

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held jointly with Torrridge District Council's External Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the Civic Centre, Barnstaple on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014 at 2.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Members representing North Devon Council:

Councillor Biederman (Chairman – In the Chair)

Councillors Brown, Chesters, Lane, Lucas, Luggar, Moores, Tucker and White.

Councillors Edmunds, Greenslade, Moore, Webber and Worden attended the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 9 (4).

Members representing Torrridge District Council:

Councillor Langmead (Chairman)

Councillors Brenton (substituting for Christie), Eastman, Johns, Lausen (substituting for Whittaker), Pennington and Simmons.

Non-Elected Members Mr Wrey and Mr Topham

Officers:

Representing North Devon Council: Corporate and Community Support Manager (JP) and Member Services Co-ordinator (KS).

Representing Torrridge District: Corporate Services Manager (JW) and Democratic Services Officer (SS).

**84** **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**85** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were announced:

Councillor Biederman    Item 6: Personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

Councillor Edmunds    Item 6: Personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

Councillor Greenslade

Item 6: Personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

**86 TO FORMULATE A RESPONSE TO THE DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS**

The Chairman of North Devon Council welcomed Members together with invited guests and members of the public to the meeting. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to give everyone an opportunity to address the Committee and provide a full a detailed response to Devon County Council regarding the consultation document.

At the request of the Committee, the Corporate and Community Support Manager read a letter (tabled) from Dr Alison Stapley, Executive Partner at the Bideford Medical Centre for and on behalf of the North Devon General Practice Provider Group of 22 GP surgeries.

The following guests were invited to address the Committee:

- Maureen Beecham regarding her use of an adult social care day centre as a carer.
- Jackie Mcfee regarding her use of an adult social care day centre as a carer.
- Robin Felton on behalf of the Alzheimer's Society.
- Corinne Williams and Kelly Spareway regarding the Youth Service.
- Sue Wallis and Mandy from North Devon Against Domestic Abuse.
- Karen Evans on behalf of Taw and Torridge Voluntary Services.

During the presentations, the following issues were highlighted:

Regarding day care centres:

- That the consultation document in relation to the day centres was factually incorrect.
- The need for continuity of care in order to avoid unnecessary deterioration in the condition of users, especially those suffering from dementia, who struggle to adapt to change.
- The lack of alternative day care provision with enough available capacity.
- The lack of alternative day care provision with enough security to allow carers to trust it.
- The significant impact upon the health of carers if the respite facility were lost.
- The lack of public transport between the main population centres and the one remaining day care facility in the north of Devon, in Torrington
- The lack of information on the impact of the closures upon the County Council's budget and how much would actually be saved.
- The alternative proposals put forward by the County Council were not actually alternatives and certainly not for sufferers of the more severe conditions including dementia.

- The lack of any information on how the transition would be handled.
- Concern was raised regarding the increasing demand on dementia services over the next few years with an increasing ageing population. All projections show a significant increase in demand over the next 20 years.
- The lack of effort from the County Council to ensure that the public understood the implications of the proposals.
- The proposals mean that carers were more likely to be unable to continue to support their relatives at home and would more frequently be forced to place them in residential care.
- Examples were given of the severe impact on individuals of the changes.

Regarding residential care homes:

- There was no apparent plan for transition from the present arrangement to the new proposals. Previous experience shows that it is just this type of planning that is critically necessary when dealing with proposals of that scale.
- The lack of effort from the County Council to ensure that the public understood the implications of the proposals.
- The proposals mean that carers were more likely to be unable to continue to support their relatives at home and would more frequently be forced place them in residential care.

Regarding the youth service:

- Concerns regarding the proposals to reduce the number of staff currently employed by the youth service at “Georgies” in Barnstaple by 50%.
- The impact upon young people with mental health issues if the supportive facilities that were currently available were cut.
- The loss of the open access facility would force young people out on to the streets and leave them isolated and vulnerable.
- Uncertainty over how targeting would actually work in practice and whether it would really identify those young people most in need of support.
- Concern at the loss of youth services as a gateway to other support services for young people most in need. Without something akin to present arrangements many of those in most severe need would be missed.
- A great feeling of loss of something of enormous social value.
- Examples were given of great positive impact the present service had had on the lives of individuals, which would be absent under the proposals.

General

- The use of personal or private funds to keep facilities open if the County Council withdraw their funding (e.g. North Devon Against Domestic Abuse (NDADA) support of the Women’s Refuge).
- The value of services under threat of closure, or already affected by changes in Devon County Council commissioning arrangements, and the need for their continuation for the lifesaving service that they provided.

- Voluntary groups were already under extreme pressure and were unable to provide the additional help and support envisaged by the Devon County Council proposals.
- The continuation of cuts throughout the public sector was undermining the ability of the voluntary sector to continue with the level of support already given because, contrary to popular belief, volunteers weren't free because they need support, training etc. Many of the sector's organisations were struggling to survive.
- The misconception that volunteers were "free"; volunteers require training and support, which had a financial impact upon the organisation.
- If Devon County Council was to proceed with their proposals there was a requirement to support and develop change together within existing resources.
- The importance of the sitting service, which provided a vital break for carers and was in operation across North Devon.
- The concern at the potential loss of vital services and the impact upon the carer if the services were lost and the tough decisions that they would face as a consequence.

