

Cheshire West & Chester Council

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Official response to the petition: Petition to save local respite care centres

Further to receipt of the Unison Petition 'Cheshire West and Chester: 'RescueRespiteCare!', I write to confirm that the Petition must be declined under paragraph 2.20 of the Council's Petition Scheme. I appreciate that this is not the outcome you hoped for. The reasons for this position are set out below along with what I believe is a way forward to address the wider issues here.

Reason for the Petition being declined

The requests of the Petition are that Council does not close the centres at Curzon House (Chester), Sutton Beaches (Ellesmere Port) and Leftwich Green (Northwich) and that the Council undertake a full review of local respite care provision.

The decision to close the centres was taken by the Council's Cabinet on the 7th July 2021 <http://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/g6478/Public%20reports%20pack%2007th-Jul-2021%2010.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>. The only appropriate route to



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challenge or change the decision now is by way of judicial review. Further to this a review of respite provision is already underway and further details of this are set out below.

The Council's Petition Scheme at paragraph 2.20 sets out the basis upon which a Petition will be declined, this can be summarised as a Petition 'is not an alternative to existing procedures for debating, determining or appealing specific decisions'. The petition refers to a specific decision which followed the appropriate decision-making process, views were taken, scrutiny was involved and the call in period for Cabinet decisions applied. Challenge to the decision can only be by way of Judicial Review at this stage. The primary focus of the Petition relates to this specific decision which has been through the appropriate route and in relation to which there are already processes in place to challenge and as a result it is not a Petition the Council can accept.

There is another element to the Petition which requests a review of local respite care provision. There is no provision to partially accept a Petition, I can confirm however this aspect is already under underway.

I appreciate that this is not the outcome you sought. It may assist if I provide some further information about the decision.

The report presented to Cabinet in July 2021 highlighted the need to change the way in which we offered short term respite care to people in Cheshire West and Chester. It suggested that we needed to improve the range of services available to service users by offering a more person centre, flexible, locally provided sustainable service that was also cost effective.

By offering a more person centred and flexible approach it was evident that this would impact on the three in house services at Sutton Beeches, Leftwich Green and Curzon House and the staff employed within these services. These three services currently cost the Council £3.1m per year. Occupancy levels across all three building-based services have consistently run at less than 50% for some considerable time and that the cost of each bed was far in excess of the cost of a similar bed in the independent sector.

Prior to submitting the Cabinet report a soft market testing exercise was carried out to identify if there was sufficient resource and an appetite to provide short term respite care in the independent sector so that we could confidently suggest this as one of the alternative provisions going forward. The Councils Contracts and Commissioning team led on this piece of work. The outcome showed that there was strong evidence to suggest that there was availability and an appetite in the independent market. This also confirmed that the average cost of a bed in the independent market would cost the Council significantly less than a bed in any of the three in house services. As a result, £588k was identified within the report as being the provisional cost of delivering the required alternative number of beds in the independent sector. This would mean a saving of around £2.5m which could be reinvested into adult social care services.

It is important to point out that the number of alternative beds to be commissioned from the independent sector reflected the number of beds actually used and would not result in a reduction in the level of respite provision available to service users. Following the cabinet decision in July 2021 the Contracts and Commissioning team are now working on identifying the providers who will be offering the future respite care provision. The aim is to have these alternative beds in place from mid-November – 6 weeks before the three in house buildings are due to close. This will allow staff the opportunity to support service users into a new respite care facility if required and allow staff to make a decision about their future.

In addition to this the council is due to launch a Social Care Commission which will provide a real opportunity for people to further shape future Adult Social Care services.

Response dated: 12th October 2021