

Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report 2022**

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Foreword

It is a pleasure to present the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report. I would like to place on record my appreciation for the hard work of both Board Members and also our very professional officer team who support our work. I would also wish to thank the Leader and his Cabinet Members for their regular attendance at our meetings.

I firmly believe that the best scrutiny takes place in task and finish groups, and this year has been no exception. Councillor Daisley and, more recently Councillor McKay, did a fine job in producing an excellent report examining the critical area of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Councillor Adams carried out a thorough piece of work examining how we can ensure contractors deliver the local road infrastructure which accompanies new housing development. Many councillors will be all too familiar with such matters in their own Divisions.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee plays a vital role in holding providers to account and given its workload, now meets monthly.

Unusually, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board made the trip to Redditch to examine proposals to relocate the town's Library. The meeting was very well attended by the public. I believe the Board conducted itself in a very professional and business-like manner and was a credit to the County Council.

Looking ahead, everyone involved in Scrutiny seeks to make a difference and play a positive role in influencing policy development. To that end, we shall begin our scrutiny of next year's emerging budget rather sooner than usual.

Finally, I would like to thank my Vice-Chairman for the very positive and constructive way he has supported our work.



Tom Wells
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

Introduction

This Report highlights some of the key pieces of work that Scrutiny has undertaken in the last 16 months (January 2022 – April 2023) as it gets into its stride following the 2021 elections and post the Covid-19 pandemic.

In May last year, in recognition of the Scrutiny Panels workload, Council agreed that the responsibilities covered by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Panel were too broad to enable appropriate support and scrutiny of, the key Council priorities in the Corporate Plan (Economy and the Environment). It was therefore agreed that the two elements were split, and a new Panel was formed. Scrutiny now has one Panel covering the Economy, including strategic infrastructure, and the other Panel covering the Environment.

A diagram showing where Scrutiny fits in the governance of the Council is attached at Appendix 1.

Details of the membership of scrutiny bodies and their meetings are on the Council's website.

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB)

The primary role of the Board is to co-ordinate the work of the Scrutiny Panels. However, it has also considered a range of issues in 2022/23, generally focusing on strategic Council-wide matters. This has included the Worcestershire Response to the Invasion of Ukraine (subject to ongoing Scrutiny), Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Worcestershire Children & Young People's Plan 2022 – 2024.

In October 2022, the Board took Scrutiny into the community to consider the proposals for the Relocation of Redditch Library – the Board continues to monitor the progress of these proposals.

Scrutiny Annual Work Programme

The 2022/23 Scrutiny Work Programme was drawn up following consideration by each Panel, so that their individual priorities could be taken into account. The work programme was endorsed by [Council](#) in July 2022. The 2023/24 Programme will be considered at its meeting in May 2023.

Scrutiny of Other Agencies

The Board met with representatives of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) to receive an annual update on the achievements of the WLEP over the last 12 months as well as discussing the strategic objectives for 2022/23 and WLEP's Energy Strategy.

Community Safety

As the Council's designated statutory Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee, the Board meets on an annual basis with Crime and Disorder partners, to discuss issues of mutual interest. This year, the Lead Member for Crime and Disorder led the Board in this meeting and in addition to considering the community safety issues affecting Worcestershire Members also heard about work undertaken to relaunch Community Speed Watch in February 2022, and ongoing work since then.

In January of this year, the Board explored the developments relating to local drug and alcohol related outcomes and the development of a Worcestershire Drug and Alcohol Strategy.

Budget 2023/24

The Scrutiny function has maintained its approach to monitoring and challenging service and budget performance this year. Regular updates are included in each Panel's work programme and this has led to some 'deep dive' work being undertaken to follow up queries. This has helped Panel Members to be proactive when scrutinising the budget and to develop a deeper understanding of the services.

Following the approval for the budget consultation by Cabinet on 5 January 2023, the Board collated Scrutiny's views on the draft budget for the February meeting of Cabinet. The comments came from a rigorous scrutiny process, in particular of the revenue budget, and the Board is grateful to the Cabinet Members (CMR's), officers and witnesses who enabled this scrutiny to take place in a tight timescale.

