

Proposed changes to Residential Care Homes and Extra Care Housing for older people in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Consultation Report

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Executive Summary

1. This report analyses findings from a consultation process undertaken by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in respect of proposals to modernise its residential care services for older people and to create additional Extra Care housing.
2. Consultation took place from 12th December 2022 to 27th January 2023. Alongside the public consultation process, Practice Solutions ran an exercise which provided additional opportunities to ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of care home residents and their families and residential service staff within the four homes directly affected by the proposed options. Sixty-two residents and relatives participated and thirty-seven staff.
3. The consultation events were designed to:
 - offer participants the best possible information about the proposals for change;
 - give them appropriate and effective ways of making known their views and feelings in an environment which encouraged people to use their voice, individually and collectively; and
 - ensure a strong thread of independence throughout the process, including writing an informed but non-partisan report for Cabinet which accurately reflects what had been said.
4. Events for residents and relatives were organised for each of the four Council-run care homes for older people affected by the proposed options – Troedyrhiw, Ferndale, Ystrad Fechan, and Garth Olwg.
5. The main themes that emerged in the discussions are set out in the full report. It is important to note that, in some key areas, representations made in three of the homes (Troedyrhiw, Ferndale House and Ystrad Fechan) differed considerably from those in Garth Olwg.
 - i. Without exception, residents and relatives praised staff for the high quality of care and support currently provided in the care homes.
 - ii. People wanted clear priority given to meeting the assessed needs of current residents and to ensuring continuity of care. Initially, some participants were sceptical about whether this could be reconciled with the Council's proposed options. Some questions were asked about whether possible budget cuts were the real motive for change.
 - iii. Having listened attentively to clarification from senior managers, most participants began to express greater confidence in the plans that were being considered. For example, they appreciated the scale of investment which the Council is prepared to make in providing modern, purpose-built accommodation and facilities for older people. They asked for more details about the Council's Extra Care housing programme (including schedules for building, potential sites for redevelopment and how the new facilities would operate).
 - iv. There was a positive response to reassurances that the proposed changes would not involve residents moving out of current placements unless their individual circumstances changed. This helped participants to acknowledge that creating new, more modern facilities was the proper way forward and they broadly supported the options put forward in the Cabinet report. In some events, people discussed the possible merits of 'doing nothing' (i.e., keeping the status quo or waiting for additional information before making decisions). However, they agreed that prolonged uncertainty is destabilising and risks generating even more anxiety.

- v. People were worried about how the Council's proposals would be implemented, especially during any period of transition. They wanted decisions to be accompanied by a commitment to ensuring that safeguards would be in place, including prompt assessments of need, choice of placements, dignified and timely transfers, top ups where necessary and full involvement by current staff in the homes. Once again, concerns centred on the need for implementation plans to put the well-being of current care home residents and their families at the heart of any proposed change. This should be demonstrated by placing more emphasis on co-production throughout the modernisation process; ensuring timely/effective communication about the general programme of change; and setting out in detail the implications for individuals whose lives will be affected.
 - vi. There was strong opposition from residents and families in Garth Olwg to the option which involves decommissioning the care home. Residents did not want to leave a place they regarded as home and relatives were very anxious about the impact of the proposed changes. They put forward an alternative where the home would be retained and modernised. Two of the residents had already experienced a placement move brought about by the sudden closure of an independent sector care home. This made them especially appreciative of the environment provided by Garth Olwg and even more worried about change. Their relatives explained the difficulties which they had previously experienced, including the challenge of finding a setting in which their family member could thrive.
6. Consultation events for staff working at all the Council's residential care homes affected by the proposed options were organised in three geographical localities (Rhondda, Cynon and Taff Ely). No staff attended the Cynon event. A separate event was held for relevant managers. The main themes that emerged in the discussions are set out in the full report.
- i. In all the events where staff were in attendance, they demonstrated how much they wanted the best for current residents, for their interests to be a paramount concern in decision-making, and for a meaningful choice of placement to be made available to residents in homes where planned closure was agreed.
 - ii. They were provided with assurances that, where possible, the Council would decommission homes only when new facilities had been built. Given the length of time needed to develop alternatives, this means that the proposed changes are unlikely to involve residents moving out of current placements unless their individual circumstances change.
 - iii. With the exception of Garth Olwg staff, the options put forward by the Cabinet did receive support, although doubts persisted about the merits of decommissioning homes. Some staff felt that they might be adversely affected by the proposed changes and said that they were experiencing considerable anxiety about Human Resource issues - such as job security, safeguarding employment rights, long-term career prospects, remuneration and other entrenched causes of instability within the residential care sector.
 - iv. Despite these high levels of anxiety, staff displayed a strong sense of loyalty to the Council. This was grounded in a shared public service ethos, the high standard of care being delivered in the homes, its employee terms and conditions vis-a-vis the independent sector, and the fact that Council-run care homes are anchored in the communities they serve. They looked for reassurance that the provision of care in new Extra Care Housing facilities would be undertaken by Council staff.

- v. Participants were preoccupied by the proposals for the home in which they worked and for their geographical area. However, they were also looking for evidence that the Council has a genuine (and future-proofed) commitment to providing high quality care and modern facilities in those homes where the options include retention. In particular, there was a feeling that the Council still needs to improve staff recruitment and retention. They expressed dissatisfaction with the practice of advertising only casual posts.
- vi. The staff said that, in their opinion, most residents (and their relatives) would prefer to remain in their current home, even if they could not be modernised to provide facilities such as en-suite bathrooms. Those working in Garth Olwg believe that the proposed option for the home would have a very adverse impact upon current residents, as it would deny them the opportunity to remain living in the home. Staff from the Rhondda Fach made strong representations that a facility, either a residential care home or Extra Care housing/dementia residential care, should be available in their valley. This would aid staff recruitment and retention and also ensure that the community was not deprived of an important community asset. They wanted assurances about where this new facility would be located and further consideration of the proposed balance there between extra care accommodation and residential care facilities for people experiencing dementia-related illnesses.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report analyses the findings from a consultation process undertaken by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in respect of proposals to modernise its residential care services for older people and to create additional Extra Care housing. Consultation took place from 12th December 2022 to 27th January 2023.
- 1.2 The report is in five parts:
- Part 1: Introduction
 - Part 2: The Council's Proposals
 - Part 3: Consultation Methods
 - Part 4 Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives – Main Themes
 - Part 5: Consultation Events with Staff and Managers – Main Themes

There are three accompanying documents:

APPENDIX 1: Presentation for Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives

APPENDIX 2: Reports from Individual Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives

APPENDIX 3 Reports from Individual Consultation Events with Staff and Managers

2. The Council's Proposals

- 2.1 The Council's key priorities include a commitment to modernising and continually improving Adult Social Care Services.
- 2.2 Some factors helping to influence its approach are set out below.
- Welsh Government policy, including the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 which directs councils to undertake local market assessment and shaping duties;
 - The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016; and
 - The Cwm Taf Regional Plan 2018 to 2023, produced by relevant local authorities and the Local Health Board in response to their statutory duties for conducting population needs assessments and providing a market strategy.
- 2.3 In November 2016, Cabinet approved a strategy designed to modernise accommodation options for older people and deliver Extra Care housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It committed the Council to reviewing and reshaping the care market to:
- increase the options available for people needing accommodation with care and support; and
 - deliver a viable alternative for people who can remain independent with support.
- 2.4 In September 2017, Cabinet agreed a £50m investment plan to develop 300 Extra Care beds across Rhondda Cynon Taf and to deliver modern accommodation options able to meet the needs and changing expectations of a growing population of older people. This policy decision was intended to further the process of achieving a shift in the balance of care from residential care settings to more community-based options, including Extra Care housing.
- 2.5 Notwithstanding this decision, Rhondda Cynon Taf has continued to depend heavily on residential care placements. It has the highest proportion of people aged 65 or over living in residential care in Wales.
- 2.6 The future of the Council's residential care homes for older people has been subject to ongoing review since 2017. In December 2020, Cabinet considered:
- the outcomes of three previous stakeholder consultations;
 - the rationale and drivers shaping the choice of preferred options for future provision of the Council's residential care homes for older people; and
 - supporting information relating to capacity and demand.
- 2.7 The decisions made are summarised below:
- *The Council's residential care homes have served their communities well and are popular homes with good standards of care, provided by committed staff.*
 - *There is a need to retain Council residential care homes to ensure that the Council meets its commitment to maintaining, in the local market for residential care, an in-house offer of provision.*

- *The difficulties experienced by existing Council's residential care homes in accepting the range of referrals and the complexity of need being presented unless the current facilities are upgraded to the modern standards identified for dignified care delivery.*
- *The demand for traditional residential care is decreasing and less residential care will be needed in the future, as more people will receive care in their own homes (including extra care housing and other supported housing schemes). This is consistent with national and regional priorities and the Council's aim of providing care for and support to people in their own homes wherever possible.*
- *The over-provision of residential care beds and sufficient alternative provision of the required type and quality to meet current and forecast demands - less residential care will be needed in the future geographical market share across Rhondda, Cynon and Taf areas.*
- *The current and forecasted need is for more complex care (including dementia care), reablement, respite care or short breaks for carers and nursing care.*
- *The impact of older people exercising choice now on the occupancy levels in our care homes.*
- *To receive a further report setting out a comprehensive modernisation programme.*

2.8 Following a further review, Cabinet agreed in July 2022 to address ongoing pandemic-related issues and challenges within residential care (including reduced demand and low occupancy, staffing shortages and quality of care issues) by:

- closing temporarily Ystrad Fechan (Treorchy) and transfer the eight residents to Pentre House (Pentre) or another home of their choosing which meets their needs; and
- in partnership with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, providing temporarily up to ten new step-up/step-down beds at Parc Newydd (Talbot Green) to support hospital discharge.

Because affected residents were supported to access suitable alternative provision, occupancy levels at other Council care homes increased.

2.9 In December 2022, Cabinet received a detailed report setting out a modernisation programme for the Council's residential care homes and providing, for consideration, proposed preferred options for future provision.

2.10 The five options were:

OPTION 1: Retain the current service provision at five current Council care homes.

This includes:

Clydach Court in Trealaw

Pentre House in Pentre

Tegfan in Trecynon

Cae Glas in Hawthorn

Parc Newydd in Talbot Green.

OPTION 2: New accommodation with 40 Extra Care apartments and 20 residential dementia beds in Treorchy.

This development would be explored with Linc Cymru and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board. It would be located on land near the existing Ystrad Fechan Care Home. The care home is currently temporarily closed with no residents living there and would be permanently decommissioned.

OPTION 3: New accommodation with 20 Extra Care apartments and 10 residential dementia beds in Ferndale.

This development would be explored with Linc Cymru. It would be located on land near the existing Ferndale House Care Home. The care home would be decommissioned when the new accommodation is developed.

OPTION 4: New accommodation with 25 Extra Care apartments and 15 residential dementia beds in Mountain Ash.

This development would be explored with Linc Cymru. It would be located on land near the existing Troedyrhiw Care Home. The home would be decommissioned when the new accommodation is developed.

OPTION 5: New accommodation with care to support people with learning disabilities in adulthood, in Church Village.

This would be achieved by redeveloping the existing Garth Olwg Care Home. The care home would be decommissioned when suitable placements are found for its residents, in a home of their choice which meets their assessed needs.

- 2.11 The proposed changes in the service provided by some of the Council's residential care homes require the Council to consult with the public and those directly affected (including care home residents, their families, and staff). This is to ensure that their views can be considered when a final decision is made. To fulfil its legal obligations, the Cabinet decided that a six-week consultation process should take place.

3. Consultation Methods

- 3.1 To implement the Cabinet decision on public consultation, the Council's Research and Consultation Unit developed a comprehensive approach for the exercise. The aim of the public consultation was to gather as many views as possible from residents, their relatives, staff and the public, to inform the Cabinet in its decision-making about the future provision of residential care homes for older people in each of the geographical areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.2 Information about proposed changes, options and the consultation process were publicised extensively, including use of the Council's website (www.rctcbc.gov.uk/consultation) and a FREEPOST address. A dedicated consultation page on the Council's website contained key links and attachments. A booklet called HAVE YOUR SAY! was made available. Both the website and the booklet explained how to complete a questionnaire/survey, online or in hard copy. All completed questionnaires had to be returned by 5pm on 27th January. People were also encouraged to participate by means of "Drop In" events across the County.
- 3.3 The public consultation process ran alongside an exercise designed specifically to provide additional opportunities to ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of care home residents and their families and residential service staff within the four homes directly affected by the proposed options. This was seen as a crucial aspect of the overall approach and one which merited considerable planning and attention.

The role of Practice Solutions

- 3.4 The Council engaged Practice Solutions¹ to facilitate independently a series of consultation events which would inform participants and give them opportunities for discussion and debate in group sessions. Senior managers from Social Service (including the Director and the Head of Accommodation Services) attended the sessions, to provide further information about the Council's intentions and to answer questions posed by relevant stakeholders. The advocacy service provided by Age Connects was promoted and made available to all service users and their families. A representative from Age Connects attended each consultation event. There was Trade Union representation at meetings with staff and with managers. Observers made a written record of each session. People in attendance were provided with information about how to make further contact with Practice Solutions should they wish to provide any additional observations.
- 3.5 The independent consultation events took place over a period of three weeks, from 9th January to 24th January 2023. Four meetings took place with residents and their relatives from the care homes most affected – Troedyrhiw, Ferndale, Ystrad Fechan, and Garth Olwg. Meetings with staff took place in three of the Council's leisure facilities – Sobell Leisure Centre (Aberdare), Llantrisant Leisure Centre and Rhondda Sports Centre (Ystrad). A meeting with managers likely to be affected by the proposals took place in the Council's offices in Ty Elai (Williamstown).
- 3.6 The consultation events were designed to:
 - provide participants with the best possible information about the proposals for change;

¹ From its base in Abercynon, Practice Solutions:

- supports social care and health organisations across Wales to plan and deliver improvements in services; and
- facilitates effective engagement with service users and staff.

