Annual Report 2012/13

Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny in Hertfordshire
Welcome to the Annual Report of Hertfordshire County Council’s Health and Overview and Scrutiny committees. The report provides details of the scrutinies undertaken April 2012 – March 2013

Alan Searing Chairman Overview and Scrutiny
Sally Newton Chairman Health Scrutiny until February 2013
Bernard Lloyd Chairman Health Scrutiny from February 2013
Allan Witherick Vice Chairman Overview and Scrutiny
Nick Hollinghurst Vice Chairman Health Scrutiny

What is Scrutiny?
Local government scrutiny is about reviewing decisions made by the Executive (Cabinet) and acting in the capacity of critical friend i.e. holding them to account. To achieve this members conduct investigations, take evidence and talk to witnesses and then make recommendations.

Hertfordshire has two scrutiny committees, Overview and Scrutiny (OSC) and Health Scrutiny (HSC). Both set annual work programmes for the areas they wish to scrutinise, whilst retaining flexibility to deal with issues quickly, an example being the special meeting held on 21st March at which all members of OSC discussed the issue of 20mph speed limits in Hertfordshire and agreed a whole committee scrutiny of the topic should take place as soon as practicable. The majority of scrutinies run for whole days (one or two days being the maximum for all but the most complex scrutinies).

There is an increasing overlap between Health and Social Care, meaning that some scrutinies involve joint committee membership/work. The scrutinies that fall into this category are identified in the report. They are listed under the committee that took the lead on the particular scrutiny.

Scrutinies are focussed with a clear objective; a number of questions to be addressed; desired outcomes; and identified constraints i.e. areas that are not being covered. A detailed timetable is produced and thorough Member briefings take place in advance of any formal meetings. ‘Topic Groups’ are then formed to look in depth at the subject and to produce a report with recommendations.
When the report is published the relevant Executive Member/Trust Director has two months in which to respond to the recommendations in particular and to the report in general.

In 2012/13 across HSC and OSC, 92% of recommendations were implemented by Trust Boards or the County Council Executive, 6% partially implemented and 2% rejected.

**Health Scrutiny Committee (HSC)**

The Health and Social Care Act (2001) requires one of the County Council’s scrutiny committees to have the power to scrutinise health services. In doing so, it can establish joint arrangements with and/or delegate some responsibility to the County’s district and borough councils.

Where there are substantive variations or developments to health services, the appropriate committee must be consulted by the Strategic Health Authority or Health Trust and can refer matters to the Secretary of State for Health.

A Health Scrutiny Committee considers strategic countywide health issues. It consists of fifteen county councillors and a representative from each of the County’s ten district and borough councils.

Topic Groups, listed in alphabetical order, have taken place on:

**Children’s Mental Health - 19 June 2012**

The focus was the current model of Child and Family Clinics in Hertfordshire, looking at accessibility, delivery and the outcomes achieved. Members observed good practice and heard of initiatives to transform CAMHS services and it is clear that staff are committed to helping children and young people with mental health issues. The topic group was mindful that its recommendations would inform the outcomes of the re-commissioning of children’s mental health services in March 2013 and identified consistency, liaison between providers and developing a sustainable model of provision.

The topic group did not consider mental health conditions in detail, however, evidence pointed to areas where ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) provision could be improved. OSC and HSC have added this to the joint work programme.
Site visits: the topic group visited a clinic in east Herts and one in the west of the county.

End of Life - 29 & 30 April 2012
The focus of the scrutiny was to identify developments in current service provision for adults in the last 12 months of life and explore opportunities for supporting service development across the County, and between health and social care. The topic group heard from a wide range of witnesses and gathered additional evidence at in depth site visits. Members found much to commend and were impressed at the enthusiasm and commitment of those involved in this sensitive work. Members believe that a secure platform is in place from which to extend this work. Recommendations were aimed at ensuring equity of provision and supporting health and social care professionals and the general public in sensitive conversations to clarify personal preferences to achieve a "good death".

Site visits: the topic group visited a hospice and residential and nursing homes, including a specialist dementia facility.

Health Budget Scrutiny
Due to local government elections and the likely impact on membership of HSC the committee decided to postpone the budget scrutiny to autumn 2013. This will be reported in the annual report for 2013/14

Monitoring of Recommendations 20 Sept, 6 Dec 2012
This Topic Group receives updates on the implementation of topic group recommendations six to nine months after a report has been received by the trust. Members hear from trusts about progress on the implementation of recommendations and any problems that have arisen. The Topic Group has responsibility for signing off recommendations or asking for further reports at a future date.

The Health Scrutiny Committee also visited:
17 May Ambulance Service
11 July ENHT (East and North Herts Trust) Seminar
25 Sept ADTU (Alcohol and Drug Treatment Unit) and CATT (Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team)
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)
The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold The Executive to account by scrutinising:

- Decisions made by, or on behalf of, the Council or Cabinet
- Any operational or policy aspect of the Council’s business

OSC membership consists of fifteen County Councillors, four parent governors and two church representatives, the latter six being only able to vote on Education related issues and take part in Education related scrutinies.

Topic Groups, listed in alphabetical order, have taken place on:

**Adoption: The length of time it takes to place children for adoption - 13, 17 and 18 December 2012**
This scrutiny examined the progress Hertfordshire is making in meeting the targets in ‘The Adoption Scorecard’ which introduces new performance measures for achieving permanence for children in public care and for assessing prospective parents. Members were pleased to hear the progress to date but noted Hertfordshire had some way to go. They asked to be kept informed of the county’s progress in meeting the three key indicators making up the adoption scorecard and of progress in meeting performance measures relating to the assessment of prospective adoptive parents.

