

People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Annual Report 2017-18

Most people are *healthy* and make good lifestyle choices.

But... unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone. For example, there are many people who suffer from poor mental health, and there are parts of the county where life expectancy is low.

If we can help and encourage people to adopt healthy lifestyles and lead active lives, they will be more likely to avoid preventable illnesses as they grow older, and life expectancy will improve.

The strong link between a healthy environment and physical and mental health and wellbeing is well known. We will work hard to ensure our natural assets are well managed, accessible and promoted, and that waste and pollution are minimised and controlled.

Dorset County Council Corporate Plan 2017-19

Confident people living in strong, supportive and vibrant communities are vital to *independent* living.

But... we need to help more of our young people be confident and successful learners into adulthood –helping them to remain independent and happy.

We also have a high number of older people who are isolated and lonely. By coordinating the efforts of social care, health and other agencies, we are striving to help people remain happily independent in their own homes and able to make informed choices about their support needs.

This requires us to identify and work with vulnerable families at an early stage, to help them stay close and look after each other.

Dorset County Council Corporate Plan 2017-19

**Working Together
for a Strong and Successful Dorset**



Dorset County Council

Foreword

Once again: It has been a privilege to chair this very busy committee, working with proactive, enthusiastic members, from all parties, supported by very knowledgeable officers who not only share but instil their passion for “good” scrutiny.

This is the second year that the committee structures agreed by council have been based on the new outcome focused forward plan, aligned with Dorset County Council’s Corporate Plan. Consequently, the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s remit is to oversee what the council does to help people in Dorset be as **healthy** and **independent** as possible.

It still feels like a fresh way of focusing scrutiny, to use “Outcomes Based Accountability”, “a key methodology designed to get from ‘talk to action’ quickly, as the methodology actively encourages appropriate, timely, evidence-based action to deliver improvement.” This way of working really does work and being part of something that actually delivers in a positive way for the people of Dorset is a pleasure.

Covering the many different issues scrutinised over the past year, members, through “Task and Finish Groups”, “Workshops” and “Inquiry Days” were able to dig deep into issues, causes and possible solutions and look at the best ways forward. The issues chosen for the committee to scrutinise came from a Work Programme populated by members themselves and the experiences of their communities. The findings coming out of the committee not only impact the lives of our constituents in Dorset but are a catalyst for work on a wider, even national, forum. One such piece of work was a workshop held on Mental Health involving all stakeholders as well as service users themselves. The workshop focused not only on access to services and service provision, but scrutinised wider factors, such as housing, benefits, commissioning and the need for safe places. The report, derived from the workshop and further scrutiny, was sent to the appropriate organisations with an invitation for them to consider the recommendations arising from the day. We will follow up later to establish what actions have been taken.

It has been a great team effort and I would like to thank all those members of the Council’s Scrutiny Committees for their hard work. A special “Thank You” to Cllr. Mary Penfold, Vice Chairman for the P&COSC in standing in for me whilst I was incapacitated. Now let’s get back to work and take “scrutiny” to new heights.



