

PROTOCOL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS IN CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This protocol has been developed as a framework for the operation of joint health scrutiny arrangements across the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside. It allows for:
- scrutiny of substantial developments and variations of the health service; and,
 - discretionary scrutiny of local health services.
- 1.2 The protocol provides a framework for health scrutiny arrangements which operate on a joint basis only. Each constituent local authority should have its own local arrangements in place for carrying out health scrutiny activity individually.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The relevant legislation regarding health scrutiny is:
- Health and Social Care Act 2012,
 - The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013; and
 - The Health and Care Act 2022.

This is supplemented by relevant guidance:

- Local Authority Health Scrutiny (DHSC, updated 2024)
 - Statutory guidance: “Reconfiguring NHS services – ministerial intervention powers” (DHSC, 2024).
- 2.2 In summary, the statutory framework authorises local authorities individually and collectively to:
- review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health service; and,
 - consider consultations by a relevant NHS commissioning body or provider of NHS-funded services on any proposal for a substantial development or variation to the health service in the local authority’s area.
- 2.3 Ultimately the regulations place a requirement on relevant scrutiny arrangements to reach a view on whether they are satisfied that any proposal that is deemed to be a substantial development or variation is in the interests of the health service in that area. In instances where a proposal impacts on the residents of one local authority area exclusively,

this responsibility lays with that authority's health scrutiny arrangements alone.

- 2.4 Where such proposals impact on more than one local authority area, each authority's health scrutiny arrangements must consider whether the proposals constitute a substantial development or variation or not. The regulations place a requirement on those local authorities that agree that a proposal is substantial to establish, in each instance, a joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of considering it. This protocol deals with the proposed operation of such arrangements for the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 2.5 Whilst it is recognised that the previous power of a health scrutiny committee or joint health scrutiny committee to refer a service change proposal to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been removed, such committees will now possess the ability to request formally that the Secretary of State "call-in" a service change proposal. The ability to "call-in" a proposal should only be used in exceptional circumstances where all efforts to resolve issues locally have been exhausted.

3. PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL

- 3.1 This protocol sets out the framework for the operation of joint scrutiny arrangements where:
- a) an NHS commissioning body or health service provider consults with more than one local authority on any proposal it has under consideration, for a substantial development/variation of the health service;
 - b) joint scrutiny activity is being carried out on a discretionary basis into the planning, provision and operation of the health service.
- 3.2 The protocol covers the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside including:
- Cheshire East Council
 - Cheshire West and Chester Council
 - Halton Borough Council
 - Knowsley Council
 - Liverpool City Council
 - St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
 - Sefton Council
 - Warrington Borough Council
 - Wirral Borough Council
- 3.3 Whilst this protocol deals with arrangements within the boundaries of Cheshire and Merseyside, it is recognised that there may be occasions

when consultations/discretionary activity may affect adjoining regions/ areas. Arrangements to deal with such circumstances would have to be determined and agreed separately, as and when appropriate.

4. PRINCIPLES FOR JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY

4.1 The fundamental principle underpinning joint health scrutiny will be co-operation and partnership with a mutual understanding of the following aims:

- To improve the health of local people and to tackle health inequalities (outcome-focussed);
- To ensure that scrutiny activity adopts an appropriate balance between a focus on future service delivery and a focus on responding to immediate concerns/ issues (balanced)
- To represent the views of local people and ensure that these views are identified and integrated into local health service plans, services and commissioning (inclusive);
- To scrutinise whether all parts of the community are able to access health services and whether the outcomes of health services are equally good for all sections of the community (evidence-informed); and,
- To work with NHS bodies and local health providers to ensure that their health services are planned and provided in the best interests of the communities they serve, taking into account any potential impact on health service staff (collaborative).

5. SUBSTANTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF /VARIATION TO SERVICES

5.1 Requirements to consult

5.1.1 All relevant NHS bodies and providers of NHS-funded services¹ are required to consult local authorities when they have a proposal for a substantial development or substantial variation to the health service.

5.1.2 A substantial development or variation is not defined in legislation. Guidance has suggested that the key feature is that it should involve a major impact on the services experienced by patients and/or future patients.