- give them appropriate and effective ways of making known their views and feelings in an environment which encouraged people to use their voice, individually and collectively; and
- ensure a strong thread of independence throughout the process, including writing an informed but nonpartisan report for Cabinet which accurately reflected what had been said.

3.7 Different presentations were used in events for care home residents and their families and for staff and managers but the overall agenda was similar.

- What do you think? PART 1
- How can I have my say?
- Where are we right now?
- Why are the changes needed?
- What are the options?
- What do you think? PART 2
- What happens next?

3.8 Details of the independent consultation events held including the numbers of people attending each event are set out below:

Week	Date	Venue	No of Attendees
Residents and Family Meetings	10 January	Troedyrhiw	16
	12 January	Ferndale House	16
	17 January	Pentre House (Ystrad Fechan)	2
	19 January	Garth Olwg	28
Staff Meetings	9 January	Ty Elai (Managers)	6
	11 January	Sobell Leisure Centre	0
	19 January	Rhondda Sport Centre	22
	24 January	Llantrisant Leisure Centre	9

4. Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives

- 4.1 Events were organised at each of the four Council-run care homes for older people affected by the proposed options-Troedyrhiw, Ferndale, Ystrad Fechan, and Garth Olwg. Residents and relatives were invited to attend. The agenda was designed to maximise participation (see **Appendix 1**). The meeting for Ystrad Fechan residents and relatives was held in their current placement, Pentre House.
- 4.2 Following a short presentation from Practice Solutions to set the scene, an open “What do you think?” session was undertaken on each occasion (to initiate comment and discussion). Practice Solutions then outlined the five proposed options and advised residents and relatives about how they could have their say within the wider consultation process. Another “What do you think?” session was scheduled for the second part of the meeting to capture further thoughts, observations and questions.
- 4.2 **Appendix 2** has reports from each of the individual consultation events with care home residents and their relatives. A summary of the main themes that emerged in the discussions is set out below.

Main Themes

- a) The number of participants varied but it was evident that people very much wanted the opportunity to express their views, to have them recorded and to influence the decision-making process. In all the events, it quickly emerged that some people had been left perplexed by conflicting information, rumours or difficulties in navigating complicated systems/processes. They appreciated the way in which senior managers sought to answer questions and provide realistic reassurance. Exchanges of views were properly challenging but also characterised by a willingness to listen and to reconsider.
- b) While acknowledging the need for services and facilities to be modernised for the future, without exception residents and relatives praised staff for the high quality of care and support currently provided. The contribution and commitment of staff were mentioned repeatedly. There was high regard also for services which have a strong public service orientation, well connected to the community and to their locality. People were anxious that this key element could be lost if and when changes are made, especially if services are transferred to independent sector organisations.
- c) People wanted clear priority given to meeting the assessed needs of current residents and ensuring continuity of care. In the case of three homes (Troedyrhiw, Ferndale House and Ystrad Fechan), assurances could be given that changes would not involve residents being compelled to leave current placements unless their individual circumstances changed. Here, participants in the consultation events were willing to acknowledge that creating new, more modern facilities was the proper way forward. They were broadly supportive of the preferred options for put forward in the Cabinet report.²
- d) There was strong opposition from residents and families in Garth Olwg to the option which involved closing and decommissioning the care home. Residents did not want to leave a place they regarded as home and relatives were very anxious about the impact of the proposed changes. They put

² Because of the need to close Ystrad Fechan as a matter of urgency, two of its residents had moved to Pentre House. They were very pleased to know that they would be able to remain in the placement while new facilities are being developed.

forward alternatives whereby the home would be retained and modernised. Two of the residents had already experienced a placement move brought about by the sudden closure of an independent sector care home. This made them especially appreciative of the environment provided by Garth Olwg and anxious about change. Their relatives explained the difficulties they had encountered, including the challenge of finding a setting in which their family member could thrive.

- e) During the meeting in Garth Olwg, people listened carefully to explanations given by senior managers. This helped to generate discussion about what might happen to residents if Option 5 was approved and what steps could be taken to safeguard the interests of current residents and their relatives. While maintaining their opposition to the proposal, they did welcome the efforts made to understand and respond to their concerns.
- f) Putting care home residents and their families at the centre of the modernisation process was seen as essential. This would be helped by a greater emphasis on co-production - ensuring timely, effective communication about the detailed implications for individuals as well as the general programme of change. Participants were very anxious about how Council decisions would be implemented, especially during the period of transition. They wanted any decision to be accompanied by commitments to ensuring that safeguards would be in place, including prompt assessments of need, choice of placements, dignified and timely transfers, 'top ups' where necessary and full involvement by staff in the homes.
- g) There was unanimously a feeling that any disruption to the residents must be kept to a minimum. Residents and relatives requested early, detailed information about transition planning, as well as the timing of any such move to ensure that the process is properly managed and that continuity of care can be maintained. People were concerned about safeguarding the interests of residents who lack capacity. Relatives were seeking assurances that longer travel distances should be avoided, especially as some of them are dependent on public transport. They were reassured by the fact that the proposed redevelopment sites being considered in Mountain Ash and Ferndale are seen as good locations for new facilities.
- h) The events generated debate about the Council's rationale for its proposals. For example, there was initial scepticism about explanations for low occupancy levels in residential care homes, given factors such as increasing numbers of very old people in the population and severe problems in discharging people from hospital. Also, some people were concerned that the Council's primary motivation for making changes was to make financial savings. After considerable debate, it was generally acknowledged that most older people experiencing delayed discharge from hospital did not want permanent placements in residential care homes and that there is a discernible move away from choosing residential care where other suitable options are available.³ The Council's commitment to significant investment in accommodation for older people was warmly welcomed.
- i) Residents and relatives had some reservations about the ability of Extra Care housing to match the high standards of care in current homes and to provide a 'homely' environment while also catering for complex needs. They were somewhat reassured when more information was made available, alongside an offer of opportunities to visit one of the new facilities. They welcomed case examples of

³ There was a degree of consensus around the fact that the Council is required to meet increasing demand from older people for care and support within the resources available. This generated further discussion about how this can mean reducing reliance on traditional services such as residential care homes which are no longer viable and moving to a different pattern of help – one that is sustainable for the future and effectively meets the needs of an ageing population with more complex needs and different expectations.

the way in which current facilities in Rhondda Cynon Taf are working. Possible financial implications for individuals moving into other facilities were worrying those likely to be affected. Requests were made for further information about proposed sites and about how the transition to Extra Care would be undertaken and the timetable for homes to close. There was a very strong preference that, in any new facilities, the provision of care should be undertaken by the local authority.

- j) In some of the events, there was discussion about the possible merits of 'doing nothing' (i.e., keeping the status quo) or waiting for additional information before making decisions. However, people agreed that prolonged uncertainty is destabilising and risks generating even more anxiety.

