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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 JULY 2023

Present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Gary Suttle (Vice-Chairman), Laura Beddow, Ray Bryan, Simon Gibson, Jill Haynes, Andrew Parry, Byron Quayle, Jane Somper and David Walsh

Cabinet Leads in attendance: Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Andrew Kerby, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke and Cllr Mark Roberts

Also present: Cllr Shane Bartlett, Cllr Jon Andrews, Cllr Piers Brown, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Brian Heatley, Cllr Paul Kimber and Cllr Bill Trite

Also present remotely: Cllr Gill Taylor

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

Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Peter Hopkins (Corporate Director - Assets and Property), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Vivienne Broadhurst (Executive Director - People Adults), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), John Sellgren (Executive Director of Place), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services), Paul Dempsey (Corporate Director - Care & Protection), Jonathan Price (Interim Corporate Director for Commissioning), Kate Turner (Strategy Manager for Libraries) and Chris Matthews (Head of Human Resources)

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

Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151)

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to report.

20. Public Participation

There were no questions received from the public.

21. Questions from Councillors

There was 1 question from Councillor G Taylor; these along with the response is set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

In response to a supplementary question, the Chairman confirmed that when the national survey, referred to within the Portfolio Holder's response, was made available, this would be referred to People and Health Overview Committee for consideration.

22. Forward Plan

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan for September was received and noted.

23. Quarter 1 financial management report 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy presented the Council's projected financial performance for the full 2023/24 financial year, being made at the end of quarter 1.

In response to a question regarding Council Tax arrears, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy advised that the collection and recovery process would continue to improve following an extended period of closure and delay.

It was proposed by Cllr G Suttle seconded by Cllr J Haynes

Decision

- (a) That the Senior Leadership forecast of the full year's outturn for the council, made at the end of Quarter 1, including progress of the transformational and tactical savings incorporated into the budget, be agreed.
- (b) That the capital programme for 2023/24 be noted.

Reason for the decision

The Council had responsibilities to deliver within its corporate plan and it must do this within the resources made available through the revenue and capital budgets for 2023/24. This report summarised the Council's forecast financial performance for the year at the end of the first quarter.

24. Ofsted Focused Visit to Care Leaver Service

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help presented a report that set out a summary of the findings from the Ofsted focused visit to Dorset Children's Services on 17 and 18 May 2023. Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for 16- and 17-year-old care leavers.

He advised Cabinet that the Ofsted's headline findings were that:

'Leaders have significantly strengthened support and services for care leavers and have made notable improvements in the quality and standard of their accommodation. This was an area for development at the last inspection'.

He further advised that Ofsted identified just one area under what needs to improve in this area of social work practice: “The quality and timeliness of supervision” and the action plan was set out at appendix 2 to the report.

In proposing the recommendation, the Portfolio Holder paid tribute to officers and the previous portfolio holder for all their hard work and effort in this important area of the service.

It was proposed by Cllr B Quayle seconded by Cllr A Parry

Decision

That the contents of the report and the action plan to address areas for improvement, be noted.

Reason for the decision

This report provided members with an overview of the Ofsted focussed visit and the intended actions to further strengthen the service and experiences for care leavers in Dorset.

25. **Adult Social Care, Reablement Centre (Bed-Based Care)**

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing set out a report on the progress of the Reablement Centre Project and sought Cabinet approval to commence work on the design of the first centre which would be in Dorchester.

The Interim Corporate Director for Commissioning & Improvement gave a short PowerPoint presentation on progress to date and next steps. The project brief consolidates the Council’s strategic intention, service concept and business case for the project. The proposal was for an 80 bedded centre at Damers Road/Bridport Road in Dorchester, working in partnership with Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and NHS Dorset. The centre will be for all Dorset Council residents who require recovery and rehabilitation services.

In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the provision and decision for the site in Dorchester site had been based on demand.

Responding to further questions, the Interim Corporate Director for Commissioning & Improvement confirmed that patients would need to be medically fit to be discharged to this site, but given its proximity to the Dorset County Hospital, this would give a strong partnership/relationship with the hospital site to ensure that any future medical needs could be managed.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy and the Executive Director for Corporate Development responded to questions relating to the financial arrangements for the project.

It was proposed by Cllr J Somper seconded by Cllr S Gibson

Decision

- (a) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of People - Adults & Housing, Executive Director of Corporate Development and the Portfolio Holder for Adults, Health & Housing, and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy to finalise negotiations with NHS partners to secure the Dorchester County Hospital site for the first centre.
- (b) That the procurement of a design partner to develop detailed plans and costings for the Dorchester Reablement Centre, be approved, and to present back to Cabinet for the delegated authority to approve the required capital commitment to deliver the build stages of the project.
- (c) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of People – Adults & Housing and the Executive Director of Corporate Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adults, Health & Housing, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy and the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Property to commence the design of the scheme.

