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Residential Care Consultation Team
Adults, Wellbeing and Health
Durham County Council
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15 April 2010

Dear Ms Shimmin

Consultation on proposal to close in-house residential care homes

Please find attached feedback from County Durham LINK about the Council's proposals to close 7 residential care homes.

In addition to our response, we also wish to offer you feedback on the consultation design and to ask for the following additional information which will enable us to monitor the closure process:

1. A clear timeline indicating when final decisions will be taken and when you expect the process to complete
2. A copy of any implementation plan for home closures which will enable the LINK to monitor progress on behalf of its members and to respond to any issues or concerns raised by users, carers or communities about the impact of closures on them

Feedback about the consultation design

Although our Residential Care Working Group spent a good deal of time co-ordinating a response, the consultation design itself had a number of weaknesses and did not encourage confidence in the process. We have provided feedback as part of our response which we hope you will ensure is taken on board by your design team and would be happy to support you in the design of future processes which involve stakeholders.

Care Quality Commission

We are keen to develop a positive relationship with the Care Quality Commission and will be sharing with them our experience of consultation exercises by commissioners to help inform their assessment of the quality of public involvement by commissioners in decisions which affect them.

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely

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CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. What would be the impact on your organisation, should the Council decide to carry out its proposals to close the 7 named in-house residential care homes.

Response: The main impact on the LINK will be how to support members and local communities affected by the decision to close homes. We anticipate that there will be many questions people need answers to and would want to know what the Council will put in place to provide full, accurate and timely responses and up to date information for those affected. A key role for the LINK will also be supporting those who are unhappy about the new service they are provided with.

Feedback:

The question implies that all 7 will close, rather than be judged on a case by case basis; some organisations will only be affected by one closure, others by all 7. 'In-house' may not be understood by all – would be better to use 'Council-run'

2. The mid-range cost of an independent sector place is £436.60 per week against an average weekly cost for a council place of £728.51.

In your opinion, is this difference ?

- Acceptable
- Tolerable
- Undesirable
- Unacceptable

Response: the answer to this very leading question is clearly intended to be 'unacceptable.' Whilst recognising that there would indeed be savings, the LINK response is 'it depends' since in some cases paying more for a quality service and better outcomes (whether state or privately funded) may indeed be acceptable. We have no idea how these figures were arrived at, whether they are comparing like for like, why only an average figure is presented and why the prices are so different. If for example Council-run care overheads would reduce significantly by renting or leasing premises, rather than owning them, then the difference may not be so great.

Feedback:

The Working Group feels very strongly that a closed question of this nature is designed to give the Council the response it is seeking and undermines the principles of consultation. Presented in this way, the average Council tax payer would be hard pressed to answer in the affirmative but as we have indicated above, there may be other ways to reduce costs without closure, however these are not offered. If the issue is about over-supply rather than cost then this could have been stated

3. In your opinion, what would be the impact on the community of closing the 7 in-house residential care homes?

We anticipate the main impact will be

- increased costs to residents, families and carers in time, travel, stress, anxiety and loss of routine and familiarity

- increased costs to the health service – detriment to health and well-being for frail older people being moved, especially against their will, is well documented
- loss of jobs and income in communities who are already affected by poverty, unemployment and the recession; women will be particularly disadvantaged by this decision
- poor public transport infrastructure, especially in more rural areas, which will mean residents have less visitors and social interaction

We asked members living in these communities for their views and it would have been helpful to know where the closest private care home would be in each circumstance. It would have also been useful to know if staff would be guaranteed jobs in private sector homes

Hackworth House – Shildon

Our member feedback is that the nearest private care home is operating at capacity with waiting lists for local people; also that staff in this private home are paid minimum wages with no enhancements for weekend or bank holiday working. This is felt to increase staff turnover, reduce motivation and adversely impact on care. It is unclear why Hackworth House has so much capacity when there is undersupply in Shildon

Lynwood House – Lanchester

Member feedback suggests a policy of under occupancy here; The Council are urged to consider the option proposed by the community interest company made up of the parish Council, GP Practice and Mental Health Trust as an option alongside the private sector

Manor House – Annfield Plain

Member feedback suggests that the quality of care has actually improved here since competition from the private sector was introduced

Shafto House – Newton Aycliffe

Member concern centred on increased costs of travel for family members to alternative accommodation

Feedback: the question implies there can be one answer for all communities, rather than treating them individually. Has 'the community' been widely consulted about the closures? By this we mean other businesses, transport providers, the VCS, other Council services?

4. How would any closure of in-house care homes affect your business or your future investment plans?

N/a - LINK is not a business

5. In your opinion, what services should the Council invest in, to help older people live at home?

All of these-however we are unclear why this question is being asked as part of a proposal to close residential care homes. See feedback below.

- Home Care
- Intermediate Care and rehabilitation services.

- New technology – much more information is needed about what this could mean
- Aids and Adaptations

Other – please specify

1. Concerns were raised about the closure of 2 Home Independence Service outlets and their centralisation; particular value was placed on the value of OT guidance & support which is not offered in commercially run shops.
2. Feeling that this list is still very service-led and that the Council should consider investment in leisure, transport, carers support, housing, health and services to reduce isolation if more help at home is to be offered-very much a **Total Place** approach
3. A list of services is not a good fit with personalisation and individual budgets. Evidence from members suggest awareness of personalisation among the local population is very low-more should be invested in marketing this
4. Better information, marketing & signposting about options
5. More co-operation with the third sector
6. Are you aware of any special circumstances which may apply to any of the care homes or their localities which you wish us to consider? See comments in 3. above

Feedback: The rationale for including this question in a consultation about closures should have been explained since there will always be a need for residential and nursing home care as our population ages and lives longer. We assume the question implies that a) you believe there is sufficient capacity to meet future need in the independent sector and b) that you are planning to reinvest some or all savings in community care though how much is not specified. It however it could be argued that you should invest some savings in ensuring higher quality care in private settings given the concerns about minimum wages and staff turnover.

7. Please submit any other comments to the address below, no later than 30th April 2010

- We suggest an individual impact assessment is carried out in each of the communities where closures are proposed and action taken to mitigate the adverse impacts on communities, funded from savings where necessary.
- We suggest that while closures are being managed, you consider alternative uses for part-occupied homes
- We suggest much more robust business cases for each closure and how savings will offer tax payers and service users improved financial and social return through reinvestment in community care