

Derby City Council: Consultation on Care Home Closure Proposals

Report on consultation at Warwick House

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1. Introduction

Agencia Consulting was commissioned by Derby City Council (DCC) in November 2010 to support consultation on DCC proposals to close two of their care homes; Warwick House and Merrill House. Agencia was to provide a neutral and independent role in supporting current residents of the two homes and their families to discuss the proposals and submit their comments to the Council for consideration as part of the decision-making process. Full details of the Agencia plans for undertaking this role were agreed with DCC in November.

The consultation process was launched by DCC on 1st December 2010, with documents setting out the proposals being issued to residents and their relatives and discussed at brief meetings at each home. This was followed by opportunities to respond through further meetings and in writing, as outlined in section 3 below.

This final report on Warwick House summarises the consultation process, analyses the main points arising from meetings and responses received and identifies the principal issues to be considered and addressed by DCC in deciding the way forward. This report is to be considered by Council Cabinet. It is only at that point that a final decision will be made and the date for this decision will be Tuesday 12th April 2011.

Throughout this report and the supporting documentation, the Agencia team has sought to record and present accurately the nature of the comments made by respondents. We were not, however, in a position to verify or comment on the validity of the views expressed to us. During the consultation period, DCC responded to some requests for additional information, both in meetings and in written papers. We have not reflected that additional information in this report as it would be outside our brief of reporting the views of residents and their families and carers.

The Agencia team would like to thank all those who participated or responded in any way to the consultation process, for taking the time to share their experiences and views with us. We recognise that many of those involved have been very concerned and emotional about the proposed closure of Warwick House and we have tried to reflect their views as clearly and objectively as possible in this report.

2. Background to the proposals and consultation

2.1 The DCC proposals

On 23rd November 2010 Derby City Council Cabinet made a decision to allow consultation on a proposal to close Warwick House care home for older people. The consultation process began on Wednesday 1st December 2010 and ended on Wednesday 23rd February 2011.

DCC issued a consultation document setting out their proposal, the main points of which are summarised in the box below:

Warwick House has 28 bedrooms. 6 bedrooms are occupied by long-term residents. A further 6 bedrooms, known as the Cherry Tree Unit, are used to provide Intermediate Care. The remaining rooms are used to provide emergency and respite care.

The Council has been considering changes to care home services for some time. Reports were presented to Council Cabinet on 17th March 2009, 27th October 2009 and 16th February 2010 setting out the reasons that changes needed to be made and the time over which changes should take place.

The main reasons set out for change were:

- 1. Fewer people were moving into care homes each year because they were now better supported at home*
- 2. This meant there were too many care home places in Derby as a whole*
- 3. There was very little Extra Care Housing in Derby and older people said they wanted this as an alternative to care home places*
- 4. There needed to be a clearer focus on dementia and on intermediate care (short-term rehabilitation designed to help people return home)*
- 5. The Council's care homes were built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s for more able people than currently live in them. Although staff are generally excellent the designs of the homes do not support good care.*

On 16th February 2010 Council Cabinet agreed that Warwick House should be adapted to provide specialist dementia care.

However, like many other Local Authorities, the Council's financial situation has changed a great deal in the last year. Firstly, the Council has much less money available to build new services like specialist dementia care homes and Extra Care Housing. The decision Council Cabinet has made is to focus available investment on building Extra Care Housing. This is why the proposal to develop specialist dementia care at Warwick House has been abandoned.

Secondly, the Council can no longer justify running all of its care homes if there are too many care home places in Derby as a whole.

There are two ways that closing Warwick House would help the Council:

- 1. Day to day running costs will be saved*
- 2. The selling of the site will give the Council money to help develop more Extra Care Housing. The Council is having to rely more and more on its own funding for these developments since other Government funding has dried up.*

The Council's financial situation has speeded up the need for change, but the principles of the previous work still apply. The five reasons for change set out still stand. In particular, there are still too many care home places in Derby. The report shows that the numbers of beds could be reduced by 78 and there would still be enough places for older people who need to move into residential care.

This principle of making sure there are enough places for older people is extremely important. Care home beds cannot be cut so much that vulnerable older people have nowhere to move. Although money is clearly an important factor, the overriding consideration is that there are enough care home places for older people at any given time.