Reason for the decision

To receive a report on progress of the Reablement Centre Project and give approval for the commencement of work on the design of the first centre which would be located in Dorchester.

26. **A Devolution Deal for Dorset**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Levelling Up presented a report on the opportunity for Dorset Council to progress a Devolution Deal for Dorset which could have significant social, economic, and environmental benefits. He advised that the report before Cabinet sought a mandate for the Leader of the Council and himself to begin negotiations with the government and neighbouring councils.

To secure a devolution deal Dorset Council would need to partner with at least one appropriate neighbouring council to achieve the government's population threshold of 500,000. It was also important that the Council had a strong governance structure in place which accorded with the government's devolution framework. He further acknowledged that the mayoral model would not necessarily find support within the Dorset Council community.

Non-Executive members asked questions and spoke in support of the proposal making the following comments.

- Education, environment, and transportation should be areas of focus.
- Acknowledged that every devolution deal was bespoke.
- The arrangement would need to reflect local circumstances.
- Any deal would require strong governance models.
- Members were reassured that the Mayoral model would probably not be pursued.
- Concerns were expressed around the risks of a Pan-Dorset arrangement.

Cabinet members supported the report's recommendation as it was considered that a devolution deal for Dorset would provide an opportunity to boost the financial and economic investment for the area.

It was proposed by Cllr S Gibson seconded by Cllr S Flower

Decision

That the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Levelling up together with the Chief Executive and Executive Director for Place continue to take forward work to seek to secure a Devolution Deal for Dorset as set out in the report.

Reason for the decision

There was an opportunity for Dorset Council to progress a Devolution Deal for Dorset which could have significant social, economic, and environmental benefits. Such a Deal could give the council not only additional powers in relation to these matters but also additional funding and other resources.

Seeking a Devolution Deal would require Dorset Council to be proactive not only in making the case with Government but also in seeking a suitable partner or partners with neighbouring authorities. Suitable governance arrangements would need to be put in place to provide oversight of the deal.

27. Library Strategy - Recommendation from Joint Overview Committee

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Communities advised that the new Library Strategy had been developed following 2 phases of public consultation and would guide how the council developed and delivered the library service over the next 10 years.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Joint Overview Committee had considered and supported the recommendations before Cabinet. Non-Executive members present, and Cabinet members welcomed the recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr L Beddow and seconded by Cllr D Walsh

Decision

- (a) That the Library Strategy, operating model, and action plan be endorsed and adopted (appendices 1,9, & 10)
- (b) That the operating model be implemented from 2024 by the Library Service following consultation with the workforce and engagement with communities.
- (c) That the consultation and engagement undertaken with our communities, involving residents, children, communities, partners, businesses, councillors, our workforce, and all council services be noted (appendices 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6).

- (d) That the findings and proposals contained within the Equalities Impact Assessment be noted (appendix 8).

Reason for the decision

The Dorset Council Library Strategy would guide the council on how to develop and deliver library services over the next 10 years, delivering services in line with the needs of residents and Dorset Council's strategic priorities.

28. Dorset Council Plan Priorities Update: Housing for Local People

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health, and Housing gave an update on the Dorset Council Plan priorities for housing. She also set out some of the key challenges being faced by the service which were also detailed in the report attached to these minutes at Appendix 2.

29. Portfolio Holder /Lead Member(s) Update including any Policy referrals to report

There were no referrals to report.

30. Urgent items

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

31. Exempt Business

It was proposed by Cllr S Flower seconded by Cllr R Bryan

Decision

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in item(s) No 16 to 18 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) 1 & 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public

32. The Proposed Sale of land at Pond Walk, Stalbridge

The Portfolio Holder for Assets and Property presented an exempt report regarding the proposed sale of land at Pond Walk, Stalbridge and proposed an amendment to the wording of recommendation 2. The amendment and recommendations 1 & 3 were seconded by Cllr G Suttle.

Following debate and upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Decision

That recommendations 1 to 3 (as amended) set out within the exempt report to Cabinet of 25 July 2023 be approved.

Reason for the decision

To consider the disposal of land at Pond Walk, Stalbridge.

33. Digital Infrastructure and Innovation Funding Competition

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation presented the exempt report and recommendations. This was seconded by Cllr S Gibson.

Decision

That recommendations 1 to 3 as set out in the exempt report to Cabinet of 25 July, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To support the corporate aim of driving economic prosperity and Cabinet's commitment to digital innovation.

