

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE**  
**Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Date: 4 FEBRUARY 2016**  
**Author: HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Rowans Short Break Service is open 52 weeks of the year and provides a residential short break to adults with learning disabilities. The bungalow situated in Larbert is a registered service with the Care Inspectorate and offers respite to those between the ages of 18yrs – 65yrs. The service is fully funded by the Council.
- 1.2 An internal review was carried out in in 2014 relating to the provision of respite/short breaks for adults with learning disabilities. Although it was recognised that the service was one of excellent standard and regarded highly by service users and carers, it compared unfavourably in financial spend terms when compared with similar external provision. This led to a proposal being made as part of the 2015 budget process to close the Rowans and provide the service through external providers. This was agreed by the Council as part of the provisional budget for 2016/17 with a projected saving of £100k.
- 1.3 A comprehensive Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment was undertaken at the time which acknowledged that a change in provision would be unsettling and anxiety provoking for service users and carers.
- 1.4 On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the service. The Interim Head of Adult Services advised that the service would remain open at least until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2106 and that a review of the planned closure of the service would be undertaken. This was taken against a background of concerns expressed by the families of service users over the level of consultation and the lack of alternative provision within the council area. A review has been undertaken, which has been led by the relevant Service Manager.

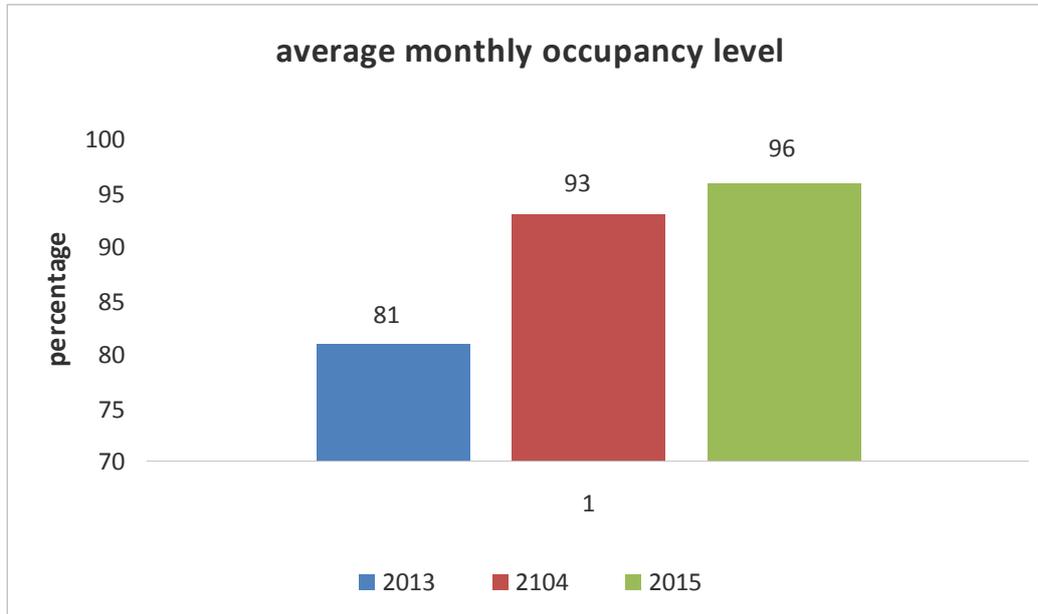
**2. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT WORK**

- 2.1 The Service Manager held an initial meeting with families that would be affected by the closure of the service. The meeting was held at the Sensory Centre on 28 October 2015. Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer was in attendance. Over 30 families attended these meetings and during lengthy discussions, parents conveyed the following points of concern and worry. These are as follows:
  - Occupancy Levels – There was concern that under occupancy had been taken into account in reaching the view that the running cost of the establishment was too high when the service was now fully occupied.

- Alternative Short Break Provision - Contact with Community Care Workers had been limited, therefore the option to explore alternative respite provision with families for their family member had not been satisfactory. Parents and Carers had a need to have information to support them to make informed choices in relation to alternative provision.
  - Occupancy levels at the Meadows and cost of the 2 contracted beds.
  - Eligibility Criteria and respite entitlement – There were queries raised by some families as it had been indicated that there were occasions in the past where they had been informed that they could not access the Rowans Service. Families requested clarification on what is the breakdown of those service users accessing the Rowans under the eligibility criteria.
  - The flat rate contribution - A question arose about and why there is a difference between the Meadows and Rowans Short Break Service in relation to charging?
  - Hidden costs associated with transport – Families and carers noted that this was an additional burden when accessing alternative short break provision outwith the Falkirk Council area.
  - Integration Joint Board and the Draft Falkirk Integrated Strategic Plan 2016-2019 – Families and Carers raised concerns about how this will impact on Falkirk Council Short Break Respite provision. The concern was also raised that the closure did not reflect well on the stated aims in the Integration Scheme and the draft Strategic Plan about supporting carers.
  - More broadly, there was concern that the closure would impact on a group of carers who needed the respite provision to support the care they provided which in turn prevented the Council from having to bear the cost of providing care. In the view of those attending the meeting the alternatives did not make like for like provision as the need was for provision close to home to minimise travel and ensure that families were close to hand should the need arise.
- 2.2 It was agreed that a second follow up meeting would be held with the parents and carers 4-6 weeks after, to allow research and findings into the areas of concerns documented to be undertaken and feedback to be provided to families and carers.
- 2.3 A further meeting took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 at Dundas Resource Centre. Deirdre Cilliers, Interim Head of Service was present and Suzanne Thomson, Programme Manager Health & Social Care Integration (Falkirk) was invited along to speak with the parents/carers surrounding the role of Integration Joint Board. Around 30-35 families attended the meeting.

