

Key themes from public events

Fear that services will stop on September

The key concern/ question amongst the service user, carer and parent groups were that services were going to stop or be interrupted when the current contract with Wye Valley Trust ceases in September. This fear was compounded, as to be expected, by worried staff affected by this process giving incorrect information and adding to the concerns of service users, carers and parents.

Assurances were given based on the message from Cllr. Powell.

Initial communications

Many concerns were raised about the initial communication:

- Some service users cannot read and require a carer to read it to them
- Some have difficulties in understanding contents even when read to them and
- Most do not have capacity to use email or internet independently, if they have queries regarding her letter?
- All the letter did, when explained to my service users, was to make them very scared that services would be stopped, changed or altered to 'Live independently' as described in the letter

Assurances were given that a new, clearer communication will follow and in addition the Council has a commitment to set up representative groups to feed into the current process and how services will be shaped in the future.

Personal Budgets and Assessments

A lot has been made about people buying services using PB's but there are very few currently receiving one. For many they cannot see the proposed benefits to them nor have many local examples of people using PB's and DP's in a positive way to draw on, demonstrating choice and control over their lives. There is currently no word of mouth and few good news stories to promote the change in the client groups.

But the biggest issue is around those that have been through the assessment process, and the time scales taken for this to happen. In a number of cases, as communicated at the meetings, this has taken many months; even years to complete or they are still ongoing.

At the meetings it was communicated that the council is aware of the difficulties around the assessment process and a separate piece of work is addressing this. It was also considered if this could also be looked at by the representative groups moving forward.

Also a suggestion that the manager at Marshfields could be used as an ambassador for promoting not only other ways of working but also PB's and their use from his experience.

Timescales for change

Many were concerned that all the projects that seem to be running alongside each other could not be done in the timescales given. Whilst this was part of a misunderstanding around what the September date meant in reality, it was still a concern that the assessment process and lack of a market place for other services still needed to be revised as part of the process.

Worried that good services are going?

Again where good work has been done by current services it is a concern that by having new providers, services would be starting all over again and mistakes from the past were to be repeated. All the services spoken to so far (APS, Day Centres and esp Norfolk house) saw this as a big issue and in some instances and very emotive one.

Many are uncomfortable that those running these projects or making decisions do not understand the large amount of change that is being required to happen, can be done within the timescales proposed.

It was also highlighted that there is no other service provision or choice in Herefordshire which is gone into in more detail below.

Again the message that we want to work together moving forward was given.

Reassurance sought about current levels of provision remaining

There were concerns raised that after assessments and moves to PB's that hours or time was being cut or budget provision no longer covered what the service user received previously. An example of this was given using 'Pack it' which Cllr Kenyon is involved with and a service users days being cut from 5 days to 4 days as that's all his budget can afford. This was one of a number of similar concerns.

This fear was also compounded by the worry of a cut in hours/ support. This is a common concern with those who currently attend Day Centres who see that whilst the service will/ may still be there post September 14th fear that the actual support given will be less due to less staff being available following current staff reduction plans.

Some carer groups were also every vocal in saying that current provision is very cost effective when compared to 'Individual outings' and there are concerns that PB allocation may no longer cover these activities or future planned services

The message was given that we have a duty of care to the service user and representative groups will work these issues.

This is just privatisation

One of the phrases heard often is that this is just about 'Privatisation by the backdoor'. It is seen that the council wants to 'Wash it's hands of services and service users'

There is a large mistrust of private companies who need to make a profit being cheaper or being able to offer the same services for less money.

The message given to this was that the council is currently restricted in what services it can provide and how it can do it. This process is not a closed one to just private companies, but is open to charities, 3rd sector and strong emphasis on staff mutual's. The audience was made aware of the steps the council is taking to provide support for any staff or carers who wish start a mutual/ social enterprise.

Lack of market place for other options/ services

It was stated when ever giving the message that we wanted to offer more choice and control, that Herefordshire currently does not have a market place of services to support this. Many may well be happy with being able to shop around and find alternative provision but currently it is recognised that this isn't available. Again a fear of losing something without another option was raised.

The message given was that this was understood and this is just the start of a process. Again representative groups were asked to feed into this. It is also hoped that other pieces of work

which are ongoing will start to highlight the benefits of PB's and DP's as well as promoting other services in Herefordshire.

Fear of change

For all fear of change is a major issue. What came through strongly was that service users felt 'Attached' to their current service and didn't want or need change. For most it was their only outlet for social activities, to meet with friends and highlighted that they had formed strong trust relationships with staff and carers. Disruption to this or any cut in hours/ provision was seen as majorly detrimental to the service users and to home life where parents and carers are already under pressure.

Again it was reiterated that the council has a duty of care and we want to work with services and those using them as we move forward with the project.