Another principle of the previous work that is still very important is to look at the different needs of different areas and not treat Derby in a "one-size-fits-all" way. Warwick House is one of two sites chosen out of the Council's seven homes because there are enough local alternatives to support the area if the home is closed in September 2011.

Ensuring older people have proper access to good dementia care is still essential although the approach to achieve this has changed. The Council's commitment to providing Intermediate Care that helps people regain confidence and skills to return home when it is safe also remains strong.

2.2 Impact of proposed changes on residents at Warwick House

The Council recognises that closure of the home would be extremely difficult for residents, respite attendees, family members and friends, as well as staff working in the home. If closure was confirmed the Council would work sensitively with affected people, exploring good quality alternatives over a manageable period of time that minimises the stress of moving.

For everybody affected:

- Council Care Managers will work very closely with residents, respite attendees and their families, looking at whether needs have changed and making sure their wishes are central to decisions.
- Residents or respite attendees without involved family members or friends will be offered advocacy by an independent organisation that can help them express their wishes.
- Approximately six months will be allowed between any decision to close Warwick House and its actual closure so that decisions are not rushed.

For long-term residents:

- Permanent residents will be supported to move to care homes that meet their needs in locations they prefer.
- Some residents may prefer to move to other Council-run care homes. This may be an option but extreme caution needs to be exercised: the Council has made it clear that other care homes will undergo consultation on closure as the demand for places falls further.
- Some residents will have developed friendships at Warwick House and may prefer to move in groups. This will be accommodated when at all possible.

For respite attendees:

- Respite attendees will also be given help to access different respite arrangements that suit them.

- The Council's obligation to meet individual respite needs will not change if the home closes.

For intermediate care attendees:

- Intermediate care arrangements will be switched to Perth House.
- The same number of beds as now will be available so, apart from a change of location, people with intermediate care needs should not experience any difference in their service.

2.3 Scope of the consultation

The current consultation relates to the proposal to close Warwick House and is limited to people directly affected by the proposed changes to Warwick House. These include:

- Residents of Warwick House
- The families, carers and advocates of the above
- Council staff who work in Warwick House
- Wider stakeholders who have an interest in the development of older people's services in the area including local residents and community groups.

The current consultation is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of plans for care services across the whole City of Derby.

2.4 Agencia's role in the consultation

The Council recognises the significance of these proposals and has therefore recruited Agencia Consulting as an independent organisation to facilitate and report on the consultation for them. Agencia Consulting has considerable experience of ensuring that people affected by change and their families are properly engaged in consultation. All responses to the consultation have been directed to Agencia Consulting.

Agencia's role in the consultation was:

- to advise DCC with regard to the consultation process;
- to arrange, run and facilitate a programme of consultation meetings in the care homes, for those using the services and their families;
- to support residents, service users and relatives in giving feedback on the proposals, both through the meetings in homes and directly to Agencia by telephone and in writing;
- to receive and report on responses from other organisations and individuals expressing views on the Council's proposals;
- to record and analyse the feedback received through the consultation process, and
- to produce a report to the Council, highlighting the main issues for consideration.

(Based on consultation document issued by Derby City Council)

3. The approach to consultation

3.1 Launch Meetings

Meetings were held at Warwick and Merrill House on Wednesday 1st December to launch the consultation process, and were well attended. Each commenced with a brief summary of the DCC proposals and the consultation process, followed by discussion of issues raised by those present, including both residents and their relatives, together with some community representatives. The main points raised at those initial meetings were both similar and are summarised below:

- Why were external consultants being used to run the consultation and at what cost? Why was money being spent in this way when it could be better used on the care of older people? Many suggested they would rather speak to DCC representatives directly to express their views. People criticised the fact that DCC Councillors were not present to hear their views and requested that they attend meetings in each home as soon as possible (subsequently arranged for 14th January at Warwick House)
- Had the decision already been made to close these homes?
- What was the rationale for the closure of these homes and where was the evidence to support the proposals?
- Both homes were seen to be very well used and popular – why was DCC seeking to close them?
- Concerns were expressed about the standard of care in other local care homes, where DCC had suggested alternative places were available.
- Information was requested about the cost of running the homes and potential savings to be made – why was it not viable for DCC to continue running homes which were well occupied, if private homes were able to make a profit?
- People were strongly critical of other DCC spending plans and felt more priority should be given to looking after vulnerable older people.
- Some questioned why DCC had spent money recently on improving the decorations and furnishings in the homes if it was intended to close them.
- Some residents had already been moved from other DCC homes which were threatened with closure, and strong concerns were expressed about the impact of such disruption and repeated moves on their health.
- A request was made that the Agencia report on the outcomes of consultation with residents and their relatives should be made available to them, prior to it being presented to the Cabinet for decision.

