

Future of mental health services
consultations

Woodside Day Centre



A Healthwatch Dudley report for
Dudley Council Adult Social Care
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Summary

The Woodside Day Centre provides a local authority service for adults from the age of eighteen onwards who have mental health problems. It closed during the Covid-19 pandemic period. The council will need to decide what happens with the Woodside Day Centre building over the longer term. However, it has stated it is fully committed to continuing to provide services similar to those that were delivered at the centre. Healthwatch Dudley was asked to help with independent note taking at consultation meetings and the recording of people's views on the Woodside Day Centre and what mental health services might look like in the future.

The findings from the consultations show that there are people who are worried about what will happen to the centre and the future of mental health services in the borough. They do not feel they have been kept properly informed about council plans for change. Others feel they should have been told about what might happen with the centre and involved in discussions about its future earlier. They do not want to lose all of the valued relations built up and good work done there over many years. At the same time, there are concerns about change and how a new model and ways of delivering mental health services will work for people. However, they are open to exploring new ideas and recognise there may be scope to improve existing services and ways of working.

Recommendations

- Ensure communications and the dissemination of information about services is as effective as it can be and works well for different people.
- Involve people early on in discussions and decision making that will determine how services will be delivered in the future.
- Do as much as is possible to ensure that what is good about services is understood and not lost when change happens.
- Build trusting relations with people who access or have an interest in services to help to facilitate genuine collaborative working.
- Promote the co-production of ideas, designs and plans.

Introduction

The Woodside Day Centre provides a local authority service for adults from the age of eighteen onwards who have mental health problems. It closed during the Covid-19 pandemic period. And inspections later revealed the building did not meet health and safety standards. Further investigations confirmed a considerable amount of money would be needed for repairs to its heating system and toilets, a dangerous chimney, falling plaster and the effects of flooding.

Future of mental health services consultation

Dudley council is currently reviewing the way it delivers mental health services across the borough to make sure they are fit for purpose and will meet people's needs in the future.

The council will need to decide what happens with the Woodside Day Centre building over the longer term. However, it has stated it is fully committed to continuing to provide services similar to those that were delivered at the centre. And will explore alternative options regarding the location of facilities and the delivery of services at, for example, the Queens Cross Network building, the Brett Young Day Centre, and buildings in Stourbridge, Coseley and Brierley Hill.

The future of mental health services consultation asks people about the future of services at the Woodside Day Centre and their views on its potential closure. At the same time, it asks for people's views on whether services can be provided at other venues.¹

Healthwatch Dudley

Healthwatch Dudley is the local independent champion for people on both health and social care services matters. We listen to people's experiences and views on getting help with their health and care and share what we learn with managers and others who make decisions about how health and care services are delivered.²

¹ Dudley Council consultations: <https://www.dudley.gov.uk/council-community/get-involved/future-of-mental-health-services-consultation/>

² Healthwatch Dudley: <https://healthwatchdudley.co.uk/>

We were asked to help with independent note taking at consultation meetings and the recording of people's views on the Woodside Day Centre and what mental health services might look like in the future.

The consultations

The consultation meetings were open to people who had been accessing services at the Woodside Day Centre or elsewhere and the wider public. It was also possible for individuals to complete, anonymously, an online questionnaire survey on the council's website (see Appendix 1, on page 12). And the consultations were promoted on the council's 'Connectivity' Facebook page and through libraries.

The consultations meetings comprised of 9 separate face-to-face or online events held between 18 October and 5 November 2021 (see Appendix 2, on page 13). A Healthwatch Dudley or Dudley Council for Voluntary Service member of staff attended and took notes at 6 of the meetings.³ The consultation process closed at 5pm on 21 November 2021.

The council's Head of Adult Safeguarding and Mental Health chaired meetings and another council member of staff was present to take notes for the council.

Attendees at meetings

In total, 49 individuals attended consultation meetings where a Healthwatch Dudley or Dudley Council for the Voluntary Sector member of staff was in attendance. They comprised of 30 members of the public (including people who had been using the Woodside Day Centre) and professionals who were council and Healthwatch Dudley or Dudley Council for Voluntary Service members of staff. A few people accessing mental health services attended more than one consultation meeting.

There were, in total, 23 female and 22 male attendees (where their gender was recorded) at the meetings with an age range of between 20 and 70 - with a significant skew towards those in the middle to older age groups. Most of the attendees were categorised as White or White British with 1 Black and 2 South Asian attendees (see Table 1, on page 5).

