

MEETING OF REGIONAL HEALTH SCRUTINY CHAIRS

29TH NOVEMBER 2005

THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM

Present: Councillor Deirdre Alden
Councillor Richard Burt
Councillor John Edwards
Councillor Honor Cox
Councillor Val Woodruff
Councillor John Reynolds
Jeremy Snape
Rebecca Coffey
Narinder Saggu
Jonathan Jardine
Alison Barrett
Deborah Merry
Mark Inglis
Fiona Bottrill

In Attendance: Darren Wright
Helen Walker

1. Introductions and Declarations of Interest

Councillor Deirdre Alden opened the meeting by welcoming the delegates to Birmingham, following which they introduced themselves.

There were no declarations of interest to record.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Clifford Ridge, Dr. Jacky Chambers, Sean Ward and Steve Hilton

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Councillor Alden said that Item 1 (Updates from Health Scrutiny Panels) should have shown that the major review into MRSA was currently underway, and the review into the shortage of NHS Dentists was due to begin soon.

With this amendment, the Minutes were then agreed as correct.

4. Matters Arising

Regarding the Protocol for Substantial Variation, Councillor Cox reported that a new protocol had been drawn up for Solihull, which had been done without reference to the NHS and was felt to be more 'user-friendly'.

Fiona Bottrill said she had brought copies of Wolverhampton's protocol to the meeting.

5. Consultation Paper on the Development of Dental Training and Specialist Dentistry for the West Midlands

Narinder Saggu explained the background to the consultation document, i.e. the options for improving the service. The preferred option is currently the creation of a new Dental Hospital and Training School on a new site close to the University of Birmingham, together with out-reach centres in Birmingham City Centre, Coventry and Stoke-on-Trent. Birmingham O&S Committee had received a presentation and comments were now invited from other Authorities by 20th December for incorporation into Birmingham's formal response. Dr. Jacky Chambers had advised that the proposed variations were not deemed to be substantial changes for Coventry or Stoke-on-Trent as they were benefiting from a new service. As a result no arrangements were made for establishing a Joint Committee and each Authority was being consulted separately by their respective PCTs. Jonathan Jardine said the proposed out-reach centre was under consideration for integration into redevelopment plans in Coventry and it was expected this would be passed through the planning process without any problems.

Councillor Alden said Birmingham councillors had expressed some concerns about the accessibility of the outer-city location for patients without private transport.

Councillor Reynolds said he had attended a presentation on the subject and it was not felt that the new location would be a major problem. He was more concerned that dental services would not remain centralised in Birmingham, but would fully cover the outer areas of the region as well.

Councillor Edwards said that people were already used to travelling to the nearby Queen Elizabeth Medical Centre site.

Jeremy Snape said that when medical services were centralised in Worcestershire, additional public transport services were introduced following co-operation between the NHS and the County Council; it was discussed that something similar could be explored within the SHA, to address accessibility.

Fiona Bottrill said that all environmental issues, including extra transport demands, would be part of the normal planning procedures in Wolverhampton.

Jonathan Jardine said that it was interesting that in neither the consultation document nor the two presentations he had attended had the cost implications been mentioned. Narinder Saggu said that a capital figure of £70 million and revenue costs of £3.4 million had been included in a further document, which she would be glad to share with delegates; as part of its response, Birmingham will be investigating risks and affordability of the scheme.

6. Centre for Public Scrutiny Health Scrutiny Implementation Programme - Self-Assessments and Bids

Rebecca Coffey tabled an analysis of West Midland regional responses to the CfPS offer of support for Health Scrutiny.

Councillor Alden said that Birmingham had selected substantial variations and working with Patients Forums; no response had been submitted yet until it was known if any other Authorities would like to combine on these.

Fiona Bottrill said that Wolverhampton had completed their self assessment and had decided to use 3 days for Wolverhampton and offer two days for joint work with other B&BC authorities. Two areas identified were common with Birmingham, so could be a potential area for pooling days.

Mark Inglis said that in Walsall there was very little involvement with Patients Forums. It was thought the allocation of adviser days would actually create a lot of work, which would pose special problems for those Authorities with no designated Health Scrutiny support function.

Councillor Reynolds thought it was difficult to work out just what benefit would result from these proposals. Councillor Burt said Dudley was also waiting to see what other Authorities proposed about 'pooling' days. There was a general consensus of opinion that while there were probably some obvious areas where ideas could be pooled, it was difficult to decide just what support was needed and that many Authorities did not actually want advice on some issues.

Mark Inglis said there is a need for health scrutiny training, but he was not sure that the CfPS's approach was the right way to go about it. Several delegates agreed that the problem was compounded by the number of Members who were currently completely new to the subject. Councillor Reynolds suggested that other Authorities might like to talk it over with their PCTs, as Wolverhampton had already done.

Rebecca Coffey said she was attending the National Overview & Scrutiny Network meeting in London on 3rd December and would relay these comments to Tim Gilling, who speaking at the event.

It was also agreed that Narinder Saggu should draft a written response on behalf of this meeting and submit it to delegates for their approval.

7. Department of Health Consultation on Future Support for PPI Forums

A variety of experiences was reported about accessing and completing the questionnaire.

Darren Wright reported that he had completed the questionnaire. Jonathan Jardine said he had seen it. Councillor Cox said it had been received, but not reached her yet. Fiona Bottrill said it had been difficult to read on the website and she had had to obtain a hard copy by post. Delegates considered it was asking many wrong questions and was too difficult to complete satisfactorily.

