Petitions Committee rapporteur visit in connection with

P-04-366 Closure of Aberystwyth Day Centre

Background

The rapporteur visit took place in Aberystwyth on 15 June 2012. Members of the Petitions Committee met with petitioners at St Paul's Church Hall, Aberystwyth. Following that meeting, Members met with representatives of the Ceredigion County Council and attendees at the new day care centre facility in the Town Hall, Aberystwyth. The meetings are recorded in this note.

Meeting with Petitioners

Present:

- William Powell AM, Chair of the Petitions Committee
- Bethan Jenkins AM, Petitions Committee member
- Elin Jones AM (observer)
- Frank Hogg
- Gerald Morgan
- Joyce Evans
- Pamela Hughes
- Gwenda Williams
- Ken Thomas
- Martin Shewring
- Pam Ellis
- Eurwen Booth
- Richard Spencer
- Abigail Phillips, Committee Clerk
- Alex Phillips, AMSS

Gerald Morgan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Petitions Committee for considering the petition and for visiting Aberystwyth in order to see the new day care centre.

The petitioners expressed their regret that the Petitions Committee members would not be visiting the Park Avenue Day Care Centre which had been closed and replaced by the Town Hall Day Care Centre. Petitioners felt that it would have been useful for the Committee to gain a clear idea of the space available at the old centre and the gardens surrounding the building.

Petitioners raised a number of concerns. These were:

- A need for clarity with regard to the evacuation of service users at the day centre in the event of a fire. The Committee was asked to seek assurances that a personal evacuation

plan was in place for all users and that a fire officer's report had taken account of the mobility needs of service users

- There is no pedestrian crossing or layby outside the building to enable service users to access the centre safely. Service Users were previously taken undercover to a door, but access is now via a long ramp that is open to the elements
- There is no public bus service to the centre at present
- No more than 32 Services Users can access the Centre at any one time, which is fewer than the 90 – 100 that the old centre allowed. Petitioners have been told that the number of people wishing to access the service has declined, but they remain concerned about the reasons for that reduction and question whether everyone who wants to access the service is able to
- Petitioners felt that no proper consultation was carried out ahead of the closure of the Park Avenue Day Care Centre
- People who had previously met with friends at the Park Avenue Day Care Centre on a Wednesday are now unable to attend the new Centre as it is open to patients on referral only
- There is no bathing facility available in the new centre, only a combined shower and disabled toilet room. There was an expectation that patients who could not be bathed at home would be taken to an alternative location to be bathed, but this has not happened. It was reported that one patient had been unable to access a bath or shower for the 6 weeks since the closure of the old centre.
- One service users was unable to use the new Day Care Centre with his wife as he could not walk the length of the access ramp. This has resulted in a loss of 15 hours of respite for his carer and means that the couple cannot socialise together.
- Petitioners pointed out that socialising was an important aspect of life for individuals who were being cared for at home. It is also important that carers are able to maintain a social life.

Petitioners told the Committee that they would like an alternative centre to be provided. The old Drill Hall had been offered as an alternative to the Park Avenue site, but there had been no consultation on that and the offer had since been withdrawn.

Petitioners also told the Committee that the Council's decision three years ago to close the Day Care Centre with no alternative provision could have been 'called in' but that too much time had now elapsed for that to happen.

Petitioners reported that they had been told by Council Officers that the Day Care Centre was non-statutory provision and so could be withdrawn altogether. The petitioners feel that as the Day Care Centre is paid for by the over-stretched Social Services which encourages care at home, the funding may be under threat. The petitioners feel that the centre should be paid for from the Health budget.

One petitioner described the care that people receive at home from visiting professionals as rushed in comparison with the relaxed atmosphere of a day care centre at which service users benefit from the varied skills of a larger work force and the company of others.

One petitioner suggested that costs were not an issue for the Council but if they were, the Centre could be run by a charity in an alternative location. Examples of such an approach in the Netherlands were cited.

Petitioners felt that the decision to close Park Avenue Day Centre would have been overturned by the newly elected council, but for the binding contracts that they are a party to. As Welsh Government is part funder of the Mill Street Regeneration that has led to the need to close Park Avenue Day Care Centre, petitioners feel that the Welsh Government have a responsibility to take action, perhaps by 'calling in' the decision.

Finally, petitioners called for an independent assessment of the current centre. Any such assessment should include consideration of the experience of carers and service users along with the effects of the changes on those who had used Park Avenue Day Care Centre but felt they could not use the new centre.

