

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

Introduction

Overview and scrutiny is a statutory function which supports good governance and decision making and helps to improve 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 partner organisations could improve services for the people of Nottingham by offering constructive review, feedback and challenge on decisions, actions, policy, strategy and performance. Its purpose is to:

- hold local decision-makers, including the Council's Executive and the Boards of the Council's group of companies, to account for their decisions, actions, performance and management of risk
- review existing policies and strategies of the Council and other local decision-makers where they impact on Nottingham citizens
- contribute to the development of new policies and strategies of the Council and other local decision-makers where they impact on Nottingham citizens
- explore any matters affecting Nottingham and/ or its citizens
- make reports and recommendations to relevant local agencies with respect to the delivery of their functions, including the Council and its Executive
- review decisions made but not yet implemented by the Council's Executive in accordance with the Call-in Procedure.

During 2022/23 overview and scrutiny work was carried out by:

- an Overview and Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor Sam Gardiner, 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 Sub-Committee which meets as and when required to consider requests to 'call-in' Executive decisions that had been made but not yet implemented. There were no call-in requests submitted during 2022/23 for the Sub-Committee to consider;
- 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; and
- a Health and Adult Social Care 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 National 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 the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, 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 2022/23.

Scrutiny Development

Across the scrutiny function, the major focus for 2022/23 was to continue the scrutiny improvement activity already underway to ensure that improvement was sustained and embedded. All three scrutiny committees took a robust approach to planning their work programmes for the year ahead, ensuring that they continued to have a strong focus on the Council's recovery and improvement. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Statutory Scrutiny Officer met frequently with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to scan the horizon of decisions coming to the Executive, and the Chairs of other scrutiny committees met regularly with relevant Portfolio Holders, Corporate Directors and Directors to identify and discuss key emerging issues to help with alignment of the forward plans for overview and scrutiny. This more rigorous approach to ensuring appropriate and relevant focus for scrutiny activity, with potential to add value was supported by a training session on work programming delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

A suite of training on overview and scrutiny knowledge and skills took place in the early part of the year, and covered core scrutiny skills, work programming and financial and budget scrutiny. While this training was targeted towards scrutiny councillors, it was open to all councillors to attend. The Scrutiny Chairs, Executive Councillors and Scrutiny Officers also benefitted from bespoke training and mentoring.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee implemented a new recommendation tracker, which is a publicly available document evidencing the recommendations made by the Committee, the responses to those recommendations and progress on implementation of accepted recommendations. It has been an effective tool in ensuring appropriate follow-up to recommendations made by the Committee, particular when responses were contrary to the expectations of the Committee.

During the course of the year, work took place to identify the learning and development that would be required for new councillors following local elections in May 2023, and progress against the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan was monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In 2022/23 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.

The Committee continued its focus on recovery and improvement, as well as considering a number of specific topics.

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

Together for Nottingham Plan and Statement of Requirements Progress

The Committee was keen to maintain its focus on the Council's planned recovery and improvement under the guidance of the Improvement and Assurance Board (IAB). The Committee heard from the Leader at every other meeting about the progress made in implementing the Council's Together for Nottingham Plan. The Leader also communicated key messages from the IAB at relevant points, as well as updates on the Statement of Requirements. All three types of update provided by the Leader helped inform the Committee's work programme throughout the year.

Transformation Programme

The Transformation Programme was first presented to the Committee in October 2021 and, at the meeting, it was agreed that the Committee would be regularly updated on progress at relevant points. An overall update was provided at the April 2022 meeting, and the Committee then scheduled specific programmes throughout the year:

- at the May meeting the Committee reviewed the work carried out to date on the Customer First Transformation Programme. The Committee heard that the transformation work was well underway and was on track to be completed within its deadlines. The main challenge was lack of buy-in from staff and customers who were reluctant for change, but work was ongoing to address this. The Committee welcomed the progress made.
- at the June meeting the Committee reviewed the effectiveness of the work being undertaken in the Asset Rationalisation Programme to review the Council's property portfolio with a view to selling some buildings and changing leases on others to manage them more effectively and raise capital funds. The Committee heard that the programme was making good progress and that a Community Asset Policy was being developed, which the Committee requested to see the draft of prior to be it being adopted at Executive Board.
- in July the Committee was involved in pre-decision scrutiny on the Libraries Transformation Programme. It considered the robustness of the consultation carried out and made recommendations for the Executive Board to consider before the final decision was made. The Committee felt that the consultation could have been more thorough, that further effort could have been made to engage under-represented groups, and made a number of recommendations for the Portfolio Holder to consider prior to taking the proposals to Executive Board.

