

Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report** 2020 - 2021

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Foreword

I am very pleased to introduce this Annual Report to Council which outlines the continued contributions made by the overview and scrutiny committees during 2020/21. Throughout the year scrutiny councillors have engaged in a number of significant pieces of work and have worked to add value to the delivery of City Council and NHS services in a challenging operational environment.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic our three scrutiny committees adapted very quickly to the need to meet remotely both for informal and formal meetings, with the latter livestreamed to enable public access.

As scrutiny councillors we talk a lot about the need for scrutiny to work closely with the Executive and the Council's leadership and this is something we will continue to do – both providing constructive and critical challenge and gathering data from a range of sources to contribute to service improvement in a meaningful way. This is increasingly important in the current climate while the Council is focusing on improvement and recovery, including implementation of the recommendations from the Report in the Public Interest concerning the Council's governance arrangements for Robin Hood Energy Ltd (PIR) and the Non-Statutory Review of Nottingham City Council(NSR), both of which took place in 2020.

In 2021/22, it will be increasingly important to focus our scrutiny resource on areas where we feel we can support the Council to make difficult decisions in order to achieve recovery with the best outcomes possible for our citizens and those who work in and visit the city.

As is often the case, we owe much of our achievement to the continued support and engagement of councillors and colleagues across the Council and our partners and contributors from outside the Council. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all of those people who contributed to and supported the work of all of the scrutiny committees this year.

In particular, I would like to thank Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire for enabling Ajanta Biswas to regularly attend and contribute to Health Scrutiny Committee meetings, adding valuable insight and evidence to contribute towards effective scrutiny of NHS commissioners and providers.



Councillor Anne Peach
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Nottingham City Council

Introduction

Overview and scrutiny exists to help improve governance and public services for the benefit of local people. It ensures that 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 through the call-in process; and
- challenging performance to ensure that services are meeting the needs of local communities.

In 2020/21 as the Covid 19 pandemic took hold, like all other local authorities, the Council had to find an alternative to face to face public meetings. From May 2020 – April 2021 all public meetings were live-streamed. Councillors, colleagues and partners quickly adapted to meeting virtually to carry out transparent, publicly accessible scrutiny.

During 2020/21 overview and scrutiny work was carried out by:

- an Overview and Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor Anne Peach, which took an overview of key strategic issues relevant to Nottingham, ensuring decision-makers were held to account for their decisions and actions;
- a Call-in Panel which met as and when required to consider requests to 'call-in' Executive decisions that had been made but not yet implemented. The Panel met once during 2020/21;
- a Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor Carole McCulloch, which focused on the scrutiny of issues and services relevant to the wellbeing and safeguarding of children and young people in the City;
- a Health Scrutiny Committee to carry out the statutory roles to review and scrutinise matters relating to health in the Council's area, with powers to make reports and recommendations to health service commissioners and providers, and to scrutinise Adult Social Care to ensure the wellbeing and safeguarding of adults in receipt of support. The Committee was chaired by Councillor Georgia Power.

The function was supported by two Senior Governance Officers (as part of their wider role), with support from other colleagues in Governance Services.

As part of developing its evidence base, the overview and scrutiny committees often invited individuals and organisations to attend meetings and provide information about their work, experience or expertise. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the work of overview and scrutiny during 2020/21. In particular, we would like to recognise the contribution of Ajanta Biswas, who attended Health Scrutiny Committee meetings to share the insights and evidence gathered by Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire about the issues being considered by the Committee.

Contributing to Service Improvement

Overview and scrutiny provides an opportunity for councillors to review decisions, policies and services of the Council and other organisations operating in Nottingham to ensure that they meet the needs of local communities. Where evidence shows that there could be a better way of doing things, overview and scrutiny can make recommendations for change. Overview and scrutiny cannot make decisions or overturn the decisions of others. However, it aims to support service improvement by putting forward robust evidence-based recommendations to influence the decisions and actions of those who can make decisions. Decision makers are asked to provide a response to recommendations and overview and scrutiny councillors then monitor the implementation of accepted recommendations to assess the impact.

In spite of the pandemic, 2020/21 was a busy year and the overview and scrutiny committees undertook a wide range of work. The scrutiny work of the committees has resulted in several areas of positive impact for those who live and work in the City. This Annual Report provides a snapshot of some of the contributions made to improving services for local people.

Holding Decision Makers to Account

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In 2020/21 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee aimed to offer constructive review, feedback and challenge to the Council's Executive and other relevant local decision makers on their decisions, actions, policy, strategy and performance in order to ensure that the services delivered by the Council were fit for purpose.

As well as considering a number of specific topics during the 2020/21 municipal year, the Committee also invited individual Portfolio Holders to discuss their progress against Council Plan priorities, their objectives and current challenges within their remit.

Below are some examples of the work carried out throughout the year.

