

Date: 15 July 2020

To: The Leaders of Staffordshire Borough and District County Councils; Chairs of the District and Borough Health Select Committees.

cc Leader of Staffordshire County Council (SCC), SCC Cabinet Member of Health and Social Care; SCC Cabinet Member for Children; Members of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee.

Dear Sir/Madam

County Health Scrutiny

For some time now members of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee have felt that the role of the District and Borough Chairs has not worked as well as it might and many of the District and Borough Chairs, I think, feel frustrated in their role. It is timely that I, as Chair, make three observations:

First is to outline the role of each tier of Local Authority in respect of Health Scrutiny. By statute the Authority which is responsible for the scrutiny of the NHS and Health and Social Care is the Authority that delivers Health and Social Care. In our case this is Staffordshire County Council. The second -tier Authority is responsible for the scrutiny of the wider determinants of health. As District and Boroughs Councils in Staffordshire are the planning authorities with responsibilities for Environmental Health this makes perfect sense. Although some are better than others, the District and Borough reports to the County Committee are often absent altogether or show that most Districts either do not understand this role or choose not to fulfil it. It is my view, as a retired clinician, that improving these wider determinants of health, examples of which in relation to the current crisis I will refer to later, will do more to improve the health and longevity of the people we serve than the scrutiny responsibilities in the County.



Secondly, The Francis Report recommended the attendance of District and Borough Chairs with full rights and responsibilities, in part, to help the Committee understand the challenges at a local level. This is in order that any future problem similar to Mid Staffs should be able to come to the attention of the Committee earlier. Such questioning from the District and Borough Chairs is sparse and, in many meetings, non-existent. This suggests that your representatives are not being briefed by their colleagues about concerns in their communities. In short, the Francis recommendations are not working.

Thirdly, although I cannot direct, I am in a position to suggest items that you may wish to look at. This current crisis is the opportunity of a lifetime to consider some wider determinants of health for your scrutiny committees.

- 1) The opening up of Town Centres are done safely.
- 2) The challenges that the small local voluntary organisations are currently facing.
- 3) District and Borough Council employee Stress and Mental Health Challenges.
- 4) Inviting the County Council Director for Health and Care and the Cabinet Member for Health and Care to discuss SCC management of the current crisis and how local lockdown would work were it to become necessary in your area.
- 5) Assure that all is being done for residents to take full advantage of the summer weather to promote their physical and mental wellbeing safely before we approach autumn.
- 6) The local provision for people suffering from low grade mental health issues as a result of the crisis. For instance, low grade anxiety and loneliness that requires only social support but not the services of Health or Social Care Professionals.

I am asking you to give the role and prominence of scrutiny at the Districts and Boroughs your due consideration.

Being assured of the wider determinants of health such as the examples given above and availing your Chairs of the opportunity to be fully briefed by local members about issues on their wards could go a long way towards improving the lives of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Johnny McMahon
Chairman of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