34. Approach to Engaging Our Temporary Workforce

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation presented the report that had also be considered and supported by Place and Resources Overview Committee of 6 and 28 June 2023.

The Portfolio Holder proposed and Cllr L Beddow seconded the recommendations.

Decision

That recommendations 1 and 2 as set out in the exempt report to Cabinet of 25 July 2023, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To agree the approach to engaging the Council's temporary workforce.

Appendix 1 - Councillor Question and Response

Appendix 2 - Dorset Council Plan Priorities Update: Housing for Local People

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.17 pm

Chairman

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Questions from Councillors to Cabinet – 25 July 2023

Question from Cllr G Taylor

Preamble

In March/April 2023 the proportion of children experimenting with vaping had grown by 50% year on year, from one in thirteen to one in nine. Children's awareness of promotion of vapes has also grown, particularly in shops where more than half of all children report seeing e-cigarettes being promoted, and online where nearly a third report e-cigarette promotion. Only one in five children now say they never see vapes promoted, down from 31% last year. It is an offence to sell e-cigarettes to children under 18 in the United Kingdom and children means those aged 11-17 years old, unless otherwise specified. (Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). Use of e-cigarettes (vapes) among young people in Great Britain. 2023.)

Question 1

Nationally 48% of young people aged under 18 years who vape say they purchase vapes from shops. It is illegal to sell vapes to young people under the age of 18. Therefore how much enforcement work has Dorset Council undertaken in the last year on the illegal sale of vapes from shops in Dorset to under 18 year olds?

Question 2

The report also gives a figure nationally of 46% of young people being given vapes. Would Dorset Council and their partners, Public Health Dorset, consider an awareness campaign on the dangers of vaping?

NB. There are no local statistics publicly available for vaping in children under 18 in Dorset. Government data is based on reports by ASH and the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC) Youth Tobacco and Vaping survey. There is however anecdotal evidence of the use of vapes by children in our schools.

Response to Question 1

Dorset Council Trading Standards service has carried out test purchasing with underage volunteers for a number of years, targeting alcohol and tobacco sales. In response to the rise in concern about the sale of disposable vapes to children a test purchase exercise was conducted in February 2022. Eleven premises were tested, four of which sold to the 15-year old volunteer. One of the sales was a 0% nicotine vape, which was not an offence, the other three were dealt with by way of advice and simple cautions.

From January 2022 to date, officers have visited 32 retailers selling vapes. Advice on preventing sales to children was given, and a guidance note detailing the law relating to vapes and the prevention of underage sales of vapes left. Eight seizures of legally non-compliant vapes were made during these visits.

Since January 2022, Trading Standards has seized 3470 legally non-compliant vapes from 9 premises, removing them from the supply chain.

Trading Standards is currently working with Dorset schools, the Youth Service and Police to drive down the sales of vapes to children and legally non-complaint vapes.

Response to Question 2

Public Health Dorset does not currently have plans for an awareness campaign on the dangers of vaping. This is partly because we do not yet know enough about the dangers, and any campaign would have to be carefully designed with a clear call to action. Simply asking children not to vape is unlikely to be effective without knowing more about the behaviours and underlying reasons behind vape use.

However, we do work with local schools at their request and have delivered some behaviour change workshops around vaping in schools. These aimed to provide information on vaping (from the [latest ASH survey and ASH resources](#)), but mostly focused on helping schools to understand the issue they are experiencing – vaping during school hours and the selling on of vapes in schools - and helping them break down their problem to think about what they could do to address these issues.

Members may also be aware that the Government has recently announced plans to clamp down on use of vapes by children as it renews focus on how to address the rise of vaping among young people. As part of this plan, the Government has endorsed the inclusion of education on vaping to be included in PSHE lessons. The national survey of drinking and drug use in school aged children is about to be launched and is seeking participation from schools. The survey will ask about vaping this year. Schools participating in the survey will receive two supporting lesson plans and can use the anonymous data on vaping specifically to tackle the rise in vaping amongst their own pupils. Public Health Dorset and Dorset Council children's services are raising awareness of the survey and asking schools to take part, so we get a better understanding of the data on use.

The Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Sir Chris Whitty sets out a clear position on vaping, which Public Health Dorset supports: "The key points about vaping (e-cigarettes) can be easily summarised. If you smoke, vaping is much safer; if you don't smoke, don't vape; marketing vapes to children is utterly unacceptable."

Dorset Council Plan Priorities – Housing

Cabinet – 25 July 2023

Portfolio Holder update from Cllr Jane Somper

The Dorset Council plan sets out its priorities from 2022 until 2024, reflecting what is important to the administration and the residents of Dorset. Within this plan and the associated delivery plan, housing and creating stronger and healthier communities are two key priorities.

