

DORSET COUNCIL - PEOPLE AND HEALTH OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Cllrs Andrew Kerby (Chairman), Pauline Batstone (Vice-Chairman), Tony Alford, Pete Barrow, Toni Coombs, Ryan Holloway, Stella Jones, Rebecca Knox, Robin Legg and Daryl Turner

Also present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Leader), Jill Haynes (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services), and Laura Miller (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health).

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

Vivienne Broadhurst (Interim Executive Director - People Adults), Laura Cornette (Corporate Policy & Performance Officer), Bridget Downton (Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Paul Rutter (Service Manager for Leisure Services) and Helen Whitby (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the People and Health Overview Committee. The Committee had a policy creating role which would help the Council make better decision and under its terms of reference had a wide scope for scrutiny activity.

The Chairman would take items 5 (Future Working models) and 6 (Forward Plan) together as they were closely linked. He said that members had a wealth of experience and knowledge and he encouraged them to be creative. Policy making required good collaboration and any good ideas would be considered. He also reminded them that party politics played no part in scrutiny.

Members and officers were then introduced.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllr T Alford declared an interest in item 4 as a former Cabinet member he had been involved in the formation of the proposals for Voluntary and Community Sector report and would not speak or vote on the subject.

The Corporate Director - Legal and Democratic Services explained that many members were actively involved in their communities and that the law

required them to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests. This did not prevent them from taking part in the item.

4. Public Participation

There were no statements or questions from Town and Parish Councils or members of the public.

5. Financial provision to the voluntary and community sector

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive, which explained the results of the consultation regarding Dorset Council's proposals for allocating funding to the voluntary and community sector.

The recently appointed Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services explained that the report had been developed over a long period and was looking to change from grant provision to commissioning activity. If the recommendations were agreed, this would give the organisations currently working with the Council the confidence to continue with this. They had provided a good response through the Covid-19 pandemic and it was important to go forward without grant reductions as they were saving the Council money. The final recommendation suggested that smaller organisations could bid for outcome-based funding.

The Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships explained that when Dorset Council had been established it had inherited many different funding arrangements. The Cabinet had agreed to a full public consultation on the future provision of grants to Dorset's voluntary community sector and this had run for 8 weeks. Overall, the response to the consultation was positive but since the consultation closed the Covid-19 pandemic had had a major effect on all areas of the voluntary and community sector. This had led to some financial instability within the sector and micro groups moving to support local communities. The policy would enable communities to build and develop new relationships and support prevention at scale. The Committee were asked to support the recommendations and recommend them to Cabinet for decision.

Members asked a series of questions about: the EU procurement exercise; whether small groups currently receiving funding would have an extension of this to 30 September 2021; clarification of Recommendation 3; what outcomes were being sought under recommendation 5 and were they achievable; whether there would be support and advice available for micro groups set up as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; whether arts and museums had been included; whether there would be any funding left for the bigger organisations once the smaller organisations had received their funding; whether Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council could abuse their power; and whether the discretionary outcome-based funding was allocated by Dorset Council;

In response it was explained that:

