

## Children's Services Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,  
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 20 January 2015.

Present:

Michael Bevan (Chairman)  
Pauline Batstone (Vice-Chairman)  
Steve Butler, Barrie Cooper, Beryl Ezzard, Susan Jefferies, Mike Lovell,  
Margaret Phipps, Daryl Turner and Mrs Mary Kahn.

Toni Coombs (Cabinet Member for Education and Communications), Robert Gould (Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources) and Rebecca Knox (Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families) attended under Standing Order 54(1).

### Officers attending:

Sara Tough (Director for Children's Services), Vanessa Glenn (Head of Family Support), Phil Minns (Head of Learning and Inclusion), Siân Dobson (Children's Services Group Finance Manager) and Rebecca Guest (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

### The following officers attended for certain items, as appropriate:

John Alexander (Policy and Performance Manager), and Roger Bushell (Joint SEND Development Lead).

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Children's Services Overview Committee to be held on **17 March 2015**.)

### **Apologies for Absence**

1. Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dan Brember, Mike Byatt and Peter Hall; and Mrs Joy Tubbs and Dr Michael Turnbull.

### **Code of Conduct**

2. There were no declarations by members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

### **Minutes**

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2014 were confirmed and signed.

### **Matters Arising**

#### Minute 88.1 – Appointments

4. The Committee was advised of the on going recruitment exercise for additional Parent Governor representation on the Committee and that the deadline for nominations was 2 February 2015.

#### Minute 92.3 – Corporate Parenting Board

5. The Chairman confirmed that the Pledge was included on the Committee's work programme for 17 March 2015.

#### Minute 93.4 – Petition to Change School Admission Arrangements

6. The Committee noted that the Schools Adjudicator had amended the admission arrangements for Christchurch Junior School.

Minute 101.4 – Children and Young People's Mental Health Services

7. The Chairman encouraged councillors to attend a Health and Wellbeing workshop on 26 January 2015 to consider mental health throughout life.

**Corporate Parenting Board**

8.1 The Committee received the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board meetings held on 24 September 2014 and 21 November 2014.

8.2 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families, as the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board advised that West End House had recently received an outstanding rating following an Ofsted inspection. The good work of the staff was highlighted in addition to the drive and approach taken by the inspectors. The Director echoed these statements and added that two inspections had taken place since the last Committee meeting. Both care homes (The Cherries and West End House) had performed well with all but one area within each inspection rated as outstanding. One inspection was now outstanding, at Mulberry House.

**Noted****Public Participation**Public Speaking

9.1 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

9.2 There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

Petition

10. There were no petitions received in accordance with the County Council's petition scheme at this meeting.

**Noted****Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15, including Forward Together Update**

11.1 The Chairman, in agreement with all parties present, brought the report forward on the agenda for discussion. The Committee, with support of Cabinet members present, asked that future agendas be amended to reflect this change. The Democratic Services Officer advised this request would be taken forward, but asked the Committee to note the need for consistency with other overview and scrutiny committees.

11.2 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer which set out the budget monitoring information as at the end of November 2014. The information showed an overall forecast overspend of £4.3m.

11.3 The Children's Services Group Finance Manager explained that the Children's Services forecast overspend was £1,517k and £426k on transport of children with statements or attending a learning centre. This was largely due to the increased number of children in care which had caused an overspend of £1.7m in the Family Support budget and £0.2m in the Learning and Inclusion Budget. The Children's Services overspend on service budgets would be offset by the forecast underspend on other central budgets of £1,465k and Cabinet had also approved a budget increases to fund necessary services, resulting in a forecast overspend of £4.3m.

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11.4 The Committee raised concerns over the continued overspend in relation to the transport of children with statements or attending a learning centre. The Children's Services Group Finance Manager advised that this had been caused due to a range of complex issues including the raised threshold in service supply which had reduced the number of available suppliers, the reduction of the number of children involved, the increase in the distances travelled by each and general inflation costs. This made it very difficult to give a cost per unit, however officers were carrying out a holistic transport review to reduce the overspend.

