

**Dorset County Council**



# Petitions Panel

27 September 2017

## 1. Background to the Petition Scheme

- 1.1 The County Council's Petitions Scheme was adopted on 29 April 2010 and came into effect on 15 June 2010. The Scheme was subsequently updated by the County Council on 21 July 2016.
- 1.2 If a petition is supported by 50 or more signatories then it will be dealt with by a small customer focussed panel. If a petition is supported by 1,000 or more signatories it will be scheduled for a debate at the next meeting of the full County Council.

## 2. Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

- 2.1 The County Council received a petition organised by Mr John Richards on Thursday 20 July 2017. This reads as follows:

*This petition is concerned with the proposal to open a drug and alcohol recovery facility (a new hub for wraparound holistic recovery support) at 22 Abbotsbury Rd, Weymouth. The intention is for this Weymouth based facility to serve those affected by addiction, coming from across the whole of Dorset. The proposed property and its location are both inadequate and inappropriate to meet such needs, and this petition asks Dorset County Council to reconsider.*

- 2.2 As this petition contains more than 50 signatures, the Panel are invited to note and discuss this.
- 2.3 This discussion should conclude with a decision as to how to respond to the petition. This may include recommending one or more of the following:
  - taking the action requested in the petition
  - considering the petition at a council meeting
  - holding an inquiry into the matter
  - undertaking research into the matter
  - holding a public meeting
  - holding a consultation
  - referring the petition for consideration by the council's Audit and Governance Committee
  - calling a referendum
  - writing to the petition organiser setting out the Panel's views about the request in the petition.

- 2.4 Alternatively, the Panel may determine a combination of the options above, or decide on another course of action as appropriate.

## 3. Purpose of the report

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the need for a Recovery Hub in Weymouth, as well as the process which led to the recommendation of 22 Abbotsbury Road as the

Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

preferred location for the facility. It also outlines the key concerns highlighted by members of the public and local councillors following public engagement earlier in the year, and describes how Dorset County Council has reconsidered its initial recommendation.

- 3.2 The planning application process will assess the 'adequacy and appropriateness' of the proposal in relation to the local plan. A group of local experts in the field from the NHS, charities and the Police have been involved in the choice of location and property, and consider 22 Abbotsbury Road to be both adequate and appropriate as a setting for the proposed services. The planning statement supporting this application is attached at Appendix 1, and gives more detail about how the Hub would function, as well as further evidence about the model proposed.

#### **4. Context**

##### Impact of Drugs and Alcohol in Weymouth and Portland

- 4.1 The rate of drug use in the Borough of Weymouth and Portland is more than double the average across the County and national estimates suggest that there are likely to be about 500 opiate users in the Borough (i.e. more than 1 in every 100 of the adult population)<sup>1</sup>. In relation to alcohol use, 1200 adults are estimated to be drinking at levels which are considered higher risk (men who regularly drink over 8 units per day or over 50 units per week and women who regularly drink over 6 units per day and over 35 units per week)<sup>2</sup>.
- 4.2 On average approximately half of the drug related deaths across the County are in residents of Weymouth and Portland, and the alcohol-specific death rate in the Borough is the highest of any district in Dorset, at almost twice the county average.<sup>3</sup> This means that in the Borough between 2013 and 2015 there were 20 drug-related deaths, 36 adults died as a direct result of their alcohol consumption, and there were a further 10 deaths from alcohol related road traffic accidents.
- 4.3 The consequences of substance misuse are much more complex than mortality alone, with negative effects on both the physical and emotional health of children and families, as well as the impacts on the community from crime and antisocial behaviour.
- 4.4 Nationally 27% of serious case reviews mention alcohol misuse, and 29% mention drug use. A typical heroin user spends around £1,400 on drugs each month, but treatment significantly reduces this, and the crime often committed as a result. PHE estimates that for every £1 spent on drug treatment in the UK, £2.50 is delivered in savings to the health service and criminal justice system and wider community.