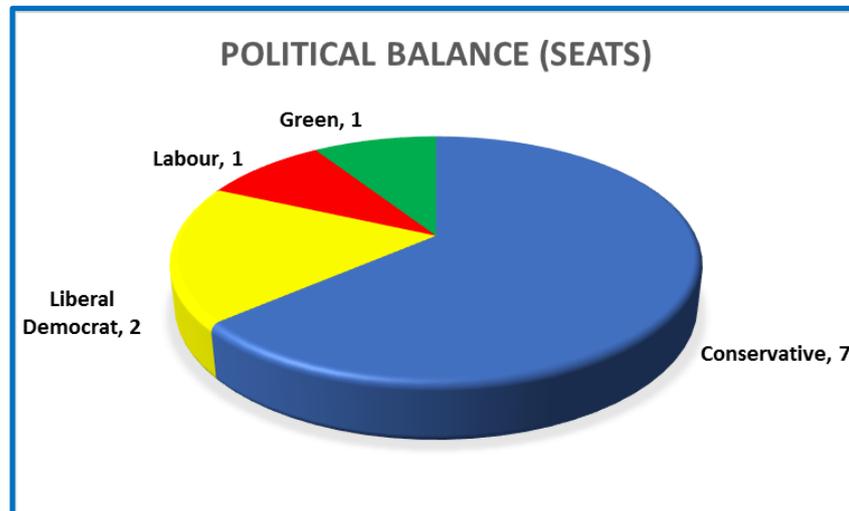
David Walsh

Chairman, People and Communities Overview
and Scrutiny Committee

Committee Membership 2017-18

David Walsh (Chairman)

Shane Bartlett
 Derek Beer
 Graham Carr-Jones
 Katharine Garcia
 Mary Penfold
 Byron Quayle
 Mark Roberts
 Clare Sutton
 William Trite
 Kate Wheller



Background: Outcomes Focused Scrutiny

Dorset County Council's Corporate Plan is based on the outcomes that we are seeking for Dorset's people – that they are **safe, healthy and independent**, and that they benefit from a **prosperous** economy. Underpinning this is the firm commitment to work as One Council, alongside our partners and communities, to ensure the best possible outcomes for Dorset's people, even as the available resources diminish.

Historically, scrutiny at the County Council reflected directorate structures and was based around children's services, adult services and environment services. While this worked to an extent, its focus on services rather than outcomes meant no committee had oversight of thematic, cross-cutting issues, like independence. Senior leaders – both councillors and officers – were keen to break out of this model and focus on strategic outcomes, with greater involvement from local residents and partners.

To take this forward, in February 2016 the council agreed that the future committee structure should be based on the new outcome focused Corporate Plan. Instead of focusing on a single directorate, as the old Overview Committees had done, three new Overview and Scrutiny Committees would each champion one or two corporate outcomes.

Three new committees were formed:

- **Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to keep people in Dorset **safe***
- **People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to help people in Dorset be as **healthy and independent** as possible*
- **Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to make Dorset's economy more **prosperous**.*



Our councillors also separated the 'audit' and 'scrutiny' functions, so the former Audit and Scrutiny Committee became the Audit and Governance Committee. This committee's primary purpose is to assess the governance, financial, performance, internal control and risk information from right across the authority. An Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, comprising the Chairmen of the four new committees, was created to bring oversight and coordination to the whole process.

The rationale for our overview and scrutiny arrangements is that councillors want to ensure that our committee system reinforces the corporate plan and uses the outcomes framework to ensure we work as one organisation to improve the lives of residents and communities (and also that they have a say in assessing how well this is done). Changing the focus of each committee has meant meetings, debates, recommendations and decisions are aligned with the corporate plan, helping councillors and officers alike focus on what makes a real difference.

The changes also place councillors in the position of proactively leading investigations on the issues they want to consider, instead of our more traditional approach of officers taking the lead and deciding which reports are required.

This Annual Report summarises the work of the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee during its second year – the committee's purpose, the work in which it has been directly involved, and the contributions it has made towards improving outcomes.

Purpose of committee

Delivering good outcomes for the residents and communities we serve through a constructive, proactive and objective approach to the consideration, scrutiny and review of policies, strategies, financial and performance issues.

Overview

- To review and develop policy at the Committee's own initiative or at the request of the Cabinet or the Public Health Joint Board and make recommendations to the Cabinet, Joint Committee or the Full Council.
- To oversee major consultations and make recommendations to the Cabinet, Joint Committee or the Full Council.
- To give advice on any matters as requested by the Cabinet or the Joint Committee.

Scrutiny

- To hold the Executive to account through a process that seeks and considers necessary explanations, information and evidence to ensure good outcomes for our residents and communities.
- Through proactive scrutiny inquiry work, to contribute to improving the lives of our residents and communities, through an active contribution to the Council's improvement agenda.
- To scrutinise key areas of strategic and operational activity and, where necessary, make recommendations to the Full Council, Cabinet or Joint Committee in respect of:
 - i) Matters which affect the Council's area or its residents;
 - ii) Performance of services in accordance with the targets in the Corporate Plan or other approved service plans;



- iii) To provide a clear focus on finding efficiency savings in accordance with requirements in the Council's financial strategy;
- iv) To monitor expenditure against available budgets and, where necessary, make recommendations to the Cabinet or the Joint Committee;
- v) To consider proposed budget plans, service plans and any other major planning or strategic statements and to make recommendations to the Cabinet or the Joint Committee.