11.5 The Director gave additional information in regards to the holistic review and advised that this was being carried out in liaison with other Directorates including Adults and Environment. The County Council's aim was to reach solutions for all vulnerable people and their needs had to be understood as a whole to achieve this.

### **Resolved**

12.1 That the forecast budget position for the Children's Services Directorate and the actions that have been and would be taken to reduce the overspend position before the end of the financial year, be noted.

12.2 That future reports on this subject be located at the start of each agenda.

### **Reason for decisions**

13. Close monitoring of the budget position was an essential requirement to ensure that money and resources were used efficiently and effectively.

## **Revenue Budget 2015/16**

14.1 In accordance with the previous decision, this agenda item was brought forward for discussion, and would be presented at the beginning of agendas for future meetings.

14.2 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Financial Officer and Director for Children's Services that gave a summary of the key issues within the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and the impact of the settlement on the budget strategy for Dorset County Council. The report also outlined the implications of the budget strategy on the Children's Services Directorate for consideration and comment.

14.3 In regards to the Budget Strategy for Children's Services Directorate, additional funding of £561.5k had been provided as part of the budget strategy to contribute to the costs of the increased number of children in care. The Directorate had plans in place to deliver £400k of savings in 2015/16. These comprised £225k from the previous restructure, £75k from business support and £100k increase in income targets for traded services. These were all anticipated to be achieved.

14.4 A further £500k of savings had since been identified for 2015/16, and in December 2014 Cabinet agreed to temporarily fund some extra social work capacity (8 social workers for 2 years) and £150k for learning and development of practice managers in the first year. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was published on the 17 December 2014 indicating just over a 1% increase in school funding. The total allocated was £254m, however a number of deductions and additional funding had been allocated against this.

14.5 The Group Finance Manager responded to general questions and the Head of Learning and Inclusion confirmed the work being undertaken to develop trading and increase surpluses. The Committee was advised that detail of the budget was presented to, and approved by, the Schools Forum on Friday 16 January 2015.

14.6 The Committee considered alternative and/or additional measures that could be taken to reduce the remaining budget gap.

### **Noted**

#### **Forward Together for Children – Update**

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided a further update on the progress with the Forward Together Programme which was being implemented within the Children's Services Directorate. The report included progress since the previous update to the Committee on 14 October 2014.

15.2 The Director highlighted the change of name for the report, which served to give a clearer understanding of the Directorate's aim. She confirmed the proposal for the Programme to adopt a 'whole system' approach, in consultation with all stakeholders to deliver the wider children's services system in Dorset. The timetable of events to achieve this was reviewed and the Director advised of the need to reconvene the Executive Advisory Panel on Universal Services to help steer the work going forward, as well as holding regular councillor seminars to explore findings and key issues.

15.3 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families asked that the EAP be placed on the Committee's agenda on 17 March 2015, and that membership be inclusive to councillors outside the overview committee. She raised the need for councillors to be involved at the earliest opportunity, which was welcomed by the Committee. The Director confirmed engagement would take place at the appropriate time.

15.4 The Chairman took the opportunity to encourage members to propose agenda items for future consideration, and advised that he would be meeting with the Director to set the next agenda on 2 February 2015. The Director confirmed that her officers were always happy to talk to councillors and she advised that the Directorate now had a dedicated communications officer, Melissa Craven.

### **Resolved**

16.1 That the direction of travel of work being undertaken towards the Children's Services Forward Together Programme be supported.

16.2 That the Executive Advisory Panel on Universal Services be reconvened and a report be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 17 March 2015.

### **Reason for decisions**

17. The Programme was critical to Children's Services' ability to meet the challenge of sustaining high quality services for children and families whilst at the same time delivering those services within a reduced financial envelope.

#### **Special Educational Needs Provision Review**

18.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services that provided an update on the implementation of proposals within the review of specialist provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The report also highlighted some key challenges and potential risks.

18.2 The Joint SEND Development Lead highlighted the key developments within the report and the future priorities for the spring and summer terms. In addition, he advised that officers were developing a self assessment form for schools to use to determine their readiness for the new provision for complex communication difficulties.

