



Nottingham
City Council

Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report

2012-13



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Introduction

Overview and scrutiny exists to help improve governance and public services. It ensures the Council's Executive is publicly held to account for its decisions and actions, and promotes open and transparent decision-making and democratic accountability. It also has a wide remit to explore how the Council and its partner organisations could improve services for the people of Nottingham by:

- reviewing existing policy and contributing to the development of new policy;
- acting as a 'critical friend' to those making decisions;
- holding decision-makers to account for their decisions and actions;
- challenging performance to ensure that services are meeting the needs of local communities.

This annual report looks at how the Overview and Scrutiny function performed in 2012-13 and provides a snapshot of the contribution it made to improving public services.

The structure for Overview and Scrutiny in 2012-13 comprises:-

- an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to determine and co-ordinate a prioritised work programme and carry out scrutiny of key strategic issues;
- up to three Scrutiny Review Panels at any one time to undertake short, focussed reviews on topics agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to deliver the work programme;

- a Health Scrutiny Panel to scrutinise health issues within the city;
- a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise health issues across the Nottingham conurbation with members from both the City and County Councils;
- a Call-in Sub Committee to review executive decisions when requested by non executive councillors. This sub committee met once during the year.

The function was supported by a small team of scrutiny colleagues within Constitutional Services.

To be successful Overview and Scrutiny depends upon active participation, not only from the non executive councillors, but also the input of many others – executive councillors, colleagues, representatives of external organisations, the voluntary sector, interest groups and individual citizens. This year Overview and Scrutiny has been supported by a large number of organisations and individuals including Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS), Nottingham Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP), Nottingham University Hospitals, CityCare Partnership, East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS), Nottingham City Clinical Commissioning Group, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Local Involvement Networks, Nottingham Equality and Fairness Commission, Royal College of Nursing, and individual patients and users of health services. The review panels have also been supported by citizens, service users and contributors.

We offer our sincere thanks to all those who provided us with information, attended meetings and responded to our recommendations in 2012-13.

Contributing to improvement in public services

Adding Value and Making an impact – participation and service outcomes

We have sought to maximise the opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to be of value to the City Council, our partners and the City of Nottingham. The Work Programme ensures that every item has a clear purpose and is focussed on achieving outcomes. The commissioning of Review Panels with a single responsibility to carry out a review aims to ensure focus on the matter in hand and provide a clear indication of when work was complete.

In 2012-13 we introduced some single session reviews based on the Hertfordshire model where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decides the scope, then the Review Panel seeks the evidence and agrees findings and recommendations, which are discussed with contributors present. A short report on the outcome of the review is produced and approved by the Chair, with recommendations sent to contributors for response following the meeting. If appropriate, a follow up meeting may take place to confirm progress of implementation of recommendations.

The following are some examples of the impact and outcomes which have flowed from the findings and recommendations of scrutiny activity in 2012-13:

Review of Personal Budgets

The scope of this Panel was to explore Personal Budgets with particular reference to, ‘the tensions between choice and autonomy for the individual and the Council’s ability to provide the level and range of services that enable choice’. The Panel decided that the specific focus for the review would be how customer friendly the procedures and information are, the range of options available and how citizens are supported in making informed choices. The Panel was supported during the review by contributors in receipt of personal budgets, who shared their experiences of the assessment process, their concerns about the Resource Allocation System and concerns that the financial value of Personal Budgets was reducing (although the latter was not within the Panel’s review remit).

The Panel gathered evidence, through meetings with Adult Social Care and Quality and Commissioning colleagues, about the assessment processes and how the Council is helping to develop the adult social care market for micro, small and medium enterprises and the community and voluntary sector. Evidence was also gathered through desktop research, including analysis of national surveys and reports. This gave the Panel a picture of what was happening both locally and nationally.

The outcome and progress of implementation of recommendations will be reported in the Annual Report for 2013-14.

Review of Housing Nottingham Plan Consultation

This Panel was commissioned to respond on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Housing Nottingham Plan consultation. A single review session was held to scope, gather evidence, agree conclusions and findings and put forward recommendations. It met on 18 September 2012 and

the Panel concluded that, although the Housing Nottingham Plan Consultation was heading in the right direction there were areas of the strategy which needed strengthening in relation to links with community transformation, developing multi-agency approaches to anti-social behaviour, issues relating to empty or poor quality housing and how the under-occupancy issue could be resolved.

