

Agenda Item No.11

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMISSION 1ST September 2014

REPORT TITLE: Commissioning plan for short breaks and other services for disabled children and their families

Ward(s) affected by this report: All

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Purpose of the report:

To respond to questions raised by members of the People Scrutiny Commission about the commissioning plan for short breaks and other services for disabled children and their families and the results of consultation on that draft plan.

This matter was the subject of a report to the People Scrutiny Commission on 31st July 2014.

The Mayor will be invited to approve the final commissioning plan in Cabinet in October 2014.

RECOMMENDATION for the People Scrutiny Commission:

- 1. To note the responses to questions raised by members of the Commission set out in this report.**

Questions and responses

Questions raised by Councillor Rob Telford

Q1. Is it absolutely necessary to remove five beds rather than two beds? It seems that the Bush is at 80% capacity, so that only justifies removing two beds, not five – so I'd like to know what other options there are for keeping 8 beds and removing just two.

Answer: Yes, in order to release resources to invest in increasing the availability of alternatives to residential short breaks, this is the minimum number of beds we would need to close. The proposal to close 5 beds at the Bush will release £325K to reinvest in other

short breaks. The option of running the Bush with seven beds (ie. closing three beds) was considered, but this would have released only about £40-80K for re-investment. The layout of the building means that closing three beds would only have allowed a minimal reduction in staffing and staff costs.

We are looking at the whole system of short breaks and our analysis tries to understand the need for a range of types of short breaks, including the need for overnight short breaks. Past usage of both the residential short breaks units (the Bush and New Belbrook) informs our understanding of the need for overnight short breaks. The occupancy rates for the two units were:

	2012/13	2013/14
The Bush (10 beds)	80%	78%
New Belbrook (5 beds)	65%	75%

To understand the need for overnight stays there are also other factors we need to take into account. These include:

- The units are used for some children who have a very high number of nights per year. Strictly speaking these are not short breaks, they are “shared care” arrangements where a child is a looked after child while they are staying in the unit. We have placed these children in the short breaks respite units because the beds are currently available. If five beds are closed at the Bush, we will make other arrangements for these children.
- Some families have had additional nights (offered because there are cancellations or vacancies). They are therefore getting more nights than they need.
- Some families were not offered alternative short breaks when they started to use the Bush or New Belbrook and/or alternatives were not available. For some families, their need could be met by another type of service such as a direct payment or overnight stays in another family’s home.

Questions raised by Councillor Barry Clark

Q.2 In the consultation, when users / carers were asked whether they would like the new suggested services, was it explained to them that it would mean cutting back on the availability of the current service and would therefore mean limited availability to the Bush.

Answer: At all consultation sessions we made it clear that we were looking at the whole system of short breaks and that investing more in direct payments, breaks in another family’s home and other short breaks would be funded from resources released by reducing the number of residential short break beds across the city from 15 to 10.

Q.3 What is the actual percentage usage of beds just based on a bed being vacant due to non requirement and not therefore being left vacant for safety or extra demand of users, to allow for emergency provision or for building works taking place.

Answer: The occupancy rates which are set out in the answer to Q.1 have already excluded bed closures due to building works, bank holidays, staff training days, etc. In the years 2012/13 and 2013/14 there were no significant periods where beds were blocked for emergency placements.

For 2012/13 and 2013/14 it is not possible for us to exclude instances where beds are vacant because of the needs of a child as this has not been recorded by the unit. This data is now being recorded and has been supplied to us by the Bush for April-July 2014. In this period there were a total of 1109 bed-nights available of which only 22 were recorded to have been unallocated due to the needs of children.

Q.4 What weight was given to the 954 signed petition and how was this counted into the overall consultation results especially as the consultation was not designed for residents of Bristol who are not users to be able to give their views.

Answer: The number of petition signatures indicates that many people feel strongly about services for vulnerable disabled children. However the wording of the petition was:

'We the undersigned appeal to The Mayor not to reduce the number of beds available for overnight respite at The Bush Residential Centre for disabled children. These beds are currently used by some of the most vulnerable disabled children and pressured families in our city.'

We cannot tell whether or not signatories understood that the proposal to reduce beds at the Bush was part of a wider plan to increase the availability of other types of short breaks. Many of the signatories did not give a Bristol address. We have however still considered the petition as part of the proposals alongside other feedback received from the wider consultation process.

Q.5 The Bush currently splits the unit into two age specific areas for users. If only one area is left what affect will this have on the users and how will this how the unit runs. Will the full age range be present at the same time.

Answer: New Belbrook successfully operates as a five bed unit providing short breaks to children across the age ranges. If the Bush reduces to five beds, they will generally book younger and older children in at different times. They will take into account the needs and behaviours of individual children to make sure they have an appropriate mix.

Q.6 There has recently been a large uptake in the Bush facilities from new users and I believe this has increased the usage percentage to 97%. Will these more up to date figures be built into the final report or will it be based on the current outdated ones and if not why not.

Answer: We have data from the Bush for April-July 2014 which shows that across these four months the occupancy average was 90% (excluding beds that are unusable for any reason). Our analysis is inconclusive about what this recent increase in occupancy tells us about the need for residential short breaks. The possible reasons for the increase include:

- There have been some new referrals to the Bush in this period
- There is at least one current emergency full-time placement at the Bush resulting from a foster placement breakdown
- There is often a seasonal increase at this time of year as families request more support to cope over the summer holidays
- Parents may also be requesting increased nights as a result of the commissioning review (to demonstrate their own need and/or the need for the service generally)
- Parents may be using all of their allocation and cancelling fewer sessions to show they need the service as they are worried about the impact of future bed reductions

Q.7 As seven beds is the quoted amount of beds required based on the usage in the report, what will be the repercussions by dropping down to five and therefore 28% below the perceived requirement? How many users will be affected and how many sessions / days will this be over.

Answer: Please see the answer to Q.1. Current usage is not the only factor to take into account to establish the need for residential short breaks. It is important that we are also able to offer families alternatives to overnight short breaks such as direct payments and breaks in another family's home.

We have done detailed modelling on the impact of closing 5 beds at the Bush. In summary these are our findings (details of this should not be released):

- 14 young people will turn 18 by April 2014 and will stop getting short breaks at the unit
- We estimate that if new families needing a short break can be encouraged to take up alternatives, then only 7 new children will need to start having residential short breaks
- The average number of overnight short breaks per child is currently 49 per year (which we think is relatively high, but we have been unable to get reliable data from other authorities).
- If we increase occupancy to 90%, 14 18-year olds leave and 7 new children start then may be some wider impacts. We think these proposals can be achieved with minimal impact on families currently getting residential short breaks as two families have indicated they would consider an alternative and there are some "shared care" arrangements (see answer to Q.1) with children staying at the residential short breaks units for over 150 nights per year whose needs would be better met in another type of placement. The average number of nights received per child will also need to reduce from 49 to circa 42.
- It will be necessary for some children currently using the Bush to move to Belbrook. There are at least two children who live and go to school close to Belbrook, but have their short breaks at the Bush.

Q.8 What other options were looked at to find the funding for the new services through cuts / savings in other parts of the people directorate or what has been looked at to find new funding streams to help finance these services.

Answer: The budget agreed by the Council in February 2014 is a three year plan to close the budget gap and deliver savings of circa £80m. The People Directorate, along with all Directorates across the Council, have considerable savings to achieve as part of this 3 year plan. Across the whole Council, in 2014/15, we will spend around £12m less in revenue than in the last year. Despite these significant reductions, these short breaks proposals are not reducing spend, but rather reinvesting the savings made on the closure of the beds into more community based short breaks resources for disabled children.

We explored the option of selling beds at the Bush to neighbouring authorities and had discussions with one authority about this. However, this was not a viable option as the other authority was not prepared to block book places and we would have to carry the costs of voids/liability.

Q.9 If it is found that the beds need to be reinstated due to demand how easy would it be and what do you believe the cost of the reinstatement would be.

Answer: The resources released by closing beds at the Bush will be reinvested in other short breaks services and will not be available to fund reinstated beds. If we reinstate the closed beds, there would be a shortfall in short breaks funding of c.£325K per year.

We have not calculated the one-off costs of reinstating the beds, but they are unlikely to be substantial.