¹ This includes NHS England and any body commissioning services to the residents of Cheshire and Merseyside, plus providers such as NHS Trusts, NHS Foundation Trust and any other relevant provider of NHS funded services which provides health services to those residents, including public health.

- 5.1.3 Where a substantial development or variation impacts on the residents within one local authority area boundary, only the relevant local authority health scrutiny function shall be consulted on the proposal.
- 5.1.4 Where a proposal impacts on residents across more than one local authority boundary, the NHS body/health service provider is obliged to consult all those authorities whose residents are affected by the proposals in order to determine whether the proposal represents a substantial development or variation.
- 5.1.5 Those authorities that agree that any such proposal does constitute a substantial development or variation are obliged to form a joint health overview and scrutiny committee for the purpose of formal consultation by the proposer of the development or variation.
- 5.1.6 Whilst each local authority must decide individually whether a proposal represents a substantial development/variation, it is only the statutory joint health scrutiny committee which can formally comment on the proposals if more than one authority agrees that the proposed change is “substantial”.
- 5.1.7 Determining that a proposal is not a substantial development/variation removes the ability of an individual local authority to comment formally on the proposal.. Once such decisions are made, the ongoing obligation on the proposer to consult formally on a proposal relates only to those authorities that have deemed the proposed change to be “substantial” and this must be done through the vehicle of the joint committee. Furthermore the proposer will not be obliged to provide updates or report back on proposals to individual authorities that have not deemed them to be “substantial”.
- 5.1.8 For the avoidance of doubt, if only one authority amongst a number being consulted on a proposal deem it to be a substantial change, the ongoing process of consultation on the proposal between the proposer and the remaining authority falls outside the provisions of this protocol.

5.2 Process for considering proposals for a substantial development/variation

- 5.2.1 In consulting with the local authority in the first instance to determine whether the change is considered substantial, the relevant NHS commissioning body / provider of NHS-funded services is required to:
- Provide the proposed date by which it requires comments on the proposals
 - Provide the proposed date by which it intends to make a final decision as to whether to implement the proposal
 - Publish the dates specified above

- Inform the local authority if the dates change²

5.2.2 NHS commissioning bodies and local health service providers are not required to consult with local authorities where certain ‘emergency’ decisions have been taken. All exemptions to consult are set out within regulations.³

5.2.3 In considering whether a proposal is substantial, all local authorities are encouraged to consider the following criteria:

- *Changes in accessibility of services:* any proposal which involves the withdrawal or change of patient or diagnostic facilities for one or more speciality from the same location.
- *Impact on the wider community and other services:* This could include economic impact, transport, regeneration issues.
- *Patients affected:* changes may affect the whole population, or a small group. If changes affect a small group, the proposal may still be regarded as substantial, particularly if patients need to continue accessing that service for many years.
- *Methods of service delivery:* altering the way a service is delivered may be a substantial change, for example moving a particular service into community settings rather than being entirely hospital based.
- *Potential level of public interest:* proposals that are likely to generate a significant level of public interest in view of their likely impact.

5.2.4 These criteria will assist in ensuring that there is a consistent approach applied by each authority in making their respective decisions on whether a proposal is “substantial” or not. In making the decision, each authority will focus on how the proposals impacts on its own area/residents.

6. OPERATION OF A STATUTORY JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6.1 General

6.1.1 A joint health overview and scrutiny committee will be made up of each of the constituent local authorities that deem a proposal to be a substantial development or variation. This joint committee will be

² Section 23 of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013

³ Section 24 *ibid*

formally consulted on the proposal and, in exceptional circumstances, formally request that the Secretary of State to “call-in” a proposal, where local consultation has failed to resolve significant outstanding issues.

6.1.2 A decision as to whether the proposal is deemed substantial shall be taken within a reasonable timeframe and in accordance with any deadline set by the lead local authority (see section 6.6), following consultation with the other participating authorities.

6.2 Powers

6.2.1 In dealing with substantial development/variations, any statutory joint health overview and scrutiny committee that is established can:

- require relevant NHS bodies and health service providers to provide information to and attend before meetings of the committee to answer questions
- make comments on the subject proposal by a date provided by the NHS body/local health service provider
- make reports and recommendations to relevant NHS bodies/local health providers
- require relevant NHS bodies/local health service providers to respond within a fixed timescale to reports or recommendations
- carry out further negotiations with the relevant NHS body where it is proposing not to agree to a substantial variation proposal.

