

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2024

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Laura Beddow, Bridget Bolwell, Sally Holland, Chris Kippax, Claudia Webb and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Robin Legg and Jane Somper

Also present: Cllr Derek Beer

Also present remotely: Cllr Ryan Hope and Cllr Clare Sutton

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), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Antony Bygrave (Senior Assurance Officer - Complaints), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance)

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

Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), Sian Walker McAllister (Independent Chair, Safeguarding Adults Board) and Chris Swain (Risk Management and Reporting Officer)

23. **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

24. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25. **Minutes**

The Chairman stated that the minutes of the previous meeting on 24 October 2024 would be signed at the next meeting, as they were still in draft.

26. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

27. Councillor Questions

There were no questions from councillors.

28. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

29. Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report

The Chairman introduced the item. A working group of committee members had received a presentation and reviewed the annual report, ahead of the meeting. The working group had a positive meeting.

The committee discussed the annual report, and the following points were raised:

- There was a concern with electronic records not being able to be shared by GP's between countries, within the UK, which causes delays for patients. The Safeguarding Adults Board Chair responded that this issue was escalated to the Department for Health and Social Care and the Chair's Network was anticipating a response by December. It may take time to resolve the issue due to a change in legislation needed.
- The Corporate Director for Adult Care Operations would raise this issue with the Senior Leadership Team, so it could be shared with MP's.
- A concern was raised with the South-West Ambulance Service (SWAST) using a manual referral process and the time taken to implement a new system. In response to this concern, the Safeguarding Adults Board Chair was confident that SWAST was using a robust risk assessment to manage the referrals until a new technical system was in place.
- In response to a question about the relationship with prisons, the Safeguarding Adults Board Chair was ensuring that the engagement of prisons at Board meetings has been more meaningful. There has been work with prisons to ensure they have a better understanding of escalating safeguarding issues to Adult Social Care.
- In relation to the deaths at the Gainsborough Care Home, if there was a Care Act referral to the Safeguarding Adults Board and if it met the criteria for a review, then a review would be commissioned to find learning points.

30. Prisoner Early Release Scheme

The Committee received a briefing note, from the Corporate Director for Housing and Community Safety, on the Prisoner Early Release Scheme. There were 2

prisoners released in the Dorset Council area. It was business as usual as other prisoners were released regularly.

In response to a question about reviewing early releases, the Corporate Director advised that a 12-week review taking place depended on how smoothly the release went.

The Committee welcomed the briefing note.

31. **Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report 2023-24**

The Complaints Manager introduced the Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report. He outlined the key messages from the annual report, highlighting that although there was a 13% decrease in complaints, it was the second highest year for complaints since Dorset Council was formed. There were 117 approaches to the council made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Half of the complaints investigated by the Ombudsman were related to SEND Provision.

The Committee discussed the report and asked questions, and the following points were raised:

- In response to a question on the number of approaches from the Ombudsman, the Complaints Manager explained that of the 117 approaches made by the Ombudsman, only 42 of these were investigated.
- Although complaints could be seen as negative, it was positive that people can make complaints and if they are dealt with well, it should not lead to negativity.
- There was a concern about poor communication in the early stages of contact with SEND teams, which has led to complaints. In response to these complaints SEND teams were receiving training on how to better phrase responses to families when the outcomes are not as families would wish.
- A member challenged how elderly people, particularly living in rural areas, could make complaints when they may not be comfortable doing them online. In response to this, there were other options to submit complaints, such as calls to customer services who can complete a complaint form on behalf of someone.
- There was a concern that 17% of responses to complaints exceeded the 20-day timescale. There was an understanding that there are reasons why deadlines cannot be met on some occasions, but it was important that this should not cause a long delay following a deadline. There was a need to monitor and improve response times.
- There was a role for councillors in resolving issues, such as by directing residents to the right officer. However, this needs to be recorded to ensure that the complaints system is used effectively.
- A question was raised on the potential costs of legal action. There was uncertainty about the costs of legal action due to outcomes not being known until legal proceedings were complete.
- A complaint referenced black bin bags being provided to a child in care to move belongings. The Committee were concerned that this had happened because the predecessor council had banned their use; and that it should

not happen in the future. The Corporate Director for Education and Learning gave assurance that this would not happen again.

32. **Performance Scrutiny**

The Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance introduced the item. In a pre-meeting the Committee identified 4 performance indicators of concern which officers needed to address.

The first performance indicator was the number of outstanding Care Act assessments, which has remained high. The Corporate Director for Adult Social Care responded that it was a challenge to ensure that capacity was evenly spread across months, with August typically seeing a reduction in productivity due to annual leave. At the current time there were approximately 1200 outstanding assessments.