Looking forward to 2024/25 budget scrutiny, Members of the Board are keen to emphasise the policy development role of Scrutiny and would like the opportunity to feed into the Corporate Strategy Planning process in September 2023 and would therefore wish to get involved in the budget setting process earlier in the year in order to have a more meaningful role.

Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Throughout the reporting period, the Panel has heard of the significant financial pressures on the Council relating to adult social care, due to cost pressures and service demand from an ageing population. The Panel was pleased to hear that the CMR and Officers took every opportunity to lobby Government for fair funding. Council Tax for 2022-23 and 2023-24 includes an Adult Social Care Levy and for 2022-23, additional grant funding for adult and children's social care totalled £12.6m. The Panel learned that for 2023-24, further additional funding is anticipated, including to support people being discharged from hospital into social care.

Workforce has been a constant theme, with the Council and organisations across the health and social care sector working, often together, to recruit and retain staff. The Panel agreed that care work as a career could make a huge difference to people's lives yet recognised that other sectors could be more attractive due to better rates of pay. The Council and partners are looking at the overall employment offer, which includes flexibility and conditions of service, to attract staff.

Joint working across health and social care is now more formal, with the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System (HWICS) launch in July 2022, replacing the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

In January 2022, the Panel was pleased to learn that the Council and the CCG had worked together to agree new and effective ways of working to ensure there was a fair, equitable and transparent approach to funding of NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC is a package of care for people who are not in hospital and have been assessed as having a primary health need), joint packages and S117 cases (aftercare funding designed to cover the cost of meeting all a person's mental health related support needs). It was reported that as a result, there had been a significant reduction in inter-agency disputes, an increase in numbers eligible for CHC funding and an increase in fast track funding eligibility. The Council's income related to CHC increased by £1.1m and a further £1.6m was received from backdated claims.

In March 2022 and 2023, the Panel welcomed the Independent Chair of Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB). The 2022 discussion highlighted that the County's issues were in line with those experienced nationally – rough sleeping, the role of the lead professional and exploitation. The biggest challenge outlined by the Chair was staffing in the care profession, especially as 'Home First' was advocated as best practice. The Panel's 2023 update included discussion around work being done following a thematic review of deaths of rough sleepers in Worcestershire, which had been very much welcomed, and Panel members who were also district councillors expressed interest in continuing discussions. The new Complex Adult Risk Management (CARM) framework was also cited as a gamechanger especially for rough sleepers and hoarders, who should receive a social care assessment, and many had now gone through this process.

The Panel has been kept updated about the new Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessments of Local Authorities and has learned that preparation for the new assessments has involved an enormous amount of work. The Council had been fortunate to be able to do a series of dress rehearsals with other local authorities and numerous workshops were taking place to ensure consistency across staff and stakeholders. It was anticipated that inspections would begin from 1 April 2023 under the new framework.

Direct Payments (where people commission their own care) was discussed in May 2022. The Council is fully supportive of this option as it provides choice and control to residents and enhances the strengths-based approach to social care. Work to promote Direct Payments is ongoing, mindful that any services bought need to meet the needs of the individual.

The Health O&S Committee and the Panel have separately discussed aspects of patient flow and discharge from acute hospitals, and attendance by both respective Chairmen and other members has strengthened the knowledge base of both scrutiny bodies. Challenges around the Covid-19 pandemic have been reported throughout.

The Panel when focussing on the Council's role in discharge of complex patients from acute hospitals found out that support was provided through the Intermediate Care Service, with the aim of providing speedier discharge from hospital and helping with admission avoidance. In addition, enhanced domiciliary care was being offered as part of a pilot project. All health and social care partners were working together, with external national support, and there was a stronger partnership now than in previous years. Discharge of complex patients to intermediate care and reablement in their own homes was now very successful. The Reablement Team had earned national recognition for this and other local authorities were keen to learn how it had been achieved, however recruitment remained a challenge so that not all posts were filled, and further challenges related to increased demand, the requirement for additional domiciliary care hours, the need for staff to double up for some patients and the logistics of a large, mainly rural County.

The Panel has been kept updated about the Government's plans for Adult Social Care Reforms which have been delayed until October 2025.

In September, the Panel received its annual update on compliments and complaints for adult services. Complaints had increased from 123 to 233 during 2021-22, although 62 were discontinued. Standards of service was the main area for complaints fully or partially upheld and all reports were a valuable source of information.

