

18 January 2021

Dear Mark

Further to the meeting on Thursday 7th January I am writing to confirm the responses to the questions asked to the Council at your user group meeting on 18th December 2020.

As you have summarised the questions, answers and comments from the meeting I am using it as a framework for my response. It was a helpful session and I hope that through this response that there is greater clarity and understanding of the next steps.

Please can we have a clear honest answer about whether the Bridge, Wiseworks and Mental Health Supported Housing are being closed?

At the meeting it was confirmed on several occasions, by Councillor Brown and Paul Hewitt, that no decision has been made by the Council to close the Bridge or Wiseworks. This assurance was also given by Councillor Brown in response to a question at the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee in November regarding the Bridge.

The Bridge and Wiseworks as venues, along with other Council Neighbourhood Resource Centres, are closed currently. These decisions are based on the outcome of the covid risk assessments. Despite this, there are a range of services that continue to be provided in covid safe ways for example, virtually and this mode of operation will need to continue during the covid pandemic, and afterwards. As the covid situation changes the offer will be reviewed, but with the National Lockdown announced it is impossible to predict when face to face services will be able to resume and it is unlikely to be in the next few months. The point was also made that over the long term, there may be changes to locations, venues and sites and all options are still on the table.

A community offer does include the use of a variety of venues, and will endeavour to make best use of all council buildings and assets, as well as venues provided by our voluntary and community sector.

Is the Mental Health Review about saving the Council money?

No, it was confirmed at the meeting that the mental health review is not about saving money and there are no changes to the current levels of funding. The point of the review is to optimise the existing funding so that it delivers best value for our residents and stakeholders.

Can the full report of the mental health review referred to the November 2020 Cabinet Report be shared?

Officers clarified that Mark could share the Mental Health Review Report and it is understood that this has been actioned. It is also noted that a Freedom of Information Request was submitted for the report and the document has been released via this request.

Is the Council planning to re-develop the Bridge site? - *The previous Council Leader promised that the Bridge would be kept open and the site would not be redeveloped. The Council has recently announced the Leisure Centre site re-development with Wates.*

The Council is in the process of appointing Wates as the Council's Strategic Development Partner for the Regeneration Programme. This is a long-term programme and includes extensive sites for redevelopment in Harrow including Poets Corner (the Civic Centre site) and Byron Court (an extensive site including the Leisure Centre, former driving centre etc). The Bridge is not included within the Regeneration sites.

How is the Council's mental health review aligned to national government policy for mental health services? *For example, the Bridge is a 'community asset' which would appear closely aligned to the government's policy for the future of mental health services.*

Yes. The Mental Health Review Report sets out the National Policy drivers including the NHS England Five Year Forward View (FYFV) for Mental Health published in 2016 and the NHS Long Term Plan (2019) priorities for mental health services.

Please can we receive the impact assessment which has led to the closure of Bridge building except for the food bank?

A risk assessment (was undertaken for The Bridge and this has been shared with Mark for circulation.

Challenges to the process

You recorded a number of comments made by service users and carers about the Mental Health Review which are listed below:

- *Service users and carers should have been engaged in co-production with the Council before the November Cabinet report which has decided how the review process will work.*
- *The recommendations in Cabinet report do not reflect the focus group feedback – from the view people such as me who participated in the focus groups. The Council has not been transparent about how the report recommendations were created.*
- *We don't believe in the veracity of the findings for the Cabinet report. For example, the building-based Bridge service can be person-centred and tailored to an individual person's needs.*
- *We challenge the idea that services don't need to be building based. Loneliness is a big factor in mental illness and so connecting at a building space matters. The drop-in aspect of the Bridge is really important which does not appear part of a future*

service – a place which creates a feeling of community, family and friendship essential to mental health. It's a lifeline.

- *Some people have life-long mental disorders, which means that they need a safe space to go to when they need to. Mental health recovery is not a neat process where we go from point A to B and are fixed.*
- *Some people present were very upset by the Council letter received suddenly telling community groups to end their use of the building and remove their belongings, which was expressed with without any consideration or compassion for the impact on the community groups using the Bridge.*

The points are noted, and we agreed that the communication about the way forward needs to be clearer. It is important to stress that the Mental Health Review has been concluded and, in accordance with Cabinet's decision, we now need to implement the recommendations, in collaboration with all stakeholders; especially the citizens who use mental services in the Borough .

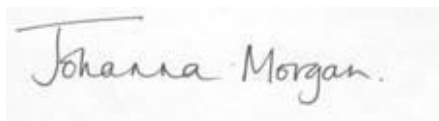
One of the outcomes of the review identified the need for a new way of working with residents, collaboratively using co-production to inform future decisions. This is our intention and continues to be a critical component of implementing the review.

As we discussed, our approach to implement the recommendations is to do so, developing a co-production approach. This is a relatively new way of working for many service users, providers and officers; and a positive start has been the appointment of the experts by experience (EBE). Once induction and training have been jointly provided, an immediate task for the EBE is to develop the road map to co-produce services including the community-based offer and the accommodation pathway.

On the final bullet point noted, the letter was issued directly to the service providers following individual conversations, and its purpose was to confirm the arrangements discussed. It is unfortunate that the contents were shared widely in the public domain which has led to misinterpretation and increased anxiety. The letter was not intended or written for a wider audience, and it is acknowledged that this has had an adverse effect on trust, which will now need to be re-built.

I hope that this response clarifies the points from the meeting.

Yours sincerely



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