5. Consultation Events with Staff and Managers

- 5.1 To facilitate discussion about the proposals to modernise care homes in the Borough, consultation events were organised in three geographical localities (Rhondda, Cynon and Taff Ely) for staff working in all the Council's residential care homes affected by the proposed options. It should be noted that no members of staff attended the Cynon meeting. The format for the consultation events mirrored that for care home residents and their relatives but there were slight changes to the information content.
- 5.2 **Appendix 3** has reports from each of the individual consultation events with managers and staff. A summary of the main themes that emerged in the discussions is set out below.

Main Themes


- a. All the events demonstrated how much staff wanted the best for current residents and for their interests to be a paramount concern in decision-making. With the exception of Garth Olwg staff, the options put forward by the Cabinet received general endorsement by those attending consultation events.
- b. Fearing that they might be adversely affected by the proposed changes, some staff said that they were experiencing considerable anxiety about Human Resource issues – such as job security, safeguarding employment rights, long-term career prospects, remuneration and other entrenched causes of instability within the residential care sector. Questions included:
- What would happen to staff members if their place of work closes?
 - Are current employees guaranteed to keep their jobs?
 - Will the current staff have options around redundancy?
 - Will the current hours be reduced if staff are redeployed?
 - How will proposed changes affect career prospects?
- c. It was helpful that HR and Trade Union representation was made available for the events, so that general concerns could be addressed. Staff were strongly in favour of continuing this level of dialogue and advice as soon as decisions are made. It was important to ensure that these decisions are made known to staff directly. They were especially concerned that more needed to be done to improve staff recruitment and retention. It was their perception that not enough permanent contracts were being offered, resulting in too much reliance on casual contract and agency workers to cover unfilled vacancies. The subsequent discussions revealed some confusion about the Council's policy and its implementation. Managers gave a commitment to resolving the issue.
- d. Despite high levels of anxiety, staff displayed a strong sense of loyalty to the Council, but some felt that this was not always reciprocated. There was a consensus about wanting to remain employees of the Council. This was grounded in a shared public service ethos, the high standard of care being delivered, its employee terms and conditions, and the fact that Council-run care homes are anchored in the communities they serve.
- e. Staff were understandably preoccupied by the proposals for the home in which they worked and for their geographical area. However, they were looking also for evidence that the Council has a genuine and future-proofed commitment to providing high quality care and modern facilities in those homes where the options include retention. This would mean spelling out plans for investment in buildings and staff over a sustained period. 'Review fatigue' was evident, with staff expressing frustration and

apprehension that they find themselves in this position again within such a short space of time. There were fears that further reviews would be held, and further closures recommended. This was seen as putting at risk the Council's commitment to providing equity of service in the three principal parts of the Borough (Rhondda, Cynon and Taff Ely).

- f. Concerns were also raised about how the proposals have been communicated to staff. This had left much scope for misinformation and rumour. They felt ill-equipped to reassure residents and relatives whose lives were deeply affected by ongoing uncertainty or even to explain the reasons that lie behind the proposed options. Following all the problems associated with the pandemic, this had perpetuated feelings of crisis and uncertainty. However, they were pleased to have an opportunity to hear from senior managers.
- g. There was some appreciation that refurbishing all existing residential homes may not be financially viable. Staff appreciated the work done to explore the prospects for modernising each of the current homes, although there was scepticism about whether some findings are valid - especially as it is their perception that refurbishment has been put on hold for a long time.
- h. The staff felt that current residents and their relatives would prefer to remain in their current home even if they could not be modernised to provide facilities such as en-suite bathrooms. Those working in Garth Olwg believe that the proposed option for the home would have a very adverse impact upon current residents as it would deny them the opportunity to remain living in the home.
- i. Staff from the Rhondda Fach made strong representations that a facility, either a care home or extra care housing/dementia residential care, should be available in their valley. This would aid staff recruitment and retention and also ensure that the community was not deprived of an important community asset. They were concerned to explore in detail the option for Ferndale House set out in the Cabinet report and they welcomed details about a potential new site that is being explored.
- j. It was considered essential that residents in all homes are given a meaningful choice of placement if their home was to be closed while they were there. Staff expressed considerable relief that this is unlikely to be the case if most of the proposals go ahead, given the length of time needed to develop alternatives. They wanted assurances about where any new facility would be located and further consideration of the proposed balance between extra care accommodation and residential care facilities for people experiencing dementia-related illnesses.
- k. Where care homes are to be retained or redeveloped on another site, managers would like to see early, detailed information about the investment plans and what the implications would be for each home. They expect to be involved in the decision-making process as early as possible, especially in managing any potential impact for residents and staff.
- l. Some staff are looking for more information about moves to commission significantly increased levels of Extra Care housing. It appears that not everybody has a clear enough understanding about the role of housing associations and "not for profit" organisations, or the way in which Extra Care operates. There was a consensus that the Council should explore opportunities for ensuring that care in these settings is provided by its own staff.

Appendix 1

Presentation for Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives



**PROPOSED CHANGES TO
RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES
AND EXTRA CARE HOUSING
FOR OLDER PEOPLE
IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**


Consultation Events
January 2023

Phil Evans and Paul Pavia

[@Pracsolutions](#) www.practicesolutions-ltd.co.uk

AGENDA FOR CARE HOME EVENTS

- What do you think? PART 1
- How can I have my say?
- Where are we right now?
- Why are the changes needed?
- What are the options?
- What do you think? PART 2
- What happens next?



WHAT DO YOU THINK? PART 1

- What worries/interests me most is....
- What residents want most/least is.....
- It's very important that staff are/aren't.....
- What I would most like to see is.....
- Has the Council considered.....?
- Why are homes recommended for closure when they provide such good care?
- Why isn't there enough demand for places in Council homes?
- Other questions, comments, concerns?



HOW CAN I HAVE MY SAY? PART 1

- Public Consultation started December 12th and closes January 27th
- Series of consultation events in residential care homes and with staff
- HAVE YOUR SAY! Consultation Booklet
- Further information on the Council's website
- Questionnaire/survey
- Democratic accountability



HOW CAN I HAVE MY SAY? PART 2

- For further information, you can visit the Council's website: www.rctcbc.gov.uk/consultation where you can find out the detail of the proposals
- You can get in touch via:
 - 01443 425014
 - or
 - residentialcare@rctcbc.gov.uk
 - or
 - FREEPOST RSBU-HJUK-LSSS, Research & Consultation, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale, CF40 2XX



WHERE ARE WE NOW? PART 1

- The Council proposes making important changes in services for older people
- This would involve:
 - retaining five of the Residential Care Homes which the Council runs and eventually closing four others
 - creating three new facilities that offer Extra Care and residential dementia care, plus additional accommodation for adults with learning disabilities
- No decisions have been taken yet, pending this public consultation
- The Council invites you to let them know your views and Cabinet will make the final decision



WHERE ARE WE NOW? PART 2

- £50m is being invested in Extra Care, to deliver 300 extra care apartments within five new facilities across the County Borough
- Extra Care housing aims to provide ‘a home for life’ for many people, even if their care needs change over time. People have their own self-contained home in purpose-built accommodation and with 24-hour care and support available. Apartments usually consist of either one or two bedrooms, a lounge area, a kitchen area and a fully fitted wet room
- Details about the Extra Care programme can be found on the Council’s website:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/SupportingAdultsinRhonddaCynonTaf.aspx>



WHY ARE THE CHANGES NEEDED?

