

# Impact Assessment



Assessment of: Review of North Devon Link Service – Part of the mental health services in Northern Devon

Service: North Devon Link Service

Head of Service: Solveig Wright / Tim Golby

Date of sign off by Head of Service: 1 November 2021

Assessment carried out by: Sarah Dent – Commissioning Development Officer

## 1. Description of service

The four Link Centres in North Devon located in Barnstaple, Bideford, Holsworthy and Ilfracombe are for people experiencing a wide range of mental health difficulties. The Link centres provide a safe space for drop-in sessions where people can socialise and make friends. They run a variety of wellbeing and therapeutic groups, offer time limited community outreach and can offer one to one support during centre opening times. The service supports people with mental health difficulties, signposts to other services where necessary or works to find practical ways of resolving particular problems, including housing, debt and benefit difficulties. The service primarily involves drop-in sessions where people can socialise and make friends and get support from staff to talk over any concerns or difficulties. Wellbeing and therapeutic groups and time limited community outreach for

people struggling to leave their home is also provided as capacity allows.

There is no charge for the service and people can refer themselves or ask a health or social care professional to refer them. This service is only delivered in North Devon and does not exist in this form as a dedicated stand-alone service in any other part of Devon.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the buildings were temporary closed in line with government guidance and the service moved from a buildings-based support provision to a virtual support service, mostly by telephone. Referrals for the service were temporarily ceased on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020. Since December 2020, alongside the virtual support to existing service users, North Devon Link Service staff have worked with the North Devon Mental Health Social Work Team (Devon Partnership NHS Trust) providing a short-term supporting independence approach in addition to the virtual support provision.

As of November 2021, the four buildings remain closed. All four services are based in buildings owned by Devon County Council. The service staff are employed by Devon County Council but managed by Devon Partnership NHS Trust (DPT).

## 1.1 Service Specific Information

### Barnstaple

- Opening times Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – 31.5 hours a week. Weekend peer support by appointment only.
- Number of service users on 20 October 2021 – 78
- Number of service users who also use other DPT services – 37 (47%)

In November 2020 it was identified that excessive building work was required on the North Devon Link Service based in Alexander Road in Barnstaple. It was agreed that the service would move to Rosebank, also in Barnstaple. Consultation was undertaken with staff and service users.

### Bideford

- Opening times Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday – 19 hours a week.

- Number of service users on 20 October 2021 – 104
- Number of service users who also use other DPT services – 54 (52%)

#### Ilfracombe

- Opening times Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – 15.5 hours a week
- Number of service users on 20 October 2021 – 82
- Number of service users who also use other DPT services – 27 (32.9%)

#### Holsworthy

- Opening times Tuesday and Thursday – 10 hours a week

In July 2021, the Holsworthy service was temporarily closed and service users, being supported virtually at that point, were transferred to the Bideford team for ongoing support.

## 2. Reason for review

2.1 An initial review started in June 2018 and a further in-depth review took place between October 2018 and July 2019.

These reviews were undertaken because:

- In 2019, the board that manages the social care element of mental health provision (the then joint Devon County Council and Devon Partnership Trust 'Section 75 Assurance Board'), requested a review of the four Link Centres in North Devon to establish a clear picture of activity that was being undertaken in the service, the outcomes achieved and whether their service users were Care Act 2014 eligible or eligible for mental health services.

The findings of these reviews were:

- Centre staff are committed and passionate about what they do.

- Centres tell us they provide a recovery service to people from across the mental health spectrum.
- The centres have long-term attenders of up to 20 years plus.
- Most people attending are between the ages of 41 and 65. The service does not meet the needs of younger adults.
- There is little consistency across the service.
- At that time 11% of people who accessed the service had an eligible social care need and were in receipt of additional commissioned support.
- At that time 43.25% of people who access the service were in receipt of another DPT service.
- Community Mental Health Teams made nearly half of the referrals.
- No admission or discharge criteria and no outcome focus or key performance indicators were attached to the service.
- Many of the group activities can or could be met in the community.
- This service is open access, free at the point of delivery service is only available in North Devon resulting in inequality across other areas of Devon.

The proposal taken forward from the review was to implement developmental good practice changes to the existing provision of Services, ensuring consistency across the four centres which would continue to offer a buildings-based service. A project group including Link Service staff was established to progress the work. Progress stopped when the service delivery changed because of Covid-19.

2.2 Since March 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the buildings-based service has been closed and support has been provided virtually, mainly by telephone. A further review was therefore prompted by having the buildings closed and the resulting change to service delivery change due to Covid-19.

