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Our Ref: DB/GJ/am

5th October 2007

Councillor Bob Edger
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission
3 Turner Place
College Town
Sandhurst
GU47 0FW

Dear Councillor Edger

Re: Review of Healthcare Funding – Report from a Working Group of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission

Thank you for forwarding me the final version of the report of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission. For the purposes of this response I shall not seek to comment on some of the evidence the working group gathered other than to say in general that the evidence confirms much of my comments to members about local health funding and the need for us as an authority to be vigilant, not so much about national formulae, over which neither we nor any other authority has control, but over the actual commissioning priorities the East Berkshire PCT is proposing and how they appear to be inflicting arbitrary forms of rationing on some of our most vulnerable residents in order to recover operational overspends. A matter I have drawn to the attention of the Joint East Berkshire Health O&S panel at its last meeting.

For clarification, I should point out that the Health and Social Care Partnership Board is chaired on a rotational basis between the Council and the PCT and in fact the PCT are currently in the chair.

For ease of reference, I have set out my response to the recommendations in turn.

- 5.1.1 I note from the text that the matter of whether or not the Council was informed was not actually clarified. However that said I will action this by asking the Director to request from the PCT that he, myself and the Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel receive copies of their Board papers. I would also suggest that the recommendation is widened to include all forms of correspondence and contact with the PCT as they do not just interface with this authority via the Director of Social Services and Housing.
- 5.1.2 I concur with the recommendation and offer assistance from staff of the department as appropriate. This should also include the PCTs Local Development Plan which is their plan for the forthcoming year.
- 5.1.3 I concur with the recommendation. This has been actioned and 24 September was the second meeting of the Board under these new terms of reference. I have attached these as Annexe 1 to this response.

I have naturally left the recommendations for Berkshire East PCT for the Chief Executive to respond to. The joint recommendation responses are:

- 5.3.1 I intend to ensure that the development of a constructive dialogue as mentioned in my

evidence continues so that the improvements identified are built on. It must be recognised though, that even if we as a Council are more informed, and able to influence decisions, many of the funding decisions will be taken by the PCT Board and they in turn are influenced greatly by the SHA. I draw your attention again to my genuine concerns over future local health funding and the move by the SHA and PCT to move their care responsibilities on to us in order to ease their own budget management problems.

Members will shortly see the final version of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy to which the PCT has contributed openly and which is designed to draw together all our dealings over health and wellbeing with all our health and care partners. This strategy will form the basis of our ongoing relationship with the PCT and all other health and care providers. I'm pleased to report that a Health O&S working group made a valued contribution to its creation.

5.3.2 I concur with the recommendations and look forward to seeing future presentations at Scrutiny Panels.

The importance I place on driving forward the local health and wellbeing agenda cannot be overstated. As Councils come under increasing pressure from their health partners to fund things that they traditionally have and should fund we will have to stay vigilant and be tough in our dealings to ensure that proper funding is maintained for keeping people healthy and living longer in good health. When their health does suffer we must make sure they get the right care in the right place at the right time without the cost falling on hard pressed Council Tax payers.

I know you share my objectives in this area and once again I thank you and the working group for their contribution to what will I'm sure be an ongoing task.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Birch', written on a light-colored background.

Councillor Dale Birch
Executive Member, Adult Services, Health & Housing
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