

MINUTES of the meeting of Health Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday 25 February 2009 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor JK Swinburne (Chairman)
Councillor AT Oliver (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: WU Attfield, PGH Cutter, MJ Fishley, P Jones CBE,
G Lucas, GA Powell, A Seldon, AP Taylor and PJ Watts

In attendance: Councillors PA Andrews, LO Barnett, WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards and
TM James

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr J Wilkinson of the Local Involvement Network.

40. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

44. WEST MIDLANDS AMBULANCE SERVICE IN HEREFORDSHIRE - SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the scrutiny review of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in Herefordshire, commissioned by the Committee in September 2008.

The Chairman thanked the Review Group for their work and the balanced report they had produced. She also thanked the officers of the Ambulance Trust in particular for the open way in which they had responded to requests for information, together with officers of the Primary Care Trust and the Hospitals Trust. She also thanked officers of the Council who had supported the review.

The Chairman of the Review Group was invited to comment on the Review Group's findings. He endorsed the Chairman of the Committee's thanks to those who had contributed to and supported the review. He then commented on the Group's

principal findings and recommendations as set out in the executive summary of the report.

Other Members of the Review Group commented on and highlighted some of the findings they considered to be of particular concern.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- In response to a question about what happened if one of the vehicles from Herefordshire had to travel to Birmingham a representative of the Ambulance Trust confirmed that as soon as the vehicle had completed that one job it was returned to the locality and not retained for assignment to other calls in the Birmingham area.
- Turnaround times at the hospital were a particular concern identified in the Review report. The Ambulance Trust Locality Manager commented that, whilst there were improvements to be made, Hereford Hospital's performance in this respect compared favourably with other hospitals. One of the main problems faced in Herefordshire was the fact that there was only the one acute hospital so if a difficulty arose at that hospital there was no convenient alternative facility to which patients could be taken.
- The resilience of the ambulance service in the county and the importance of regular needs assessments to ensure that the service was resilient was discussed. It was noted that the review recommended additional resource be provided at Ledbury.
- The recommendation that there should be improvement in collaboration and co-location of blue light services was discussed, noting that the national development of a shared radio system would represent one step forward.
- The importance of examining patient outcomes rather than relying simply on the measurement of time-based targets was discussed. It was noted that a national consultation exercise on targets was underway and it was to be hoped that this would address this concern.
- The Chief Executive of the Hospitals Trust commented that bed capacity clearly had a bearing on turnaround times. However, the Trust had already made improvements in turnaround times and he would confirm progress in his formal response to the Review.
- The Review Group had been informed in February that the commissioners of the ambulance service had proposed their own independent review of the service in December 2008, the Committee's own review having been commissioned in September 2008. Assurance was sought and received that this later review, which it was noted was now due to report to the regional commissioners in May 2009, would take account of the Committee's recommendations. The Committee was advised that from Herefordshire PCT's perspective this later review had been prompted amongst other things by concerns about the unit cost of the service and recognition that the needs analysis for Herefordshire needed to be updated.

The Chairman commented, in conclusion, that the review of the Ambulance Service had been undertaken in response to concerns expressed by members of the public. The review had found a service that was generally performing well but had also found there had been some grounds for that publicly expressed concern and the

consequent need for improvement in some aspects of the service.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the findings of the review of West Midlands Ambulance service in Herefordshire be approved unanimously for submission to relevant Health Service bodies;**
- (b) the response to the Review be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee; and**
- (c) a further report on progress in response to the Review then be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

45. GP- LED WALK IN HEALTH CENTRE

The Committee was informed of the award of a contract for the development of a GP-led walk-in health centre for Herefordshire and the provision of the out of hours service to Nestor Primecare.

The Chairman reported that, in response to comments made about the proposed development of the GP-led Health Centre at the Committee's meeting in December 2008, she had met the Director of Integrated Commissioning and the Equitable Access to Primary Medical Care Programme Manager (EAPMCPM) to seek clarification and assurance on a number of points.

The report summarised the history of previous reports to the Committee on the project and the clarification and assurances received in response to questions asked by the Chairman following the Committee's meeting in December.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- Mixed views were expressed about the advantages of the Centre, its cost and potential effect on existing services. Further clarification was sought in particular on the implications for local GP surgeries within the County of the Centre's ability to register patients. The EAPMCPM emphasised in response that the Centre would only be able to register patients within the Hereford City boundary. People living outside the City boundary would, however, be able to attend the Centre on a walk-in basis. He added that registrations were restricted to 3,000 over the life of the five year contract representing some 5% of the City population. The safeguards outlined in the report reflected the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) aim to avoid destabilising the existing services but provide an additional service, a principal benefit of which would be to reduce pressure on the Accident and Emergency Unit.
- In reply to a question about the views of Hereford City GPs it was replied that the Local Medical Committee (LMC) had invited Nestor Primecare to take part in LMC meetings. The PCT had also been constrained to a degree in the discussions it could have with GPs during the tender process by the fact that a consortium involving some local GPs had submitted a bid for the contract. Since the award of the contract the PCT was now able to discuss the plans more openly with the GPs and explain the safeguards in the contract, the absence of a financial incentive in the contract to increase registrations and the focus of the key performance indicators in the contract on reducing inappropriate A&E

attendances through the provision of walk-in capacity. This had addressed a lot of the GPs' concerns.

- Asked about recruitment of staff the EAPMCPM said that a local GP had been appointed by Nestor Primecare as the GP lead for the Centre. Nestor Primecare's wide contacts should assist in the recruitment drive. Given the economic downturn Members suggested that Nestor Primecare should be encouraged to employ local people where possible.
- The Director of Integrated Commissioning reported in response to a question that it was still hoped that it would be possible to accommodate the Centre on the Hereford Hospital site. Discussions with the Hospitals Trust were continuing.
- It was observed that the provision of a walk-in centre open from 8am until 8pm seven days a week contrasted favourably with provision in the Market Towns and rural areas. It was noted that GPs had the option to provide extended opening hours and at the moment some 50% of GP practices in the County had opted to do so. The range of services offered by GP practices also varied. It was proposed that there should be a scrutiny review of the services offered by GP practices within the County.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by observing that the Committee had been provided with firm assurances that there were safeguards within the contract to prevent the development being to the detriment of existing services. The Committee would have the opportunity at its next meeting to ask Nestor Primecare about its business plan to improve service provision in the County.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the report be noted: and**
- (b) a scoping report for a scrutiny review of the services offered by GP practices within the County be prepared.**

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm

CHAIRMAN