

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 11 JUNE 2013**

Present: Councillor E Godwin – Chairman.  
Councillors G Barker, S Howell, E Oliver and D Watson.

Also present: Councillors R Chambers (Executive Member for Finance) and J Cheetham (Deputy Leader); Daphne Cornell, (Chairman of Tenants' Regulatory Panel); Rob Ashford (Director for Essex Ambulance Services) and Darren Meades (General Manager South and West Essex); Ian Stidson (Director of Primary Care and Partnership Commissioning, NHS England) and Toni Coles (Director of Development and Strategy, West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group).

Officers: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), P Evans (Housing Business and Performance Manager), V Taylor (Business Improvement and Performance Officer) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

SC1

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Evans, Morson and Rich.

*Councillor G Barker referred to the declaration he had made at the last meeting regarding a disclosable pecuniary interest. He reiterated that declaration in respect of item 7, NHS England reports and explained he worked as a self-employed medical practitioner and was on the principal list of the General Medical Council and his name was held on the Performers' List North Essex PCT. He had never worked within the NW Essex area so had no conflict of interest, but had still obtained dispensation from the Council's Monitoring Officer to talk and vote in relation to NW Essex PCT and its successor body.*

*Councillor Watson declared a non disclosable pecuniary interest in that his son worked for the East of England Ambulance service.*

*Councillor Oliver declared a non disclosable pecuniary interest in that his son was a GP in Cromer.*

The Chairman welcomed the speakers this evening and said with Members' permission she intended to change the order of the agenda.

**EAST OF ENGLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE**

Darren Meades and Rob Ashford gave a presentation on the operational structure of the East of England Ambulance Service following the recent re-structure of the service.

Members asked questions on a range of subjects.

Regarding ambulance staff training and use of private ambulances, members were informed that reliance on private ambulances had reduced from a high during the winter months of 21-22% to 11-15%. The reason for some continued reliance on private ambulance crews was to enable the release of staff for training.

In reply to a question about the classification of incoming calls, Mr Meades said a national triage system was used, the "ANPBS" system, which used points to classify a call via a series of questions. It was considered the best system available for ambulances.

Regarding ambulance turnaround times, specific information could be provided. The ambulance service was working with hospitals and had made some headway in reducing queuing.

In response to a question about reasons for unprecedented demand on the service, Ian Stidson said urgent care was causing real pressure on the system and NHS England was working very closely with its partners on this subject. The problem was recognised across the whole system. There had been unprecedented demand from December through to March, which was much longer than in previous years. The reasons for the demand were not clear.

Toni Coles said West Essex had experienced increased demand for emergency admissions, but not as much as in some areas of the country, due to CCG initiatives with the community teams. Another issue was unnecessary attendance at A&E, an area the CCG was working on with practices and patients to try to get people to use the health service appropriately.

Councillor G Barker asked about the effect on capacity of turnaround time, and whether options such as using "jumbulance" vehicles had been considered to alleviate this problem.

Mr Meades said turnaround was responsible for 25% of ambulance crew time. Initiatives such as using "jumbulances" would probably require the permission of the CCG and LATs.

Councillor Watson asked about the accuracy of tabloid reports that unprecedented pressure on the service was due to GPs not having 24 hour responsibility for patients.

Mr Meades said there was national recognition for support for patients outside the acute environment, as this had a knock-on effect, and there was a drive to look at alternative care pathways.

Mrs Coles said the CCG was resourcing primary care in A&E departments at certain hospitals to try to prevent the issues of delay due to patients attending A&E unnecessarily.

Mr Stidson said there were some potential areas for new ways of working during the GP working day, as currently all GP home visits took place from 12-2pm. This meant that A&E departments often experienced a batch of additional patients at that time. Therefore there was potential for staggering the times when home visits took place.

Mr Ashford welcomed this proposal, as the impact on ambulance services and A&E departments during the usual GP closure times at lunchtime was very significant.

In reply to a question about the legally permitted maximum number of working hours for paramedics, Mr Meades said paramedics could opt out of the Working Time Directive. Rosters varied, with a maximum of 40 hours per week, based on a 37.5 hours per week contract.

On the question of discharge of patients and inconvenient waiting for hospital pharmacies, Mrs Coles said timing was acknowledged to be an issue which had also been raised by patient forums. Work was progressing to ensure services which had previously operated historically could work in a "joined up" way.

Regarding a question on the GP contract, Members were informed the national contract provided for practices to work between 8am and 6.30pm, but there was the option for GPs to offer a Directive Enhanced Service. NHS England was working with GP practices to make changes to the shutting down hours across Essex.

Councillor Chambers asked about involvement of the Ambulance Service in community budgets.

Mr Meades said the Ambulance Service vehicle leases were not under local budgetary control and the Service did not have any involvement with community budgets but aimed to build relationships with the CCGs to meet local needs, as one size didn't fit all.