Recovery and Improvement

The Committee was keen to focus some of its activity during the year on the Council's planned recovery and improvement as it began to address the issues raised in both the Report in the Public Interest concerning the Council's governance arrangements for Robin Hood Energy Ltd (PIR) and the Non-Statutory Review of Nottingham City Council(NSR).

The Committee heard from the Leader, Deputy Leader and colleagues in September 2020, December 2020, February 2021 and April 2021. At these meetings the Committee received information about the Council's Recovery and Improvement Plan, the governance arrangements for overseeing delivery of the Plan and progress in implementing actions to address PIR and NSR recommendations. During discussions the Committee welcomed the work that was being done to try to achieve change, but expressed concern regarding the lack of diversity in the membership of the Improvement Board, which did not represent the diverse demographic of Nottingham City. The Committee confirmed with the Leader that any reduction in community facilities, which was likely to accompany the need to make savings should be balanced to ensure that no one area of the City suffered more than another.

Towards the end of the municipal year, the Committee agreed that it needed to tighten its focus on recovery and improvement, given the enormity of the task and its significance, including refining its approach to holding decision makers to account. These discussions informed plans for the Committee's work programme in 2021/22 (see below).

Impact of Covid 19

In September 2020, the Committee received information on how the Council had responded to the Covid 19 pandemic. The Committee welcomed the swift response, led by Public Health colleagues, alongside the Local Resilience Forum and its sub-groups, which focused on keeping social care going, mobilising civil society, supporting and protecting the economy, financial resilience, maintaining the welfare of the workforce and corporate resilience. A great deal of work had gone in to ensuring the continuation of essential services and planning reinstatement of services when possible.

The Committee was particularly concerned about the impact the return of university students would have on the City's rates of Covid 19 infection and the impact of the pandemic, including homeworking on staff, especially BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) staff. Colleagues assured the Committee that they were working closely with the two universities and with colleagues on both of these concerns. Unfortunately, for a wide range of reasons, the City's rates of infection increased, resulting in the allocation of Tier 4 status at the end of December 2020.

In October, the Committee heard from the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Highways and Strategic Transport and colleagues from the Community Cohesion team about the work being carried out to tackle inequality, particularly in relation to the impact of the pandemic and the development of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023. The Committee welcomed the work being carried out during the pandemic, including establishment of the Golden Number for citizens to request support in the early stages of lockdown #1, the development of foodbanks, communication of health and support messages to citizens (including specific work with faith leaders and Black majority church leaders) and actions taken in partnership with the Police to investigate incidents of prejudice and hate.

The Committee received its annual update on performance from the Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP) in November 2020. The Committee learnt that during the period of the pandemic all crime had reduced in all but two wards; domestic violence and abuse had increased; hate crime had remained at a similar level to the previous year, but it was expected that it would reduce without the night time economy; and anti-social behaviour (ASB) had seen the biggest increase, mainly in noise related complaints. When the Portfolio Holder for Employment and Community Protection attended the Committee's February 2021 meeting she discussed ASB further, informing the Committee that it had increased by 33.3% during the pandemic. Covid breaches were being recorded as ASB and activities were underway to target hot spot areas and ensuring a community protection response to all incidents. The Committee welcomed this work and agreed that it would like to explore community protection more generally in detail at a future meeting and ASB specifically with the CDP on their next visit to the Committee in 2021/22.

In January 2021 the Committee explored the impact of Covid 19 on the City's economy, focusing on the support available to local businesses. The Committee heard about support from the Government (including furlough, self-employment income support and the Kick Start scheme to support long-term unemployed people), local administration of national business support grants and the range of agencies the Council works with, in partnership, to support

businesses. The Committee was concerned to hear that probably only 50% of those who were self-employed were likely to be eligible for government support but was pleased to hear that the furlough scheme would continue for employees.

When the Portfolio Holder for Employment and Community Protection attended the Committee's February 2021 meeting, she provided more detail on the impact of the pandemic on training and employment, including delays to participation of young people in work experience and to work with the City's two universities to link with businesses and challenging unemployment rates. The Committee welcomed the work of the Employment Task Force to bring together partners, working through hubs and linking clear pathways from school to apprenticeships, employment and university, particularly for disadvantaged groups, as ways that had been and continued to be developed to manage the proliferation of different organisations, funded in multiple ways in the field of training and employment. Members identified the complexity and potential lack of coherence in this field as an area it would like to scrutinise further in the future.

