

AGENDA ITEM: 6

NHS Scrutiny - Update for the Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This short paper is intended to update members of the committee on what has happened since the attached papers from COMT and CADEX were produced. Although there has been little progress in terms of legislation there are a number of matters that members may be interested to hear about.

Since the discussion at CADEX the leaders of the County Council and District Councils have agreed the proposal for the County Council to set up an Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will include co-opted District Council representatives. The leaders also agreed in principle to support the costs of NHS scrutiny although the basis of this is still to be agreed.

The Chairman of the Partnership Select Committee has had an initial discussion with the Chief Executive of the Health Authority. This will be followed by similar meetings with the Chief Executives of the PCTs.

The future of the Community Health Councils (CHCs) is still in doubt. However an announcement is expected at the end of this month. It is interesting to note that the Government's view continues to be that the new scrutiny system should be "cost neutral". It is difficult to see how this could be achieved unless CHCs are abolished and their funding is redistributed.

It is important that the County Council retains contact with the CHCs as long as they continue and builds links with the new organisations. These include the Patient Advocate and Liaison Service (PALS) and Patients' Forums. The former are due to be established April 2002 although they are already in place in some areas. It will be interesting to see how these develop bearing in mind that they will be based within the trusts and PCTs. How willing will they be to criticise the hand that feeds them?

That question may be resolved by the Patients' Forums part of whose role will be to review the PALS in order to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities. Again, April 2002 is the target date for establishing the Forums.

In addition to the PALS and Patients' Forums, Independent Local Advisory Forums (ILAFs) and Patients' Councils are also scheduled to come on line next year to complete the set of local reviewing/scrutiny organisations. Nationally, the Independent Complaints Advocacy service is due to start in 2002/03.

Preparation of regulations and guidance for scrutiny is underway. A working group comprising representatives from health, local government, patients' groups etc. is about to begin work. Consultation is scheduled for the Autumn and the guidelines will be available before April next year.