

Strategy & Commissioning, People Directorate

222 Upper Street, London N1 1XR

Report of: Executive Member for Health & Adult Social Care

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Executive	17 th October 2019	Holloway
Delete as appropriate:		Non-exempt

SUBJECT: Consultation outcome and decision on the proposed closure of the Drovers Centre.

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report follows on from a Joint Board report on the 16th July which sought permission to consult on the proposed closure of the Drovers Centre.
- 1.2 This report follows a now completed 6-week consultation with service users and associated stakeholders.

This report summarises the consultation feedback gathered

This report sets out the options available for Joint Board and Executive to take on the future of the Drovers Centre.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the summary and detailed findings from the Consultation on the proposed closure of the Drovers Centre
- 2.2 To agree one of the 3 proposed options set out:

- 1. Close the Drovers Centre with services ending at the end of January 2020 and planning to commence on the alternative uses of the site. (Recommended option).
- 2. Keep the Drovers Centre open and seek to keep the services running by either reprocuring the services or taking the services in-house.
- 3. Close the Drovers Centre, but defer implementation until plans for the site are fully worked up. This will require either re-procuring the services or taking the services in-house for the interim.

3. Background

3.1 Context

The Drovers Centre is a building owned by Islington Council which hosts services on North Road in the Holloway Ward of Islington.

The services at the Drovers Centre are run by Age UK Islington, funded through a contract from the Council with a value of £90,000 per annum, paid for through the Council's Adult Social Care budget. The Drovers Centre provides a space for older residents to meet, socialise and take part in a range of activities – and a base from which to find out about activities in other locations in the local area.

3.2 Rationale for proposed closure

The proposal to close the Drovers Day Centre stems from the following:

Building repair and maintenance costs: It is estimated that the building requires around £170,000 of significant repairs, including an entirely new boiler, in addition to annual maintenance costs of around £3,000. An independent Building Condition Survey found that repairs would be needed for areas such as windows and roof-lights, doors, floor coverings, external paving and leaking pipes.

Service Funding: Islington Council pay Age UK Islington £90,000 per year to run the service. This money has not been enough in recent years, meaning that Age UK Islington have had to put in significant amount of additional investment in order to keep the service running, with the Council unable to increase its funding. The full cost of the service is estimated at £150,000 per year.

Age UK Islington's position: AUKI remains committed to reducing social isolation and loneliness, but as an organisation are considering how to make the best use of resources, to bring the most benefit to the largest number of people. AUKI have decided to discontinue their operation of a centre-based activities service from Drovers, from the end of January 2020.

Housing: This is a significant priority for the Council, and the site of the Drovers Centre and neighbouring Goodinge Health Centre present an opportunity to develop much needed housing.

Alternatives available: There are other ways in which the Council can help people be active and socially connected. We believe that, with the right support, we can ensure our residents who use the Drovers Centre can find good alternatives that preserve what matters most to them.

Budget pressures: Islington Council has savings to make to all its budgets, including Adult Social Care. This means that we cannot afford to increase the funding for the Drovers Centre. Any savings made by the closure of the Drovers Centre would help achieve a balanced budget for Adult Social Care.

Accordingly, we have consulted with service users of the Drovers Centre on two key questions:

- A proposal to support people who currently use the Drovers Centre to find alternative ways of meeting their needs and interests across the extensive range of community activities and meeting places that are available in the local area.
- A proposal that we close the Drovers Centre and make the site available for building new council homes for local people.

3.3 Outline of consultation process

The Council has conducted a six-week consultation in partnership with Age UK Islington to hear feedback from residents about the proposed closure. This was led by the Council, enabling AUKI to focus on supporting the wellbeing of the service users and providing information about alternative services and activities available.