6.2.2 A joint health overview and scrutiny committee has the ability to request the Secretary of State to “call-in” a service change proposal where it has not been possible to resolve significant outstanding issues during the course of local consultation. The ability to request the “call-in” of a proposal should only be exercised in exceptional circumstances where all possible efforts to resolve the matter locally have been exhausted, as outlined in 6.2.3 and 6.2.4 below.

6.2.3 Where a committee has made a recommendation to a NHS commissioning body/local health service provider regarding a proposal and the NHS body/provider disagrees with the recommendation, the local health service provider/NHS body is required to inform the joint committee and attempt to enter into negotiation to try and reach an agreement.

6.2.4 In any circumstance where a committee disagrees with a proposal for a substantial variation, there will be an expectation that negotiations will be entered into with the NHS commissioning body/local health service provider in order to attempt to reach agreement.

6.2.5 Where local authorities have agreed that the proposals represent substantial developments or variations to services and agreed to enter into joint arrangements, it is only the joint health overview and scrutiny committee which may exercise these powers.

6.2.5 An ad-hoc statutory joint health overview and scrutiny committee established under the terms of this protocol may only exercise the powers set out in 6.2.1 to 6.2.4 above in relation to the statutory consultation for which it was originally established. Its existence is time-limited to the course of the specified consultation and it may not otherwise carry out any other activity.

6.3 Membership

6.3.1 The participating local authorities must ensure that those Councillors nominated to a joint health overview and scrutiny committee produce a membership that reflects the overall political balance across the participating local authorities. However, political balance requirements for each joint committee established may be waived with the agreement of all participating local authorities, should time and respective approval processes permit.

6.3.2 A joint committee will be composed of Councillors from each of the participating authorities within Cheshire and Merseyside in the following ways:

- where 4 or more local authorities deem the proposed change to be substantial, each authority will nominate 2 elected members
- where 3 or less local authorities deem the proposed change to be substantial, then each participating authority will nominate 3 elected members.

(Note: In making their nominations, each participating authority will be asked to ensure that their representatives have the experience and expertise to contribute effectively to a health scrutiny process)

Local authorities who consider change to be 'substantial'	No' of elected members to be nominated from each authority
4 or more	2 members
3 or less	3 members

6.3.3 Each local authority will be obliged to nominate elected members through their own relevant internal processes and provide notification of those members to the lead local authority at the earliest opportunity.

6.3.4 To avoid inordinate delays in the establishment of a relevant joint committee, it is suggested that constituent authorities either arrange for delegated decision-making arrangements to be put in place to deal with such nominations at the earliest opportunity, or to nominate potential

representatives annually as part of annual meeting processes to cover all potential seat allocations.

6.5 Quorum

- 6.5.1 The quorum of the meetings of a joint committee shall be one third of the full membership of any Joint Committee, subject to the quorum being, in each instance, no less than 3.
- 6.5.2 There will be an expectation for there to be representation from each authority at a meeting of any joint committee established. The lead local authority will attempt to ensure that this representation is achieved.

6.6 Identifying a lead local authority

- 6.6.1 A lead local authority should be identified from one of the participating authorities to take the lead in terms of administering and organising a joint committee in relation to a specific proposal.
- 6.6.2 Selection of a lead authority should, where possible, be chosen by mutual agreement by the participating authorities and take into account both capacity to service a joint health scrutiny committee and available resources. The application of the following criteria should also guide determination of the lead authority:
- The local authority within whose area the service being changed is based; or
 - The local authority within whose area the lead commissioner or provider leading the consultation is based.
- 6.6.3 Lead local authority support should include a specific contact point for communication regarding the administration of the joint committee. There will be an obligation on the key lead authority officer to liaise appropriately with officers from each participating authority to ensure the smooth running of the joint committee.
- 6.6.4 Each participating local authority will have the discretion to provide whatever support it may deem appropriate to their own representative(s) to allow them to make a full contribution to the work of a joint committee.

6.7 Nomination of Chair/ Vice-Chair

The chair/ vice-chair of the joint health overview and scrutiny committee will be nominated and agreed at the committee's first meeting.

