

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Close or find an alternative provider to run Willows Edge Care Home		Service Director: Paul Coe Author: Jo England		8 February 2024 Version 1 (Scrutiny Commission)	
Proposal:	<p>To cease operating Willows Edge as a care home from 1 April 2024. There are two options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 1 - to close the home and relocate residents to Birchwood, other private care homes in West Berkshire and, if required, care homes in neighbouring districts; the site would be available for other uses, for example, conversion to housing or being sold as a freehold for redevelopment, resulting in a capital income for the council • Option 2 - to source an alternative provider to continue to operate Willows Edge, with a cost of provision more aligned to that in the private sector; this could include an agreement on investment to improve the service and/or no investment from the provider to operate the business 				
Total budget 2023/24:	£	Initial proposed saving 2024/25:	Between £250,000 and £500,000	Recommended saving 2024/25:	£TBD
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 280 responses were received. The breakdown of responses is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 - A user of the service • 209 - A resident of West Berkshire • 14 - A visitor to West Berkshire • 3 - A West Berkshire business owner • 8 - Employed by a West Berkshire business • 27 - Employed by West Berkshire Council • 6 - A Parish/Town Councillor • 2 - A District Councillor • 1 - A partner organisation • 3 - A West Berkshire Council service provider • 27 - Other 				

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	<p>We also received 2 petitions signed by a total of 1852 people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An online one had 1786 signatures of which 722 (40%) had an 'RG' postcode ○ A hand-collected one had 65 signatures of which all but one was 'local' 	
Key issues raised:	<p>Overall respondents are strongly against closing Willows Edge, with c80% disagreeing/strongly disagreeing and c15% agreeing/strongly agreeing. Of the 180 comments on Question 3 (What impact could this have), 103 (60%), raised concerns about the stress, distress and negative physical and mental health impacts on residents who would be moved. 24 (13%) commented negatively on the increased distance families would have to travel to alternative accommodation. Whilst a direct comparison cannot be made, this equals the number of service users who responded.</p> <p>Opinion on option 2, seeking another provider is split, with 43% for the idea and 43% against. 7 respondents commented on this, of which 6 were positive and 1 negative.</p> <p>Many of the comments from relatives of service users commented positively on the quality of care from the staff the attitude of the staff towards. A number of comments acknowledge that the facilities are old and not en-suite, but felt these issues were outweighed by the sense of community built up by residents and staff.</p> <p>In terms of minimising impact, the most common response was to not go ahead with closure. 51 (33%) of comments stated that good communication and planning, involving residents, families and staff, would be key to reducing the impact of any change.</p> <p>On the broader question of reducing costs and saving money, responses were diverse, with the most common being to reduce spending on non-core activities. Projects cited included several references to bike lanes. Other reductions suggested included cutting posts in the council and reducing/freezing high salaries.</p>	
Equality issues:	<p>No issues were raised during the consultation, that weren't already included in the EqIA stage one.</p> <p>OR</p>	

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	Summarise additional issues raised during the consultation and refer to EqIA stage two where these have been picked up.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Don't close the home	The council is taking a considered decision and the impact on residents and staff is a key consideration. The council has recent experience of successfully closing a home (Walnut Close) and transferring residents and believes that experience would ensure a safe transfer	
	If closed or transferred, have clear plans and ensure good communication with all those affected	As noted above, the council has tried and tested plans and communications to minimise the impact of any change.	
	If transferred to another provider, ensure staff are looked after	The council would comply with all relevant legislation and ensure staff are transferred in accordance with TUPE or offered alternative roles in the council.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Reduce spend on agency staff	The council has been actively recruiting permanent staff over the last 6 months and has significantly reduced the amount of agency staff in Willows Edge. Despite this, costs are still higher than can be obtained on the open market	
	Invest to create a more efficient home	The council has explored options to invest in a more modern home, but budgetary constraints restrict this and we assess that due to economies of scale a larger private provider could operate at a lower cost	

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Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Seek sponsorship and charitable support	The council supports this approach in many areas, but feels that this may be less appropriate in what is effectively someone's home	
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	<p>C80% of respondents are against Option 1, closing Willows Edge, with 73.2% strongly disagreeing. While c 43% disagree or strongly disagree with Option 2, transferring to another provider, c43% agree or strongly agree with this option and c14% neither agree nor disagree. Given this response and also the supply and demand challenges that have further developed in the last few months, we recommend pursuing Option 2.</p> <p>We are aware that two potential providers have already expressed an interest, one via the consultation.</p> <p>We recommend developing an Invitation to Tender to identify and select potential providers. Given the budgetary pressures, we recommend that we should aim to select a provider by 20th June 2024. If we are unable to proceed with Option 2 at this point, we should seek to close the home unless there has been a very material change in circumstances.</p> <p>We recommend that subject to legal review, we should seek to include Birchwood and Notrees in the ITT, with providers given an option to bid for provision at 1,2 or all 3 homes.</p>		

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