

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Report of the Chair of People Scrutiny Committee

Report Subject Matter: Call-in of the Tudor Street Day Centre decision

1.0 Context:

1.1 On 30th November, a decision was made to decommission the property on Tudor Street as an accommodation base for day support services for adults with learning disabilities in the north of Monmouthshire. This decision did not affect the ongoing provision of the service that has been operating throughout Covid. The strategic direction for learning disability services has been in place since 2014, seeking to support people with a learning disability to pursue their individual interests and aspirations within community settings. This had led to a reduction in the number of people accessing Tudor Street Day Centre and a gradual reduction in opening hours before it closed temporarily in 2020. A wider review of the service is underway, and it had been determined that the building on Tudor Street was no longer fit for purpose and could be sold.

1.1 The decision was called in to be scrutinised by the People Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Monmouthshire County Council Constitution for the following reasons:

- There has been no scrutiny and it was not included on the planner.
- The building is situated on a flood plain.
- There has been no consultation with users/groups. The facility is vital for the users/groups, and they have severe special needs.

A debate on the matter was held Tuesday 3rd January, which included contributions from a number of service users and members of the public.

1.2 Monmouthshire's scrutiny process allows for a 15-minute Public Open Forum on every scrutiny agenda, which can be extended at the committee's discretion. It also allows for the submission of written public contributions and videos in advance of the meeting which are circulated to the committee and an opportunity for people to attend in person or remotely and speak at the Public Open Forum. There was significant interest in public participation on this issue and the scrutiny committee therefore extended its Public Open Forum to enable people who had notified the Council in advance of the meeting of their wish to speak, to do so.

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- 1.3** This report provides a fuller account of the substantial public contributions to the meeting, which were welcomed and appreciated by the committee and the formal outcome of the debate by the People Scrutiny Committee. The draft minutes of the meeting will be available on the Council's via the following link. [Agenda for People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 3rd January, 2023, 10.30 am \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/agenda-for-people-scrutiny-committee-on-tuesday-3rd-january-2023-10.30-am)

2.0 Contributions to the Public Open Forum

- 2.1** The following points were made by members of the public as part of their contribution to the Public Open Forum at the People Scrutiny Committee on 3rd January 2023. This report provides an account of what was reported at the meeting and does not seek to comment on the accuracy of any statements made. Views have been summarised under headings for reference.

What People suggested Tudor Street Day Centre offered them

- 2.2** People stated that Tudor Street Day Centre offered a central, safe, warm environment for vulnerable people with learning disabilities to socialise with friends and undertake activities such as cooking, crafts, exercise and to hold workshops on sensory activities, art, music, Information Technology, radio presenting and many other activities. Members heard that service users, carers and support staff held events in which the wider community were involved, enriching the lives of service users, providing respite for carers from 24/7 caring responsibilities.
- 2.3** People spoke of how Tudor Street Day Centre meant much more than a physical building to them – it acted as a hub, a place to go to for people from all walks of life to build their confidence, to learn life skills and to achieve qualifications. Examples were given of a people who had produced artwork at the Tudor Day Centre to sell in the community with the assistance of the support worker and how some people with an interest in radio presenting had achieved their goal, working with Able radio station and achieved qualifications. Members heard that the Tudor Street Day Centre was felt to be a place where lasting meaningful friendships were formed between service users and the wider community, who attended their fundraising events.
- 2.4** People told the scrutiny committee that the central location of Tudor Street Day Centre in Abergavenny town was easily accessible to them and that it had the appropriate facilities, such as a changing bed and disabled toilet facilities that suited many people with learning disabilities, but not those with profound complex needs. Some people told the committee that their relatives couldn't use the centre because it didn't cater for the needs of people with severe

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disabilities, particularly those who needed hydrotherapy, tracking hoists and sensory spaces, which are provided in purpose-built facilities, such as the facility located in Cwmbran.

- 2.5** People spoke about how 'My Day My Life', whilst operating at the Tudor Street Day Centre prior to the pandemic had enabled people to make personal plans and choose what activities they would like to do within their day. People highlighted the importance to them of having the choice of day services and/or being in the community, explaining that community-based activities alone didn't support the building of friendships in the same way, because activities such as going to the cinema or going on a bus trip aren't activities that tend to encourage social interaction between people with learning disabilities. They advised they simply wanted to see their friends in a safe, warm environment that had the appropriate facilities for their needs. People explained how the service users and their carers ran a café at the centre and how they regarded the day centre to be at the heart of the community.