In December, Panel members visited social work teams at Bromsgrove and Worcester to see working environments and ways of working, which they found very helpful and staff also appreciated the interaction with elected members.

In January 2023, the Panel was given the opportunity to comment, in advance of a Cabinet decision, on a proposed review of replacement care (previously known as respite), mainly to change the assessment for replacement care to a non-residential service and make it clearer for service users, and also to charge for both carers when two are required to attend a home care visit. The Panel was unanimously supportive of the proposals set out.

Also in January 2023, the Panel received an update on the implementation of the Day Opportunities Review which took place during 2022. Members of the Panel were pleased to hear that the feedback from service users had been mainly positive and unexpected savings were welcomed. Negative comments received had been generally about the process rather than the outcome, with examples given including transportation queries or session times.

In March, the Panel learned more about the Directorate's progress to develop the Learning Disability Service (LDS), following a Peer Challenge Review which had identified several areas for improvement. There were now good joint working arrangements with the Integrated Care Board including work towards a formal agreement for joint funding arrangements. The Vulnerable Adults Team had been reviewed to ensure a robust staff team was in place to deal with anticipated future demand and this would continue to be a priority along with overall LDS recruitment and retention and preparing for CQC inspection.

The Panel continued to monitor performance on a quarterly basis and in the main were pleased with the key performance indicators presented.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Panel's work this year has ranged across both the education and social care aspects of its remit. May 2022 saw a number of Membership changes included a new Chairman and Vice Chairman.

Throughout this period, Members were particularly pleased to see an increase in public participation at its meetings covering topics such as the All-Age Disability Service, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services, the Worcestershire Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report and Home to School Transport. In total 19 Members of the public spoke at Panel meetings, including 2 young people.

Members began 2022 with a joint discussion with the Adult Care and Well Being O&S Panel on proposals to restructure services to create an All-Age Disability Service. The proposals were developed jointly by the County Council's People Directorate and Worcester Children First (WCF) and aimed to provide a more coherent and coordinated response to need and deliver better outcomes in the short term and into adulthood. A further joint discussion to evaluate the implementation of the proposals is planned for later this year.

The Assessment Pathway for Children and Young People who may have Autism has been considered regularly in recent years by both the Children and Families O&S Panel and the OSPB. In January 2022, the Panel invited colleagues from WCF and the Health Service to provide a further update on assessments and referrals, waiting times and funding. Members welcomed the improvements that could be seen, including reduced waiting times, and were keen to ensure that the improving trajectory was maintained.

An additional Panel meeting was held in February to hear about the outcomes of two external inspections of WCF services. Firstly, the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities revisit, Members were pleased to learn that sufficient progress had been made in eight of the twelve areas of significant weakness detailed in the previous inspection in 2018 and wished to support the continued focus on the remaining four areas and, in particular, on the rebuilding of relationships with parents and carers (a further update on progress was received in November 2022). Secondly, Members also considered the outcome of the first Ofsted inspection of WCF's Independent Fostering Agency which had taken place in September 2021 and discussed the Improvement Plan that had been drawn up as a result of Ofsted's recommendations.

In March 2022, the Panel considered its annual update of Educational Outcomes and was keen to follow up its previous discussions on the impact of Covid-19 on education and also to hear about how the pandemic had affected apprenticeships. Although school attendance in the County was broadly in line with national averages, issues remained for some children and Members welcomed the continued focus on this area. It was recognised that the pandemic had presented challenges to apprenticeships and the role of individual Councillors in promoting apprenticeships to residents was important. A further update was provided in March 2023, the first since the Covid pandemic to include nationally published data.

In May, the Panel welcomed colleagues from the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership and West Mercia Police as part of an update on developments relating to GET SAFE and GET THERE, both were important areas of multi-agency partnership working. At the same meeting, Members considered the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report for 2020-21.

In the second half of the year, the Panel was keen to hear about the support being provided to the children and families living in Worcestershire as part of the Ukraine Settlement Scheme. It also considered the steps that were being taken to review and strengthen the Council's youth offer and inform the recommissioning of the Council's funded youth services.