The consultation began on Monday July 22nd, and ran until the end of August. During the consultation, residents were given multiple means of engaging with the Council and Age UK Islington. These included:

- Everyone who attended the Drovers Centre in the last 12 months was sent a consultation letter, information pack, Frequently Asked Questions document and consultation questionnaire
- Service users could respond using a SAE that came with the questionnaire or could
 - Respond online with an online version of the questionnaire
 - Phone a dedicated phone line
 - Email a dedicated email
 - Attend a weekly drop-in at the Drovers Centre to talk to Council officers face to face and give views, ask questions and discuss the issues leading to the consultation

The consultation aimed to engage with everyone who had made use of the Drovers Centre over the previous year. This amounts to 556 people. Some people had not given AUKI consent to hold their personal details, so the remaining 462 people were sent a consultation pack and documents were available at the Drovers Centre throughout the 6-week period to ensure everyone had the opportunity to engage.

During the consultation, the preferred methods of feedback were overwhelmingly the questionnaire and the weekly drop ins. Very few (less than 10 people) contacted us by email or phone.

The consultation was available to service users, their family carers, AUKI staff and volunteers, and any businesses that might be affected by the closure such as people who run activities at the Drovers Centre who may need to find alternative venues.

Concurrent with the consultation process considerable work was undertaken with colleagues in the Council's Homes & Communities Service and the volunteers at the Goodinge Community Centre (over the road from Drovers) to establish how people's needs could be met through Islington's community offer should Drovers close.

3.4 Consultation Findings

3.4.1. Summary of Questionnaire Responses (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2)

We received questionnaires back from 118 people. Overall, the questionnaire responses illustrated the range and depth of benefits the Drovers Centre provides its service users.

- The greatest value people place on Drovers come from the opportunities it offers for social interaction and activities, which are linked with people's physical and mental wellbeing. Over half of respondents said that the loss of Drovers would have a significant impact on their level of social contact.
- The majority of respondents participate in one or more other services or activities, apart from the Drovers Centre.
- In terms of the support people would require to access alternatives, of those who
 responded, 26 people said that they would need no support, but others said that they
 would need some type of support. The most common types of support being
 information, personal transport (e.g. through Dial-a-ride), access via public transport
 and an alternative activity being made available.
- In terms of how the proposed closure would affect people personally, the main impacts were expected to be social isolation and loss of activities.
- The main reasons people gave for disagreeing with the proposal to close Drovers were a generalised disagreement with the proposal, the impact on social isolation and the impact on the wellbeing of older people. Other factors included the loss of activities, loss of community and the loss of a local service.
- For those people who agreed the Drovers Centre should close, people's responses broadly reflected the reasons the Council have described; housing, financial difficulties, the building condition, the availability of alternatives and a general agreement with the proposal.

3.4.2. Summary of Drop-in sessions

Six drop-in sessions were held and approximately 90 people attended. The vast majority were service users, but family carers and activity providers also attended some sessions. Attendees were free to ask questions, provide feedback or discuss any aspect of the consultation and put across their views.

Whilst the feedback from the drop-in session reflects some of the themes which have come through in the questionnaire responses (the importance of social interaction, the value of activities), there were themes that came across very strongly in these face-to-face conversations that were not picked up in the questionnaires as strongly. Key additional themes included:

- People highlighted the importance of having the Drovers offer under one roof: information, activities, social contact, without needing to go to different venues.
- Drovers is open and inclusive, which was not the case in all other venues.
- There are specific characteristics about the Drovers that encourage and enable a
 very diverse range of people to participate at a level that they are comfortable,
 which is difficult to replicate in a single alternative. This seems to include a mixture
 of the service offer, the staff, the environment/layout, the 'all under one roof' nature
 of the service, inclusivity, the 'homely' and relaxed feel, the history of the centre.

A significant number of people spoke very emotionally and powerfully about the huge value of Drovers and the life-changing impact closure could have. Some people spoke on behalf of themselves and also on behalf of others they felt were too vulnerable, unable or unwilling to speak up for themselves, who relied on Drovers.

3.4.3. <u>Summary of work to explore how Islington's Community Offer could</u> respond if the centre was to close (Appendix 3, 4, 5)

Alongside the consultation process, and as part of the Resident Impact Assessment (Appendix 5) work was undertaken to explore how Islington's local community provision could respond if the Drovers Centre was to close.

