

Report from the NHS Scrutiny Joint Working Group

Background

- Following the Government's decision to abolish Community Health Councils, new scrutiny arrangements for the NHS need to be put in place
- In an attempt to address the perceived 'democratic deficit', it was decided by the Government that these new arrangements should be local-authority based
- The Joint Working Group (JWG) was set up to discuss how local authority scrutiny could work, and to come up with a model for Gloucestershire
- The JWG is made up of a number of County Councillors, plus representatives from each of Gloucestershire's district Councils

The recommended model

- A number of different models were shown to the JWG, and we discussed which would suit Gloucestershire best
- The model the JWG preferred involved a permanent 'strategic committee' made up of County Councillors and representatives from the districts. This committee would then be able to set up 'ad hoc' time limited working groups to look into the issues deemed important or urgent. These working groups could co-opt additional members if it was felt they would add to the expertise and/or local knowledge of the problem
- It was felt that this model would allow for strong involvement from the districts, and enable a clear overview of strategic issues

Funding

- At the most recent meeting, the JWG was given a presentation by members of the Buckinghamshire NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Buckinghamshire is piloting the model the JWG is recommending
- Buckinghamshire has a similar NHS arrangement to Gloucestershire, and they are finding the flexibility of the 'strategic model' works very well
- The Buckinghamshire County based committee and the working groups are at the moment funded only by the County Council, both in terms of a budget and officer time. The strategic committee meets once a month, and they are intending to complete four major reports per year
- However, the districts have agreed between them to fund a consultant for the next report, as specialist knowledge will be regularly required

Other issues

- The JWG has also briefly discussed a system for prioritising areas in need of scrutiny, based on what can realistically be achieved given the time available, with the aim of being able to constructively improve the NHS services provided
- Sub groups have been set up to discuss issues such as how to work with both existing and new NHS organisations, as well as how to train future members of the strategic committee. There is also a sub group on how to fund the new scrutiny arrangements which will meet before the CBC O & S Committee, so I will have more information on that at the meeting.

Conclusion

- This issue is on the agenda because the County requires the approval in principle of this model from all districts before it begins its budget process. I discussed it in July with the Chair and Vice-Chair, who indicated their approval in principle, but it was thought best to bring it formally to the Committee, as you will be involved when it is in place (Cabinet members will not be allowed to sit on the strategic committee)
- The process is still in the very early stages, and I am aware that this is not much information on which to make a decision, but the Committee will of course be kept informed as things develop
- The funding implications are still somewhat unknown, but they will almost certainly be limited for this Council.

Cllr Zoë Forbes 23.09.02