

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 30 July 2015

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.40pm.

***8 Public speaking**

There were no public speakers at this point of the meeting.

***9 Minute confirmation**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 25 June 2015 were confirmed as a true record.

***10 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

11 NHS Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group decision on community hospital beds

The Chairman had brought this recent decision to the attention of the committee. NHS NEW Devon CCG had agreed to consolidate and reduce the total number of overnight inpatient beds at community hospitals in the District. This meant that:

- Community hospitals at Axminster, Cridton and Ottery St Mary will no longer have overnight inpatient beds
- Ottery St Mary hospital will have 15 overnight stroke rehabilitation beds
- Overall consolidation meant that ten overnight units would reduce to seven units.

Consultation was carried out over several months, and in their press statement, the New Devon CCG made clear that comment made during the consultation had been taken into account, but the decision had been made to ensure that everyone had the same level of access to services. None of the community hospitals would close because of the decision.

James Goddard, a member of a hospital support group for Ottery St Mary, voiced his concern to the committee about the inflexibility of the consultation process undertaken by the CCG and a lack of consistency of CCG representatives at meetings.

Philip Algar, an Ottery St Mary resident, outlined the previous options the CCG had put forward at the start of the consultation process, and evidenced those as proof that there was no intention of retaining inpatient beds at the hospital in Ottery St Mary. He also stated that the original objective to save money had become an exercise to channel money into "care at home" schemes.

Claire Wright, Devon County Councillor, asked the Scrutiny Committee to do all it could to represent the views of many across the District; the view being that the decision made by the CCG was not in the best interests to serve the community.

Councillor Douglas Hull, Ward Member for Axminster, voiced his dismay at the decision after all the hard work by local people in Axminster to keep inpatient beds at the hospital.

The Deputy Leader, as Ward Member for Axminster, advised the committee of the work by Neil Parish MP to fight against the decision. He read out in full a letter by the MP outlining the many stages of the consultation, including the independent report by Sir John Evans,

and the work undertaken by local groups in trying to keep the inpatient beds in place. The Deputy Leader also informed the committee that, as the preferred provider for care would be moving to the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, it was premature to take such a decision on bed numbers across the WAKELY area until the new provider contract was in place. He also highlighted from the independent report that 16 beds in the WAKELY area would achieve the same savings as the CCG decision, but provide a better service for the local communities in that area.

The Chairman spoke about his shock at the decision made in light of the consultation and the independent report, recounting passionately the hard work undertaken over the past months by a number of individuals, which appeared to have been ignored.

A representative from the New Devon CCG had been asked to attend, but no representative was available. A further meeting on the decision is due to take place at Devon County Council by the Devon Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2015.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Committee recognises the extremely valuable and popular service provided by the community hospitals in East Devon;
2. The Scrutiny Committee regrets the failure of the NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group:
 - a. to take proper account of the views of East Devon District Council, and of many residents and community groups in East Devon, who strongly opposed proposals to discontinue the provision of minor injuries service and to reduce or remove the in-patient beds at East Devon community hospitals;
 - b. to take proper account of the views of the stakeholder group, under the chairmanship of Sir John Evans, which produced a comprehensive report, commissioned by NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, on East Devon community hospitals;
 - c. in deciding to reduce the number of in-patient beds at Exmouth Hospital, and Honiton Hospital, and to close all the in-patient beds at Axminster Hospital and Ottery St Mary Hospital, and to cease the minor injuries service at Axminster Hospital, Ottery St Mary Hospital, Seaton Hospital and Sidmouth Hospital;
 - d. Publish detailed financial costing to justify its closure of services despite frequent requests to do so.

RECOMMENDED

1. that Cabinet agrees to write to the Chairman of the Devon County Council Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee expressing its concern at the failure of process by NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group in reaching its decision on 16 July, and asks that the matter be considered at the Devon County Council Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2015;
2. that Cabinet agrees to write to Neil Parish, MP, and Hugo Swire, MP expressing its concern at the failure of process by NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group and asks that they raise the matter with the Health Secretary as a matter of urgency, and ask him to seek to overturn the decision.

12 Financial Plan and Draft Transformation Strategy 2015 - 2021

The committee were asked to consider the long term budget situation, specifically with the Financial Plan setting out the shape of future delivery within a balanced budget. Twinned with this plan, the Draft Transformation Strategy set out key themes that will help the council improve the delivery of services, including delivering new ways of working underpinned with new technologies.

Councillors debated aspects including:

- Considering a larger percentage of New Homes Bonus to better boost revenue. This could be considered following the government spending review later in the year, in case there was a risk of government reduction or removal of that funding stream;
- Assumption was that spend on Exmouth regeneration would be received back in capital receipt;
- Review of CCTV in Exmouth would be considered alongside the assessment of refurbishment of Exmouth Town Hall;
- Costs for relocation were not present in the plan until certain decisions had been taken, in accordance with the cautious approach adopted in the production of the financial plan;
- The medium term budget figures did change on a daily basis but the overall message of a deficit if no action was taken still remained;
- Some aspects of “Worksmart” were measureable but many could not be assessed until services were operating from new premises - then comparison to existing operating levels could be made;
- Ethos of transformation strategy needs to be clear that working assets does not solely relate to financial issues, but also to community need.
- If any reductions to committee membership were to be considered then this should include Cabinet

RECOMMENDED

That Cabinet accept Financial Plan and Draft Transformation Strategy.

