

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 MARCH 2024

Present: Cllrs Gill Taylor (Chairman), Molly Rennie (Vice-Chairman), Robin Cook, Nick Ireland, Paul Kimber, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell and Belinda Ridout

Also present: Cllr Peter Dickenson, Cllr Byron Quayle and Cllr Jane Somper

Also present remotely: Cllr Cherry Brooks

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

Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Vivienne Broadhurst (Executive Director - People Adults), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Catriona Fountain (Communications Business Partner, Children's), Tony McDougal (Communications Business Partner - Adults and Housing) and Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Chris Heighway (Performance and Analytics Team Manager), Joshua Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer), and Pamela O'Shea (Deputy Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Dorset)

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

Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing)

55. **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

56. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

57. **Minutes**

Decision:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2024 be confirmed and signed.

58. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

59. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

60. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

61. **SEND Delivery Strategy**

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning introduced the item and outlined the key parts of the report. She outlined the progress of the SEND Partnership Board and the Dorset Education Board, and how the Families First for Children Pathfinder would enhance the locality model. The current progress on SEND provision and plans for a further bid for funding was outlined.

Members asked questions and discussed the report, and the following areas were raised:

- Parents coming together in co-operation can make good projects, an example was through a Local Alliance Group such as schools submitting bids for cookery workshops to increase belonging in schools.
- The council ensured that children and families were getting the right support for home education.
- It was expected that the need for 500 additional SEND places would be met, however the original target of 809 spaces may not be met. The potential for the 309 additional places could cost approximately £23 million.
- Each Local Alliance Group received £100k for improving inclusion and attendance in schools. There has been new innovation in communities due to this.
- The budget for SEND in schools was held by the council as part of the High Needs Block. The funding for ordinarily available SEND provision had not increased which created a challenge for the council.
- When local schools cannot meet the needs of a child, officers work with schools who suggested the needs could be met. The council can ask the Secretary of State to direct a school. The council would work with a school to ensure a child's needs were met.
- Parental choice could be challenging because parents did not always choose a local school.
- There was a recruitment campaign for the Families First for Children Pathfinder and the Dorset Education Board had a workforce pledge for the recruitment and retention of staff in school. There were not many difficulties recruiting and it ensured that the emerging needs of children could be met.

Members noted the report, and the progress made and challenges of SEND.

62. **Scrutiny Performance Review**

Following a review of Dorset Council's performance indicators, the committee identified two areas to raise. These were:

Staff sickness levels and the effect these could have on services – this would be added to the potential items for the work programme.

Data surrounding school attendance and exclusions – a report was requested on the Education Strategy and Belonging Strategy.

63. **Cost of Living Challenge Update**

The Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships introduced the item on the cost of living. The report updated the committee on £2 million that was allocated by the council for supporting the cost of living. The healthy home and energy vouchers did not use the full amount of allocated funding so 2 further projects were introduced for supporting homelessness. The usage of the cost of living support was outlined.

David Cadisch of Central Dorset Citizens Advice and Neil Hardisty of The Nest Weymouth explained how their organisations had used the funding. This included supporting people with debt help and increasing capacity of caseworkers to deal with debt and cost of living help. It had also been used for helping communities with food security.

Committee members discussed the report and asked questions. The following areas were raised:

- A member asked why the council's budget did not include Cost of Living funding for the next year. He was advised that it would be for the next administration following the local elections to decide on whether to replace the funding.
- There was an issue with people using foodbanks when they could be using social supermarkets. Could the council be promoting and educating people on the use of social supermarkets. In response, the promotion of social supermarkets would be actioned.
- The funding was well spent and used effectively. There was a need to ensure that the funding continued.

Proposed by Cllr Taylor, seconded by Cllr O'Leary.

Decision:

That the Committee:

1. Supports how the funding has been used.
2. Thanks all the voluntary groups involved in delivering this work.
3. Recommends to Cabinet that the funding for the cost of living support is extended and that the relevant Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, considers options for funding. The funding should be reviewed annually in the budget setting process.

64. Registered Providers of Social Housing Update

The Corporate Director for Housing updated the committee on registered providers of social housing, following previous work of this committee and the Housing Strategy being approved. There was widening engagement with registered providers, and they had responded well to the committee's work.

Members discussed the report and raised the following points:

- Concerns about the size of housing associations and the accountability of them.
- It was difficult to get contact details for people and new councillors should be given the contacts for people who work in Housing. A single point of contact could be explored for housing enquiries.
- Annual reports from registered providers were useful. It would be good to receive them from all providers.
- There needed to be more engagement with local communities so that there was support for new homes. Housing associations could make the case earlier for affordable housing.
- Developers were asking for planning conditions to be reviewed which was impacting the numbers of affordable housing in developments. Developers should be completing viability assessments before submitting planning applications.

The Chair suggested that the Housing Strategy should be reviewed by the committee later in the year.

65. Committee's Work Programme and Executive Forward Plans

There were no updates on the work programme. The work programme would be developed by the new committee following the local elections.

66. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.22 pm

Chairman

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