

APPENDIX A

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE DISABILITY RESOURCE
CENTRE**

**AN APPRAISAL FOR
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
PARTNERSHIP FORUM**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was not a “best value” study but the approach adopted similar principles. Buckinghamshire Disability Resource Centre (BDRC) was compared with available, national data and three other Resource Centres which were visited. The consultants challenged the present role of the Centre and practice setting out five development options. Consultation took place with service users. Key funders and other statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders were interviewed as were tenant organisations based at the Centre.

The purpose of the study was to review the Buckinghamshire Disability Resource Centre and set out some alternatives for the future. The brief provided by Buckinghamshire Health Authority in conjunction with a steering group representing Health and Social Services interests asked if the BDRC is:-

- Consistent with national and local strategies.
- Capable of being managed by an identified user group
- Viable and sustainable from a practical and financial point of view
- Meeting the needs of disabled people
- Meeting the objectives for which Joint Finance was allocated
- Meeting the needs of the County as a whole
- Based on good practice

We answer the specific questions first, then summarise the future options and finally indicate action on better practice.

1. Insofar as the BDRC promotes independence and choice it is consistent with National policy. National policy is to deliver a better, more integrated community equipment service. In reviewing the OT’s service and equipment loan stores the BDRC should also be considered as one element in getting a better, integrated service. Social Services would consider placing staff at the Centre which would assist this objective.

The BDRC is, however, limited in scope and there is considerable potential. There is limited emphasis on assistive technology, housing, transport and employment which is not so in tune with National policy. Nor is the Centre truly user-led.

2. A coherent local strategy, with measurable targets, for people with physical disabilities, including sensory impairment, is hard to discern in Buckinghamshire. In other areas such as Oxfordshire a DRC would be viewed as delivering a significant element of a service/strategy in a way which is not so apparent in Buckinghamshire.
3. We conclude that at present the Centre cannot be managed by an identified user group. We suggest for the time being the Centre is constituted as a Company Limited by Guarantee with a management committee drawn from a combination of tenants, funders, contractors and disabled people.
4. The Centre is, in principle, sustainable from a practical point of view on the basis that:-
 - stakeholders in Social Services, Community Health Council and similar organisations support the concept of a DRC and see it doing more
 - tenant organisations are positive about the Centre and see advantages in being brought together and would be willing and able to contribute further in a suitable structure.
Tenants are actively cross-referring people, beginning to collaborate on pooling resources, sharing information and learning from each other so improving their own skills and thus services to disabled people
 - there is an embryonic “one stop shop” service which disabled people we spoke to valued highly. Developing this gives one possible “vision”
 - there is interest in other organisations joining the Centre which could address some gaps in service

- disabled people and carers using the Centre value the service
 - the Centre is widely used by a range of professionals in and around Buckinghamshire
5. Judgement on financial viability depends on what future direction, vision and option, is preferred. At present the Centre is very heavily dependent on AVCHT. Decisions about Brookside and financial support, particularly for the Independent Living Exhibition (ILE), by a successor body could very easily undermine the Centre. In principle, however, a Buckinghamshire Resource Centre of a similar scale to the present, with tenant organisations involved (but possibly with a different mix of services and facilities), should be financially sustainable because:-
- it is demonstrable from DRC's around the Country that they are financially viable. Some have been running for many years while new ones are being established. Our report indicates running costs, staffing levels and service mixes/found in other Centres
 - Joint Finance allocated remains in part unspent and could be used to enhance facilities/services
 - there is scope to increase the lettable space and some demand for space at Brookside
 - constituting as a Company Limited by Guarantee with charitable objectives would open up the possibility of charitable funding and could as a result increase net resources going into disability provision in Buckinghamshire
 - the Centre has yet to be marketed
 - Social Services could base staff or services at the Centre
 - additional funding is just being made available to both Health and Social Services by Central Government to improve community equipment services
6. Both the ILE and tenants organisations are meeting a range of needs of disabled people. The BDRC deals with over 5000 enquiries a year and is thus performing reasonably well compared to other similar centres.
7. The concept of BDRC changed from the original proposal put to Joint Finance which was essentially for a Day Centre to the present combination of an ILE and tenants groups one of which provides an information service. This model was approved by Joint Finance although it appears a stronger emphasis on social facilities was envisaged.
8. Three out of four users of the ILE come from mid-Bucks rather than North or South of the County. Some of the tenant organisations however provide telephone advice and home visits which are likely to be more evenly spread.
9. A clearer vision of what the BDRC is for is required. The term 'Centre' at present is something of a misnomer. It does not operate as a single entity rather different services that happen to be co-located. We set out five possible options for developing the Centre. The list is not exhaustive but includes:-
- re-locate ILE with single site equipment store. Use the space freed to create a "one stop shop" for advice and information, extend provision for social activities and meeting and possible extended services
 - re-locate health services at present occupying the ground floor to allow the ILE to stay put but freeing space for extensions of services/facilities
 - evolve centre services within available space but not extending facilities. This could involve:
 - * one or two additional tenants
 - * location of Social Services and Health disability staff full or part time at BDRC

- * improve facilities for tenants to share databases and provide a single information point
 - * increase emphasis on assistive technology and IT
 - * improve aspects of the building
 - * increase the involvement of disabled people in service provision
- extend the outreach service through the purchase of a vehicle to better serve the whole county and address some different needs
 - take a technological leap and re-orientate the centre around IT training and use by disabled people, assistive technology, a “SMART” house demonstration and remote access.

The vision should, however, be informed by the views of disabled people.

10. There is scope for improving the Centre in a variety of ways to make it better for disabled people to use and to offer a more valuable service irrespective of the particular vision:-

- the location is reasonably good but there are a number of changes that need to be made to make the building easier to use by disabled people including installation of hearing loops, signing, reception area
- parking is too limited and unsatisfactory for disabled people since 4 out of 5 are likely to arrive by car. A variety of changes to the organisation of parking are possible and it needs managing
- to improve accessibility across the County purchase of a bus or vehicle and trailer is suggested. This would also extend the range of disabled people in touch with greater use being made by more recently disabled people e.g. industrial injuries, those with newly diagnosed disability illnesses. Greater emphasis on outreach could be reflected in service level agreements
- a business and strategic plan is required for the Centre as a whole, monitoring of the activities of the Centre as a whole is required probably linked in part to service level agreements and targets
- the Centre employs no staff directly. As a minimum to create a true ‘Centre’ a manager/co-ordinator post is recommended
- little marketing has so far taken place. A marketing strategy to ensure disabled people and relevant professionals and organisations are fully aware of the Centre is required. This should also relate to fundraising
- action needs to be taken to integrate the different information services provided by each of the organisations based at Brookside.

11. Finally, thinking strategically about the process in future, the steps might be:-

- i) to create a fresh strategy for people with physical disabilities in Buckinghamshire of which BDRC is an integral part
- ii) take longer term funding decisions
- iii) put in place commissioning arrangements with BDRC which encompass business plans, monitoring, service standards