##### Service provision and unmet need

- 4.5 Dorset County Council has been aware for many years of the higher level of need for support and treatment for substance misuse within the population of Weymouth compared to the rest of Dorset. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, local authorities have the duty to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of their local population by ensuring that there are public health services aimed at reducing drug and alcohol misuse. The public health grant is provided to local authorities with the condition the local authority must, in using the grant, "...have regard to the need to improve the take up of, and outcomes from, its drug and alcohol misuse treatment services..."

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Public Health England (See <http://fingertipsreports.phe.org.uk/health-profiles/2015/e07000053.pdf> and <http://fingertipsreports.phe.org.uk/health-profiles/2015/e10000009.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Local Area Profiles for England (See <http://www.lape.org.uk/downloads/alcoholestimates2011.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> Source: PHE Fingertips (<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/local-alcohol-profiles>). Rate in Weymouth is 18.1 people per 1,000, compared to an average of 10 for the Dorset County Council area and 11.5 for England as a whole.

- 4.6 Treatment services have always had a strong presence in Weymouth, and have successfully operated out of rented buildings in central Weymouth – in recent years two properties on Weymouth sea front have been used, as well as space within Weymouth Community Hospital. During 2016, about 300 Weymouth residents who are opiate users were treated as well as about 130 residents who have alcohol dependency but don't use other drugs.<sup>4</sup>
- 4.7 Some people require a detoxification from either alcohol or drugs as part of their clinical treatment, and for many this can be done safely in their own home - but this does require support from family or friends to keep an eye on them 24 hours a day for several days. In the absence of such family support then detoxification can only be safely offered in a hospital or specialist unit.
- 4.8 Historically, beds were available for detoxification within the Linden Unit on the Westhaven Hospital site, but these were shut in April 2014 following a reconfiguration of mental health beds by the NHS and no local facility has been available in Weymouth since this time. Detoxification services are now commissioned across a range of providers in the South West for those where inpatient care is the best option due to complex medical needs. Local residents who need detoxification and are well enough to be treated in their own community but do not have the required support from family or friends have no choice but to travel – this could be to Poole Hospital, or to units further afield such as Bristol, Weston-super-Mare or Cornwall.
- 4.9 Recovery-focused treatment groups have been offered across Dorset for many years to service users who have made good progress and have stopped using alcohol or illicit drugs. This is a key part of the service in the later stages of treatment and focuses on helping clients make the necessary changes to stay off drugs and/or alcohol long term – this includes both the practical issues such as identifying opportunities for employment, as well as addressing other aspects. There is a growing proportion of Dorset residents who have been engaged in treatment for long periods of time without achieving full recovery and would benefit from improved access to recovery focused care.
- 4.10 It has been difficult for service providers to offer these group programmes consistently and regularly throughout the County because of the challenges of identifying venues that are accessible by public transport to all clients. The service has therefore been inconsistent and inequitable. Making short-term overnight accommodation available for a proportion of service users whilst they are completing a one to two week course would improve access and equity, and ensure sufficient numbers to make groups viable.
- 4.11 Currently there is no building available for drug and alcohol services across the County which has the necessary planning consent to allow service providers to offer these kinds of residential treatment and properties with the category of use required to provide short-term residential treatment are generally not available within the rental market.
- Capital Funding Allocation
- 4.12 In early 2014, Dorset County Council, in its capacity as a commissioner of healthcare services for substance misuse, was successful in an application for over £0.6 million of capital funding from Public Health England to develop a Recovery Hub in Weymouth – the proposal was developed specifically to address the needs above.
- 4.13 The proposal to site the Recovery Hub in Weymouth was to ensure the support is in the location where the need is greatest, with a recognition that if the facility were sited away from Weymouth, then the Weymouth community would benefit less.