Following the consideration of the statements made, Members of the Committee raised the following questions for the Cabinet of Devon County Council:

1. Your website tells us that your consultations said:

*"We know that ALL services are important to you but...*

*You have told us that the services that really matter are...*

- *Care for the old, young and those most vulnerable in our society (and those that care for them)*
- *Protect children from abuse and support our mental health services"*

Why do these proposals target precisely the services that the people you represent most want to preserve when the Devon County Council budget for 2014/15 includes £47 million for:

- Business Strategy & Support (£17m )
  - Human Resources (£5m).
  - Treasurer's Services (£13 m)
  - Strategy, Policy and Organisational Change (over £3.8 m)
  - Library and information (£7.2 m)
2. Have the Cabinet Members who will decide whether to close day care and residential care facilities and the youth service visited any of the sites? If they have, which ones and when?
  3. At the heart of the proposals for day and residential care is the difference in unit cost between the private sector and Devon County Council. Why is

the private sector so much cheaper? Will the decrease in cost bring a decrease in the quality of the service?

4. Have Devon County Council raised the bar by increasing charges and discouraging referrals to day centres and residential care homes to discourage people from using them in order to leave Devon County Council with the argument that usage had dropped so the facility should be closed?
5. Why are Devon County Council turning away people who want to be referred to day centres at the same time as claiming that the centres are underused?
6. How does the withdrawal of facilities match the NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group's policy of Care Closer to Home? Or does it directly conflict with the Devon County Council talk of "close working with partners?"
7. Which partner organisations (e.g. District Councils, Clinical Commissioning Group's, police service etc) did Devon County Council engage with during the consultation?
8. Have you considered the impact of the loss of services to partner organisations such as the police and the National Health Service?
9. As Devon County Council have a duty of care to both older and younger people will the council be setting a quality benchmark for the future provision of affected services and then monitoring to ensure it is reached?
10. What assessments have Devon County Council made of the quality of potential alternative provision in particular for people who suffer with dementia?
11. If the proposals do go ahead how will you ensure that individual needs and quality of care are addressed?
12. Can Devon County Council explain how carers will be assured that the community facilities listed in the day centre consultation can be safely entrusted with the care of their ailing relatives?
13. What care can be provided by the private sector that is equal to that provided by Oakwell?
14. What plans are there to adapt services to address the demographic deficit, with the higher ratio of female to male carers?

15. Evidence suggests that the desperate needs of both carers and patients are not being met. Can you give assurance that a carer's assessment will be undertaken and held on record for each occasion that a request for assistance is made?
16. The consultation on day care centres suggests that community facilities such as charity shops and community halls can somehow be used in their place. Can Devon County Council provide examples of how this might happen in practice?
17. What are the alternative provisions referred to in the consultation on day centres?
18. What evidence does Devon County Council have to show that the voluntary sector has the capacity and skills to meet the work the consultations expect of them?
19. What plans are there for the services under consultation (i.e. day centres, residential care, youth service) to change to reflect future population increases and an ageing population?
20. How do Devon County Council propose to avoid turning carers into the cared for?
21. The Health Profiles of both North Devon and Torridge show low education attainment levels. How do Devon County Council see the proposals for the youth service affecting this?
22. If some facilities are closed what will happen to the redundant buildings?
23. What lessons on changes similar to those being consulted on for social care day services and residential care has Devon County Council learnt from other local authorities such as Norfolk County Council who are considering reversing their decision?
24. To what extent had Devon County Council assessed and mapped the psychological and social needs against the proposals?

RESOLVED that:

**Overall**

- a) The Committee understands and sympathises with Devon County Council's need to address the budget problem caused by inadequate funding for rural councils from central government but feels it should introduce change in a more measured and planned way.

- b) The Committee believes there are wholly inadequate strategies in place for the implementation of these potential changes.
- c) The Committee considers it deplorable that the County Council could send neither one of its Cabinet Members (who will make the decisions) nor even a senior officer to this joint meeting.
- d) As the County Council could not send a Cabinet Member to North Devon a delegation of Councillors and representatives of the affected groups be sent to County Hall to meet relevant Cabinet Members and attempt to discover the reasons for these proposals.

### **Day centres**

- e) The Committee asks the Devon County Council Cabinet Member to reconsider the geographical imbalance whereby the north of Devon loses 92% of its day care places whereas the rest of the county "only" lose 67%.
- f) The Devon County Council Cabinet reconsiders its decision to allow a single Councillor to decide whether or not to close facilities such as day centres and residential care homes that are of such critical importance to the people of Devon.

### **The youth service**

- g) Devon County Council delays its proposal to no longer manage or run any youth centres until such time as there was some evidence that the voluntary sector had the capacity to plug the gap. At the moment there was nothing to suggest that volunteers had any capacity or the qualifications to do so
- h) The Devon County Council Cabinet reconsiders its decision to allow a single Councillor to decide whether or not to close services such as open access youth service that is of such critical importance to the people of Devon.

### **Communication**

- i) Details of the resolutions of this Committee and copies of submitted letters be sent to the local Members of Parliament;
- j) All of the evidence and information be collated and passed to the Council appointed representative for presentation to the Local Government Association Rural Commission (SPARSE) as a case study to provide the Government with an insight into the impact that the proposals would have on rural areas.

- (a) Letters submitted by Members of the public to the Committee be included in the response to Devon County Council as evidence together with the letter from the GPs in the Northern Devon area.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of North Devon Council thanked the invited guests and members of the public for their attendance at the meeting together with the Members and officers of both Committees for their support to the meeting.

The Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (External) of Torridge District Council thanked the Members and officers of North Devon Council for their hospitality.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 4.24 p.m.

**NOTE:** These minutes will be confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.