

Minutes of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

**Wednesday 20th October, 2021 at 6.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor M Rogers (Chair)
Councillor C Neale (Vice-Chair)
Councillors R Ahmed, R Collins, T Crumpton, P Drake, A Goddard, P Lee, P Lowe, N Neale, K Razzaq, D Stanley and E Taylor.

Dudley MBC Officers:

M Bowsher (Director of Adult Social Care), S Lonsdale - Head of Adult Safeguarding and Mental Health and H Mills (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor P Harley – Leader of the Council
Councillor N Barlow – Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
Councillor S Keasey
Councillor L Taylor-Childs

Together with 8 members of the public.

20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Atkins, A Hopwood, L Johnson, S Waltho and M Westwood.

21 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillors R Collins, A Goddard, N Neale, D Stanley and E Taylor had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors A Hopwood, L Johnson, P Atkins, M Westwood and S Waltho, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

22 **Declarations of Interests**

Councillor A Goddard declared a non-pecuniary interest in view of her employment with Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

Councillor P Lowe declared a non-pecuniary interest in view of his mother being diagnosed with dementia.

Councillor N Neale declared a non-pecuniary interest in view of her employment with Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

23 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September, 2021, be approved as a correct record and signed.

24 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

25 **Call-in of the Cabinet Decision – Mental Health in the Community**

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted to respond to the call-in of the Cabinet decision concerning Mental Health in the Community. The decision had been called-in at the request of five Members of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, as set out in the Council's Constitution.

A copy of the Cabinet minute and report relating to this item was circulated, together with the procedure to be followed at the meeting, as outlined by the Chair. Responses to written questions submitted were circulated by email to Members prior to the meeting and a printed copy, together with photographs displaying the dilapidated condition of Woodside Day Centre were available at the meeting.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to make representations concerning the decision and in doing so the Leader commented that he considered the call-in to be premature and would be more appropriate following the consultation process whereby an in-depth report would be presented to the Cabinet. It was emphasised that the proposals were not for the service to cease, though to be provided in a different manner, as Woodside Day Centre was an old building that was no longer fit for purpose.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care to make representations and he confirmed that he had no further comments to add at this stage in the process.

The Director of Adult Social care was then invited to make his representations. In doing so it was appreciated that this was a sensitive topic and the service was of great value to residents that used the provision. The call-in would provide an opportunity for questions to be asked and responses to be provided. It was emphasised that there were challenges to be faced as a result of the pandemic and that there was no desire to create undue distress. A change in service delivery would be a difficult process and the opportunity to answer questions was welcomed.

Responses to the written questions submitted had been circulated prior to the meeting. There were no points of clarity on the responses, therefore the Chair invited questions from Members of the Committee to the Leader, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care and the Director of Adult Social Care.

A Member commented that they had met with service users of Woodside Day Centre, some of which had attended the facility for 15 years or more and questioned why no investment had been placed into Woodside Day Centre. It was stated that approximately 215 residents from across the Borough accessed the services at Woodside Day Centre, with a physical unit being their preferred support network instead of a telephone call, virtual engagement or one-off activity programme. It was considered important that users of the service had continuity and weekly engagement with people that supported and understood their needs. The Member expressed concern of reports of service users being told to 'pull themselves together' and to meet in a public café, however this was not considered an appropriate means of care or environment for vulnerable people. Service users in attendance at the meeting were commended as it was recognised that this was an environment completely out of their comfort zone, and it was questioned as to why service users had not been consulted prior to this process. Woodside Day Centre was regarded as a safe environment and as mental health was at an all-time high, it was commented that the Local Authority should be considering expansion of the service rather than closing a popular, respected and long-established provision.

In response, the Director of Adult Social Care confirmed that there had been some investment into the maintenance of the building, with works being undertaken on the heating system. A log of all maintenance works was available onsite, however, Woodside Day Centre would no longer be considered fit for purpose as there were construction issues with the floor, roof and electrics throughout, and the building was in need of a major renovation. The need for access to space was recognised and provisions would be made available at alternative sites, four days a week, with qualified staff with mental health expertise on hand.