- six months would be long enough to give notice of changes to current arrangements and undertake a procurement process under EU regulations;
- funding for small groups would be extended to 30 September 2021;
- currently Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council provided the social voluntary sector infrastructure which would be continued for a further six months;
- those affected by recommendation 5 had been given notice of the change. If the recommendations were agreed, then these organisations would receive information about next steps;
- the criteria for the outcome-based fund had been consulted upon and details were included in the consultation report. Final details of the criteria would be signed off by the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services but all teams administering specialist grants had been involved to ensure criteria were appropriate for the level of funding;
- Dorset Council officers would be able to provide expertise and Dorset Community Action could provide information and guidance to organisations to help them write bids or carry out an organisational health check so that they were in the best place to access funding. The Arts Development Company could provide support for arts and cultural organisations;
- arts and culture had been added to the Dorset Plan and an extension was being asked for the first three recommendations to 30 September 2021 to allow the EU procurement process to be undertaken.
- It was not in the public interest to delay Recommendations 4 and 5 because there was an inequality in the ways these organisations were funded by the previous Sovereign Councils. If the recommendations were agreed by Cabinet, this would enable micro organisations to bid for funding from 1 April 2021. The other recommendations had extended current arrangements to 30 September 2021 so that there were no gaps whilst the procurement exercise was undertaken;
- the assets review currently being undertaken would be reported to Cabinet on 22 November 2020.;
- all organisations would bid for funding at the same time. This process was in development and there were potentially three different levels of funding - under £1,000, £1,000 to £10,000 and over £10,000 and there would be a different process for each. Details would be put in place once Cabinet approval had been given;
- the three organisations would be providing infrastructure and support to the rest of the sector and would not deliver services. They would be expected to work in partnership with other organisations and this would be included in the terms of the new contract. There was no guarantee that they would be successful if they bid for the new contract;
- the allocations system for the discretionary outcome-based funding was being developed and was expected to be carried out by Dorset Councillors, officers and a representative from the sector.

The concern was expressed that Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council should not have full control under Recommendations 2 and 3.

The Chairman referred to the Committee's responsibility for policy making and suggested that voluntary sector engagement be included into all Dorset Council policies.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health reminded members that the Council should be working in partnership with communities to grow and shape policies and be looking for opportunities to build community resilience. The Executive Director of People - Children supported this approach. It was also suggested that social prescribing should be embedded into commissioning criteria.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services added that Council policies seemed to be in silos currently. As the integrated care system moved forward, and the Council worked with health colleagues, towns and parish councils, it would become increasingly difficult to write everything into every paper. It was important for a holistic way of working with people to be adopted in order to try to help residents. It was about social prescribing but also about getting partners to be part of it. She and the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health had taken this on board.

The Chairman referred to work undertaken on this by the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, and Locality Health Groups and suggested that a policy be developed on how the Council should work with health partners. The Executive Director of People - Children added that senior leadership team meetings across organisations were being held to look at directing funding to help people at an early stage. In Weymouth and Portland engagement with the community was underway to find out what the communities needed. Although his process had started, there was more to do. In terms of the relationship with health partners, Interim Executive Director of People - Adults explained that they were working across the integrated care system to build communities and ensure the right care and support was available in the right place. The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care added that the difficulty of getting organisations to forego sovereignty had started to change since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organisations were now more willing to share and attribute credit to the integrated care system as a whole and not to individual agencies. She fully supported this change.

The Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships summarised that there was a need to ensure that a whole systems approach was taken when looking at future policy development with the inclusion of partners and the social voluntary sector.

The Chairman thanked officers for the work undertaken.

It was proposed by Cllr P Batstone and seconded by Cllr D Turner and unanimously agreed :-

Recommendations

That the Cabinet agree to:-

1. The continued provision of the 'information, advice and guidance' service for residents at the current financial rate for a 5-year term to offer stability. Extension of the current grant for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021
2. The continued provision of an arts and culture support service at the current financial rate for a 5-year term. Extension of the current grant for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021
3. The continued provision of support services to the social voluntary community sector at the current financial rate for a 5-year term. This will be tendered as one contract for bidding organisations to work in partnership to deliver the support for the rest of the social voluntary community sector. Extension of the current grant recipients for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021
4. The continued commissioned support of the museums and community centres in which Dorset Council have a reversionary interest at the current financial rate for a period of 1 year from 1st April 2021 to be considered within the wider council buildings and assets review.
5. A discretionary outcome-based fund to be introduced to replace all historical grant programmes offered by Dorset Council. Criteria to be modified in accordance to the comments made in the consultation and agreed with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder.
6. That voluntary sector engagement be included into all Dorset Council policies.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The consultation has evidenced the value and very strong level of support for the information, advice and guidance service for residents. Due to the value of the contract, there is a requirement to procure the service. The timescales involved in undertaking an open and transparent procurement exercise will necessitate the need to extend the existing contract to allow sufficient time for this to be completed.
2. The consultation has evidenced the value and very strong level of support for the arts support service. Due to the value of the contract, there is a requirement to procure the service. The timescales involved in undertaking an open and transparent procurement exercise will necessitate the need to extend the existing contract to allow sufficient time for this to be completed.
3. The consultation has evidenced the value and very strong level of support for the social VCS support service. Due to the value of the contract, there is a requirement to procure the service. The timescales involved in undertaking an open and transparent procurement exercise will necessitate the need to extend the existing contract to allow sufficient time for this to be completed. It is acknowledged that the current organisations worked incredibly effectively together before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, achieving joint outcomes.
4. The consultation has evidenced a strong level of support for the museums and community centres in which the council has a reversionary interest.