³ Healthwatch Dudley or Dudley Council for Voluntary Service did not attend meetings held on 18 October 2021, 21 October 2021 and 28 October 2021.

Meeting	Pub	Prof	Tot	F	M	Age	Ethnicity
22 October 2021	4	4	8	5	3	-	6 White, White British, 2 South Asian
26 October 2021	4	4	8	5	3	50-60	8 White, White British
27 October 2021	1	0	1	1	0	40-50	1 White, White British
3 November	5	4	9	2	3	50-60	9 White, White British
4 November 2021	13	4	17	7	10	20-70	12 White, White British, 1 Black
5 November 2021	3	3	6	3	3	30-50	5 White, White British, 1 South Asian
Total	30	19	49	23	22	-	41 White, White British, 3 Asian, 1 Black

Table 2: Attendees at meetings where a Healthwatch Dudley or Dudley Council for the Voluntary Sector staff member was present

What people were saying

The conversations that occurred across the different meetings clearly showed that the people in attendance were angry and upset. They were anxious about their own wellbeing and uncertain about the future and where they would go to get access to mental health services and recreational or leisure activities.

Frustration and anxiety

People were saying they felt that they had not been involved in discussions about the future of the Woodside Day Centre early enough. The not knowing coupled with the added difficulties encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic period had led to some people feeling particularly anxious about what was going to happen to the Woodside Day Centre and the services delivered there.

‘Why has it taken so long to get to this point? People should have been involved sooner ... why weren’t we consulted with sooner?’

Some individuals remarked that the situation with the centre had affected their own wellbeing. And people were confused over the council’s messaging on the centre and its future - whether it would close or not, and what would happen to services.

‘I’m confused over messages and is it [Woodside] staying open or closing. We could do with some clarification ...’

‘All I can see is closure, all I can see is cut-backs ... It’s really affecting me and my nerves ... I’m that frightened.’

‘I am fearful and worried that Woodside will not open again’

People believed important decisions about the centre had been made prior to the consultation meetings happening. And they were uncertain about the extent to which they would be able to influence any decision-making in the future.

‘I don’t believe the consultations will result in people’s views being considered. It’s a fait accompli, we have little trust in what is happening.’

Community and belonging

It is clear that there was a community of people using the Woodside Day Centre - a group of individuals who derived a strong sense of belonging to something valuable through getting together, talking to each other, and participating in different recreational and leisure activities.

‘At Woodside, you build up good relationships, the staff are fabulous, you can have one-to-one [conversations] ... they cheer you up’

‘I like the computer group ... then there is the socialising, sandwiches and chat with friends. I lost friends through mental illness and have made new friends at Woodside.’

Woodside is seen as a safe place where individuals can come together, make new friends, and get help and support through chatting with others and participating in different activities. All of this helps to build confidence and improve self-esteem.

Proposals and ideas

At the consultation meetings council proposals for the future of Woodside and mental health services across the borough were explained. Using the Queens Cross Network building in Dudley town centre and further expanding the provision of mental health services delivered at seven community based hubs.

At the same time, people raised concerns about damage to the sense of community that had existed at the Woodside Day Centre and the practicalities of sharing a new venue with other groups of people who are also using it.

It was noted, though, that less than 70 people had been attending the Woodside Day Centre each week before it had to close during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

‘The new offer needs to meet the needs of hidden communities and support people with their cultural needs’
(Stephen Lonsdale)

The council wants to change the way that mental health services work to reach out and support and increased number of people. Meanwhile, some of the people who had been taking part in recreational and leisure activities at the Woodside Day Centre recognised that, in some instances, there was room to improve the way that they were organised and delivered.

Others were reassured by the proposals to have more flexible opening hours and more social activities - including in the evenings - happening at venues in the future.

‘I’m happy with that, what is being said. It’s not so bad as I thought it was going to be’.

There was talk about having an allotment or green space available for people to use in the future and more work being done to better connect with existing groups in the community where they might be able to help with the delivery of different recreational and leisure activities.

It was also remarked that there was scope to consider how communications work and people are kept informed about plans for services and are involved in relevant discussions and decision -making that will determine what they look like in the future.

‘We need some way to communicate with people who have not attended meetings, not got letters’.

‘Only a handful of people know about things, you are only hearing from them, not the others’.