Public Sculptures and Monuments Policy Development

In July the Committee considered the draft policy and application form for statues, monuments and public artworks in parks, open spaces and the public realm owned by Nottingham City Council, which was another opportunity for the Committee to be involved in pre-decision scrutiny. The Committee heard that street art would be subject to a separate policy, which it requested to look at in the future. The

Committee recommended that Ward Councillor consultation was included in the proposed policy.

Selective Licensing Scheme Proposals

In October the Committee considered whether the consultation on the Selective Licensing proposals had been fair, transparent and robust, and how the consultation responses would influence the final proposals presented to Executive Board. This pre-decision scrutiny exercise reviewed the robustness of the consultation carried out and the Committee made recommendations to the Executive Board on the proposed Scheme. The Committee welcomed the Scheme but expressed concern that there could be a negative impact on areas being removed from the Scheme, and those not covered by the Scheme, and that work needed to be done to ensure standards are maintained/met in those areas.

Municipal Resources and Waste Strategy

At its November meeting the Committee provided views on the draft Municipal Resources and Waste Strategy while it was out to public consultation, as well as considering the robustness of the consultation that was underway at the time. The Committee commended the number of responses received at the time of the meeting and made a number of recommendations in relation to the Strategy which were accepted by the Portfolio Holder.

At its February meeting the Committee considered the analysis of the consultation findings and the proposed way forward in relation to the Municipal Resources and Waste Strategy prior to a decision being taken by Executive Board in March. The Committee was supportive of the Strategy but highlighted that the education of residents around the proposals were a crucial element in the success of the Strategy.

Community Asset Policy

Further to the request at the June meeting when the Asset Rationalisation Programme was considered, the December meeting included the Committee considering the draft Community Asset Policy and whether the consultation had been fair, transparent and robust, and how the consultation responses would influence the final proposals presented to Executive Board. The Committee welcomed the Policy and made a number of recommendations which were considered by the Portfolio Holder prior to it being considered by Executive Board.

Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a statutory duty to scrutinise the work and progress against targets of the CDP under the Police and Justice Act 2006. Representatives from the CDP and the Portfolio Holder were in attendance at the January meeting to discuss the CDP Plan and performance. The Committee was concerned with a lack of consistency in responding to anti-social behaviour issues and requested that work was done to improve this.

The Budget

In January the Committee heard from the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, and the Corporate Director for Finance and Resources on the Council's budget. The meeting focussed on scrutinising the budget proposals for 2023/24 –

2026/27 with the Committee acting as a consultee. The budget proposals involving children, adults and health were scrutinised by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee respectively. The Committee expressed disappointment that the consultation period had not taken place earlier as in previous years and recommended that the Portfolio Holder ensure that the consultation was brought to the December meeting going forward. The Portfolio Holder accepted the recommendation.

At the February meeting the Committee noted the responses to the budget consultation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, for submission to Executive Board later that month.

Carbon Neutral Policy

In March the Committee considered performance against the Council's Carbon Neutral Action Plan in the delivery of priorities to enable Nottingham to be the first UK city to be carbon neutral by 2028. The Committee welcomed the progress made to date and made a number of recommendations in relation to improving engagement and communication which were accepted by the Portfolio Holder.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

For 2022/23 the remit of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was to hold decision makers to account for their decisions, actions, performance and management of risk; to review policy and strategy; and to contribute to the development of new policies and strategies where they impact on Nottingham's children and young people. The Committee met six times across the year to fulfil this role and covered a range of issues including children's social care, changes to early help and intervention, child exploitation and the provision of activities and support for children and young people during holiday periods.