This further review of the impact of Covid-19 therefore requested feedback on the impact of the buildings-based service being closed from all stakeholders.

2.3 Feedback on the impact of the temporary suspension of referrals was requested from referrers to the service by letter on 23rd November 2020 and the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

- Service user feedback received as part of this review was very low so cannot be viewed as representative of all service users, however, of that received, the majority appear to be in the service because they are lonely or socially isolated.

- Some members of DPT were concerned that they would no longer be able to discharge people from their caseload to the service. Other members of the teams reported that they wouldn't use the service.
- 2.4 The 2019 review established that some people had been accessing the drop-in service for in excess of 20 years. Feedback from engagement has shown that this is still the case. Although it is recognised that some people with long term conditions may need input over a long period of time, these do not necessarily need to be met by statutory services.
- 2.5 There is a national focus on improving and developing the way we deliver community mental health services, including national investment and the introduction of the Community Mental Health Framework.
- 2.6 We want to ensure all community mental health services, including those currently offered from the Link Centres, meet the needs of people in their own communities. The health investment in the Community and Voluntary Sector across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth from national funds (£3.65m over the next 3 years) to support community mental health framework implementation, whilst not linked to this consultation, demonstrates the national and local commitment to that aim.

### 3. Aims / objectives, limitations and options going forwards (summary)

- 3.1 There is opportunity to build on the innovative ways that people have been supported during the pandemic by bolstering and reshaping short-term enabling support in communities across Devon and supporting people to live as independently as possible.
- 3.2 The following proposal was developed for the redesign of the North Devon Link Service and engagement on this proposal ran between 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021.
- Redesign the North Devon Link Centre Service from a building-based model to short-term enabling support for those with a statutory need, working with people in their community to achieve what matters to them.
  - Invest in the local community and voluntary sector to support people who do not need this level of support.

3.3 Feedback from service users and stakeholders during the engagement activity was analysed and the proposal for consultation was changed to:

- Redesign the North Devon Link Service to become a community offer that continues to meet the needs of people with varying levels of support, in a wider variety of accessible community setting across Northern Devon. We will continue to run the current service whilst those other services are set up, to ensure no one is left without the support they currently receive.
- The redesigned service will, in the first instance, be for new people accessing the service who have an assessed eligible need under the Care Act 2014.
- Those people who currently access the support provided by North Devon Link Service will be offered an assessment or review to identify how their needs can be met by an alternative service, whilst continuing to receive virtual support.
- This interim period of the two services running in tandem will allow us to identify what development and investment is needed in the Community and Voluntary Sector and develop alternative and future services with people who may be using the services.

3.4 This proposal will develop in line with the Community Mental Health framework which will help local systems address inequalities in mental health care and strengthen relationships with local community groups and the Voluntary and Community sector.

## 4. People affected and their diversity profile

4.1 People affected and their diversity profile

- People of working age with a Mental Health Need diagnosed and undiagnosed who live in North Devon.
- Staff who work in the services.
- Carers

4.2 Demographics

The demographic information in this section was obtained from the Devon Partnership NHS Trust patient record system, Carenotes, in October 2021.

Team Count

Team	Patients
Link Centre Barnstaple	78
Link Centre Ilfracombe	82
Link Centre Bideford	105
Total	265

## Gender

Team	Female	Male	Total
Link Centre Barnstaple	47	31	78
Link Centre Ilfracombe	58	24	82
Link Centre Bideford	56	49	105
Total	161	104	265

## Age Group

Team	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	Over 80	Total
Link Centre Barnstaple	6	10	14	27	16	5		78
Link Centre Ilfracombe	4	9	14	31	17	5	2	82
Link Centre Bideford	2	13	18	39	25	8		105
Total	12	32	46	97	58	18	2	265

## Ethnicity

Team	Black or Black British - African	Mixed - White & Black African	White - British	White - English	White - Other/Unspecified	White - Polish	Not Known	Total
Link Centre Barnstaple	1	1	7	64	5			78
Link Centre Ilfracombe			11	67	2	1	1	82
Link Centre Bideford			7	92	6			105
Total	1	1	25	223	13	1	1	265

## Sexuality

Team	Bisexual	Client Unsure	Heterosexual	Null	Prefer not to answer	Total
Link Centre Barnstaple	1	1	14	62		78
Link Centre Ilfracombe			15	65	2	82
Link Centre Bideford			13	92		105
Total	1	1	42	219	2	265

Demographic information about disability has not been collected.

