

DOUGLAS BADER – UNISON’S RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE

The issue of consultation, its meaning and purpose is again of cause for concern. During management’s consultation with the trades unions UNISON posed the question “In consulting the public on the closure of Douglas Bader is it the case that if public opinion were against closure it would not happen?” No real answer was forthcoming however given Leicester City Councils track record to date UNISON suspect not.

In respect of the consultation with staff and the trades unions – it is debatable to what extent are they able to influence the decision making – to propose an alternative which might be accepted?

If consultation can change nothing surely it is meaningless and futile and therefore very difficult to engage in with any faith.

In respect of the current proposal to close Douglas Bader the rationale offered for the closure is as always falling numbers of people attending the service – thus increasing the cost to the Council.

In relation to this claim UNISON would submit that 60 people on the books and an attendance of 35 daily seems a fairly healthy and popular service. Were there any more we suspect the rationale for closure would then be that the service was too large, impersonal – not sufficiently tailored to the needs of individuals and too anachronistic.

Whilst the Personalisation agenda may have played some part in the decreasing number of service users it is clear that LCC itself had a hand in the decline.

A lack of referrals is a major contributory factor for falling numbers. UNISON believe this was a planned strategy - details of which can be found in the same budget papers which set out an identical approach in respect of the EPHs i.e. 2011 budget and recommendations.

Reference is made to within this document to ***'effective management of referrals in the interim period to prevent further placements'***

No doubt this is what happened.

The flexibility of non- council services and the use of Personal Assistants (working evenings and weekends) are cited as advantages of closing the service. It appears no-one has considered whether the current staff would be willing to be equally flexible.

When UNISON met with the staff group they were concerned that their service was not understood, that it was seen as entirely building based and somehow old fashioned. They wanted people to know this is not the case. They are much more than a traditional day centre and have forged links with the community which they support service users to access.

They are disappointed that other options are not being considered; for example the re-provisioning of the service such that it is either less building based or based in buildings already being utilised by the community. Staff were willing to work flexibly in the evenings and at weekends to provide services to the current client group.

Whilst reference has been made to the work of the Community Inclusion Team it needs to be noted that this is short term (12 weeks) and much is expected of this very small team. Not only are they required to help people access services in the community it appears they are also charged with developing services (presumably in recognition that there isn't currently sufficient provision). Whether the team has the capacity to undertake all of this work effectively remains to be seen.

One of the concerns the staff at Douglas Bader raised with UNISON is that not all of their client group will benefit from the work of the Community Inclusion Team; some service users are more highly dependent and their needs more complex. It is this group who they believe require a different service; one which is currently not provided in the community – a service which they believe they could provide.

It is important to consider the fact that at this moment in time this political administration is presiding over the biggest decimation of social care services this city has ever seen. The closure of Elderly persons homes, the closure of Older Persons Mental Health Day services, the closure of the mobile meals service and the closure of Douglas Bader. We expect a proposal to reduce the provision of day services to adults with a learning disability in the not too distant future. UNISON would assert it really doesn't have to be this way.

As the largest public sector trade union we believe that the provision of public services should lie with the public sector – thus ensuring their accountability.

The Executive cannot continue to lay the blame for decisions which devastate the lives of service users and their relatives at the door of the coalition – it either has to own its priorities or change them.

The report received by the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission on 10th October 2013 stated (at Para. 3.7) that cost was not the main driver - if this really is the case then it is to be hoped that the Executive will seriously consider the suggestions proffered by staff and not proceed with the closure of Douglas Bader.

Janet McKenna

20/12/13