

Health Scrutiny Support Programme – Update for Information

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee following the working party formed after the previous committee meeting in September. The working party was tasked with making decisions about the topics to be covered by the Health Scrutiny Support Programme for Wiltshire, which will take place early in 2007.

Background

2. The Centre for Public Scrutiny, as part of the Health Scrutiny Support Programme, makes available five development days with an expert advisor free of charge each year. Overview & Scrutiny Committees are expected to identify areas for development and a suitable advisor is then drawn from the IDE&A's Peer Clearing House.
3. The five free support days are to include scoping, planning and summarisation of the events. Therefore, it can be assumed that the time allocated will allow for roughly four half day sessions with an advisor working with the Committee and a range of interested or relevant stakeholders.

The Working Party

4. The working party met to discuss the support programme and identify some topics for development of the Committee on 19 October 2006. The working party was made up of:

Dr Peter Biggs – Wiltshire Patient & Public Involvement Forum
Cllr John English – Wiltshire County Council
Cllr Mike Hewitt – Salisbury District Council
Cllr Pat Rugg – Wiltshire County Council
Cllr Roy While – Wiltshire County Council
Cllr Margaret White – Wiltshire County Council
Cllr Paula Winchcombe – Kennet District Council

5. The working party discussed a range of issues that are relevant to the Committee at the present time and eventually identified four key areas that they felt would be useful topics for the Committee to explore in dedicated sessions. These topics are:
 - Scrutiny of Health and Social Care
 - Local Area Agreements (Health Block)
 - NHS Service Provision & Financial Pressure
 - Substantial Variation

Health & Social Care

6. The recent Department of Health guidance paper "A Stronger Local Voice" encourages Overview & Scrutiny Committees to focus on the commissioning of health and social care services.
7. Wiltshire County Council's adult social care department is in the middle of a widely publicised financial recovery programme, and as a result a number of changes have been made to services. The Council has also recently appointed a new director for social care and community services who is due to join the council in December 2006.
8. The Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee has so far focussed mainly on health services provided by the NHS. This is partly due to the severe financial position of the NHS locally which has necessitated a number of service changes and public consultations about future services.
9. The working party felt that, with a new Primary Care Trust for Wiltshire and a reconfigured social care service, complete with a new director, it was timely for the Committee to consider, with these key stakeholders, how best to scrutinise the commissioning practices of both services in order to ensure that those who need them are receiving the best services possible.

Local Area Agreement (Health Block)

10. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Wiltshire has been drawn up largely without input from Overview & Scrutiny. However, the Government Office for the South West is clear that there should be a role for OSCs, if not in developing targets, then in monitoring the delivery of the aims and objectives of the partnerships.
11. In Wiltshire the main focus for the health block of the LAA is the Healthier Wiltshire project, which was sponsored by the Wiltshire Strategic Board in 2004, with the aim of making Wiltshire the Healthiest County to live in by 2014.
12. The Healthy Wiltshire Project was discussed as part of the Health Scrutiny Support Programme in 2006, however capacity constraints and changes within the NHS have made it difficult for the Committee to devote further time to the project.

13. Now, the emerging LAA will be the vehicle for Wiltshire to draw down further funding for key schemes from central government, and so it is vital that the Committee understands the key drivers for the health block and is able to scrutinise the achievement of targets on behalf of the community.

NHS Service Provision and Financial Pressure

14. The NHS is subject to a great many targets, ranging from waiting times for diagnosis and treatment of diseases and conditions, waiting times for urgent care, prevention of disease and financial management.
15. In Wiltshire all of this has to be delivered against a background of ever expanding recurrent overspends and an enormous historical debt. This must affect the decisions commissioners and service providers make in determining the types of care to be offered to patients in Wiltshire.
16. The working party felt that it would be a useful to the Committee to develop a greater understanding of which services have to be provided, which services are discretionary and how the NHS decides which areas warrant further development in a culture where money is in perpetually short supply.

Substantial Variation

17. Since the inception of Health Overview & Scrutiny in 2003 there have, at various times, been national and regional discussions, and publications which have sought to define the term “substantial variation” both for OSCs and the NHS partners who are subject to the constraints implicated in the Health & Social Care Act, 2001 relating to service change.
18. However, as membership of the Health OSC changes each year the working party felt it would be useful to facilitate a session whereby members of the Committee and key representatives could debate the issue and discuss the implications inherent in the Health & Social Care Act which outlines the need to publicly consult on matters of service change.

Current Position

19. Following the meeting of the working party, a submission was made to the Centre for Public Scrutiny for a suitable advisor. This advisor has now been identified and will be meeting soon with the Health Overview & Scrutiny Chair and Officer to plan the events.
20. When a number of suitable dates have been identified members and key stakeholders will be approached so that venues can be booked and arrangements can be made as quickly as possible.
21. The working party also asked the Health Scrutiny Officer to carry out further research into areas of health and well being where Wiltshire, compared to other authorities in the South West, or of similar make up nationally, shows a below average performance. A report will be submitted at a future meeting of the Committee.

Conclusions

- 22. The working party was able to identify four key areas that everyone agreed would represent a worthwhile body of development work for the Committee to undertake.
- 23. A suitable advisor has been identified by the Peer Clearing House and will be working with the Chairman and the Officer to plan the development sessions.
- 24. The process will be made more worthwhile if the key stakeholders are available to participate.

Financial Implications

- 25. The cost of rooms and refreshments will be met by the Wiltshire health scrutiny support budget. The fees and expenses for the advisor are met by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

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