

DORSET COUNCIL - PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 13 JANUARY 2020

Present: Cllrs Jane Somper (Chairman), Toni Coombs, Stella Jones, Emma Parker, Molly Rennie, Mark Roberts, Maria Roe, Clare Sutton and Gill Taylor

Apologies: Cllrs Mary Penfold

Also present: Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Laura Miller and Cllr Andrew Parry

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

Vivienne Broadhurst (Interim Corporate Director Adult Care Operations), Theresa Leavy (Interim Executive Director of People - Children), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Roberts declared an interest as a contractor for adult services to Dorset Council.

2. Public Participation

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

3. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

4. Pre-decision Scrutiny of the 2020/2021 Budget

The committee was invited to consider the budget proposals for 2020/21 prior to consideration at Cabinet on 28 January and Full Council on 18 February 2020. The report set out the proposals for Dorset Council's 2020/21 revenue and capital budgets, summarised the medium-term financial plan, which covered the following four years to 2024/25 and included the capital strategy and treasury management strategy. The committee had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals on behalf of residents of Dorset and to provide constructive challenge to decision makers before a final decision was made. It was noted that the comments made by the committee would be reported to Cabinet on 28 January 2020 and taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process.

The Portfolio holders for Adult Social Care and Health, Children, Education and Early Help, and Housing and Community Safety, all provided a short introduction to their budget area.

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

- In response to a concern raised, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help confirmed that the council had a statutory obligation to provide safe accommodation to children in care. In terms of budget setting, it was difficult to know what the requirements would be in a year as the numbers of children in the service could only be a forecast. It was accepted that there was a risk to the budget but mitigation was built in
- The Interim Executive Director for People, Children, confirmed that the forecast was based on previous patterns and that in addition, officers would take learning from elsewhere including the use of statistical neighbouring authorities. Discussion was also held with those within the service. Through the Blueprint for Change transformation work, which would evolve over time, the service was looking to mitigate risks
- The Portfolio Holder felt that there was a greater political awareness in Dorset Council of issues in this area, with a clear role for the Council as corporate parents
- Reference was made to the costs associated with high end residential placements and the risks associated in this area were recognised and would need to be reviewed during the year. The service would always work to keep children in family settings where possible
- The difficulties in predicting level of demand was recognised and it was noted that a lot of work was done in this area
- In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health felt that the budget proposals would demonstrate that the funding and capability was in place in order to build public confidence. The use of early interventions and making information available was key. In terms of winter pressures, funding was in place and conversations with partners were in place
- The importance of the council and relevant partner organisations communicating with residents was noted
- A point was noted that proposals within the Children's Services Blueprint for Change for locality working should assist with the dissemination of information and more rapid intervention and prevention measures
- The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help confirmed that work was being focused on reviewing and speeding up processes and specific reference was made to health care plans and SEND transport
- Reference was made to the level of contribution to adult services from the NHS and this was currently being discussed with partner colleagues

- Conversations were taking place with partners including the NHS and some good work had taken place in the adult services area. However more work needed to be done
- A concern was raised that efficiency savings to be made through transformation activities should not have a negative impact on front line service delivery
- In response to a comment, the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health confirmed that money had not been set aside within services for factors arising from EU Exit. Some modelling had been undertaken but this was an unknown area at present. Examples of some areas within Adult and Housing Services which could assist with issues arising, such as arrangements for key worker housing, were provided
- A point was raised with regard to a historical deficit for high needs block funding which remained on the council's balance sheet. It remained a priority to reduce this over a number of years. It was noted that grants to high needs block were not implemented within the budget
- Reference was made to the use of early intervention and the Blueprint for Change would ensure that all services were joined up to assist in this area
- The Blueprint for Change would look at management and job roles and bring people together. It was expected to increase front line delivery of services with people working with the same children but in a different way. The troubled families initiative was referred to
- The experience gained by having new senior officers in these areas was recognised and how this could be of benefit to the services
- The role of volunteer organisations in supporting Children's and Adult Services was recognised and would be considered further moving forward
- A point was raised with regard to the trends of growth in Children's Services and concern that the budget would not cover the increased demands on the service. In response it was noted that through modelling undertaken, the service tried to adopt a realistic position but with an awareness of the unknowns of a demand led service. Variations in demand in the service were monitored and it was noted that needs may grow in some areas and lessen in others
- The issues around SEND transport were considered and it was hoped that improvements would be made by bringing the SEND transport team into the wider council transport team
- Councillors considered whether the committee should have a special meeting to consider some of the issues being raised during the discussion. The Chairman noted that the Audit and Governance Committee received the quarterly financial monitoring reports in order to monitor the issues. The Portfolio holder indicated that an item could be brought to this committee upon request. The Chairman noted that the committee would be considering relevant reports at future meetings

- A point was raised with regard to the modelling that had been undertaken which included assumptions
- Close working was undertaken with partners through the Health and Wellbeing Board
- There was a need for robust performance indicators to be put in place for all areas in order to measure financial aspects as well as the outcomes for the services. These needed to be accessible to all councillors. This was agreed by the Portfolio Holders.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chairman summarised the main points covered by the committee as follows:

- The committee recognised with concern the pressures on both the Children's Services and Adult Services budgets as they were demand led services and therefore it was difficult to predict the budget requirements
- Key points raised during discussion included the need to consider the increasing complexity of needs for both children and adults, the role of early interventions, the level of NHS contribution towards adult services and transport for SEND children
- There was concern that efficiency savings to be made through transformation activities should not have a negative impact on front line service delivery. It was noted that savings made should be redirected to improving front line services. The impact of not making savings should be considered
- The role of the voluntary sector in providing support in areas of Children's and Adults Services was recognised and the potential impact of funding issues within the voluntary sector
- The desire was to provide the right service at the right time with an assessment of and reduction in the number of processes
- The experience gained by having new senior officers in these areas was recognised and how this could be of benefit to the services
- There needed to be a way of measuring the success and effectiveness of transformation with particular emphasis on outcomes for children and adults
- There was a need for effective robust performance indicators which focused on quality of service rather than quantity. People Scrutiny Committee request a report on the development of performance indicators at an appropriate time along with quarterly budget updates to Audit and Governance Committee.

The Chairman thanked the portfolio holders and officers for their work in preparing the budget and for their attendance at the meeting.

5. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 3.02 pm

Chairman

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