The next performance indicator was the number of safeguarding concerns received during the month. The number of safeguarding concerns had risen and the committee sought assurance that these concerns would be responded to. The Corporate Director for Adult Social Care assured the committee that all safeguarding concerns were triaged to ensure the most important issues could be addressed in a timely manner.

A member raised that care homes were being put under pressure by the CQC to report concerns, which may lead to things being reported that do not need to be, which puts extra pressure on the number of safeguarding concerns. The Corporate Director confirmed that further work will be done with care providers on this issue.

The next performance indicator was the proportion of older people who were still at home 91 days after hospital discharge. This indicator was raised because it had worsened significantly. The Corporate Director recognised this issue and that a deep dive was commissioned to identify the reasons for it. The initial information suggested that readmissions were caused by urinary tract infections, falls, and sepsis. There was a health system-wide review of urgency and emergency care which would identify improvements to the reablement offer, which would help to reduce the number of readmissions. The Committee would receive a report on this work at a future meeting.

The final performance indicator was the net number of single households in B&B accommodation. Although this indicator was showing an improvement, it was still above the target. The Corporate Director for Housing and Community Safety responded to the performance indicator, stating that performance in this area was strong compared to the national average and that there was an aim to reach 0 single households in B&B accommodation by the end of 2025. In response to a question on how long people are staying in B&B accommodation for, he explained that it depended on how complex their accommodation needs were and it could range from a number of days to several weeks, aiming to move them as quickly as possible into more settled and appropriate accommodation.

33. **Cost of Living Challenge Update**

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture, and Community Engagement introduced the report. He outlined the 14 projects being progressed through the Cost of Living fund, and that the projects aimed at filling gaps where there was no longer government support. He highlighted that there was an £0.5m underspend which could be transferred into the next financial year, and there was a risk that 3 unapproved projects not proceeding.

The Business Partner for Communities and Partnerships gave a breakdown of the spend and progress of each project, emphasising the need for regular reviews to monitor the progress of projects. Some projects, particularly cost of living caseworkers at Citizens Advice, and emergency and affordable food security, had no spend yet and it was anticipated that this would happen by Quarter 4. The Business Partner outlined the recommendations to the committee.

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

- The uptake for cost-of-living support has been positive, but the specific data will be provided by the Department for Work and Pensions at the end of the financial year. The data would be available to the committee in the next update report.
- A member appreciated the flexibility to respond to emerging trends in take up of the support.
- There was a targeted grant programme for food security starting in November. The allocation of funding from this grant would be based on the number of people supported by the food bank or social supermarket.
- There were efforts to restart community lunch clubs in partnership with Age UK. Members were asked to contact the Business Partner if there was a need for a community lunch club or one that has ceased to exist in their ward.
- The committee requested that the local Ward Members are kept updated on the projects in their wards, as well as ensuring that Town and Parish Councils are updated.
- A member sought assurance on how it was ensured that schemes were spread across Dorset. In response to this the Business Partner assured that the team knew Dorset well and they receive knowledge from members, officers, and the voluntary sector. It was known where the areas of deprivation were. It has taken longer to start projects in rural areas which was why initial progress in Weymouth was quicker.
- The £50k investment in Lendology CIC was clarified. Members would receive a briefing on this topic with further information.
- A member asked about the cost effectiveness of the projects, suggesting that Citizens Advice was the most cost effective. The Cabinet Member felt that the value residents received from the cost-of-living support was immeasurable.
- A member noted difficulties for charities in supporting ongoing projects, particularly community transport, due to insurance issues. The Business

Partner highlighted that the Community Transport team had a small grant scheme which may help with these issues.

- A member raised a concern about core funding for community projects, where grants do not cover their core funding. The Business Partner stated that there was an Organisation and Revenue Support Fund which could assist with core funding. Groups could apply for this fund every 2 years. Children's Services provided a Youth Fund for youth organisations to receive core funding. There was assurance that these funds did not overlap and double-fund groups.

The Committee emphasised the need to ensure that there was equal access for schemes across Dorset and that it can help all Dorset residents.

The Committee noted that:

- (a) Government has recently announced that extension of the Household Support Fund to 2025/26.
- (b) £1.5m of the Cost of Living fund had been committed so far and that no further commitments were intended to be made at this stage whilst the impact of the Household Support Funding was assessed. If necessary, the balance of the £0.5m cost of living fund can be transferred into next financial year.

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

The Chairman updated members on the committee's work programme. There had been a request to add Birth to Settled Adulthood, to review its implementation, at the meeting on 6 February.

There were no comments on the work programme or the executive forward plan.

35. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.14 pm

Chairman

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