Recommendations included:

- The need for a stronger, clearer strategy to manage under occupancy in both Nottingham City Homes and social housing.
- To develop a more pro-active and collaborative relocation scheme between social housing partners to support citizens to move to smaller properties from large family homes.
- A commitment to develop a pro-active, collaborative multi-agency approach to address issues of anti-social behaviour by those living in private rented or privately owned properties.
- Greater clarity in the Housing Nottingham Plan on how the Council and its partners will pro-actively address and manage the issue of empty properties of all tenures.
- Stronger reference to the benefits of community transformation and the link between housing and broader life experience, for example, the positive impact that pleasant living environments have on health and wellbeing.
- The need to expand the bond scheme to help individuals with deposits etc for private sector rented properties.

Review of Resettlement of Prisoners

The purpose of this review was to evaluate how well partner agencies are working together on the effective resettlement within Nottingham's communities of adult male and female prisoners following release from prison. The review included looking at the work directly undertaken with offenders and ex-offenders. The Panel was keen to find out to what extent the implications of offender release on victims and the wider community are taken into consideration, and to understand the steps being taken by organisations to address victim and community concerns. The Panel was well supported by a range of partners including the Governor at HMP Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Probation Trust, the Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP), Housing Liaison Group (HLG), Jericho Road, NACRO, Housing Aid and Housing Strategy, Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum, Nottingham Futures, Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust, ReThink and Victim Support.

The Panel met with council colleagues and partners on 25 March 2013 to receive the responses to its recommendations and during a productive meeting discussed options on how to develop stronger links and partnership working including the following:

- To implement risk assessments with a focus on adults sentenced to less than 12 months custody.
- To identify the impact and number of young women affected by domestic violence and gang related violence.
- To improve information sharing between Nottinghamshire Probation Trust and Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum

to protect those at high risk of domestic violence following release;

- To review data relating to Friday prisoner release and its impact on ex-offender re-housing.
- To organise wider participation of housing providers and specialist housing providers at offender led prison workshops.
- To request that women offenders from the City are sent to HMP Foston Hall, Derbyshire rather than HMP Peterborough, as it is closer to the City and has stronger network and support links.
- To review of the suitability of supported housing provision for female ex-offenders and look at the impact of housing allocation policy on women with children who need appropriate accommodation to facilitate access.
- To recruit suitable volunteer mentors particularly those with similar life experiences, to deliver practical support to offenders starting when they are still in prison and with continuity after discharge.

The Panel is due to meet in March 2014 to review the progress made against the accepted recommendations and agreed actions above.

Review of Drug Education (2011-12)

This Panel met on 5 December 2012 with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Director of the CDP and contributors to discuss recommendations and agreed:

- That the DrugAware programme is effective and that alternative sources of funding, such as selling the package to nationally, would be pursued.
- The idea of a 'conference' would raise expectations unreasonably and was not financially viable in the light of current financial constraints. However, there are existing routes to spread the message and to share information and good practice and learning with partners which could be effective. Existing routes include governor training events, Head Teachers conference, schools newsletters, additional information on the DrugAware website, and quarterly Chair of Governors and Vice-Chairs meetings.
- The focus should be on expanding the range of issues covered by DrugAware and the quality of the programme. Schools should be revisited for continuous accreditation and work is taking place to address this. A quality assured re-accreditation process is to be put in place, to be carried out on a bi-annual basis. Work is also taking place on a voluntary basis with selected schools annually in order to specifically track pupil progress. Results from one cohort have already been very positive.

A review of progress of the implementation of recommendations will be reported on in the Annual Report for 2012-13.

Nottingham City Health Scrutiny Panel and Joint City/County Health Scrutiny Panel

Minimising cancelled hospital operations

Following public concern about high levels of cancelled operations at Queens Medical Centre and City Hospitals in

early 2012, City and County health scrutiny councillors monitored the work of Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust to improve its performance over the last year. Quarterly reporting to councillors showed a reduction in the percentage of operations cancelled 'prior to the day' and 'on the day' and the Chief Executive assured councillors that the Trust would never again have the high level of cancellation rates seen in early 2012. While councillors were content with the improvement, they provided challenge to ensure that action to reduce the impact of winter pressures on cancellations did not adversely affect operation waiting times; and that the Trust learns lessons from its better performing peers. Councillors welcomed the Trust's commitment in its Quality Account to continue the focus on minimising the number of cancelled operations as one of its priorities for 2013-14.

Changes to health services

Councillors carried out a year-long oversight of the transitions taking place in the NHS. They were reassured that arrangements were in place to support the successful transfer of public health responsibilities to the Council and for the formal establishment of the Health and Wellbeing Board and appointment of an organisation to establish and support Healthwatch Nottingham. The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel was involved in the recruitment of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Healthwatch Nottingham and discussions have started about how scrutiny and Healthwatch can work together to maximise their respective powers to ensure that local health services are the best they can be for local people.

