

meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 17 December 2009

agenda item number **7b**

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Purpose of the Report

1. Although this is the report from the Chair of the Overview Committee to update members on the work of scrutiny and on the implementation of recommendations that are made in scrutiny reviews it also includes updates on the work of the three standing committees. Members may therefore, wish to ask questions of the three Standing Committee Chairs as well as myself.

Overview Committee

2. We have begun a new scrutiny review into partnerships and whether they achieve improvements for local communities.
3. Members are concerned at the lack of clarity in the County Council's involvement in over 300 local partnerships in which this authority has a leading role and the review will examine whether they provide value for money in delivering improvements. The review will be carried out by a small review group of members.
4. Met with LAA scrutiny committee with the intention of engaging more effectively with district scrutiny chairs.
5. The Overview Committee has also begun a bio-energy review following a request from Cabinet.
6. The Committee has heard about progress in implementing recommendations in a recent scrutiny review into sickness absence from Marje Toward, Service Director for Human Resources.
7. Despite an improved absence management system the number of days lost to sickness absence remains high - 9.6 days a year down from 9.75 - at an estimated annual cost to the authority of almost £20million.
8. Many review recommendations are being implemented, including senior managers taking more responsibility for action, adopting more flexible working and lowering the sickness threshold for when action is triggered. However, the attendance management team will operate

only until April next year and although the role will be continued within departmental human resources teams, there will be no permanent attendance officer appointments.

9. Although slowly improving, Nottinghamshire performs badly compared to other county councils. The review compared Derbyshire County Council's practice where sustained improvements have come from less generous triggering levels and better management.
10. The Committee also heard from the Sustainable Community Strategy Working Group that the lingering effects of the economic downturn may affect implementation of the community strategy for Nottinghamshire. The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out a long term vision for the county between now and 2020, based on community concerns, such as crime and anti social behaviour, to improve the quality of life and services in a local area.
11. Sustainable Community Strategies provide the context and set the direction for plans to promote and improve the well being of an area. It is from these that Local Area Agreements (LAA) are developed.
12. The committee continues to monitor budget proposals in terms of the challenges facing the authority and the ongoing public consultation. A meeting of the committee in January will be dedicated to discussions with Cabinet Members and Service Directors to look at the possible implications for services of reallocating funds.
13. Councillor Martin Wright has replaced Councillor June Stendall as a Vice Chair on the Overview Committee.

Standing Committees

Communities & the Environment

14. Officers from the Department responded on behalf of the Cabinet Member to recommendations in the Critical Infrastructure Review. This review considered the resilience of the infrastructure in Nottinghamshire – such as energy supply, health provision and transport – in response to potential catastrophic failure.
15. The meeting also received an update on the implementation of the recommendation of the Flooding (Drainage and Watercourses) Review. This review examined the severe effects of the 2007 summer flood to find out if any of the devastation could have been prevented and whether better maintenance of drains and water courses could help protect properties in the future.
16. The committee has begun a review into highway maintenance, in response to local concerns about road and footpath repairs. The review is looking to ensure better value for money and good practice in the repair of roads, by considering how the authority deals with reported problems and complaints and how repair work is prioritised. Members hope to visit depots, make site visits and inspect work.

Education

17. A review group of members had begun looking at apprenticeships in the county and whether the public sector in general - and the county council in particular - should be offering more apprenticeships. The review will examine current provision of apprenticeships and consider if current places meet demand.
18. Following a request from the cabinet members for Children & Young People's Services and Personnel & Performance and following the recent scrutiny review into School Meals, a small review group is giving further consideration to whether all activities associated with the school food service - currently split between Children and Young Peoples Services and Communities - should be amalgamated into a single department.

Health & Wellbeing

19. A Review Group of members is considering proposals for future health services for Newark. Proposals from NHS Nottinghamshire County include replacing the accident and emergency department in a major shake-up of health provision in the town.
20. NHS Nottinghamshire County is now consulting on options to replace Accident & Emergency with a minor injuries unit plus, staffed either by GPs or specially trained nurses with more community care services, outpatient clinics and GPs.
21. Specialist centres for stroke, heart attack and trauma are all expected to be based in Nottingham in a move towards offering patients the best specialist care in a smaller number of centres. However, the proposed changes to urgent care should make no difference to the number of patients treated in Newark.
22. The Review Group will consider whether the Trust has taken into account the public interest through appropriate patient and public involvement and consultation, and whether the proposals are in the interests of the local health service. The public consultation on the plans runs until March 6
23. A small review group of members will also review health inequalities and access to GPs services. The review will examine issues relating to access to GP services and consider if there is a link between access and health inequalities.
24. The review will consider whether surgeries are applying good practice when managing appointments and examine if patient perception of poor service is valid.
25. Although there are significant improvements in terms of health for the county as a whole, Mansfield, Ashfield, Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood are all falling behind the average for the rest of England in terms of life expectancy.
26. The Committee have received a presentation from Charlie Keeney, Assistant Chief Executive of NHS Nottinghamshire County on tackling

the growing problem of obesity in the county. Obesity has trebled in the past 20 years with 28% of Nottinghamshire adults now classed as obese. Obesity is expected to overtake smoking as the greatest cause of premature death by 2020. With 1 in 4 children aged 5 classed as obese in the county (rising to 1 in 3 by the age of 11), NHS Nottinghamshire County are focussing on prevention among children, while working to reduce the number of children who already are obese.

27. The Committee also heard about child protection issues from Helen Ryan, Service Director for Social Care & Health and current practices used by the authority and its partners to protect children and young people who are at risk. Abuse happens to children of all ages and from all social backgrounds, usually involving a parent, another family member, or someone else caring for the child. Helen Ryan stressed the additional pressures that are being placed on social workers through increased workload from a higher number of referrals and the department is facing recruitment and retention challenges of front line service workers.
28. Three working groups have been set up to consider Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, Lift Buildings and Learning Disability Campus Services - reviews that were carried out before the election. These groups will consider the implementation of recommendations and report back to the standing committee in the new year.

Councillor Joyce Bosnjak
Chair of Overview