In September the Panel heard about the Supporting Families First Service, a multi-disciplinary service for families to prevent escalation of risk and the need for child protection. Panel Members were very pleased to hear about the positive difference that the team was making to the lives of children and families in the County.

As part of a full agenda in November, the Panel received an update on developments relating to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and heard about the new duties placed on upper tier authorities and the focus on providing safe accommodation and support services for victims of domestic abuse and their families. Members also discussed WCF's Social Care and Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework, including KPIs, feedback from children, young people and families and audit activity, and were pleased to hear that this was an area that had received positive feedback following a focused Ofsted visit in 2021.

The Panel's agenda in January 2023 included an update on the school nursing service (part of the Starting Well Partnership). Members heard about the impact of the Covid pandemic and the national shortage of School Health Nurses which had resulted in recruitment challenges locally. Possible options to improve the recruitment and retention situation were also explored. The Panel heard that there were similar recruitment and retention challenges for qualified children's social workers and WCF were focusing on being the employer of choice in this area.

Ongoing monitoring of budget information alerted the Panel to significant pressures on home to school transport and in March 2023 the Panel held a discussion on the issues involved. The meeting was also attended by the Chairman of the Environment O&S Panel. Members heard that a Corporate Transport Review is now underway, and the Panel looks forward to a further update in September of this year.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Since January 2022, the Panel has looked at a wide range of topics, from the Council's commercial and procurement work, recruitment and retention of staff, the customer experience, the Here2Help Scheme, libraries, museums, arts and culture, support for refugees and digital technology.

The Panel, with the support of the CMR for Corporate Services and Communication has throughout the year been piloting Power-Bi (data visualisation software) for its monitoring of quarterly performance and in year budget information. The ability to interrogate the data to understand trends and highlight possible areas for Scrutiny is welcomed by Members. For instance, the Panel has used this information to understand the challenges around the registration of deaths within 5 days. It is planned that Power-Bi will be rolled out to all Scrutiny Panels in due course.

The Council currently spends approximately £633m per annum with external organisations for goods, services and works to support the delivery of the Council's priorities and has a responsibility to ensure that public funds are spent wisely and effectively. The Panel has been following the development of the Council's refreshed Procurement Strategy (including the Key Performance Indicator Delivery Plan) which runs alongside the Corporate Plan and has taken into account the impact of Covid-19.

Recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge for the Council and the Panel welcomed a wide-ranging discussion about the initiatives and actions the Council is taking to improve the situation. The discussion around this included the need for succession management, apprenticeships and consideration about how to promote the Council and Worcestershire as a good place to work. Linked to this, Members also considered Smarter Healthier Greener Ways of Working with an emphasis on remote working and maximising the use of Microsoft Teams.

Since November 2021, the Panel has been regularly monitoring the performance of compliments, comments and complaints and is pleased to note that the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2022 showed an improving picture for complaints along with an improved performance for children social care complaints being completed in 65 days.

In May 2022, the Panel refreshed its workplan and looked at the Council's overall Policy on Support for Refugees. The Panel was informed about the detail of the four resettlement programmes that Worcestershire are involved with.

At its July meeting, the Panel received an update on progress of implementing the Worcestershire's Library Strategy and the Library Service's response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Libraries Unlocked (open library service delivery model) was introduced at Droitwich and Stourport libraries in June 2022 and brought in an 85% increase in opening hours.

In the autumn, the Panel looked into the culture of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers along with the detail on the services and functions provided by or on behalf of the Council.

In November 2022, the Panel was interested to hear about how the Council recognises the importance of arts, culture, and heritage in making Worcestershire a great place to live, work and visit. Whilst the Council, has no overarching Museum, Arts and Cultural strategy, it delivers and provides access to a wide range of opportunities.

At the start of 2023 the Panel has looked at the important areas of how the Council provides support for volunteers and volunteering through the Here2Help Service and income generation at the Council's countryside sites.

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel (until May 2022)

In preparation for scrutiny of the 2022/23 budget proposals in January, a small task group of Panel members had considered detailed budget information. The Chairman had also written to the relevant CMR's with the Panel's request that Cabinet considered funding for particular service areas including small flood alleviation schemes, footways and public rights of way. At the January meeting the Panel welcomed the draft budget and Members were pleased that it included additional investment in those areas about which Members had expressed concern.