- Long journey – ongoing review since November 2016 to establish the case for change, explore options and ensure that resources are used wisely.
- Outcome of the review - wanting to keep some Council-run residential care homes but only if they can be upgraded to meet changing needs expectations and standards (dementia friendly/ frailty/end-of-life care).
- Residential care homes are closing in many places - declining occupancy/ageing premises which require renovation and new facilities/ people’s preferences for other options.
- Plans are in place to develop new choices for older people, especially extra care housing and integrated support at home.



WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS? PART 1

- **OPTION 1:** Retain current service provision at 5 Council care homes.
- **OPTION 2:** New accommodation with *40 Extra Care apartments and 20 residential dementia beds* on land near the existing Ystrad Fechan Care Home. The home is temporarily closed with no residents living there and it would be permanently decommissioned.
- **OPTION 3:** New accommodation with *20 Extra Care apartments and 10 residential dementia beds* on land near the existing Ferndale House Care Home. The home would be decommissioned when the new accommodation is developed.



WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS? PART 2

- **OPTION 4:** New accommodation with *25 Extra Care apartments and 15 residential dementia beds* located on land near the existing Troedyrhiw Care Home. The home would be decommissioned when the new accommodation is developed.
- **OPTION 5:** New accommodation with care to support people with learning disabilities in adulthood. This would involve developing the existing Garth Olwg Care Home. The home would be decommissioned when suitable placements are found for its residents in a home of their choice which meets their assessed needs.
- Individual homes – Table 6 in the Cabinet report



WHAT DO YOU THINK? PART 2

- Possible themes

- Concerns for residents, carers and relatives if homes are closed.
- How will the change be managed? - continuity of care, assessments for current residents (including advocacy), review of care and support plans
- Timescales for change
- What choice will residents have about where they live? – facilities, eligibility, costs
- Geographical location of proposed facilities and investment plans
- Implications for staff
- Alternative proposals/Recommendations



Appendix 2

Reports from Individual Consultation Events with Care Home Residents and their Relatives⁴

a) Troedyrhiw

Proposal

Initially, concerns were raised about the proposed option for the care home, in relation to its closure and decommissioning. Residents and family relatives felt the care home provided good quality care and that it would be 'terrible' if it were closed.

One family member said: *"My father's needs are being met in the care home now. He has everything he wants here."*

One family member felt that the specific option for Troedyrhiw seemed *'too good to be true'* because the care home would not be closed until a new facility was developed.

It was unanimously agreed that any new facility needs to be built within the local area, so that families would be closer and better able to visit. Concerns were raised about identifying a site and questions were asked about what would happen if appropriate land could not be found. This was seen as a risk that must be mitigated but participants were much reassured when details about a potential site were provided.

High standards of care and specialist care

Assurances were sought that the same high standards of care and an appropriate, 'homely' environment would be available in any new accommodation provided to the residents of Troedyrhiw. In particular, relatives were adamant that any new provision should be run by the local authority.

Moving residents to Extra Care homes

In relation to any change that may occur following the Council's decisions, there was a unanimous feeling that any disruption to the residents must be kept to a minimum. More detailed information was requested about transition planning, so that the timing of any moves helped to ensure continuity of care.

As one relative stated: *"This will be a major disruption for people staying here at the moment. The care home is great as it's local and it has a good reputation. Anything which is built not like this will not be good for the residents. We need to ensure it's an easy transition."*

Both relatives and residents requested that, if a decision is made to approve Option 4, local authority officers should come back to them as early as possible, to involve them in developing the proposals for any new facility.

Relationships with staff, residents and their families

The quality of care and commitment shown by staff was praised and there were concerns expressed about their future employment. It was suggested that ideally, the staff should move

⁴ Material expressed in Parts 4 and 5 of this report directly represent the views of those attending the series of consultation events and does not cover the responses to questions and further information provided by Council officers.

with the residents to ensure continuity of care is maintained. Staff were also deemed to have a crucial role in providing families with help and support.

Relatives felt it was important that any new facility must have good staffing levels to deliver consistent, high-quality care. However, there were also concerns raised more broadly about staffing capacity at the current facility and that the Council needed to do more to encourage people to work in the sector.

Conclusions

At the end of the consultation session, there was a strong feeling within the group that the proposal for Troedyrhiw was the right decision for the community and the best outcome that could be achieved.

However, it was also felt that the needs of this current generation of residents should not be overshadowed in developing facilities for the next. Excellent communication with and support for families would be essential. Notification of any decisions must be made to residents and their families first before any wider dissemination.

b) Ferndale House

Proposal

There was some initial confusion around the 'preferred options' being proposed, with a perceived discrepancy regarding the information published on the consultation page on the Council's website and material printed in the 'Have Your Say' consultation document. People questioned what they perceived as ambiguity about whether the proposed options were a prioritised list, whether they were linked to each other or whether they were 'all or nothing' options, or whether they could be individually 'cherry-picked' by the Council. Further discussion helped to clarify all these issues. Officers in attendance provided clarification.

Residents and relatives liked the current care home facility and did not understand why change was necessary because they initially believed the care home was oversubscribed.

One family relative stated: *"I know the hassle that we had to go into my mother into here."*

Another recognised the positive psychological effect that had taken place when their loved one moved to the home and expressed their initial anxiety surrounding any proposed change.

However, when presented with the trend data on falling residential care home places, one relative observed: *"I was shocked when I saw the vacancies (referencing statistics in the information pack)."*

Another family member commented on current NHS pressures to discharge people from hospital and questioned why there was not a higher degree of demand for beds in the care home.

Questions were asked about: the location of the proposed new facility; how close it would be to the current home; how accessible it would be, particularly to emergency vehicles; how the retained care homes identified in Option 1 were decided on and whether the Council had a specific target to achieve in reducing residential care beds.

One relative asked: *"Is the Council trying to make cuts with these options and privatise care?"*

Another relative raised concerns in relation to the cuts in services, particularly day care services, that had already taken place in the community.

All these points were discussed in detail and the group then agreed with one participant who said: *"Now I feel much better about it all and grateful for the time to think about it."*

Moving residents to Extra Care homes

Residents and relatives wanted to know more about the model of care used in Extra care accommodation – how the care and support is delivered; what facilities are available and their suitability for residents affected by decommissioning; who would be eligible; what costs would be incurred; and how did the facilities link to the wider community. They sought detailed information about how the transition to Extra Care would be undertaken and the timetable for homes to close, to ensure that the quality and continuity of care would be maintained.

Relationships with staff, residents and their families

People praised the quality of care and commitment shown by staff. It was suggested that, ideally, the staff should move with the residents to ensure continuity of care. Staff were also deemed to have a key role in providing families with help and support during a period of transition.