By April, when the Committee received an update from the Deputy Leader and colleagues, rates of infection had considerably lowered. While a number of key activities to manage the impact on the City continued, the focus had expanded to include increased testing, promoting the vaccination programme, including supporting uptake amongst vulnerable groups, reopening schools and education and a continuing programme of reintroduction of services. The Committee was reassured that robust plans were in place to manage each stage of the Government's roadmap for gradually lifting restrictions. Members of the Committee were disappointed that the valuable contact data collected when citizens contacted the Golden Number could not be retained for future use to communicate with potentially vulnerable citizens, but recognised that this would not be compliant with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

Transport

The Committee considered strategic transport priorities, hearing from the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Highways and Strategic Transport in October 2020 and details on local transport priorities from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care and Local Transport in December 2020. The Committee recognised that there had been a number of delays to transport plans due the pandemic but was pleased to hear that the further development of Nottingham's cycle network and the introduction of contactless public transport payments were on track. It was disappointing to hear that delays would mean that targets to support Nottingham people to access work through tram development and increasing the frequency of the weekend bus service would not be met. However, the Committee was pleased to hear that the Council had secured funding from the Transforming Cities, Future Transport Zone, Emergency Active Travel and Active Travel funds to support future developments in transport services.

Also attending the December 2020 meeting were representatives of Highways England, who updated the Committee on the status of works to Clifton Bridge, a major arterial route into and out of the City. The Committee was pleased to hear that there had been no disruption to works as a result of the pandemic. It was disappointing that the full reopening of the route would be delayed by the discovery of the need for additional works in the light of the cost to individuals, those sharing cars, public transport and business time, but the Committee recognised that this was essential for maintaining the life expectancy of 120 years for the bridge.

Housing

In March 2021 the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Heritage attended the Committee to discuss Social Housing and Homelessness.

The Committee heard that while there had been progress in increasing the availability of social housing for rent, new build and conversions, this had been inevitably affected by the pandemic. Regulations in relation to the pandemic had resulted in a reduction in the use of B&B (bed and breakfast) as temporary accommodation and the provision of shelter for those who would usually be living on the street.

The Committee acknowledged the challenges facing the Council in terms of future procurement in the light of limitations on acquisitions and the Airbnb market, as well as the consequence of easing Covid restrictions and supported the Council's focus on prevention of homelessness. It welcomed the work that was being carried out in this area and restructure of Housing Aid services to deliver the extra capacity required to implement its workplan and the expansion of Housing First with its wrap around support, which meant that those who had previously refused a tenancy because of fears that they could not sustain it were now able to accept tenancy offers with the support they needed.

The Committee was particularly concerned that the Planning White Paper proposed that developments would be deemed to have planning permission if they were included in the Local Plan, as this would reduce the level of debate on applications. Consultation on the proposals was expected to take place during 2021/22 and the Committee was pleased to hear that the Portfolio Holder and colleagues plan to contribute to this view.

Future Work

Towards the end of 2020/21, the Committee had several informal discussions about its work programme and the focus it wanted to apply to its scrutiny in 2021/22. It recognised the key role it would be able to play by scrutinising the Council's recovery and improvement through its mandate to hold decision makers to account and as the body which provides the checks and balances that ensure that the decisions that are made reflect the needs of the people of Nottingham.

Based on this decision, the Committee identified a number of areas for inclusion in its work programme for 2021/22, but also agreed to develop its work programme flexibly throughout the year, to enable timely and appropriate scrutiny of recovery and improvement. Areas already agreed for scrutiny early in 2021/22 include:

- The Council Strategic Plan Refresh 2021-2023, to ensure that it is robust and fit for purpose, and that it provides the strong strategic direction the Council needs to succeed in its recovery and improvement.
- The effectiveness of the restructuring of the Council's Regulatory Services (Community Protection, Neighbourhood working, Environmental Services and Trading Standards, Public Safety Officers etc) in the context of Council service provision, savings achieved and capacity as it works towards recovery and improvement.
- The effectiveness of the Council's commercial ventures in the light of changes required by the PIR and their contribution towards the Council, especially in the context of its recovery and improvement.
- Exploration of the impact and management of Anti-Social Behaviour with the Crime and Drugs Partnership.

- Consideration of how the range of services to support employment work together, the resources available and their effectiveness, especially in the context of pandemic recovery and the Council's financial constraints.
- Focused scrutiny of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan and budget planning for 2022/23.
- The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers digital access across the city; how this impacts on access to services particularly given the likelihood that there will be continued emphasis on virtual/online provision for the foreseeable future; and what can be done to address these issues.

Call-in Panel

Call-in is a mechanism for scrutinising Executive decisions. Overview and scrutiny has the power to ask for an Executive decision to be reconsidered if, during the five working days immediately following an Executive decision being made, valid concerns are raised about the way in which the decision has been taken, for example that relevant information was not considered.

The Call-in Panel met once during 2020/21 in relation to the decision to declare Exchange Buildings surplus to operational requirements. The Panel considered a range of evidence in relation to the decision, including speaking with the relevant decision maker and those councillors who initially requested that the decision be reconsidered. The Panel agreed that the decision could be implemented, but the process provided an opportunity for councillors to find out more about the decision being taken and why, and assurances were given in relation to the way in which the decision would be implemented.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

The Jay (2013) and Casey (2015) Reports into child sexual exploitation, and how it was addressed in Rotherham, drew specific attention to the need for better local authority scrutiny to contribute to the protection of children and young people, through listening to local people, influencing policy and holding decision makers to account. As a consequence, the Council established the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to facilitate the scrutiny of issues and services relevant to the wellbeing and safeguarding of children and young people in Nottingham.