In response to a question from Councillor Edwards, Darren Wright said he thought the questionnaire was aimed primarily at Patients Forum members, but that other interested parties could also obtain copies and submit their views. Councillor Cox said that as the replies were submitted anonymously, it might be difficult to lend any weight to them.

The general consensus was that delegates were not very impressed with the questionnaire. Councillor Reynolds said in fact his Panel's previous good relationship with the Forums had possibly been damaged by this consultation.

Councillor Cox said that a Forum member was already co-opted onto their Committee; Councillor Woodruff said a member was due to attend for the first time in December.

Jonathan Jardine said two PF members had been co-opted in Coventry and the Committee had asked for a discussion paper on how Forums might be better supported in the future. Darren Wright said he understood that Forum Support organisations had expressed concerns about the lack of support from the CPPIH. Jonathan Jardine also said he had heard that the FS role might be taken over by either the NHS or local authorities, which caused a lot of debate. Jeremy Snape said many local authorities believed they could not support all the various bodies being created. Fiona Bottrill pointed out that there may be a potential conflict of interest if the NHS were to take over the role of FSOs, as PPI Forums had powers to manage the ICAS service. Jonathan Jardine said that that power may be under review.

Alison Barrett explained that financial and administrative support arrangements for CHCs had been undertaken by the NHS at arms length and this had worked well.

Alison Barrett said in Sandwell there were problems in engaging with the Forums and coping with their level of awareness of health issues.

8. Updates on Work Programmes

Birmingham: Reports on the reviews into MRSA and Access to NHS Dentists are currently being prepared. Consideration is being given to a review into access to GPs.

Solihull: Councillor Cox said the Chief Executive of Birmingham Heartlands & Solihull will attend the Board's December meeting to give an update on the application for Foundation status. The Board is also monitoring the Solihull site on a regular basis. New arrangements for out-of-hours GP services had been discussed with Solihull PCT; they appear to be satisfactory. Dental services will also be considered next year. The Board recently considered the role of the Environmental Health Department relating to environmental crime. The Board is monitoring the development of the Care Trust and will be involved in scrutinising plans for consultation early next year.

- Walsall: Received another presentation on restructuring of service. Planning a review of obesity in children. A review of mental health in adults (funded by Social Services) should be completed in January.
- Wolverhampton: Completed an analysis of the proposed transfer of the Eye Infirmary to the main hospital site; this was not now such a priority for the newly-appointed PCT Chief Executive. Starting a review of access to A&E services for older people and possible alternatives.
- Sandwell: Joint Working Group with Birmingham has been re-established to consider the work of the 2010 consultation and the reconfiguration of women's and children's services. A multi-agency group supported by the PCT will examine the health inequalities in the Great Bridge Ward. A study is proposed into the correlation between health and educational achievement in children. A Task & Finish review of domestic violence and Council responses should be completed in February. The report into the second phase of the review of advocacy services is currently being drafted.
- Coventry: Review of GP services is close to completion. External funding for a review of breastfeeding has been obtained. They are following up the review of NHS dentistry.
- Dudley: Continuing the review of maternity services (with particular regard to visual impairment, drug abuse and the Asian community); the wheelchair review is also underway. Following a discussion of Birmingham's breastfeeding policy, it had been recommended for adoption in all their Trusts. A meeting with Chairs of Trusts is planned for January. It is hoped to look at obesity and lifestyles, and the advice given in schools – using Birmingham's report as a starting point.

Councillor Alden suggested that Birmingham's review reports on Breastfeeding and Obesity be shared with those Authorities that were currently looking at those issues.

9. Update from WMLGA

Jeremy Snape spoke about the development of the West Midlands O&S Website. It widely supported at its launch in July but since then use had been disappointing. The WMLGA had now taken over direct support and development of the Website and would pursue with colleagues at tomorrow's Regional O&S Network meeting their needs and expectations for the Website. In response to questions about its purpose in relation to the Centre of Public Scrutiny Website, Jeremy said that the purpose was to share intelligence in way which was more accessible than the format available nationally. For example, the posting Authority would need to supply a limited critique to accompany their review. In addition, the site can offer local contact details, training requests and training opportunities.

He also reported on the successful Health Inequalities conference held in October; it is hoped to organise another event in 2005. The WMO&S Steering Group met recently, and considered the proposal to run training in the New Year in the use of Health Scrutiny Evaluation framework; however, Members had said it was not the right time and there were problems with financing: the issue of access to the CfPS advice & support days meant, potentially, that authorities who have prioritised evaluation may receive support from advisors for free, instead of paying for development & training from the consultants commissioned by the Steering Group. No training will be commissioned at the moment. Jeremy said he would welcome comments on how to keep the evaluation framework going. One suggestion had been to develop a 'peer challenge' network, where Members and Officers would examine other authorities.

10. West Midlands Ambulance Service

Darren Wright raised the issue of turnaround figures for ambulances at A&E Departments. The target for WMAS was 15 minutes, which was met in only 15% of cases. Delegates believed this was probably a 'knock-on' effect from the targets for A&E Departments once patients had been registered.

11. Centre for Public Scrutiny – Health Scrutiny Chairs Regional event

Narinder Saggu reported that Birmingham had been asked by CfPS to organise the first West Midlands Regional Conference for Chairs of Health Scrutiny early in 2005. Work was in progress and further details would be supplied soon.

12. Date of the Next Meeting

Councillor Burt offered to host the next meeting at Dudley Council House. It was agreed that it would take place on Monday, 24th January. Lunch would be provided at 12.30 p.m., the meeting to start at 1.00 p.m.