However, broader concerns were raised about current and future staffing levels. One relative noted that the Council was not offering full-time, permanent jobs and was reliant on casual contracts, to the detriment of efforts to recruit carers. They felt that that work should have been undertaken to rectify this problem as they perceived working for the Council as a better option than working out in the community providing care.

Conclusions

At the end of the discussion, the general consensus was that the option set out in the Cabinet report for Ferndale House was the best way forward, especially as ‘doing nothing’ was not viable and was just going back to square one. Residents and relatives acknowledged the age and limitations of the current care home in terms of space and layout. However, change was seen as unsettling: residents and their families required much reassurance that the Council had fully considered the needs of current residents.

As one resident stated: *“The people here do want their dignity.”*

However, another family member said: *“Why wouldn’t anyone vote not to have a new facility, when we can keep the current one? I cannot see why anyone would not want it. It seems a better option for managers, staff and residents.”*

It was clear that, if any decision was taken to develop a new facility, that residents and their families would want to be involved in the shaping of those plans in a co-productive way, including the viability of the site identified by the Council. There was also a strong feeling that any new facility should be Council-run’.

At the conclusion of the event, one relative said: *“Come on...I want it done.”*

c) Pentre House

As the event was intended for former residents of Ystrad Fechan who had moved to Pentre House when their care home was temporarily closed, there were only two residents present and no relatives. The meeting was attended by an Older Person’s Advocate from Age Connects, who knew the two individuals and acts for one of them in other matters. Some parts of the consultation event were conducted bilingually.

Proposal

It was explained to both residents that they would not be affected directly by the proposals and they were reassured that their place in the home was secure.

Relationships with staff, residents and their families

Both residents were very happy with the care and support that they received in the home. They knew the staff who looked after them and they were both very complimentary about their work.

One resident said: *"They've been brilliant to me here."*

While the other said: *"They're all bloody (sic) good."*

Conclusions

Both residents had moved from another residential care home; they felt very settled at Pentre House and got on well with staff and the other residents.

One resident noted there were no staff in the care home that she could communicate with fluently in Welsh (her first language). However, staff do make a conscious effort to use Welsh phrases and sayings to engage with her and this is much appreciated.

Both residents were happy to stay at the home. They very much appreciated further confirmation that the proposals would not affect them personally. There was a clear need for staff to reinforce this message and provide further reassurance.

d) Garth Olwg

Proposal

There was significant opposition to the proposal to decommission Garth Olwg as a residential care home and repurpose it as a supported living facility for adults with a Learning Disability. Residents and relatives felt that this was the worst-case scenario for the home.

There was a high-level of anxiety amongst both residents and relatives. There was a feeling that the Council *"needs to understand they are dealing with 'people' not 'bed numbers" and "start dealing with people's expectations."*

As one relative stated: *"When looking at care, we can't lose the fact that they are people, and they have a story. If many of them had a choice, they would want to be in their own homes. But we are aware that domiciliary care has long lists. Circumstances have dictated that they have to live here. The Council needs to consider that they are paying over £700 a week for their own care (self-funded) so should remember that. All they want is to stay where they are because they are happy where they are. I feel that, if you do a show of hands, many would agree."*

One resident said: *"I'm filled with alarm and very upset."*

Another resident said: *"I've only been there a year but it's the best life I've ever had."*

A third resident was worried about moving away from the very good friends they had made in the home. The resident chose to read out a statement, describing how when they arrived in Garth Olwg, their situation was dire, physically and mentally. *"It is due to the understanding and hard work of the staff that I am the person that I am today. I am very happy here and the thought of having to move elsewhere is causing me mental distress. This is a very happy, well-run home. We have a dedicated, hard-working staff and remember this is the only home in RCT that during the covid pandemic had no deaths or cases of coronavirus. The effort and work staff made during that time was incredible. Now their efforts and hard work are being rewarded by being made possibly redundant or having to find other employment. As many of them have been here for years, it is a blow for them. Jenny the warden has been here for 33 years. The staff must be devastated. Returning to the residents here... personally I would not be happy to become an extra care resident.When in 2019, it was decided to keep Garth Olwg open, it was a great relief. Once again, closing Garth Olwg, I feel that authority think only of numbers and not people and decide to change their mind.....I understand the need for support for people with learning difficulties, but remember the elderly have needs too! I would now like relief in my final days having worked all my life."*

One relative explained about their mother's experience of moving to the care home in September 2022 and that the move was not well managed and was a very difficult episode for the whole family. They enquired why they were not made aware of these proposals at the time before the move was made. They also expressed a '*lack of faith*' in the Council to manage another move when they witnessed the impact of the last move and especially given there were more people to transition from Garth Olwg to other facilities. The resident in question expressed great upset because she had been assured that it would be her last move now it was not going to be. The notion of supporting vulnerable older people who regarded Garth Olwg as their 'home for life' had not been given any priority, it was suggested.

One participant drew attention to a manifesto commitment made by the Labour administration in the 2022 local government elections to keep the care home open. He felt that, clearly, this had been reneged on.

There was a belief too that the needs of adults with Learning Disabilities were being given more priority than the older adults in the home.

One resident said: "*It seems that people with disabilities are being given everything and we feel we are being pushed aside despite paying into the economy for years.*"

Questions were raised regarding the rationale behind the proposal:

- Why was the local need in relation to Learning Disabilities not raised three years ago during the last consultation process? The view was that the Council had been short-sighted.
- Why does the Council feel the home is not fit for purpose, when residents and their families do?
- Are people really not wanting to come into residential care or is the extent of the vacancies in the home caused by a lack of staff?
- Were the new proposals future proofed? What will happen in a few years' time when there will be a further influx of elderly people?
- Given that residents in the care home did not fit categories of disabled or dementia – what care homes in the area now cater for their needs?

Alternative options/proposals

There were a several alternative proposals discussed:

- If there is a need, could the Council not develop a purpose-built facility on other land in the area and then decommission and move residents, in line with other proposed options in the consultation?
- Could the current building be adapted and modernised over time, minimising disruption to the residents?
- Given that the Council's analysis highlights future need for high care dementia beds and the pressure on the NHS to discharge people back into community care, could Garth Olwg be dual registered for both residential and also nursing accommodation?

Relationships with staff, residents and their families

There was unqualified praise for the quality of care and the commitment shown by staff.

One resident said: "*There's a lot of love and care in this facility and you cannot buy that. I've had marvellous support here. I'm now able to walk again since moving here.*"

Residents and relatives expressed concern about staff welfare but also regarding their future employment options. It was hoped that they would be redeployed to Parc Newydd.

Extra Care

Residents and relatives asked questions regarding the model of care used in Extra Care accommodation: how the care and support is delivered; what facilities are available and their suitability for residents with varying degrees of need; and who would be eligible. Several relatives expressed a view that they would be unhappy to move their loved one into an Extra Care facility.

Moving residents to alternative care facilities

Participants requested information regarding how transition arrangements would be managed if a decision were made to close the care home. Residents and relatives asked questions regarding choice of alternative provision and what the timescales would be to make that transition. One relative asked if suitable alternatives could not be found in the short-term, whether their loved one would be able to stay until other arrangements were made.