How People reported feeling about the Day Centre's closure

- 2.6** Some people told the scrutiny committee that people were "roaming the town centre with their support workers in cold conditions, as they haven't got anywhere to go" apart from supermarkets and cafes. Some people commented on how they felt they had lost the opportunity to participate in activities they previously undertook, in which they were able to gain valuable life skills and qualifications due to the closure of the centre. One person explained how since the closure, they rarely met with friends, unless there was a My Mates function, which take place infrequently. People reported that the closure of the centre had increased their isolation and loneliness and spoke of being "lost without the centre". Another person told the scrutiny committee that "My Day My Life should be supporting their users, not abandoning them in the community in all weathers".
- 2.7** One of the reasons explained to the scrutiny committee as to why people with severe disabilities struggle to access activities based in the community are that the toilet facilities in cafes and shops are inappropriate - people with severe learning disabilities need a changing bed in a toilet facility so that carers can dedicate the necessary time to assist the person. A carer explained the difficulty of changing a person in a community based disabled toilet, where other members of the public may be actively trying to access the toilet or queuing to use the toilet. It was suggested that greater thought needed to be given to people's needs.

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- 2.8** A carer told members that activities in the community provided little stimulation for people with learning disabilities and that the closure of the centre had negatively affected their own mental health. Several carers reported how since the centre had closed during the pandemic, service users felt they had lost their friendships, their learning opportunities and were regressing socially. Carers also highlighted how they missed the respite that the day centre offered full time carers. Some people spoke of their isolation and a person suggested that reopening the centre would have helped people to reintegrate into the community, as well as support the wider community. More than one person told the committee they hadn't had contact with a social worker throughout the pandemic and that they had only been contacted after the decision was made to close the centre. One person stated explicitly that Mardy Park was felt to be an older person's centre and as such, they felt that their own needs were being ignored and that they "were being 'grouped' as adults" - without recognition of the difference in their needs. Some people felt Mardy Park (as an alternative day centre) was difficult to access.
- 2.9** People told members that the permanent closure of Tudor Street Day Centre would "significantly negatively affect service users, carers and support staff". A public submission received by the scrutiny committee referred to the Welsh Covid study, which highlighted that the effects of the lockdowns and the isolation resulting from the pandemic had a more profound impact on people with a learning disability and had increased anxiety and loneliness, leading to a reduction in social activities and relationships. The written submission stated that, "closing services increases loneliness and overlooks the importance of group identity and togetherness".
<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/cedar/covid19-learningdisability/results/policybriefing/covid19dwalesenglish2022.pdf>

What the contributors to the Public Open Forum advised service users need

- 2.10** A person suggested that there was a lack of day centre provision in the north of the county, and another told the scrutiny committee that "it's not appropriate for vulnerable people to be walking around the town, using supermarkets to socialise". The public present told the committee that the Council needed to give greater thought to its decision and to consider how services could be improved, involving service users in shaping the offer. A person suggested the decision had been based upon cost and that it shouldn't have been taken ahead of the conclusion of an overall review of services. They highlighted that the consultation process had provided no detail as to what alternative provision may be offered in place of what was being withdrawn. People felt that if the number of service users had fallen, it was important to ask how the service could be improved and to enable service users to be involved in shaping the offer.

