

## Consultation meeting for service users and relatives

Newent Resource Centre  
Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007

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### Present:

Simon Pearce (SP), Head of Community Care Services  
Fiona Connolly (FC), Principal Manager, Resource Centres for Older People  
Rory Belfield, Resource Centre Manager, Newent House  
Councillor Penny Shelton  
Service user and relatives

**Mr C** read a letter out sent from **BM** stating that if Newent was to close it will set back the Day Centre system 40 years. Hundreds of vulnerable people will be discriminated against. Newent provides excellent meals, and devoted staff.

**Mr C** said Wandsworth and other London boroughs were getting more funding. Why? Does this mean RBK is useless at managing and negotiating?

**SP** replied that the only Council that gets a smaller Government grant than Kingston is Richmond. Kingston has made strong recommendations and this issue has been raised with the Government.

**Mr C** said Kingston must be an inefficient Council and wastes money.

**SP** replied that Kingston gets the worse deal from the Government.

**TH** addressed Cllr Shelton by saying she felt it heartless and cynical to use Hobkirk and Newent Day Centres against each other.

**Cllr Shelton** said it was not intended to set one against the other. The Council has to save £22 million and the Council Tax is up 5%. The Council can't make money to cover services. This saving will help the saving of other services.

**TH** was concerned about the ageing population. She represents her mother but what about others. She asked why there was a huge layer of management?

**Cllr Shelton** replied that Government has increased spending on the NHS by 90% since 1997 but only by 14% on Local Authority services. Because of this lack of funding there is no way Kingston Council can continue to provide the level of service it offers now. It would appear that the Government does not care about what happens to older people. It is the same in all other boroughs. Whichever political party were in power in Kingston, savings would still have to be made. Kingston spends £ 600,000 in grant monies to support local organisations and over £400,000 on concessionary fares for older people. It is unfair to say the Council is not supporting local older people.

**AS** said people were concerned about the here and now. A large amount of money was going to be taken from the elderly. Why was this so?

**Cllr Shelton** said there has to be a saving of £7/8 million this year with no increase in resources.

**AS** commented that no provision had been made to meet these savings but Councillors have had large pay rises.

**Cllr Shelton** refuted councillors had been given large pay rises.

**Mrs B** said she was aged 83, blind and in a wheelchair her husband died in 1969 and she had cared for her 2 children on her own. She had sat in air raid shelters in the war to be safe from the bombs and she had worked at the MOD. She felt she deserved places to come to and that this town owed her and should let her be with other people. She did not want to live in Victorian times and be shut away. She wanted somewhere to go and be with other people.

**Cllr Shelton** replied that the service will not be taken away from people already receiving it.

**AS** asked if Newent and Hobkirk were combined how could the same level of care be given?

**FC** replied that there was a need to look to the future and the possibility of other choices for people. There are a number of people who have been coming for many years to Newent and Hobkirk who may be interested in other services better suited to their individual needs.

**SP** said that regarding the use of either Newent or Hobkirk for offices, no decisions had been made. The Council was looking at all its buildings and their use but it should not be forgotten that both Hobkirk and Newent included care homes where people lived so this aspect of their service needed to be preserved.

In terms of expenditure, its worth remembering that Kingston is one of the highest spending authorities on Day Services for older people. The Council is facing big financial challenges and difficult choices. Other boroughs were having to do the same.

**AS** said her mother is cared for by very able and talented people and she wants them to keep their jobs.

**FC** replied that the staff teams at both Centres worked well together and were highly valued. Their hard work, motivation and commitment was second to none. In terms of staff keeping their jobs, there were other Centres with staff vacancies so some opportunities to redeploy staff.

**TH** asked why was it as late as February when everyone was told about the changes?

**Cllr Shelton** replied she was not aware that a decision had been made.

**SP** added that the budget setting process starts in the late summer, early autumn. The Council gets notified by the Government of its spending grant in the first week of December. The Council then needs to make rapid progress deciding how it will spend its grant monies and what to do to make its budget balance. No decision would have been made before December. Whichever political party was in power locally would have been faced with a shortfall of £20 million.

**R Family** asked why people were not involved earlier. Meetings were held during the daytime which meant that many families were unable to attend. Things could have been done months ago to enable service users to act sooner?

**SP** replied there is a 3 month consultation period and a 2 year lead in before any changes take place in full. It is always difficult if a consultation goes on a long time.

**AS** said she had written to the Daily Mail about the proposals.

**SP** said that Kingston had its faults but is far better than many boroughs when it comes to these issues. Some local Councils were far more brutal.

**TH** asked if she could see a list of all the money saving proposals that were on the table before the decision to close a Day Centre was made.

**Cllr Shelton** replied that all the alternatives were in the documentation. Other than payments to schools which are ring fenced, everything was in melting pot.

**SP** said the issue is ultimately political.

**AS** asked if Hobkirk had a garden?

**FC** replied that it did.

**FC** said that if the proposal to close one Day Centre goes ahead, the issue of transport will need to be dealt with. People's individual needs will have to be assessed. Some people like being on a bus while others are not so keen. People coming in with high support needs would need separate transport.

**S Family** asked if her Mum will she still be able to attend 5 days a week?

**SP** replied that if a person comes 5 days week then there would be no problem. If a person comes 3 days a week, for example Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, then they may need to adjust their days, but we will try and guarantee the same days.

**JC** said there are no hot meals at drop-in centres.

**Mr C** commented that he feels the decision to close a Centre had already been made at the council meeting in February.

**FC** replied that no decision had yet been made. The Executive will decide at its meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007. All are welcome to attend this meeting.

**TH** commented that it was important that people's voices were heard and that the power of the press should be used to make sure everything was in the public domain.

**FC** advised people to speak to their individual councillors and MP to get their voices heard.

**Mr C** read out a letter on behalf of all service users.