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DORSET COUNCIL - PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 20 JULY 2020

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

Apologies:

Also present: Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr David Taylor and Cllr Peter Wharf

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

Theresa Leavy (Interim Executive Director of People - Children), Mark Blackman (Corporate Director - Education and Learning), Claire Shiels (Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), David Webb (Service Manager - Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service), Susan Ward-Rice (Equalities and Diversity Officer), Paul Iggulden (Consultant), Vivienne Broadhurst (Interim Executive Director - People Adults), Rebecca Kirk (Corporate Director of Housing, Dorset Council), Gill.Vickers (Interim Corporate Director - Adult Care Operations) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

6. Minutes

Councillors sought updates in respect of items in the minutes as follows:

- An update was provided in respect of work to be undertaken on transitions from Children's Services into Adult Services
- Items on the committee forward plan would be looked at under the People Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan item later in the agenda
- Reference was made to the Outreach Youth Service and it was noted that this would be raised during the item on the Children and Young People and Families Plan
- The development of a toolkit in respect of domestic violence and abuse issues was raised and it was noted that this was being looked at with a multi agency approach and was a key part of the Children's and Young People and Families Plan
- Reference was made to the role of scrutiny and of executive advisory panels (EAPs). It was noted that any councillor could attend a meeting of an EAP as an observer.

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 and 13 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed at a future date.

7. Declarations of Interest

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

8. Public Participation

4 questions were received from the public.

A shortened version of the questions were read out by Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and responses to the questions were read out by Rebecca Kirk (Corporate Director for Housing). A copy of the full questions and the responses are set out in Appendix 1 these minutes.

9. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

10. Children and Young People and Families' Plan 2020 - 2023

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help presented the report which invited the committee to consider the proposals for the development of the Children and Young People and Families' Plan and to provide feedback on the proposed priorities to enable the development of the final plan by the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People before it was recommended by Cabinet for endorsement and adoption by the Full Council.

The Corporate Director, Commissioning, Quality and Partnerships provided an overview of the report and the work that had been undertaken to date. In order to deliver the vision in this area, a set of emerging priorities have been identified and classified into six themes which were set out in the report. The committee's feedback was sought on the themes, which would assist in the development of the plan to be considered by Cabinet in September and onto Full Council.

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

- A number of councillors thanked the leadership team in Children's Services for their work undertaken to date
- Points were raised with regard to how resources could best be targeted, the importance of early intervention, issues around family breakdown and the recruitment of more foster carers, and the council's work in these areas was noted
- The Corporate Director noted that the council, working with partners, aimed to give children the best start in life. Partners were fully engaged in the development of the plan
- There would be constant review of the action plan in this area and a regular process around tracking actions was welcomed

- A discussion was held in respect of the roles of the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People and local alliance groups. The local alliance groups brought together a range of local organisations who could provide information at a local level and all councillors were encouraged to be aware of local alliance groups in their area and how they could assist in the promotion of these
- A point was raised as to how to include representatives of non-commissioned services. In response, the Corporate Director expressed a commitment to involving people in conversations and the encouragement of further engagement
- In response to a question, the importance of the council and partners working collectively was recognised. There was felt to be strong leadership across the partnership and that alongside the action plan, the measures were in place to ensure required outcomes
- The Corporate Director for Education and Learning noted that the council had built strong relationships with schools, with a shared understanding of working together to achieve better outcomes for all
- A point was raised with regard to the importance of data sharing in safeguarding issues
- Comments were made with regard to the language used in the plan and the need to ensure it was clear to read, the financial implications of the plan and the need for continued monitoring through scrutiny
- In response, the Executive Director for Children reminded councillors that any cases of concern must be escalated through the appropriate channels. She also made reference to the critical relationships with health colleagues, the impact of Covid-19 on the service and peoples' lives, the importance of sharing information and the key role of early intervention. The council and it's partners could approach these issues together but it was recognised as a difficult time
- In response to a point raised, it was noted that the service was in the process of undertaking a viability check in respect of the child care sector. In addition, services provided by children's centres were being looked at to ensure that hubs of support were in the right places
- A point was made that children should be thought about before any decisions were taken
- It was noted that there were no young people represented on the Strategic Alliance and whether this should be considered
- In response it was confirmed that conversations with young people were ongoing and that much of the work undertaken in respect of the plan to date had come from work undertaken with young people. This would be kept under review
- In order to deliver what was required, there would be a set of outcomes which would be tracked over a period of time
- The Executive Director for Children noted that Children's Services was a complex directorate and that life outcomes for children were

not currently where they needed to be. There was a need to be able to prioritise in several areas with the biggest challenge to keep families at the heart of looking after their own children

