

## **PEOPLE AND HEALTH OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2024**

**Present:** Cllrs Beryl Ezzard (Chair), Will Chakawhata (Vice-Chair), Louise Bown, Carole Jones, Cathy Lugg, Steve Murcer, Jon Orrell and Andy Todd

**Apologies:** Cllrs Jindy Atwal and Stella Jones

**Also present:** Cllr Clare Sutton and Cllr David Taylor

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Bridget Bolwell, Cllr Craig Monks, Cllr Steve Robinson, Cllr Gill Taylor and Cllr Kate Wheller

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

Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Richard Conway (Service Manager for Housing Standards)

**22. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jindy Atwal and Stella Jones.

**23. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**24. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2024 were confirmed and signed.

**25. Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**26. Councillor Questions**

There were no questions submitted by councillors.

## 27. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

## 28. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing introduced the report. The policy had several significant inclusions in it, compared to the existing policy. These inclusions were a discretionary payment to top up a disabled facilities grant, a Moving On Grant to help disabled people move to a more suitable home, and an Energy Improvement Grant, which helped disabled people with energy efficiency and heating upgrades. Funding would be provided through existing budgets.

Members discussed the report and asked questions. During discussion, the following points were raised:

- There were some disparities between grants. These were caused as a result of different legislation, how complex they were to administer, and any conditions that are on the grant scheme.
- Properties that needed remedial work were generally older properties, but there were challenges in both rural and urban areas for remedial work.
- Empty homes were identified through council tax lists. However, there was a role for ward councillors to help report empty homes. If property owners cannot bring an empty home back into use, then the council could consider a Compulsory Purchase Order.
- The level of risk identified in the report should be reviewed if there was a chance of not receiving government funding for the next year.
- Interest rates on loans were generally around 4%. The length of time for repayment varied.
- Grants and loans were publicised through the council's website, and leaflets were available. It was a challenge to ensure all grants were in the same place, because they were wide-ranging, and it was a challenge to ensure they were in plain English, because of specific conditions. The website page could be reviewed to ensure it was accessible as possible.
- Eco 4 was a complex grant that was funded using money from utilities companies. It was available periodically throughout the year for different people. Feedback was given to government asking it to be simplified, so people can understand what is available.
- Some grants and loans had clawbacks if the property was sold. This would be means tested for Disabled Facilities Grants but it would not be for loans.

The Committee requested an all-member webinar on grants that were available.

Proposed by Cllr J Orrell, seconded by Cllr C Jones.

### **Decision:**

That it be recommended to Cabinet:

1. That they adopt the Dorset Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy attached as **Appendix 1** to the report.

2. That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Housing and Community Safety in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Health and Housing to:
  - (a) Make minor amendments to the policy to comply with legislation and guidance.
  - (b) Suspend the approval of any discretionary housing assistance offered in this policy.
  - (c) Introduce new assistance to help private residential property should funding become available.

## 29. **Families First for Children Pathfinder Progress Update**

The Executive Director for People – Children introduced the progress report to the committee. The Council was chosen by the Department for Education to take part in the Pathfinder, and the new Government is supportive of the Pathfinder. The progress since implementing the Pathfinder was outlined. There was a lead person to evaluate the implementation; the council was receiving positive feedback from families, with partner organisations feeling more involved in child protection and decision making.

Members of the committee discussed the progress update and asked further questions of officers and the Cabinet Member. The following points were raised:

- There was a need to know whether the Government would support further funding of the Pathfinder into the future. It would be difficult to deliver without funding.
- The Pathfinder had benefits for prevention and early intervention. There was more success in ensuring families do not get to a point of crisis, which was expensive for the council.
- It was too early to identify savings, however it was anticipated that savings may be made from fewer children going into care, and through reduced legal costs through providing early intervention.
- The three local authorities taking part in the Pathfinder were meeting the minimum requirements set by the Department for Education. However, it was difficult to compare them because they had different operational and delivery models.
- There were approximately 440 children in care and this number was slowly reducing. The number of child protection plans and children in need had also reduced. The national average for each of these was rising, which may make further progress to reduce these numbers more difficult.
- A member had a concern about information sharing, which should be made more effective to improve the experience that families have.
- The council has commissioned Triple P to continue which enabled families to receive flexible support. This would be shared with providers and communities, offering them training to become a Triple P practitioner.
- There was multi-agency collaboration for implementing the Pathfinder. An officer from the police and the health sector had been seconded into the project team. There was collaboration with adult social care through

Safeguarding Families Together which helped with drug abuse, mental health, and domestic abuse.

- Feedback has been given to the Department for Education to ask for funding to the police and Department for Health and Social Care so they can effectively support the scheme.

The Committee supported the on-going participation in the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme and congratulated all who were supporting its implementation.

**30. Dorset SACRE Common Agreed Syllabus**

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning introduced the report on the Dorset Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education's (SACRE) agreed syllabus. There was a statutory duty for religious education to be delivered in school and for local authorities to adopt a syllabus. It would provide teachers an outline of the curriculum that they need to deliver.

Following a question about how it would be implemented, members were advised that the council would encourage schools to implement the syllabus; it would be promoted through communications and training offers on the new syllabus. Ofsted were the regulator so they could check its implementation

The Chair of Dorset SACRE was grateful for the support of the Education Authority and was looking forward to launching the syllabus.

Proposed by Cllr C Jones, seconded by Cllr W Chakawhata.

**Decision:**

That the Dorset SACRE syllabus be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

**31. Committee's Work Programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan**

There were no comments on the Committee's work programme or the Cabinet Forward Plan.

**32. Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Duration of meeting:** 2.00 - 3.31 pm

**Chairman**

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