3.2 The consultation process

Immediately following the launch meetings, arrangements were put in place for meetings to be held in January for residents and their relatives to meet the Agencia team and discuss their views on the DCC proposals for each home. Dates were agreed and publicised and a process was established for people to book meetings directly with Agencia or through care home staff where appropriate.

The booking for these meetings was slow at first, with some people expressing concerns about meeting an external consultancy paid for by DCC. However, initial meetings were held in Warwick

House on 7th January and were reasonably well attended. Further meetings were held on the 18th January and attendance proved much greater. Summaries of the main points raised at these meetings are given in chapter 4.

In addition, many families responded to the consultation proposals in writing and by telephone. These responses were collated and analysed, and are reported later in this report. In addition, families responded to the consultation proposals in writing and by telephone. These responses are also reported later in this report.

3.3 Responses to consultation

The nature and scale of responses to the proposals through the different media varied significantly, but the following summary will provide an indication of the numbers directly involved in each way. However, it should be borne in mind that many others were informed and chose not to respond, often having spoken informally to staff or other contacts.

In total, the Agencia team met with 20 people (excluding staff) during the consultation meetings at Warwick House, representing 17 residents. Additionally, there were 13 written responses received in relation to Warwick House (5 comments forms, and 8 letters).

3.4 Recording and analysis of comments

The Agencia team kept a written record of the main comments made in meetings with residents and their relatives, and these were then typed up and processed. All comments were coded and summarised in a spreadsheet to assist analysis and comparison of issues arising from the various meetings.

A log was maintained in the Agencia office of all comments received from individuals or organisations by telephone or in written form (by letter, email or comments form). Acknowledgements, or specific responses where appropriate, were sent to those respondents who indicated they wished to receive a reply. Again, all comments received were summarised, entered onto a spreadsheet and analysed in compiling this report.

The fact that responses were being recorded and analysed throughout the consultation process allowed issues to be identified and considered as they arose, rather than waiting until the consultation period had closed before doing so. This enabled issues to be picked up in correspondence and discussions as appropriate, and allowed DCC, who were leading the process, to assess the issues raised and decide on any further action required during the consultation period (e.g. meetings with Councillors and provision of additional information). Nevertheless, this present report was only produced following the conclusion of the consultation period, and every effort has been made to ensure that all issues have been given a fair hearing and equal weighting, however and whenever they were raised.

4. Findings: meetings with residents and their families

The Agencia team visited Warwick House on Friday 7th and Tuesday 18th January, when meetings were held with individuals or small family groups, representing 17 (permanent, respite and intermediate care) residents. A similar semi-structured agenda was followed in each meeting and the main points were reported back to a group of 17 (residents, relatives and staff) on Tuesday 1st February for validation and refinement. The DCC lead officer was in attendance at this meeting, and provided additional information in response to questions raised in the earlier meetings.

Given the nature and content of the consultation process outlined above, and the level of detail emerging from meetings, every comment made cannot be presented in full in this report. In this section, therefore, we have attempted to summarise the findings from the meetings with residents and relatives.

To reiterate the point made in the introduction, throughout this report and the supporting documentation, the Agencia team has sought to record and present accurately the nature of the comments made by respondents. We were not, however, in a position to verify or comment on the validity of the views expressed to us.

