

Report of Meeting with Buckinghamshire Community Alliance

March 11 2002

I attended a meeting of the Buckinghamshire Community Alliance on March 11 2002. Their invitation asked me to speak about the work of the Partnership Scrutiny Committee. In their invitation they pointed out that they are a group of voluntary organisations set up in 1998 with the following terms of reference to

- Identify common ground and develop a united voice in the voluntary sector with the aim of working in true partnership
- Identify and develop proposals
- Campaign and lobby
- Develop a co-ordinated response to statutory bodies

Membership is open to all voluntary organisations throughout Buckinghamshire with an interest in Health and Community Care. Their membership includes most of the voluntary bodies that provide care services on behalf of the County Council.

In my talk I spoke about the changes that had led to the establishment of scrutiny committees and gave a brief outline of the new political and management structures. I talked about the work of scrutiny generally and told them about its scope and range and how it fitted in. I moved on to talk in more detail about the Partnership Committee and went into some detail about our work on Winter Pressures and more recently Social Care Partnerships. I outlined the changes that will take place from May and explained the new role of scrutinising health.

They were particularly interested in the latter two issues, they asked a number of questions and strongly expressed their opinions. They were clearly pleased that time is being given to examining the relationship between Social Services and the Voluntary Sector. Members said that relationships could be better. They were critical of communications, saying that they often went months without contact, for many there was no named person that linked with their organisation and getting advice and help was difficult. They acknowledged that there had been many changes in the staffing of social services but felt that maintaining contact was important.

They questioned whether Council members were really aware of the extent of the voluntary sectors contribution to social care provision in Bucks. I was asked about how we choose the organisations with whom to consult. I explained the process but clearly some felt that they could have added to our enquiry. I think they accepted that we had tried to meet a representative group.

They also asked some questions about scrutiny of health and wanted to know how our role will fit in with the other changes that are talking place. In regard to our work on Winter Pressures they said had they known that it was talking place they would have wished to contribute. This comment came particularly from carers groups.

Perhaps the sharpest question came at the end of the meeting, “when are we going to be told about our grants for 2002/03?”. They said no one from the County Council had been in touch to tell them what they are going to get, and the delay was causing some difficulties. They clearly felt that this was unreasonable and not truly in the spirit of partnership.