Findings

- ***There are those who feel frustrated and are anxious*** about the future of mental health services across the Dudley borough and their own mental wellbeing. They do not feel they have been kept properly informed about what is happening with the Woodside Day Centre or plans for mental health services in the future.
- ***There is anger over the late involvement*** of people using the Woodside Day Centre in discussions about its future and the future of mental health services across the Dudley borough. They do not feel they have been properly involved in discussions about services and instead feel that they have been excluded or ignored.
- ***A sense of community and belonging*** is important to people using the Woodside Day Centre. They do not want to lose all of the valued friendship and camaraderie that has been built up over many years. Any new meeting arrangements must provide a safe and welcoming environment where this friendship and camaraderie can continue to be important and built upon.
- ***There are concerns about change*** and how a new model for the delivery of mental health services and a move to new premises would work for people. How safe and welcoming spaces can be created where people can come together and get the support and access to recreational and leisure activities that meet their needs.
- ***People are open to exploring new ideas*** and recognise there is scope to improve the way that some mental health services are working. But they say that communications between the council and them must work better. They need to be kept better informed about what is happening with services and involved early on thinking about how they might develop or change.

Recommendations

- Ensure the communication and dissemination of information on services works well for people. It happens in a planned and timely way that can help to prevent or reduce any fear or anxiety that might otherwise arise about what is happening with services and how they are delivered.
- Involve people from the outset, or as early on as possible, in any discussions so that they can make a substantial and valued contribution to thinking about the design of services and decision making that will determine how they are delivered in the future.
- Do as much as is possible to ensure that what is good about the way that existing services work and how people use them is understood and not lost when change happens.
- Build strong and trusting relations with the people who are accessing or have an interest in services alongside transparency and honesty about any plans or intentions to review or change the way that services work or are delivered so that people are, as far as possible, reassured that they are not being kept in the dark or misled.
- Promote collaboration and the co-production of ideas, designs and plans so that people can have more real and meaningful influence in discussions and decision making that will determine how change happens and services will work for them in the future.

Future conversations

It would be good to have more, and longer, conversations with people accessing services at the Woodside Day Centre and a wider group of individuals not attending the centre but who might benefit from participating in different recreational and leisure activities as well as carers and other interested parties. In turn, work could be done to increase the number of people participating in conversations who are from younger age groups and ethnic backgrounds other than White British.

Improvements to communications and how information is sent out to people or disseminated in other ways could also help to eliminate or reduce complaints about not receiving letters or being unaware of council proposals. In turn, more notice of meetings, in more venues and at different dates and times that are convenient for different groups and individuals would help to increase participation in discussions about the future of mental health services across the borough. It would also be good to get more people from different backgrounds and situations and from different age and ethnic groups involved in the discussions

The emphasis should be on building trusting relations and the coproduction of new models or ways of working.

Appendix 1: questionnaire survey

A question on whether people had any concerns about service provision was followed with:

If YES, please select one or more areas of concern from the list below

Tick	Concern
	Staffing levels for future service provisions
	Access to services
	Locality of services
	Other
	If other, please let us know in the box below

What impact would closing Woodside day centre and relocating services have on you? Rate from 1 - 5, (1 having the least impact and 5 having the most impact)

What kind of support do you need in the future	
Tick	Kind of support
	Community engagement
	Carer support
	Help to feel part of the community
	Access to leisure activities
	Training and employment opportunities
	Support with your mental health
	Other

Do you want to access day centre type support in the future?

Yes No

Would you utilise venues such as Queens Cross, Brett Young and three community rooms based in Stourbridge, Halesowen and Coseley for mental health services

Yes No

Appendix 2: council consultation meetings

Date	Time	Venue	Notes taken by Healthwatch
18 October 2021	-	-	No
21 October 2021	-	-	No
22 October 2021	5-6 PM	Queen's Cross Network	Yes
26 October 2021	4-5 PM	Online	Yes
27 October 2021	4-5 PM	Online	Yes
28 October 2021	4-5 PM	online	No
3 November 2021	5-6 PM	DY1 Community Building	Yes
4 November 2021	5-6 PM	Queen's Cross Network	Yes
5 November 2021	5-6 PM	Queen's Cross Network	Yes

Healthwatch Dudley would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in online and face-to-face consultation meetings and gave their time to talk about the future of the Woodside Day Centre and mental health services across the Dudley borough.

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