



My Ref:
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Date

Dear Sir or Madam,

NHS White Paper, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the North East Regional Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, in order to submit the Committee's response to the NHS White Paper consultation.

The full response is attached at Appendix 1. The Committee would also like to emphasise the following points in relation to health scrutiny:

- The Committee welcomes the enhanced role for local government within local health services, and the creation of Health and Wellbeing Boards. However, Members have serious reservations about the proposed transfer of scrutiny powers in relation to major service re-design from health scrutiny committees to the new Boards. The Boards will have influence over the type and shape of local services and for the Board to also have the ability to then scrutinise service changes can only lead to blurred accountability.

- Furthermore, health scrutiny is effective as it makes use of the ability of elected Members to reflect the views and concerns of the people they represent. Health and Wellbeing Boards will need to be accountable for their actions and although the proposed membership of Health and Wellbeing Boards includes elected Members, they will be in the minority compared to the other proposed members.
- It is important to recognise the full scope of the work that is being undertaken by health scrutiny committees. The introduction of Health Scrutiny has enabled non-executive Councillors to undertake a wide range of pro-active investigations into issues of local concern and/or interest. Many of these reviews have identified recommendations aimed at reducing health inequalities. The Committee see it as important that the ability to carry out this work, and to require responses from NHS bodies in relation to associated reports and recommendations, is maintained.
- There should be a clear separation between those who are commissioning and influencing health services, and those whose duty it is to hold them to account. The Committee believes that the retention of the full range of scrutiny powers by an independent health scrutiny forum made up of elected, non-executive Members represents the best way forward in terms of ensuring that local accountability is maintained.

The Committee would like to thank the Department of Health for the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained with the White Paper and associated documents.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Ann Cains

Chair

North East Regional Joint Health Scrutiny Committee