Since it was established the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has provided an appropriate and robust level of challenge to those in authority, and on actions and performance where they impacted on Nottingham's children and young people. Throughout 2020/21, the Committee was well attended by a range of senior managers, Executive Portfolio Holders and frontline service providers.

Below are some examples of the work carried out by the Committee in 2020/21.

Impact of Covid-19

The Committee recognised the hard work and commitment from staff in Children's Integrated Services in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to respond quickly and change the way that it operated to effectively support children, young people and families.

It was a significant challenge to maintain services and protect children and young people as much as possible.

The Committee heard about the impact on statutory and priority work supporting individuals and families, and on the Service's improvement work. Despite the proactive work that had taken place to try to continue to provide services during this period, the Committee remained concerned about the impact on children, young people and families of services that had to temporarily close or change in terms of content and/or delivery model, for example aspects of the play and youth services, children's centres, short breaks, face to face contact from social workers. To this end, in July 2020, the Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People that children, young people and families were asked about their experiences and perspectives of services during this period to inform decision-making on service provision, restoration of services and planning for the future. The Committee welcomed how the Service responded to this feedback, for example by enhancing the virtual and telephone offer and expanding communications to keep families informed about the support available.

The Committee was pleased to hear the positive feedback from some young people about the provision of virtual services and that in some ways this was a preferable method of engagement for them. However, the Committee considered that it was crucially important that all citizens had the means to engage with online services – both in terms of access to equipment and internet connection and data. In some areas of the City internet access not via a mobile phone was very low. Over the course of the year, a lot of work took place to address this issue for school-aged children and young people. However, the need for digital access goes beyond households with school-aged children. Therefore, in September 2020, the Committee referred the issue of digital access to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for inclusion in its work programme to look at current digital access across the City; how this impacts on access to services particularly given the likelihood that there would be continued emphasis on virtual/ online provision for foreseeable future; and what could be done to address these issues.

The Committee welcomed the work that took place through the Education Psychology Team to understand the experiences of children and young people and use that to inform decision making and approaches to the full return to school in September 2020, and during subsequent lock-down and return to school periods. In addition to the findings of this survey work, the Committee heard evidence about the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Adequately supporting children and young people with mental health and wellbeing issues will be very important as the City recovers from the pandemic. There have been significant negative impacts on attendance, academic attainment and mental health and it is particularly concerning that research shows that disadvantaged children will have the largest gaps in their rates of progress. One positive has been the close working between Education Services and Children's Services to identify and support vulnerable children and the Committee would like to see this closer working relationship continue once the pandemic is over. The Committee formally recommended that the Health Scrutiny Committee considers including this area of work in its Work Programme for 2021/22 in relation to the support and treatment provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Improvement and Recovery

The Committee was concerned about the impact on children and young people of the Council's challenging financial position and the need to address recommendations from the

PIR and NSR. While short-term funding had been made available to support the work of Children's Integrated Services, the Committee was concerned about risks to the delivery of long-term sustained improvements.

The Committee was pleased to note the relatively good position in terms of workforce. Recruitment, retention and capacity of social workers has been an issue for a number of years, and the Committee was pleased to hear the Director of Children's Integrated Services comment that in terms of staffing, the Service was in the best position that it had been for a number of years.

In March 2021, the Committee was pleased to hear about the progress that had been made in implementing the Children's Integrated Services Improvement Plan, in spite of the pressures of the pandemic. The relationship with the Council's Partner in Practice (Essex County Council) had supported the continuing improvements, particularly in ensuring the basics of good social work practice, access to high quality reflective supervision and getting to a consistently good standard of practice.

Youth Services

The Committee reviewed the progress being made in implementing the actions arising from HMIP inspection of the Youth Justice Service. While the Committee welcomed findings of the inspection that delivery of statutory work was generally strong with lots of positive aspects, it was concerned that the Service was rated as 'requires improvement' and that there were six recommendations for improvement. The focus of the recommendations was on Out of Court Disposals and young people on the edge of criminality. The Committee welcomed improvements, such as the availability of data on very young people to the Youth Justice Board and that the disproportionate representation of BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) young people is now a focus. The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People assured the Committee that she was satisfied that feedback from the inspection was being taken seriously, that an action plan had been developed and the Board was robustly monitoring progress against the action plan. The Committee was satisfied with the progress made so far and plans for future improvement to address the recommendations.

The Committee heard about the reshaping of Play and Youth Services to take a more targeted approach to delivery in the light of available budget and concerns about serious youth violence. In these circumstances, the Committee supported services being targeted towards children and young people who are most at need of intervention and diversion, eg those permanently excluded from school, those at risk of involvement with County Lines.

