

REPORT FROM REPRESENTATIVE ON OUTSIDE BODIES

COUNCILLOR TONY AUSTIN

HEALTH AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I attended an informal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee at Preston Hospital in August with Lord Markham, a Health Minister. He joined a panel of experts discussing the new hospitals planned for Preston and Lancaster. We were given a presentation with slides, showing the design of buildings envisaged. Representatives from Lancaster explained how urgent it was, to replace their Victorian 22-building Infirmary on a steep hillside. I received cross-party support for my concerns about good public transport links to the proposed new sites.

On 13th. September, I attended a scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee at County Hall. The first main item was the Happier Minds Update. We understood suicide rates in Lancashire at 13.5 persons / 100,000 were higher than both the North West and England; Blackpool was the worst in the geographical county at 18.7; male rates were 30% higher than female and child rates were sadly increasing. We were reminded about Suicide Prevention Week and the Orange Button campaign of suicide awareness.

We heard about the work of the Lancashire Drugs and Alcohol Partnership Board and charities, such as Inspire, who have produced an excellent short video with self-studies of reformed alcoholics. More work is being done around compulsive addicts of pain killers. A conference about drug-related death is being held next year.

The second main item dealt with the Community Health Transformation programme, which is looking to developing a faster integrated approach in a three-year programme. Any patient referred by a G.P. will be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team before treatment. The team will look at wider issues triggering poor mental health, such as poor housing and financial difficulties. The team will attempt to help patients more quickly with the aim of treatment being commenced, before a serious crisis point is reached.

The plan is to create integrated multi-disciplinary Community Hubs (including social workers) for each of the three areas in Lancashire. These will support patients referred by G.Ps. in the area, the first operational areas being West and Central Lancashire this month. Special short-term support will be given to help people start recovering in their own homes.

Finally, I will soon be visiting a public engagement event about a new planned inpatient unit for those with learning difficulties at Guild Park in Whittingham, to be discussed in detail at a future scrutiny committee.