Also in January, the Panel received an update on the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the role of the Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) pilot in Bromsgrove which was intended to establish the concept and gauge the benefits and risks. The Panel was informed that the pilot had been well received and feedback was very positive. Subject to funding being obtained from the Department of Transport, the Panel was advised that the Council would then be able to look at how DRT could be embedded in the network in the county.

A street lighting update was received by the Panel in March following the additional £6m funding which had been included in the Council Budget for the LED conversion work. The update included details of progress made by the Lighting Maintenance Contractor and it was anticipated that the remainder of the conversion of non-LED street lighting would be completed within 12 -18 months.

The Panel benefitted from a site visit to the Lydiate Ash depot to view the site systems and operations, which Members found very helpful to aid their understanding.

At the Panel's final meeting in May 2022, Members were pleased to receive a number of detailed updates in relation to active travel, the cutting congestion programme, and road safety and reduction of speeding by use of built highways infrastructure. The Panel looked forward to an update the following year to include information on what had been achieved and delivered, as well as details of completed schemes and future projects.

Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel (from May 2022)

This new Panel had a remit for scrutinising the economy, which includes workforce skills, strategic infrastructure and broadband communications.

Initially, at its first meeting, the Panel received an overview of the economic situation in Worcestershire to help Panel members determine areas of focus and to understand the Council's role in economic development including how it works with partners. Following which the Panel set a theme of holding a meeting at each of the six district council offices in Worcestershire, inviting the respective District Council Leaders, to set out the economic challenges faced in their area and how the County Council could help. From Malvern, the Panel

learned that the County Council could support the District by being an advocate for additional bus services, endorsing active travel to and within the district, continue to promote the expansion of the successful Malvern Hills Science Park, and ensure the most rural parts of the district had access to superfast broadband. The Panel agreed that reliable transport options were vital for economic growth and that active travel was a positive way forward.

From Wyre Forest, the Panel learned that the key area that the County Council could support the District with would be with improving the subways in the town centre, which were currently a barrier to attracting visitors to the town. Other areas highlighted included, public transport improvements and developing new areas of joint working such as parking enforcement, residents' car parking schemes and maintenance of highways verges. The District was also keen to ensure that the effective joint working and communication was able to be continued and developed.

Coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Panel has been interested to hear about tourism, the work completed and what is planned since the Council took over the running of Visit Worcestershire.

The Council's role in promoting apprenticeships has also been explored. The Panel heard that around the county there had been a shift in the focus of apprenticeships with growth in Public Services and decline in retail and manufacturing although this was now improving. The Panel expressed concern about the lack of apprenticeships in disciplines such as construction due to an inability to recruit tutors and it was explained this was a problem nationally due to the fact that earnings in these trades were so much higher than in tutoring. The CMR advised that the Council had committed £1.2m to support providers which would help, for example, give flexibility to pay more for a period of time. In response to a Panel suggestion, the Skills and Investment Group Manager would verify that colleagues had considered promoting tutoring roles to recently retired people from these sectors.

During the annual update to Scrutiny on broadband, it was agreed that while the roll out of superfast broadband had been extremely successful, some disappointment was expressed that mobile phone call coverage was not as good. It was reported that there was a national drive to improve 4G coverage and public bodies were working together to install additional masts, however, sites were sometimes rejected due to communities objecting to proposed mast sites.

An update was received on the Council's Enterprising Worcestershire Start-Up programme and details of how the Council supported and promoted enterprise in the County. It was reported that the European funding which would cease at the end of June 2023, would be replaced by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, for which the 6 District Councils would have responsibility for managing and allocating funds. The Panel learnt that proposals had been submitted to the Districts for continued funding for business support, with confirmation now awaited. The Council had also allocated funding through the Open For Business Board for a business support and grant programme and the Panel noted that the next 2 years of activity for business start-ups would shortly be commissioned.

As part of the Panel's regular performance and in-year budget monitoring, additional figures are now provided for business survival rates, railway station usage and journey times for all the main stations in Worcestershire.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel (from May 2022)

The other new Panel had responsibility for the Environment including Net Zero Plans, Highways, Flooding and Waste.