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18.3 The Committee was asked to note that a new contract for the provision of speech and language therapy, until the end of March 2016, had very recently been signed off. The new contract recognised the need to respond flexibly to meet the needs of provision developed as a result of the review. There was now an opportunity to work with commissioners to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place for a range of health related services from April 2016 onwards.

18.4 Officers confirmed the review was part of a broader strategy aimed to better equip schools and reduce the need for long term services. Early identification and intervention was key to this and all stakeholders would play different but vital roles to intervene earlier, reducing later costs.

18.5 In response to a question, the Head of Learning and Inclusion confirmed the complexity of the funding per pupil figure, as reported. Officers would work closely with schools to ensure the design would be fit for purpose and members noted that many larger schools had developed schemes to support children with special needs and these would be shared with other schools.

### **Resolved**

19. That the Overview Committee continue to monitor the process in implementing the proposals.

### **Reasons for decision**

20.1 This was a complex agenda with many stakeholders, representing a range of interests and needs, and involved change across more than one system.

20.2 The implementation process must align with and complement work to implement the far reaching SEND reforms set out in the Children and Families Act which came into force on 1 September 2014.

### **The Dorset Learning Partnership - Update**

21.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services that provided an update on the developments of the Dorset Learning Partnership since September 2014.

21.2 The Head of Learning and Inclusion highlighted that the governance of the Partnership had been strengthened through the introduction of a Partnership Board with clear membership and a new chair (a head teacher) had also been appointed. In order to facilitate a change in the Partnership's focus to school improvement activity, its terms of reference had been reviewed and the roles of all groups represented at the Board were clarified. The Group had also been renamed to the Dorset School Improvement Partnership to better identify with its redefined role.

21.3 The Board's focus was to achieve its aims through true partnership working, with all members being treated equally. Accordingly, there was no distinction made between academies and local authority schools. Currently work with private schools was limited, however the Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families highlighted that safeguarding children was a common theme and relationships were being forged with everyone. This was reiterated by the Director who advised that it would be short-sighted to restrict dialogue to local authority schools and she was positive all schools were engaged in the ambitions of the Partnership Board.

### **Noted**

**Audit of Capacity/Funding to Deal with Increasing Numbers of Children Coming into Care - Update**

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services that provided an update on the progress made against the action plan, reported to the Committee at its last meeting, and highlighted areas for further development following consideration by senior management.

22.2 The Head of Family Support summarised the progress made to date and highlighted that work had commenced on many areas of concern, before completion of the audit and accompanying action plan. She advised that three key areas had been identified and set out within the covering report. A summary of these were given.

22.3 In response to a question, the Head of Family Support advised that each child's needs would be continually discussed to ascertain how best to meet their needs. Line managers and senior officers would be involved as individual social workers could not authorise placements.

22.4 The Head of Family Support confirmed that an external provider was available to offer independent support to families who had a child placed in care, but due to the sensitive circumstances, this was usually requested after some time had passed.

22.5 The Committee expressed the wish for councillors to see regular updates on the progress made against the action plan and it was agreed that a report would be presented to future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Director also confirmed that she had monthly sight of the progress made and this would also be included within forward together updates.

**Resolved**

23.1 That the implementation of the action plan, with a key focus on enhancing prevention services and joint development of a care and support model, be supported.

23.2 The development of a commissioning led programme to strategically focus on the provision for children in care, be supported.

23.3 That regular updates on the progress made against the action plan be presented to future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

**Reason for decisions**

24. To act on the findings contained within the South West Audit Partnership report.

**Corporate Performance Monitoring Report Second Quarter 2014-15  
(1 July – 30 September 2014)**

25.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and Director for Children's Services that presented the results of the monitoring of the Corporate Balanced Scorecard for the second quarter of 2014-15. As well as the Corporate Plan, the Balanced Scorecard was the principal means by which the County Council monitored high priority performance measures on budget management, customer service and staff development and wellbeing.