Children's Social Care Improvement

Provision of children's social care services involves some of the most important statutory responsibilities and duties held by the Council and is subject to a robust and rigorous regulatory regime. In July 2022 the Council was subject to an inspection of its children's services by Ofsted which found the Council to be 'requires improvement to be good' in the domains of the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers; and 'inadequate' in the domain of experiences and progress of children who need help and protection. The overall outcome from the inspection was 'inadequate'. The Committee had been aware of the need for significant improvement in children's services for some time and in previous years had heard from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools, the Corporate Director for People and the Director for Children's Integrated Services about work taking place to make the changes required. The Committee had also reviewed feedback from Ofsted focused visits. The Portfolio Holder had previously assured the Committee that, coming out of the Covid pandemic and following changes to senior leadership, the Service was on the right track for making the improvements necessary. The Committee was therefore disappointed that work to, for example make changes to the 'front door' of services being done with support from Essex

County Council, had not been as successful as it needed to be by the time of the inspection.

In early November, the Committee dedicated an entire meeting to understanding the implications of the inspection findings and scrutinising plans for addressing the issues identified for improvement. The Committee heard from the Portfolio Holder, Corporate Director, Director and Head of Strategy and Improvement about their assessment of Ofsted's findings, which recognised the progress that had been made and areas of strong practice to be built upon and identified eight key areas where improvement was required. They acknowledged to the Committee that substantial improvement was required at a quickened pace. They explained that the existing Improvement Plan was being reviewed to reflect the areas identified for improvement but, in the meantime, action had already started to be taken. The Committee was pleased to note the positive comments in the Ofsted report about the commitment and loyalty of frontline staff and the existence of good social work practice. Highlighting the importance of staff being well supported, the Committee welcomed the new emphasis on proactively communicating with staff at all levels of the Service, including in identifying areas for improvement and helping to shape those changes. The Committee also encouraged an openness in sharing information about improvement. The Committee subsequently reviewed the updated Improvement Plan and welcomed the approach of dovetailing it with the existing transformation programme and wider service improvements, to have a co-ordinated and coherent approach to improvement articulated through the Changing Lives Changing Futures Strategy. While it was disappointing that this meant there was some delay to the commencement of the transformation programme, the Committee concluded that this made sense for the benefit of improvement in its totality.

The Committee spoke with Lou Williams, Independent Advisor and Chair of the Children at the Heart Improvement Board about his role, the role of the Improvement Board and his assessment of the Council's position. He informed the Committee that, in his view, the Corporate Director, Director and Portfolio Holder had a real grip of the issues that needed addressing and, as at January 2023, a lot of work had already taken place to improve the 'front door' to services. He echoed comments in the Ofsted report about confidence in a senior leadership that promotes good culture and is open to challenge. While there had been progress, he advised that there is a lot more to do and, based on experiences of other local authorities, it will take 18-24 months to deliver sustained improvements.

The Committee continued to receive verbal updates on progress against the Improvement Plan from the Portfolio Holder at each meeting who, at the request of the Committee, committed to also sharing letters arising from the Ofsted monitoring visits. Conscious that the first monitoring visit was likely to focus on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the 'front door' to services, in January the Committee received a more detailed update on progress in this area from the Director. The Committee found this update to be well-evidenced and reassuring.

Throughout its scrutiny of improvement, both in response to the Ofsted inspection and from transformation, the Committee has been concerned about the capacity to deliver change at the pace required. This view was reinforced by information from senior officers that the most significant risk to delivery of improvement is workforce.

In January, the Committee reviewed budget proposals relating to services for children, young people, and families. The Committee was comfortable that the proposals supported getting children the right support at the right time but flagged a concern about capacity and capability to deliver savings, transformation, and wider improvement alongside delivery of a complex, high risk service. The Committee spoke to the Children's Services Transformation Delivery Lead about progress across the transformation projects and how the Service is assuring itself that sustainably improved outcomes are achieved. The Committee recognised the potential for transformation to manage demand and better meet need within available resources. It suggested that it would be beneficial to have a clearer articulation of how the voice and feedback from children, young people, families, carers and former service users is heard, understood and reflected in transformation and recommended that the Programme joins up with other strategies and services e.g. Housing Aid to take full account of the whole context affecting children's lives. While acknowledging the need for the Council to operate within existing resources, the Committee raised a question about whether the impact of changes to early help services conflicts with desired outcomes from transformation. It heard that the Council is taking a strengths-based approach to supporting families and redesigning early help services. It will review development of the new Early Help Strategy in 2023/24.

