



Shaping future care in the Forres locality

Note of the community meeting held in Forres Town Hall on 13 June 2018

A more joined-up system of care which responds to the needs of frail elderly patients rather than making them fit into existing services and buildings is being developed for the Forres locality.

A report due to go before a meeting of the board in November will set out a new model of safe and effective care and support for resident.

No decision has been made on the future of Leancoil Hospital which will meantime remain open as long as staffing levels can be maintained and the building remains operational.

Pam Gowans, Chief Officer of Health & Social Care Moray, led the latest in a series of community engagement events at Forres Town Hall on 13 June.

She told attendees: "It's not a question of what we do with Leancoil but of how we care for people appropriately. If we can get the health and care system sorted out and come up with a different solution to care for people safely and effectively, then there is the possibility of a community asset transfer for the site. I want to stress that nothing has been decided but four beds in a setting which is not being used is not sustainable."

The earlier workshops have provided a platform for people to come together to consider challenges around finance, demand and staff recruitment, and to identify opportunities for improvement within existing resources. The community discussions are supporting the work of a core group of key stakeholders who have been tasked with drawing up an improved model of integrated care and support for frail elderly members of the community.

Questions were asked as to why Leancoil would close when there was rising demand for care and support from an aging population and concern was expressed about elderly patients being sent to community hospitals in Dufftown, Aberlour, Buckie and Keith rather than a local facility.

There was a long history to Leancoil and hopes community beds would be provided as part of the new health centre had been dashed. Mrs Gowans confirmed no money has been assigned to invest in upgrading the building.

The starting point should not be talking about the beds and buildings but what are the needs of the patients which we are trying to respond to and what are the skills of the multi-disciplinary staff team that need to be around the model, Mrs Gowans questioned.

"We know hospital is not the best place for older people but we are not saying we don't need them. Stays in community hospitals are longer than what geriatricians would consider reasonable. We're not saying patients don't get good care but it is never going to optimise their recovery.

"We as professionals have to work through with GPs as to what the tolerance and ceiling of care is that it's OK for someone to be cared for at home and when they need a hospital bed. Then we need to consider how we are going to provide that within the resources. If someone needs a hospital bed is that Dr Gray's or somewhere else? Are there opportunities to negotiate with NHS Highland over Nairn Community Hospital or negotiate with care homes?"



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Or can somewhere like Varis Court do it for us? If it's Varis Court is that OK? If it's Nairn or a care home is that OK and acceptable?

“Canterbury in New Zealand changed its system after an earthquake. If a building was not there tomorrow what would you do? Could we go to a no bed base and have no community hospitals in Moray or does that feel a step too far?”

Five five augmented care beds are facilitated in the Hanover's Varis Court development in Forres and supported by Health & Social Care Moray's Forres Neighbourhood Care Team in a test of change. Over 100 people have been supported at home by the team with only a small number requiring admission to the unit. A full evaluation on the project is due in November.

Officials from the NHS and the health and social care partnership have met with members of Forres Community Council to discuss the possible legislative transfer of Leancoil Hospital to the community and have toured the hospital buildings, including the former nurses' home.

Chair Graham Hilditch said that while recognising no decision has been made on the future of Leancoil, the community council is keen to be proactive.

“We have taken the viewpoint that we should be looking ahead and anticipating any changes at Leancoil rather than looking back historically. At the moment it is a very expensive facility and as a community council we question the financial viability of it and have reviewed possible scenarios,” Mr Hilditch outlined.

The community council considers that continuing as is would not represent value for money or be a long term solution and has also questioned whether the building could be upgraded to provide a modern community hospital setting. It recognises that if the decision is made to close the hospital then there is the possibility of the site being sold to a developer.

Giving an update, Mr Hilditch said: “To go down the community asset transfer route you need to be a legal entity and Forres Community Council would qualify as that. The second stage would be to raise funds to commission a feasibility study. We estimate it will cost in the region of £20,000. We are at the point of talking to various bodies and we are fairly confident we can achieve that.

“The feasibility study will investigate the state of the building and the amount of work involved in refurbishing it. There is also a need to look at potential uses and if they could be viable – there is no point acquiring the building if it does not have a viable future. The feasibility study would involve a lot of public engagement and input into possible uses.”

40 members of the public attended a recent meeting of the community council to talk about the future use of the site. Offers of support for the community asset transfer have been received from prominent members of the community, politicians and experts in a variety of fields, including Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Glasgow School of Art has already expressed an interest in using part of the site for student accommodation.



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The community council hopes the feasibility study can get underway by autumn. That would be as far as they would want to take the process. It is expected a board of trustees or charity would then be established to progress the community asset transfer which could take two to three years.

“This is a big, long-term project which is a great opportunity for the local community and for an iconic building. Nostalgia is not a reason to keep it open – we need to find uses for the building which are financially viable.”

Reports on the proposed new integrated model and the evaluation on Varis Court and the Forres Neighbourhood Care Team are expected to be considered by the Moray Integration Joint Board in November.

ENDS