Key Lines of Enquiry

In selecting, refining and focusing areas for possible scrutiny, members frequently work with lead officers on a scoping exercise, looking at progress towards key outcomes within their committee's remit and asking:

- i) If we do nothing, where is the trend heading? is this OK?
- ii) What's helping and hindering the trend?
- iii) Are services making a difference?
- iv) Are they providing Value for Money?
- v) What additional information / research do we need?
- vi) Who are the key partners we need to be working with (including local residents)?
- vii) What could work to turn the trend in the right direction?
- viii) What is the Council's and Members role and specific contribution?

Key Outcomes

What have we achieved and influenced?

To give a flavour of the types of issues and the work that comes before the Committee for its consideration, the following provides examples of focussed and targeted assurance and scrutiny work which has been undertaken by the Committee during the year.

Monitoring Corporate Plan outcomes

At each of its four meetings in 2017-18, the committee received a report on progress with the "People in Dorset are Healthy" and the "People in Dorset are Independent" outcomes in the corporate plan. The reports focused on the six big "Healthy" issues and the six big "Independent" issues identified in the corporate plan, as follows:

Healthy

- Inequality in life expectancy between different population groups
- Rate of hospital admissions for alcohol-related conditions
- Child and adult excess weight
- Prevalence of mental health conditions
- Under 75 mortality rate from cardiovascular diseases
- Levels of physical activity in adults

Independent

- The percentage of children "ready to start school" by being at the expected level at Early Years Foundation Stage
- The percentage of children with good attendance at school
- School achievement at age 11
- Percentage of 16 -18-year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- The rate of delayed transfers from hospital care
- Proportion of clients given self-directed support and/ or direct payments

The monitoring reports also include performance measures by which the County Council can measure the contribution and impact of its own services and activities on the Corporate Plan's outcomes. As can be seen below, the evidence from these reports helped shape, but did not dictate, the agendas for the committee throughout the year.

Local Government Reform

In June, Rebecca Knox, the Leader of the County Council, presented a report on proposals for the Council to be part of two joint committees, with other Dorset councils, to develop future governance arrangements and service provision across the County and support the development of the Future Dorset proposal for Local Government Reorganisation. She asked the Committee to consider an amendment to the report that the County Council's seats on the Joint Committee should be



limited to six, irrespective of the number of councils that might join later. The committee unanimously made this recommendation to the County Council.

Educational Attainment in Dorset

Jay Mercer, The Assistant Director for Prevention and Partnerships in Children's Services, attended the committee's first meeting of the year to present a report on the self-assessment of Dorset's Education Performance in 2016. He discussed the outcomes for the different key stage areas, highlighting areas of disappointing performance and the apparent contradiction between poor performance and good Ofsted inspection results.

Members discussed the report in detail, expressing concern and disappointment about the current situation. They questioned whether poor attainment is linked to social and economic disadvantage and asked how schools that are not performing well are being supported and whether successful schools can be used to help under-performers. They also discussed current funding arrangements and asked whether the Council is putting pressure on Central Government regarding funding allocations.

Later in the year, Key Stage 4 results for the 2016-17 academic year were released, and Dorset's performance had declined further. In March 2018 the Interim Director for Children's Services, Nick Jarman, came to the committee to discuss ways in which the County Council could influence improvements. His report drew attention to areas where performance is below the minimum acceptable standards. Dorset Middle Schools are making poor progress, and there is particular concern about Weymouth and Portland secondary schools, where low educational attainment contributes to Weymouth and Portland being ranked as the third worst area of the country for the prospects of disadvantaged young people.