At its first meeting in July, the Panel welcomed the new CMR for the Environment to outline the priorities for the year ahead and beyond. The Panel also received details of the countywide footways programme, for which there was a total available budget for 2022/23 of £6.8m. The key issues raised by Members included the rollover of funds between years and Members being given an earlier input in future as to how the strategic funding was allocated.

In October, the Panel received an update on developments within Community Transport, with 14 schemes currently in operation in the county and were pleased to welcome the Chair of Worcestershire Community Transport Consortium to join the discussion. The Panel was reminded of the differences in funding with some schemes receiving their funding from the Strategic Grant, which was diminishing but currently at £90k per annum, whilst other schemes were fully funded by District Councils. The Panel urged the CMR to consider how the Council's overall support for community transport could be improved. They also wrote to the Government Minister with responsibility for buses to stress the importance of protecting concessionary fares funding beyond March 2023.

At the same meeting, the Panel received an update on the new requirements of the 2021 Environment Act, covering 3 key areas: biodiversity, waste and pollution, which were at an early stage of implementation. Two of the new requirements of particular interest were development sites being required to deliver 10% biodiversity net gains for a minimum of 30 years, and the introduction of the extended producer responsibility in waste services. The Panel also welcomed an update on developments and highlights relating to the Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan. Members were pleased to learn that there had been a 47% reduction in net emissions being achieved since 2009/10, through factors including energy efficiency schemes and the move from landfill of household waste to disposal through EnviRecover.

The Panel received background history relating to the waste services management contract which covered the Council's role as a Waste Disposal Authority. The 25-year integrated contract had commenced in 1998, with one contractor covering all the services. The Panel was informed that a 5-year extension was currently being finalised which would extend the contract to January 2029.

Members scrutinised the 2023/24 Budget proposals in January and felt the proposals were generally positive for the Environment area. They welcomed the Cabinet's continued commitment to funding the pavement improvement programme, flood mitigation measures and LED street lighting. The Panel still had some concerns about particular service areas including Public Rights of Way and the backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs), and issues relating to Section 278s which they would continue to closely monitor through the quarterly performance indicators.

Following a site visit to the Lydiate Ash Maintenance depot the previous year, the Panel welcomed Ringway, the Council's Highways Maintenance Contractor, to provide an update on new developments and efficiencies in highway maintenance in the county.

In March the Panel received the Flood Risk Management Annual Report for 2022 which set out details of progress on flooding schemes and initiatives throughout the year. Representatives from partner organisations joined the Panel for this discussion and their input and expertise was valued. The Panel have asked for a briefing paper on the implications of the potential legal

change which would enable the Council, as the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) approval body, to be able to adopt SuDs in the future.

Finally, in recent weeks Panel members enjoyed an interesting visit to the House of Commons. A key highlight of the visit was being able to observe a Liaison Committee hearing in action as its members scrutinised the Prime Minister in his work. They also watched the House in session and enjoyed a tour of Parliament.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

The HOSC has looked at a very wide range of areas this year, from maternity services to dementia, the Covid vaccination programme and end of life care. The main focus however has been to scrutinise efforts to relieve pressures on urgent and emergency care, which has of course been a critical national concern at hospitals across the country. In order to be able to maintain scrutiny of these pressures, alongside the existing work programme, the Committee is meeting monthly.

An intensive scrutiny session towards the end of 2021 on ambulance hospital handover delays, led the Committee to identify patient flow as the key area to monitor; delays in a patient entering, moving through acute hospital care and being able to return home or to an alternative setting, were creating unmanageable pressures. HOSC members have been hugely concerned about the impact on patients and staff and it was therefore very pleasing to hear that moving into 2023, demand had started to reduce and that from early January, there had been improvements with less ambulance delays and significantly reduced ambulance waiting times, which was allowing for the improvement work to be embedded.

Regular Q&As on patient flow have taken place with representatives from local Health Trusts, the Integrated Care Board, the Ambulance Trust and Council Directors responsible for adult social care and public health. Adult Social Care also plays a role in enabling patients with ongoing care needs to leave acute hospitals, and this has been scrutinised by the Adult Care and Well Being O&S Panel, with some HOSC members in attendance.