The Committee felt that it was positive that the Head of Service recognised the gaps in provision, and acknowledged to the Committee that Play and Youth Services do not have sufficient capacity to do everything that they would want to, eg in relation to County Lines and Asian boys. Budget pressures facing the Council impact on capacity to carry out this work and the service has to work in partnership with others. The Committee welcomed the partnership working taking place, including secondment of staff between services and shared training. In addition, the Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People that consideration was given to establishing Youth Networks for each area to enable partners to share intelligence and tackle challenging issues.

The Committee wanted to see an explicit focus on vulnerable children in service delivery through the Area Based Grant (ABG) process. The Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Highways and Strategic Transport that, when allocating ABG the

Council needed to ensure that it was satisfied that organisations were delivering what was needed, avoiding duplication and gaps in provision, to the standard required. The Committee supported the use of a quality mark as a way of ensuring ABG partners meet the standards and requirements to achieve agreed outcomes.

Given the targeted approach to service delivery the Committee was surprised that data was not available on the number of young people that Play and Youth Services work with who have been excluded from school. The Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People that this sort of data should be routinely collected to help managers ensure that the service was focusing on, and reaching, the young people likely to be most in need of intervention and support.

While acknowledging that impact and outcomes could be difficult to quantify, the Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People that Play and Youth Services put in place mechanisms and tools to robustly assess what was and wasn't working well, and evaluated the effectiveness of services, with regular review by senior managers.

Speech and Language

In March 2021, the Committee heard about the Council's work with partners to develop a workable Speech, Language and Communication Strategy (SLC) for the City to address evidence that Nottingham's children are not developing their speech and language skills to the best of their ability. The Committee recognised the long-term impacts of poor SLC skills, including attachment, attainment, offending, mental health, wellbeing, and employment opportunities.

The Committee welcomed the aspirations for the Strategy and the current and ongoing work planned to ensure that children across the whole of the City who need support receive it and the efforts to establish a close relationship and joint working with colleagues and partners, eg in health, to co-ordinate and align services.

The Committee was keen to scrutinise implementation of the Strategy once it was in place and agreed to include this in its work programme for 2021/22.

Future Work

The Committee has identified a number of areas for inclusion in its work programme for 2021/22, including:

- Continued monitoring of progress in the delivery of improvement and recovery actions during 2021/22 and the potential impact of pressures on services for children and young people.
- Progress on outstanding actions from the Action Plan arising from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and further scrutiny focus on the specific actions relating to the Inquiry that still need to be fully implemented.
- Focused scrutiny of permanent exclusion from school and the impact on the lives of young people, particularly secondary schools where the Council is limited to an influencing role. The Committee intends to invite the Regional Schools Commissioner and representatives of the City's Academies to a future meeting to discuss exclusions, as well as educational outcomes for specific groups e.g. white working class boys and gypsy/ Roma children with the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- The Council Plan has a target for at least 75% of eligible two year olds to access free nursery provision. The Portfolio Holder reported that this will be challenging to achieve

and, given the importance of early years for school readiness, the Committee will explore this issue in more detail during 2021/22.

- Implementation of the Speech, Language and Communication Strategy.
- The Committee is also keen to look at how the Council provides support to children and young people with no recourse to public funds and children and young people from Traveller families.

Health Scrutiny

The Council has a statutory role to review and scrutinise the planning and delivery of local health services with the aim of helping to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.

The role includes:

- strengthening the voice of local people in decision making, through democratically elected councillors, to ensure that their needs and experiences are considered as part of the commissioning and delivery of health services;
- taking a strategic overview of the integration of health, including public health, and social care;
- proactively seeking information about the performance of local health services and challenging and testing information provided to it by health service commissioners and providers; and
- being part of the accountability of the whole health system and engaging with the commissioners and providers of health services and other relevant partners such as the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch.

In addition to the broad powers held by all overview and scrutiny committees, committees carrying out health scrutiny hold additional powers and rights to require information and attendance at meetings from organisations that commission and provide NHS and public health funded services; and to make reports and recommendations to those organisations and expect a response. Health scrutiny committees also have a statutory role to consider proposals to substantially develop or vary health services to ensure that the views of patients and the public have been taken into account when making significant changes, as well as ensuring that such changes are in the best interests of local health services.

During 2020/21 health scrutiny was carried out by the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Health scrutiny engaged with a broad range of health and social care issues during the course of the year. Below are some examples of that work and how it contributed to improving health and social care services for the people of Nottingham.

Platform One

This was a key item of work for the Committee during 2020/21. In November 2020, the Committee became aware from a stakeholder briefing of changes to the contract for the city centre Platform One Practice (provided by NEMS). The Committee called an additional meeting and invited the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to attend.