- More resources had been put into front line services. There was a need to have better resources locally moving forward
- The service was making plans for a potential local outbreak of Covid-19 which included discussions with schools to ensure risk assessments were in place and discussions as to how the council could support families living in poverty.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for the report and for their work and leadership in this hugely ambitious area. Useful comments had been made by the committee which could be taken into account as the plan was developed. It was noted that a report with the final plan would be brought to Cabinet and Full Council later in the year. A request was also made for a further report to scrutiny at an appropriate point.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the committee for their very helpful debate and noted that comments raised would be taken on board. In addition, he referred to the impact of Covid-19 in this area and also the importance of early intervention. He reiterated the importance of councillors contacting the service if they had concerns.

It was proposed by T Coombs seconded by M Rennie

Decision

That the People Scrutiny Committee:

1. Have considered the proposals for the development of the Children and Young People and Families' Plan and provided comments as set out above
2. Have provided feedback on the proposed priorities to enable the development of the final plan by the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People before it is recommended by Cabinet for endorsement and adoption by the Full Council and provided comments as set out above
3. Note and endorse the shared commitment of the partnership as set out in the Governance and Terms of Reference of the Dorset Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People
4. That the action plan associated with the Children, Young People and Families Plan should be monitored by the People Scrutiny Committee.

11. **Approval of Youth Justice Plan 2020-21**

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help introduced the report with regard to the Youth Justice Plan for 2020/21.

Councillors were informed that there was a statutory requirement to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan which must provide specified information about the local provision of youth justice services. The report summarised the Youth Justice Plan for 2020/21, with a copy of the Plan appended. It was noted that the Youth Justice Plan needed to be approved by Full Council.

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

- A point was raised with regard to what was being done to increase opportunities available through training providers and colleges. In response it was noted that a lot of work was being focused in this area
- A question was asked about whether an Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out. An updated Equality Impact Assessment had not been completed as the Plan did not reflect a change of policy or new strategy
- Further information was provided about work undertaken by members of the Youth Justice Team in respect of education issues for those in the service and a concern noted with the range of current provision
- This was a significant area for development and exploring opportunities within Children's Services. Wider opportunities were being explored and it was hoped to utilise wrap around locality services in order to understand the requirements of young people better
- A question was asked in respect of resourcing for the service and a particular point made about the police contribution. In response, it was confirmed that the police contribution remained at the same level as previously but that this may not be clear due to the way the money was accounted for
- The importance of the speech and language therapy posts was highlighted which played a key role in understanding and responding to the needs of young people in the service. It was hoped that funding for these posts could be made permanent
- A discussion was held in respect of offending rates in the Dorset Council area. It was noted that the report was written from a pan-Dorset perspective and that the rate in Dorset was lower than in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area
- The report recognised nationally that young people from minority ethnic groups were over-represented in the youth justice system and in the youth custodial population. A point was noted that it was difficult to resolve issues in the criminal justice system alone but there was a need to be alert to potential issues in this area
- In response to a point raised, it was confirmed that information on the gender and ethnicity of staff in the service could be included in

future plans. The workforce did not currently have any people from minority groups, however this was partly addressed through the use of mentors

