

**County Councillor Questions and Statements for the Cabinet
27 June 2018**

Councillor Statement

**Statement from Clare Sutton to the Cabinet Member for Community and Resources in
relation to the Quarterly Asset Management Report**

I applaud the Cabinet for working to expedite the transfer of leases to the relevant bodies, and appreciate that in some cases this has been quite a difficult process. However, as a Trustee of STEPS in Weymouth, which lies within my division, I would like to make a couple of additional points:

1. Unlike some of the other groups, the STEPS Charity has been fully functional (including in terms of our legal representation) throughout the period and our Trustees signed the final version of the Lease over two months ago. In our case, the delays to completion of the transfer have been mostly due to the fact that there are four bodies involved: the STEPS Charity, DCC, W&PBC (from whom DCC lease the land) and the DfE, because of the 'Myplace' capital grant.

From the outset, Trustees have been acutely aware of potential complexities in relation to the Myplace agreement with DfE and we have worked actively with DCC and our solicitor to resolve these. Indeed, we were assured by our solicitor that these had been resolved around 8 months ago. However, we now understand that the DfE (who hold a covenant on the title of the property) need some assurances relating to the original conditions of the grant before they grant permission for the transfer. In order to assist with that, the Charity's Principal Youth Worker has now written a summary document outlining how the Club will continue to meet the original aims/conditions of the Myplace agreement which the locum DCC solicitor who is handling the STEPS lease can send to DfE.

2. In light of the fact that STEPS the Charity is in robust health and, alongside numerous partners, is delivering an excellent range of services to local young people, and the only outstanding matter is the permission from DfE, I hope the Cabinet can reassure us that if the timetable for transferring the lease needs to be extended due to circumstances entirely outwith our control DCC will accommodate that.

Councillor Question

Question from Nick Ireland to the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills in relation to Weymouth Schools

Question

Following the recent Ofsted inspections of Budmouth College and All Saints school from which both emerged as being rated 'inadequate' and in 'special measures', combined with the current rating of Atlantic Academy also as 'inadequate' and Wey Valley, after six years as an academy, still 'requiring improvement', will the Cabinet detail the specific measures that Dorset County Council, as the Local Education Authority, is taking at each school to address the drastic fall in standards and also what steps it is taking to rectify the borough wide failings in the funding for and provision of secondary school level education

Answer

Dorset County Council is extremely disappointed by the Ofsted results for schools in the Weymouth and Portland area. However, when considering the measures taken to address the background to this, it is important to recognise that Local Authorities (LA) no longer run schools. The title Local Education Authority was removed by the Children Act, 2004 and LAs now have substantially reduced powers and duties; namely:

- Planning School Places (but not establishing schools).
- Ensuring sufficiency.
- Ensuring all learners have a place.
- Ensuring that the needs of vulnerable learners are met.
- Residual powers relating to school standards.

2. Schools rather than the LA are responsible for their own performance and standards. The LA now has specific duties to children and families rather than schools themselves. Schools and academies are responsible for their performance and standards to Ofsted and in the first instance they are the responsibility of the headteacher and governors. Academies are completely autonomous, meaning that they have no obligation to seek LA support. At the same time funding for schools is determined by the Education & Skills Funding Agency; not the LA, which has no power or influence over how much Dorset schools receive.

3. As an LA the Council does, however, remain absolutely committed to improving standards in schools. Dorset has a small school improvement team which is tasked with supporting, advising and challenging maintained schools with the aim of improving standards. Many of the school improvement services have to be purchased by schools and academies and the size of the school improvement team is dependent upon the scale of buy back. Beyond this the LA has the statutory power to:

- Require underperforming schools to work with another school, college or other named partner for the purpose of school improvement.
- Appoint additional governors.
- Apply to the Secretary of State to replace the entire governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB).

- Take back the schools delegated budget.

4. As a very limited resource in relation to Dorset's 174 schools the school improvement team target maintained schools where there is the greatest need. Since academies have greater autonomy they must elect to buy in this support and the LA is not the only supplier available. In addition, the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and takes action in relation to underperforming schools.

5. As highlighted in the question, a series of recent Ofsted visits have drawn attention to concerns about a number of secondary schools in the Weymouth & Portland area (the primary schools are doing relatively well). Dorset County Council's Officers have supported the schools in the following ways:

- Helping to secure £60K worth of additional funding for Budmouth School specifically targeted at school improvement.
- Weekly support and challenge visits to the maintained schools to agree improvements (and support effective action planning).
- Commissioning and funding school-to-school and external support (e.g. support and challenge to improve leadership of All Saints provided/brokered by Queen Elizabeth's School, Wimborne).
- Working in partnership with the RSC.
- Appointing additional governors (at Budmouth).
- Organising robust monitoring and evaluation meetings with key stakeholders to review progress against school priorities and agree future actions.

6. In summary, Dorset County Council can advise and cajole but it cannot force schools or governors to act and there are no additional funding or resources available. The Council has, however, deployed its limited resources to best effect and has not been afraid recently to use its statutory powers where required. Whilst there is still much work to do the Council will ensure that governance at Budmouth and All Saints is appropriate to the task of turning these schools around. This may require robust action in conjunction with the RSC.