The Committee learnt that the CCG's contract with NEMS at the Platform One Practice would reach its natural end on 31 March 2021. Having been unable to secure a new provider via an open market procurement process, the CCG reduced the practice boundary to retain a focus

on an inner city population, resulting in approximately 3000 patients being allocated to a practice closer to their home address; and identified a new provider to provide services to the remaining 7,800 patients from a City Centre location.

While the CCG did not consider these changes to be a substantial variation of service, the Committee considered the dispersal of 3,000 patients from a city centre practice to a practice local to their residential address to be a substantial change. The Committee was unhappy that it had not been consulted at an earlier stage to identify whether the changes might be considered substantial, and also became aware that other stakeholders had significant concerns about the changes.

While, the CCG did not accept the Committee's recommendation to pause proceedings, the Committee agreed to make every effort to work with the CCG in the best interests of the patients affected. The Committee prioritised this item throughout the remainder of the municipal year from the procurement of a new provider to deliver city centre GP services through mobilisation plans and engagement with patients and stakeholders, particularly vulnerable patients (whether they were to transfer to the new provider or be dispersed to another practice).

The Committee focused its scrutiny on communication and engagement with patients and ensuring that the needs of patients, especially vulnerable patients, would be met following transfer or dispersal. Discussions included consideration of how the needs of those patients who were homeless, who did not have a fixed permanent address, who experienced poor mental health and who experienced severe multiple deprivation would be met. The Committee emphasised the necessity for a pro-active approach to support and encourage service users to be able to fully participate in a meaningful consultation and to be supported when the transfer/ dispersal would take place.

The Committee recommended improved communication and engagement with patients, including engaging more proactively with organisations who already had experience of supporting service users on how best to consult and engage with those patients affected by the changes. In response, the CCG set up a Stakeholder Task Group (consulting the Committee on its terms of reference) to ensure that the interests of patients and service users, particularly where there were complex needs, were reflected in mobilisation plans and, therefore, to ensure the best outcomes for individuals and the wider system. In addition, the CCG extended the Platform One practice contract for a further 3 months to support the seamless transition of patients to the new provider.

Following discussion with the Committee, the CCG considered in detail the extent to which existing commissioning activities supported patients with severe multiple disadvantage and subsequently commissioned a new Primary Care Local Enhanced Service for Severe Multiple Disadvantage that all other practices in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire would be able to access. Additional funding was identified for this.

Once the new practice provider, Nottingham City General Practice Alliance (GPA), was appointed, GPA representatives attended a Committee meeting to take part in discussions and also delivered an informal briefing session to Committee members on the organisation and its ability to meet the needs of all patients who would transfer from Platform One.

At the Committee's March meeting, the CCG acknowledged many of the Committee's concerns throughout the process, including:

- that the CCG should have consulted the Committee at a much earlier stage;
- that the CCG could have been more proactive in engaging with Platform One patients and local organisations that work with and support them, particularly given the vulnerability of some of the patient cohorts; and
- that it should in future, at the outset of any service change proposal, provide greater clarity of the policy context in which it is operating – clinical, financial, contractual and otherwise.

The previous Platform One Practice ended on 30 June 2021 and from 1 July patients were either transferred to the new provider practice or dispersed to a GP practice local to their residential address, with the reassurance that their health support needs will be met.

Impact of Covid-19

Along with the other scrutiny committees, the Health Scrutiny Committee was keen to ensure that the impact of the pandemic was being appropriately managed, with specific reference to health and care needs.

In July 2020, the Committee received an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on Nottingham from the Director of Public Health, and an overview of changes to NHS services in response to the pandemic from the CCG, to enable identification of areas it would like to scrutinise at future meetings.

Acute Stroke Services

At the Committee's September 2020 meeting the CCG discussed with members two main areas where changes introduced in response to Covid-19 were being considered for retention as permanent changes: acute stroke services and the urgent care pathway.

Acute stroke services were centralised on the Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) site. Transformation work was already being considered prior to the pandemic, in line with regional and national plans, but the move was accelerated due to the pandemic. The Urgent Treatment Unit was relocated from QMC to Platform One on the edge of the city centre. There were no changes to the services offered and the changed location had improved the navigation which flowed from the 111 First pathway.

The Committee requested that if commissioners decide to propose that changes in relation to the reconfiguration of acute stroke services are made permanent, those proposals, along with plans for consultation and engagement are presented to the Committee for consideration.

Health Inequalities

Since the outset of the pandemic, councillors had raised concerns about national reports of a disproportionate effect on some population groups, including some ethnic minority communities and people living in more deprived communities. The Committee was aware from previous work that these groups already face health inequalities. In December 2020 the Committee heard from Public Health and Community Relations colleagues on what was known locally and how that knowledge was being used to inform decision making in relation to the Covid response, recovery and into the future. The focus of their contribution was on the inequalities facing ethnic minorities in relation to Covid-19. However, it was clearly acknowledged that there is a range of other inequalities which affect citizens.