Councillor Chambers said he had had personal experience of relying upon the Ambulance Services, and he said he wished to express his sincere gratitude for their excellent assistance.

The Chairman said she hoped she would be invited to another public Board meeting. She appreciated the Ambulance Service had had a tough few months, and she was pleased Mr Meades and Mr Ashford had returned to speak to the Committee.

Mr Ashford offered all members a ride in an ambulance so that they could see at first hand the excellent work of the Ambulance Service. The Chairman said she was keen to accept this offer and thanked Mr Meades and Mr Ashford for attending.

SC3

### **NHS ENGLAND**

Mr Stidson clarified his role and that of Mrs Coles, in that NHS England was responsible for GPs, Dentists and Clinicians, plus the supervision of estates, whereas West Essex CCG was responsible for commissioning of services. However both organisations worked together and endeavoured to have a joined up perspective.

Mrs Coles said the transformation of the former PCTs to form the CCGs had at last taken place and from 1 April 2013 the CCG was a statutory body. This was a very busy time. The CCG had a strong reputation in Essex, with active involvement with GPs. There were some challenges with demand outstripping supply, and there was a need to save £60m out of a budget of £320m. The CCG had had to develop a radical transformation programme over the next 6 months, and she would be able to discuss this at a future committee.

Mr Stidson said NHS England oversaw 7 CCGs in Essex. West Essex was one of the most mature and proactive. The new arrangements gave potential to transform primary care and Uttlesford was leading the way in West Essex in taking this aspect forward.

The Chairman asked how commissioning worked.

Mr Stidson said NHS England commissioned a GP service through the usual procurement rules.

The Chairman asked about the patient to GP ratio and whether the Committee could have an up to date patient list. Mr Stidson said he would forward this information. He explained that the list varied between practices from about 1,600 – 2,300 patients, but that significant variation above the national average would give rise to concern.

In reply to a question about education of patients to seek advice from a nurse practitioner rather than a GP, Members were advised that this was not always the appropriate option due to complexities of both the clinical interrogation process and patient expectations.

Mr Stidson produced the West Essex January – September patients' survey results and said there were some very good practices in West Essex but some where more work was needed. These issues would be taken forward with East of England NHS and the CCG.

Councillor Cheetham asked about the common problem of obtaining appointments for the same day, and asked what would be done to ensure provision of GP practices in view of the development pressures on the area.

Mr Stidson said the Essex primary care strategy aimed to identify by working with local authorities where care needs arose. It was clear there was significant housing development in Essex. Mrs Coles said the CCG was already making representations where it was known that capacity would need to increase and where it could secure options on land under section 106 agreements.

Mr Stidson said NHS England had a shortfall in its budget and had to maximise efficiencies so that money was targeted in the most appropriate places. There was less money available but increasing expectations.

Mrs Coles said the primary care strategy of the CCG recognised the necessity of collaborative working.

Councillor Cheetham said pharmacies should be part of the equation and their potential could be used better. Mr Stidson agreed.

Councillor Watson asked about the services covered by GP contracts. Mr Stidson said these comprised three areas: core services, additional services such as maternity checks and immunisations, and enhanced services such as minor surgery and smoking cessation.

Mrs Coles said some of the enhanced services were run by NHS England, others with County and some with the CCGs. The CCG tried to commission them differently to gain a wider range of services, but that meant transferring out of the hospitals to the community. This created the opportunity to create new services. The Chairman asked that she be sent a chart of which organisation had responsibility for which areas.

Councillor Watson asked about the issue of incompatible computer records between the Saffron Walden Community Hospital and The Rosie at Addenbrookes. Mrs Coles said she would find out if the issue was being resolved but she was aware this was not a unique problem in the NHS.

Councillor G Barker said 2,500 houses were due to be built in Great Dunmow in the next ten years and asked about the funding which would be required to set up a new GP practice.

Mr Stidson said there was no long-term resource and this type of commitment would need to be built into the plan. It was important to ensure the health agencies were made aware at an early stage in the planning process of the need to allocate land and money.

Councillor G Barker asked why not all GP surgeries carried out blood-taking, as patients requiring this facility in the south of the district had to travel to Harlow or Bishop's Stortford.

Mrs Coles said a review of GP practices was being carried out and blood-taking was likely to be one of the enhanced services reinstated.

The Chairman noted there was much work yet to be done in the provision of health services. She thanked Mrs Coles and Mr Stidson for attending.

SC4

#### **HOUSING TENANTS REGULATORY PANEL**

The Housing Business and Performance Manager presented a report which informed Members about a new tenants' regulatory panel.

Mrs Cornell, the Chairman of the new Panel, summarised the Panel's responsibilities and said it would report to the Tenant Forum, which in turn reported to the Housing Board. She said the Panel was made up of volunteers who had responded to a request publicised in the Tenants' newsletter. The Panel was currently looking at voids and would in time review other matters including Choice Based Lettings.