The committee questioned why Dorset schools have performed well in the past, but are now outperformed by schools in other areas. The Director explained that resources have been extensively devolved to schools over a period of years, making them virtually autonomous and greatly reducing the influence of local authorities. Any efforts to improve performance need to be either at the strategic level where the local authority continues to have some legal duties, or in partnership and co-operation with schools.

In conclusion, the committee asked officers to contact similar local authorities to establish how they manage school performance and relationships with schools and report their findings to the meeting in October 2018.

The Relationship Between the Council, Schools and Academies

Following the discussion on attainment, the Director presented ideas about the future relationship between the Council and schools of all types, as more become academies. He discussed the need to engage with schools to understand their needs and preferences. The report had been previously considered by the Cabinet.

He explained that the County Council's priority will be to focus on advice, improvement, shared responsibility for the quality of education, and opportunities for schools to influence the areas with which the Council should be involved. There will be a consultation exercise with the Dorset Secondary Heads Association, and individually with primary schools. Members agreed that in order to preserve rural schools, they should be encouraged to develop into larger academies or federated schools to make the best use of resources and take advantage of economies of scale.

Members expressed their disappointment that the Committee had been asked to scrutinise the report after the Cabinet had already reached a decision. The Cabinet's decision was read out and members



commented that they hoped scrutiny would be carried out before decisions were made in future. However, members supported the Cabinet's decision.

Brexit

In October, the Committee considered a report by Matthew Piles, the Service Director for the Economy, which set out how Brexit might affect the Council and proposed how the Council should organise its resources for planning, preparing for and shaping future policy. The report was also considered by the Economic Growth Committee. It sought members' views on preparations for Brexit in order to minimise and mitigate risk and maximise any opportunities for the Council to progress corporate aims. It suggested that a Brexit Advisory Group should be established to progress this, involving members.

The Economy and Enterprise Team Leader then outlined scoping work that had been undertaken, and emphasised the need to focus effort on opportunities to influence outcomes from Dorset's perspective. He also informed the Committee that the Council is represented on a national working group looking at the implications of Brexit.

The Committee discussed the report, and in particular the implications for non-UK citizens working in the UK, the possibility of more of the future workforce coming from commonwealth countries, the need for a consistent approach to be taken across the whole County, and, as the whole country has the same issues and needs the same answers, a plea for no duplication of effort. Members supported the establishment of a Brexit Advisory Group with member representation. In order to take the matter forward the Committee referred it to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Race and Hate Crime

Race and Hate Crime was identified by the Committee as an area for review during 2016-17, following some evidence of an increase in incidents after the Brexit referendum. Some members were aware of incidents within their electoral divisions, and others were not. The committee discussed whether the issue needed a review, and decided that in light of incidents nationally, some evidence of the under-reporting of incidents, and to better understand the local situation, the review should go ahead and other members should be invited to take part and share their experience. A half day review was proposed.

Later in the year, however, following the completion of a scoping document for the review, it emerged that more recent evidence showed a downward trend in race and hate crime. Members decided that, on balance, time and resources would not be best used on a review of the issue. Should incidents increase again then this decision will be reconsidered. Reassurance was also drawn from the number of other agencies monitoring the issue.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion was identified by the committee as an area of focus during 2016-17 and a scoping report had since been produced which set out a possible review methodology. Links between social isolation, loneliness, deprivation, and life expectancy were highlighted, and the impact of cuts to rural transport services and the importance of community transport schemes were discussed. It was suggested that the review should focus first on Beaminster and Blandford to try to understand the issues, and then use the lessons learned from this to consider a more generalised approach. The review would consider social inclusion among all age groups, with the Young Researchers helping to collect and understand the views and experiences of young people.



A group was set up to take the review forwards, led by the Chairman of the Committee, and a schedule of meetings arranged with an agreement that the group would report its findings to the June 2018 meeting.



