

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Wednesday, 13 September 2023 - 2.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)

Councillors L Bach, J Craigie, S Harding, C Hawkins,
P Shepherd, H Thomas and C Wheatley (Substitute for
Councillor Smith)

ALSO PRESENT

S Dorey	- Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
S Matthews	- Save Our Hospital Services
Sargeant G Clark	- Neighbourhood Team Leader, Devon & Cornwall Police
A Fors	- Friends of Bideford Link Centre and Service User
S Gould	- Friends of Bideford Link Centre and Service User
T Vanstone	- Senior Electoral & Democratic Services Officer
K Hewlett	- Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor C Hodson

205. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brenton and Councillor Smith. Councillor Wheatley was present as substitute for Councillor Smith.

206. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Bach and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 31 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 6, Abstention 2)

207. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received. Though, at the Chair's discretion, members of the public took part in discussions during Item 212 of the agenda.

208. ACTION LIST

Chair reviewed the action list with members and the following was agreed:

- Action 137 – Completed. Following the set up of the Water Quality Working Group it was agreed to remove this from the action list.
- Action 154 – Completed. Chair updated members on the planned agenda item for DCC Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee on 21st September, which can be viewed at the following link. It was also confirmed that North Devon and Torridge were planning a joint Committee and one of the issue suggested was dentistry.
- Action 192 – Ongoing. To remain on the action list whilst a response from the MP Office is awaited.
- Action 195 – Completed. Chair provided members with an update since the last meeting and it was agreed to complete the action following today's meeting.
- Action 195 – Ongoing. This action is to be raised at the Community Safety Partnership meeting in October.
- Action 199 – Ongoing. Currently waiting to discuss the opportunity for a joint Committee with North Devon.

209. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

210. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

211. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

Chair requested that the meeting times for December and March be changed to 10am.

Members raised concern regarding Stagecoach bus timetabling and the impact of changes for members of the public. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) confirmed that Stagecoach could be invited to the meeting, and it was suggested that this be raised under the forward plan.

Discussion moved to the state of the roads and whether Devon Highways should be invited to Committee. It was suggested that HATOC would be the best place to raise these concerns. The Senior Elections and Democratic

Support Officer agreed find out contacts for the group and pass these to Councillor Thomas.

212. MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION - DRAFT RESPONSE TO DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION

Chair welcomed the presenters to Committee and provided some insight on why the Committee had been called, advising members that at the time of the meeting Devon County Council (DCC) consultation details about the Link Centre provision were still to be confirmed. Members were advised that feedback from the meeting would be shared with the DCC Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee.

Chair advised that after hearing from presenters there would be an opportunity to discuss recommendations.

Sue Matthews from Save Our Hospital Services (SOHS) introduced herself to the Committee and explained the service's involvement in challenging proposed changes to local provision in the past, as well as background to the current proposals for the Link Centre locally and mental health provision in the district.

The impact of the pandemic was highlighted, along with the changes in Link Centre provision during this time. It was explained that following the pandemic these services had yet to be reinstated. The impact of this change in provision for local providers and in terms of financial impact was noted and it was confirmed this was raised at the recent DCC Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee in July.

The representative from SOHS also touched on the health inequality being experienced in Devon, alongside recent changes to service provision for mental health.

Anna Fors introduced herself to Committee as a service user and member of Friends of Bideford Link Centre. She went on to highlight the work that had taken place to inform the consultation process on provision and confirmed that since the DCC Scrutiny Committee in July the proposal for Link Centre closure had been withdrawn. The new proposals were still awaited.

The level of support and recovery work provided by the Link Centre was explained for members. It was explained that the provision was for all severities, and most of the people accessing support from Link Centres have complex mental health needs. The pre-pandemic provision was explained as being a mental health hub, and it was stated that this is what NHS Community Mental Health framework recommends as best practice.

It was confirmed that there are no referral routes open to the Link Centre, but it was stated that there remained a high need for the service locally. It was asked that the Committee support calls to reopen these referral routes. Chair advised this could be one of the recommendations considered at the end of the meeting.

Sonia Gould, service user of the Link Centre introduced herself and spoke to the Committee about the need for referral routes to be re-opened for people to access support, stating that if referrals reopened it would be clearer how many needed the service. She went on to explain how the service had supported her, and noted that some of the alternative provision suggested through consultation wouldn't be suitable for those with complex mental health needs. The importance of outside core hours support was also stated.

The closure of the Link Centre in Holsworthy was highlighted, along with the importance of support to help those at risk of suicide.

The representative from SOHS summarised that currently there was no alternative proposal and the impact this could potentially have for service users. She explained how the northern Devon model had been used in other areas of Devon and shared as good practice. She also stated there had been an increase in the number of attendances at North Devon District Hospital and that Devon County has one of the highest rates of suicide in the Country.

The importance of choice for those who need support was stated and it was explained that those with complex mental health needs may not be able to access the support that is available in the community, due to high social anxiety. It was felt that the Link Centre, with their trained staff, was more appropriate for this high level support.

During discussions it was explained that a petition of over 4,000 signatures had been handed to Devon County Council. An additional petition was now in place to reinstate referral routes.

It was suggested that Sir Geoffrey Cox MP could be invited, along with Councillor McInnes to visit the Link Centres again to raise awareness.

The role of the Devon Partnership Trust was highlighted for members and their role within the consultation as the provider of Mental Health Provision. It was explained that Devon County owned the building the Link Centre was based within.

