



## **Derby City Council: Consultation on Care Home Closure Proposals**

### **Report on consultation with staff of Merrill House**

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## Findings: feedback from staff

As part of the consultation at Merrill House, the Agencia team held a meeting with 10 staff, including the home manager. Staff were encouraged to speak freely about their concerns for the care of their residents, but HR and other job-related issues could not be covered in this session. The meeting followed the same format as those held with residents and their relatives and the main points arising are summarised below:

### Understanding of the consultation process and DCC proposals

- All staff understood the consultation process and the proposals.
- The staff attitude was to continue to operate as 'business as usual' and they were still taking bookings. However, this was challenging when it was not clear how long Merrill House would remain open – *"we had a relative call up asking for a place who said 'I hope mum dies before you close'."*

### Proposed closure of Merrill House

- Staff explained that Merrill House (and other Local Authority homes) was popular with residents and relatives because of the high standards – *"we are audited every month" and "we know horror stories regarding independent sector homes."*
- Staff believed that the figures for the consultation document on care home demand were inaccurate – *"social workers were told to push the independent sector, so we didn't get the calls and bookings. They fixed the figures for the survey."*
- Staff disagreed that there was a reduction in demand for Merrill House beds and were unsure of where the cited spare 78 beds were. They assumed that these were all private beds and if so, were concerned that the private sector would not be able to cope with a sudden surge in demand.
- Staff disagreed that closing Merrill House would save money. Instead they believed that closing Merrill House would cost the council more due to having to supplement private care home costs, build Extra Care Housing and increase the numbers of hospital admissions.
- Various concerns about substituting Extra Care Housing for Merrill House were raised. This included the fact that ECH was not yet built and once it was built, it would not be suitable for the residents of Merrill House.
- The absence of factual information on previous studies and surveys which supported the consultation document (e.g. bed numbers and extra care housing) was of serious concern to staff.
- A few staff were sceptical that the money saved from closing homes would be reinvested into building new homes for the elderly. This view had arisen as a result of other homes being closed under the same premise, but sites then being left derelict and susceptible to vandalism.

### Impact of proposals on care of individual residents

- All staff expressed concern about the effect that the consultation was having on residents – *“my major concern is about the residents”* and *“we have a duty of care, but we can’t stand up and say anything.”*
- Staff gave examples of the last time that residents had been moved, and suggested that the stress of moving had meant that 5 residents had died. They were of the opinion that this would happen again if Merrill House were to close – *“moving is one of the most stressful events in anyone’s life, let alone for the elderly.”*
- Staff said that a move would confuse residents with dementia and Alzheimer’s – *“if you rip people away and put them somewhere else, it’s like being on a desert island.”*
- There was a plea from staff that residents and staff be kept together and moved with residents if a move proved necessary *“can you pick us all up and move us together?”*

### Impact of proposals on staff

- The majority of staff present indicated that they were frightened to speak openly to Agencia, saying that they were frightened about jobs and their futures – *“people are fighting between them for jobs;”* *“there may be a chance of re-deployment, but there’ll only be one home left to get a job at...”* and *“we have been told that we will have to re-interview for our jobs.”*
- Staff reported they were not told of proposals directly, and found out from reading it in the paper.
- All staff expressed their shock and sadness at the prospect of losing jobs which are ‘more than just a job’ – *“I’ve worked here for 15 years and spent Christmas here. I’m part of the family-it’s really sad”* and *“we are more than just workers, we are family.”*
- A senior staff member had been pre-warned of proposals on the morning of her going on holiday but told to speak to no-one *“my holiday was booked in advance; I wouldn’t have gone otherwise.”*
- Since the launch of the consultation process, staff said that no DCC manager had been to discuss it with them and there had been no HR involvement in any way from DCC-*“there has been no consideration for the staff.”*
- They also reported that no trade union had contacted staff.
- Staff had heard that their conditions of service might change with lower pay / less leave / sick time. Although this was unofficial information, they were concerned about the impact on morale and the potential impact on the care provided to residents.
- Staff were of the opinion that the Council’s proposals for closure of Merrill House were not transparent – *“all seems shrouded in secrecy. We don’t trust the Council; it’s not the first time they’ve done this...”*

### Any other comments or suggestions

- The key message given from staff was not to close the home, and a plea for DCC to think about the old people.