This highlighted that:

- Islington has a strong offer for older residents living in the borough and any next steps should include ensuring service users at the Drovers Centre understand and have access to the wide range of services and benefits available in the borough.
- This includes a wide range of services which AUKI will continue to offer, funded by the Council, to provide Information, Advice, Signposting, direct enabling support and support to coordinate activities. If the decision is made to close the Drovers Centre, these services will ensure people are contacted proactively to monitor their wellbeing and identify any further support people require to access alternative services. AUKI will also be strengthening their links with local community centres and other facilities to provide coordination, information and support.
- The Goodinge Community Centre which is located directly over the road from the Drovers Day Centre already has a relationship with a number of the people using Drovers and is keen to be very involved in supporting people to access alternatives including at the Goodinge where possible.
- The Goodinge Community Centre is already very busy (see the timetable in Appendix 4), and is not set up to operate as a community hub. Therefore, it would not be able to pick up all of the Drovers provision in its entirety. However, Goodinge have confirmed that they are very happy to
 - o accommodate any activities within their timetable that they can
 - o welcome anyone from Drovers to access their existing activities
 - work with LB Islington and Age UK to explore setting up a drop-in space for people who want somewhere to come and socialise without activities or programmed support

- The overwhelming, majority of activities could be relocated at the same time and date
 to local community centres within a 20 minute walk of Drovers, should a decision be
 made to close the Centre. Of 21 activities, 18 have been mapped to available and
 suitable venues in the local area (see Appendix 3). The remaining 3 activities need
 further work to determine how they would be moved due to timetable clashes (in the
 case of 2 activities) or other practicalities (gardening group requiring an external
 space).
- The Council's Community Development team have, in particular, been interested in the findings from the consultation about the need for drop in provision for older people who want regular access to local informal spaces where they are not required to take part in an activity or receive a service. There is a strong commitment to build this learning into future development work with community centres across the borough to understand how this could be provided more routinely. Should the Drovers Centre close the team have committed to working closely with Age UK and commissioners towards finding the most suitable alternative for the people who value that informal drop in. This would take into account what matters most to them whether that be the group relationships, the geography, the setting or combinations of those.
- There will be costs to using alternative community venues and a budget would be needed for governance and coordination. Funding would need to be identified to meet the costs of preserving the activities people participate in, if the Drovers Centre closed.

3.4.4. Summary of Key Findings

Of those who responded to the consultation, the majority of people do not want the Drovers Centre to close. Of the 107 people who responded to this direct question by questionnaire, 74% said they did not think the Centre should close. No-one attending the drop-ins said they thought the centre should close. However, 26% of people who responded to this question by questionnaire said they thought the centre should close, which shows a significant proportion of people do agree with the proposal. Additionally, of the people who did not answer this question a further 9 people said they were not sure or neither agreed nor disagreed. A summary of quantitative responses to the questionnaire can be found at Appendix 1.

The qualitative responses received by questionnaire reflects the very wide diversity of people who use the centre across all the domains asked about:

- Value placed on the Centre and its services
- Levels of engagement with activities and services other than the Centre
- Support required to access other activities and services
- Perceived impact of the proposed closure

There is no one 'typical' Drovers Centre service user and it is recommended that any decision on the future of the Centre should enable a tailored approach that accounts for the needs of individuals and groups of varying sizes. Significant numbers of people rely on the Drovers Centre as their main source of social contact and a number of people across the consultation referred to Drovers as a 'lifeline'. At the same time, for a significant number of people Drovers is part of a full and varied social calendar and many of those people expressed that the closure would not have a significant impact on them.

Alongside this consultation Age UK Islington have conducted a series of in depth conversations with over 150 Drovers service users, in order to support their wellbeing and to

create activity plans and conduct 'wellbeing reviews' in light on the uncertain future of the Drovers Centre. This work has prioritised the most vulnerable people and those most reliant on the Centre, and the work will continue regardless of the decision, in order to understand how best to support each individual. If the Centre were to close, this support will enable Age UKI to prioritise and tailor transition arrangements.

