

Anna Soubry MP visited Middle Street on the afternoon of Friday, 23rd July, and afterwards she spoke live to BBC radio Nottingham. Here is more-or-less what she said:

I intended to be there for an hour, and ended up staying for about 3, which was not difficult. I wasn't surprised because I have no preconceptions about people with mental health difficulties, but it was a great place, offering support and classes, building confidence. It helps people reach their own goals, for example there's someone who is finally able to go off to university, someone else going back to work. Not everyone will do those things, of course.

(Questioner remarks that she's against closure, while her party is for it)

It's not quite like that – looking at the (consultation) document, there is what almost appears to be a typing error “....the use of current buildings as a place to provide day services will not continue” which implies that the council has made a decision (already) which is not my understanding. And it goes on to say that people will be supported to achieve what they want through a personal budget, which is legislation introduced by the previous government, which I don't have any trouble with.....but overwhelmingly at this place which serves 200 people from both County and City, people are saying, “I'll tell you what I want, I want the Middle St Resource Centre to stay open please”. If we're being honest about giving people choice about what they want with their problems, the Centre has to stay open, doesn't it?

(Questioner asks about the 2 other Centres under threat)

I don't know about them, I've just been Middle St and it seems to me to be doing an excellent job. I can't see any reason to change that. I mean, there are some things I think should change there.....maybe it shouldn't open (just) 9 till 4. This is a place where they grow their own vegetables, cook and eat them in the restaurant. A place that offers courses. A place that engages with the community. Where people can go on to learn in other places. There's a good argument to expand it to give people even more reason to use it.

The next week, she confirmed what she said in this email to a service user:

Would you be so good as to pass on the following and the attached letter to everyone at the Middle Street Resource Centre.

It was an absolute pleasure to meet everyone last Friday afternoon at Middle Street. It is clearly a great place providing an important set of services to a rich variety of people with mental health problems and illnesses. It is clear that Middle Street is held in great affection by its users and understandably and rightly so.

I can see no good reason why Middle Street should be closed; on the contrary I think it should be

opening longer and if the users agree, should involve more people from the wider community. As you can see from the attached I have written a lengthy letter to Councillor Kevin Rostance who is the County Councillor with responsibility for the future of Middle Street. Please be assured that I intend to do everything I can to keep Middle Street open. I very much hope that you will involve an appropriate organisation or charity to do an evaluation of Middle Street and the services it provides to users and the many benefits users derive from the Centre. Parliament is now in recess and I am now working at my constituency office. I think it would be helpful if we met again once I have had a reply from Councillor Rostance. Please convey my thanks and best wishes to everyone I met on Friday.

ANNA SOUBRY
Member of Parliament for Broxtowe

The full text of her letter to Councillor Rostance is here:

*Dear Kevin,
May I firstly apologise for what is a lengthy letter. I have a number of questions and a number of comments which I suspect you will want to reply to.
This letter is also my contribution to the "consultation" in relation to the "Future of mental health day services" and the Middle Street Resource Centre in my constituency which is used by a large number of my constituents.
As you know I visited the Middle Street Resource Centre in Beeston on Friday July 23rd and met with a number of people who use, or have used, the day centre on a regular basis.
I know you are also aware that a campaign has been underway by users of the day centre for a number of months.
As a result of various discussions, emails and my visit on Friday I would like to raise the following with you as a matter of some urgency please. From tomorrow (Wednesday 28th July) I shall be back in the constituency office and would be grateful if all or any communication could be conducted via Barton House, 61, High Road, Chilwell, NG9 4AJ
Shortly after my election in May I received a petition from a number of users of and others connected with the Middle Street Resource Centre. In due course I was forwarded an email from Jon Wilson the Service Director, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, sent on June 11th to a number of County Councillors, no doubt in response to the lobbying they had received from users of Middle Street. In short County Councillors and I had received letters (and in my case the aforementioned petition) opposing any introduction of charges and making clear their opposition to any proposed closure of the Centre.
In his email Mr Wilson wrote:
"To date we have made no proposals to close the service, although we have been talking to people about the future of services in general."*

And continued

"It is unfortunate that service users and others have been orchestrated to make comment prior to the commencement of the consultation process, at which time we will be able to have full and open discussion with them about the need to change alongside the need to continue to meet the individual and collective needs of the county's population."

In my response to those constituents who had contacted me, I quoted extensively from the above

email and assured users there were no plans to close the Middle Street Centre and a consultation would involve all users and be a genuine opportunity to gather the views of all users.

You can imagine my concern that within a few weeks of Mr. Wilsons email the “consultation document” makes plain at p.8

Specific Proposals

1. The use of the current buildings as a place to provide day services will not continue.

Would you be so good as to answer the following questions please, given that it is my understanding policy matters are determined by elected Councillors and not by officers.

1. Is it the policy of Nottinghamshire County Council that the current buildings used as a place to provide day services will not continue?