The Chairman commended the excellent start made by the Tenants' Panel and said the Committee looked forward to hearing more from it in future.

SC5

#### **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LEADER**

Councillor Cheetham as Deputy Leader presented a report on behalf of the Leader, who could not be present this evening. The report summarised various significant occasions for the Council during the year 2012/13, such as the celebrations to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, including the "Sparks will Fly" event, and the journey of the Olympic flame through Uttlesford. The report also highlighted the introduction of new projects such as new recycling and waste collection practices and summarised the Council's approach and achievements regarding financial planning, the corporate plan, and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy and the introduction of a local Council Tax Support Scheme following the Government's changes to the benefits system.

The report also set out a list of projects and achievements of the Council during 2012/13. Councillor Cheetham said the report would be circulated to all members.

The Chairman said this was a record to be proud of and she thanked Councillor Cheetham.

Councillor Howell said he echoed the Chairman's comments, as this was an exceptional record, detailing an impressive array of achievements. It was right to acknowledge the contribution of staff whose professionalism had made his job as Chairman of the Performance and Audit Committee easier. In particular he was sympathetic to the challenges for both staff and residents regarding the benefit changes.

In his view the Cabinet system had improved the speed of decision-making.

The Chairman acknowledged this to be the case.

Councillor Cheetham said she had received compliments about the way the council had taken a gentle approach to the new benefits system, and the Council should be congratulated.

Councillor Chambers said he would be presenting at Cabinet a report looking at second homes and empty homes. He agreed staff had been marvellous at communicating the new system to people.

Councillor Watson said officers and in particular the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance had done an outstanding job in making the Council's finances clear and understandable.

## SC6 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 APRIL 2013**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2013 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## SC7 **MATTERS ARISING**

### **(i) Minute SC52 – Lower Street Car Park, Stansted**

Councillor G Barker asked whether the Minutes reflected what was said. The Business Improvement and Performance Officer said the comments recorded in the minutes were a summary of what was stated at the meeting.

SC8

## **CAR PARK TASK GROUP**

The Chairman said that in the absence of Councillor Evans, the Chairman of the task group, the Committee would receive her report at a later meeting. She understood from having attended a meeting of the Task Group that it was looking at every car park in the district and aimed to take into account implications of planning development. Councillor Watson said he too had attended a meeting and that the Group was beginning to gain a sense of common themes developing regarding the district's car parks.

The Chairman thanked officers for their support in the work of the Task Group.

SC9

## **HIGHWAYS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP SCOPING REPORT**

Members considered a scoping report on the Highways Strategic Partnership, for a review to take place at the September meeting. The aim of the review was to consider whether the Highways Strategic Partnership was working effectively.

Members asked that the terms of reference include:

- § Liaison with other agencies between Highways and the various utilities bodies regarding the digging up of roads.
- § what customer satisfaction feedback there had been and whether this feedback indicated improvement or deterioration with issues such as potholes, as well as the satisfaction or otherwise with the website for reporting potholes.
- § How much compensation Highways had paid out to motorists

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said 50% of complaints to this Council were about potholes, which whilst they were misdirected, indicated a very high degree of dissatisfaction about this issue across the district.

SC10

## **ANY OTHER ITEMS**

Councillor Watson referred to a complaint he had received regarding a planning application. He said this related to the submission of draft rather than final documentation to the Planning Committee. He had made enquiries on behalf of the complainant and was very concerned to find that the planning department had not met certain Key Performance Indicators for the last five quarters. He considered this to be a serious matter and asked the Chairman whether planning officers could be brought before the Committee to explain.



Councillor Howell said he was aware of the issues regarding performance in the Planning department and that the Assistant Director for Planning and Building Control had attended three meetings of the Performance and Audit Committee in succession. Evidence brought to that committee indicated there was significant improvement in the processing of planning papers. However if the complaint was about how applications were received then this was not for his committee.

Detailed discussion took place on the appropriate method of investigating the complaint. Councillor Watson said he felt this matter was appropriate for investigation by the Scrutiny Committee. The Director of Corporate Services said a distinction had to be made as to whether this was a one-off complaint or a question of performance. Councillor G Barker said a complaint needed to go through the complaints procedure which had to operate independently from Scrutiny. The outcome following that procedure could be considered by the Committee. Members noted that the Assistant Director Planning and Building Control had already achieved improvements and had been assisting the Performance and Audit Committee.

Councillor Watson said he felt that if the planning department was underperforming then this was a matter for Scrutiny.

The Director of Corporate Services reminded members that the scrutiny training they had received supported the investigation by Scrutiny Committee of matters which had been considered by the Performance and Audit Committee. He suggested that the September meeting consider the performance of the Planning department for the preceding six quarters and that if there were still grounds for concern that they look at the matter further.

The meeting ended at 10pm.