

Subject: Referral from Audit Committee: Health Inequalities

Date of Meeting: 02 December 2009

Report of: The Director of Strategy and Governance

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 At its 29 September 2009 meeting, the Audit Committee considered an Audit Commission report on Health Inequalities in Brighton & Hove (the Audit Commission report is reprinted as **Appendix 1** to this report; an extract from the relevant Audit Committee minutes is reprinted as **Appendix 2**).
- 1.2 The Audit Committee decided to refer the Audit Commission report to HOSC in order for HOSC to monitor the implementation of the report recommendations. Although not explicitly stated in the Audit Committee minutes, it seems reasonable to assume that the matter was referred to HOSC because Audit Committee members felt that 'health inequalities' were a HOSC issue.
- 1.3 However, whilst 'health inequalities' undoubtedly fall within HOSC's remit, it is clear from the Audit Commission report Action Plan that most of the report recommendations are not for implementation by health bodies. In fact, the bulk (seven out of nine) of the report's recommendations require implementation by officers of Housing Strategy (albeit sometimes working in conjunction with Public Health officers).
- 1.4 The scrutiny of Housing Strategy normally falls under the remit of the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee (ASCHOSC). As this is ostensibly an ASCHOSC matter and as ASCHOSC has well-established links with Housing Strategy, it might be thought more appropriate for ASCHOSC to monitor this issue.

- 1.5 The Overview & Scrutiny Commission (OSC) is charged with “determining arrangements for dealing with a particular issue” where “matters fall within the remit of more than one Overview & Scrutiny committee” (Constitution Point 6: Paragraph 3.1b)). Therefore, if HOSC members do not themselves wish to take responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Audit Commission recommendations on Health Inequalities, they should consider referring the matter to the OSC rather than directly to ASCHOSC or any other O&S committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That members:

(I) note the contents of the Audit Commission Health Inequalities report (**Appendix 1**);

(II) agree to refer the report to OSC for further consideration.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 ‘Health Inequality’ refers to the variable health outcomes across the population, with some groups of people typically suffering much worse health and earlier mortality than others.
- 3.2 Given the existence of a national framework of standardised NHS healthcare provision available to all UK citizens free at the point of contact, it is not generally considered that health inequalities significantly correlate with unequal access to healthcare or with major differences in the quality of NHS provision from place to place (although poorer communities may typically experience some access problems, particularly in terms of primary care services such as GP surgeries and dental practices).
- 3.3 Rather, health inequality is thought to correlate most strongly with social factors, such as worklessness, poor housing etc. Therefore, tackling health inequality requires effective partnership working between health bodies, local authorities and other agencies.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken in preparing this paper.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are none for Overview & Scrutiny, as any monitoring work can be managed by the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) team in the course of its day to day work.

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 No legal advice has been sought in relation to this report.

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Health Inequalities are clearly a core equalities issue. However, in the context of determining which O&S committee is best placed to monitor the implementation of the Audit Commission report, there are no particular equalities implications to consider.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 None identified.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 None identified.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 For Overview & Scrutiny to work efficiently, it is important that issues should be dealt with by the most appropriate O&S committee.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 Tackling health inequalities is a core priority of the Council (“Reduce Inequality by increasing opportunity”). It is also a significant driver for the Local Area Agreement and one of the key determinants of NHS Brighton & Hove’s commissioning strategy.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. The Audit Commission Health Inequalities report;
2. Extract of relevant minutes from the 29.09.09 Audit Committee meeting.

Documents in Members’ Rooms:

None

Background Documents:

None