The reasons for the inequalities faced by BAME communities are complex and include social, domestic and economic issues. These issues were present pre-Covid but the high profile of the pandemic has highlighted them. Existing health inequalities meant that everyone did not start the pandemic in the same position. The Committee heard that the Council was working to develop a place-based approach to reducing health inequalities that aligned to the work of the Integrated Care Partnership. This work included looking at a range of evidence bases and national work, and listening to local communities about ways to address inequalities appropriate to those communities. This approach had informed the response to Covid-19.

The Committee welcomed the work taking place to address inequalities in relation to Covid-19 but also in relation to health more generally.

Covid-19 Vaccination Programme

In March 2020 the CCG updated the Committee on the Nottingham City Covid-19 vaccination programme and its successes and challenges to date, with particular reference to how the City compared to the County and nationally in delivery of vaccinations to priority groups, ease or otherwise of booking vaccinations, take-up of vaccinations and issues which impacted on vaccination take-up rates.

Following some initial challenges, particularly in relation to the location of accessible vaccination centres, good progress was being made with reaching vaccination targets for the appropriate priority groups. Committee members appreciated the hard work undertaken to ensure this success, particularly in relation to working with local communities to reach those people who were resistant to being vaccinated, BAME communities and people with learning disabilities.

Maternity Services

In October 2020, the CQC carried out an unannounced inspection of maternity services at Nottingham University Hospitals (NUH). Maternity services are provided at both the Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) and City Hospital sites. The CQC published its report in December 2020, which highlighted a number of concerns and re-rated services from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Inadequate', along with issuing two Warning Notices. Representatives of NUH attended the Committee's January meeting where members reviewed the actions that NUH had already taken, and its plans for further action to address the issues raised by the CQC and held the Trust to account for the quality and safety of its maternity services.

The Committee welcomed the commitment of NUH to improving maternity services, but also expressed concerns about the long standing problems with services, which existed prior to the CQC report and which had not been fully addressed. Of particular concern was the need to change the culture whereby front line and junior staff had felt unable to raise their concerns, the need to continue to recruit to the full staffing complement and the need to provide a standard of care which would reassure pregnant women, mothers and their family/ friends that they would receive quality services.

To ensure that progress continues to be monitored and scrutinised, the Committee asked that NUH return to provide an update to the Committee's July 2021 meeting.

Mental Health

The Committee maintains a keen interest in the quality, availability and accessibility of mental health services, especially in comparison with physical health services and the negative impact of the pandemic on mental health.

Mental Health Crisis Services

In December 2020, the Committee explored what mental health crisis pathways were available, whether this was sufficient to meet need and how the system ensured that people in mental health crisis had access to appropriate services at the right time in the right place.

The Committee welcomed the work which was being done by the CCG to commission appropriate and widely available services and by the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to deliver the services it could in the light of the pandemic and staff shortages. The need for a whole system response to meeting mental health need in order to deliver effective and accessible services was recognised by both organisations.

The Committee was particularly concerned that commissioners and providers focused on preventative services to avoid reaching the point of crisis. Where there is a crisis then the view of the patient should be fully taken into account, ie it was the experience of the patient which was important not an objective ranking of what constitutes a crisis and what does not, and referrals should be appropriately directed towards primary and secondary care.

The Committee welcomed the investment in mental health services and will continue its work to scrutinise services, both from a commissioning and provision point of view.

Suicide Prevention

In April 2020, the Committee received reports and discussed with colleagues and partners, the Suicide Prevention Strategy 2019-2023, having considered this previously on two occasions (in 2018 and 2019).

Colleagues from a range of organisations attended the meeting, including from Public Health, the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, the CCG, the Police, Harmless (The Tomorrow Project) and Nottingham Trent University.

Real-time surveillance in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County had identified a potential slight increase in suspected suicides in young people and that there may have been an increase in suicide/ attempted suicide/ self-harm during the pandemic, although numbers were too low to assess statistical significance.

It was clear that a great deal of work was being carried out to try and prevent suicide and self-harm and to support those who were either a risk of, or who had attempted, suicide and/ or self-harm.

However, the Committee remained concerned about the plethora of pathways for support, which can be confusing to the patient, and that there were still many reports of negative patient experiences of services, particularly in relation to accessing services, eg in terms of getting referrals and/ or long waiting lists.

The Committee agreed to look more closely at access to specific mental health services in 2021/22.

National Rehabilitation Centre

The Committee had previously received reports and held discussions with the Integrated Care System (ICS) and CCG colleagues on proposals for a substantial variation to the provision of rehabilitation services, ie to establish a new rehabilitation centre with a broader treatment

model to be sited on the Stanford Hall Estate. Colleagues attended the Committee in July 2020 to discuss the consultation and engagement plan which had been delayed by the pandemic. They returned to the Committee's November 2020 meeting to present changes to the proposals in response to issues raised during consultation and engagement.