Child Exploitation

At its meeting in March the Committee reviewed the activity of the Council and its partners in identifying, safeguarding and supporting children who have gone missing from home and are at risk of exploitation. The Committee heard that a new Strategy was being developed and recommended that the Strategy was co-produced with partners and seeks to embed trauma-informed practice and, in recognition that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility, engagement with all frontline workers who may have contact with children and young people, not just those in social work or community protection professions. The Committee decided to review implementation of the new Strategy, and that has been scheduled in its work programme for 2023/24.

Future Work

Looking ahead to 2023/24, the Committee is receiving support from the LGA, as part of a wider improvement support package, to explore what good scrutiny of children's services looks like, how it can effectively engage with the Ofsted inspection process and how scrutiny committees can add value following a judgement of 'inadequate'. Learning from this will be used to inform development of the Committee's work programme for the next few years as it looks to provide constructive support and challenge as the Council seeks to move its children's services to being rated as 'good'. Having prioritised scrutiny of improvement of children's services during 2022/23, the Committee now intends to rebalance its work programme with a greater emphasis on education issues. Nottingham has been designated as an Education Investment Area and the Committee will be exploring what this means for the City and how it can effectively hold partners to account for delivery of the agreed action plan for improvement. The Committee also intends to focus on the support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. In 2021 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission undertook an inspection of how well the City carries out its statutory duties in this area. While the findings

were largely positive, the Committee looked at how the Council and NHS commissioners responded to areas identified for improvement. During 2023/24 the Committee will be checking back to see what changes have actually been made and the impact that has had on outcomes for children and young people.

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee was responsible for carrying out the overview and scrutiny functions in relation to adult social care and health during 2022/23. In addition to the powers held by all of the overview and scrutiny committees, the Committee also held the additional powers and rights of a health scrutiny committee 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.

For 2022/23, the Committee's work programme was a combination of a continuation of ongoing scrutiny activity and new issues that emerged during the course of the year, some of which will continue to be a focus for the Committee in the year ahead. In order to carry out its role, the Committee engaged with a broad range of individuals and organisations including councillors, senior officers, NHS commissioners, NHS providers, Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, voluntary and community sector providers and interested local stakeholders and citizens through formal committee meetings, informal evidence gathering sessions and submissions of information to the Committee. Set out below is a snapshot of work carried out, the outputs from that work and what has happened as a result.

Adult Social Care Services

The Adult Social Care Transformation Programme was established to address the challenges of increasing demand, workforce retention and financial pressures, with the aim to improve service quality, provide better outcomes and deliver financial savings, which are integral to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. As a significant programme of change integral to the Council's recovery and improvement activity and a key priority for the Council, the Committee has prioritised delivery of transformation as a focus for its work programme for the duration of the Programme. Building on work in the previous year, during 2022/23 the Committee reviewed progress of the Programme and looked in more detail at the progress of the Supported Living and Strengths Based projects. The Committee encouraged an approach of co-production with citizens and staff and welcomed evidence of work taking place in this regard. Based on the evidence available to it, the Committee supported the expansion of the initial projects and the development of new projects as increasing the independence of citizens, enabling them to live in their own homes with appropriate support, and consequently improving outcomes for them alongside being more financially efficient.

How local authorities deliver their functions under the Care Act will soon be subject to independent review and assessment by the Care Quality Commission. To receive reassurance that the Council is aware of, and addressing its vulnerabilities in relation to this, the Committee reviewed the findings of the Adult Social Care Self-Assessment, which was carried out as part of the Council's involvement in a pilot inspection process. The Committee intends to consider how the Council responds to any areas identified for improvement by the pilot inspection when the report is available in a few months time.

Mindful that winter is one of the most challenging periods for the health and care system, in January the Committee reviewed the mid-winter position for delivery of the Adult Social Care Winter Plan within the context of the wider system. It received evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Health, Director for Adult Health and Care and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board's System Delivery Director for Urgent Care. The Committee was pleased to hear from both organisations about positive partnership working and that, despite significant challenges, their assessment was that the local picture at that time was relatively good. However, the Committee was concerned that the non-recurrent short-term funding made available to local authorities won't support a sustainable health and care system and encouraged the Portfolio Holder to lobby the Government on this matter and the need for a strategic national approach to recruitment and retention of care workers.