- It was highlighted that it was hugely important to always consider if there was racism in a system. It was noted that there were staff within the Children's Services Department representing black and minority groups. All staff were challenged to recognise issues in their daily work
- The impact of the lockdown associated with the Covid-19 Pandemic was discussed in respect of the impact on the young people in the service and their wellbeing
- The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help indicated that work would be undertaken with colleagues on opportunities for young people and how support could be given to reinvigorate economic platforms and provide meaningful employment for young people, who could be affected by a downturn in the economy
- The ability for the service to receive both positive and negative feedback was considered
- Issues around child exploitation were raised and the impact of the current Covid-19 Pandemic
- The Covid-19 Pandemic had impacted on the service and particular reference was made to access to education currently being difficult, incidences of anti-social behaviour and delays with the courts having been closed for three months. Alternatives to court processes had been used in some cases
- A concern was raised that some young people would not be able to cope when schools reopened in September. In response it was noted that ongoing conversations were being held with schools about issues in this area. It was recognised that it would be challenging for some young people and that the council was working with head teachers to develop processes. Work included talking to families and young people to assist with building a relationship base to provide for their needs, working with partners
- A point was noted that the plan did not include a section on risks to how the service would achieve agreed outcomes. In response it was noted that this had not been included in a specific section but that an obvious risk was around resourcing for the service. However it was felt that the service had managed its resources through having a pan-Dorset partnership and it was felt that the service had the resilience in order to continue.

It was proposed by J Somper seconded by M Penfold

Recommendation to Cabinet

That the Youth Justice Plan be endorsed and recommended for approval by Full Council.

12. **Covid-19: How well has Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups during 'lockdown' - Review of report considered by Cabinet on 30 June 2020**

The committee reviewed the report, 'Covid-19: How well has Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups during 'lockdown'', which had been considered at Cabinet on 30 June 2020. It was noted that Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report, had been updated as it had been formally signed off by the Equality and Diversity Action Group, who were responsible for reviewing and signing off EqlAs in Dorset Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change provided information on the associated round table discussions that had taken place with a number of groups.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- It was noted that further analysis of the information was to be undertaken as part of the council's equalities duties
- Issues around domestic abuse were raised and officers noted that concerns in this area could be added to the action plan. This was also something being discussed between the council and partners in terms of ensuring that the voices of carers and those living with dementia were heard
- In response to a point raised, it was noted that work was being done with organisations such as the Dorset Blind Association and citizens advice as to the best way to make information available
- There were still issues around community shielding that needed to be addressed and actions would be included within 'business as usual' work
- There was a strong group of community sector organisations working together as well as joined up working with colleagues in the CCG about how the council and organisations worked together in reset and recovery mode
- Issues were raised in respect of anti social behaviour associated with young people, number of referrals for free school meals and issues around older people and domestic violence. In addition, a point was raised about concerns expressed about the lack of information available to local community support groups which it was felt had not been addressed in the report
- Support for carers was being provided including making safe spaces available in day centres to support wellbeing groups
- Intelligence systems were being used to identify those most at risk of vulnerability, mental health etc.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the committee for their comments and noted that action points would be taken away from the meeting.

CONTINUATION OF MEETING BEYOND 3 HOURS

In accordance with the procedure rules in the Constitution, the committee agreed to continue the meeting beyond 3 hours.

13. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Councillors considered the position with the forward plan for the People Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that this forward plan would be combined with the forward plan of the Health Scrutiny Committee to form new forward plans for the People and Health Overview and People and Health Scrutiny Committee from September 2020 onwards.

The items would need to be reviewed by both councillors and officers. The Chairman was keen that the meetings with housing associations take place in some form.

14. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Appendix 1 - Public Participation

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.02 pm

Chairman

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People Scrutiny Committee – 20 July 2020

Agenda item 4 - Public Participation

Questions from Karen James

- 1) **Why did the Council not seek advice from local Police when deciding to place so many problematic, drug dealers, those with criminal behaviour together? Did the Council fail to understand that housing these individuals together would be a massive issue and the Police may have warned against certain individuals being housed together.**
- 2) **Why has the Council not taken a proactive stance and placed a closure notice on hotels when it has shown to be the cause of major antisocial behaviour?**

Response from the Corporate Director for Housing

- 1) In replying to this question it is important to provide the wider context regarding the housing of rough sleepers and homeless households during the Covid-19 pandemic, as this response will be seen by members of the public who may not be aware of the situation. As part of the response to the covid-19 pandemic the government required councils to take urgent action to accommodate homeless people as they would otherwise be at particular risk of Covid-19.