Concept picture of modular housing on DCC land at the proposed Wareham Care Village

Meanwhile in January 2018, the Outcomes Monitoring Report noted an 18% fall in the proportion of social care clients reporting sufficient social contact between 2015-16 and 2016-17. In this context, the committee welcomed the Cabinet's recent decision to agree to 'care villages' being developed in Wimborne and Bridport, to provide housing and other services for social care clients and key workers. Their proximity to these thriving communities should help lessen isolation for this client group. Subject to planning permission, the Cabinet also agreed a programme of modular housing on the same sites which would provide quicker, temporary accommodation which could be

relocated once the care villages were built. With regard to whether this concept would be extended to other areas, it was confirmed that a detailed needs assessment was being carried out across all districts and would be completed by the end of April 2018. Following this, consideration will be given to how these needs could best be met.

Community Transport

Community Transport was identified as an important area of focus during 2016-17, not least because of its significance to social isolation. A scoping report was presented to the Committee in June.

Many local members described their experience of the problems faced by communities because of cuts to rural bus services, and they supported community transport as a means of addressing these. Officers are working with communities, local Transport Action Groups, operators and the Clinical Commissioning Group to explore options to look at alternative provision. However, communities themselves need to come forward with ideas for solutions for their areas. One councillor observed that there are many effective transport groups around the County, and he felt that there is a need to promote the schemes that are available and encourage new ones to develop.

The need to support local towns and their businesses was emphasised, and the important role played by community transport in Bridport, Weymouth and Portland. Attention was drawn to changes to school arrangements on Portland from September 2017, with no corresponding transport plan in place to support this.

Review of Integrated Transport



The review of integrated transport took place on 26 February 2018, involving delegates from local authorities, transport providers and the health service.

Afterwards, Matthew Piles, the Service Director for the Economy and the Natural and Built Environment, commented that a lot of the frustrations in the community were related to ability to access health services. He suggested that communication needs to be improved to promote community transport schemes and help people to understand that solutions can be found by communities working together. A full report from the day is due to be presented to the Committee in July 2018.

The committee supported the idea of an inquiry day on the issue, but by October it became clear that other committees, including Economic Growth, were also interested in scrutinising community transport and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board was coordinating these exercises to avoid duplication.

In the end, an inquiry day was held on the broader theme of integrated transport, at the Dorford Centre, in February 2018. A full report from the day is due to be presented to the Committee in July 2018.

Home to School Transport Assistance Eligibility Policy

The Committee considered a report by Nick Jarman, the Interim Director for Children's Services, on proposed changes to this policy. The changes are aimed at making entitlement easier for families to understand. Members were reminded that a series of price increases for Post 16 transport were agreed two years previously. Families in receipt of working families tax credit or free school meals remain eligible for a 50% discount. According to the report, the increases had been reviewed by Dorset Travel for consistency, were competitive with other councils, and were moving the council closer to full cost recovery.

While members supported the need for policies to be clear and understandable, there was nevertheless discomfort about the proposed fare increases. These included concerns about travel distances for children on Portland, and that the lack of assistance may mean that more families will choose to home educate, causing further disadvantage. Members were clear about the need for a good communications plan to explain the reasons behind the increases, and called for greater awareness that price increases are likely to result in more parents driving their children to school, thus increasing congestion and impacting on cost recovery, and that a decision should be delayed pending further information being sought, given the concerns expressed.

It was suggested by some that any increase should not be more than inflation, but others pointed out that if this was the case, a similar decision about increases would be needed in subsequent years. Members also commented that it would have been helpful if the report had included how figures were calculated by Dorset Travel, how many pupils will be affected and what safeguards exist for those most at risk.

The Interim Director for Children's Services referred to the Children's Services budget and the need to address a £7m funding gap with a significant part being attributed to home to school transport. He said that if the increases were not agreed, any shortfall would have a serious impact on the Council's budget and savings would still have to be found from elsewhere, resulting in equally difficult decisions needing to be made in other areas. On that basis, the committee agreed to support the policy, although not unanimously.

Mental Health

Increased awareness of the growing prevalence of mental health problems led the committee to prioritise the issue for scrutiny during 2016-17. A workshop was organised for December 2017 involving the Clinical Commissioning Group, key professional staff and service users, and taking into account a recent review of Children and Adults Mental Health Services by the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee as well as members' views about children's mental health, access to services and service provision. Other prominent issues at the workshop were housing and benefits, commissioning, and the need for safe spaces.