25.2 The Policy and Performance Manager highlighted the improvements and challenges within the report and drew attention to the marginally widened gap in achievement levels at key stage 2 between special educational needs (SEN) and non-SEN pupils. He confirmed the budget pressures due to the rising number of children in care and the continuing overspend on transport for pupils with special educational needs.

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25.3 GCSE results for Dorset were ahead of the national figure and the Head of Learning and Inclusion emphasised the improvements made over the last three years in this area.

25.4 The Committee was asked to note that in comparison with the rest of the Country, Dorset had very few Job Seekers Allowance claimants, but within that, youth unemployment was very high. In addition, the percentage of young people in jobs without training, was well above the national average. These were crucial issues and needed to be treated as a priority. Members discussed this, and the impact of this long-term for the County, at length. Other barriers such as transport were also raised. The Head of Learning and Inclusion confirmed that officers were encouraging employers to offer better opportunities, however this was challenging due to the nature of employment available, e.g. a lot of employment opportunities were based around tourism and therefore seasonal, part-time and unskilled.

25.5 In response to the Committee's concerns, the Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families suggested that the issue be brought to the attention of the Director for Environment and the Economy. This was welcomed by the Committee.

### **Recommended**

26.1 That the corporate performance monitoring report for the second quarter of 2014-15 be noted;

26.2 That the Committee's concerns regarding the level of youth unemployment and young people in jobs without training (and the barriers they faced) within the county be highlighted to the Director for Environment and the Economy.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

27. To ensure councillors were aware of the County Council's performance against the 2014-2015 Corporate Plan and Corporate Balanced Scorecard.

### **Work Programme**

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which detailed the updated work programme for 2015 and they were asked to highlight any requested additional items to the Chairman.

28.2 Additional item to be added to the work programme as set out in the minute 17.2.

### **Noted**

### **Schedule of Councillor Seminars and Events 2015**

29.1 The Committee received a schedule of forthcoming seminars and events arranged for councillors in 2015.

29.2 The Chairman highlighted the Dementia Friends seminar to be held on 24 February 2015.

29.3 The Cabinet Member for Education and Communications advised that at the meeting of the Environment Overview Committee, on 19 January 2015, an all councillor seminar on Holistic Transport was agreed.

### **Noted**

### **Councillor Briefings**

30. No subjects for future member briefings were identified.

### **Outside Bodies**

31.1 The Cabinet Member for Education and Communications advised that the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education had met to discuss and prioritise Locally Co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme applications for building works in advance of notification of the settlement from Government. The final settlement remained outstanding.

31.2 The Schools' Forum had agreed next year's budget and early indications showed a 1% increase, which was welcomed. A number of schools remained in deficit and while work was underway to repay these, balances were covering the deficits. In the interim, the F40 group was in discussions with the Department of Education to receive more funding.

31.3 The Forum also advised that the number of premises for early years provision rated as good or outstanding, had increased by 4%. She referred to recent press releases regarding the closure of nursery schools following Ofsted's low assessment, and the Head of Learning and Inclusion clarified that these inspections were carried out more frequently than those of schools. Ofsted and officers also worked with establishments to try and raise their standards before their licenses were removed.

31.4 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families advised that the Children's Trust Board had focused its attention on giving detailed input to the Forward Together Plan. While minutes were not in the public domain, she would encourage the publication of a newsletter for all councillors to view.

31.5 The Dorset Safeguarding Children's Board would be considering the issue of child sexual exploitation at a future meeting. This would be a key focus for the Board and extra training was being made available for school governors. The Director suggested that a seminar be held to alert councillors to the problem and the Cabinet Member asked that the Committee's support be given to enable the County Council to request that Barnardo's release a copy of their film on child sexual exploitation, to accompany the seminar.

31.6 A councillor highlighted the need for the safeguarding of children to be considered at all times, for example, during consideration of licensing applications and play area creation.

### **Resolved**

32.1 That an all member seminar on child sexual exploitation be arranged.

32.2 That support for the County Council to request that Barnardo's release a copy of their film on child sexual exploitation, to accompany the seminar, be given.

### **Questions from County Councillors**

33. No questions were asked by councillors under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting Duration: 10.00am – 11.50am