

**REPORT ON THE CONSULTATION DURING FEBRUARY / MARCH 2008
ON FUTURE SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN ARGYLL AND BUTE**

Prepared by Douglas Boynton, Social Care Consultant

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 In September 2007 Argyll and Bute Council's Executive Committee considered a report on the future of services for older people and agreed that an options appraisal would be undertaken.
- 1.2 The Council also approved a Consultation and Communication Strategy and a programme of meetings with various stakeholders throughout Argyll and Bute was arranged. In order to promote objectivity an independent consultant was engaged to lead the meetings.
- 1.3 A total of 49 meetings took place in localities including Mull, Tiree, Oban, Mid Argyll, Campbeltown, Islay, Helensburgh, Bute and Cowal. In all some 500 people attended the meetings.
- 1.4 Detailed notes were taken of the issues raised by those attending the meetings.
- 1.5 There was some criticism, particularly in the first week about the way in which the consultation programme had been organised
- 1.6 Concerns were expressed about the quality of the services thought to be on offer from the independent sector
- 1.7 There was a general lack of confidence in the role of the Care Commission and of the Council itself in monitoring and ensuring quality.
- 1.8 The tendency of the private sector to 'cherry pick' in terms both of service users and of locality was a concern.
- 1.9 There were many concerns expressed about the consequences of the Council applying a 'one size fits all' approach.
- 1.10 There were a range of understandable concerns expressed by staff about the potential impact on them of any change in provider arrangements.
- 1.11 It was felt that the Council needs to look at ways of making better use of what it already has rather than simply abandoning its role as major provider.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 In September 2007 Argyll and Bute Council's Executive Committee considered a report on the future of services for older people. The Committee agreed that an options appraisal would be undertaken which would include a tendering process for certain services, in order to evaluate the merits of externally provided services as an alternative to direct provision.

The Council also approved a Consultation and Communication Strategy for the project which set out the commitment of the Council to effective consultation and meaningful communication with elected members, staff, service users and their families and other internal and external stakeholders.

The strategy sets out the standards and principles for consultation, indicates the content and scope of the process and details the methods to be used.

2.1.2 In line with the Consultation and Communication Strategy a programme of meetings with various stakeholders throughout Argyll and Bute was arranged. In order to promote objectivity an independent consultant was engaged to lead the meetings. The consultant, Douglas Boynton has a background in senior management in the public sector and had previously been employed as Head of Services for Older People by Aberdeenshire Council. The consultant was supported by two Council Officers, Linda Thomson and Lorna McCallum. In addition one of the Council's Community Services managers was in attendance at most of the meetings in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to the process and to respond to any issues arising to which a Council response was required.

2.1.3 A total of 49 meetings took place in localities including Mull, Tiree, Oban, Mid Argyll, Campbeltown, Islay, Helensburgh, Bute and Cowal. In all some 500 people attended. Separate meetings were arranged for the various interested parties. However, in practice attendance tended to overlap with, for example, some staff attending meetings primarily aimed at service users and carers. It is felt that this did not have any particular impact on the programme as a whole. A standard Powerpoint presentation format was used in order to ensure consistency. However at some meetings, for example at those with care home residents, a different style was adopted. Detailed notes were kept of the main points arising at each of the meetings and the main issues are summarised below.

2.2 Outcomes of the Consultation Programme Meetings

2.2.1 Views of the Consultation Process

There was criticism, particularly in the first week about the way in which the consultation programme had been organised. It was felt that the notice given for meetings was too short and that advertising had been poor. That being said, the general turnout to meetings was perhaps as good as could have been expected and often these complaints were voiced by people who were nonetheless at the meetings!

"Whole thing has been very rushed! Not well advertised – no info at all!"
(Lynnside, Oban)

There was a degree of cynicism, particularly from staff about whether the consultation process was genuine one. In anticipation of this response, mention was made in the presentation of the consultation strategy and of the Council's commitment to genuinely listen to the outcomes of the process. However, views were expressed about it being

"A done deal and this consultation is just a cosmetic exercise".

The recent Single Status issues were still a factor in affecting staff attitudes and there was some criticism of the timing of the consultation exercise which was seen to be following closely the recent difficulties in staff/employer relations.

