

COMMITTEE: AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE**DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2008****SUBJECT: TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES IN LUTON****REPORT BY: HEAD OF AUDIT****CONTACT OFFICER: DAVID GOWING****TEL: 01582 546077****IMPLICATIONS:****LEGAL** ✓**COMMUNITY** ☐**SAFETY****EQUALITIES** ☐**ENVIRONMENT** ☐**FINANCIAL** ✓**RISKS** ☐**STAFFING** ☐**OTHER****WARDS AFFECTED: NONE**

PURPOSE

- 1 To provide the Audit and Governance Committee with details of a recent audit undertaken by the External Auditor

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 The Committee is asked to note the report.

BACKGROUND

- 3 This review, as part of the 2007/8 audit plan, assesses the extent to which public sector organisations in Luton understand their local health inequalities; direct resources appropriately to address the gap; have arrangements in place to challenge and review their actions; and know how well they are doing.

The review was designed to examine six main issues:

- How partners set and deliver strategic and operational objectives in relation to health inequalities;
- How partners work together to tackle health inequalities;

- How partners use information and intelligence to drive decisions;
- How partners have engaged their workforce in the health inequalities agenda;
- How partners manage performance; and
- How partners are approaching the issue of corporate social responsibility.

The outcome of the review is a joint performance report across local government and the health economy in Luton. It identifies risk areas; makes high level recommendations; and shares notable practice to help improvement planning.

This report has been prepared for the Members of Luton Borough Council and the Directors of Luton Primary Care Trust

- 4** Health and wellbeing is a key national focus for improvement. Narrowing the health gap between the most disadvantaged groups and the rest of the country is a top government priority. This is reflected in a single nationwide public services agreement (psa) target to reduce inequalities in health outcomes by 10% by 2010, as measured by infant mortality and life expectancy at birth. Reducing health inequalities is also one of the four top-level priorities in the 2007/08 NHS operating framework. Tackling health inequalities is a new formal requirement on both local authorities and primary care trusts (PCTs).

The department of health's 'commissioning framework for health and wellbeing' sets out a reform agenda for the health service. It emphasises the need for joint strategic needs assessment by councils, PCTs and other relevant partners; and the effective sharing and use of information.

REPORT

- 5** The last two years have seen steady improvements to the health of the people of Luton, and measurable reductions in the health inequalities experienced in different parts of the borough. Although some weaknesses have been identified in the ways that partners have worked together, it should be noted that outcomes for local people are generally moving in the right direction. Our main conclusions are summarised below:-

- There is a lack of clarity around the overall strategic approach to tackling health inequalities, with no overall joint strategy in place. Whilst there is a consistent focus on inequalities, strategic documents from partner organisations are not always clearly linked. Partners are already working to address this.

- The right partners are involved in tackling health inequalities in Luton and there is a clear, shared commitment to this. Voluntary sector partners have been engaged effectively to help access specific groups within the community. However, partners have not always worked effectively together to combine influence and add value. Work to redevelop the sustainable community strategy and to negotiate the second round of local area agreements is addressing this area. Some strong and effective partnerships exist at an operational level with an explicit remit to tackle health inequalities. The overview aspect of the council's health overview and scrutiny board is not fully effective.
- Effective use is made of data drawn from a wide range of local and national sources to drive strategic planning and commissioning of local health services. The capacity of partner organisations to turn data into useful intelligence is improving and is linked to an ongoing joint strategic needs assessment.
- More can be done to ensure that the whole workforces of partner organisations are fully engaged in addressing health inequalities, especially where workers have direct access to disadvantaged individuals and communities within the borough.
- Partnership performance management arrangements have historically been weak, but there is significant current investment in improving these and arrangements are strengthening, focused by the increased discipline imposed by LAA2.
- Public services in Luton have a significant and direct impact on local environmental, economic and social conditions and employ a significant proportion of the local population. As such, partners have a responsibility to use their corporate powers and resources in a way that maximises the potential health benefits of their influence in the borough. Partners are aware of the need to develop approaches to corporate social responsibility, and are starting to address this area.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6 There are no risk implications to this report other than those set out in the body of the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7 There are no financial implications to this report other than those set out in the body of the report. This has been agreed with the Head of Corporate Finance on 5 September 2008.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8 There are no direct legal implications to this report save for those set out in the body of the report. This has been agreed with Richard Stevens, Head of Legal Services on 5 September 2008.

APPENDIX

- 9 Attached as Appendix A is the full report “Tackling Health Inequalities in Luton”

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.