On the 26th March Dorset Council along with all other local authorities in England were e-mailed by Dame Louise Casey with the heading “Everyone In” asking housing teams to focus on getting every rough sleeper an offer of somewhere they can stay safely by the weekend of the 29th March.

At the same time the government was advising people to stay at home, and told providers of holiday accommodation that they must close. The guidance was later revised in the same week allowing exceptions for B&B’s, hotels and caravan parks to remain open if they were accommodating key workers or homeless persons. However, by this point many smaller guest houses and hotels had closed and furloughed their staff. The Council approached many businesses in Dorset asking for their support in accommodating rough sleepers as well as an increasing number of homeless persons, who in the main were in shared accommodation and were being asked to leave their accommodation for a number reasons. Only a small number of hotels were prepared to support the Council in providing accommodation in a very short timescale.

Each person that was placed in accommodation had a suitably assessment form completed by a housing officer that asks a number of key questions about the individual, their vulnerability and support

needs. All rough sleepers who were placed had a support worker allocated to them. The Council has worked closely with the Police and other partners such as the probation service, community safety, homelessness support charities, REACH drug and alcohol support and the health services throughout this pandemic and shared information on all those accommodated. On the 7 April the 1st of what continues to be a weekly meeting with all the partners took place. At these meetings intelligence is shared about specific individuals that were and are supported by the Council through accommodation and if specific action was required by any agency, that has been followed up.

- 2) The Council is aware that the anti-social behaviour caused by a small number of people accommodated in the Seafront hotels experienced by local residents over recent weeks has been very upsetting and difficult. The Council has worked closely with the Police and Probation Service through weekly meetings to identify the key perpetrators of ASB and take the appropriate action and has taken a proactive stance to reduce the levels of ASB.

On 26 March 2020 Luke Hall MP, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to local leaders thanking us for the continuing work in response to the COVID-19 crisis. He emphasised the unprecedented scale of the challenge we all faced and our joint responsibility to safeguard as many homeless people as we can from COVID-19. He wrote that our strategy must be to bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission of Covid-19.

For the Council then to have taken steps to attempt to close hotels or to encourage the police to use their powers would have risked making residents homeless and would have run counter to the requirement to take homeless people off the streets.

Instead of closure we have, as a result of the ongoing partnership working, been able to achieve a number of key outcomes which are as follows;

- The rehousing of several key ASB perpetrators outside of the Weymouth area.
- Provision of security services at the hotel
- The discharging of statutory homeless duties by the Council to those individuals confirmed causing ASB and the individuals being asked to leave the premises
- Several arrests for public order offences and breaches of Section 35 dispersal notices.
- A male arrested for breach of court conditions and remanded to prison.
- A female arrested for breach of Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) and remanded to prison.
- A significant county line disrupted for dealing drugs in the area and reports are that drug availability is low.

- Numerous drug possession and supply offences detected including a male that was caught dealing drugs as a direct result of information provided to police from local residents.
- 8 individuals in the last 2 weeks have been subject to Community Protection Notice (CPN) / Community Protection Warnings (CPW) and 3 individuals pending CBO's. This will restrict the movement of these individuals

It should be noted that of 8 key individuals of interest to the Police at the present moment in time only 1 is being accommodated by the Council in the Seafront Hotel and a warning has been issued by the Housing Service about his behaviour in relation to his housing application. The Police have advised that levels of ASB in the vicinity of the hotel have improved over the past few weeks and levels of ASB currently are lower compared to this time last year.

Questions from Cllr Ken Whatley

- 1) **Why have Dorset Council not taken any action regarding the breaches by the landlady not controlling the behaviour of her guests. I.e. noise, outside drinking, drug dealing and sexual acts.**
- 2) **Is it true Dorset Council are paying to have rooms restored at the council tax payer's expense?**

Response from the Corporate Director for Housing

- 1) Please see the answer already given regarding the steps taken by the council in partnership with others and the outcomes achieved.
- 2) It is unfortunate that small number of those accommodated have caused damage to their rooms. As part of the agreement with the landlady of the hotel the Council has agreed to repair any damage caused by someone accommodated at the premises. However, where possible the Council will seek to recover the costs from the individual causing the damage.

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