One relative asked about the circumstances of a loved one with a Learning Disability and enquired whether she would have to move out to move back into Garth Olwg.

There was a strong view from both residents and relatives that the majority would want to remain in placements local to the current care home because they liked the community but also for the transport links for visiting relatives. One resident expressed a view that they did not want to move further away from their family and would prefer a transfer to a facility in Bridgend County Borough and asked whether this was feasible.

Concerns were raised about local alternatives and their suitability. In terms of Council-run Parc Newydd, there were concerns about current capacity and whether it could accommodate all the residents who may want to stay local and move there. One relative asked whether the Council could restrict access to Parc Newydd for new admissions and reserve sufficient capacity to allow all residents from Garth Olwg to transfer across if that were their choice. There was a perception that the rooms were smaller than those in Garth Olwg and that the outlook was not as favourable, which would have an adverse impact upon the well-being of residents. There were also concerns raised about the housing estate near Parc Newydd. There were perceptions that 'undesirable' people living there were potentially involved in risky, anti-social behaviour.

In terms of local independent provision, while people acknowledged that there were other independent sector providers in the vicinity, this was not an option that residents or their relatives had initially considered. They wanted to go to Garth Olwg because the facility and level of care were excellent.

Communication and information

Both residents and relatives enquired why they were not made aware of the options sooner.

They also enquired about the process of reporting and decision making – would they be able to see a copy of the independent consultation report in advance and how would it be published. They also asked when the Council reports would be published and how they would be able to access copies.

They also enquired about whether Council officers had seen the numerous petitions that had been generated and whether they had been formally submitted. As the Council's proposed option for Garth Olwg potentially has the greatest effect upon residents and relatives, it was felt to be unfortunate that their consultation event was the last in the schedule

Other issues

- Why were consultants commissioned to undertake this exercise, presumably at significant cost?
- What would happen to the money (capital receipts) from the other residential care homes identified in the preferred options Cabinet report?
- Why is the capital money used for infrastructure development and not staff/workforce development?
- Is the Council investing more money in older people now than in previous years?
- What is the purpose of the new Council developments in Llantrisant?

Conclusions

Given that Garth Olwg was initially earmarked for closure and decommissioning during the last consultation process and then given a reprieve, elevated levels of anger and anxiety had been generated by this being put forward as an option again. Residents and relatives unanimously opposed the proposal.

It was evident that both residents and relatives place a very high value on this Council-run care facility because of the quality of care, the dedication of staff and the homely environment that had been created. This had led them to put forward alternative options for the Council to consider.

Appendix 3

Reports from Individual Events with Staff and Managers

a) Staff Event at Sobell Leisure Centre

No members of staff attended the event.

b) Staff Event at Rhondda Sports Centre

Ystrad Fechan

Questions were raised initially about the temporary closure of Ystrad Fechan and the rationale behind the decision. Staff were aware that children's services were now making use of the premises but they had not been told anything about this decision, even as a matter of courtesy.

This had left them feeling angry and disappointed. *"We feel let down again by the Council."*

Another said: *"We feel in limbo. This has gone on too long...we have been here before."*

There were questions about the long-term plans for Ystrad Fechan and whether children's services were going to be there permanently or whether residents and staff were going to return eventually.

One member of staff said: *"We worked there for so long, we didn't want to leave."*

Another said: *"Fair enough that we've moved. However, if it reopens, surely as it's my home we can go back in?"*

Proposal

Staff members felt their greatest concern about the entire process was the uncertainty, the 'not knowing.'

There were also concerns raised by staff from Ferndale House about the level of service provision in that part of the county. There was a feeling that there had been cuts and service erosion over recent years.

One staff member said: *"There's nothing here in our valley. There is no elderly service or day services from Maerdy to Porth – there is nothing available for the elderly."*

Another member of staff said: *"I never thought I'd be sitting here once again fighting for the Rhonda Fach. All services have been taken away and everything is in Rhondda Fawr."*

While questions were asked about the location of the new facility and the timescales for the changes to take place, there remained an entrenched belief that the current proposals were an inadequate response to the needs of older people in the Rhondda Fach. There was concern about the proposed balance of dementia beds to Extra Care places, given increasing numbers of older people experiencing cognitive impairment. Staff felt that, before any long-term proposals were developed, the Council needed to address workforce pressures.

Workforce (recruitment, retention and security)

While there was considerable anxiety about what the proposals meant for staff job security in the future, there was also a strong focus around the recruitment and retention challenges for the Council's adult care workforce more generally. Staff felt that there were still too many vacancies, with not enough permanent appointments being made and too much reliance on casual contracts to cover those vacancies.

Staff felt that there needed to be more incentives for people who work in care. Staff wanted to see proper career pathways created, so that people could train and develop in permanent roles, ensuring greater stability for individuals and the Council over the longer term. There was also a feeling that staff loyalty needed to be properly recognised by the Council.

There was a discussion about the implications of the proposals for the current staff cohort in relation to the management of change – what it meant for job security; how the job would change; what it meant for local staff in terms of redeployment; what the effects would be on working hours and pensions and what the consequences would be if another provider (other than the Council) was commissioned to deliver care in the new facility.

Independent sector

Concerns were raised about the quality of care and standards of facilities available in the independent sector. It was suggested that the quality of Council care homes was much higher. There was a strong feeling that any new facility should be Council-operated because a public service focus and motivation were perceived to be better for residents, staff and the community.

One staff member said: *“The private sector is all about money – not care focused.”*

Extra Care

There was a discussion held around the development of an Extra Care facility, how the model worked and how flexible it was to manage the decline experienced by an individual along their dementia pathway, as well as accommodating the general demands of dementia EMI placements. One staff member expressed the view that the number of dementia beds in the proposal for Option 3 was not sufficient to meet demand and that it should be doubled (from 10 to 20).

Other issues

Staff commented on current NHS pressures to discharge in a timely way people from hospital in need of care and questioned why there was not a higher degree of demand for beds in care homes.

Conclusions

A strong commitment to residents, other staff colleagues and the needs of the community was demonstrated throughout the meeting.

Staff were under no illusion that Ferndale House requires updating. However, there were concerns and considerable anxieties raised about job security.

Notwithstanding the consultation process, staff felt strongly that the Council had already made its mind up about the proposals and that feedback would not lead to any real amendments.

c) Staff Event at Llantrisant Sports Centre

Proposal

Staff really wanted to know why Garth Olwg had been singled out again for closure? They expressed the view that the process was causing great anxiety, uncertainty and distress. Staff members said that the announcement of the proposals had a very strong impact upon their own Christmas celebrations.

Staff members raised their concerns about the effect the proposals and the consultation were having on the residents for whom they care.

One staff member said: *“Since the (residential) consultation, residents have been really bad. One resident did not want to leave their room as they are very low. We have to go back and deal with the upset. We*

don't want to have to deal with their questions and we are worried about answering them because we don't want to cause residents more upset."