The HOSC has also held one of its public meetings at Worcestershire Royal Hospital and toured the new Urgent and Emergency Care Unit.

The HOSC has heard a consistent message about workforce pressures being a significant problem for the health and social care sector. Recruitment and retention has been highlighted as 'what keeps me awake at night' in several meetings, and the Committee fully supports the message from the health sector that the absolute priority is to attract and importantly, to retain a permanent workforce, for example by trying to be as creative and flexible as possible to ensure a work/life balance. A further update to the Committee is scheduled for May 2023.

Following successive lockdowns, the HOSC was concerned about the potential for and impact of meeting health needs of those who had not come forward with health concerns. During an update on cancer diagnostics in January 2021, it was therefore reassuring to learn that while during the first wave of the pandemic, people were reluctant to go to hospital for cancer treatment, the subsequent swell in referrals was a good indicator that they were now happier to come forward. It was also positive to hear that whilst backlogs continued to be worked through, monitoring of cancer outcomes across the Covid recovery period was not indicating increased harm to patients.

During an update on dentistry in March 2022, HOSC members highlighted to service commissioners (NHS England) the problems experienced by Worcestershire residents in accessing NHS dental care and NHSE accepted that there was a significant problem and was

currently mapping need across the region. The HOSC learned that contract rates was an issue of national concern and reform was being considered by central Government, although the pandemic had stalled discussions.

As part of regular updates on public health expenditure and outcomes, this year the HOSC has also been kept informed about development of the new Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2023. In January, the Committee looked at outcomes from public health work. HOSC members were keen to see the Public Health Ring-Fenced Grant fully made use of and were therefore pleased that the 3-year plan in place for the use of the reserves which had been paused during the COVID pandemic, was now underway. Everyone welcomed the success of falls prevention work. Future public health related scrutiny will include the NHS Health Checks Programme for everyone aged between 40-74.

The Committee was very interested to hear the public health themes which were emerging from the pandemic – including the indirect impacts on education, alcohol consumption, physical activity and mental health. The fact that those in deprived areas had suffered more had highlighted the need to focus on the least affluent.

The HOSC has been kept updated about a change in the service model which provides mental health care for people aged over 65 years with severe and enduring mental ill health or disorder that enables patients requiring treatment and support for an acute mental health problem to be cared for within their own homes. The service was originally established in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, when efforts were made to keep older people out of hospital as much as possible. This resulted in the temporary closure of the Athelon ward in Worcester, and the ward budget was used to pilot the Hospital at Home Service. As part of making this temporary change permanent, the HOSC was kept informed about the consultation with service users, their families and stakeholders – and Committee members praised the positive outcomes of the Hospital at Home Service and the initiative in taking it forward.

In October, the HOSC discussed Stroke Services, the organisation and running of which was being reviewed, to make sure those accessing services in Herefordshire and Worcestershire would have the best opportunity to survive and thrive after stroke. Ahead of an engagement exercise, HOSC was presented with an Issues Paper which highlighted the challenges currently faced and potential solutions – the main challenge being recruitment of staff with specialist stroke skills to provide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week services across the 2 Counties.

The HOSC has continued to monitor improvement of Maternity Services, following the Care Quality inspection in March 2021 which rated the Service as requiring improvement for being safe and well-led. Assurances have been sought about the Acute Hospital Trust's own monitoring of progress against the actions required by the CQC, and while workforce remains a concerning key pressure, reflecting the national picture, in October it was reported that the Service was in a much better position with new recruits.

The HOSC has continued to keep abreast of the development of the Integrated care System (ICS) for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The major change highlighted is the ability to move finance around the system, whilst also shifting away from the current very monetary based system to one which focused on outcomes and flexibility – and Committee members will be keen to see the benefits this may bring.

In November, the HOSC considered an overview of the role of Community Hospitals and site by site services, and it was explained that while historically there had been multiple contracts for clinics, this was being streamlined. The discussion gave HOSC greater understanding of community hospitals' role in enabling patients to leave acute hospital care, and also generated debate around minor injury units, some of which were very busy with others underused.

