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People and Health Scrutiny Committee

Date: Wednesday, 30 July 2025
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Meeting Room 1, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 3)
Toni Coombs (Chair), Jane Somper (Vice-Chair), Bridget Bolwell, Barry Goringe, Sally Holland, Carole Jones, Chris Kippax, Robin Legg, Andy Todd and Carl Woode

Interim Chief Executive: Sam Crowe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

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Agenda

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	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2025.	

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Dorset Council

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2025

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Jane Somper (Vice-Chair), Bridget Bolwell, Barry Goringe, Carole Jones, Chris Kippax, Robin Legg and Andy Todd

Present remotely: Cllr Sally Holland

Apologies: Cllr Carl Woode

Also present: Cllr Clare Sutton and Cllr Gill Taylor

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):
Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), George Dare (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Beth Whittaker (Interim Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Andy Frost (Service Manager for Community Safety), Graham Duggan (Head of Community & Public Protection), Ian Grant (Programme Coordinator), Jennifer Lowis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Rachel Partridge (Acting Director of Public Health) and Kath Saunders (Head of Locality and Strategy (North))

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):
Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Anita Thomas (Chief Operating Officer, Dorset County Hospital), Jo Howarth (Director of Nursing, Dorset County Hospital), Jo Hartley (Director of Midwifery and Neonatal Services, Dorset County Hospital), Hannah Leonard (Deputy Director - Maternity and Perinatal Services, NHS Dorset) and Fiona Thomas (Communities Team Leader)

1. **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Carl Woode.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr C Jones declared in respect of Item 9 – Impact of Cost-of-Living Support Programme 2024-25, that she was a trustee of a charity receiving funds from the programme.

Cllr A Todd declared in respect of Item 8 – Education, Health and Care Plans Enquiry Day Update, that his daughter had an EHCP.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2025 were confirmed and signed.

4. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

5. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

7. **Maternity Services in Dorset**

The Committee received information on maternity services at University Hospitals Dorset and Sailsbury Hospital. Sailsbury hospital's maternity services had improved to a 'Good' rating following an improvement programme after it was rated as 'requires improvement'. University Hospitals Dorset has demonstrated progress in its outcomes for its improvement journey, following a rating of 'inadequate' in 2023. Its maternity services had moved to its new BEACH building and the hospital managed to sustain achievement in its improvements whilst it moved maternity services to the new building.

The Committee then heard about the CQC improvement journey at Dorset County Hospital maternity services after it was rated as 'requires improvement' in 2023. The services employed a maternity improvement advisor and it and recent recruited a 10th consultant, so it was now compliant with consultant presence. The maternity service's leadership team and its audit process had been strengthened. The most recent CQC inspection took place in June 2025, and no immediate concerns had been raised, with the visit being more positive than the previous inspection.

The Committee then received an update on the temporary closure of the Special Care Baby Unit and inpatient maternity services at Yeovil District Hospital. The temporary closure was the result of a Section 29A warning notice issued by the CQC for Paediatric services, and subsequent improvement requirements that Yeovil District Hospital was unable to achieve in the timeframe. The update

included a timeline of events, the impact it has had on other hospitals, and an outline of Dorset County Hospital's operational response.

Members asked questions of the NHS representatives and discussed the item. The following points were raised:

- Women who would have used Yeovil District Hospital could choose where they would want to continue their care, and it would transfer to that place.
- A member queried whether the CQC allowed sufficient time for improvements to be made. It was assumed that Somerset Foundation Trust were not able to meet the expectations within the timescales.
- A member asked how an increased number of births at other hospitals could be accommodated. Somerset Foundation Trust have been working closely with Bath hospital and increasing the capacity as Musgrove Park, Taunton. Some women may also choose to give birth at Salisbury hospital. The capacity for home births around the Yeovil area had been increased.
- Dorset County Hospital would take approximately 20% of the births that would have happened at Yeovil. The hospital has considered different ways of working and a business case for increased staffing levels to accommodate the additional births.
- The increase of visitors to the Dorset area over the summer was not a cause of significant concern for Dorset County Hospital and it would be business as usual. They were prepared for an increase in patients with a flexible workforce and estate, where rooms could be converted to create capacity.
- Most hospitals use the same electronic record for maternity services and most women would have an app with their pregnancy information. This enabled hospitals to have the relevant information.
- Members sought assurance that there would not be a crisis at Dorset County Hospital with an increased number of maternity service patients over the summer period. The Chief Operating Officer felt confident that this could be assured and they have done risk assessments for it.
- Community settings, such as Blandford or Weymouth Community Hospitals, could be used for less complex maternity cases, such as providing scans or taking bloods.
- Dorset County Hospital did require additional resources and staff from Yeovil hospital have been working in Dorchester. They were mindful that the legacy of the temporary closure could continue to have impacts on the hospital after the service in Yeovil reopened.
- Travel times from Yeovil was not a significant area of concern for Dorset County Hospital, as they were similar times of travel from East Dorset to Dorchester or Bournemouth.
- Members were impressed by the way Dorset County Hospital has responded to the temporary closure at Yeovil District Hospital.