A full report on the workshop was presented to the March 2018 committee, which included a summary of the key issues identified and priorities for action. The day was considered to have been



very useful in identifying issues with mental health provision in Dorset. The Council was already acting on the findings within its own areas of responsibility, but some actions required the activity of other agencies. Also, the importance of managing the boundary between the work of this review and that of the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee, to minimise duplication, was emphasised. It was noted that a joint commissioning group was being set up with the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group which will include operational and commissioning teams. This will use 'one care pathways' in order to build capacity and identify short and long-term accommodation and more community support.

It was agreed that the report should be sent to appropriate organisations with an invitation for them to consider the recommendations arising from the day. This would be followed up later to establish what actions they had taken.

Quality and Cost of Care

In February 2017 the committee organised a multi-agency inquiry day into the quality and cost of care. This investigated the key issues of staff recruitment and retention, training, key worker accommodation, staff benefits, respite care and joint working with other authorities.

In June, the committee discussed progress since then. A working group has been established by the committee to look at workforce issues, and it added a review of the Better Care Fund to its work programme. An invitation was issued to members from a care provider to visit a care home and many were keen to do this.

The committee discussed recent press articles indicating that several small care providers are going out of business, impacting upon the County Council's provision of care. There is a national shortage of nursing and skilled staff and this means that some smaller providers cannot sustain their businesses. Locally work is going on across organisations to try to help providers to recruit and keep staff. It is likely that more nursing care will be needed in future and this needs to be considered when planning future capacity.

Workforce Capacity

After the Inquiry Day into the Cost and Quality of Care, officers were asked to focus on the recruitment and retention of the adults' and children's social care workforce, linked to the financial efficiency of the County Council. This should include looking at the possible impact of Brexit, external initiatives, multi-agency action, and at evidence of "what works" to make improvements.

In March 2018 the committee were provided with information about the size and structure of the workforce in Dorset, staff turnover, demographics, pay, qualifications, training and skills and current initiatives to improve recruitment and retention.

The importance was emphasised of encouraging care providers to move away from their focus on hourly pay and casual contracts, towards more long-term investment and sustainability. The Council's commissioners have been asked to establish how many workers are needed within their segment of the market to try to meet this demand. The possibility is also being explored of setting up micro-providers in communities to meet people's care needs, an initiative with which Somerset County Council has achieved some success.

Delayed Transfers of Care

The committee looked at Delayed Transfers of Care during 2016-17, following which members asked to be given an update in March 2018 looking at performance over the winter months so they could decide whether any further scrutiny was needed.



By their January meeting it was already clear that significant pressures were being experienced in local acute and community hospitals. Up to the beginning of the week of the meeting, Adult Social Care was keeping within its targets, but the NHS was struggling. Cases of flu were increasing and this was starting to affect the system.

In March the committee received the report and presentation from officers on latest performance. The Council has a crucial role to play in ensuring people leave hospital when they are ready to leave and, although there have been pressures on acute hospitals across the country, Dorset has performed comparatively well - historically, Dorset has been one of the ten worst performing local authorities, but over the last year it has improved to 126th out of 151.

Members were provided with an update on the position regarding discharges for people with mental health issues, and work to address the availability of accommodation, develop provider relationships, increase workforce capacity, and use micro-businesses to respond to local need. The Better Care Fund has provided some money for discharge planning in community hospitals, and for support and reablement services. However, Better Care Funding is at risk if performance does not meet targets.

Members raised several issues: can the number of 'delay days' be translated into the number of people affected? Can the reasons for delayed discharges be analysed? What has been the impact of the closure of community hospitals and the loss of beds? Are people leaving hospital provided with essentials at home? Are intermediate placements available? Has best practice from other local authorities been analysed?

