

## **North Devon Link Centre Service – Proposal for Future Delivery**

Report of the Locality Director (North and East), Devon County Council and NHS Devon CCG

Recommendation: that Committee consider the proposal as part of the statutory engagement and consultation process on the new service model.

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### **1. Summary**

1.1 This report sets out the proposed future model for the North Devon Link Centre Service (NDLS) based on findings from a thorough review and the impact of Covid-19.

1.2 The proposal is to:

- 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.

### **2. Introduction**

2.1 Unique to North Devon, the service was originally established in 1992 as a Devon County Council (DCC) In House Service. The Service remains the responsibility of DCC but is managed by Devon Partnership Trust (DPT) as part of the assigned services under the Section 75 Agreement.

2.2 It is open access and free at the point of delivery, focused on recovery for people with a perceived mental health need and/or Autism, a Learning Disability, who are homeless or receiving support for substance misuse.

2.3 There are four centres across North Devon (Barnstaple, Bideford, Holsworthy and Ilfracombe) providing a building-based traditional day service together with some outreach and group sessions. The outreach sessions build confidence to encourage people to attend the centres and the group sessions focus on wellbeing. The centres are fully funded by DCC, who own the buildings, and the cost of running the service is £480k per year.

2.4 Like many day centres, since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the service has moved from building-based to virtual support, mostly by telephone. Since December 2020, alongside virtual support, staff have been working with the North Devon Mental Health Social Work Teams (DPT) to provide short-term support for people.

- 2.5 A review of the support provided by the North Devon Link Service was initiated to understand alignment with our strategic intent for people to live independently as part of the community and to benefit from strengths-based support that is focused on achievement of goals and progression. The review concluded in July 2019.
- 2.6 To understand the impact of Covid-19 on the North Devon Link Service delivery, a further review, concluding in May 2021 was undertaken.
- 2.7 Feedback has been sought from people who use the centres, their families/carers and staff working in and/or connected to the centres. In line with the message to work from home where possible and whilst the review is taking place, the service has been advised that the buildings will remain closed.

### **3. Strategic context and key findings**

- 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. Independence and a good quality of life should be less about services and more about increasing capacity around early intervention and enabling life experiences - which must include timely preparation for adulthood.
- 3.2 The impact of the pandemic has focused and accelerated thinking around the limitations and resilience of the pre-pandemic model of provision. A recent ADASS report on the impact of Covid-19 on people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people recommends moving away from a heavy reliance on building-based services and investing instead in a more diverse set of opportunities for enablement and independence in communities. Proposals for the NDLC have been developed in this strategic context.
- 3.3 Investment in the Community and Voluntary sector will encourage people to get involved in their local community.

#### Key findings from July 2019 review and impact of the pandemic

- 3.4 Centre staff are committed and passionate about what they do. Centres report that they provide a recovery service to people from across the mental health spectrum from little or no mental health need to those who meet the secondary mental health threshold.
- 3.5 Despite identifying as a recovery service, the review concluded in July 2019 highlighted that some people had been attending the service for up to 20 years (mostly between the ages of 41-65). Some of these people attended on and off as they needed support, but others continuously as a place to socialise and receive support. The age range of people who use the centres shows that the current offer does not meet the needs of young people.
- 3.5 There is no admission or discharge criteria and the service mostly supports people who do not have a Care Act eligible need, alongside people receiving support from secondary mental health services. 11% of people who access the service have an eligible social care need and 43.25% of people are in receipt of another DPT service. The Community Mental Health Teams

(CMHT) were the main referrers who use the NDLS for monitoring people discharged from their caseload.

- 3.6 A survey of people who use the service said they used the centres as a place to meet other people and feel safe, supported and listened to. Their friends go there, and they don't need to pay for it. Some people identified other groups outside of the Link Centre that they would like to see developed and other wanted more activities to be provided in the Centre.
- 3.7 Feedback on the revised service model operating during the Covid-19 pandemic was also sought from people who use the NDLS service (October '20 survey) and from staff working in and/or connected to the centres (Summer '20, April '21). The response to the survey was very low, with feedback mostly from people who access the service to combat loneliness or social isolation. A full impact assessment is being developed to better establish the impact of the change in service delivery since Covid-19.
- 3.8 The number of people who are supported by the service has significantly reduced during the pandemic. Whilst services moved to a virtual delivery during the pandemic this has been predominately by telephone with very limited progress around virtual groups. A review of three open access voluntary organisations that support people with similar needs has shown some excellent virtual activities and ongoing support that could be developed.
- 3.9 NDLS staff have attended training and the opportunity to trial new ways of working, but wish to reopen the centres and operate as before. Based on the analysis undertaken, maintaining the previous model of support will not meet DCC's strategic aim of promoting independence and the service will continue to support people who do not have a Care Act eligible need.

#### **4. Proposed way forward and next steps**

- 4.1 On the basis of the thorough reviews that have been undertaken, including on the impact of the pandemic, the proposal is to:
  - Redesign the North Devon Link Centre Service from a building-based model to short-term enabling support for those with a Care Act eligible 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.
- 4.2 This proposal builds on the innovative ways that we have seen people be supported during the pandemic, and which we know they have valued. It will bolster and reshape short-term enabling support for people to achieve what matters to them.
- 4.3 The proposals will ensure that a statutory service to promote independence is provided to people who have an eligible need, whilst investment will help to increase sufficiency of services in the voluntary and community sector for people who have a need for non-statutory mental health support.

- 4.4 Timely, focussed interventions that are based in the community will positively impact people's lives and reduce the need for longer term packages of support. Currently people who have a primary diagnosis of mental health are unable to access the DCC Reaching for Independence (short-term enabling support) service. The opportunity to access this support will be considered as part of the work to take these proposals forward.
- 4.5 A period of engagement with Service Users and Stakeholders has started and will continue until 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Engagement documents have been published on the Devon County Council Have Your Say webpage. In recognition that not all Service Users will be digitally enabled, the engagement document with stamped address envelope has been sent to North Devon Link Service Users. Engagement will be followed by a period of consultation lasting 30 days.

## **5. Options/Alternatives**

- 5.1 An action taken forward following the July 2019 review was to implement good practice changes to the existing provision of the service, ensuring consistency across the four centres. This would continue to offer a building-based service and could be considered as an alternative to the proposal.

## **6. Consultations**

- 6.1 The engagement process is currently in progress and views from that, and the consultation, will be analysed to form part of the more detailed Impact Assessment.

## **7. Financial Considerations**

- 7.1 The cost of running the centres is currently £480k per year. There are no plans to reduce investment but invest in a different way.

## **8. Legal Considerations**

- 8.1 The lawful implications of the proposal have been considered and taken into account in the preparation of this report on the proposal set out above. The legal considerations include Devon County Council's statutory responsibility to provide a service to people who are eligible for services under the Care Act 2014, a legal responsibility to carry out consultation with staff lasting 30 days and a full and meaningful engagement and consultation process with service users and stakeholders.

## **9. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)**

- 9.1 We want people to lead meaningful lives within their communities. There are clear social and economic benefits in supporting all adults to live as independently as possible. Environmental impact considerations will be looked at as part of the impact assessment.

## **10. Equality Considerations**

- 10.1 We want people with health and care needs to have the same opportunities as everyone else and to lead meaningful lives in their communities. An impact assessment is being completed as part of the engagement process

with people and stakeholders for this proposal, which will inform the decision, which will then be subject to a formal consultation period.

## **11. Risk Management Considerations**

- 11.1 This proposal has been assessed and all necessary safeguards or action have been taken to safeguard the Council's position. In addition, work is underway with the Community Mental Health Teams to support discharge options, alongside the development of support within the community and voluntary sector. The project risk register has been updated as appropriate.

## **12. Public Health Impact**

- 12.1 Public Health are taking forward actions developed across the wider Council to support people to live as independently as possible within their communities and to reduce health inequalities. Our proposal aligns with *Healthy and Happy Communities*, Devon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020 to 2025.

## **13. Summary/Conclusion**

- 13.1 The authority is undertaking a formal consultative process to seek views on a new service model for mental health support in North Devon in light of national best practice, evidence from the pandemic and a recovery approach. The committee is invited to contribute its view as part of the process to inform any future decision making.

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Electoral Divisions: North Devon and Torridge  
Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Services  
Councillor James McInnes  
Chief Officer for Adult Care and Health: Jennie Stephens

### **Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers**

Contact for Enquiries: Sarah Dent, Commissioning Development Officer  
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| <b>Background Paper</b> | <b>Date</b> | <b>File Reference</b> |
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| Nil                     |             |                       |