

By: Alex King, Deputy Leader

To: Cabinet – 29 March 2010

Subject: External Scrutiny

Introduction

1. (1) Increasingly the legislative framework for Overview and Scrutiny requires local authorities to make provisions to scrutinise partners/agencies e.g. Health, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships partners etc.

(2) When the County Council reviewed its Overview and Scrutiny function in 2009 it was informed of the growing area of external scrutiny of partner bodies/agencies outside the local authority (building on the already well established overview and scrutiny of local health services which has been in operation since 1 January 2003). This includes the new requirement to overview and scrutinise the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP) which includes the responsible authorities i.e. Police, Primary Care Trusts, Kent Fire and Rescue (and will shortly be extended to include the Probation Service as part of these arrangements). The first meeting of the Committee to look at scrutiny of the CDRP takes place on 6 April 2010.

(3) There is also the provision to scrutinise the Local Area Agreement which the County Council will undertake through its existing Overview and Scrutiny structure.

Emerging Issues for the Cabinet/County Council

2. (1) As an example the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has recently been involved in responding to a Councillor Call for Action from Maidstone Borough Council and local concern particularly in the greater Maidstone area to look at the reconfiguration of services for Women and Children's Services provided by the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust who run the hospitals at Maidstone, Pembury and Tunbridge Wells.

(2) To take this Councillor Call for Action forward the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group (cross party which included District Councillors who serve on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee). The report of the Task and Finish Group resulted in the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 February 2010 unanimously agreeing to exercise the Committee's right to refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Health asking him to look at the decision on the reconfiguration of Women and Children's Services again as the Committee considered it was not in the best interests of the local residents and access to local health services.

(3) Attached for the Cabinet's information is a copy of the letter of referral to the Secretary of State for Health, a response from the Head of NHS Reconfiguration and a further response from the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

3. The Cabinet is asked to note that regular reports will be submitted to the Cabinet on scrutiny activity relating to external partners and agencies which impacts on the County Council and our District Council partners.

Paul Wickenden
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