



## **News Release**

### **“Cavalier” Government**

Councillors have condemned the Government's "cavalier" attitude towards public and patient inspection of health services.

The criticism - by East Sussex County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) - follows proposals which would see public and patient representatives lose their right to inspect hospitals and other NHS institutions.

In a paper entitled 'A Stronger Local Voice', which was issued in July, the Department of Health intends to replace patient and public involvement (PPI) forums with local involvement networks, known as LINKs.

PPI forums include individuals from a variety of backgrounds who monitor and review NHS performance locally. They work alongside HOSC in East Sussex but have powers to visit and inspect NHS premises and make recommendations for improvements. LINKs, however, will not have this right.

Speaking after a meeting of HOSC, chairman Cllr Bob Lacey said: "We are deeply concerned about what looks like a cavalier attempt by the Department of Health to try and undermine public accountability in the health service."

"PPI forums in East Sussex are run by committed and enthusiastic people who have built up considerable knowledge and expertise and have undertaken some excellent work. The right to inspect NHS premises is key to their effectiveness; this is now all under threat. LINKs will have no similar inspection powers and this we believe is a fundamental weakness of the proposals."

PPI forums have only been in place for three years having replaced Community Health Councils after they were abolished in England in 2003. At the time the transition period between the two groups was criticised.

The LINK will cover the whole of East Sussex, rather than a specific organisations, and will include representatives from user groups, local voluntary and community sector organisations and interested individuals.

The Committee recorded its desire to protect the visiting and investigation rights of PPI forums and resolved to promote this practice in the new LINKs.



The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is managed by East Sussex County Council and works in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council and Wealden District Council.

Ends

NOTE TO EDITORS:

**HOSC:**

East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) was set up, in October 2003, by East Sussex County Council in response to Government aims to get people more involved in health decision-making and improving local health services. The committee includes members from every district and borough in the county - Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden – and representatives from the voluntary sector.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee last met on September 22.

For more information on HOSC see the website at [www.eastsussexhealth.org](http://www.eastsussexhealth.org)

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