13 Sickness absence

Overview and Scrutiny Committee previously identified for a future report on sickness absence, following review of the performance indicator on the number of days lost due to sickness.

The report previously presented to Cabinet on the 17 June 2015 highlighted the increase in days lost being directly related to a higher number of long-term cases in the current year. The report set out the varying reasons for absence and the work undertaken by the HR team through formal absence review meetings and proactive approaches to encourage staff to stay healthy.

Councillors debated:

- Public sector was more risk adverse and had to follow national guidelines and sick pay terms, as opposed to a private sector approach which could more easily terminate employment;
- Publicity on the number of days lost to sickness absence was inevitable as the report before the committee was a public document;
- The council worked closely with UNISON and there is a culture of commitment by staff;
- “Happy, Healthy, Here” initiative was proactive in keeping staff in work;
- There was no evidence that work related stress was linked to staff having too high a workload. Most stress and depression absence related to personal issues;

- Additional cost could arise for longer term sickness absence but generally, teams are robust and rally to cover work for shorter absences.

The Chairman reminded the committee that Council staff were the Council's greatest resource, and monitoring aspects such as sickness absence was key.

RESOLVED

1. that the committee accept the report on sickness absence;
2. that the committee continue to be kept informed on the levels of sickness absence;
3. that comparative data, where available from other authorities, is included in future updates to the committee.

14 Media Protocol

Cabinet agreed a revised media and publicity protocol on 17 June 2015. The protocol sets out the principles and standards of communications, including the promotion of council business.

The committee discussed the protocol and raised communication issues including:

- Ensuring that the protocol is followed as it makes clear what is expected from both officers and councillors;
- Respect that individual councillors may want to contact the press directly and should not be discouraged from doing so;
- Contact with Ward Members by officers prior to contacting the press was key to ensure that those Ward Members are prepared;
- Consider option of Ward Member adding comment to drafted press releases where appropriate;
- Lessons had been learnt on recent examples where communication had not been up to expectation.

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee endorses the Media Protocol

RECOMMENDED

1. That the communications service should apply equally to all councillors and committees, not just the Cabinet;
2. That early and consistent involvement of Ward Members in work across the Council is encouraged as part of the working culture of officers.

15 Local Elections 7 May 2015

The Chief Executive presented his report outlining the issues that arose out of the combined Parliamentary, District, Town and Parish Council elections that took place on the 7 May 2015.

The report set out the learning points for future elections, including:

- two polling places reviews to be carried out to identify possible alternative locations for polling stations
- clear expectation to neighbouring Returning Officers on the delivery of verified votes
- review the count venue
- posting results online as soon as possible after the declaration

The committee discussed the report and made comments, including:

- methods of dealing with voters who have attended the incorrect polling station;
- clarification on fund sources for operating the election and electoral registration;
- impact of voter registration online on workload for officers. The Electoral Commission have acknowledged that the lack of a check facility online impacted on staff nationally, and will have in place a facility in future to allow a voter to check online that they are registered, to avoid duplication of registration as occurred with this election;
- Ward members and town and parish councils are encouraged to give feedback on polling places review;
- Regulations permit the use of licensed premises providing that alcohol is not served in the area used as a polling station during the hours of polling;
- Procedures have been put in place to ensure proof reading is validated;
- A second polling places review may take place following work by the Boundary Commission for local elections in 2019;
- Revisit guidance to candidates to make clear what can and cannot be done in relation to attendance at polling stations;
- Count venue alternatives will not save money, due to the cost of hire. A quicker count can be achieved with more count staff in a larger venue, but this also increases cost;
- Clerks of towns and parishes are informed by email of the count results and there is an expectation that they will then publish a notice locally;
- Confidence in the count supervisor team in providing an accurate result;
- Excellent work and good nature of all the staff involved in running the election and count despite the huge scale of the task;
- Additional staff at polling stations does incur additional cost.

RESOLVED

1. that the Scrutiny Committee endorses the report by the Chief Executive on the local elections 7 May 2015;
2. that the Scrutiny Committee recognises the hard work of all staff involved in the running of the national and local elections on 7 May 2015;
3. that a brief financial statement on how the elections are funded be provided to the committee.

16 Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Committee's forward plan was updated.

Attendance list

Committee Members present:

Roger Giles (Chairman)

Alan Dent (Vice Chairman)

Dean Barrow

Maddy Chapman

David Foster

Cathy Gardner

Simon Grundy

Marcus Hartnell

Bill Nash

Cherry Nicholas

Val Ranger

Marianne Rixson

Brenda Taylor

Other Members present:

Susie Bond
Jill Elson
Peter Bowden
Ben Ingham
John Dyson
Douglas Hull
Ian Hall
Eileen Wragg
David Barratt
Steve Hall
Tom Wright
Andrew Moulding
Mathew Booth
Ian Chubb
Paul Diviani
Peter Faithfull

Officers present:

Mark Williams, Chief Executive
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Karen Jenkins, Strategic lead Organisational Development and Transformation
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Committee Members apologies:

David Chapman
Alison Greenhalgh

Other Members apologies:

Mark Williamson
Pauline Stott
Paul Carter

Chairman

Date.....