---

<sup>4</sup> Source: Halo (Dorset treatment system case management system)

Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

- 4.14 The proposed Hub would allow local residents to access a residential detoxification services when needed, as well as increasing access to recovery focused treatment groups.

DCC decision-making process

- 4.15 The original bid for funding was approved by the relevant Head of Service and Director of Adult and Community Services in partnership with Public Health Dorset prior to submission, as well as the responsible Cabinet member at that time.
- 4.16 When DCC was informed that it had been successful in winning the funding, officers and members from the County and Borough councils, as well as other stakeholders, were informed and briefed both individually and through relevant groups such as the Melcombe Regis Task Group (now Board).
- 4.17 In December 2014, DCC Cabinet approved that the administration and payment of the grant funding allocated for a Weymouth Recovery Hub be delegated to the Director for Adult and Community Services, including authorisation to take an option to secure a suitable property on terms to be agreed by the Director for the Environment and Economy and the Chief Financial Officer.
- 4.18 More detailed oversight of the project has therefore been conducted through DCC's Property Management Group (PMG), with relevant Cabinet member oversight throughout the process. PMG approved initial proposals in February 2015, which were then presented again in July 2016 with further details and refinements to the original plans. PMG again offered advice in July 2017 after recommendations from the public and elected members had been received that alternative properties ought to be considered, and recommended continuing with 22 Abbotsbury Road as the preferred property.
- 4.19 In developing the plans for the services to operate from the Hub, a specific Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was approved in Spring 2015. Since then, consultation with stakeholders and the wider public has been conducted about the structure of substance misuse treatment services in the future, which then informed the re-commissioning of substance misuse services across the county. At this point, a comprehensive EqIA was submitted and approved to cover the entire re-commissioning process, including the provision of services from a Recovery Hub. This re-commissioning process has also been approved by the Joint Public Health Board to ensure it is appropriate and sustainable.

Why has 22 Abbotsbury Road been chosen as the preferred site?

- 4.20 The search for suitable properties in Weymouth in terms of location, size and affordability has been limited by the market of available properties. The majority of those identified have been either in Melcombe Regis or Westham, which are the areas of Weymouth where analysis shows need for this service is greatest.<sup>5</sup> More detailed information and analysis of local need can be found in the planning statement, attached as Appendix 1
- 4.21 A location in Melcombe Regis or Westham would also represent a good fit with the relevant local plan, specifically policies COM2, which seeks to ensure the accessibility of community assets, and ECON6, which seeks to preserve tourist accommodation where appropriate.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.22 However, Dorset County Council has received advice from Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and the broader Melcombe Regis Task Group, that while they are supportive of the project they would recommend that the facility should not be sited in the Park District. No alternative site was suggested.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Halo (Dorset treatment system case management system)

<sup>6</sup> See [https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/media/209581/West-Dorset-Weymouth--Portland-Local-Plan-2015/pdf/West\\_Dorset\\_Weymouth\\_Portland\\_Local\\_Plan\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/media/209581/West-Dorset-Weymouth--Portland-Local-Plan-2015/pdf/West_Dorset_Weymouth_Portland_Local_Plan_2015.pdf)

