

Dear Cllr Penny Shelton

RE: PROPOSED CENTRE CLOSURE

My Mother is a client at Newent Day Centre and I refer to a letter sent to her by yourself giving details of a meeting on the 26th March 2007 to discuss this. It is very probable that I shall be away on that date and so I am writing to you in case I am unable to attend.

My intention is to circulate this letter to Mr Ed Davey, councillors and appropriate personnel involved in this decision. I am well aware that my comments will be repetitious to you nevertheless they are important to the staff at Newent House, my Mother and all the other clients as well as to myself.

Everyone these days is subject to cutbacks, and however unfair these may seem to be in monetary terms they have to be addressed. It is how these cutbacks are divided out amongst the people of Kingston is what is important. It seems to me that the share of these cutbacks to the elderly of this Borough is out of all proportion. They are amongst the most vulnerable and I am appalled that the closure of a Day Centre is being considered. The elderly deserve better; they are frail and unable to fight their causes in the same way as, for example, the proposed closure of a library was overturned. Without becoming too political I am surprised and indeed saddened that this Liberal Democrat Council is voting against the wishes of the most vulnerable and needy in our midst. It is shameful that this is being considered at all.

I attended the recent Council meeting to discuss this proposed budget. I was shocked at the dismissive attitude of the Liberal Democratic Councillors after the initial petition from Hobkirk was accepted and commented on. The subject of the closure of a Day Centre was repeatedly raised by the Opposition and the Liberal Democrats moaned and groaned on saying things like 'can't we move on'. On such a serious issue that affects so many of their voters it was disgraceful and shocking.

I also attended a meeting at Newent House where these proposals were explained. A very large burden is to be put on the voluntary services to help with the elderly in this Borough. They too, perhaps even more so, have constraints on their budgets as less and less is being made available to them from the Government and the Lottery and will have to rely more and more on donations - even more so with the proposed overspend for the Olympics. This is simply pie in the sky thinking and an outrageous shift of responsibility for these vulnerable people on to volunteers.

Newent House, headed up by Alaine Dixon, is an efficiently run, happy environment for elderly people who mostly live alone. It is their opportunity to leave their homes where they spend hours alone to meet up with her caring staff and friends and this gives them a lifeline. Alaine Dixon and her staff have created an outstanding atmosphere in their Day Centre which is a pleasure to visit at anytime.

All their clients would be devastated if this facility was not available to them in the way it is now. They have been told that they will not be affected by these changes but of course they will. Gradually one Centre will be crammed full which will totally change the ambiance and security that they love. This proposal is full of logistical problems; how long for example will it take to bus these frail people to and from their homes if their local Centre is closed? What on earth will happen to the many elderly people coming up through the system? We were told that the numbers of vulnerable, elderly people are falling but this Council can be the only ones in the United Kingdom who believe this.

The policy of keeping elderly people in their homes is acceptable to a point, especially if that is what they want, but they become prisoners if they are not helped to get out to meet with others. The camaraderie of a Day Centre is so vital to their quality of life. Somewhere to have their hair done, feet seen to, nurses in attendance when necessary, etc. etc. and above all where someone can keep an eye on them and alert Managers if necessary. This is so expertly overseen by Alaine and her staff who work so hard to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. My concern for the staff job futures is real. Natural wastage is not the answer and takes time, and combining staff into one Centre is most definitely not either. So what is their future if this proposal goes ahead? This has not been adequately addressed in my opinion.

Finally, there are many more ways to save money, the Kingston magazine for a start. There is no way that this can be considered by the Borough to be more important than caring for their elderly people.

I should be happy to discuss this further so please ring me anytime.

Yours sincerely

C&A