providers that people did not want to return to or use in-house day centres. Some carers in two private day centres have initiated groups to "save our day centre". 18 letters and emails were also written directly to the Strategic Director of Adults and Communities formal process.

The main themes arising from carers' responses are

- concern about possible closures
- concerns that budgets were overspending and about efficiencies
- concerns about how care would be provided in fewer centres
- concerns about care from private providers
- concern about the impact of changes on carers' well-being
- concern that centres would be over-filled
- concerns about having different staff or staff losing jobs
- concerns about what happens next and future of services
- views that support is needed for people to attend community activities
- concern that the consultation was genuine

The chart attached at the end of this appendix shows the full range of comments made by carers.

In addition 2 petitions have been received from carers' groups. The first is from Alderman Bowen Centre with 260 signatures and the second is from Elizabeth Gunn Centre with over 2,000 signatures

Results from the easy-read questionnaires

The easy-read documents were produced to facilitate discussion with service users during the meetings and to provide a simple way for people to express their views on what were quite complicated proposals within the Cabinet report. The questionnaire included a recognised pictorial language designed specifically for people unable to read, to convey the key messages in the Cabinet report and included a tick-box section with pictures to help people to make a choice of the options that the proposals to cabinet covered. Facilitators at each of the meetings recorded all the verbal comments on flipcharts and people were assisted through the questionnaire to consider what the implications of the Cabinet report meant. Lots of service users and carers chose to take a questionnaire away and to complete this separately. Some service users were facilitated by advocates to complete the returns. There were 646 questionnaires returned. The majority of written responses came from carers rather than from service users as follows.

Returns Received	Service Users	Family Carers	Joint users and carers	Staff	other	Total
	39%	45%	4%	8%	4%	100%

An analysis of responses received in the questionnaire is as follows:-

Question	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	No answer	Total
Birmingham City Council should make sure that the money for services for adults with learning disabilities is used to provide services for as many people as possible.	529 82%	86 13%	28 4%	3 1%	646 100%

Birmingham City Council should see if they can fill empty places in the 9 council day centres for people with learning disabilities.	553 86%	53 7%	36 6%	4 1%	646 100%
Birmingham City Council should talk to people who use private day services paid for by the council to see if they could use a council day centre.	527 82%	57 8.5%	58 8.5%	4 1%	646 100%
Do you think Birmingham City Council should consider closing some day centres if they can't get more people to fill the empty places?	104 16%	476 74%	64 10%	2 0%	646 100%

The questionnaire also allowed people to make comments. The main comments made via the questionnaires were as follows:

- Concerns about possible closures
- Queries and comments on why occupancy is so low
- People would like support to access more community activities
- Concerns about missing people/friends if centres closed
- Views about how improvements could be made to the buildings
- Concerns about how care would be met, having enough bathrooms and equipment in fewer day centres
- Concerns about different staff and staff's futures
- Concerns about the budget situation and overspends
- Views on moving people from 3rd Sector services
- Comments about how choices would be offered in future

The full list of comments made has been recorded in the chart at the end of this report.

Themes from contacts with internal and external stakeholders

The majority of emails were received from carers often these were sent via elected members. The main issues raised through these were:

- Concerns about the budget situation and overspends
- Concerns about how care would be met in fewer day centres
- Concern about the impact on family carers of changes/loss of places
- Issues about moving for people with complex needs
- Views about improving the buildings
- Concerns for the loss of staff and their future

The majority of letters were from carers often sent via elected members or local members of parliament. The main issues in letters were

- Meeting people's needs and the environment

- Having access to appropriate services
- The impact of changes on carers
- Opposition to closures
- Queries over the budget situation and overspend

The list of comments made via letters and emails has been shown in the chart at the end of this report.

Conclusions

Not surprisingly this consultation has been an emotional event for some service users and many carers and there is strong opposition to the possibility of closures of day centres. This has been represented consistently at all meetings with users and carers and in letters and emails received from people linked to the in-house centres. This has also attracted considerable media coverage and 2 petitions have been received opposed to closures. In addition to the in-house centres, the carers and users from independent sector have been very vocal in their opposition to any closures of their services. The main concerns about possible closures was the fear of a loss of familiar services and the impact that the changes will have on people who have been attending the centres for many years with people they perceive as their friends or staff with whom they are familiar.

If a decision is taken to close centres no-one will lose a place as a result of these proposals the analysis in Appendix 2 of this report show that the current occupancy levels are so low that all existing users of Aldridge Road and Collingwood could be re-provided for within another centre without these becoming over full. The analysis does show that there are sufficient places available in the other 7 centres to offer people a choice of centre. It would be likely that many of the existing care staff will transfer with service users to their new centre and this will be carefully planned so that the key staff important to the most dependent service users would facilitate their settling into their new centre or service. The aim would be to minimise travel time by offering the centre closest to a person's home or to offer the one where groups of friends are attending. Everyone's needs would be re-assessed and they would be assisted to express their personal preferences and through a carefully-managed planning phase every effort would be taken to try to accommodate as many individual choices as possible and to handle ensure that people were introduced gradually to their new setting.

In order to minimise disruption and to address many of the concerns in the consultation the following principles have been drawn up and could be agreed with service users and carers as the basis on which the changes are implemented;

- Services closest to a person's home address will be offered first
- Additional travelling time will be kept to a minimum necessary
- People's friendship groups will be considered in planning the moves
- If people decide to travel further to be closest to friends or others then every attempt will be made to accommodate this within the changes
- All service users will be given the chance to visit the choice of centres and to adapt to the change through a phased introduction to the service
- The numbers of people moving to each day centre will be limited in order to prevent over-occupancy

- Existing care staff would be offered vacancies in one of the 7 centres where these are required to meet the needs of service users
- Where possible key staff will transfer with service users to the receiving centre
- Carers to be fully involved in how decisions are made about individuals
- Transport arrangements will continue to be provided for people changing centres
- Where suitable local alternatives to day centres will be offered to individuals who could benefit from these services

In respect of the independent sector day services the consultation has generated some strong views in reaction to the option to reduce duplication and rationalise services. Many carers are concerned that the in-house centres are not suitable for more dependent people. The review as set out in appendix 2 does support this position to some extent and has highlighted the need to develop a wider range of services in future to respond to people's choices through direct payments and for there to be a range of specialist provision for the most highly dependent service users.

There has been some recognition, through the consultation, that the council needs to address inefficiencies and achieve value for money and there was also recognition that the current day centre model required some modernisation. However, whilst many people did make reference to people having access to more community-based options it is also apparent that a key function that the centres provide is a respite service to carers and a place people where people feel safe. People have been keen to engage in the discussion about how services could be modernised and some people made suggestions about how current buildings and services could be improved to meet future needs. There are many examples across the country of different models of day services being developed and people appeared keen to hear about these and to consider how Birmingham's services could be modernised. This debate will need to engage a wide-range of stakeholders including service users, carers and other partners and could look at a number of options for future models of day services and bring forward ideas to the Cabinet later this year.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMENTS MADE DURING THE CONSULTATION

The list on the two pages below represents a summary of the main comments made during the consultation clustered into groups by similar subject. The table shows the source of the comments and the numbers of times a comment was made. Obviously the total numbers of comments made exceeds the numbers of people in the groups or the numbers of responses received because several people may have made several comments. The topic has been recorded based on a specific reference made in the response, for example, where closure was specifically mentioned this has been counted, but where a comment was made about the impact of closures this has been recorded under the specific subject mentioned rather than under closures.

This list can only be representative of the types of comments made and is produced as a summary of what was said, the full set of responses has been made available for inspection by elected members and others.

Summary of the comments made	Users	Carers	Qu'aires	Emails	Letters	Total
Concerns about access for people with disabilities	14	4	3	1	1	23
Need to ensure access to an appropriate service	5	97	54	10	16	182
Impact on family carers of changes/loss of places	13	95	41	20	15	184
Concerns about possible closures	198	76	147	7	14	442
People would like support to access more community activities	87	32	59	4	5	187
People need access to their local centre/locality	12	34	16	2	4	68
Issues for people with complex needs in moving	5	44	3	19	8	79
Positive comments about the service people get now	2	15	25	4	2	48
Concerns about what happens next and for future of services	78	40	22	5	2	147
Concerns about how the consultation was implemented	11	63	35	12	8	129
Being treated fairly or having similar services	3	11	9	4	1	28
Concerns about missing people/friends if centres closed	198	36	59	10	6	309
Will service users be safe in different places where staff don't know them	8	22	54	9	5	98

Concern that decisions had already been made	3	20	13	5	1	42
Ideas about improvements to day centres		5	30	3	2	40
Views about improving the buildings	11	39	102	18	8	178
Comments on how people would be kept informed and how choices would be offered	7	27	42	6	3	85
Comments about what happens next	18	49	4	7	5	83
How day services support people to develop new skills		7	12		2	21
Concerns about the budget situation and overspends	42	170	168	41	13	434
Moving people from 3 rd Sector	16	56	73	7	5	157
Concerns about how care would be met, having enough bathrooms and equipment in fewer day centres	100	100	68	25	18	332
Queries about why occupancy is so low	26	63	140	2	6	237
Having personal care from staff you don't know	3	3	2	19		8
Concern about service users' human rights	7	32	22	7	7	75
Importance of people's routines especially people with autism	16	18	8	5	3	50
Concerns about different staff and staff's futures	78	91	62	13	15	259
Difficulties getting a named social worker	2	32	4	3	4	45
Comments about private sector day services		72	38	7	4	121
Comments on the transition process to adult service		21	19		2	42
Concern about transport e.g. would it be provided	47	38	14	2	5	106
Some people also affected by residential reprovision	1	19			2	22
Negative comments about day centres being over filled by others	374				2	376
Positive comments about new users - it would be nice to make new friends	269				1	270
Comments about people who have already moved day centres e.g. Bordesley Green	6			2		8