The Director of Adult Social Care advised that the consultation began on 20th October, 2021 and service users and staff at Woodside Day Centre were all encouraged to take part. Feedback from the consultation would be reported to the Cabinet and promoted in various areas including social media. The questions forming part of the consultation were live and would be made available to the Committee. The Director of Adult Social Care confirmed that he had been open and transparent with the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, the Shadow Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care and the Scrutiny Committee, with regard to the proposals, in that there was a genuine risk that the service could not continue to operate in the same way.

It was recognised that support had not been provided in the same manner during the Covid-19 lockdown, however every effort had been made to ensure that vulnerable people had been contacted and supported throughout. Lockdown had been a difficult period for everyone, and an increasing number of people were requesting mental health support as a result of the pandemic.

In referring to the reports submitted to Cabinet on 23rd September and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 9th September, a Member expressed concern in that the content of the reports were misleading as there had been no mention to the potential closure of Woodside Day Centre. It was questioned if prior information had been shared with the Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

Whilst the Member agreed that the timing of the call-in may have been premature, it was imperative that the process was monitored and scrutinised moving forward with focus on service provision, rather than the physical building structure. It was established that moving forward the proposed service would not be the same as that currently provided, as it would be delivered in a different manner. It was evident from the photos presented that the building had not been maintained, and that the reports previously submitted were not clear regarding the specific aims and omitted vital information. It was regarded that Dudley was on the verge of a mental health crisis and a joint letter from the Cabinet Member and Shadow Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care had been sent to the Minister of State expressing the Local Authority's concerns and outlining the need for additional funding.

The Member commented that he was not aware of any similar models in operation in the West Midlands, nationally or internationally, to that proposed for Dudley, and believed that to implement such a proposal would require significant additional financial investment. Concerns were expressed in relation to the detriment that would be caused to residents should an existing service close prior to having a fully operational provision in place and that lessons had not been learned from the implementation of previous initiatives without additional investment.

It was requested that the proposed model be monitored by the Cabinet and through Scrutiny and that no changes to the service be made before the proposed systems were up and running elsewhere and that no decision be made by the Cabinet until after the consultation and further scrutiny from this Committee.

In responding to a question, the Chair confirmed that the report presented to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 9th September had been received in a positive way and the benefits of the new service delivery model were welcomed. It was acknowledged that the lack of investment and maintenance of Woodside Day Centre had been the responsibility of both political parties, however moving forward there was a need for a restructure of the mental health service to meet the needs and demands of residents of the Borough.

The Director of Adult Social Care confirmed that the Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee had received the same level of information as the Scrutiny Committee and that both reports sought a broad consensus on a shift to Community based mental health support. A further in-depth report had been programmed for submission to the Cabinet at the end of the consultation process. The proposed service model name 'Infusion' had not been positively received and would likely change in consultation with service users. Members were welcome to undertake a site visit to Woodside Day Centre prior to the next meeting of the Cabinet and the Director of Adult Social Care would make the appropriate arrangements for Members.

Whilst it was recognised that pump-priming was used to build and develop new service models, it was reiterated that there would be no additional investment to the service and changes would be incorporated within the existing envelope. It was confirmed that the subsequent report to Cabinet would include details concerning the existing and proposed structure of the service, the new service model, equality impact assessments, full responses received through the consultation and budgetary implications.

The Head of Adult Safeguarding and Mental Health concurred there are significant pressure on mental health services, though it was not limited to Dudley and was a national issue. It was reported that guidance from the Government White Paper and National Services Framework for Mental Health was that prevention and intervention was at the forefront of the health agenda and the suggested model was based on prevention and building community cohesion. The vision was to build a strength-based service that meets the needs of hard-to-reach residents.

It was reported that access to Woodside required the attendee to have a care co-ordinator or to be referred by a professional body, which limited access to the provision. The service model proposed would offer wider inclusion and an opportunity to deliver support on a wider basis which would ensure people that currently used the service were appropriately catered for, as well as expand to those harder to reach.

