

Wirral West Constituency Committee – 11 February 2016

Minute 29: Public Question Time – Girtrell Court

The Chair invited questions from Members of the public regarding matters in relation to the budget option to close Girtrell Court, a respite breaks facility located in Wallasey Constituency.

- A resident addressed the Committee to comment on the proposals that had been submitted to users and carers of Girtrell Court Service Users to outline alternative provisions available. He stated how he felt proposals to be wholly inappropriate to meet the needs of his 33 year old son who attends Girtrell Court on a regular basis. He informed Members of the Committee how he felt disheartened and ashamed by some of the proposed alternative provisions, particularly those located in old people's homes.
- A Unison representative then addressed the Committee to outline concerns in relation to levels of redundancies if the proposal were to be agreed. Members heard how there was the potential for 46 redundancies within the service, many of which are high skilled workers. He further commented about his additional concerns regarding the protection of vulnerable people, a top Council priority. He informed Members of the Committee how he felt the Council had taken priority financially, before people's lives. He urged Members of the Cabinet to reject this proposal on 22 February.
- A resident commented on the financial difficulties that the Council face and identified some expenses that he felt the Council had unnecessarily incurred, for example: redundancy packages, the use of consultants and increase in pay of the Chief Executive. He further commented that in light of these expenses, Girtrell Court should be kept open, and that every efforts should be made to protect the service.
- A resident and father of a Girtrell Court Service user came forward with his son to make the Committee aware of the benefits of Girtrell Court and the detrimental impact it would have upon his family if the service were to close. He explained how closing the service would severely affect the quality of life for both him and his son and informed the Committee that the service is two edged in that it provides carers with a break and a safe and enjoyable environment for people who use the service. He stated that the proposed decision does not offer the level of comfort that is needed for both carers and service users. He urged Cabinet Members to vote against the decision.
- The brother of a regular user of Girtrell Court then passed comment on the excellent service Girtrell Court provides for his sister who is severely disabled. He explained how he felt the service to be safe and he is confident that his sister received the best care possible at the centre. He expressed grave concern over the proposed alternative provisions and queried whether such options would be safe or have the relevant facilities in place to specifically meet his sister's needs. He then passed comment on the inability

of some service users to inform family members if they had been receiving ill treatment and re-emphasised the need for safety in any environment.

Graham Hodgkinson, Director of Adult Social Services, In response to comments raised, informed residents and Members of the Committee how he is aware of specific needs of many of the service users and has met with many in the past to discuss particular care plans. He reassured residents and Members of the Committee that one to one needs assessment would be undertaken for every person affected by the proposal. He also acknowledged the impact it would have upon staff employed at Girtrell Court and agreed the situation is unsettling for all involved.

He informed the Committee how Girtrell Court is the only care home for adults owned by the Council and that the majority of this type of care across the country is now provided by the independent sector. He explained how the care currently being provided at this facility could be provided by an extensive range of independent providers across the Borough and in the Region. This would offer more choice to people that want different types of support.

Members and Residents then heard, from the Director, how the cost to the Council is £1,500 per week, for every bed occupied at Girtrell Court. He explained that he would still have the equivalent of an average of £1000 per week to spend on alternative types of care but that the Council provided service is relatively very high cost, so the plan is to use the money is available better.

Mr Hodgkinson acknowledged that the list of alternative provision submitted to carers and service users did have some gaps and omissions and that not all appropriate services had been listed. He then assured all involved that the Council has a clear duty of care to identify specific needs and that he would not allow for users to be placed elsewhere without a detailed needs assessment.

The Chair then invited Cllrs Whittingham and Smith, Cabinet Members and members of the Constituency Committee to respond to comments raised.

Councillor Smith addressed the Committee to remind Members and residents that the matter is still out for consultation and that no decision would be made until such time whereby every person who uses facilities at Girtrell Court has had a one to one needs assessment.

A Member of the public then addressed the Committee to express concerns that no bookings were being taken at Girtrell Court from March onwards. He stated how he felt this to have meant the decision to be pre - determined.

In response to this comment, Councillor D Elderton a Member agreed that this is a real concern and urged the Committee to recommend to the Cabinet that bookings should continue to be taken

Members then passed comment following questions and subsequent responses and explained their own personal experiences with the work undertaken and services available at Girtrell Court. It was stated that the problem is with not knowing the outcome of the consultation and how a key priority for the Council is the protection of vulnerable people.

It was moved by Councillor Green and duly seconded and

**Resolved (9:0:with 6 abstentions) –**

- (1) That the Wirral West Constituency Committee regard proposed saving options in respect of Girtell Court to be over optimistic and express concern to the Cabinet regarding the lack of planning and uncertainty regarding alternative provisions to those offered at Girtrell Court; and**
- (2) the Wirral West Constituency Committee recommend that bookings continue to be taken at Girtrell Court from March onwards until such time that a formal decision has been made.**