

Appendix 1. Report to the meeting of West Hill Parish Council on 2nd October 2018 DCC Cllr Claire Wright

Community hospitals update

Interestingly, I have a motion before DCC full council (submitted in July) on Thursday (4 October), which asks the council to urge the NHS to retain community hospital buildings and oppose any plans to declare any such buildings surplus to requirements. This is very valid as the local NHS prepares its Estates Strategy.

So far two committees of Devon County Council have rejected my motion. The conservatives on the health and adult care scrutiny committee voted my proposal down in June and the all conservative cabinet simply noted that 'it was a matter for the NHS' at its 12 September meeting. For a full report see - http://www.claire-wright.org/index.php/post/devon_county_council_cabinet_rejects_my_motion_to_back_retention_of_communi

On 4 October, all 60 councillors will get to debate the issue and vote. I am hoping that common sense will prevail. We need our community hospital buildings to provide local health services.

Environmental watchdog

Also on 4 October I have a motion on a post Brexit environmental watchdog. The government's current plans are for a rather thin arrangement which will go nowhere near providing the same level of accountability as currently provided by EU legislation. The new proposals have been criticised by top lawyers as being 'toothless.' They will let off the hook big business and government from prosecutions. This could lead to our land, sea and air becoming polluted with little or no recourse to resolve the issue.

My motion actually backs up the response from DCC officers to the official government consultation. I am however, disappointed to report that the councillors on the all conservative cabinet simply resolved to 'support the principle' of my motion and take no further action. This is a massive lost opportunity and in my view lets down Devon residents, who should have these sorts of assurances.

We are one of the most nature depleted countries in the world according to the most recent State of Nature report, and should have absolutely watertight safeguards to protect our wildlife and environment, as a result.

Again, there will be a full debate and vote on 4 October.

http://www.claire-wright.org/index.php/post/devon_county_councils_cabinet_recommends_no_action_on_my_post_brexit_enviro

Local NHS cuts – my push for more transparency rejected

At the last health and adult care scrutiny committee meeting last week (20 September) my proposal for a review into what cuts the local NHS is making failed as no councillor would second my proposal.

I have been asking for over half a year for information on what cuts the local NHS is making as part of the government's plan to reduce the NHS £30bn shortfall by 2020. In Devon, this has translated into around £500m by 2020 and in Devon the NHS is working to achieve this. At the June meeting (after I had asked for more information on the cuts as the local NHS reported its confidence to get back to zero by 2020) the health and adult care scrutiny committee received a paper, including a side of A4 of bullet points on what was being cut. It was extremely vague and did not provide anything like the level of detail required for a proper scrutiny session.

I asked a further paper for our September meeting. This arrived by email two days before the meeting. The finance section was four pages of bullet points. Slightly less vague but fell very short of what I would have expected for councillors to carry out a proper scrutiny of what services are being cut in order to meet the government's requirements for financial balance in 2020.

I said I thought that there was some obfuscation going on. I proposed a spotlight review into the cuts as a result. I emphasised that there was little more important at the current time and residents were being kept in the dark. Unfortunately, the chair, Sara Randall Johnson tried to take it to a group that meets in private. I objected to this and argued that both the NHS and Devon County Council were both publicly accountable organisations and this issue should be debated and reported to the committee that meets in the public domain. The health and adult care scrutiny committee is the right place for it. The chair continued to object to what I was saying. In the end, frustrated at her attitude I simply asked for a seconder so there could be a vote. I am very disappointed to report that no committee member seconded my proposal. I remain baffled and angry about this. This programme of cuts, known as the sustainability and transformation plan essentially underpins all the work the NHS is doing for the two years and I believe that people across the county have been let down by our committee, which failed to see the importance of our committee having access to this information.

A spotlight review for carers

I have been doggedly pursuing this issue in my role as a health scrutiny committee member, since the beginning of the year when I asked for more information on how carers were faring and discovered a report of a focus group that showed many carers are experiencing real emotional, physical and financial hardship. Some saying that they feel their lives are over and are in poor health as a result of the stresses of caring for a partner or a friend.

I proposed a spotlight review at the June meeting but this was delayed at this point and instead the committee was invited to attend a meeting at the Westbank League of Friends, which runs the contract for Devon County Council carers support. This was useful in determining how the Carers Act of 2014 (among other things) has made it harder for carers to access financial support and respite care.

Two carers addressed the health scrutiny committee last Thursday (20 September) and told their stories. Both became emotional. I proposed a spotlight review to look into how carers are being supported. It was seconded by the chair, Sara Randall Johnson. The committee voted unanimously in favour. I am really really pleased to have this agreed and I hope the review will make some useful recommendations that will help carers. They do an amazing job.

Community hospital (care at home) review (the system which has replaced community hospital beds)

This spotlight review, which I am chairing, will report back to the November health and adult care committee. I am anticipating some useful recommendations. We have certainly found some worrying issues, as outlined by witnesses who took part in the review.

2nd October 2018

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