

**Committee:** Scrutiny Committee 1  
**Date:** 12 June 2002  
**Agenda Item No:** 5  
**Title:** WORK PROGRAMME 2002/03  
**Author:** Mick Purkiss (01799) 510430

### **Summary**

- 1 This report gives an officer view on the key issues likely to arise during 2002/03 and recommends that the Committee determine a work programme for that period.

### **Background**

- 2 2001/02 was a busy year for the Scrutiny Committee. Some groundwork was carried out on how the scrutiny of the NHS would be managed and work is progressing on this issue in partnership with Essex County Council and other district and borough councils. A thorough review was undertaken of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy and some work was carried out on the issue of making best use of public rights of way. The work of the Community and Leisure and Health and Housing Committees was monitored and one decision was the subject of the "call in" procedure.
- 3 Following the review of the Council's Constitution this committee will be responsible for scrutinising the work of the Leisure (PFI) Board. The project is now at a crucial stage and a progress report will be made earlier in the meeting.
- 4 During 2002/03 the Housing Best Value Review will take place with regard to housing need, homelessness, tenant participation and private sector housing. The Leisure and Cultural Services Best Value Review will also be carried out during this period.
- 5 Scrutiny of NHS matters, particularly at a local level, will continue to be a priority for this Committee and close liaison with the Primary Care Trust will be essential.
- 6 In addition to the items identified above some work will arise from the "standard" agenda items from the Committees being scrutinised.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1 the items set out in paragraphs 3-6 be included within the work programme for 2002/03

- 2 Members consider whether any other items should be included at this stage
- 3 the work programme be reviewed in November 2002.

**Committee:** Scrutiny Committee 1

**Date:** 12 June 2002

**Agenda Item No:** 6

**Title:** LOCAL AUTHORITY HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**Author:** Mick Purkiss (01799) 510430

### **Summary**

- 1 This report updates Members on progress with local authority health overview and scrutiny.

### **Background**

- 2 On 3 May all Members were sent a copy of the framework document which had been prepared following meetings between representatives of Essex County Council and district councils.
- 3 In April a consultation workshop on the Government's proposals was held at Ingatestone. The event which was organised jointly between the NHS Eastern Region and the Essex Health Authority enabled local authorities and local organisations to put forward their views and comments were fed back to the Secretary of State.
- 4 The workshop referred to the new powers contained in the Local Government Act 2000 for Councils "to promote and improve the economic, social or environmental well being of the area". This led to the setting up of local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs). The responsibility for health related OSCs is located with Social Services Authorities (Essex County Council) and OSCs will be made up of Councillors who are not members of the executive.
- 5 The functions of the OSCs are:
  - To improve health and reduce health inequalities, (local authorities have the power to review and scrutinise the totality of local services planned and provided)
  - Social Service Authorities also may review and scrutinise the operation of the health service in its area

- OSCs will be able to refer contested proposals for major service changes to the Secretary of State
- OSCs will have the power to scrutinise social care services provided or commissioned by NHS bodies.

6 OSCs will operate in the following way:-

- they must be open to the public except where confidential or “exempt information” is disclosed
- they will make reports and recommendations to the Boards of the NHS bodies scrutinised
- reports will be copied to MPs, strategic health authorities, Patients Forums, local commissions, interested voluntary organisations and other bodies
- reports will be placed in libraries and on key web-sites.

7 The Department of Health recognises that different styles may be appropriate for different types of scrutiny. Councillors will always provide the core group of panel members and democratic leadership. District Councillors may be co-opted as voting members.

8 The Essex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is currently being set up and the County Council membership includes Councillor Mrs S Flack. Councillor D Morson, the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee 1, has been nominated as a district council representative and a decision will be made by the County Council on this shortly.

9 In addition to the OSCs, a Partnership Forum is being set up covering Essex, Thurrock and Southend. There will be one member and one officer from each of the three Local Authorities with Social Services functions, plus one member and one officer representing Borough and District authorities. A “substitution” system will apply.

10 The Forum will be a non-voting body with no executive functions. The Chair of the forum will rotate between the three social services authorities. The County Council will take the Chair at the beginning of the cycle. The functions of the Partnership Forum will be:

- To seek to agree the annual NHS O&S programme, but recognising the final right of each authority to proceed unilaterally.
- To agree or to note the composition of all O&S panels.
- To produce guidance for the conduct of NHS O&S investigations and reporting.

11 The first meeting of the Essex OSC will be on 5 July and the Partnership Forum will meet on 12 July.

12 The Department of Health’s timetable for national implementation is currently:

Summer 2002 - To consider comments on draft Regulations and Guidance

- Autumn 2002 - To carry out training and development
- Winter 2002 - To issue final guidance
- January 2003 - Regulations come into force and health scrutiny powers introduced.

- 13 It is intended that Community Health Councils will cease to operate on 1 April 2003. The new Essex OSC will be established in January 2003 and will work alongside the CHC during that transitional period.
- 14 The Committee will be updated on progress as soon as further information is available. The officer responsible for health scrutiny at the County Council has offered to give a progress report to members at a future meeting if required.

FOR INFORMATION

**Committee:** Scrutiny 1 – Community & Housing

**Date:** 12 June 2002

**Agenda Item No:** 7

**Title:** Internal Audits

**Author:** Simon Martin (01799) 510422

**Summary**

- 1 This report sets out the results of internal audit work completed during the past six months. It refers to services falling within the remit of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee only. The results of other work falling within the remit of the Resources and Environment Scrutiny Committee will be reported at their next meeting.

**Background**

- 2 The Internal Audit Section reviews the Council's internal control systems as a contribution to the management of risk and the economic, efficient and effective use of resources. The requirement for an adequate internal audit function is set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996.

## Recent Audit Work

- 3 *Housing rents* – reviews of rent administration, collection and accounting all proved satisfactory. It was noted that, during the past year, arrears have fallen from 3.4% to 2.9% of the overall debit.
- 4 *Homelessness* – at the time of the audit there were some delays in assessing homeless persons' housing benefit claims. It is understood that circumstances have improved since the audit. In addition some minor differences were identified between the date benefit was paid and the date records showed people as homeless. These have now been corrected. All other areas of this review proved satisfactory.
- 5 *Tourist information centre* – computer back-ups were not carried out for some stand-alone systems at the centre. There was consequently a risk that data would be lost in the event of hardware or software failure. It is understood that back-ups have since been re-introduced. An unofficial invoice book was being used to collect small amounts of money owed to the Council, rather than the official sundry debtor system. This practice has now stopped. All other areas of this review proved satisfactory.

Background Papers: Internal Audit files relating to housing rents, homelessness & tourist information.