It is important that Dorset Council continues to monitor and report on its progress against these key priority areas. This report outlines the strong progress that we are making in housing, and also reflects the considerable challenges and opportunities which exist.

Access to good quality housing is the foundation upon which people can build happy and successful lives¹. We are developing a new and ambitious Housing Strategy for Dorset, to provide an overarching plan to guide the Council and our partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the residents of Dorset.

The Housing Strategy is entering the formal consultation stage. This has included positive and constructive discussions at the People and Health Overview Committee and wide engagement and interest from Members. This is due to come to Cabinet on 5 December 2023 for consideration and approval. Prior to that meeting, there will be a further paper to Cabinet on 5 September 2023 to consider the current delivery plan for Housing, and how we are to respond in the most effective and efficient way to rising demand, rising costs, and declining availability of private rented housing. This will also show details of a new Housing Board to support the delivery of our objectives.

Some of the key challenges include:

- The rise in demand for social and affordable housing in 2022/23 is being sustained in the first quarter of 2023/24.
- In the financial year 2022/23, we had 3996 households approach us as being homeless, or at risk of homelessness. This is 600 more than the previous year. We are receiving up to 400 new applicants per month for the Housing Register, with a range of needs being presented, as well as homelessness.
- Currently, we have 369 households in temporary accommodation, of which there were 113 in bed and breakfast. The fact that the overall number is static is testament to very strong performance in preventing homelessness (from those first people first approaching us) and moving people on into settled housing. The figure is static, but there is a regular flow of people moving into temporary accommodation and then moving on into settled housing, such as those offered through Registered Provider Housing Associations. For example, a typical ten-bedroom hostel that we use, has had 30 households move through the scheme in the past two years.

¹ [Housing and health: a reading list - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/libraries/commons/2019/07/24/housing-and-health-a-reading-list)

- The cost of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast is rising, with increases greater than inflation being common. The Local Housing Allowance rate is frozen, so any increase in temporary accommodation charges take the rents further away from what can be recovered through Housing Benefit. We are focusing on sourcing and managing more cost-effective temporary accommodation, rather than over-reliance on expensive housing such as bed and breakfast. The cost of providing B&B is much higher than traditional forms of accommodation. This is a cost purely between the Council and the provider. Invoices are paid by the Council and are not subject to any contribution from the occupier. Examples of this breakdown are in this table:

Room Type	Eligible Cost of room per week	LHA subsidy	Subsidy Loss
Single	£320	£102	£218
1 adult, 1-2 child	£450	£102	£348
Larger family	£700	£102	£598

- We work well to enable and support the development of new affordable housing, with 664 new homes built in the last financial year. This is higher than at any point during our time as a Unitary Council and is delivered when the economic challenges are greater. We also work to encourage the best use of the existing homes owned by Housing Associations and to work similarly with the private landlord sector. This helps to close the gap between the demand for housing and the availability of affordable homes to rent.
- Part of our work is to ensure good housing standards across sectors, with a team in place to encourage best practice from landlords and to take enforcement action when necessary. This includes a current rise in awareness and concern about damp and mould, and our team work with landlords to maintain the best conditions for tenants. We also work to bring empty homes back into use, and have had a strong success recently in Blandford, bring back an empty home and converting into a home for six homeless people.
- We have made good use of capital resources and Government grants, delivering a hostel acquisition, a programme of rough sleeper accommodation, empty homes acquisitions and a programme to acquire temporary accommodation to use initially for Ukrainian and Afghan households.

The work on the Housing Strategy is driven by the need for Dorset's residents to live safely and securely in well-designed and well-built homes which meet their needs. The need to match the demand for housing to the supply of available homes is a key challenge, and the Housing Strategy is looking to find ways to increase the availability of housing across tenures, as well as to help people to explore options when they are facing homelessness or living in unsuitable housing. Our work also focuses on making sure that homes are maintained at a decent standard and be accessible. Our teams work to ensure that landlords and owners can deliver to that level.

As a non-stock holding Council, we are clear that our role as an enabling authority is a critically important one and this strategy recognises the importance of collaborating with partners to deliver high-quality, affordable, and sustainable housing for our residents.

This point also translates to other demands for housing or accommodation from across the Council's areas of need.

Housing is a key foundation of a good life. If someone or a family has a decent home, they stay healthy, work locally, study successfully, age well and contribute to wider communities. Without a decent home, that reverses – poor health, unemployment, low educational achievement, age related decline and a limited ability to contribute. Our paper to Cabinet on 5 September will outline in more detail the context of how we are operating as a Housing Authority and how this supports the delivery of the wider range of Council objectives and aspirations.

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