- 4.23 In identifying properties, Dorset County Council drew together an expert group of local professionals, service users, charities, the Police and partner organisations. The criteria for identifying potential properties were:
- Location – accessibility from the centre of Weymouth. Many service users do not have access to private transport and so are dependent on public transport.
  - Private outdoor space to reduce the need for service users to congregate outside the property.
  - Adequate space to accommodate 1:1 consulting space, group therapy space, dining area and kitchen, bedrooms and office space.
  - Affordability – ability to buy and refurbish the property to a high standard within the available budget
- 4.24 After extensive research of available properties (including those available through disposal of any public sector buildings), plus viewing in person more than 10 commercial and residential properties across the area (including Upwey, Chickerell, Westham and Melcombe Regis), the final recommendation on a preferred property was made after consultation with our expert group. The decision was based on identifying the property which offered the best balance between location, meeting service needs, affordability and deliverability.
- 4.25 22 Abbotsbury Road offers the right package of space to meet the specific needs of a hub, with a combination of short-term residential rooms and communal space. In addition, it is well located in a mixed-use area. As well as other guest houses and privately-owned houses, there is also a hairdresser, pharmacy, cycle shop, GP surgery, charity shop and insurance broker.
- 4.26 In addition to the fact that this location is appropriate because it meets local need and the area is already one of mixed use, converting this property into a Recovery Hub is appropriate because its present use is not sustainable. The current owners are not able to run the business as solely tourist accommodation, and have received no offers from potential buyers interested in maintaining its current use, despite the property being on the market since September 2014, and the asking price being reduced on several occasions.
- 4.27 Given its current use as a guest house, advice was taken that a formal change of use application would be required, and the advice from planning officers within both the County and Borough councils was that this should be overseen by Dorset County Council's Regulatory Committee.
- Engagement with stakeholders and the public
- 4.28 Throughout this process, officers and members from both the Borough and County Council, as well as other partners including the NHS, Dorset Police, and local charities have been involved, both in the choice of property and with advising on how to consult with wider stakeholders, including the public.
- 4.29 Borough members were asked how best to engage local residents, given that there would be a formal consultation process as part of the planning decision, and they advised that a public meeting would be appropriate.
- 4.30 The public meeting, chaired by the DCC ward member Cllr Byatt, was held in February 2017 at a local community venue close to the proposed site. Publicity was conducted in advance of the meeting with leaflets delivered and in-person visits made to nearby properties, as well as a press release that led to coverage in the *Dorset Echo*, and on

Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

Wessex FM and BBC Radio Solent, ensuring that local residents were aware of the meeting and able to attend if they wished.

- 4.31 A large number of local residents attended the meeting. A variety of views were expressed regarding the facility, but the following specific concerns were noted:
1. **Antisocial behaviour and crime** – including drug dealing – currently occurs nearby the property; would this be worsened or put service users' recovery at risk?
  2. **Parking** at the property is limited and would be inadequate if it was envisaged that both service users and staff would travel by car;
  3. If there is **excessive noise and the visible presence of the service users** this could have a negative impact on neighbouring businesses;
  4. If people come from outside Weymouth to access the facility, there might be a risk that they look to stay in the area, **increasing the number of people with substance misuse issues locally.**

How have we responded to concerns expressed?

- 4.32 Since the public meeting, the council has considered carefully and responded to these concerns, engaging in correspondence directly with members of the public, the MP for South Dorset and elected members, who have got in touch to continue the discussion.
- 4.33 Since February 2017, in response to the concerns raised by both the public and members, officers have again explored whether there are any properties now available in Weymouth which would be a better alternative than 22 Abbotsbury Road, including those available through the open market as well as any which will become available through disposal of public sector property. No better option has been identified, and when discussed at PMG the group agreed to recommend continuing with the acquisition of 22 Abbotsbury Road.
- 4.34 As regards antisocial behaviour and crime, Dorset Police have stated:
- “The proposed model would provide a service to those who are already engaged in the process of rehabilitation and are therefore far less chaotic in their behaviour than people who attend centres before reaching this stage in their recovery. As a consequence there is very little crime associated with these centres as they are staffed and have close contact with their local Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT). Anyone intent on dealing drugs would naturally tend to avoid these areas as they are more likely to be seen by police or medical professionals. The area around Abbotsbury Road has a variety of uses including housing, guesthouses and some commercial properties and has an experienced NPT that is already engaged with tackling drug dealing within the town.”*
- 4.35 Similarly the experience of service providers locally who provide services both in Dorset and nationally that based on their experience opening any facility has a positive impact on crime in the immediate vicinity – their view is that this is not only about the presence of professional staff who will report crime, but also through self-policing on the part of the drug-using community.
- 4.36 Therefore, it is anticipated that, if anything, the provision of this service may reduce the incidence of crime and antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood, and there is strong evidence that treatment for substance misuse issues in general reduces crime and antisocial behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-misuse-treatment-in-england-evidence-review-of-outcomes>

Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

- 4.37 However, we take this issue very seriously, and have looked into ways that we could help further reduce crime and antisocial behaviour locally. One proposal is that the project could fund the installation of CCTV which would address the crime and antisocial behaviour that the neighbours report in and around Holland Road. We would welcome working with residents to develop further initiatives to ensure the safety and cohesion of the local community.
- 4.38 In terms of **parking**, we expect and would encourage the majority of service users attending the Hub to walk or use public transport. This operates without any issues for the comparable services that currently operate in Weymouth. Staff parking (three spaces) is allocated within the site at present and would remain unchanged, given the continuity of staffing levels. Overall, as there would be fewer people staying in this facility overnight than the current nine-room guest house, we would expect our proposal to reduce local traffic and parking pressure. This would be in accordance with the adopted local plan.
- 4.39 We are acutely aware of the need to ensure that the proposed Hub would not **impact on the next-door property** so, for example, within the refurbishment budget there would be funding to improve sound-proofing if required (although we anticipate that noise from this facility should be less than from the existing guesthouse given the type and level of use, and the behaviour rules that would be in place in the facility).
- 4.40 In relation to the broader **impact and visibility of service users** and the facility as a whole, the current front garden space would be kept as a garden, ensuring that any service user waiting to be let in does not obstruct the pavement. There would be discreet signage next to the front door (similar to the signage on the door of Turning Point (Drug Intervention Project), next to Bluebird Coaches on the Esplanade in Weymouth). The small enclosed courtyard at the back of the property would be kept, to provide sufficient outdoor space for service users to relax, ensuring that they do not need to congregate beside either entrance/exit.
- 4.41 Most people accessing support at the Hub would be Weymouth residents already, using it as an 'outpatient' during the day, and anyone staying in the property overnight would only be allowed to do so if they had stable accommodation already in place that they could return to after their short stay. These stays are more comparable to a residential course, or a short stay in hospital, and therefore no-one accessing the facility would acquire any tenancy rights, meaning that **the facility itself should not attract any additional service users to Weymouth**.

What opportunities are there for local residents and other stakeholders to get involved and influence the project?

- 4.42 The planning process includes a minimum of 21 days consultation, which began on 12 September and will therefore remain open until at least 03 October. Local councils and neighbours are being notified of the application, and notices are being placed on site and in the local press. The application and accompanying information can be found at <http://countyplanning.dorsetforyou.com/ePlanningOPS/searchPageLoad.do>. Dorset County Council has also publicised the consultation through social media and has released a statement to the media. Representations from neighbours and other interested parties in response to the planning application will be taken into consideration when the application goes before the Regulatory Committee.
- 4.43 More detailed information about how the recovery hub would function, should the planning application be successful, is available in the supporting information that accompanies the planning application and this is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.44 If the application for change of use were accepted, the council and its partners would be keen to work with local residents to ensure that the refurbishment of the property causes

Petition against the Proposed Drug and Alcohol Recovery Hub, 22 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, Dorset

the minimum of disruption, and the ongoing operation of the service is smooth and effective for all involved. This offer to be further involved in the design and decision-making process was made at the public meeting and has been reiterated directly to both elected members and the general public since.

**5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 The Panel is invited to note the receipt of this petition and decide what action(s) to recommend.

Officer Contact

Name: Will Haydock, Senior Health Programme Advisor

Tel: 01305 224104

Email: [w.r.haydock@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:w.r.haydock@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

**Dr David Phillips**  
**Director of Public Health**

**Cllr Steve Butler**  
**Cabinet Member for Safeguarding**

September 2017