



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 14th October, 2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Claire Davies, Andrew Fry, Joanna Kane, Sachin Mathur and David Munro

Also Present:

Councillor Brandon Clayton – Chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Worcestershire County Council

Sue Harris – Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

Natalie Willetts – Director of Nursing, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

Richard Keble – Programme Director for Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System

Officers:

Mark Cox (WRS). Guy Revans and Stephen Williams (WRS)

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

35. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Rogers.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

Chair

37. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers registered to speak at this meeting.

38. CONTAMINATED LAND INSPECTION STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Specialist Lead Officer (Contaminated Land) from Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy. It was explained that six Districts across Worcestershire would be looked at as part of the review, although not in any particular order. It was noted, however, that the Redditch Borough review was the first area to undertake such a review due to the number of contaminated land sites within the Borough.

During the presentation of the report the following was highlighted:

- Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed a duty on local authorities to review and assess risks through the contaminated land regime. On occasions, local authorities could cause their area to be inspected in order to ensure that this regime was being adhered to. The term 'Contaminated Land' covered a range of sites including petrol stations, factories, depots and launderettes. The presence of a harmful substance did not mean that land would meet the definition of "contaminated land". However, it was reported that a very high bar must be met in order to deem it as not contaminated.
- Statutory guidance stated that action under contaminated land legislation should only be used when there was no other appropriate alternative. These included the planning and development control processes, as well as voluntary action taken by landowners to minimise the unnecessary burdens placed on taxpayers, businesses, and individuals.
- The new strategy had been amended in order to reflect the gradual reduction and withdrawal of central Government funding for Local Authority contaminated land work. It also outlined the inspection process, and the methodology applied.
- The strategy did not change the statutory responsibilities, and local authorities still had to adhere to the current statutory guidance.
- There were nine thousand three hundred contaminated land sites across Worcestershire and seven hundred and fifty of these were located in Redditch. This would necessitate a

large number of inspections and investigations being carried out.

Following the presentation, Members raised questions in respect of some areas of the report, as follows:

- Assurances were sought that the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy was sufficient to prevent examples of contamination events such as the high-profile case which occurred following a flooding in Surrey in 2014 where water infiltration through a landfill site resulted in (contamination) hydrogen cyanide entering a property, resulting in a case of death and long-term disability. Officers explained that the strategy covered the local authority's legal duties in relation to contaminants but that the Strategy could not mitigate against all possible risk. Nevertheless, the Strategy provided a framework on how contamination risks would be addressed.
- It was reported that ongoing risk monitoring was being undertaken at the contaminated land sites in Redditch, Former British Aluminium Tubes, Studley Road, and Properties at Marlpool Drive. Present The former BA Tubes site was remediated in 2017 and Marlpool Drive site had been remediated but subject to active remediation solution and monitoring.
- Who was the responsible party when it came to remediation of contaminated land sites? - It was explained that this would be on a site-specific basis. In some cases, it might be the Council, however, the owner or a purchaser of a site might also be responsible.
- Has Redditch Council been impacted by the withdrawal in central Government funding for contaminated land work? –It was commented that the funding cut had not impacted on Redditch as to date and through the new Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy all the contaminated sites and potential risk sites in Redditch continued to be monitored.
- Was the process of assessing contaminated land sites subject to quality assurance? – It was reported that there was detailed guidance and best practice guidelines in respect of this. Often these reports would be peer reviewed in order to ensure that the correct process had been undertaken. It was explained that there was a significant amount of expertise within WRS in this matter and that this level of expertise would be utilised when undertaking these kinds of inspections. This was particularly important as contaminated land site reports were usually lengthy and detailed.

- A Member highlighted that Blaze Lane in Astwood Bank ward was a former rubbish tip site with contaminants in the soil. It was raised that recently there were planning applications and housing built on the site and that it might necessitate adding the site to the list of contaminated sites. Officers responded that the site might already be included on the list but undertook to check this and report back to Members.

Members took the opportunity to thank Officers for producing a comprehensive Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy that identified a great range of potential risks.

RECOMMENDED that

The Council adopt the revised Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy which should be published on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) website.

39. PROPOSED RECONFIGURATION OF ADULT MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT AND REHABILITATION SERVICES AND CLOSURE OF HILLCREST WARD IN REDDITCH

The Chairman of Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) alongside representatives from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (the Trust) and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) were introduced.

The HOSC Chairman explained that the Worcestershire County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny (HOSC) was the only committee in the county to which the different NHS organisations were required by law to consult when any changes to health services were planned. HOSC could ask the relevant health professionals to attend its meetings to explain the change of service. It was reported that officers appeared before HOSC on a number of occasions to update on the situation concerning the Hill Crest mental health unit.

It was explained that the Hill Crest Mental Health ward was for acute care designed to admit people experiencing mental health difficulties, including patients detained under the Mental Health Act, for a period not exceeding one month.

The Trust's Director of Nursing provided background information into the situation at Hill Crest ward. It was explained that patient safety and quality of care concerns at the Hill Crest ward were

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highlighted in July 2022, following which discussions took place with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that triggered the first intelligence-led CQC inspection of Hill Crest ward.