Physiotherapy Services was a new topic for consideration and HOSC members learned that a shift towards extended hours and 7-day working supported more flexible employment, and that increasing demand for physiotherapy was in part due to an ageing population, who was encouraged to keep well for longer at home. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, referral to treatment of 18 weeks was more usual, however, self-care was improving and the pandemic had accelerated new ways of working, such as remote consultations.

Assurances were sought about the Hillcrest Mental Health Ward following concerns about safety and staffing raised by the Care Quality Commission. The HOSC was reassured that actions had been taken to make improvements, including a new leadership structure, changes to staffing, including regular agency staff, increased therapy, greater patient voice and enhancements to the building – however the inspection report will be considered at a future meeting, when available.

The HOSC also requested an overview of the Elective Recovery Programme, which is working to eliminate long wait times for elective care coming out of the pandemic, including hospital appointments, investigations and treatments. Operating theatre capacity had increased from the previous year and the focus was on eliminating wait times of 65 weeks by April 2024. It was hoped that the further 7 operating theatres to concentrate all elective surgery at the Alexander Hospital, would be a further boost.

The Committee's final meeting during this report period looked at Community Pharmacies and the role they play in everyday life, including dispensing prescriptions and providing clinical advice. For some, they offer vaccination clinics and a number are providing enhanced additional services. Commissioning arrangements will transfer to the ICB from July and HOSC will be very interested to see what changes further integration will have on these high street community assets. Workforce pressures across the system were highlighted as was differing ways of working across each pharmacy or pharmacy group and the pharmaceutical needs assessment undertaken by Public Health. A few Members had heard from residents that some medicines were subject to regular shortages and we were informed of possible reasons and solutions.

At the same meeting, the HOSC had an update on the Carenotes Electronic Patient Records Outage which affected the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust. The supplier had been subject to a cyber security attack which disabled access to the Carenotes system. HOSC was assured that no data was released and business continuity planning ensured that services continued. The system is now rebuilt and services are using Carenotes once more, however, performance data for the affected period is still incomplete.

Feedback from Healthwatch Worcestershire has been very helpful over the year and has fed into the Committee's discussions on patient flow, for example communication around Minor Injuries Units, and feedback from residents on maternity care, cancer treatment and engagement around plans for Stroke Services.

The HOSC will also welcome the opportunity to comment on NHS Quality Accounts, which are reports about the quality of services and improvements offered by NHS healthcare providers.

Scrutiny Task Groups:

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

The CAMHS Scrutiny Task Group, with a terms of reference '*to investigate access to and the availability of appropriate mental health services for children and adolescents*', was ongoing throughout 2022 and completed in early 2023.

In order to gain an understanding of the services currently available to support children and young people (CYP) with their mental health and the referral process for accessing those services, the Task Group met with a range of colleagues from Specialist CAMHS, Public Health and Education Psychology, the CAMHS Well Being and Emotional Support teams and from Onside Advocacy who run the Act on It Programme. The Group also obtained feedback on the experience of service users including schools, GPs, a youth facility and looked at practice in other areas.

The Task Group's draft report was considered and approved by OSPB in February 2023. The report was then presented to Cabinet in March, alongside formal responses to the recommendations from the relevant CMR's and from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board. The report was welcomed by Cabinet and the response of the CMR's was adopted as the way forward. An update on progress made on the recommendations would be provided to the OSPB in 6 months-time.

Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure

The Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure Scrutiny Task Group looked at *how to get developer-funded highways infrastructure built quicker for the benefit of residents and road users and How the Council can help ensure the planning conditions imposed on developers to build key highways infrastructure by certain deadlines are met.*'

From the outset it was recognised that the process of approving developer funded infrastructure is, by its nature, complicated since applications to alter a public highway involve planning law; schemes need to work for residents, the local area and be safe.

During the process the Task Group interviewed a range of witnesses including housing developers, other county councils, a construction engineering company and the Council's current Highways Professional Services Contractor (HSPSC) and also collected and analysed data.

Resulting from this the Task Group developed 21 recommendations covering specific working practices and processes currently in place, the oversight and performance management of the teams, liaison and communication with developers, joined up working with the Local Planning Authorities and performance monitoring by the Environment O&S Panel.

The Task Group's draft report was considered and approved by OSPB in April 2023 and will be considered by Cabinet in May, alongside the response from the CMR.

Further copies of this report are available from:

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