4.1 Understanding of the consultation process and Derby City Council (DCC) proposals

- Most relatives said that they had seen the consultation document, although some permanent residents said that they had not seen it.
- The proposals in the document were generally understood, but were considered too vague on the rationale for the proposed closure and the implications for residents. More information was needed on the rationale for the proposal and how the planned closure would be implemented.
- Some residents and relatives expressed concerns about how the proposal had been announced, with some hearing about it through the local media, rather than directly from the Council. This immediately caused hostility – *“the person responsible for the PR on this should be shot.”*
- One former resident said he found the document insulting: *“document states ‘Warwick House is generally excellent.’ What is not excellent? Take the word generally out...”* and felt he had to support the vulnerable people who could not stand up for themselves.
- Two permanent residents said that they had not taken much notice of the consultation process or proposals, as they were determined not to leave Warwick House: *“This is my home and I’m not leaving; I’ve been here XX years”* and *“I’m dependent on Warwick House.”*
- One permanent resident referred to the document as being impersonal – *“they’ve sent the same letter to everyone, but we’re all different.”*

4.2 Proposed Closure of Warwick House

- Most people spoken to expressed concern at the Council’s apparent lack of a plan / strategy on what they would do, if homes close, with the residents and respite clients. Most believe DCC has not got a plan. If there was a plan, DCC had not discussed it with

anyone, compounding the fears of those affected. In particular, one relative who is a care home inspector said that Perth House was being changed into intermediate care beds and therefore would not provide an alternative for respite.

- Relatives understood the need for DCC to save money and cut costs, but wanted to see far more of the evidence upon which DCC had selected Warwick House for potential closure. The lack of factual information about previous studies / surveys which supported the consultation document e.g. bed numbers, extra care housing, was of serious concern to all parties. (N.B. Some additional information on the issues raised was handed out by DCC at the feedback meeting on 1 February).
- Many relatives expressed the view that the proposal to close Warwick House was misguided – the proposals were perceived as purely financially/budget driven rather than needs driven.
- Several relatives said that they did not believe that there was a reducing demand for the services of Warwick House – *“we are the baby boomers and there will be more demand for services, not less.”*
- Some residents and families had experience of other homes (4 others in one case) and felt Warwick House was best, as it provided a home rather than simply a place to live. Why choose Warwick House for closure, when all were very happy with the standard of care provided?
- Many relatives expressed concerns about the quality of private homes *“one private home was a disgrace.”* Concerns centred round perceptions that private homes were exclusive (e.g. do not accept residents who are incontinent or are partially sighted) and were not inspected in the same way as DCC homes. One relative requested information on the revised DCC plans for dementia care in private homes.
- Some referred to the £90 million (including loan repayments) reportedly being spent by the Council on improvements to the Council House offices and felt this demonstrated the Council had not thought through its priorities.
- Some residents and relatives expressed concern that they faced the prospect of ‘another move.’ Examples were given of individuals already having moved once or twice (some from other DCC homes) and the upset that moving again would cause. One relative said that Councillor Jennings (the Leader of the Council) had stated on the radio that all council-run homes in Derby would close. If so, it was felt that this presented a very different situation (both with regard to available alternatives and staff job opportunities) to that of only Warwick closing. There was a strong demand for information on plans and timescales for the closure of other DCC homes.
- The apparent lack of serious effort to keep relatives / staff together if moves went ahead was a source of great distress to many of those interviewed.
- One relative suggested that the closure of Warwick House would have been more acceptable if it was replaced by a new dementia unit, as DCC had initially proposed, although that would still have been difficult for residents. However, to close it now without any real justification or replacement was wholly unacceptable.
- One relative suggested that there had been a ‘wilful neglect’ of council care homes, so as to force their closure.
- There was a feeling that the consultation and the Agencia report would not stop Warwick House from being closed, so what was the point of the consultation?

- There was a strong plea to DCC to think again and keep Warwick House open. One resident offered an invitation to Councillor Jennings to come and visit Warwick House and witness what the home did for people, before reaching a decision.