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- 2.11** Whilst the remit of Tudor Street Day Centre was not to provide services for people suffering mental health issues and people weren't being signposted to the centre for mental health support, one person suggested during their presentation that the centre was attended by people suffering mental health issues, as well as people with learning disabilities and that attending the centre helped to reduce their isolation and build their confidence.
- 2.12** People spoke of the need for dedicated facilities and a central base that could be extended to the wider community, such as the approach submitted to the committee by one contributor titled "The Gathering Pitch", which could provide an opportunity for people to come together, share experiences, learn and make friendships.
- 2.13** In terms of people with learning disabilities being able to pay for personal assistants and carers instead of accessing day services, a person highlighted that personal budgets were intended to give people choice, not to replace services. Some people felt that the closure of Tudor Street Day Centre was the withdrawal of a service, despite the continuation of the 'My Day My Life' model in a different way. A contributor suggested that people with low support needs who might benefit from attending a day centre, might not be eligible for direct payments or personal budgets and that whilst some people may choose personalised support, others will prefer welcoming, inclusive and accessible mainstream services.
- 2.14** One person explained how she felt that the 'My Mates' Scheme had led to a reduction in 'My Day My Life' activities at Tudor Street Day Centre and how people who need one to one support are unable to access many of the 'My Mates' activities, that tended to include trips to restaurants, the cinema or pop concerts. It was suggested that these are too expensive for most people to attend on a regular basis and tend to be mainly in the evening, which wouldn't suit some people.
- 2.15** Another member of the public asked what community-based opportunities exist in Monmouthshire, particularly in Abergavenny for people with very complex needs, as they hadn't found any opportunities where there were adequate facilities, such as for changing or hoisting, therefore needing to attend settings outside of the county. The committee heard that individuals with complex needs are extremely vulnerable, needing nursing-trained carers to attend to feeding tubes, to attend to people who may suffer epilepsy or have episodes of agitation. People with complex needs require a spacious purpose-built building that can accommodate tracking hoists, changing beds, toilet facilities, a sensory room and a quiet space, stating that this cannot be

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accommodated at cafes or places in the community that people felt were being suggested as 'alternative places to go'. This person confirmed that for people with profound complex needs, Tudor Street Day Centre wasn't suitable and that there is no such day centre in-county. The lack of in-county respite provision for people with complex needs was also highlighted, requiring people to travel to Ebbw Vale.

- 2.16** It was asked what support was provided for young people leaving special education needs and transitioning into the adult world, which is a particularly difficult transition. Reference was made to consultancy work undertaken by Bob Rhodes, which had led to the creation of 'My Day My Life' for people with learning disabilities and a move away from institutional life to community-based activity choice. A service user suggested that for the small minority of people that are severely disabled and have complex needs, this change was not for the better and that she felt that "care in the community had broken down".
- 2.17** A former staff member suggested that one to one care would be far more costly than operating day services in a single setting and highlighted how the day centre could provide so many more opportunities for different types of care, if fully trained carers were in place. She advocated the need for respite and claimed that the day centre had been a flagship for care in Abergavenny and that if improved, many more people could benefit from using it.

Wider issues raised by the public

- 2.18** There was a suggestion that the decision prioritised the needs of one vulnerable group of people (homeless people) over the needs of another (people with learning disabilities). It was suggested that the intention to progress the planning application to avoid legislative changes relating to flooding was not in line with the philosophy of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, nor its aim to 'involve people in decision-making as equal partners'. There was a suggestion that there was a need for online engagement about the decision.
- 2.19** Concerns were raised about the consultation process and whether the letter to service users as part of the official consultation process was written in the spirit of the Equalities Act 2010 with regard to accessibility. It was suggested that there was a lack of online engagement about the decision, working against the sense of open and transparent dialogue.

3.0 Key points raised by the 'Call-in Members'

- 3.1** Members who had called in the decision raised their concerns to the People Scrutiny Committee about the how the decision had been made without any

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pre-decision scrutiny. They questioned the quality and robustness of the integrated impact assessment and they expressed concern about the thoroughness of the consultation process undertaken with service users.

4.0 Key points raised by the Committee Members

4.1 Members spoke at length on their views on the matter but highlighted that Tudor Street Day Centre wasn't viewed by the public as just a building or a facility, but as a community, a community that people felt was being taken away from them. A committee member highlighted how day centres provide much more than a building and stated that the needs of people are far more important than the achieving of housing targets or the realising of a financial gain.

5.0 Formal Outcome of the Scrutiny

5.1 Relating to the specific matters raised in the calling-in of the decision, it was accepted that the decision should have been scrutinised in advance, with an explanation given as to why the decision had not featured on the Cabinet and Council Forward Planner that the committee had received at its previous meeting. It was also confirmed that the building is not located on a flood plain. It was furthermore accepted that there hadn't been effective consultation on the decision to close the Tudor Street Day Centre.

5.2 The committee agreed to refer the decision for reconsideration, and following a vote, the majority agreed to refer the decision to full council for the following reason:

Much greater clarity is needed on future provision. Robust engagement needs to be undertaken with service users and thorough pre-decision scrutiny should be conducted prior to any decision-making.

5.3 Council is requested to consider the findings contained in this report in assisting them to reach an agreement on whether to refer the decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.