

Letter from Anna Nicholson to Cllr Morton, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

5 February 2015

Dear Councillor Morton,

I am writing in regard to the papers published in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 10 February. Specifically, I would like to address issues arising from responses given within the 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee Budget Recommendations' document.

Under 'Item 13: New pathways for people with learning disability – Day Opportunities' the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel asked the following questions of council officers:

- How these closures will impact on the current users of these day care services
- How these closures will impact on carers, and if there are any other alternative sources of community based support?
- A loss of specialist staff and continuity of staff if the day care centres are shut
- The potential for long-term additional costs to the Council should customers be less able to access community based activities

The panel then recommended that as a result of these concerns that the Roundway Centre be kept open.

I am extremely alarmed at the complete lack of coherent or clear answers given to the panel's questions in the response column for Cabinet response/ or information request status column.

The answer does nothing except reiterate the proposal to retain Ermine Road service under a social enterprise model and states that there will be further, specific consultations on proposals to close each of the other 3 day centres. This is not what the panel asked. No answers have been provided to any of the panel's four concerns. All that has been provided is repetition of the council's initial proposals to shut the day centres.

These 'answers' make a mockery of the scrutiny panel process and functions. Councillors have not been given adequate or relevant information upon which to base a decision about the panel's recommendation. No coherent or evidence-based argument has been given for rejecting the panel's recommendation that the Roundway centre stay open.

As the Lead Councillor for Adults and Health, I am asking you to request that the panel's questions are answered – openly and clearly – before the Cabinet meeting on 10 February.

Under the comments for Item 18, where officers have agreed to the recommendation to withdraw the proposal to cut care packages by £5.7m the officers state: 'we have listened to what people have had to say and are now recommending that, on the basis of the consultation feedback, the proposal to make savings on care packages is removed.'

This is welcome news, but by the same token, officers and councillors must then also listen to the hundreds of responses they received about the impact of shutting day centres – a much more tangible cut for service users with autism and learning disabilities. Looking through the consultation responses, it seems to me that there are far more objections to the day centre closures than for many of the other proposals. This, combined with the scrutiny panel's questions and recommendations, must therefore also be taken into account – as much as comments on care package cuts have been.

The following are quotes taken from people who use the Roundway day service or their parents/carers. These quotes can be found on pages 227 -232 of the published papers for the Cabinet meeting on 10 February.

'It can't be happening – why?'

'I love my activities. I don't want to stop doing them.'

'We won't be able to go anywhere. It will restrict our movements. My son becomes destructive when he is affected by change.'

'He is always at the door waiting for the bus to come. My son would be lost without this place. If he doesn't see the bus coming he starts hitting himself.'

'How can we give you feedback if we do not know what we're consulting on? How can we be consulted on what we do not know about?'

'The quality of support for these autistic people is being compromised once again.'

'Personal budgets are not allowing enough money.'

'Service users have enough challenges in their day to day life as it is. How much stress must they keep on enduring?'

'What sort of service will service users get if they are not able to access the day centre? This is a big respite facility for carers and families that enables them to go out and do their jobs and other things.'

Please pursue this matter and present all councillors with adequate and clear answers to the scrutiny panel's questions as soon as you have them. The decision about closing day centres is life-changing and potentially devastating for hundreds of people – it is too important a decision to be made without sight of the proper evidence for how alternative provision will be provided, how these people will receive quality care from experienced staff, how they will be kept safe and happy, and how their carers will receive support and respite.

The current responses from council officers/cabinet to Item 13 are unacceptable. Such a serious matter which will have severe consequences for people with lifelong and complex conditions cannot be answered by simply restating intentions to close the day centres and point to further consultations on the matter. This gives the impression that the council lacks respect for this most vulnerable group of people.

Councillors have difficult decisions to make and must be provided with all the relevant information and evidence pertaining to these proposals in order to make an informed decision when it comes to voting on these proposals.

I am copying in Councillors Connor and Bull – Chairs of the Adults and Health, and Overview and Scrutiny committees, who raised the four concerns to be answered.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Nicholson

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