In response, members were told that the Council now receives daily information about the discharge of hospital patients; front line staff are motivated to get people out of hospital when they are medically fit to leave; staff are aware of the pressure caused by delays; care package shortages and the availability of residential care are the main reasons for delays; all hospitals have follow up schemes to support those being discharged. Attention was drawn to the fact that Dorset's improvement is due to people returning home, whereas other authorities' good performance is down to the use of residential care. If Dorset is to make further significant progress, this will be achieved by better partnership working and the use of new or alternative types of service. Members asked for some case studies to be provided for the July meeting.

Budgets for Adult and Community and Children's Services

In January, the committee received presentations from Helen Coombes, the Transformation Programme Lead for the Adult and Community Forward Together Programme, and from Nick Jarman, the Interim Director for Children's Services, on the 2018-19 budgets for their directorates, so that members could provide feedback on the proposals to the Cabinet.

The Children's Services presentation compared the cost of service delivery (£66m) to the available funding (£58m) and outlined proposals for saving £6.3m, leaving £1.8m to meet. The director explained how more is being done to recruit foster carers, to help reduce the number of children in care. There has been a review of payment rates, bringing them into line with other authorities, and an incentive scheme initiated to encourage foster carers to look after harder to place children. For Adult and Community Services, savings of £9.3m are needed during 2018-19 and the Committee was given an explanation of how this will be achieved. Attention was drawn to the increasing number of older people living longer in Dorset and the increasing complexity of their needs. More safeguarding work is impacting on the number of assessments and reviews undertaken, and financial pressures are caused by people not planning for their future at an early enough stage. Early advice is needed to help people make better financial decisions about their future.



One member drew attention to the reluctance of some older people to apply for attendance allowance, and asked whether steps are being taken to address this. Ms. Coombes responded that more is being invested in the welfare service, and to district councils' revenue and benefits services, to inform people about the allowance and of the need to plan for the future.

The work Tricuro is doing in Weymouth to make better use of its centres was showcased, as was the rising cost of the Council's transport to get people to day centres and the reduction in income this causes. Members were reminded that since 2007 the policy has been for people to have individual personal budgets so that they have choice and control over how the money allocated to them can be best used for their benefit. The Council is trying to increase awareness of this through use of social media, financial advisers and banks.

Alcohol related harm

The outcomes monitoring report in October drew attention to the rising number of alcohol related admissions to hospital, particularly among women. Members asked for a briefing paper on the issue of alcohol related harm, which they received at the following meeting in January.

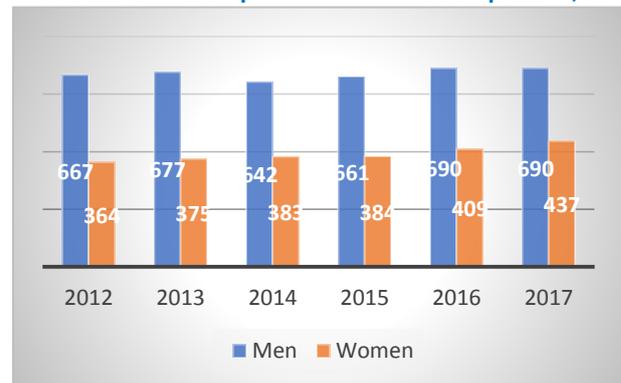
The briefing paper emphasised how alcohol related harm impacts on all four of the County Council's outcomes, and for various reasons affects more deprived communities more than more affluent ones. It carries implications for child and adult safety, crime, health and wellbeing, housing and homelessness, and workforce absenteeism.

Alcohol misuse has a significant impact on County Council services, including Public Health and child and adult safeguarding, as well as the services of many other agencies, including district and borough councils, the health service, the blue light services and businesses. The issue is an important part of the Sustainability and Transformation Plan, scrutinised through Dorset's Health and Wellbeing Board. Any further efforts to tackle the problem will therefore need to involve a joint approach by the agencies involved.

Other related issues were discussed by the committee. For example, the outcomes monitoring report showed that only 25% of clients engaging with the Public Health commissioned Live Well Dorset service were from the most deprived quartile of the population. The report also showed that the prevalence of mental health conditions, often related causally or consequentially to alcohol misuse, is increasing, while funds for mental health services have been cut by 50%.