Amongst the public, there were some similar views expressed but there was a general acceptance that the consultation process represented a genuine opportunity for people to have their say. However there were strongly expressed views in one location in particular that the consultation should not end at this stage. It was felt that the Council should, before advertising any tender for services, go back to communities to make sure that the tender document fully reflects the issues arising from the consultation process.

2.2.2 Quality

Concerns about the quality of the services thought to be on offer from the independent sector formed by far the most numerous group of comments made. A significant number of 'real-life' examples of poor quality services were given, most commonly by family carers who had had direct experience of care home places on offer in private sector homes.

"Private Providers are out to make money. If the Council afford to run these services, how can a private provider do so without making cuts to quality? We are very lucky in the staff we have here and the way the home is run, we don't want change" (Gortonvogie Day Hospital, Islay).

The main concerns expressed were:

- The low quality of care provided by private sector staff. There is a perceived lack of training and expertise of private care staff and a perception that overseas workers are often employed in large numbers with consequent communication difficulties, and a general view that staff commitment is low because of poor terms and conditions.

"Council have a rigorous programme for staff re Moving and Handling - how would this be run for Private Providers?" (Willow View, Oban)
"PP's employ a lot of foreign workers - how can they communicate with older people and those with Dementia?" (Struan Lodge, Dunoon)

- By contrast the work of the Council's existing staff was almost universally praised. It was felt that staff managed to provide high quality care despite, in some cases, inadequate facilities and poor employment conditions. The 'public sector ethos' was felt to apply so that staff were willing to 'go the extra mile' in order to provide a more personalised service, often providing more than they were paid to do. This contrasted with the private sector staff giving a basic service in return for basic wages.

“Great care in a lovely setting & we are spoiled here with the small numbers” (Dunaros care Home, Mull)

- Concerns were also expressed about the financial viability and long term commitment of private care companies. Examples were given of privately owned homes that had closed without warning and there was a need for effective contingency arrangements to underpin any outsourcing arrangement.
- In general the private sector was felt to offer large scale, impersonal and basic services, in contrast to the more local, homely and personalised services on offer from the Council. Privately provided services were felt to be less reliable and less consistent. Examples were given of private homecarers simply not turning up and of many different and unfamiliar carers being used for individual service users.

“What if an external provider does not turn up? Worries over contracting – agencies can step back from their contracts as the contracts have no teeth attached!” (Willow View, Oban)

- There was a general lack of confidence expressed in the role of the Care Commission and of the Council itself in monitoring and ensuring quality. It was felt the Care Commission operated a system of basic standards which did not ensure good quality care. There were also criticisms of their lack of consistency and a view (mostly expressed by Council staff) that private care operators were given an ‘easier ride’ than the Council in terms of compliance with required standards. It was felt that the Council needed to put in place more effective contract compliance and quality monitoring systems than currently appear to exist.
- The tendency of the private sector to ‘cherry pick’ in terms both of choice of service users and of locality was a concern. It was felt that by and large private companies were interested in service users whose needs were more straightforward and who live in towns and more accessible places and that people with more complex needs living in more remote places would be given less priority. It was felt the Council would need to have very secure tendering and contracting processes in order to ensure equity of service provision.

“Would clients in remote rural areas would be of financial interest to Private Providers?” (Willow View, Oban)

2.2.3 Diversity

There were many concerns expressed about the consequences of the Council applying a ‘one size fits all’ approach. It was felt that the Council needed to recognise that different approaches might be required in different

areas in response to variable patterns of need and distinctive community structures. There were thought to be dangers in the Council opting for a single alternative provider of services as it was feared that the provider's energies would be focussed upon the more urban areas with a consequent neglect of more remote communities. It was felt that inevitably there would be a drift away from the provision of services at a local level and that people would have to travel away in order to receive services.

These concerns were voiced most prominently but not solely by the island communities who felt that 'mainland solutions' would not work for them. The potential for residents having to leave the island in order to receive care was a particular concern. The absence of an alternative workforce and difficulties in housing any new staff were given as particular issues which would have to be faced by any new provider.

The Council was urged to consider a flexible approach in any tendering process, recognising the differing needs of the variety of communities in its area.

