Overview & Scrutiny

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REVIEW OF THE PLANNED CLOSURE OF RNIB MANOR HOUSE

Report OSB/9/04 to the Executive
13th July 2004

Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board
14th July 2004

TORBAY COUNCIL

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Paul Lucas, Executive Director

Further copies of this report can be obtained from :

Mark Hammett, Overview and Scrutiny Officer
01803 207063
mark.hammett@torbay.gov

Foreword

This Review Panel was established to investigate the issue of the planned closure by the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) of the specialist employment and social rehabilitation centre based at Manor House in Torquay.

The Panel considered the reasons for the closure, the manner in which the consultation process was conducted and the impact that the closure would have not only on the visually impaired community, but also on Torbay as a whole.

Throughout the process the panel invited input from a number of interested parties ranging from senior management at the RNIB to The Friends of Manor House and South Devon College.

It is hoped that this report will help in some way to preserve at least some element of the service that has been provided by Manor House over the last 60 years.

Finally can I also express the thanks of the Panel to Shenagh Marley and David Nairn who acted as Co-opted Members on our Review Panel, and who gave us the benefit of their considerable expertise in this area.

Cllr Jennings
Chairman of the RNIB Manor House Review Panel

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The RNIB Manor House Review Panel considered the reasons for the closure of Manor House and the impact the closure will have on the local community.

1.2 It examined the rationale behind the closure and investigated the manner in which the consultation process was conducted. The Panel also went onto assess the impact of the closure on the visually impaired community as well as on the wider community of Torbay.

1.3 The Panel met with a number of parties involved in the closure and this enabled the local community and key stakeholders to put forward their views about the closure.

It is recommended to the Executive:

1.4 That Torbay Council work actively with any future provider of a specialist visually impaired service within Torbay, and that the Council should seek to work with other partners to help to provide this service in the future.

1.5 That the Government be pressed to explore the current lack of provision for rehabilitation for those people who have suddenly lost their sight in the United Kingdom.

1.6 That the RNIB be pressed to explain why they have failed so far to implement their own recommendations from the South West Review of 2003 to set up between two and six partnership projects in the South West region.

1.7 That the Council should make representations to the Charity Commission over the conduct of the RNIB in regard to the closure of Manor House, due to the high levels of public dismay at the shutting down of the centre.

It is recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

1.8 That the Review Panel Members receive a monthly written update from the lead officer at Social Services on the progress made in regard to the provision of an alternative specialist visually impaired service within Torbay.

1.9 That the Review Panel reconvene as and when it is felt necessary to consider any developments in regard to the closure of Manor House and to consider the alternative proposals to set up a specialist visually impaired service within Torbay.

2. Introduction

2.1 RNIB Manor House is a specialist employment and social rehabilitation centre for adults who have lost their sight or whose sight has deteriorated. The aim of the centre is to give people the skills and confidence they need to cope independently at home, work and outdoors.

2.2 Manor House and the RNIB have been providing rehabilitation for the blind since 1941 but earlier this year the RNIB announced that it was closing the centre by the 31st July 2004. An alternative employment rehabilitation and further education service for the South West is opening in September 2004 under a partnership between the RNIB and Somerset College of Arts and Technology based in Taunton.

2.3 Members of the Council were invited to a meeting held at Manor House by the Board of Governors on the 22nd May 2004 where the closure of the centre was looked at in more detail. As a result of this meeting the Review Panel was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to investigate the closure.

2.4 The key objectives of the Review were:

(i) To investigate the reasons for the proposed closure of RNIB Manor House.

(ii) To assess the impact of the closure of Manor House on the local community and the visually impaired community.

(iii) To assess the impact of the closure of Manor House on the local economy.

2.5 The Project Plan, which sets out the full details of the review including the methodology which was employed, is attached as Appendix 2.

2.6 The membership of the Panel comprised of Councillors Burridge, Cope, Darling, Hytche, Jennings and Turnbull. Councillor Jennings chaired the meetings of the Review Panel. The Panel also had two Co-opted Members throughout the review, these being Shenagh Marley and David Nain from the Board of Governors of Manor House.

3. Process

3.1 The Panel met formally on seven occasions to consider evidence and to work through its Project Plan.

3.2 Evidence for the Review Panel's work was collected from the following presentations and discussions with:

Jill Read, Manageress of RNIB Manor House

Neville Lawson, Assistant Director of Education and Employment of the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

Shenagh Marley, Board of Governors RNIB Manor House

Christine Tibbets, Community Fund Raising Manager, RNIB

Maria Doyle, South Devon College

The Friends of Manor House

3.3 A written submission was also received by the Panel from Torbay Council's Social Services Directorate on the impact of the closure on the services provided by the Council to the visually impaired.

3.4 The Panel also watched the video "See the difference" which explained the work of Manor House.

3.5 The list of key documents (including background papers, reports and briefing notes) which were considered by the Panel is attached as Appendix 3.

4. Key Findings

Reasons for the closure of RNIB Manor House

4.1 The reasons given to the Panel for the closure of RNIB Manor House were:

- The RNIB's strategy in recent years to move away from residential provision towards a policy of more Social Inclusion in its institutions. There is also a movement by the RNIB to provide local services across the country, rather than a one-centre approach like Manor House.

- The Government's strategy in recent years to move away from long-term residential training.

- The decline in referrals to Manor House since the 1990's by Job Centre Plus Disability Employment Advisers.

- The fact that the RNIB is currently undergoing financial problems due to the fact that in recent years they have received less donations and legacies. This has led the charity into making savings for the future.

- The view made by the RNIB that the facilities offered by Somerset College of Arts and Technology were superior to those offered by South Devon College.

- That the RNIB did not consider it to be appropriate to use RNIB funds to maintain the subsidy to Manor House as the Somerset College of Arts and Technology option would be self funding by the second year of operation.

- That the RNIB could be accused of not promoting or marketing Manor House enough in recent years and that this had led to a decline in client referrals.

- The contracts between Manor House and Job Centre Plus may have contributed to the decline in referrals and thus the closure. This was due to the fact that the new contracts stipulated that all clients now had to have a single room instead of sharing a dormitory. This led to the centre having less capacity to deal with clients in the future.

Quality of the consultation process

4.2 The comments made to the Panel about the quality of the consultation process by the RNIB in relation to the closure of Manor House were:

- That although there was a consultation process with the staff of Manor House by the RNIB, it was felt by many to be too brief. It was also regrettable that the staff at Manor House learnt about the closure from the media before being informed by the RNIB.

- That the RNIB had not been very proactive in its consultation with other key stakeholders like Torbay Council.

- That the RNIB's consultation process with South Devon College had been weak and that the College had received no formal written feedback from the RNIB on their decision to move their services to Somerset College of Arts and Technology. The Panel also felt that the move to Somerset College of Arts and Technology had been pre-determined by the RNIB.

- That the RNIB had not considered the views of the visually impaired living in Cornwall when it undertook the decision to relocate to Somerset College of Arts and Technology.

- That the ex-clients of Manor House felt ignored by the RNIB throughout the consultation process.

<u>Impact of the closure on the local community</u>

4.3 The comments made to the Panel about the impact of the closure of Manor House on the local community were:

- That Manor House currently employs 32 members of staff as well as volunteers. These 32 members of staff will all be made redundant when Manor House closes in July 2004 without the opportunity of re-deployment.

- That Manor House currently supported visually impaired students at South Devon College, but that with closure, this service would be lost to the College and the local community. It was explained that Manor House provided the staff of South Devon College with visual awareness training, and that this service would be lost in the future after the closure of Manor House.

- That the closure of Manor House would have an impact on the provision of services by the Council's Social Services Directorate as with the closure of Manor House the Directorate would no longer be able to contract out mobility and orientation training to Manor

House. This will therefore lead to an increase in waiting times for this service or even no provision of the service at all.

- The Social Services Directorate had serious concerns about the Low Vision Clinic, which is to be relocated to Totnes. It feared that there may be a drop in the take up of this vital service locally as the majority of patients are over 65 and would find travelling to Totnes difficult. There was also concern over the future of the Annual Low Vision Service for Torbay children after the closure of Manor House in July 2004.

Impact of the closure on the visually impaired community

4.4 The comments made to the Panel about the impact of the closure of Manor House on the visually impaired community were:

- That Manor House offered much more than just education and employment, it also gave visually impaired people the skills and confidence needed for the future.

- That the extra services offered by Manor House in providing life skills and rebuilding confidence for those who have just lost their sight, which is above and beyond its remit of education and employment, would be lost to the visually impaired across the country when Manor House closes in July 2004. This is because Manor House is almost unique in providing this type of rehabilitation in the United Kingdom to the visually impaired.

- That visually impaired people would lose the cultural awareness that has developed in Torbay over the last 60 years with the closure of Manor House when the relocation of some services moves to Somerset College of Arts and Technology.

- That Torbay would be losing staff who have considerable expertise with the visually impaired.

- That the closure of Manor House would also see the loss of valuable services to the visually impaired like the Resource Centre and the Low Vision Clinic, which would be relocating to Totnes.

- That Manor House had provided dignity for visually impaired people and that with the closure this sense of dignity would be lost in the future.

Impact of the closure on the local economy

4.5 The comments made to the Panel about the impact of the closure of Manor House on the local economy were:

- That the closure of Manor House would hit the Torbay economy hard in terms of loss of revenue for local shops and businesses, and would create 32 redundancies in an already overcrowded job market.

Other issues raised by the Review

4.6 There were many other issues raised throughout the Review Panel's investigation that have a bearing on the scope of this review. They are outlined below:

- That Staff at Manor House and other interested parties including the Board of Governors of Manor House were in the process of investigating the possibility of providing some smaller service for the visually impaired in Torbay after the closure of Manor House in July 2004. It was hoped that a meeting due to take place on the 14th June 2004 at Manor House between the Chief Executive of the RNIB and other interested parties may clarify this issue further.

- That a number of interested parties were currently in the process of contacting the Charities Commission to investigate the conduct of the RNIB over the closure of Manor House. They are looking to report the RNIB to the Commission over the issue of Harm. In effect this means: causing serious detriment to the people or causes the charity serves, the loss or misuse of significant assets or resources and serious damage to the reputation of the charity generally.

- That many local people felt upset and concerned about what was going to happen to money raised locally for Manor House after its closure in July 2004.

- That there was some concern from the National Lottery over what will happen to the proceeds from the sale of Manor House by the RNIB, as the National Lottery contributed money to the building of Hewitt Lodge, an accommodation block at Manor House.

- That the sale of the site and property of Manor House by the RNIB would be difficult to complete quickly because of the planning permission process.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Panel deplored the decision by the RNIB to close RNIB Manor House and feels that the consultation process undertaken by the RNIB was weak and poorly organised. It also feels that the consultation process had ignored the views of many key stakeholders and other interested parties.

5.2 The Panel also identified that the closure of Manor House would have a significant impact on the local economy in terms of the loss of revenue to local businesses and the loss of 32 jobs within Torbay.

5.3 The Panel also considered that the closure would be felt most severely by the visually impaired community within Torbay, as they would lose the vital services provided by Manor House. These vital services include the loss of the Resource Centre as well as the relocation of the Low Vision Clinic to Totnes.

5.4 However the Panel felt that the most damaging aspect of the closure was the fact that in the future the confidence and life skills given to a recently visually impaired person by Manor House through its rehabilitation programme would be lost forever to the wider community of the United Kingdom.

5.5 Finally the Panel concluded that the closure of Manor House would mean the loss of specialist staff, and that the visually impaired had lost a centre in an area where there was a high degree of cultural awareness for the visually impaired.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended to the Executive:

6.1 That Torbay Council work actively with any future provider of a specialist visually impaired service within Torbay, and that the Council should seek to work with other partners to help to provide this service in the future.

6.2 That the Government be pressed to explore the current lack of provision for rehabilitation for those people who have suddenly lost their sight in the United Kingdom.

6.3 That the RNIB be pressed to explain why they have failed so far to implement their own recommendations from the South West Review of 2003 to set up between two and six partnership projects in the South West region.

6.4 That the Council should make representations to the Charity Commission over the conduct of the RNIB in regard to the closure of Manor House, due to the high levels of public dismay at the shutting down of the centre.

It is recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

6.5 That the Review Panel Members receive a monthly written update from the lead officer at Social Services on the progress made in regard to the provision of an alternative specialist visually impaired service within Torbay.

6.6 That the Review Panel reconvene as and when it is felt necessary to consider any developments in regard to the closure of Manor House and to consider the alternative proposals to set up a specialist visually impaired service within Torbay.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The Panel wishes to monitor the progress made on the proposals to set up an alternative specialist visually impaired service within Torbay. Therefore the Panel wishes to have a written update given to them on a monthly basis on the progress made in setting up an alternative specialist visually impaired Service within Torbay.

7.2 The Panel also feels that the Review Panel should reconvene as and when it is felt necessary to consider any developments in regard to the closure of Manor House and to consider the alternative proposals to set up a specialist visually impaired service within Torbay.

Acknowledgements

The members of the Review Panel would like to thank all the people and organisations who contributed towards the work of this review particularly:

Jill Read and all the Staff at RNIB Manor House

Neville Lawson, Assistant Director of Education and Employment, RNIB

David Nain and Shenagh Marley of the Manor House Board of Governors

Christine Tibbets, Community Fund Raising Manager, RNIB

Maria Doyle, South Devon College

Peggy Evans and The Friends of Manor House

Gill Roberts, Rehabilitation Officer, Sensory Team, Social Services

Appendix 1

Implications of the Recommendations

Legal	Under The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, where a person appears to need community care services, the authority shall carry out an assessment of need, and dependent upon the results of that assessment, provide a service. With the loss of Manor House, alternative services to meet the needs of the visually impaired community will need to be sought to meet assessed needs.
Financial	There are no financial implications however Social Services does assist people with sensory loss and although wishing to support clients, the Directorate would not like to see a large increase in expenditure as a result of the RNIB withdrawing from Torbay.
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Change Mgt Plan	None

The recommendations contained within this Report are in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework

The recommendations contained within this Report would not be a Key Decision

Appendix 2

Review of the planned closure of RNIB Manor House, Torquay

Draft Project Plan

Objective of the Review

To investigate the proposed closure of RNIB Manor House, Torquay.

Introduction

The RNIB is proposing to close down RNIB Manor House by the 31st July 2004. Manor House is a specialist employment and social rehabilitation centre for adults who have lost their sight or whose sight has deteriorated. The aim of the centre is to give people the skills and confidence they need to cope independently at home, work and outdoors.

Scope of the Review

1. To investigate the reasons for the proposed closure of RNIB Manor House, Torquay.

2. To assess the impact of the closure of Manor House, Torquay on the local community and the visually impaired community.

3. To assess the impact of the closure of Manor House, Torquay on the local economy.

Service Background

The Royal National Institute for the Blind is a charity that offers information, support and advice to over two million people with sight problems.

Review Panel

Councillor Gordon Jennings (Lead Member)
Councillor Steve Darling
Councillor Wendy Burridge
Councillor Jean Cope
Councillor Jean Turnbull
Councillor Michael Hytche
David Nain Co-opted Member
Shenagh Marley Co-opted Member

Timetable for Review and Methodology

Date	Time	Venue	Council/Stakeholder/Community representatives	Key Tasks
28th May 2004	10 am	Town Hall	Overview and Scrutiny Panel	• To agree the objective and scope of the Project Plan for the review. • To agree the key tasks to be undertaken by the Panel in completing its Review.
28th May 2004	10:30 am	Town Hall	Jill Read, manageress of RNIB Manor House, Torquay.	• To receive a briefing about the reasons for the proposed closure of Manor House, Torquay, and an explanation of the impact this closure will have on the local community.
1st June 2004	1.30 pm	Town Hall	Neville Lawson, Assistant Director, Education and Employment, RNIB	• To receive a briefing about the reasons for the proposed closure of Manor House, Torquay.
4th June 2004	10.00 am	Town Hall	Shenagh Marley, Board of Governors, RNIB Manor House Christine Tibbets, Community Fund Raising Manager RNIB	• To consider information from the local community and key stakeholders about their views and opinions on the proposed closure of Manor House, Torquay.
4th June 2004	10.30 am	Town Hall	Maria Doyle, South Devon College Friends of Manor House	• To consider information from the local community and key stakeholders about their views and opinions on the proposed closure of Manor House, Torquay.
28th	11.00	Town	Overview and Scrutiny	• To consider if there are any

June 2004	am	Hall	Panel	further issues in relation to the closure of Manor House, Torquay that have not been addressed by the Review Panel. • To determine the conclusions of the Review. • To determine the recommendations of the Review Panel. • To finalise the report of the Review Panel.

The final report of the Review Panel will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting to be held on the 14th July 2004

Appendix 3

List of Key Documents and Resources

- RNIB Manor House Skills Development Centre Torquay Prospectus 2003
- Minutes of House of Commons Adjournment Debate 28th April 2004
- New Beacon Magazine June 2004
- Complaints about Charities booklet published by the Charity Commission in May 2003