4.3 Impact of proposals on care of individual residents

- Several residents and relatives said that people would not physically survive if they had to move. They were also worried about the effect of a move on those with dementia *"it is very cruel to move people with dementia"* and *"the anxiety of going somewhere else will affect her memory."* One relative said that the Council had *"grossly underestimated the disorientation and anxiety caused to older people and especially those with dementia. The impact needed to be understood by the Council and taken on board."*
- Respondents requested more information about what the options would be for residents – what short term respite care places would be available, in which homes and at what cost? *"It is not enough just to have a place in respite; it needs to be consistent-the same place."*
- Most respondents questioned whether alternative homes could offer anything like the same quality experienced at Warwick House. The quality of the intermediate care provided at Warwick House was seen to be very high, with one former resident saying it had *"helped to restore his faith in humanity"* and another resident saying *"the care here is out of this world!"* Could this quality of service be continued at Perth House in future?
- People would need real help and support from the Council in looking at the alternatives, especially those with little family support. Most were unaware of the options available and how they would be able to access them.
- What would be the financial impact of any move for residents and their families? – would DCC support any additional fees or costs involved in people moving to private sector homes, which they feared would be more expensive? If so, would this support be available for anybody choosing to move at an earlier stage?
- All relatives of those receiving respite care said that they would not be able to manage without regular high quality respite, and many emphasised the trust they had in the Warwick House staff and services. Several relatives stated that if respite services were not available, residents would have to be placed in full-time care; relatives would not be able to continue caring for them in their own homes: *"if respite is not available, I'll dump mother on the council steps tomorrow."*
- Several relatives and residents stated that Extra Care Housing would not provide enough care to meet their complex needs. Lack of sociability associated with Extra Care Housing was also a real concern – people would be more isolated in small flats.
- All the permanent residents said that they had expected to be able to stay at Warwick House forever – they feel safe and the staff understand them.
- Questions were asked about how furniture and personal belongings would be moved –one lady has been there 23 years and has a lot of furniture.
- Concern was expressed by many about whether residents would have to change GPs as a result of a move – this could be very disruptive to their care.

4.4 Important issues to be addressed if decision is reached to close the home

- The permanent residents (and others) stated that the way in which the proposals had been communicated and the speed of the proposed closure, were what had made people so bitter: *"they should have done this in a more gradual way-let people pass on. The way they have done this is wrong."*
- Two relatives insisted that clear individual medical and social work assessments of each resident would need to be made in advance of any move being made. It was not clear if DCC had a plan for doing this. In view of the potential impact on health, it was suggested that a planned merger with another DCC home would be preferable to the dispersal envisaged, to reduce the disruption for residents.
- People felt that choice would be limited, because of the higher fee levels involved in many private sector homes – would DCC support any additional cost? Most families said that they could not afford to pay more for services in private homes. A few individuals said that they valued Warwick House so much, that they would rather pay more than face the disruption of moving.
- Several relatives involved in caring for elderly family members stressed that they themselves were an ageing generation on pensions, and therefore limited in terms of the care and finance that they could provide.
- Many spoke very highly of the staff group and their commitment, describing them as having a vocation and very special values. Several families expressed anger at the prospect of breaking up what was considered to be an excellent team of staff – *"I wouldn't be at this meeting if I didn't think that the place and the staff were worth saving."*
- Some questioned why DCC appeared not to value older people and respect their needs and wishes *"Where's the Putting People First policy in all this?"* and *"We keep hearing all this talk about 'choice.' What choice do the people here have? None."*
- A couple of relatives raised the issue of whether they were able to plan and make respite bookings beyond September – *"Can the Council provide assurances regarding bookings beyond September? We can't book our holiday until we know we've got respite."*

4.5 Any other comments or suggestions

- Positive statements were made about developing the Warwick House site and making constructive use of land and space. For example, several relatives suggested that the Warwick House site facilities could be further maximised by attaching day care to the site. There was anger that money had been spent on work to upgrade a building which DCC now proposed to close. This was perceived as DCC demonstrating a lack of foresight.
- One relative (also employed as a care home inspector) said that he could not see any needs-driven rationale for going down the Extra Care Housing route; he felt ECH was inappropriate for people with dementia.
- It was suggested that there needed to be provision for short-term respite care in the service model. Where was this? *"The private sector does not offer this."*
- One relative suggested that a better way of saving money would be for DCC to share some of its services with other councils.