A Member commented that only a small percentage of mental health cases were self-referred and questioned how prevention would be defined should people not actively present themselves.

The Head of Adult Safeguarding and Mental Health stated that the vision would be to work in partnership with 3rd sector organisations to look at the proposals and establish how they would work. It was emphasised that professional referrals would continue to be accepted, however the proposed model would make it easier to access and offer more flexibility to allow for any person with concerns of their own mental health to undertake a self-referral.

The Director of Adult Social Care commented that the proposed new model would provide a menu of choice, would encourage services to operate differently to reach those struggling and reduce barriers. It was highlighted that not all clients wished to attend centre-based services and preferred something more discreet and private, and it was important to cater to demand for different groups and different experiences.

A Member referred to the overall purpose of scrutiny and the commendable work that had been undertaken by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee during the preceding 18-month period. The Committee relied on clarity and information from Officers to undertake its role and disappointment was expressed in that information available to them had not been explicit with regard to the closure of Woodside Day Centre. It was envisaged that Officers would have been aware of the forthcoming changes to the service, with concept of the closure, at the time of setting the Scrutiny Committee Annual Scrutiny Programme and questioned why this had not be factored into the Committee's programme, and the importance of being open and transparent to Members and users of the Service was emphasised.

It was recognised that Dudley was facing a huge problem, which the closure of Woodside Day Centre could exacerbate. It was considered vital that emerging thoughts from the consultation were shared with Members of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee so that further scrutiny, involving the users of the service, could be undertaken. Reference was made to the Cabinet minutes in that it was acknowledged that further work was to be undertaken, particularly on the proposed re-provision of services at Queens Cross, therefore a more in-depth report, outlining the strategy, how the service would operate and the benefits to users was anticipated.

It was queried further how people would be sign posted to services, as not all people felt safe coming forward with identified issues. Although support could be provided through community associations and the voluntary sector, they would be unable to manage with the expanding numbers without extra provisions and it was queried how the additional COVID monies that had been allocated to the Local Authority had been used to support the vulnerable.

A Member also referred to the capacity at Queens Cross and queried what form of day service would be provided, as provisions at Woodside Day Centre would be different to those provided at a physically disabled provision. It was suggested that a site visit to both Woodside Day Centre and Queens Cross be undertaken.



The Director of Adult Social Care reiterated that the former reports sought a broad consensus on a shift to community based mental health support and that no decision on the closure had been made. A further in-depth report would be submitted to Cabinet following the consultation. It was commented that there was a need for flexibility within the service to meet with demand as the current service was unsustainable. The impact of the pandemic had changed the nature of demand for services on all levels and it was accepted that further scrutiny was required and the establishment of a consultative group or working group moving forward would be supported.

It was indicated that the subsequent report to Cabinet would include the proposed new model, structure and feedback from the consultation. A breakdown of how COVID monies and outturn had been used would be provided in due course, however it was reported that these funds had been used for infection control and to support nursing home capacities. It was stressed that to continue to meet with existing packages, regardless of any further growth, would require significant investment. The capacity at Queens Cross and the type of support provided was outlined in the responses to written questions. The Director of Adult Social Care would make arrangements for Members to visit both Queens Cross and Woodside Day Centre.

The Chair supported further meetings and/or working groups to be held in this regard. It was also considered important for site visits to both provisions to be undertaken for comparison purposes, particularly given the dilapidated condition of the provision at Woodside Day Centre.

Members commented positively on the services and provisions available at Queens Cross. The photos of Woodside Day Centre clearly identified that the building was depleted and not a suitable environment for residents.

In commenting, the Co-opted Member was mindful of timescales surrounding the consultation process, however suggested that the approach to the process be explored as the proposed change in model would not solely impact upon people that used Woodside Day Centre, but had wider implications. It was considered that the consultation period was short and asked if the closing date could be extended to connect with a wider audience and to work collaboratively with the voluntary sector.