Helen Coombes added that many people using alcohol or substances were not looking for medical intervention. The discussion therefore broadened to the wider issues of deprivation, the lack of social mobility in parts of the county, and homelessness. The committee returned to the issue of alcohol

Alcohol Related Hospital Admissions: rate per 100,000



Rates of hospital admissions related to alcohol are considerably higher than 30-40 years ago, resulting from higher levels of alcohol consumption and improved data recording. Admission rates remain much higher for men than women, but the rate among women appears to be rising while the rate amongst men is largely static. This relates to the fact that average rates of drinking have risen among women faster than men in the past 30 years. Admission rates are highest among those aged 40-64 for both men and women, whereas in their parents' generation, men were more likely to drink heavily – hence the sharper rise amongst women. One third of Dorset's population falls within this age range – slightly higher than in England and Wales as a whole. Younger people are less likely to be heavy drinkers, and Dorset has a smaller percentage of younger people than the general population.



related harm in March, as new data in the Outcomes Monitoring Report showed a further rise in the number of women admitted to hospital for alcohol related conditions. This was alongside a reported dip in the number of successful completions of alcohol treatment services.

Nicky Cleave, the Assistant Director for Public Health Dorset, attended the March committee to discuss alcohol treatment services and Livewell Dorset. She pointed out that while the rate of successful completions for alcohol treatment services in Dorset - 45.9% - had declined recently, it remains higher than the national figure of 39.5%. A new integrated all age service has been commissioned in the last six months and it was hoped that the performance would improve as a result.

She acknowledged that the reduction in the number of clients engaging with Livewell Dorset from the most deprived quartile was disappointing. This is a difficult group to engage, and it is hoped that the number of contacts will double across Dorset next year with the service being brought back in-house from April 2018. A new on-line digital offer is also being developed to provide more flexible ways for people to engage.

Homelessness

In October, David Walsh, suggested that with homelessness on the increase, the committee should instigate a review of the evidence, to help them gain a better understanding of the situation in Dorset, and how the County Council works with district and borough councils and other partners. They also wanted to consider the impact that the 2018 Homelessness Reduction Act will have. Clare Sutton agreed to be the lead member.

In January, the committee further noted that there are overlapping elements between a number of the topics upon which the committee, and the other overview and scrutiny committees, have been focussing; alcohol and substance misuse, mental health, poor educational attainment, social isolation and a lack of social mobility are arguably all connected by the common factors of deprivation and social inequality.

Homelessness relates to all four of the outcomes in the County Council's Corporate Plan. In particular, rough sleepers do not live in a safe environment; they are many times more likely than other people to be the victims of violence and abuse. Street homelessness also has implications for anti-social behaviour, and contributes towards an increased fear of crime in the areas it affects. Homeless people, particularly rough sleepers, often struggle to lead healthy lives; drug and alcohol abuse, poor mental and physical health, infections, hepatitis and tuberculosis are all more common with homeless people, and rough sleepers have an average age at death of just 43. Interventions to alleviate homelessness need to prioritise helping people to have greater control and choice over their lives and become, and remain, independent. Poverty and deprivation lead to homelessness, and street homelessness contributes to a sense that some areas, such as Weymouth, are becoming less safe, more run down and less prosperous, which affects businesses and visitor numbers.

All of these issues will be considered in detail in a review of the evidence to be presented by officers to the committee at its July 2018 meeting.



Conclusion - Looking to the Future

The thematic approach to scrutiny adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees has identified and sought to better understand a range of key issues facing Dorset and its communities, and constructively challenged public sector approaches to making a positive difference with the resources that are available.

Through 2018-19 the committees will work to refine the conclusions that arise from this work, so that they can contribute to the base of evidence available to the various committees of the new Dorset Council. Armed with the best information available, the new unitary council can enable better, more joined-up approaches to the issues with which this committee and others have wrestled, such as mental and physical health, social isolation, homelessness and deprivation.