Jane Cannon, service user, raised that a question had been raised in Parliament regarding mental health provision and went on to highlight funding provision from Government. This led members to note the area's deprivation levels and the levelling up agenda for the area.

Sgt Glyn Clark, Neighbourhood Team Leader, addressed the Committee and highlighted the patch he covers. He went on to explain the 'Right Care, Right Person' policy, which was due to be rolled out by the Police force nationwide. It was explained the policy meant that Police would attend if there was a threat of immediate harm and those who did not meet this threshold would be referred on to the 'right person'.

Section 136 powers where people need immediate care due to overdose or suicide risks were highlighted for members. It was explained that under these

powers the person needs to be taken to a place of safety. Currently the nearest provision is in Exeter, the next is Plymouth, then Torquay.

Following a question regarding call outs it was noted that a high number of calls to the Police are because people don't know where to turn. This led on to a discussion regarding funding streams and access to funding for the frontline provision and service users.

Members noted the following 2022 benchmarking figures for Torridge:

- 239.2 of 100,000 hospital admissions were due to intentional self-harm – it was stated this was 60 people more than the national average.
- The Suicide rate for Torridge is 12.4 compared to the English average of 10.4. Meaning the area was above average by 2 people a year.

It was explained that these figures are readily available and demonstrate the importance of early intervention to avoid an escalation to crisis point. Members noted anecdotal evidence from services that also demonstrate that need locally is growing.

This led on to a conversation regarding representation at Committee and some members noted their frustration at the lack of attendance from partner agencies. It was felt that there needed to be more detail regarding Devon County Council's decision making process, and what future provision would look like for service users.

Members asked about the statutory duty of DCC and asked how this was evaluated. Members were advised that individual health based services were assessed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) – Devon Partnership. It was confirmed that Devon County Council were not covered by this.

During discussion Linda Ellis (member of the public) advised of a duty under the Care Act 2014 and the 2010 Equality Act. Members noted that nationally Local Authorities were failing to meet this duty, as reported by the LGA.

Service users spoke to Members about the complexities of accessing care pathways and the support needed. This led onto a discussion regarding the Police 'Right Care, Right Person' policy and who the 'right person' would be locally.

It was explained that the roll out was yet to be confirmed, but other areas of the Country already had the policy in place. It was noted that the loss of the Link Centre service may be felt and therefore Devon and Cornwall Police should be involved in the consultation.

It was agreed that Sargeant Glyn Clark would pass on details of the consultation to the lead for the Right Care, Right Person roll out.

Members discussed raising a formal complaint with DCC. The Head of Legal & Governance confirmed that Committee were able to do this but advised that a first step would be to share feedback from this Committee to the DCC Health

and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee through Councillor Hodson, who was the District Representative. It was explained that this was the route suggested to Committee by DCC officers.

It was proposed by Councillor Thomas, seconded by Councillor Craigie and Resolved:

That Committee also investigate how concerns can also be raised to a higher level, should the need present.

(Vote: For Unanimous).

Councillor Hodson spoke to Committee about her role on the Health and Adult Health Scrutiny Committee. She advised members of the previous meeting she attended, where the consultation on Link Centres was discussed. At the meeting it was agreed for the proposals to be withdrawn and to continue the Link Centre service until March.

It was suggested that the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee should request that referral routes to the Link Centres are reopened. The importance of early intervention was restated.

Councillor Hodson advised she would feedback any comments she received as the District Representative on the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee for DCC. It was confirmed there wasn't currently a set date for this to return to the DCC Committee, as they needed sufficient time to deal with the issues raised previously.

There was further discussion regarding following the complaint process. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) explained reasoning for pursuing the DCC scrutiny process.

Members were reminded that Councillor Hellyer sits on the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee as a County Councillor, and could be kept informed of External Overview and Scrutiny involvement.

It was proposed by Councillor Craigie, seconded by Councillor Shepherd and

Resolved:

That External Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Torridge continues to extend an invitation by letter to DCC, to attend and discuss the alternatives that they want in place of Link Centres.

Vote Unanimous

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Craigie and

Resolved:

To recommend, with agreement of the service, that Sir Geoffrey Cox MP and Councillor McInnes visit the Bideford Link Centre and for the MP to publicly support the continuation of the service. This invitation is to be extended to the relevant County Councillors as well.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Craigie and

Resolved:

That the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee support the petition to re-open all the referral routes to the Link Centres in Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe and reinstate staff led therapy groups as they were pre-covid, so people can get the help they desperately need. Committee also recommend that Full Council support this petition.

(Vote: For 7, 1 abstention)

During discussions the following actions were agreed:

- To contact the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) and raise concerns regarding potential impact of Link Centre closures – it was noted that Councillor Hackett attends regular PCC meeting.
- To speak with the Leader for TDC regarding what provision is in place, particularly for those with complex needs, following the closure of the Link Centre in Holsworthy and what options are being considered for the building where the Link Centre was housed.

213. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair reviewed the forward plan with members and the following was discussed:

- **12th October** - plans are still in place to hold the Community Safety Partnership at Brynsworthy.
- **1st November** – It was confirmed that the focus of this meeting would be employment and education and invites had already been sent.
- **December** – This date was suggested for the planned Joint meeting with North Devon District Council.
- Lendology was also suggested for the December meeting.

- **April** – Pickwell Foundation were suggested and the Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) confirmed they were keen to attend and update members on their work.

The meeting commenced at 2.02 pm and closed at 3.53 pm