The Director of Adult Social Care welcomed the comments and agreed that broader conversations were required and contributions and collaborations with Dudley Healthwatch were appreciated. The consultation was planned to close on 21st November to ensure feedback could be provided to the Cabinet in December, though the consultation could remain open thereafter and continue to the point when a decision was required.

Members concurred that an extension to the consultation should be considered by the Cabinet, as this was an important and life changing issue which should not be rushed. It was stated that political issues should be put aside, and a cross-party approach should be adopted. The need for additional Scrutiny Committees or the establishment of a working party was reiterated, as well as the fact that emphasis was on the service provided and not the physical building and that nothing should be taken away until alternative provisions were fully available.

A Member commented that a review of the Adult Social Care system across the Borough was required and being mindful that users of Woodside Day Centre had had no provision since 2020, with the support and contact during that time inadequate, it was fundamental that their needs were addressed imminently.

The Director of Adult Social Care agreed there was a desire for service users to regroup, however a better way to sustain the service and cater for demand was required. The level of support provided during the lockdown had not accurately been reflected, as users had been contacted via telephone and/or social media. It was reported that from 172 users at Woodside Day Centre, 164 people had had their care plans reviewed during this period and the outstanding eight were in progress. Telephone support from staff at Woodside Day Centre was ongoing, as well as virtual groups taking place and some physical activities were also available.

In referring to the length of time that some service users had attended Woodside Day Centre, a Member questioned whether the provision had been meeting the needs of those people, as it was important for the service not to become stagnated and suggested that it was time for progression and to move forward. Though it was empathised that service users preferred the surroundings familiar to them, it was accentuated that there was no intention for the service to close, just provided in a different method, which would benefit residents of Dudley.

Whilst Members were of the view that there was a need for a wider and inclusive approach, concerns were reiterated on how this would be achieved with no additional funding and suggested further scrutiny be undertaken on the financial implications.

At this juncture the Chair invited service users to make representations. It was stated that a maximum of 5 to 6 calls had been received over the preceding 18 months since Woodside Day Centre had closed. The calls had been brief, with members of staff that were unfamiliar to them, which were considered meaningless. They had not received any notification, correspondence or consultation with regard to the proposed changes to the service. They had been encouraged to attend a public café with other service users, however they were unable to undertake any of their usual crafting activities in a public area. It was commented that the photos identifying the condition of the building were not a reflection of how the building was left back in March 2020 and no money had been invested in premises. Woodside Day Centre was a good service, which had helped to develop good friendship groups, produce lots of quality products and projects and gave users a sense of importance and pride.

The Chair commented on the good quality woodwork and gym facilities available at Woodside Day Centre, however expressed his concern in relation to the overall condition of the building, including the electrical and water issues that he had observed, which were a health and safety risk. A significant amount of money would be required to be spent on the building before anyone would be allowed access.

A service user stated that the woodwork unit had closed prior to lockdown due to staff shortages and it was their desire to be a community again, but health and safety prevented this. It was stressed that the Local Authority had been aware that there was no-one to run the woodwork service for some time but continued to appoint inappropriate staff at the provision that were not adequately equipped to help. It was commented that service users had predicted that the provision would not reopen and stressed that Woodside was more than just a day centre to users, it was their support network and community.

The Chair expressed his thanks and gratitude to service users for attending and for their contributions, all of which were encouraged to submit their thoughts as part of the consultation. It was emphasised that a decision to close Woodside Day Centre had not been made, and that this was the start of the consultation phase.

Members expressed their desire to undertake site visits to both Woodside Day Centre and Queens Cross and the Director of Adult Social Care undertook to make the appropriate arrangements.

Following all questions and contributions, the Chair asked for any final statements before the Committee proceeded to consider the matter.

Resolved

- 1.) That the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee recommends the Cabinet to formally review the structure for adult mental health services in Dudley Council and the feedback from the consultation process at its December meeting.
- 2.) That the Committee further recommends that no changes to mental health services in Dudley are made until further discussion by the Cabinet in the December meeting and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee thereafter.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

CHAIR