When the Holsworthy Service closed due to lack of staffing, clients were transferred to the Bideford Service. Therefore, there is no Holsworthy specific information in this section.

## 5. Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts

- 5.1 Community Mental Health Teams – North Devon Link Service is sometimes used as a destination to discharge people from the Community Mental Health Teams or to monitor people whilst they are on the waiting list. This facility will still be available.
- 5.2 North Devon Social Work Teams will have support from part of the North Devon Link Service staff team by the delivery of short term enabling support. The level of support will increase as alternative services develop.
- 5.2 Community and Voluntary sector organisations – some of the services provided by the North Devon Link Service are also offered by the Voluntary and Community Sector and they will be involved in scoping and developing services.
- 5.3 GPs make referrals to the services, but they are very low. GPs will still be able to refer to the service.
- 5.4 Carers and families. The Link Service provides a break for carers and families. Because of the reduction to the amount of drop-ins, the facility may not be so regularly available.

## 6. Research used to inform this assessment

- Mental Health needs Assessment 2013
- Link Centre Performance Dashboard
- DCC charging policy
- Care Notes
- 5 ways to wellbeing
- Reaching for Independence guidance and reviews
- Government Covid-19 Guidance
- Community Mental Health Framework guidance and proposals

## 7. Description of consultation process and outcomes

### Initial Engagement

- 7.1 For the review which concluded in July 2019, engagement with Staff and service users in Ilfracombe, Barnstaple and Holsworthy was face to face. A questionnaire was sent out to professionals working within DPT and Link Centre Service users.
- 7.2 For the Impact of Covid-19 review, feedback on the impact of the buildings-based service being closed has been gathered via engagement from:
- People who use the NDLS service by way of a survey in October 2020.
  - Through conversations with teams external to NDLS such as the North Devon Mental Health Social Work Team (DPT) and Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) in the summer of 2020 and again in April 2021.
  - NDLS Service and Deputy Managers, Centre Managers, and support staff in the summer of 2020 and again in April 2021.
- 7.3 Feedback on the impact of the temporary suspension of referrals was requested from referrers to the service by letter on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020 and the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

## Further Engagement

- 7.4 A subsequent engagement process started on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and ran until 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021 on the following proposal.
- Redesign the North Devon Link Centre Service from a building-based model to short-term enabling support for those with a statutory need, working with people in their community to achieve what matters to them and to live as independently as possible; and
  - Invest in the local community and voluntary sector to support people who do not need this level of support.
- 7.5 An engagement questionnaire was developed for Service Users and published on the Devon County Council “Have Your Say” webpage. In recognition that some people who use the North Devon Link Service might not have access to digital resources, a copy of the questionnaire with a pre-paid envelope was posted out to 278 people on the caseload on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021. 124 postal responses were received.
- 7.6 An engagement questionnaire was developed for stakeholders and published on the Devon County Council “Have your Say” webpage. An e-mail was sent advising of this to all GP Practices in North Devon, Community Groups in Holsworthy who referred into the service, the North Devon Community Mental Health Teams and the North Devon Mental Health Social Work Team.

## Summary of Responses

- 43 responses were received from stakeholders via the Devon County Council webpage.
- 30 of those responses were from Ilfracombe.
- The overwhelming reason for attending the North Devon Link Service was to receive support and guidance around mental health and as a place to meet people and combat loneliness – for many it was both reasons.
- Most people attended the drop-in part of the service, closely followed by classes and groups. Some people attended both.
- Three quarters of respondents told us that they received virtual support by phone during the pandemic.
- It is acknowledged that most people said they would like to see the buildings stay open, but some responses included seeing more services in the community.
- Most respondents told us that they refer to/use or recommend the North Devon Link Service for support and guidance around mental health and as a place to meet people and combat loneliness.
- Stakeholders referred to/used or made people aware of drop-in, Community Support and classes and groups equally.

- Stakeholders have said that they would like to see the North Devon Link Service buildings stay open but have also suggested services that they would like to see in the community such as services for younger people, outdoor activities, holistic treatments and support and more mental health support group to help people gain self-esteem and confidence.

## Formal Consultation on a Proposal

7.2 Taking due regard of feedback received from the engagement process, the proposal for consultation was changed to:

Redesign the North Devon Link Service to become a community offer that continues to meet the needs of people with varying levels of support, in a wider variety of accessible community settings across Northern Devon. We will continue to run the current service whilst those other services are set up, to ensure no one is left without the support they currently receive.