6.8 Meetings of a Joint Committee

6.8.1 At the first meeting of any joint committee established to consider a proposal for a substantial development or variation, the committee will also consider and agree:

- The joint committee's terms of reference;
- The procedural rules for the operation of the joint committee;
- The process/ timeline for dealing formally with the consultation, including:
 - the number of sessions required to consider the proposal; and,
 - the date by which the joint committee aims to reach its final conclusion on the proposal – which should be in advance of the proposed date by which the NHS commissioning body/service provider intends to make its final decision on it.

6.8.2 All other meetings of the joint committee will be determined in line with the proposed approach for dealing with the consultation. Different approaches may be taken for each consultation and could include gathering evidence from:

- NHS commissioning bodies and local service providers;
- patients and the public;
- voluntary sector and community organisations; and
- NHS regulatory bodies.

6.9 Reports of a Joint Committee

6.9.1 A joint committee is entitled to produce a written report which may include recommendations. As a minimum, the report will include:

- An explanation of why the matter was reviewed or scrutinised.
- A summary of the evidence considered.
- A list of the participants involved in the review.
- An explanation of any recommendations on the matter reviewed or scrutinised.

The lead authority will be responsible for the drafting of a report for consideration by the joint committee.

6.9.2 Reports shall be agreed by the majority of members of a joint committee and submitted to the relevant NHS commissioning body/health service provider.

6.9.3 Where a member of a joint health scrutiny committee does not agree with the content of the committee's report, they may produce a report

setting out their findings and recommendations which will be attached as an appendix to the joint health scrutiny committee's main report.

7. DISCRETIONARY HEALTH SCRUTINY

- 7.1 More generally, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the 2013 Health Scrutiny Regulations provide for local authority health scrutiny arrangements to scrutinise the planning, provision and operation of health services.
- 7.2 In this respect, two or more local authorities may appoint a joint committee for the purposes of scrutinising the planning, provision and operation of health services which impact on a wider footprint than that of an individual authority's area.
- 7.3 Any such committee will have the power to:
- require relevant NHS commissioning bodies and health service providers to provide information to and attend before meetings of the committee to answer questions.
 - make reports and recommendations to relevant NHS commissioning bodies/local health providers.
 - require relevant NHS commissioning bodies/local health service providers to respond within a fixed timescale to reports or recommendations.
- 7.4 Ordinarily, a discretionary joint committee would not have the ability to request the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care "call-in" a service change proposal. However, please note section 8.3 below.
- 7.5 In establishing a joint committee for the purposes of discretionary joint scrutiny activity, the constituent local authorities should determine the committee's role and remit. This should include consideration as to whether the committee operates as a standing arrangement for the purposes of considering all of the planning, provision and operation of health services within a particular area or whether it is being established for the purposes of considering the operation of one particular health service with a view to making recommendations for its improvement. In the case of the latter, the committee must disband once its specific scrutiny activity is complete.
- 7.6 In administering any such committee, the proposed approach identified in sections 6.3 – 6.9 of this protocol should be followed, as appropriate.

8. SCRUTINY OF CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE INTERGRATED CARE SYSTEM

- 8.1 Further to this protocol and in particular section 7 above, the nine local authorities have agreed to establish a discretionary standing joint health scrutiny committee in response to the establishment of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System.
- 8.2 A separate Joint Scrutiny Committee Arrangements document has been produced in line with the provisions of this protocol to outline how the standing joint committee will operate.
- 8.3 In summary, the “Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny Committee” has the following responsibilities:
- To scrutinise the work of the Integrated Care System in relation to any matter regarding the planning, provision and operation of the health service at footprint level only; and
 - To consider the merits of any service change proposals that have been deemed to be a substantial variation in services by all nine authorities.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside have adopted this protocol as a means of governing the operation of joint health scrutiny arrangements both mandatory and discretionary. The protocol is intended to support effective consultation with NHS commissioning bodies or local health service providers on any proposal for a substantial development of or variation in health services. The protocol also supports the establishment of a joint health overview and scrutiny committee where discretionary health scrutiny activity is deemed appropriate.
- 9.2 The protocol will be reviewed regularly, and at least on an annual basis to ensure that it complies with all current legislation and any guidance published by the Department of Health and Social Care.