

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday, 14 March 2018

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DEWHIRST
Re: Political Awareness for Deaf Young People in the Media

As a Governor of the Royal Academy for Deaf Education I have been surprised and disappointed in the lack of political awareness by the young people studying at the Academy. When questioned the young people say that politicians' words are never signed in the media so they do not hear any political messages.

Can the Leader tell me what can be done to help extend political awareness for young Deaf people in Devon?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

The County Council, along with all public bodies, are required under the Equality Act 2010 to make all reasonable adjustments to help make our services and other public information as accessible as possible to everyone.

For example, the council website is AA compliant (the national accessibility standard) and, if we receive a request for our published information to be provided in an alternative format, we have a legal duty to provide this. This includes the potential to produce signed material for Deaf people. We occasionally make information 'readily available' in BSL (British Sign Language) and this has already been used, in video form, on the website and in social media to support key targeted public health and social care campaigns. Signing has also been used as a part of specific engagement events. The County Council has also recently introduced a sign language video relay interpreting service, so that Deaf people can telephone us via an online sign language interpreter.

In terms of the democratic process, all agendas and minutes are readily available online in written form via the ModernGov system. Key cabinet, scrutiny, full council and other meetings are webcast and we have investigated the potential for these to be automatically transcribed as a part of this service. However, the technology currently available has proved highly inaccurate, so would add very little value. A live signer could be considered a regular part of all public meetings along with other more traditional tools such as an audio loop system (which is available in the DAW room and Council Chamber) for those with hearing difficulties in attendance but more consideration is needed to research how valuable this would actually be to Deaf people or indeed whether the cost would represent a reasonable adjustment.

On the specific question of having politician's words signed directly in the media, this is often not in the gift of this authority. All key media statements from elected members acting in their representative capacity are produced in written form and published online via the council's NewsCentre as well as being promoted via social media. Occasionally, these are also produced in video or audio form and we can further consider the greater use of signage in this context.

In terms of media interviews, it is interesting to note that even the might of the BBC and other commercial media organisations do not regularly make use of signers in local reporting or even when covering major national political dialogue. Nor do our own political parties have an exemplary track record in making specific adjustments to consciously reach out to Deaf people in our national or local publicity. It is therefore perhaps unreasonable to expect this authority to make adjustments that others cannot or do not.

However, the Council acknowledges, welcomes and supports the broad ambition as expressed in the question. As such, our Equalities Officer and Head of Communications offer to meet with Cllr Dewhurst and representatives of Devon's Deaf community, particularly young people, to develop an action plan to help examine and extend the opportunity for greater political awareness, involvement and participation.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE

Re: Devon County Council as part of an Accountable Care Organisation

Following the debate about Accountable Care Organisations (ACO) at the last County Council meeting I would be grateful if Councillor Leadbetter will clarify?

a) That Devon County Council will be or will not be part of an ACO for Devon from 1st April 2018?

b) If the answer is will be, can he explain why Health Scrutiny have not had the opportunity to scrutinise this significant change to Healthcare provision in the County?

Further can he say when and who has been involved in preparations for a Devon ACO?

c) Additionally, can he say where and how a democratic decision to involve DCC in a Devon ACO was taken?

d) If DCC is not as yet part of a Devon ACO can Councillor Leadbetter please say if this will happen in due course and what are the mechanics for this and whether there will be adequate opportunity for Health Scrutiny to look at and comment on the proposals in advance?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

a) There are no proposals for Accountable Care Organisation(s) in Devon.

b) See answer (a) above

c) See answer (a) above

d) The arrangements for an Integrated Care System in Devon will continue to mature and when substantive proposals requiring Cabinet decision are made they will be articulated in a report to Cabinet. Proposals regarding the further involvement of Health and Adult Care Scrutiny are made in Section 5.1 of the report 'Health and Care Integration in Devon' from the Chief Executive (ACH/18/81) to Cabinet.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE

Re: Lawfulness of Accountable Care Organisations

Does Councillor Leadbetter agree with me that Sarah Wollaston MP should be congratulated on her intervention with the Health Secretary to ensure his proposals for ACOs could be considered by the Health Select Committee?

Further does he also welcome the actions of Stephen Hawking and leading Doctors to take Jeremy Hunt to court over "back door privatisation" of the NHS?

For information a full judicial review has been granted to determine the lawfulness of the Secretary of State's proposals to introduce ACOs. In these circumstances would Councillor Leadbetter agree any proposals for a Devon ACO should be put on hold?

ACOs are alleged to be able to decide what care is free and what care can be charged for. ACOs will be paid more if they save money and will be subject to commercial rules allowing them to claim corporate confidentiality. ACOs would not be recognised in a act of Parliament and as such would not have any legal basis.

Would Councillor Leadbetter agree that on such a basis the original objectives for the NHS would be destroyed?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The Health Select Committee is undertaking an inquiry into Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs), Accountable Care Systems (ACSs) and Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) within its ongoing scrutiny of the arrangements proposed under the Five Year Forward View for the NHS, a strategy for the NHS in England published in October 2014 and updated by subsequent documents. This inquiry builds on the inquiry into Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) initiated earlier in 2017 but cut short by the General Election of June 2017.

The judicial review initiated by Professor Hawking and others is specific to proposals for Accountable Care Organisation contracts articulated in the document 'Integrating care: contracting for accountable models NHS England' published in August 2017. This draft guidance is already subject to a consultation exercise. Any proposals to apply it in practice in those parts of the country planning to enter into this kind of contractual arrangement, including regarding the potential for involvement of for-profit organisations in such arrangements, have been delayed until the outcome of that consultation exercise is clear.

The proposals in Devon articulated in the report to Cabinet do not concern the establishment of Accountable Care Organisation(s) in Devon nor the use of the contractual model currently being consulted upon and subject to judicial review.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE Re: Partnership Agreements and Democratic Authority

Councillor Leadbetter will doubtless recall all party support for my motion not to support the NHS STP for Devon at the December 2016 County Council meeting? I believe he was one of the supporters.

In subsequent conversations with the Chief Executive (CEX) I was given to understand that the STP for Devon was overtaken by a Partnership Agreement which the CEX signed on behalf of DCC.

Can Councillor Leadbetter please explain what this Partnership Agreement means and whether this has been made available to Health Scrutiny for consideration?

Does this Partnership Agreement have any relationship to possible proposals to create a Devon ACO and where and when was the Partnership Agreement given Democratic Authority?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The motion carried at the Full Council meeting of December 2016 concerned the Success Regime regarding NEW Devon CCG, not the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership for wider Devon.

Devon County Council has participated in its Sustainability and Transformation Partnership in common with all other top-tier local authorities as required by our duty to cooperate in joint planning. Devon County Council is also a signatory to the Better Care Fund plan.

Devon County Council is a signatory to the Better Care Fund plan which refers to the Council and local NHS bodies as partners. The Better Care Fund is a government policy to facilitate integration between NHS organisations and local authorities with local governance by the Health and Wellbeing Board which includes member representation.

The Better Care Fund plan sets out arrangements for working together to deliver improved outcomes for people, around a mandatory pooled budget which can only be spent with such agreement. It does not concern the establishment of Accountable Care Organisation(s) in Devon and is compatible with the proposed Integrated Care System arrangements.