**Community Nursing & Safeguarding Adults with Learning Disabilities - October 2012**
The focus of this scrutiny was to review the steps taken by HCC to ensure that people with learning a disability are receiving equitable access to mainstream health services, and are being treated safely and with dignity and respect. Members were assured that HCC is well placed to facilitate equitable access to mainstream health services in Hertfordshire. In addition members heard that staff ensure that individuals have better experiences and health outcomes in a safe and dignified manner.

**Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) - 11 October 2012**
This is an annual scrutiny that enables Members to monitor the progress and performance of HSCB. This scrutiny focussed on helping Members understand the work of HSCB, Child Death Overview, Serious Case Review and Partnership Case Reviews, as well as an update on missing children and sexual exploitation.
Insuring County Council Liabilities - 29 June 2012
This was a review of the authority’s insurance management function. It was not an in-depth review of the claims handling function. Members gained an insight into the complexity of the business handled by the County Council and were pleased to hear that HCC is held in high regard by external underwriters and solicitors. Less reassuring was the inconsistency in the quality of information provided to insurance by departments, particularly as this has an impact on the cost to HCC through higher premiums and ability to repudiate claims. In conclusion it was recommended that more consideration needs to be given to training and awareness raising so that staff understand the importance of liaising with insurance well in advance of service changes and mechanisms to facilitate this should be developed.

Integrated Plan Proposals (Budget Scrutiny) - 11 December 2012, 30 January and 6 February 2013
The annual budget scrutiny now covers three days. The first day advised Members of emerging issues arising from the budget settlement, the second was a ‘scrutiny café’ approach involving a majority of Members of the County Council (both Executive and Non-Executive), all Chief Officers and a further 30 senior County Council officers and the third day was a debate by the committee on the outcomes of the ‘scrutiny café’. Timely recommendations were produced for consideration by the Executive and Full Council in reaching decisions on the County Council’s Integrated Plan for 2013/14 – 2015/16.

Libraries: The effect of the reduction in opening hours - 14 December 2012
The scrutiny was undertaken to enable members to examine the effect on library service users of the changes made to library opening hours and mobile services, as part of the Libraries Transformation in 2011. The scrutiny examined impacts of reduced library opening hours from July 2011 and the reduction in mobile library services implemented during summer 2011. Members noted a reduction in usage across the service; however they welcomed efforts by individual libraries to mitigate the effects and asked that mechanisms be put in place to ensure better performing libraries share learning and successes. They also asked for flexibility in any future restructuring along with a local approach and greater prominence to social deprivation in any decision making.

Media - 14 November and 19th November 2012
This scrutiny looked at the use of appropriate media as an efficient and effective way of further engaging residents of Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council staff. Members concluded that in order to further engage
residents a co-ordinated approach to engagement with the media was required. In order to help achieve this they recommended all communications budgets be held by the Head of Communications and allocated to departments for specific projects. They also asked that a webmaster be appointed with responsibility for the HertsDirect website.

**Relationship with Town and Parish Councils - 26 September 2012**
This scrutiny examined the County Council’s relationship with Town and Parish Councils. In particular the Topic Group looked at working relationships, their strengths and weaknesses and how they might be improved. It concluded that the relationship needed improving, recommending a number of areas for change and asking that a short scrutiny be undertaken in the autumn of 2013 to see if improvements had been achieved.

**Review of Recommendations - 7 June 2012, 3 September 2012, 11 March 2013**
Six months after a report’s publication the Executive Member, Lead Officer and Topic Group chairman attend a meeting of the Review of Recommendations Topic Group. At this meeting they explain to non-executive members what has happened to the recommendations, i.e. have they been implemented and if not why not?

The group has the authority to sign off recommendations as completed or request that particular recommendations are monitored further. This process allows non-executives to establish whether their recommendations have influenced organisational culture and strategy. They also hear, first hand, of particular improvements for service users.

**Shared Managed Services (SMS) - 7 June 2012**
The SMS Topic Group examined the original objectives of the SMS partnership, and to what extent these have been met. Members were pleased with progress to date and asked that further work be undertaken to develop the partnership and contribute more savings towards the transformation target.

**Thriving Families - 8 March 2013**
The purpose of this scrutiny was to test the authority’s Thriving Families Programme as it moves forward to support the most vulnerable families. Members were impressed with the progress to date; however, it was recognised that work is at a relatively early stage. OSC will be asked to add a
second scrutiny to the work programme in approximately 12 months to hear evidence against the recommendations.

**Written updates**

For a range of reasons it may not always be appropriate to scrutinise a topic on which Members have expressed an interest. In these instances all Members are provided with a short written update on the particular topic. This method has been used to provide updates on:

- The new Ofsted Regime
- Whistle Blowing Procedure

**Lunchtime seminars**

Scrutiny organises two-hour long seminars, with a speaker on topics of general interest to members and officers. Recent examples have included:

- 19 July Treasury Management
- 24 July School Nursing
- 19 Nov Personal budgets
- 24 Jan Ofsted Inspections

**Having your say on the issues being scrutinised**

Members of the public are able to attend any scrutiny and/or topic group. Although the public have no right to speak at the meeting, they may be invited to do so by the Chairman. Members of the public can also make their views known to their local County Councillor or any Member of a scrutiny committee.

**Suggest items for future scrutiny work programmes**

Members of the public may write to the Head of Scrutiny to request that a relevant subject or issue be investigated.

He can be contacted at:

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All suggestions will be considered by the chair and vice chairs of the appropriate committees at the next agenda setting meeting. The member of the public will then be informed by the Head of Scrutiny of the outcome.