2. If the above is the policy of Nottinghamshire County Council then when was that policy determined and by whom?

3. If the above is the policy of Nottinghamshire County Council what consultations, public or otherwise were conducted and when and with whom?

4. If it is not the policy of Nottinghamshire County Council to discontinue the day services at the current buildings then could you explain the aforementioned “specific proposal” at page 8 and how it came to be placed in the aforementioned document?

5. Could you please clarify the purpose of the “public consultation” – what options the County Council is considering and how the views of users will be evaluated and considered in the decision making process.

The consultation document is set against the background of a White Paper “Our health, our care, our say” – the “our” being users of mental health services and an un-sourced policy or document “Putting people first – a shared vision and commitment to the transformation of adult social care” in 2007.

From the consultation document it is clear Nottinghamshire County Council will “... ensure that people....have more choice and control over how they get the support they need.” (p.4) and again in page 4 under “ What we want to achieve.....ensure people have more choice and control of their services” .

Under the title “Specific Proposals” at page 8 “people will be supported to achieve what they want to through a personal budget”.

Given these admirable aims, that will give mental health service users control of their budget enabling them to purchase the services they chose, I take it that if the majority of some 200 registered users want the Middle Street Resource Centre to remain open then they will be allowed to exercise their choice?

I am compelled to observe that given the aforementioned contents of p.8 of the consultation document, Nottinghamshire County Council appears to have removed any choice from users of Middle Street even though this contradicts the Councils policy to give users choice and control over the support they need and want. I would welcome your views on this please.

Turning to who has been consulted about the future of Middle Street, it is clear from email correspondence that I have been copied into that half the users at Middle Street have not been consulted with, neither has Nottingham City Council which funds those users as they reside within the City.

Would you be so good as to ensure that everyone with any reasonable connection to Middle Street is consulted with. I include users, their families, psychiatrists, GP’s and CPN’s and any

other health worker who refers patients or clients to the centre. I would also ask you to consult with the relevant NHS trusts/PCT's who offer mental health services within the south of Nottinghamshire. Again I welcome your views on ensuring the consultation involves all relevant parties and people.

I would like to deal with the "questionnaire" which in effect forms the "consultation". People suffering or living with a mental health illness or difficulty reflect society at large. So, some are more articulate than others, some have learning disabilities others have Ph.D's. It is therefore unfortunate that the questionnaire is so riddled with jargon and complicated in language. I am not sure that the response boxes indicating a level of agreement or disagreement is the best way to consult with service users and suggest it rather contradicts Mr Wilsons desire for "full and open discussion."

I am sure you will agree with me that it is imperative to use plain English in order to obtain the genuine views of people who are part of a consultation, at tax payers expense, into services funded by the public purse. Again I welcome your views and would ask you please to ensure that the views of users and all other interested parties and people are gained in their own words.

I wrote down the comments I gained from users, not advocates or staff, during the three hours I had the pleasure to spend at Middle Street. I was shown around the Centre by users.

Every user I spoke to on Friday told me what Middle Street means to them and not one of them wants it to close. On the contrary they all believed it provided them with invaluable opportunities and vital support. Would you please ensure these comments are part of the consultation and part of the decision making process.

"I was new to the area and my psychiatrist told me about Middle Street. It was fantastic to come here. I have gained confidence through support and the excellent courses here. I'm now doing voluntary work with the Salvation Army".

"I come here for further education. I can be me here and not frightened if I fall behind or have a bad day"

"Some of us organise things together and go out together like the theatre or walking. The staff are here to help us if we need it."

"It's all under one roof"

"I've always wanted to go to University and I am going in September thanks to here. I felt safe and secure here and gained confidence. People have blossomed here."

"Middle Street gives my day some structure"

"People are non-judgemental here. I knew I was not alone. I completed my PhD and I couldn't have done that without Middle Streets support".

"I like travelling here with people I know. I don't feel safe travelling by myself."

"I came here an absolute wreck. I was picked up and supported here. Now I am working thanks to this place."

"People can come and go. You can 'dip in' depending on whether you need some support."

"This place gives me confidence and support"

"My family are so pleased I come here. My sons live away – they are in their thirties and they used to get so worried as I used to just walk off. Now they know I have stability and a place to come and enjoy - with people I know and like and who don't judge me."

"We all chose to come here".

"Every time I see my CPN he asks "you are still going to the Centre?" because he knows it helps me."

Everyone said that in all their various experiences of mental health services Middle Street was the most positive experience they had had.

Having been to the Middle Street Resource Centre and having spoken to users I would urge you

on behalf of the majority, who are my constituents not to close down the Day Centre. We have accepted users of mental health services should be able to choose the services they want to help them. Middle Street provides such a service and the users want to continue to use it. There is much potential to expand Middle Street, in terms of its opening times and use by the community at large.

I apologise again for the length of this letter but this is an important issue to a number of my constituents. I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes

Since then, Anna Soubry has continued in her support for Middle St, and has kindly agreed to present our petition to the House of Commons (which see).