If the decision is taken to close the Drovers Centre, all the themes and issues raised will need to be addressed when supporting the transition to alternative arrangements. It is some of the less quantifiable benefits that people felt most strongly about and make Drovers such an important and valued service for some of its service users and other stakeholders. Work can be undertaken with local community centres to develop their offer to host activities, but also to address some of these additional values and benefits.

The consultation feedback was extremely rich and nuanced, with clear main themes but also many important other points and views raised. If the decision is made to close the Drovers Centre, Council Officers and Age UK Islington will draw up a detailed action plan for implementation which will include addressing the very diverse concerns and needs of individuals and small groups.

3.5 Proposal for mitigating the negative impact of closure

The consultation has provided rich information about the role the Drovers Centre plays in people lives and the impact that its closure would have on them.

The most significant risk of the closure of Drovers is social isolation. Regardless of whether people participate in activities, social interaction and the reduction of social isolation comes across as the biggest benefit of the Drovers Centre and the biggest risk to closing the service. The impact of this is clearly variable across the service user group and support would need to be targeted to recognise this. For this reason, finding alternatives to some of the Drovers provision would be critical.

The consultation feedback clearly tells us what is most important to people and what we need to consider if Drovers were to close. The next steps, should Drovers close, is to work with individuals and small groups to support them to the alternatives already available alongside developing our offer to ensure everyone can continue to enjoy the benefits of preferred activities and social interaction

The consultation has highlighted that, broadly, alternatives would fall into two categories, with a significant number of people wanting to access both:

- Specific Activities
- Informal Drop In

Conversations with individuals, and groups, would need to shape how those alternatives were developed but existing work with the Goodinge and other community centres has resulted in a very high degree of confidence that alternatives could be found.

Specific Activities				
What we have learnt	People who are regular users of specific activities have indicated a preference for the same day and time where possible			
Our Approach	 Identify alternative locations to host existing activity groups as close to the Drovers Centre as possible and keeping with existing activity dates and times where that matters and is possible 			
Possibilities for an Alternative Offer	The Goodinge Community Centre is open to accommodating scheduled Drovers activities where they could fit into its timetable. The Goodinge Community Centre has agreed to welcome any people using the Drovers Centre to its timetabled activities which include a lunch club drop in and some specific activities for older people. Other local Community Centres have also agreed to accommodate activities where they can We have therefore already succeeded in finding potential alternatives for 18 of the 21 existing activities within a 20 minute walk of the Drovers Centre			

Informal drop in	
What we have learnt	 Between 30 and 50 people use the Drover centre for an informal, unstructured drop in Of these 30 – 50 people there is a mixed picture of what is valued most which ranges from location, to group relationships to access to activities
Our Approach	 We would work with Age UK to enable more in-depth conversations with these 30 – 50 people about their individual and group alternative preferences We expect a range of preferences to emerge; some people may prefer a location closer to where they live whilst others may prioritise other factors. We also know some people want to be able to access activities easily from a drop in, whilst this is less important to others. Once we are able to map all of these preferences we will work with Age UK and local community centres to guide people to the best existing options and / or develop alternative provision(s) if required.
Possibilities for an Alternative Offer	 The Goodinge Community Centre over the road from the Drovers are open to working with us to develop a drop in option for people who would like it, subject to some additional support. We know that the Goodinge couldn't accommodate a 9am-5pm drop-in 5 days a week for all of the 30-50 people who currently use Drovers because of space and its existing bookings. Work with the Council's Community Development Team has highlighted that there are a broad range of options with other very local community centres which could be pursued as soon as people's preferences are mapped. We are confident that,

- because of these options, we will be able to meet people's needs including where groups of people want to remain together.
- The Council's Community Development team have also committed to begin working with the borough's community centres to understand how drop in provision for older people who want regular access to local informal spaces where they are not required to take part in an activity or receive a service could be more widely provided. This could really have a very significant borough wide impact on reducing social isolation amongst older residents and could enable more people to benefit than currently do.