Meeting with representatives of Ceredigion County Council

Present:

- William Powell AM, Chair of the Petitions Committee
- Bethan Jenkins AM, Petitions Committee member
- Elin Jones AM (observer)
- Ellen ap Gwynn, Leader of the Council
- Catherine Hughes, Cabinet Member
- Shirley Steen, Officer in Charge of the Day Centre
- Sue Darnbrook, Assistant Director (Adults & Mental Health)
- Alan Baily, Architect
- Peter Gough, Health & Safety
- Abigail Phillips, Committee Clerk
- Alex Phillips, AMSS

The Leader of the Council welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair of the Petitions Committee thanked the Leader for honouring the meeting date, given the pressures on her time following the recent floods. Sympathies were offered to the victims of the floods.

The Chair explained that the Committee had received a petition relating to the new Day Care Centre, and had met with petitions to hear their concerns.

The Council Leader explained that decisions made before the elections relating to the Mill Street Area development were binding, and carried a heavy financial penalty should the council now reverse the decision. The decision had been made under European Procurement Rules and used a matrix for bidder selection. Following selection, the developers chosen requested a bigger footprint of land for development that included both the Park Avenue Day Care Centre and the Drill Hall, which had been the council's preferred site for Day Care provision. It was then that the library site was identified for the Day Care provision. It was acknowledged that there had been insufficient

consultation and that no alternatives had been sought. Although the Day Care provision is non-statutory, the Leader of the Council made it clear that the provision would continue. Some service users had been distressed by newspaper reports speculating on the future and current provision of care at the new centre. Service users had told Councillors that they preferred to move than have no provision at all.

The Assistant Director (Adults and Mental Health) told the Committee that falling rolls for Day Care Centres are typical across Councils as service users seek alternative provision through direct payments and community based services if they don't need the specialist care provided at centres like that at the Town Hall, and because people are typically remaining healthier for longer. Only one gentleman had not transferred to the new centre and this is because he has chosen not to.

The Football Club now provides a luncheon club for those service users who used to access the drop in sessions on Wednesdays. The sessions are reported to be well attended and growing in popularity.

The integration of the specialist Day Care Centre in the basement of the Town Hall and the library on the Ground and upper floor of the Town Hall was felt to go some way towards integrating older people with other members of the community. It was also felt that the new centre is more intimate and encourages people to converse and use the library facilities. Two senior citizen groups were using the centre on a regular basis for meetings.

The lack of a public bus service was recognised as an issue. The Council is hoping that a service bus will soon be serving the Town Hall.

The entrance ramp that is open to the elements had also been identified as an issue. The Council intends to create a covered entrance to the side of the Town Hall that will enable service users to alight from buses and enter the Day Care Centre while staying undercover.

The Petitions Committee shared petitioners' concerns regarding the combined shower and disabled toilet but staff reassured the Committee that no patient had needed to access the toilet while the shower had been in use. Showers were planned to take place while other service users were in activities and unlikely to ask to use the toilet. There were alternative disabled toilets elsewhere in the building for wheelchair users, although very few wheelchair users attended the Centre. Alternative toilets for ambulant users were available

Council officials told the Committee that, where possible, bathing should take place away from the Day Care Centre as it was not the right environment or setting for such levels of personal care. Those service users who need aids or adaptations in order to be able to bathe or shower at home were being assessed and provided with equipment or, where appropriate, had been offered a bath at an alternative venue. The Committee was told that only one service user was still awaiting a bath, but that a bath at an alternative venue had been offered to her.

The Committee was told that the architect had worked with building control and fire officers during the design, construction and post-construction stage to ensure that the needs of users were taken into account. The Health and Safety assessment of the building showed that provision for a fire emergency was over and above the standards required.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that a review of the provision would take place around the end of April next year, and that she would welcome that to be carried out by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales as regulating body. Service user comments are being regularly gathered and acted on in the meantime. A service users group will be formed to enable attendees at the centre to shape the service.

The Committee agreed to send those present a note of the meeting, and to keep them informed of the Committee's consideration of the petition.

The Committee was then given a tour of the library facilities and Day Care Centre before chatting with service users and sharing a meal with them.

Feedback from service users

The Committee was aware that not all service users were present on the day of the visit, although the centre was full to capacity on that day. Members sensed a certain amount of anxiety from some service users who felt that they had to 'put up' with the new centre or risk losing it altogether.

Service users praised the staff, activities and quality of food at the centre.

Some service users said that they missed the bathing facility.

The lack of a covered entrance was problematic with users having to sit in wet clothes after getting wet on the way in. There was a fear that this would get worse in the winter months.

Some users asked the Committee to do what they could to re-open the old facility as it was just sitting empty.

Some users seemed to feel that they had been treated as unimportant because they had been moved to the basement facility.

One lady felt that alternatives for bathing should have been put in place before the move to the Town Hall.

Committee Service
June 2012