Maternity Services

In December 2020 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) published a report which rated Nottingham University Hospitals Trust (NUH) maternity services from Requires Improvement to Inadequate, along with the issuing of a warning notice. Since then, the Committee has taken steps to try and understanding the circumstances, encourage and support improvement and publicly hold the Trust to account for the quality and safety of services and for patient experience of those services.

During 2022/23 the Committee built upon its considerable work during 2021/22 to ensure that the issue continues to have the profile and attention that it warrants and that all partners are playing their respective part in improvement. This included meeting with the new Trust Chair and Chief Executive to understand their intentions towards ensuring the outstanding issues are addressed at pace and in a sustainable way, and the Committee also heard how the Trust Board was responding to subsequent inspections of the Service by the CQC. The Committee explored the oversight and assurance arrangements in place across the local and regional health system through the consideration of written information and discussion at a meeting with the NHS England Midlands Region Medical Director and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB)'s Chief Nurse. In addition to explaining the oversight and assurance arrangements in place, they gave the Committee their perspective on NUH's progress. This was helpful for the Committee in triangulating evidence provided by NUH and the Committee decided that it would be helpful to have a representative of the Improvement Oversight and Assurance Group at future meetings when the Committee is speaking with NUH about its provision of maternity services. The Committee welcomed the changes that had been made in involving and listening to frontline staff, which had previously been an area of concern for the Committee and was pleased to note the ICB Deputy Chief

Nurse's view that there had been a shift in culture with increasing engagement of families and staff and a focus on Board to Ward. Finally, the Committee met with representatives of trade unions representing staff employed by NUH to get their perspective on progress.

In April and June 2023 the CQC carried out further inspections of maternity services (report published in September) and the Committee has invited the Trust and ICB to attend a meeting to discuss how the Trust is responding to the findings from that inspection and the findings coming out of the ongoing Ockenden Review.

Support for People with Co-Existing Mental Health and Substance Misuse Issues

As a new issue for 2022/23, the Committee decided to look at support for people with co-existing substance misuse and mental health issues, and specifically whether the issues raised in the Prevention of Future Death Reports published in recent years relating to care for people with co-existing issues in Nottinghamshire had been addressed and to seek assurance that appropriate support had been commissioned and was being provided. The Committee considered written information from the pathway development group and spoke with members of the group including NHS commissioners, Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust, Framework, Double Impact and Change, Grow, Live. The Committee heard about the recent introduction of a new service model, including challenges such as recruitment and funding, and plans for evaluation of this approach and ongoing development.

Based on the evidence available to it, the Committee supported the introduction of the new model of support including the involvement of peer support workers with lived experience, but commented that it appeared to be very adult-centric. This was acknowledged by the partnership group, and the Committee recommended that the partnership develop the model to ensure equivalent support is available for young people, including the development of links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and young people's drug and alcohol services. The Committee also noted that GPs have reported difficulties in supporting people in primary care and to access services that are better placed to provide support, and that this was a potential gap in provision. The Committee recommended that the model is also extended to include primary care to ensure that GPs are equipped to support their patients where appropriate and able to refer to other services when necessary. Both of these recommendations were accepted and the Committee will be reviewing whether this has been done as part of its work programme for 2023/24.

Mental Health Service Transformation

The Committee continued its focus on access to Step 4 Psychological Therapies and Adult Eating Disorders services, both provided by Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. The Committee had had concern about the length of wait for assessment and treatment and wanted assurance about the support for people while waiting. In both cases the Trust highlighted that staffing shortages had contributed to longer than ideal waiting times. The Committee had welcomed plans to improve access to both of these services and decided to review progress in a year's time. The Committee was disappointed that, despite assurance from the Trust in October 2021 that work was taking place to develop the Eating Disorder Service and improve accessibility, waiting times for assessment and treatment had increased in the 12

months since then, with increasing demand and recruitment cited as the main challenges. The Trust could not give an indication of when the situation was likely to improve. As part of the reviews, the Committee heard about the progress of the wider severe mental health transformation programme, which includes Step 4 Psychological Therapies and Adult Eating Disorders services. While recognising the benefits of transformation that had taken place in Nottinghamshire County areas, the Committee was disappointed that these new services were not available for City residents to access and that gaps in service continued to exist for City residents. The Committee recommended that, where possible, future changes to service should be made on an Integrated Care System basis rather than by specific geographical area in order to provide equity in access. Mindful that implementation in the City is due to take place in 2023/24 (year 3), the Committee resolved to review the impact of transformation in the City in April 2024.