Another staff member said: *"I think change is good sometimes, but it is scary. The residents that are going through it now, are going through it a second time. We were told after the previous decision that the home was going to be refurbished but that never happened."*

Several questions were raised regarding the rationale behind the proposal:

- Would there be enough residential beds in the locality to accommodate current residents looking to move to other settings?
- Was there still a high need for residential care given the NHS pressures on discharging into the community?
- Had staffing pressures and vacancies affected residential care capacity?
- Was this just a finance/cost cutting exercise?

A discussion then took place about details underpinning the proposed facility providing supported living for people with Learning Disabilities and whether the location was the right one for those individuals and the community. Questions were posed regarding:

- How many people were on the Learning Disability Waiting list for supported living?
- What would be the age range of people accommodated in any new facility?
- What level of disability or challenging behaviour would be in the statement of purpose for the setting?
- Would it be a secure unit?
- Were the local community and school made aware of the proposal?

Alternative proposals

Staff raised the point that given there is already an elderly frail resident with a Learning Disability in Garth Olwg. Could the Council not look to bring people together in one setting rather than segregate them? Could the facility not accommodate a mix of elderly frail and learning disabilities?

As one staff member said: *"We've had people with learning disabilities come into Garth Olwg before and that has never been a problem. Seems you don't care about the other people who have learning disabilities coming into us."*

Moving residents to alternative care facilities

Participants requested information regarding how transition arrangements would be managed if a decision to close the care home was made and what the proposed timeframe would be from the start of that process to decommissioning.

Extra Care

There was a discussion about the role of Extra Care in the County, the staff model, the financial implications for the Council, the Council's longer-term ambition; its role as a direct provider and/or commissioner and what implementing the model meant for the future of other residential care settings, like Parc Newydd and Cae Glas.

Staff felt that workforce stability would be achieved only when answers to these concerns had been agreed and implemented. Confidence in the Council's overall plans was seen as an important factor in securing new staff and retaining the current workforce. One question they posed was that if staff took the opportunity for redeployment to Parc Newydd, what guarantees could be given that they would not be in the same situation in two or three-years' time?

Workforce (Recruitment, retention and security)

There was a discussion about the implications of the proposals for the current staff cohort in relation to the management of change – what it meant for job security; what it meant for local staff in terms of redeployment to other care homes like Parc Newydd; what the effects would be on working hours, rights and pensions; and whether there would be redundancies.

Communication and information

Staff enquired why they were not made directly aware of the options sooner.

One staff member said: *“We found out via Facebook, before we were told collectively.”*

They also enquired about the process of reporting and decision making. Information was sought about when they would be able to see a copy of all the reports going to Cabinet, when the Cabinet meeting would take place and how they would be informed about any decision made. Staff wanted to be informed personally and in a timely way, rather than seeing anything published second-hand on a website or via social media.

They also enquired whether Council officers had seen the numerous petitions that had been generated and whether they had been formally submitted.

Conclusions

Initially, there was considerable frustration and anger that Garth Olwg had been earmarked again for closure and decommissioning. However, towards the end of the meeting, staff expressed more their feeling of resignation that the decision had already been made.

As one member of staff stated: *“I feel as though it is already a done deal.”*

Another said: *“The reason there were no people there (at the public drop-in) is because they fought last time to keep Garth Olwg open.”*

It was clear that staff do not want continued uncertainty and feel that a decision needs to be made but that they should be treated with courtesy and informed directly as soon as it is made.

d) Managers Event

Consultation Engagement

Concern was expressed about the scheduling of the consultation events, particularly in relation to Garth Olwg (given the potential impact of the proposals on its residents and staff). It was felt that these events should not be the last ones to take place. It was evident that many of the residents have the capacity to understand what is going on and the scheduling reinforces their view that they are not being properly considered.

Proposals

Managers felt that the proposals and the consultation process were generating a significant level of anxiety and uncertainty for both residents and staff.

One manager stated that the report to Cabinet did not place enough emphasis on how the proposals were going to make Council-run facilities a better place for residents to live. Their perception was that the report was ‘bed number focused’, as opposed to person centred. It was suggested that the proposals do not give enough reassurance to residents (and their relatives) that this was going to be their lasting home.

While understanding that the decision-making process needs to operate properly, managers expressed their view that a final decision should be made quickly to bring a greater level of reassurance and stability to the residential care system in the County Borough. The point was clearly expressed that the Council

could not keep going over the same ground every couple of years. Managers felt that the system requires a greater level of consistency and continuity. It was essential, therefore, that senior officers engage in effective, long-term planning with operational managers to achieve this. Matters such as future demographic trends, levels of demand (especially older adults with dementia), models of care, geographic coverage and workforce planning should be considered carefully.

It was felt that staff need a greater level of reassurance about the investment that will be made in new facilities but also in the care homes being retained. Following the last consultation, commitments were made about investing money in the care homes to be retained but that did not happen. It was felt that detailed plans for investment in homes to be retained must be shared with managers and staff at the earliest possible juncture, so that both groups felt empowered to help shape those plans.

Managers anticipated that residents and staff would be asking about the location of any new facilities because in many communities, land is a scarce commodity.

Moving residents to Extra Care homes

In relation to any change that may occur following the Council's decision-making process, there was a unanimous feeling that any disruption to the residents must be kept to a minimum. More detailed information was requested about transition planning, as well as the timing of any placement changes to ensure seamless, continuity of care.

Workforce (recruitment, retention, security)

While there was considerable anxiety about what the proposals meant for staff job security in the interim, there was also a strong focus on the recruitment and retention challenges for the Council's adult care workforce more generally.

As one manager stated: *"We have a really good group of staff, and we are aware that, if they leave, they are unlikely to come back."*

It was felt that the Council needed to give this thorough consideration because, with the current level of workforce pressures in terms of vacancies carried and staff burn-out, careful planning would be required to ensure safe and viable services could be maintained.

One manager said: *"Staff feel there has been a mass exodus following the last Cabinet review and the pandemic. We lost many staff and now we are struggling to accommodate people."*

There was a discussion about the number of current vacancies and the role of casual contracts to cover some of these posts. Concerns were raised that not enough people with casual contracts were moving into permanent positions and this must be resolved soon. The Council has to realise how long it would take to train new members of staff to the level of those who may potentially leave its employment.

Communication and information

Managers queried how the decision-making process would take place in terms of timing and how they and staff would be informed of any decisions made. Questions were also asked about the speed of the change process and transition planning following any decision.

A query was raised about whether hard copies of the consultation document had been sent out to residents, relatives and staff - not everyone has access to internet.

Conclusions

Managers clearly expressed their concerns about the potential impact of the proposals on residents and staff, and they were rightfully carrying the anxieties of those two groups into the meeting.

It was evident that managers wanted to move to a greater level of continuity and stability across services for accommodating older people in the county. Maintaining a state of constant review was not only unsettling for residents and relatives but also had a serious impact on recruitment and retention. They all wanted to work with senior managers and to take an active role in the process of change, thereby ensuring that the service in the county was well designed and fit for purpose.

Managers understandably wanted to be involved in the transition planning process following any decision about the proposals, but they also wanted early input into planning any new facilities, if that was the direction of travel set by the Council.