During the CQC inspection in February 2023, concerns were identified which included poor patient experience in relation to insufficient staff to allow escorted leave from ward or supervised use of garden areas, lack of therapeutic activity for patients, and high use of temporary staffing. It was stated that many of the issues with Hill Crest ward had been identified prior to the 2023 inspection, and an Improvement Plan to restore safe operations within Hill Crest had been in place from September 2023. To lead the development and implementation of the Improvement Plan, the Trust and the ICB took the decision to appoint an Improvement Director to lead the development and implementation of that Plan.

It was reported that improvement in operations had subsequently been noted. Currently, there was a provision of 14 beds at the unit, which was deemed the safest level of provision. However, there were inherent environmental constraints with the Hill Crest building as it is a large, 'sprawling' ward, with a number of blind spots, which presents challenges for staff to provide good levels of observation to supervise the patients. Members were informed that in an acute mental health ward, there were safety risks related to patients detained at the ward becoming suddenly unwell, for example engaging in attempted self-harm or suicide. Therefore, observation by staff was required but the layout of the Hill Crest ward presented significant challenges in this.

There were also safety concerns arising from the ward's isolation from other mental health wards. Although the Hill Crest ward was on site of Alexandra Hospital in Redditch, the mental health ward was run by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (the Trust), whereas the rest of the hospital was managed by the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. As such there was little resilience and emergency staffing capacity in case of a serious incident occurring on site. Moreover, due to design and age of the building, improvements such as adding on suite bedrooms could not be made at Hill Crest.

The Trust's Director Strategy and Partnerships explained that in light of inherent building and staffing layout challenges at Hill Crest, it was proposed to relocate the acute mental health unit to a vacant Athlon Ward located on Elgar Unit on the Worcestershire Royal Hospital site. This was deemed the most effective and safest option as the Athlon ward was well designed and able to be adapted to most modern standards. The remaining acute mental health beds in

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Worcestershire were also located at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital site, and the Athlon ward was located next to a psychiatric intensive care unit, which provided additional back-up staff support when required.

It was highlighted that acute mental health provision at Hill Crest was a county-wide service and there were people from across the county accessing Hill Crest the unit. From October 2023 to the end of September 2024, 144 individuals had been admitted to the Hill Crest ward, of which 39 were Worcester residents at the time of admission, 24 from Redditch Borough, and 14 from Herefordshire. It was reiterated that the advantages of putting all beds into one campus area were that of safety and the ability to respond to emergency situations. It was highlighted that local mental health provision remained unaffected as a result of this change. Community, children and adolescent mental health provision would remain in Redditch, with mental health crisis team operating from the Town Hall.

Questions were invited and the following main points were made:

- Impact on staff resulting from relocation to Athlon ward, Worcester – A Member asked if all staff would be transferred to the new Worcester unit. It was explained that following engagement with staff, some staff had chosen not to relocate to Worcester as they lived locally to Hill Crest. However, all staff members had been retained and no redundancies were made as a result of the planned relocation. It was also explained that pay and conditions for all staff would remain unchanged following the move to Athlon ward as the Trust adhered to strict pay and conditions criteria set by the NHS.
- It was explained that the Hill Crest ward was staffed predominantly by a mixture of mental health nurses and healthcare support workers. Most mental health nurses at the ward were employed through a long-term booking with an agency. It was explained that there was a national shortage of mental health nurses.
- Use of Hill Crest unit following relocation of the mental health ward – It was explained that the Hill Crest building would remain in the NHS with outpatient mental health clinics and wider neighbourhood mental health services would continue operating from the Hill Crest site. It was only the acute mental health beds provision that would be relocated to the Athlon ward. It was further clarified that the risks highlighted relating to the layout of Hill Crest site concerned bedded care

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rather than provision of neighbourhood mental health services.

- Impact of relocation on arrangements for family visits – Concerns were raised about the impact of the relocation on creating additional transport burden placed on the family members from Redditch visiting patients. It was noted that the main messages from public engagement about relocation plans related to parking on the Worcestershire Royal Hospital site and transport costs for family members in Redditch visiting patients in Worcester. Members were reassured in this regard that the staff at the Hill Crest ward were providing bespoke arrangements to maintain visits for families of patients who had children, mobility and transport difficulties etc. Support included sourcing of local taxis, helping with the local bus routes. This arrangement would continue after the move to Athlon ward to accommodate visits from families of Redditch patients.
- It was reiterated that the acute mental health service provided from Hill Crest was for people from across Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and only a minority of patients currently admitted to Hill Crest were Redditch residents.
- Patients being placed in out of county placements – It was noted that the acute mental health service was subject to non-predictable fluctuations in demand and there were often patients who would have to be treated outside of Worcestershire, especially in specialist cases. It was explained that due to its nature there could be no waiting list for acute mental health services, and to cope with demand some patients would need to be treated out of county. It was noted that currently there were 10 people in out of county placements. Members requested that they be provided with data on how many people were placed in an out of county mental health placement in the last year and the number of people who were placed out of county because they could not be treated in Worcestershire.
- Members requested that an update be provided to the Committee on the repurposing of the space vacated at Hill Crest, including a plan on how this space was proposed to be accommodated.
- A query was raised about why NHS England (NHSE) commissioned a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

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(CAMHS) Tier 4 unit – for children and teenagers with the worst mental health problems – in an isolated location in a housing estate in Webheath. It was responded that whilst this was NHSE commissioning decision, outside of the control of the Trust or the ICB, the NHSE had plans to ultimately eliminate Tier 4 out of area (independent sector) beds in the country. It was noted that this target would take time to be realised and at a local level the Herefordshire and Worcestershire In-Patient Strategy details how the number of people in independent placements could be reduced locally. It was stated that locally only units rated at least ‘good’ by CQC were used. Members requested that they be provided with copies of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire In-Patient Strategy.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Chair of Worcestershire HOSC and Officers from the Trust and the ICB for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the information provided regarding reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services and the proposed closure of Hillcrest Mental Health ward be noted.

40. POST-16 EDUCATION TASK GROUP - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT

The Post-16 Education Task Group – Draft Scoping Document / Terms of Reference were presented for Members’ consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Post-16 Education Task Group Scoping Document be approved for use as Terms of Reference for the investigation.

41. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The Executive Committee Minutes from the meeting held on 3rd September 2024 were submitted for information only.

The Executive Committee Work Programme from 1 November 2024 to 28 February 2025 was submitted for Members’ consideration.

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The Executive Director reported that an all-Member briefing on Food Waste would be provided on Friday 25th October.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee Work Programme including items agreed to be presented to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for pre-scrutiny be noted.

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the following items be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Review of Cemetery Provision in Redditch – this issue was raised due to the report that the cemetery at Astwood Bank was at risk of running out of burial space. It was suggested that a briefing note on this topic be provided to Members of Overview and Scrutiny.
- Report on the process of becoming a constituent member of West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) – Members requested this report, setting out options for Redditch Council regarding this, as it was reported that the current non-constituent status on the WMCA was highly restrictive for the Council in terms of what it could do at regional level. It was deemed suitable to invite an external officer to provide a presentation setting out this topic to Members of Overview and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated to include items detailed in the pre-amble above.

43. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on Task Groups and Working Groups were provided as follows:

- a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

It was reported that the next meeting was to take place on 21st November 2024.

- b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

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The next meeting was due to take place on 16th October 2024.

- c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group – Chair, Councillor Dormer

The next meeting of the Group was scheduled for 6th November 2024.

- d) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

The first meeting of this Group had been arranged for 23rd October 2024. The Terms of Reference for this Group had been agreed at tonight's meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

44. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on the meetings of External Scrutiny Bodies were provided by the representatives as follows:

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Kane

Councillor Kane reported that no meeting had taken place since the last update to the Committee.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny – Council Representative, Councillor Munro

Councillor Munro reported that at the last meeting issues concerning traffic management within the metro area were discussed. One topic of relevance to Redditch was about policing of unnecessary cars left idling, especially around schools. Councillor Munro commented, however, that enforcement of this issue would be difficult in Redditch given the current level of parking enforcement carried out.

It was noted that the County Council had delegated responsibility for parking enforcement to district and borough councils (lower-tier authorities) including Redditch. This was in turn carried out by

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Wychavon District Council on behalf of the authority. However, Members commented that they felt there were issues with the current parking enforcement arrangement, including the relationship with the County Council. It was suggested that the Leader of the Council should raise this matter with the other Leaders at County level. The Leader agreed that he would raise this issue.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor Munro.

Councillor Munro reported that the last meeting took place on 11th October, with the main topic discussed relating to improvements to the cancer pathway. Councillor Munro reported that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Health and Care Trust had been placed in tier 1 for its cancer performance by NHS England. This meant that the service was performing poorly, requiring the highest level of support and monitoring. However, the service had been improving and it was now in tier 2 (requiring less support from NHS England) and was expected to move to tier 3 by the end of 2024.

In terms of cancer diagnosis and treatment, it was reported that Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Health and Care Trust performed above national targets as of July 2024. 80.75 per cent of patients received their diagnosis within 28 days which is higher than national target of 77 per cent. 71.28 per cent of patients were treated within 62 days which was higher than national requirement by March 2025 of 70 per cent.

Councillor Munro updated the Committee about the proposals for a new Community Diagnostic Centre in Worcestershire. The location was to be decided and Councillor Munro reported that there was an opportunity for Redditch to be chosen as location. Redditch Members were urged to show support and promote the proposal for a Community Diagnostic Centre to be located in Redditch as it was a much-needed facility for the community.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

45. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that exclusion of the public and press was not necessary in relation to Minute Item 51. Minutes as it was agreed that no information relating to exempt minutes records would be

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discussed. The meeting remained in public session for its entire duration.

46. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Overview and Scrutiny which took place on 29th August and 2nd September 2024, including the exempt records of items discussed in exempt session at those meetings, were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 29th August and Monday 2nd September 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.55 pm