Towards the end of the municipal year the Committee spoke with representatives of the ICB, as commissioners, and Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust, as the main provider, of mental health services in the City about commissioning services for need. This was based on a theme that had arisen several times in the Committee's work which had led to a perception by Committee members of gaps in provision for people who are too unwell for one pathway or service but not unwell enough to be admitted to others. The Committee heard again about the potential for transformation to address existing gaps in provision. To inform future commissioning, the Committee recommended that the ICB look into ways to proactively gain feedback from non-users of services and those citizens who have sought support but have not been able to access mental health services.

Dental Care

Following anecdotal reports of difficulties in accessing dental services in the City, the Committee decided to explore current access to NHS dental services, including its recovery from the Covid pandemic. At that time dental services were commissioned regionally by NHS England (NHSE) under a national dental contract. The Committee received evidence from the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Dental Networks Chairs, senior commissioners from NHSE and the Council's Public Health Consultant leading on oral health. The Committee also received insight from Healthwatch about its findings on dental access. The Committee heard about the current context for dental provision, how the pandemic had exacerbated issues with access that already existed and that recruitment is a significant challenge (largely due to the current dental contract). NHSE outlined action it had taken to try and improve access, but the scheme commissioned for the City had had a limited uptake by the general dental practices in the City; and plans for the future such as contributing to national discussions on contract reform and local plans to improve access for vulnerable groups by, for example, piloting a mobile dental service for those with severe multiple disadvantage. The Committee was informed that, at the time of the meeting in November 2022, all 38 general dental practices were open but NHSE was aware that some practices had been saying that they weren't accepting new patients. NHSE assured the Committee that where they are aware of this happening, they investigate and make sure that practices are aware of their contractual obligations. They welcomed feedback from councillors on where this is happening so that it can be addressed and also inform future commissioning

intentions. A Committee member cited the 'Find my Dentist' website as also saying that there were no dentists accepting patients in their area.

Based on the evidence available to it, the Committee welcomed the intentions to improve access to dental care in the City, especially for vulnerable populations and those already experiencing barriers in accessing healthcare but expressed concerns about the scale of what it had been possible to achieve so far. The Committee recommended NHS England ensure its website contains up-to-date information on dental practices; that it reviews pathways for the Community Dental Service to ensure that patients are not 'off-rolled' after a course of treatment has finished; and, notwithstanding challenges presented by the current national dental contract, make a concerted effort to increase recruitment of dental practitioners in the City. Having heard that there are particular issues around access to dental care by looked after children as a result of challenges in maintaining contact and ensuring attendance by those who move frequently and in communication with previous dentists about past care and treatment, the Committee also suggested to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board that it explore the issues looked after children face in accessing dental treatment. Responsibility for commissioning of dental services transferred to the ICB in April 2023 and the Committee decided to review how more local commissioning can better meet local need going forward.

The Committee also discussed the lack of fluoridation of water in the City and recent changes to the decision-making process for approving the addition of fluoride, which it was hoped would make it easier to achieve. The Committee recommended that NHSE and the Council work together to identify what can be done to progress the fluoridation of Nottingham's water and in September 2023, following a debate which cited evidence presented to the Committee, Council reaffirmed its commitment to improving dental health including advocating for a local water fluoridation scheme and delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder and Director of Public Health to work with partners and ask the Secretary of State to conduct a more detailed exploration of a water fluoridation scheme to benefit the City's residents.

Changes to Health Services

As the Council's designated health scrutiny committee, the Committee had a 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 2021/22 the Committee considered proposals relating to the configuration of acute stroke services and neonatal services, both provided by Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH). While, based on the evidence available to it, the Committee did not have significant concerns about either of these proposals for change it supported further targeted engagement being carried out. In October 2022 the Committee reviewed the findings of engagement undertaken in relation to both of these proposals and, in both cases, did not identify any concerns to be raised with commissioners.

During the last year, Committee also considered proposals from the ICB for the transfer of colorectal and hepatobiliary services provided by NUH from the Trust's

Queens Medical Centre site to the City Hospital Campus, including the details of the proposed change, the context and case for change and anticipated impacts. The Committee was informed that the change would enable the capacity to be 'ringfenced' to reduce waiting times for patients and therefore support work to clear the backlog of patients waiting for elective care. The Committee sought specific reassurance about engagement with staff and trade unions and the impact on those with protected characteristics. Based on the information available to it, the Committee supported the proposal and the proposed approach to patient engagement.