The Committee wanted to see the service reopening within 6 months but was concerned about it not opening within 6 months. They were reassured by the measures that have been put in place for women. The Committee asked for an update in 6 months on how Dorset County Hospital was responding their CQC inspection outcomes and to the closure at Yeovil District Hospital.

8. **Education, Health and Care Plans Enquiry Day Update**

The Chairman introduced the item and thanked all the participants of the enquiry day. She outlined the developing themes for further exploration from the enquiry day, which included: Communication with families and young people; the voice of young people in the EHCP process; the quality of content provided by the NHS for annual reviews; the effectiveness of joint funding; and waiting lists for autism diagnosis. In addition to this, future changes proposed by central government would need to be taken into account.

Members discussed the report and raised the following points:

- There were pressures in the NHS due to their resources, which led to long waiting lists. This created a weak spot within the system.
- There was a limit of 20% of pupils being from other counties at the Dorset Centre of Excellence. However, the current number of out-of-county pupils was around 4%.
- Whether there could be a role for Family Hubs in improving EHCP support and advice for families.
- The need to compare the council's support to other local authorities that have good performance with EHCP's, to see where the council can improve.

The EHCP Panel would continue its work and follow up on key lines of enquiry, before producing a final report for the committee.

The committee appointed Cllr Andy Todd to its working group on Education, Health and Care Plans.

ADJOURNMENT

At 11.45am the committee adjourned for a comfort break and reconvened at 11.58am.

Cllr Robin Legg left the meeting at this point.

9. **Impact of Cost-of-Living Support Programme 2024-25**

The report was introduced through a statement read on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement. The Business Partner for Communities and Partnerships outlined the financial details of the cost-of-living support, including that the Department for Work and Pensions would replace the Household Support Fund with a new Crisis and Resilience Fund. She highlighted some of the support available through the projects funded by the cost-of-living support.

The committee discussed the report and raised the following points:

- There was a reduction in funding from £2m to £500k by the council for cost-of-living support.
- The Household Support Fund added additional funding for cost-of-living support, however it was likely that it would be terminated or significantly reduced by Government in April 2026.
- There was concern from the committee that a reduction in cost-of-living support funding, by the council and through the Household Support Fund, would have implications for other service areas and their budgets.
- The underspend in cost-of-living support from the previous financial year was repurposed for prevention in Adult Social Care.
- It was important to continue monitoring the cost-of-living support programme to ensure there was not a negative impact on other services due to reduced funding.
- A member sought clarification on the tenancy sustainment statistics in Sherborne. The Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships agreed to follow this up after the committee.
- There was a concern about the timeliness of cost-of-living data from Government.
- The levels of support through Revenues and Benefits and the Housing allowance were set levels. However, there was a concern that if support was combined, then people may end up with less support.
- Lendology CiC was advertised through the council's website and by referral agencies, such as Citizen's Advice. This support can be used by tenants, after receiving permission from private landlords, or can be used by people who own their home.

The Chair summarised the discussion and emphasised the need to ensure that the cost-of-living support is having a positive impact on vulnerable residents. The Committee would continue having 6-monthly reports on the impact of the council's cost-of-living support.

10. **Community Safety Annual Scrutiny Report**

The Service Manager for Community Safety introduced the report and highlighted the key areas. In addition to the annual report, the committee would be reviewing community safety through quarterly performance monitoring.

The Committee discussed the report, and the following points were raised:

- Cllr Somper would meet the Service Manager for Community Safety to have a discussion on the Hate Crime Strategy.
- The Pineapple Project had a needs assessment every year, however it is not made public due to the information it holds.
- There were local area meetings across Dorset which were led by the police. It was suggested that councillors be invited to these meetings and there were already discussions taking place on this.

- Crime statistics were available on the Dorset Police website. Councillors could also get further insight through the local area meetings.
- There was a lower reporting rate for domestic abuse in rural areas, although there were various partners involved to raise awareness of domestic abuse.
- The police inform schools if a child has been involved in domestic abuse.
- There was also other work with schools, such as the Bystander project, which raised awareness of domestic abuse with pupils. Six more schools had approached the council to take part in this.
- The Dragonfly Project would provide training on domestic abuse for community groups. One of its aims is to reach people in isolated communities. Information about the Dragonfly Project would be circulated to all councillors.

The Chairman thanked the officers for attending and explaining the work of the Community Safety Partnership. There was a need for councillors to have further information about local need, such as through the local area meetings.

The Committee agreed to extend the meeting beyond 3 hours.

11. **Committee's Work Programme and Executive Forward Plans**

The Chairman outlined the items on the committee's work programme. She updated the committee that the committee's performance dashboards were being updated to reflect the needs of the committee.

The Committee noted its Work Programme and the Executive Forward Plans.

12. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.00 pm

Chairman

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