However, given that the council is currently undertaking a full review of its assets and buildings, it would be prudent to agree an initial 1-year extension to allow for these to form part of the wider review.

5. The consultation has evidenced a strong level of support for flexible funding to enable community organisations to identify and resolve local community needs. The discretionary outcome-based grants will continue to provide vital support to organisations that provide outcome-based evidence for delivery of Council Plan priorities. These will be made available by 31st December to give current grant recipients the opportunity to secure funding before the financial year end.

6. Future Working Models and the Forward Plan

The Committee considered its future working arrangements, the current Forward Plan and noted its Terms of Reference.

The Chairman stated that formal meetings were not always the best means of developing policy, although they had their purpose. He thought the Committee should embrace new ways of working, was keen to use technology in the formulation of policies and hold informal workshops to work on policy development with the outcomes being considered at formal meetings of the Committee.

The current Forward Plan was an amalgamation of the Forward Plans of the Council's People and Health Scrutiny Committees but he believed this needed to be amended to reflect the Committee's future way of working.

Members noted that it had been agreed that an informal meeting of the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be held to ensure agenda items went to the appropriate Committee and to reduce duplication. It was suggested that Cllr R Knox, as Chairman of the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, be included in these meetings.

The Chairman of the Place and Resources Overview Committee, who was also a Committee member, highlighted the need for the Committee to undertake manageable pieces of work. He also offered to undertake joint work with his Committee on cross-over issues by way of inquiry days or working groups which was a more efficient use of time and resources.

It was suggested that the findings from working groups could go straight to Cabinet rather than being considered by the Committee which was adding a further layer of bureaucracy. The Chairman hoped that such findings could be shared through a Teams Group where it could be commented upon and quickly signed off at a formal meeting.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the need for transparency and public involvement and that the more work done informally, the more difficult it became to involve the public.

The Chairman of the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, also a member of the Committee, welcomed the opportunity to join the Chairmen's informal

meeting. She thought it was important for the Chairmen to have a holistic view and decide where items were best directed as some of the housing policies scheduled for this Committee could equally sit under the Place and Resources Overview Committee.

The Executive Director of People - Children said she saw a real opportunity for the Committee to look at what was not working well and what was being done about it in various areas. She offered to provide a list of such areas for the Committee to consider. The Executive Director of People - Adults added that policy development should support the Council's ambition, focus on outcomes and make a difference.

The Corporate Director - Legal and Democratic Services explained that the Committee's Terms of Reference would help them develop their Forward Plan and that the Cabinet might request them to carry out policy development. It might also like to look at the risk register to focus on areas of concern.

The Chairman suggested having a session to create a new Forward Plan by way of a Teams group with the outcome coming back to a formal meeting. This approach was agreed. It was also suggested that additional Teams training might be needed for this.

Members noted that some of the reports previously identified for scrutiny had been moved to overview since the new committees came into being. Under their terms of reference performance data was to go to overview but this was not a statutory responsibility so members could choose not to consider. They also noted that its work needed to be informed by and help deliver the Council Plan whereas performance management could be carried out by accessing data and asking questions outside of meetings.

Decision

That an informal meeting of the Committee be held on-line to consider its Forward Plan whilst taking into account, the Council Plan, the Cabinet Forward Plan and statutory responsibilities.

7. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

8. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.35 am

Chairman

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