The Committee became aware from stakeholders of concerns about access to neurology services provided by NUH, specifically about referrals from GPs being turned down and patients potentially unable to access the service. The Chair raised the issue with the ICB and wrote to the Trust to highlight these concerns and seek greater understanding of the situation. The Trust's Medical Director, Head of Neurology and a local GP subsequently attended a meeting to discuss the situation. The Committee heard that changes had been made to the Service with the aim of ensuring that specialist neurologists are able to offer the best value to the patients who would benefit most. So when GPs referred patients the referrals were reviewed to identify those with greatest service need, those most appropriate for the service and those who would benefit most from early treatment. NUH assured the Committee that the changes had been audited and they were confident that patients requiring it are treated within Neurology or referred on to the service that they need. However there had been an increase in patients referred back to their GP, usually with advice and guidance on the appropriate treatment pathway or suggesting the patient is referred to another specialist service. The Committee was concerned about the impact on patients, including timeliness of care, and on GP workload. NUH said that it did not consider the impact to be substantive but that, following feedback, it was now considering whether Neurology could refer patients to other services directly. The Committee raised concern that it did not appear that the changes had been widely consulted on before introduction and the Trust accepted there had probably been insufficient engagement and consultation with GPs regarding the changes to how referrals are triaged and managed. The Committee recommended that primary care partners, including GPs, patients and, where substantial, the Committee are consulted and engaged with as part of the development of future changes to service. The Committee has subsequently been informed that lessons have been learnt from this and was pleased to hear that interface groups between primary care and NUH have now been established to facilitate clinician to clinician discussion about significant changes to ensure that both sides are aware of what is happening and that ideally no changes should be implemented without robust discussion.

Provider Quality Accounts

As it does every year, the Committee reviewed the draft Quality Accounts 2022/23 of the following major providers of health services to City residents: Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust and CityCare Partnership. Based on

the evidence available to it, the Committee submitted Comments for inclusion in the published Quality Accounts of all four providers.

Future Work

Looking ahead to 2023/24, the Committee will be continuing its focus on areas such as mental health transformation, transformation of adult social care, support for people with co-existing mental health and substance misuse issues and maternity services to check that commissioners and providers have done what they said they were going to do and to see whether intended outcomes have been achieved. The 'Tomorrow's NUH' programme, which the Committee has been informed about and given feedback on the development of for several years, now has a Pre-Consultation Business Case with assurance from NHS England and is potentially moving towards public consultation. The Committee will be reviewing plans for consultation as part of its statutory role to ensure that the views of patients and the public are taken into account and that the substantial changes being proposed are in the best interests of local health services. The Committee has also identified other issues, such as waiting times for support for people who have experienced sexual violence, reform of adult social care and impact of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, that it intends to explore.

Looking ahead

To continue responding to the recommendations made in the review of scrutiny carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) in 2021, work will continue to improve the scrutiny function and increase the resources available to support it within the Governance Team through:

- increasing the number of scrutiny committees and aligning them with the Directorates, which will provide the opportunity for members to develop more detailed specialist knowledge in subject areas outside of children/ health/ adult social care, and enable committees to work programme more effectively by the Chair having regular meetings with the relevant Corporate Director and Portfolio Holder to be made aware of upcoming issues;
- having call-in requests dealt with by each Committee rather than a Call-In Sub-Committee;
- addressing the additional resources required to support scrutiny by recruiting 3 Scrutiny and Audit Support Officers;
- using the summer period of the 2023/24 municipal year to hold informal training/ development/ briefing sessions for scrutiny councillors, to include:
 - introduction to the role and function scrutiny
 - scrutiny skills and ways of working
 - committee specific briefing(s) on relevant Council services, partners, legislation
 - work programming and specific committee work programme, and only schedule a formal meeting in June or July if there is a specific issue that scrutiny needs to react to.

Contact Information

For further information about this report, and anything else related to overview and scrutiny, please contact the Council's Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Nancy Barnard), or one of the Scrutiny and Audit Support Officers (Damon Stanton, Adrian Mann and Kate Morris) at constitutional.services@nottinghamcity.gov.uk