2.2.4 Staff Concerns

There were a range of understandable concerns expressed by staff about the potential impact on them of any change in provider arrangements. Staff generally seemed to be aware of their position in terms of employment law. However, they were concerned about whether jobs would continue to be available to them and also about the potential impact on terms and conditions. Confidence in the effectiveness of the Trade Unions seemed low. There seemed to be a generally fatalistic attitude on the part of staff to the future.

"Morale and Motivation is very low – staff feel they have been "sold down the river" (Salen Resource centre, Mull)

Members of the public, particularly service users voiced concerns about the implications for staff.

"Residents here have great relationships with staff and if staff are paid less under PP's then the quality of staff will not be there!" (Eadar Glinn, Oban)

2.2.5 Other Issues

As well as the main concerns described above, a range of other issues arose at meetings.

- The Council needs to look at ways of making better use of what it already has rather than simply abandoning its role as major provider. Many comments were made about the high costs of Council services and views were expressed about how Council's could make themselves more able to deliver cost effective services, for instance

by setting up an 'arms length' organisation to run care services. It was also felt that some resources were underused. For example the capacity of sheltered housing to provide other resources to local communities was felt to be something needing to be explored further.

- It was felt that the Council need to engage more effectively with communities in harnessing the resources which already exist, particularly through voluntary organisations. This it was felt could go some way to alleviating some of the problems of providing services in remote communities. A suggestion was made at two of the meetings on Islay that a form of community trust should be set up to operate care services on a non-profit making basis and it was felt that the Council should provide active support for initiatives of this sort.
- There were worries about the potential impact of change on the already fragile economies of remote communities. As the Council is currently a major employer in many smaller communities, any change could have a significant impact
- The potential impact on partnership working particularly with NHS was an area of concern. There are many examples of joint working arrangements, both formal and informal and it was felt that these would be more difficult with an alternative social care service provider.
"What about Continuing Care beds at Tigh a Rudh – these beds are well used and we are afraid of losing them?" (Crossapol, Tiree)
- People were worried about the potential impact of change on the Council's charging policy. Despite reassurance being given at meetings there is a worry that private services will cost more.
- A number of very local issues were raised and although attempts were made both at meetings and afterwards to provide information it may be that a further specific response is needed. The main issues were:
 - The perceived lack of progress on the development of the Mull progressive care centre
 - The need for upgrading at Tigh A Rudh home, Tiree
 - Concerns about the future viability of Eader Glinn home, Oban
- A number of positive comments were made about the potential of progressive care centres as a future model of care, the replication of the joint day care service currently provided at Garelochhead, examples of better value in private care homes and the example of ACHA as an alternative to Council provision.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 In spite of the criticism of some elements of the organisation of the consultation programme and of the doubts expressed by some about its value, the consultation process as a whole has been relatively successful in engaging with stakeholders. In order to emphasise the Council's commitment to genuine consultation there needs to be a continuing process whereby the various stakeholders continue to be engaged in whatever changes are to take place. Further information needs to continue to be provided for people who use services and their carers, for staff, for partners and for communities as the decision-making process progresses.
- 3.2 It is perhaps inevitable that in responding to proposals for change to familiar ways of providing services, people focus on concerns and problems rather than on advantages. There was an underlying acceptance that the Council needs to do something to respond to the challenges of the future but there were genuine concerns about what would be on offer from alternative providers.
- 3.3 The major concerns expressed about the proposed changes in arrangements for the delivery of services for older people were about quality. In many parts of Argyll and Bute the private sector providers do not appear to have a good reputation. Some of the particular concerns are based more on hearsay rather than on any direct evidence although some comments are based on experience such as those made by the relatives of people who live in the Council's care homes. It is therefore important that the Council is seen to positively address issues of quality in the tendering process. Existing arrangements for ensuring standards and quality do not appear to be regarded as being very effective. It is important that positive information is given about the Council's quality assurance mechanisms and those of the Care Commission in order to promote confidence in any changed ways of delivering services.
- 3.4 Specific responses to some of the local issues identified above would promote the value of people having their say and help to underline the Council's commitment to genuine consultation.

DOUGLAS BOYNTON

Social Care Consultant
Mill of Blackford
Rothienorman
Inverurie
AB51 8YL

boynton@btinternet.com