- There was a perception that the Council had not handled the consultation well. As a result, there was significant mistrust towards the council: *“we feel the council are trying to pull the wool over our eyes”* and *“the press have been turned away - they are trying to hide things.”*
- Many people said that DCC had given confusing messages about the future of Warwick House over the last 18 months. As a result, respondents reported that *“we can’t believe anything they say.”* One relative stated that the meeting with the Councillors had gone well; many others said that they thought the council would change to Labour on May 4th and it was hoped that this would save Warwick House from closure.
- One group of residents and relatives said that if Warwick House closed, they would want the council to resign.
- It was said frequently that residents had worked / fought to give this country freedom / free speech and were owed some consideration / debt. There was a feeling that the Council had demonstrated little regard for this.
- Several people expressed their appreciation at being able to attend a small group or one-to-one session to discuss their concerns – some did not like large meetings.

5. Findings: comments forms from residents and families

This section sets out details of the issues raised from comments forms received by Agencia. In total, 5 comments forms were received and of these, 3 were anonymous. The most frequently raised issues have been summarised below.

5.1 Understanding of the consultation process and Derby City Council (DCC) proposals

- Of comments forms that were completed, most respondents reported that they understood the consultation process (4 out of 5). The other 1 respondent did not provide a response to this question.
- Three respondents reported that they understood the DCC proposals, and 2 did not provide a response to the question.
- Some more specific comments were made and these are picked up in the subsequent sections of this report.

5.2 Proposed Closure of Warwick House

- Respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal to close Warwick House and anger was expressed by several:

“Derby City Council have no thought for the elderly people of Derby. The people of Derby are not backing you in this matter.”

“Disgusting.”

“Carers get very little free time when caring for the elderly, and the break at Warwick for the relative makes all the difference to the carer when caring 24/7 and you propose to take this away. I think your proposals are dreadful.”

- There was a real lack of understanding as to the rationale for closure:

“I understand the proposals for change, but find reasons 4 and 5 to only be pertinent to Warwick House, as it is mainly used as emergency and respite care; including the Cherry Tree Unit which provides intermediate care and is not substantially residential. Therefore do not understand reasons 1, 2 and 3, which relate to residential care homes and users.”

“I don't believe there are too many care home places in Derby. I believe demand will increase and that the Council should provide care rather than buying in private care services.”

- This was reinforced by the belief held by some that the proposal was not in the best interests of residents, and a feeling that the Council did not understand the consequences that a closure would have on those effected:

“It is a shame that the Council puts little or no priority on dementia care, especially with more and more people suffering its influences yearly, and solely wants to

concentrate on extra care housing, thus limiting places for respite care users and making emergency respite near on impossible, with limited places.”

“It will only be closed so the Council can save money, not as they imply in the interests of the residents and respite users.”

“They have closed other care homes in Derby and just abandoned them to be vandalised. It is not in the best interests of the residents or the respite users but a way for the council to eventually negate all responsibility for the aged.”

5.3 Impact of proposals on care of individual residents

- More than half (3 respondents) reported that they understood the proposals for their or their family member's care and 2 did not provide a response.
- Of respondents that understand the proposals, the overriding theme amongst comments made was worry about not being able to obtain respite care if Warwick House were to close:

“I suggest you ring round and try and get respite care when needed. Not easy - no places.”

- This worry was greatest amongst relatives whose family members had particular health problems which might mean they were prevented from accessing private care services:

“As you may or may not know, it is not always possible to place a person with dementia into any care home.”

“My father, who is blind and in his eighties uses Warwick House for respite to allow myself and my husband to go on holiday and to work on his house. If it closes where will he go? There will not be the same number of places as now and he cannot go into private care as very few will take blind people and more importantly you cannot pre-book places months in advance”.

- The point was made that the consistency of respite care was important. There was a fear that whilst the Council might make respite beds available elsewhere, these may be located across the City, forcing individuals to go wherever availability existed on each occasion that respite was needed:

“It would be a great pity if my father had to go to another home for respite care as he is used to regular stays at Warwick House. It would be even less acceptable if he were to be placed in a different home each time, which I fear might happen.

The services provided by Warwick House were rated highly and praised by many – *“Warwick House is a well run and caring environment.”* Consequently, several respondents felt that the impact of the proposals on the care of individual residents needed further research and exploration. Commentators felt upset and “patronised” by suggestions that their relatives should access community facilities and participate in everyday activities.

“Needs looking into more fully.”

"There is no better support at home because you don't provide it."

- Considerable anger was directed towards the Council, with commentators expressing criticism of the Council's approach to older people. Anger was exacerbated as a result of the perceived misguided spending priorities of the Council:

"Where do you intend to send the elderly when the carer needs a break? You have a duty of care to the elderly, but you propose to dump them."

"You state council care homes built 1950, 1960, 1970. Well bring them up to standards. Spend your money on the elderly instead of spending wastefully on a new Council House. Look after the elderly."

"They are spending millions on the Council House but claim there is not enough cash to maintain Warwick House."

5.4 Important issues to be addressed if decision is reached to close the home

- Respondents were clear that Warwick House is highly valued by residents and relatives and there was a plea for the Council to keep it open:

"I trust Warwick House and its care."

"Warwick House, with its small number of residents and a constant change of respite guests has been able to provide a hotel-like atmosphere which is greatly appreciated by everyone."

- Several commentators recognised that the Council was moving away from Local Authority provision towards private provision:

"Will there be an alternative council home for residents and respite users? The answer has to be no. Having listened to Councillor Webb and then heard Harvey Jennings on Radio Derby it is clear they wish to close them all and put everyone into private care."

- Private care homes were viewed negatively by respondents and questions were raised about their affordability:

"...tried private care homes with dire consequences, i.e. brain washing her to believe she wants to stay in the care home, alienating against family members and having to go in and literally remove her on the set date with none of her clothes packed ready for her exit."

"If we have to use private homes will the council pay towards our expenses?"

5.5 Any other comments or suggestions

- Respondents were extremely concerned about how they perceived the Council to be operating. There was a feeling that DCC was targeting the most vulnerable members of society:

“Derby City Council is the worst council in England. The people who make these proposals are mindless human beings, with no thought for the elderly, families or carers.”

“...putting more and more pressure on the families and you're not content with closing care homes you want to end day centres. Give the carers a break.”

“...targeting the vulnerable and needy.”

- Echoing the feedback obtained from the consultation meetings, commentators emphasised the need for stability, comfort and care in a familiar environment, including familiar staff, and felt that DCC had placed far too much emphasis on the state of the buildings and the need for en-suite facilities:

“Warwick House may be old and not a brilliant set up for dementia care, but I believe to modernise some of it, to bring it up to date, until more money is available, would be more practical than removing already stretched respite services.”

- Many respondents reiterated that they failed to understand why the Council was proposing to close Warwick House. In particular, points were made regarding the reasons given about lack of demand:

“It would be interesting to know the average number of free beds throughout the year, both in Warwick House and in all care homes in the Derby area.”

“The council needs to review its proposals and realise that they or their parents may unfortunately need the services they have got rid of.”

“With a population steadily getting older it stands to sense that more respite places will be required (not less).”

- There was widespread suspicion that the proposal to close Warwick House was purely financially driven, rather than being in the best interests of the residents and community. This was a source of anger and upset:

“You say you have much less money available, but you can find enough to build a new Council House. Put the elderly first.”

“It's all about money.”

“To sell off the land, at a time when prices are low does not make economic sense and how long will it take to build Councillor Webb's “villages”?”

- The perceived financial motivation behind the proposal and the feeling that the proposals and consultations had been hastily developed had resulted in a belief amongst some people that the Council had something to hide:

“The timescale is too short, they do not seem to have thought these proposals out and one can only assume that they wish to rush it through as quickly as possible.”

6. Findings: letters from residents and their families

Eight letters were received in relation to Warwick House including two from a solicitor representing 6 residents. The main issues are summarised below:

6.1 Understanding of the consultation process and Derby City Council (DCC) proposals

- There was little comment made in the letters received regarding people's understanding of the consultation process and the Council proposals. However, several queried whether the proposed closure would equate to genuine financial savings:

"We understand the pressures to reduce costs but surely a £300,000 saving by closing these homes, whilst it is a sizeable amount, is really only small fry to the Council."

"Where will all the respite people and people who come to Warwick following operations go? It would cost more money to move them I'm sure"

6.2 Proposed Closure of Warwick House

- All letters received made reference to the high standards of care received at Warwick House. In particular, the respite service offered was held in high regard and very much appreciated by many:

"My father has received excellent care, nursing and support from the short term respite care at Warwick House."

"I speak very highly of Warwick House. The management are very caring, nothing is too much trouble. It's a lovely home for the residents."

"Warwick House is a fit for purpose, well run establishment, which provides care for its residents and proves invaluable to the community by providing much needed short term care places."

"I have experienced the excellent care provided by the home, as my adoptive grandmother stayed there for respite care. She always spoke highly of the staff and the care she received. Knowing she was safe and happy whilst there was always so helpful."

"After several weeks in hospital my mother was moved to "Cherry Tree". Whilst visiting daily I was surprised by what a bright and cheerful place it was. The environment certainly helped towards her recovery. The staff could not be faulted. "Cherry Tree" has a very friendly family atmosphere."

- Worry and frustration were expressed at the prospect of Warwick House closing:

"It is a daunting prospect to think that it is being considered for closure."

“The proposed closure is scandalous in the light of the Council's commitment to spend millions on the refurbishment of its offices.”

“Not everybody can afford retirement villages - these plans should be shelved until the economic recession improves.”

6.3 Impact of proposals on care of individual residents

- Letters received frequently emphasised that the care homes were now ‘home’ to the residents, providing the safety and security people needed when they had to move from their own homes:

“After 23 years of residence my mother has no intention of voluntarily cooperating with the Council's plan to close Warwick House.”

“Regards Warwick House as home, and views staff and resident as family members.”

- Several letters highlighted the fear caused by the proposed changes. Primarily, this was because of the disruption involved, which was seen to be dangerous and life threatening. However, some were of the opinion that the stress and uncertainties arising from the Council's proposals and the consultation were already having a detrimental impact on their/their relative's health and quality of life, and wanted the Council to know this.

“My father has been a resident of Warwick House for the past 4 years, he was at Bramble Brook previously but moved because we thought it was going to close - at the age of 100 I feel another move would kill him.”

6.4 Important issues to be addressed if decision is reached to close the home

- Several letters mentioned issues that people felt needed addressing if a decision was reached to close the home. One contained a reminder that:

“Warwick House is not just bricks and mortar, it is people's homes and jobs.”

It was felt that due consideration for this was important. Another highlighted the fact that for some residents, any move would be ‘another move,’ since some had already been moved from other Council homes:

“At least one other resident has been relocated here from another closed home.”

- There was a view that the proposed alternative provision to Warwick House set out by the Council was inadequate:

“The only other alternative offered was home care visits, which are failing in the basic standards of care and reliability.”

- A further suggestion was made with regard to the way in which Warwick House might be closed, should this be implemented. This could involve a phased closure:

“The most compassionate outcome would be to allow Warwick to continue to function as long as the remaining permanent residents require the service, and then reassess the situation.”

6.5 Any other comments or suggestions

- Other comments made in the letters received include:

“I am a neighbour of Warwick House and would like to support their work to keep the home open.”

“If these closures come about it will be a great loss to the elderly community of Derby - we will lose two of our crown jewels!”

7. Findings: letters from advocates

Two letters were received from a firm of Solicitors representing six residents Warwick House. Again the main points of their comments are summarised below.

- Given the advanced age of the residents a move from their home was a disproportionate and inappropriate response to the problems identified by the Council. They should be allowed to spend the rest of their days in their current home.
- In autumn 2009, Phil Holmes wrote to their clients and then visited to explain that Warwick House would be their home for good.
- The extra care model was not suitable for their clients.
- Their clients were concerned that the cost of accommodation and care at an independently run home was likely to be more than the cost at a Council run home and although the Council stated that it would cover the difference, their clients believed that they would not have the means or the wish to do so.
- Clients did not believe that there would be sufficient beds available to give every resident sufficient choice to be with their friends.
- Clients regarded Warwick House, the residents and staff as their family home, and considered it their human right to remain there.
- The Council had given priority to renovating its own premises at a cost of some £40 million whereas that project should have been postponed during the course of residents' lifetimes so as to make funds available to enable residents to remain in their home.

8. Findings: telephone comments

One telephone call was received in relation to providing feedback about the proposal to close Warwick House. Key comments made were as follows:

"I would like a face to face meeting with Phil Holmes."

"I have just tried to book respite at Warwick and it's not available."

"Where are these empty beds?"

"I would like to invite Phil Holmes to move in with me for a fortnight and see what it's really like.."