Overall the Committee supported the principle of developing a NHS Rehabilitation Centre and the development of expertise and experience in rehabilitation services. However, Committee members were mindful of the challenges in ensuring ongoing access to appropriate services and facilities in the community. The Committee's main concern related to the location of the Centre and the potential difficulties in accessing the Centre for patients, and particularly visiting friends and family. This issue came up repeatedly in the consultation responses and Committee members were keen to see a transport solution in place before patients were admitted to the Centre. The Committee, therefore, made a number of recommendations to the CCG, including to:

- further exploration of how to address the challenges presented by the location in terms of access to the Centre and that the voluntary and charitable sector was not solely relied upon to provide an appropriate transport solution;
- ensure appropriate sustainable services to support patients in the community both post-discharge from the Centre and for patients with low and moderate needs who have not met the referral criteria for accessing the Centre;
- continue to ask for investment in services within the City location including locally based services to support patients with reintegrating into their own local communities.

Tomorrow's NUH

The Committee has been aware for many years of the challenges facing NUH in terms of its physical space, layout and estate, and the significant level of capital investment necessary to address these issues; and has been supportive of efforts to obtain funding to address this. The Tomorrow's NUH Programme has received seed-funding to develop plans under the Government's 2019 announcement of intentions for new hospital building. The Committee received updates at its formal meetings in 2020/21 and will continue to be involved and consulted as plans are developed.

Future Work

The Committee has identified a number of areas for inclusion in its work programme for 2021/22, including

- More focus on Adult Social Care to reflect the responsibility of the Committee for this area and its significance in relation to the Council's recovery and improvement.
- Ongoing contribution to discussions about new local arrangements in response to the Integration and Innovation White Paper and subsequent Bill, especially in relation to governance, representation on local committees and engagement and consultation with the public about local changes.
- Review and scrutiny of the action taken by Nottingham University Hospitals to improve maternity services.
- Continued consideration of progress and plans for consultation and engagement in relation to Tomorrow's NUH.
- Scrutiny of the impact of delays on elective care due to Covid 19, plans to mitigate this impact and the progress with meeting need following delays.
- Closer scrutiny, following receipt of information about the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's strategy on:

- plans for managing access to psychological support, particularly in relation to step 4 psychotherapy and psychological therapies through scrutiny of assessment, referrals and waiting lists;
- the impact of expansion to workforce capacity in Eating Disorder Services and the impact of out of area inpatient placements.
- Formal consideration of proposals for making changes to the configuration of acute stroke services permanent. Changes were made on a temporary basis to support the response to the Covid pandemic. If it is proposed to make the changes permanent, then this is likely to be a substantial variation to services and the Committee will need to carry out its statutory role as a consultee.
- Review arrangements for discharge from hospital and after care (including the impact on Social Care).
- The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recommended that the HScrutiny Committee considers mental health needs and support for children and young people in the light of the impact of the pandemic.

Looking Ahead

It has become increasingly clear that the scrutiny committees will need to focus much of their scrutiny on the Council's recovery and improvement as it faces the enormous challenge of achieving significant change at a pace. Scrutiny is well-placed to support this, in its role to hold decision makers to account to ensure the delivery of the best services possible to those who live and work in and visit Nottingham.

To ensure that the scrutiny function is fit for purpose to undertake this important role, towards the end of 2021/22 the Council commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to carry out an independent review of the scrutiny function to identify areas for improvement and produce recommendations on how these improvements might be made within available resources. The review included desktop work; observation; and conversations with individuals across the Council including frontline councillors and members of the scrutiny committees, the Leader of the Council and other Executive councillors, Opposition leaders, the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and other senior officers. Partner organisations who have given evidence to scrutiny also spoke to the review team.

The review found that scrutiny councillors were generally engaged and committed to delivering effective scrutiny and passionate about improving the lives of residents in the city, but that there was recognition that the scrutiny function needed to significantly improve to add greater value to decision making by holding to account. A number of areas of concern were identified including in relation to the focus and purpose of scrutiny, organisational culture, relationships, trust, communication and use of information. Weaknesses in how scrutiny selects and prioritises its work and in the skills of councillors were identified. The review made ten recommendations for improvement. A key focus for 2021/22 will be reflecting on the findings and recommendations of the review to make changes that strengthen the function, enabling it to provide effective challenge and support to the Council. This work has already started in relation to the focus for scrutiny and development of work programmes for 2021/22, as outlined earlier in this report. The review report and action plan will be considered by Full Council in September 2021.

In addition, the involvement of partners and individuals from outside the Council in overview and scrutiny will continue to be a focus. Seeking information and evidence from a wide range

of individuals and organisations supports the Council to benefit from their knowledge, expertise and experience and encourages the partnership working which is essential for the Council's customers.

Contact Information

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