The consultation ran from 23 September 2021 and until 22 October 2021.

7.8 Public Health, Devon County Council Corporate Services and Devon County Council Legal Department, advised that public meetings should not take place due to Devon being classified as an Enhanced Response Area. In light of this alternative arrangements were put in place.

Two webinars took place within the hours that the Link Service would have been open. Following feedback, an additional meeting was arranged to take place of an evening.

The consultation documents with a questionnaire were published on the Devon County Council "Have Your Say" webpage.

The consultation documents and questionnaire were posted to the North Devon Link Service Services Users on 29 September 2021 with a pre-paid envelope.

Centre staff and all referrers to the service and the community mental health teams were also contacted by e-mail and encouraged to support service users to respond.

Councillor James McInnes (Lead Member for Adult Care and Health) and Tim Golby (Locality Director for North and East Devon) emailed and met with DCC councillors representing each of the four towns during the engagement period.

All North Devon GP practices and practice managers were contacted directly, a presentation was given to the Northern Integrated Delivery Group in early August to talk through the proposals with practice managers and other stakeholders there.

Meeting with North Devon Public Stakeholder Network.

Consultation responses were reviewed and logged as received. In the event of cause for concern about the safety of any responders, an escalation process was in place.

7.9 A total of 256 responses were received. 41 by post, 49 by e-mail, 144 via the 'Have Your Say' webpage and 22 by social media. In addition, there were 9 attendees at the webinars.

Responses have been logged and themed, Frequently Asked Questions developed and uploaded to the Have Your Say webpage during the consultation period.

Only 2% of responders agreed with the consultation proposal, 29% suggested alternatives and 69% of responders did not agree with the consultation proposal.

A consistent message was that a move away from the model delivered by the North Devon Link Service before the Covid-19 Pandemic would have a detrimental impact on the mental wellbeing of attendees. Respondents overwhelmingly advocated for the drop-in service to remain as it reduced loneliness and isolation and was considered a 'safe space' where individuals did not feel judged. Anxiety was expressed that 'general' community groups would not offer the same peer-support individuals received from the mental health focussed link service and that a virtual service, despite evidence of its success across other mental health services in Devon during the pandemic, was not a suitable replacement for face-to-face services/contact.

In consideration of the feedback, the Cabinet recommendation was changed to:

1. Re-open three of the four Link Centre buildings (Barnstaple, Bideford and Ilfracombe) as soon as it is deemed safe to do so under Covid-19 guidelines.
2. Holsworthy centre to remain closed and move the once-weekly morning drop-in session to an alternative venue in the town.
3. A local implementation plan and timeframe for redesign of the service to be developed for each centre, including efficiency and management arrangements. Link Centre staff to increasingly focus on outreach support with the mental health social work teams
4. Work with the Link Centre staff, service users, and local community and voluntary sector representatives to establish:
  - a. the outreach services to be delivered in the wider community to ensure equity of provision across all of North Devon. This may include using other community facilities
  - b. which of the existing non-specialist services can be delivered by local community providers. These will need to be cost-effective and within the available budget.
5. Each local implementation plan to assess the potential for wider community use of the building in partnership with local stakeholders
6. Progress on each of the four local implementation plans is reported to Adult Care and Health Scrutiny Committee at its meeting scheduled for 21 March 2023

## 8. Equality impact analysis

Our assessment of the impact of the review and proposed changes for people with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 is as follows:

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group.  [Please refer to the <a href="#">Diversity Guide</a> and <a href="#">See RED</a> ]	<p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary.</li> <li>advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible.</li> <li>foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant?</li> </ul> <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the <a href="#">DCC Equality Policy</a>?</p>
All residents (include generic equality provisions)	This service is provided for people with varying degrees of mental health needs.	
Age	The service is for adults so can be used by people needing mental health support who are over 18. It has not been widely used by younger people.	The proposal to work with the community, staff and service users to develop alternative services, will consider how to make the service more available and appealing to younger people, will constitute a positive impact.

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group.  [Please refer to the <a href="#">Diversity Guide</a> and <a href="#">See RED</a> ]	<p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary.</li> <li>advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible.</li> <li>foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant?</li> </ul> <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the <a href="#">DCC Equality Policy</a>?</p>
Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, neurodiversity, long term ill health) and carers of disabled people	The service is for adults covered by the disability protected characteristic, as they will be affected by mental health issues.	<p>The proposal to reintroduce drop-in, albeit at a reduced level, will mean that some people with a mental health need will not be able to access the service as regularly as before, so will potentially constitute a negative impact.</p> <p>Potential mitigation of that impact will come from effective access to the wider mental health services across Northern Devon. The Link Service is part of the health and care system supporting mental health needs across Northern Devon. Other services include Community Mental Health Teams, Mental Health Social Work Teams, a mental health ward and crisis services such as The Moorings (Crisis Café), a 24-hour support phone line from Mental Health Matters and DPT's First Response Service. The Link Service does not provide urgent or crisis support.</p>

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group.  [Please refer to the <a href="#">Diversity Guide</a> and <a href="#">See RED</a> ]	<p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary.</li> <li>advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible.</li> <li>foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant?</li> </ul> <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the <a href="#">DCC Equality Policy</a>?</p>
Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, ethnic origin/race, skin colour, religion and belief	The service is available to people requiring mental health support regardless of culture or ethnicity but does not contain any specialist activity based on that characteristic.	The proposal has a neutral impact on people with this protected characteristic.
Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed)	This service is available to people requiring support for their mental health needs regardless of sex, gender, or gender identity. However, there is no specialist activity based on that characteristic.	The proposal has a neutral impact on people with this protected characteristic

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group.  [Please refer to the <a href="#">Diversity Guide</a> and <a href="#">See RED</a> ]	<p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary.</li> <li>advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible.</li> <li>foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant?</li> </ul> <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the <a href="#">DCC Equality Policy</a>?</p>
Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership	The North Devon Link Service is available to people requiring mental health support regardless of their sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership but does not include any specialist activity based on the that characteristic.	The proposal has a neutral impact on people with this protected characteristic
Other relevant socio-economic factors such as family size/single people/lone parents, income/deprivation, housing, education and skills, literacy, sub-cultures, 'digital exclusion', access to transport options, rural/urban	Although the service is for people affected by mental health issues, many service users are also subject to deprivation, literacy, digital exclusion and transport and access due to the rurality of Northern Devon.	The proposal to reintroduce drop-ins and work with communities, staff and services users to develop services in the voluntary and community sector outside of the 4 towns will constitute a potential positive impact in terms of addressing digital exclusion and access to support.

## 9. Human rights considerations:

The provision of mental support services is a way of ensuring the human rights of citizens are upheld.

## 10. Supporting independence, wellbeing and resilience. Give consideration to the groups listed above and how they may have different needs:

The purpose of our mental health services is to support all people in receipt of our services to work towards recovery and independence, which will in turn enable them to feel empowered and resourceful.

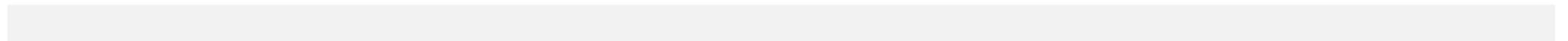
In what way can you help people to be safe, protected from harm, and with good health and wellbeing?

The purpose of our mental health services is to ensure that people are in receipt of the most appropriate, least restrictive service to keep them safe.

In what way can you help people to be connected, and involved in community activities?

The purpose of our mental health services is to encourage people to make the most use of their skills and resources (strength based approach) including involvement in community activities.

## 11. Environmental analysis



Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process	N/A
Planning Permission	N/A
Environmental Impact Assessment	N/A
Strategic Environmental Assessment	N/A

	<b>Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).</b>	<b>Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible).</b>
Reduce, reuse, recycle and compost:	N/A	N/A
Conserve and enhance wildlife:	N/A	N/A
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	N/A	N/A
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	N/A	N/A
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	N/A	N/A
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	N/A	N/A
Contribute to reducing water consumption:	N/A	N/A
Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	N/A	N/A
Other (please state below):	N/A	N/A

## 12. Economic analysis

	Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).	Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible).
Impact on knowledge and skills:	Neutral impact	Neutral impact
Impact on employment levels:	Neutral impact	Neutral impact
Impact on local business:	Neutral impact	Neutral impact

## 13. Describe and linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts (Combined Impacts):

There is some correlation, identified above, between people who use the service and economic deprivation which the move to more community based services will potentially help address.

How will the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?

Making the proposed community-based services more accessible will potentially improve the social wellbeing of the area.

## 14. How will impacts and actions be monitored?

If the proposal is taken forward a project group will be set up to implement and monitor.