

Brighton and Hove UNISON Consultation Response

Wellington House

This is our response as the trade union that represents the majority of the Wellington House workforce. Our answers are developed from a considerable number of meetings with Wellington House staff and discussions with parents, carers and stakeholder organisations during the months we have been representing and supporting our members at Wellington House and in our campaigning to protect and keep this service.

4 – Reasons for our answer

We strongly oppose the proposal to close Wellington House for a number of reasons:

- This is not just about individuals. Wellington House is a family and a community that has grown over decades. This simply cannot be replicated by farming service users out to a number of external providers.
- We believe there is a strong risk in cutting this provision without having properly done a needs assessment of adults with learning disabilities in the city that aren't currently engaging with day services and the financial implications of them not accessing quality day care. This cohort can and should be identified and encouraged to access Wellington House.
- The financial risks associated with home-care relationships breaking down and the council then having to fulfil its statutory duty to provide residential care are considerable. Just one premature breakdown in home-care would wipe out this saving in one year.
- The workforce at WH is one of the most experienced and skilled teams in terms of supporting service users with complex needs. Losing this team would be a huge drain of talent and organisational knowledge.
- There is considerable evidence that the potential of WH has not been explored and that there has been neglect and decline in the management and support of the service. There is a huge amount of untapped potential and that should be given time to be explored and developed.

6 – Potential risks and disadvantages

Risks include:

- External providers will not have the capacity and experience both in terms of infrastructure and workforce to deal with the level and complexity of need of this service user group.
- That any needs assessments will be invalid by the time the current WH service users accessed another service due to the subsequent disruption and

disregulation this would cause and taking into account the risk that the new service may not be appropriate.

- The medium- and long-term cost increase risks due to subsequent breakdown in home-care relationships.
- Reputational damage at a time where insourcing and excellent provision of community owned services and provision is seen so favourably by the public.

7 – Market readiness and sustainability

As a trade union that also represents hundreds of Brighton and Hove members working in the private/charitable/voluntary sector in the city we know that many not-for-profit and charitable providers are struggling with the increased costs of national insurance and the spike in the cost of some goods and services. We are aware that many providers are in financial stress, reducing their workforces and liquidising some of their assets. This means the sustainability and quality of the service is harder to ensure than keeping delivery in house. There is also a risk of providers 'over promising' to win contracts that they then struggle to deliver on.

8 – impact and quality of support

Please tick: reduced choice and flexibility, reduced quality of support, reduced community inclusion

Under 'other':

Having spoken to parents what cannot be underestimated is the profound loss the current WH users will experience if WH closes. They have established a family at the centre, and this family will be torn apart if the centre closes.

10 – council considerations – equality and inclusion

In terms of promoting equality and inclusion the council opens itself up to several risks if it closes the centre. The people who use the centre are not just unit costs, they are human beings. This decision should be based on what is best for them, not what saves money. This is one of the most vulnerable and potentially isolated groups in society and the council has already experienced reputational damage around this suggested closure.

The health and wellbeing outcomes for people with severe learning disabilities are profoundly worse than for the general population. On average they will die 15-20 years earlier than the general population with 50% of deaths deemed avoidable as they are related to treatable conditions. They are also significantly more likely to experience poor mental health, loneliness, social isolation, bullying and poverty. Wellington House is quite simply the best and most protective place for them to be.

11 – other considerations for the council

We would ask that the council remember that once a building is sold it cannot be sold again. This would be a one-off saving and a short-term answer to a medium/long term issue. There would also be the problem and cost of relocating staff when the few remaining main council buildings are already at or over capacity. Hove Town Hall is bursting at the seams and our members there continue to relay concerns around privacy, heat, overcrowding, accessibility and safety.

12 – alternative suggestions

UNISON's strong suggestion is that this closure should be stopped or at least shelved until a proper assessment of alternative models and ideas can be fully explored, actioned and assessed. We know that stakeholders, including the workforce, LD organisations in the city and parents/carers/family members have given some excellent alternative suggestions. We believe these have included making WH a centre for excellence around Learning Disabilities which could include proactively attracting more referrals to bring down costs per head; allowing external providers to spot purchase spaces for more challenging service users and the potential to hire out space and resources for activities.

From talking to staff and evidence we have seen from emails and communications from managers, the centre has not been managed well by those outside of the delivery workforce and has, intentionally or not, been allowed to slowly decline. There is also evidence that parents who have expressed a desire for their children to attend the centre have had their requests not actioned raising serious questions around transparency and intent.

While the workforce has become demoralised over time, their commitment and passion for the work they do has not dimmed, and if given the opportunity they would be skilled and active participants in developing and growing the service and improving its efficiency.

