

DORSET COUNCIL - AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 2019

Present: Cllrs Matthew Hall (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Simon Christopher, Susan Cocking, David Gray, Brian Heatley, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Mike Parkes, Bill Pipe and Bill Trite

Apologies: None

Also present: Cllr Pete Barrow, Cllr Piers Brown, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Laura Miller and Cllr Andrew Parry

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Paul Ackrill (Service Manager for Finance), Mark Blackman (Corporate Director - Education and Learning), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Avril Harrison (Transformation Programme Manager (Adult Services)), Rebecca Kirk (Corporate Director of Housing, Dorset Council), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), Jim McManus (Corporate Director - Finance and Commercial), Sarah Parker (Executive Director of People - Children) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

29. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

31. Public Participation

There were no representations from parish or town councils or from members of the public.

32. Urgent items

The Chairman reported that following his attendance at a Local Government Association (LGA) course on scrutiny, he had spoken to the Leader about arranging a meeting of group leaders, scrutiny chairmen and the Executive Leadership Team to discuss scrutiny moving forward.

33. People Services - Children Transformation Programme Update

The Executive Director for People – Children, gave a presentation to the committee which provided an overview of the directorate's transformation programme 'Blueprint for Change'. The presentation covered the council's vision for children, design principles for the whole council and for Children's Services, the programme timeline, an overview of the major changes proposed and the localities for the service. The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help hoped that councillors recognised the steps taken in this area including recruitment of officers at a senior level and work undertaken around the corporate parenting board. The Chairman noted that it was important for the committee to receive the presentation in order to have an understanding of the background when they were considering financial information in this area.

The committee considered the issues arising from the presentation and during discussion the following points were raised:

- A point was raised about the importance to a child or young person of having the continuity of contact with one social worker. In response it was noted that it may not always be possible to avoid the need to change social workers however, consideration was being given to the systems available to and support provided to social workers in order to retain officers in this area
- In response to a point raised about the transition of young people into adult services, it was recognised that this needed to be a respectful process which considered the important role of parents
- A point was made that there was no reference to access to doctors and dentists, as it was thought that a large proportion of looked after children were not registered with either. In response, the Executive Director referred to work undertaken through the Corporate Parenting Board, working with partners, to aim to ensure that the majority of children were registered
- It was noted that there were two locality bases in the North area as this was the largest area in terms of population and this also took into account school clusters and links to other service areas. This also took into account the amount of travel undertaken by social workers
- In response to a question, the Executive Director provided information on the time availability of youth workers, urgent care teams and social workers
- A discussion was held with regard to the support being provided to staff going through the transformation programme and information was provided on upskilling opportunities, looking at best practice, training for staff and the opportunity that this provided to listen to staff
- The transformation programme aimed to provide £1m of savings through the delivery of services more efficiently
- The presentation made reference to 'needs not thresholds' which related to the need to have a conversation when a referral was first made in order to understand what a child's needs were and who would be best to meet them. There was a need for ownership from the person making the referral

- The presentation provided an overview of the work to be undertaken to get the foundations in place and noted that further work would then have to be done. This was not just about the role of Children's Services, but how the directorate communicated with and worked with many other council services, for example, parks or apprenticeships
- Reference was made to the need to look at an earlier intervention model in terms of success rates and the need to reduce costs
- In response to a comment made about the vision statement, it was explained that children, young people and staff had had an input
- A comment was made as to how Sherborne fitted into the service localities? In response it was reported that work had been undertaken to identify where partners were located and where current asset resources were. It was a priority to get the locality teams together so that work could continue, however it was recognised that further work would need to be done when the asset plan was considered
- The position with staff morale in the service was raised and it was noted that staff were being supported through the process by the leadership. In general good feedback was being received from staff
- It was noted that staff had a voice in the process and they were able to feed in their comments. This was important as they had good knowledge of the children within the service
- The programme included a particular focus on the adolescent service, where a real impact could be made. In addition to supporting all children up until the age of 18, the service had a responsibility for children with special educational needs and looked after children up until they were 25
- The Chairman asked that when the consultation period was completed, for the committee to see the plan for the service moving forward. The Chairman also requested that user numbers for Children's Services be included in the quarterly report produced for Cabinet.

34. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

The Service Manager for Finance provided an overview of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which included what it was, how it was controlled, the role of the council and the current position for the council. As part of the presentation, the Service Manager for Finance noted that the slide titled 'DSG – what do we do?' should include a note to say that the council was able to put a school in special measures.

Councillors discussed the issues arising from the presentation and comments were made as follows:

- Reference was made to the way that the DSG was distributed to the council in four blocks, with the funding then being passed onto schools. It was noted that the Government was setting the schools budget below the schools minimum standards

- In response to a question it was noted that the Government had announced increases to the blocks which represented of the order of £200 per child per primary school, based on a particular formula, including deprivation factors. Some background to the High Needs Block deficit was provided and reference was made to a current Department for Education consultation around a proposal for deficits to sit within the school rather than with the council. The outcome of this consultation was awaited
- Councillors discussed the budget issues in this area and the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help provided background to previous financial forecasting that had been undertaken and noted that the forecasting mechanism needed to be looked at again. There was recognition that every child had a right to mainstream education although some would require special education provision in an appropriate setting
- It was noted that this was a demand driven process
- The challenge in setting the budget in this area was that notification of DSG was usually received late in the process
- It was noted that coverage in the Press was suggesting that the additional funding to be provided by Government, could take the budget back to the position in 2015
- In response to a question, it was reported that the pay increase for new teachers was just a proposal at present
- A discussion was held in respect of the way that deprivation factors were measured and it was noted that a number of factors were taken into consideration and could vary by council. The experience was that there was undeclared deprivation which could impact on the funding provided to the council in this area. The Portfolio Holder encouraged councillors to communicate and seek understanding from local MPs of the needs of Dorset in terms of funding. The situation in Dorset was considered against the situation in other areas such as London and although the issue was recognised by the Department for Education, there was currently no solution
- In response to a question, it was reported that there was no provision to allow the council to charge the deficit back to the Department for Education
- The council funded the top up of schools' budgets in respect of education, health and care plans.

35. People Services - Adults and Housing Transformation Programme Update

The committee received a presentation with regard to the People Services – Adults and Housing Transformation Programme. An updated version of the presentation was provided at the meeting which gave the latest basis for the transformation plan. The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health gave an overview of the areas covered by the presentation. She also noted that a technology room would be opening on 17 October 2019 and councillors were invited to an event to mark the opening on the lunchtime of this day. A

report with regard to the transformation plan would be provided to the People Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in due course.

The committee considered the issues arising from the presentation and during discussion the following points were raised:

- Reference was made to the Building Better Lives Programme and the need to link into Children's Services and the council's assets programme as well as looking at issues from an Adults' Services perspective. In addition it was noted that the methodology used for the scheme in Purbeck had been taken into account when looking at other areas and specific reference was made to mapping exercises that had been undertaken in respect of sites in Gillingham
- Staffing issues in this area were discussed and particular reference was made to issues around the recruitment of social workers, the nomination of design champions from across the directorate to assist with designing the programme, the need to look at how people worked including flexible working and ways to grow the workforce including the use of apprenticeships
- The use of assistive technology was discussed and issues around broadband and mobile coverage were being looked at
- Reference was made to housing issues including the need for appropriate accommodation provision in order to retain younger people in the area.

36. Dorset Council Workforce Data and People Strategy

The Chairman noted that the presentation on Dorset Council Workforce Data and People Strategy would now be given at the next meeting of the committee on 7 November 2019.

37. Minutes of the Audit and Governance (Assessment) Sub-committee

The minutes of meetings of the Audit and Government (Assessment) Sub-committee held on 28 June, 17 September and 25 September 2019 were noted.

38. Audit and Governance Committee Work Programme

The committee noted the work programme and items expected at future meetings. The Dorset Council Workforce Data and People Strategy presentation would be given at the meeting on 7 November 2019.

The Chairman noted that the committee had received a series of presentations over the last few meetings in order to provide background to a number of council areas. After November, the committee would need to give consideration as to any in-depth reviews they would like to undertake.

A point was raised with regard to the issue of asset management which was currently included on the work programmes for both Audit and Governance

Committee and Resources Scrutiny Committee. This would be clarified following the meeting. It was noted that the review of the Constitution was also included on both committee's work programmes and this would be discussed at the meeting of the scrutiny and audit and governance chairmen.

39. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.35 pm

Chairman

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