2.4 A presentation was given in response to the points which had been previously raised at the October meeting. These were as follows:

- Occupancy Levels - in 2013 to 2015 there has been a significant increase in the number of beds occupied due to a management restructure and environment upgrade. This had risen from 81% to 96%.



- Current eligibility criteria is described as:

Eligibility	
Critical	42 nights
Substantial	28 nights
Moderate	14 nights

The majority of service users that access the Rowans are assessed as being critical (37%) or substantial (35%).

- In relation to the Meadows, the occupancy level was 72%. At present the cost to access the Meadows is means tested and costs £100 per week compared with that of £64.40 per week for the Rowans. The difference in approach has been highlighted in the review. The difference is not considered to be justifiable and were the service to remain open, a recommendation would be made to Council that the charging approach be aligned. This would have the impact of making a modest increase in the income from charging to offset the cost of the service.
- All the proposed alternative services (with the exception of the Meadows) are outwith Falkirk Council area and there would be additional costs if the Council had to assist with transport. The cost does vary substantially depending on whether it is a voluntary driver or a taxi.

### **3. VIEWS OF SERVICE USERS AND FAMILIES**

- 3.1 Families have expressed the view that they have been put under stress and worry surrounding the basic care needs which they feel their family members are entitled to access within their own local community. Parents feel that the Council should enable them to exercise as much choice as possible over the providers that they wish to use for those whom they care for at home.
- 3.2 Carers stated that Rowans is a valued service which is person centred in its approach and they can trust to look after their family member whilst they have a break to recuperate and have time to engage with other day to day activities outwith their caring responsibilities.
- 3.3 Parents and carers have concerns over the amount of emotional distress caused to those they care for due to the transition of unnecessary change and the possibility of an individual's health deteriorating whilst on a short break especially if this is an hour or more away by car. This causes further burden and worry to carers.
- 3.4 Parents and carers have felt that their views have not been taken into account throughout the initial process of the proposed closure of the Rowans and that the consultation was inadequate.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 It is acknowledged that there are no other similar short break services (other than the Meadows) within the Falkirk Council area which parents and carers can access. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December an event was hosted in the Sensory Centre by the Short Breaks Bureau, inviting along external providers from other local authority areas to meet with parents and carers. This was to give families the opportunity to learn more about the alternative provisions which are available to those service users with learning disability. However, at the meeting held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, parents and carers advised that they continued to feel that services should be closer to home and not outwith their own community.
- 4.2 Recently a moratorium was temporarily placed on the Meadows from the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015 to the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2015 subject to an investigation. This unfortunate situation emphasised the Meadows as the only other local provider for respite for those with a learning disability. More recently, PSS the service provider of the Meadows has advised that they are taking a close look at the financial sustainability of their services in Scotland and undertaking statutory consultation with staff on the future of the services.
- 4.3 Although at close to full occupancy, the unit cost of providing respite in the Rowans remains significantly higher than alternative providers. The fundamental premise on which the proposal was based remains sound. It is likely that there would be some transport costs which would diminish the savings anticipated from closure but not to the extent of making a significant difference. Consideration has been given to reducing costs in the Rowans and there is scope for running the service with one fewer member of staff through non replacement of a post. Combined with additional charging, this would reduce the overall cost by c.£25k.

- 4.4 The more fundamental point posed by the families, however, is whether it is right to proceed to close the service where this would leave only the Meadows as local provision. This concern would gain added weight if PSS were to close the Meadows. It is recognised that respite services are central to achieving care in the community and containing the cost of long term care. Current policy initiatives are focused on improving support for carers these continue to emphasise to importance of respite care and appropriate short breaks.
- 4.5 If the service were to remain open, further work will be required to determine if costs can be reduced to a more sustainable level.

## **5. LESSONS LEARNED**

- 5.1 It is suggested that the lessons from the process surrounding the decision to close the Rowans are twofold. First, where a proposal is likely to have a very significant impact on a defined group of services users, early engagement with service users (which in this situation would include families) is important. Second, there is need for clarity around decision making processes in the budget.
- 5.2 On the first point, early engagement would have identified the strength of feeling in support of the provision of a local service and the anticipated practical difficulties for families in providing respite outside the council area. That is not to say that it would of necessity have made the recommendation to the Council a different one but this view would have been available prior to the decision being made at the budget meeting.
- 5.3 On the second point, the decision taken in February 2015 was part of the provisional budget for 2016/17. But of necessity, to deliver savings in that financial year action was required during 2015/16. This was reflected in the Council's decision to instruct Chief Officers to give effect to the service delivery proposals contained within the budget report (including those for 16/17). In addition, the decision was one which was subject to consideration in light of completing the EPIA process, including consultation. It is clear that there were competing understandings of the status of the decision taken in February 2015.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

**The Committee is asked to note the report.**

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**HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES**

Date: 27 January 2016

Contact Name: Nikki Harvey

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL