

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2020

Councillors Present: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Hilary Cole, Lynne Doherty, Ross Mackinnon, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: John Ashworth (Executive Director - Place), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Sara Ross (Safeguarding Adults Service Manager), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Shiraz Sheikh (Legal Services Manager), Councillor Adrian Abbs, Councillor Jeff Beck, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Carlyne Culver, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Andy Moore, Councillor Erik Pattenden, Linda Pye (Principal Policy Officer), Phil Rumens (Digital Services Manager) and Councillor Tony Vickers

PART I

46. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

47. Walnut Close Care Home (Urgent Item)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 3) concerning a significant change to the delivery of West Berkshire Council's in house care home services as a result of the impact of Covid-19. The proposed change was an immediate measure to respond to the effect of the pandemic. A far more substantial piece of work was being undertaken to set out a medium to long-term plan for the Council's wider care home provision. This work had commenced but the impact of Covid had necessitated more urgent action.

Councillor Graham Bridgman introduced the report and thanked Sara Ross for all her hard work, care and engagement in getting to this point. Closing a care home was not something that the Council did lightly and a huge amount of work had gone into ensuring that all things that should be considered had been considered and not least the welfare of the residents. Sufficient spaces were available in Birchwood to accommodate all of the residents from Walnut Close in a much more modern setting with enhanced facilities such as en-suite bathrooms. Birchwood was located under two miles from Walnut Close and therefore there should not be any issues in terms of families being able to visit (subject to current restrictions).

Sara Ross and her staff knew all the residents and their families at Walnut Close well and would therefore have a good idea of what would suit them at Birchwood. Each of them would be allocated the right type of room for their needs and care plans would be reviewed in conjunction with families and professionals. All of the staff from Walnut Close would move into similar roles at Birchwood apart from three members of staff who would be moving to other sites. The move would not be rushed and it would take as long as it needed to in order to relocate all of the residents. It was hoped that the move would be finalised by the end of February 2021.

Councillor Bridgman referred to the consultation responses set out in the report and stated that Sara Ross had personally engaged with the majority of residents and their families to make them aware of what the alternative provision would look like. All discussions had been very positive and all the residents that had been spoken to had been happy about the move to Birchwood where they would have their own bathrooms. Sara and her team had done everything possible to remove the risks associated with a

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move of this nature and gave assurance that risk assessments would be undertaken which would include concerns around the wider Covid issue.

Councillor Bridgman concluded that the residents from Walnut Close could be accommodated in far better surroundings, in a modern care home which was only two miles away from their existing one. It was noted that the vote on this matter would be taken as part of the Part II discussions.

The report was seconded by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter.

Councillors Lynne Doherty and Hilary Cole both complimented Sara Ross on the way in which this had been handled. It could not be under-estimated how sensitive this issue was for the residents. When Councillor Cole had been Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care some years ago she had been concerned about Walnut Close then and therefore she was pleased that a far better solution had been found in far superior accommodation than the residents of Walnut Close were currently enjoying.

Councillor Alan Macro thanked Councillor Bridgman for the assurances he had given but he was still worried about the Covid situation and whether the move should happen until the pandemic had subsided. Moving could be stressful at the best of times but for people in a care home it was very much more so and he was therefore pleased that the plan was to keep residents together in the Walnut area of Birchwood where relationships could be maintained. Councillor Macro noted that there were quite a lot of empty beds in Birchwood but he asked for assurance that there would be sufficient capacity for dementia patients as dementia beds in the private sector were very expensive and would be beyond the means of most people. Finally, Councillor Macro noted that part of the rationale for closing Walnut Close was the fact that the building had deteriorated and would need a significant amount of money spent on it and he wondered why that had been allowed to happen.

Councillor Graham Bridgman assured Councillor Macro that there would be sufficient dementia beds going forward and care assessments would take place with each of the residents. Sara Ross knew where each individual would be placed in Birchwood and there would still be further beds available. Councillor Bridgman stated that it was not that the Council allowed the care home to deteriorate – there had been a plan in place to refurbish it prior to Covid and the money had been set aside to do that. However, the pandemic overtook events and the Council had simply taken account of the situation it found itself in. There were enough rooms in Birchwood to move the residents from Walnut Close into better surroundings and that was the reason for doing so.

Councillor Lee Dillon wanted to reflect on the care side of things and the work undertaken by Officers to manage the process. Keeping the residents and staff together was imperative in respect of their longer term care. Should the paper be approved he felt that the residents would be getting a better quality of life and surroundings. However, the Walnut Close site was in a key area right in the heart of the town centre and he asked if the Council could liaise with the Town Council when they looked for options for that piece of land so that it would benefit the whole of the community.

Councillor Bridgman responded that he was just dealing with the transition element and he would leave it with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development to deal with the property side of things and to have those discussions.

Councillor Steve Masters echoed previous comments which had been made about continuity and the care that would be taken to accommodate the move. The best interests of the residents was vitally important especially given the Covid situation and the fears that family members might have around that. There was potential for growing demand in dementia beds locally and he asked what modelling had been put in place to

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ensure that a resident of West Berkshire actually achieved best value for money moving forward.

Councillor Bridgman referred to paragraph 1.2 of the report which stated that further work was being undertaken in order to determine what the Council's position in the market should be and what the Council's provision should be. That would come forward in due course. The modelling figures did not show an immediate pressure and as mentioned previously there would still be space at Birchwood and other care homes so there would be capacity.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The report recommended that Walnut Close Care Home be closed. Residents would be rehomed in other West Berkshire Care Homes (anticipated to be predominantly in Birchwood for reasons of capacity and proximity), with staff redeployed in those other care homes, resource centres or the reablement team;
- (2) A public consultation had taken place, with feedback considered and incorporated into the recommendation. A staff consultation and further appropriate engagement activities would take place following any decision to close Walnut Close.
- (3) Following closure, the Walnut Close site would be placed into the management of the Council's Asset Management Group for decisions regarding the disposal of the land and building.

Other options considered:

The alternative to the proposal recommended in the report was that the Council would keep Walnut Close open as it was.

This was not considered to be a viable long term option for the following reasons:

- Ongoing and rising maintenance costs;
- Considerable recruitment issues in the care home industry across the UK which meant that the vacancies were hard to fill, incurring increased agency costs and reduced level of good, consistent care;
- Loss of revenue and running at a loss;
- CQC rating improvement was less achievable within the current building – reputational damage to West Berkshire Council.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and closed at 6.18pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature