

# **Investigation launched into care home consultation “sham”**

**Claims Edinburgh Council officials attempted to override a decision taken by the board which oversees health and social care services in the city.**

Councillors said “serious questions” needed to be answered after it emerged the remit of a consultation on the future of four care homes had been narrowed behind closed doors to focus on when and how they will close rather than provision of replacement services, as previously agreed by the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board (EIJB).

A trade union said the consultation had been reduced to a “sham to justify the outcome certain individuals wish for” and described the alleged move to change its scope as “not only undemocratic but sly and underhand”.

A social care boss said as concerns were raised at a council meeting this week there had “definitely been some misunderstanding” and “no formal decision was taken” adding that assurances have been given that there will still be a “broad review of care-based need in Edinburgh”.

The local authority’s Chief Executive said an investigation would be carried out to find out “exactly what happened”.

The EIJB, which is made up of councillors, NHS representatives, third sector workers and service users and takes decisions about the delivery of health and social care,

agreed in December that engagement with the public on the homes said to be not fit for purpose and earmarked for closure – Ford’s Road, Clovenstone, Jewel House and Ferrylee – would look at “broad future provision of care and support for older people in Edinburgh”.

However some who have seen recent documents relating to the consultation said it did not reflect the Board’s position – sparking accusations that officials attempted to change it.

Speaking at the policy and sustainability committee on Tuesday (May 23), David Harrold, service conditions convenor for Unison’s Edinburgh Council branch said earlier this month he learned the consultation’s remit was now “not to discuss the future of the care homes but to decide how they are to be closed”.

He said: “Prior to this date, there is no record of this change in position – no documents, no minutes, no nothing.

“To ensure that it was not I who had missed out on such important information I then contacted your fellow Councillors who sit on the EIJB and the EIJB Chairperson. They too were unaware of any decision to change the remit of the public consultation.

“This begs the question who made this decision? If not your fellow councillors, and therefore I presume this applies to the other members of the EIJB, then who and with what authority?

“This act by persons unknown is not only undemocratic but sly and underhand. This is no longer a public consultation but a sham to justify the outcome certain individuals wish for.”

Councillor Ross McKenzie said he was also aware of a change to the purpose of the public engagement process and added he had seen proposals to shut one of the facilities down in advance of the consultation being launched.

He tabled a motion calling for the consultation to be broadened to match the aims set out in December and for an explanation of the decisions made by senior officers since then, which was passed by the committee.

Questioning the EIJB chief officer Tony Duncan, SNP councillor Kate Campbell said: "From what I've heard today a decision was made somewhere in the partnership that did not reflect the decision of the board. How did that happen and do we know who made that decision?"

Mr Duncan said: "Not that I'm aware of in the context that's been set, but there have been many things that have happened between December and April."

He said there was a "discussion but no formal decision," adding: "There's definitely been some misunderstanding, but no formal decision was taken."

The Greens' Alys Mumford said officials "clearly felt empowered to go and reverse a decision made by the board".

She said: "I'm trying to understand what that discussion looked like. What did that conversation look like?"

Mr Duncan replied: "The discussions were about how we could focus the scope more precisely so we could get the right results.

"It's not one or the other – it's both. So conversations were had, we said we would take this forward, engaged a large group back in March time to try and build context and get everybody on board.

"That's why I think something has happened subsequent which I genuinely have not seen and I need to understand what has been said. We do need to go back to the IJB and make absolutely clear what the question is we need to answer."

Tory group leader Iain Whyte said: "It strikes me that there's

some very odd things going on here.

“I’m torn on this because on the one hand, it seems there hasn’t been a change so what’s this all about? But on the other hand there’s clearly something going on that we need some answers to – because if there has been a governance failure we should find out more about that and we should put it right.”

Labour council leader Cammy Day said: “We need to get to the bottom of what’s happened here but ultimately it’s about the care that’s provided for people in care homes – and that should be the priority.”

Council chief executive Andrew Kerr said: “I’ll do an investigation into exactly what happened and I’ll lay out the facts for everyone and will issue that to all members.”

SNP group leader Adam McVey said there were “serious questions” to be answered.

He called on the EIJB chair, Labour councillor Tim Pogson, to “clarify what he knew and when regarding the change to consultation on the proposed closure of these care homes”.

Cllr McVey added: “If he did know and was briefed by officers before publication, he is not only responsible for the change of approach but there would be a serious question on whether the trade unions were deliberately misled. The residents of these care homes and their families deserve straight answers.”

Cllr Pogson said: “The Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership is conducting a broad review of care-based need in Edinburgh in order to meet future demand and ensure high quality care throughout the city.

“No decisions have been made by the EIJB and all proposals are subject to democratic consultation and oversight by the Integration Joint Board.”

A Spokesperson for Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership said: "We are committed to full and democratic consultation on the future of care homes in Edinburgh including Castlegreen and North Merchiston which have recently returned to Local Authority management.

"It was first identified in 2008 that four older care homes would not meet modern requirements, with buildings that are not offering the best environment for people that are frail and have high levels of need .

"Our priority is to provide high-quality, person centred care for all residents and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board has tasked us with consulting to ensure that this level of care can be assured in the four older care homes identified. We are committed to ensuring sufficient capacity to meet future demand and we will keep residents, relatives and staff updated."

*by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter*

*The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency. It is funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector (in Edinburgh that is Reach plc (the publisher behind Edinburgh Live and The Daily Record) and used by many qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover news about top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.*



City Chambers