If the decision is taken to close the service, it will be a priority to ensure that people can access alternatives, addressing the barriers to participation that people have highlighted. With careful planning and support we are confident that these barriers can be overcome.

3.6 Summary of Service Costs

As has been indicated earlier in this report and in previous reports, the annual contract value for the Drovers Centre service is £90,000, but the actual costs to Age UKI have been estimated at closer to £150,000. Age UKI have provided a more detailed breakdown of actual current costs, which amounts to £125,000 (per annum), not including some aspects of volunteer recruitment, area management and communications costs, which are held at an organisational level. The £125,000 includes a full-time Centre Manager and part-time activities tutors (3 permanent staff). Therefore, if the decision was taken to keep the Drovers Centre and its services open, the costs should be estimated as £125,000-£150,000, depending on the provider.

3.7 **Summary of Options:**

In considering the options available the option was explored to relocate the services in their entirety to the nearest available location, which is the Goodinge Community Centre thereby giving certainty that people's needs could continue to be met in the same geographical area. However, this option has been discounted for a number of reasons:

- The Goodinge already has a programme of activities for a wide range of groups in the local community and doesn't have the physical space or the timetable availability without displacing others.
- The Goodinge needs to continue to serve the whole local community and cannot solely provide a space for older people.
- The Goodinge does not currently have the resources or staffing to operate a service on the scale Age UK Islington are able to operate from the Drovers Centre, which relies on the wider infrastructure and specialist expertise of that organisation which is supported by significant levels of funding from the Council and other sources.
- Whilst we fully recognise the enormous value and benefit many people receive from
 the particular way that the Drovers Centre operates as a dedicated resource for
 older people, not everyone who responded to the consultation prioritised this aspect
 and not everyone wanted to continue to travel to that specific locality to access it.
 We want to ensure that future provision reflects the diversity of uses and benefits
 people receive from the Drovers Centre.

Having said that, we do know that if the decision was taken to close the Drovers Centre:

- The Goodinge Community Centre are committed to working in partnership with the Council and Age UK Islington to accommodate as much as they can of what people using the Drovers centre would value where an alternative in that immediate locality is what really matters.
- Age UK Islington have committed to continuing to stay in touch with people who used the Drovers Centre to ensure that alternative arrangements are working and meeting their needs. This would also enable those arrangements to be iteratively refined going forwards as required.

Option	Benefits	Dis-benefits &	Recommendation
		costs	
Option 1: Close the Drovers Centre with services ending at the end of January 2020 and planning to commence on the alternative uses of the site. (Recommended option)	The Drovers Centre site becomes available for development. Cost savings of up to £90,000 per annum to Adult Social Care budgets Cost avoidance of up to £170,000 to upgrade and repair the building and a further estimated £3,000 per annum in maintenance costs Aligns with AUKI decision to cease services at the end of January 2020 Enables AUKI to develop their services in line with their strategic direction and to reach more people Supports more people Supports more people Supports more people to take up other opportunities in the community and build up services	·	Recommended.

	in local community centres		
Option 2: Keep the Drovers Centre open and seek to keep the services running by either re-procuring the services or taking the services in-house.	This is the preferred option for most people who use Drovers An opportunity to invest in a highly valued service which keeps people well and prevents deterioration and other service costs An opportunity to maintain and enhance the benefits of the existing service to combat social isolation and maximise wellbeing for older people	required of up to £150,000 per annum to fund the true cost of the service. This option is dependent on successfully appointing a new provider, which may not be possible.	Not recommended.
Option 3: Close the Drovers Centre, but defer implementation until plans for the site are fully worked up. This will require either re-procuring the services or taking the services in-house for the interim.	This option provides a clear decision on the future of Drovers, but delays implementation until the site is required to be vacant This option may provide a more acceptable amount of time for people to transition to alternatives This options creates opportunities for service users of Drovers to be	The financial benefits are delayed, with funds required for service costs and repairs and maintenance in the short-term. This option is dependent on successfully appointing a new provider, which will be more challenging on a short-term basis and may not be possible.	Not recommended