Improving ambulance services

Over the last year the East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EMAS) has been developing and consulting on its wide-ranging 'Being the Best' change programme. The programme includes the size and use of its estate; the way 999 calls are responded to; and EMAS' management structure. Following

concern about proposals for where, and how many ambulances would be based in Nottinghamshire, councillors on the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee worked closely with councillors from the north of the County to develop a robust response to the consultation. Councillors considered evidence from West Midlands Ambulance Service, UNISON, GMB, Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust and Nottingham University Hospitals Trust. Recommendations included:

- Having a ambulance hub in North Nottinghamshire and encouraging cross-boundary coverage where possible
- Improving fleet maintenance and ambulance stocking processes
- Having facilities available to transport patients throughout the night.

Councillors were pleased that EMAS listened to its recommendations, and considered that the strategy agreed by the EMAS Board in March is positive for Nottinghamshire. Plans for implementing this long term strategy are being developed and councillors will scrutinise this to ensure that any impact on service users during the implementation period is minimised. The Chair of the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee also wrote to the Secretary of State for Health expressing concern that fines levied against ambulance trusts for not meeting targets were counter to the interests of local people and the health service.

Mental health needs of ex-service personnel

Most people leave the armed forces healthy and make a successful transition to civilian life. However there is evidence of a prevalence of particular factors that disproportionately affect ex-service personnel, one of these being mental health issues. There is a lack of data on the size of the ex-service community in Nottingham and the level of mental health need,

but councillors became aware of concerns at ward level about the support available to those with mental health problems. Councillors explored the work of the Nottingham Veterans Partnership, which brings together over 20 organisations including health service providers, housing and social support services, local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide a single point of contact for veterans to access the relevant type of support. Councillors were reassured about the support that is currently available locally to support ex-service personnel in accessing mental health services and that services are aware of existing gaps in provision and plans are in place to address those gaps.

Improving Patient Transport Services

Councillors on the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee have long had concern about poor performance in Patient Transport Services, which takes eligible patients to and from appointments at hospitals and treatment centres. Arriva took over the contract in July 2012. Since then performance has been disappointing and councillors were particularly concerned about services for renal patients, where performance in arrival and departure for dialysis appointments was considerably below target. As a result councillors requested reports every 3 months on the arrival and collection of patients, journey times and customer service, providing opportunity in a public forum to challenge both commissioners and providers about the service being received by patients and maintain a focus on improvement.

Tendering for Out of Hours GP Services

The current contract for Out of Hours GP Services ends in March 2014 and City and County councillors raised concerns about the potential for conflict of interests for many GPs when the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) tenders for this service. Nottingham City CCG Governing Body has decided that the procurement process should be overseen by a Joint

Procurement Steering Group across all the CCGs in Nottinghamshire to balance the need for clinical input with managing conflicts of interest.

Improving health scrutiny

The Francis Report into the appalling care at Stafford Hospital attributed blame to the Trust Board but also pointed to systemic failures in a range of national and local organisations to respond to public concerns. This included scrutiny. Health scrutiny councillors have considered the recommendations relating to health scrutiny and how our practice can be strengthened to ensure that if similar problems identified in Stafford were happening in Nottingham the Council would be aware and take strong early action.

Reflecting the increasing integration of health and social care services and learning from experience in other local authorities, the terms of reference for the Health Scrutiny Panel have been expanded from May 2013 to include social care issues. The statutory basis for health scrutiny has also been enhanced to include all 'relevant health service organisations', including providers of NHS and public health services commissioned by clinical commissioning groups, local authorities and the NHS Commissioning Board, including providers in the independent and third sectors.

Call-in Panel

The Call-in Panel met on 24 October 2012 to consider a call-in request from non executive councillors on an executive decision to continue the print and delivery of the Nottingham Arrow to residents of Nottingham City Council. The Panel did not uphold the call-in and agreed that the decision to dispense with financial regulation 3.27 contract procedure rules was both reasonable and appropriately applied in both cases. As a result both decisions could be implemented immediately.

Reflecting on our experiences and looking ahead

This year we have evaluated our approach to scrutiny and have looked at making some changes to the way we carry out scrutiny investigations. We want to move away from holding very in-depth reviews which can take up resources over a long period of time from scoping to completion. Some of our reviews have been carried out over from one year to the next as we take more and more evidence or face delays when it is difficult to bring councillors and contributors together. The learning has been that the longer the review, the greater the potential for drift. We have trialled some shorter, sharper reviews and found the experience more rewarding and the results have had just as much value as some of the longer reviews,

For 2013-14 we have a programme of short sharp reviews, to take place in extended sessions, usually at one meeting with dates already in the diary. We are looking forward to carrying out more effective reviews, which will result in positive outcomes and improvements.

Contact information

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