actively involved in This option what will continues be developed on the uncertainty on the future of the Drovers site. Centre and does not Financial benefits are address the fact that realised in the longer Age UKI are ceasing their services at the term. end of January 2020. The Drovers Centre site becomes available for development. This option enables more work to be done to mitigate and address the impact on social isolation which is unlikely to be fully achieved through transferring activities

4. Financial implications:

The Drovers Centre is currently funded from the Adult Social Care core budget. The budget for 2019/20 is £90,000 per annum.

The closure of the Drovers Centre would contribute £90,000 to Adult Social Care's contribution to the council's overall medium term financial strategy (2019/20 – 2021/22). If these savings are not achieved, the department will need to identify substitute savings.

However, this saving will be reduced if costs are incurred in transferring the activities to other local community centres and alternative savings will need to be identified to offset these costs.

If the Drovers Centre were not to close, the council would need to identify additional resources to fund the following:

- Currently Age UK Islington are reporting back that they are running the centre at a loss and an alternative provider would require additional funding to run the centre this is estimated at an additional cost of £35,000 - £60,000 per annum
- Investment to bring the centre up to the standards expected for service users. This is estimated to be a one-off cost of £170,000 and ongoing costs of £3,000 per annum.

In sourcing the service would potentially cost an additional £125,000 - £150,000 per annum plus the investment to bring the centre up to standards expected for service users.

5. Legal Implications:

Before making its decision on which option to agree, the Executive must have regard to the contents of the report and, in particular, must give genuine and conscientious consideration to the responses received from service users, family members, carers and others in response to the consultation as summarised in the report and set out, in more detail, in appendices 1 and 2.

In addition, the Executive must consider the RIA of each option, the general duties of the Council under the Care Act 2014 and the Care and Support statutory guidance and, if considering a closure option, the alternative provision that would be available to mitigate the impact of closure (appendix 3). The Executive should also consider whether, in all the circumstances it would be justifiable to achieve savings by closing the day centre. Before agreeing a closure option the Executive would need to be reasonably satisfied that the welfare and needs of current users of the centre would be adequately provided for and protected and that any risks inherent in closure would be sufficiently mitigated and monitored.

6. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030:

Should the decision be made to close the service, environmental implications will include possible increased travel for residents who will have to visit alternative provisions.

However, should a decision be made to discontinue the provision of services from the Drovers Centre, a separate environmental impact analysis will be undertaken to examine the environmental impacts of said decision.

7. Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A revised Resident Impact Assessment, taking into account the consultation responses, was completed on 11th September 2019 and is included (Appendix 5).

8. Reason for recommendations

The Drovers Centre is recommended for closure as proposed and with the rationale previously given and summarised in this report.

Whilst the consultation demonstrated the considerable values and benefits that the Drovers Centre offers and indicates the risks and impacts of closure, it is considered that these could be successfully addressed and mitigated through the broad and diverse range of other services available, through the development of local community centres, through a targeted action plan addressing the individual and specific concerns and through taking the actions set out in the Resident Impact Assessment.

Alternative options have been considered (see section 3.7: Summary of Options), but are not recommended as they do not address the underlying problems and with Age UKI ceasing to provide services at the Drovers from the end of January 2020 there is no guarantee that an alternative provider could be identified.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Drovers Consultation Summary of quantitative responses Appendix 2: Drovers Consultation Summary of qualitative responses

Appendix 3: Drovers Centre Activity Relocation Options

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Appendix 4: Goodinge Centre Timetable

Appendix 5: RIA on the proposed closure of the Drovers Centre Appendix 6: Drovers Consultation Demographic Information

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Cllr Janet Burgess

Executive Member for Health & Adult Social [

Date 9 October 2019

Care

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