

Dorset County Council Cabinet – 6 March 2019
Shadow Executive Committee – 11 March 2019

Recommendation from the meeting of Dorset County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 29 January 2019.

4 Outcome from Children's Services Review

The Board considered a report prepared by the Chairman following the Children's Services Inquiry Day held on 15 January 2019. The findings were to be shared with the Cabinet, the Shadow Executive and the new Executive Director of Children's Services.

The Chairman explained that the findings included recommendations to Government as well seeking more resources to support Children's Services. The Inquiry Day had highlighted:-

- That the role of health services in education health care plans needed to be better managed. (This would be raised at the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee.)
- The cost of out of county children with special needs. This money could be better used to improve local facilities and save in the longer term. The Leader explained that part of the asset review work being undertaken was looking at how these children could be looked after locally.
- That although £1m had been provided to increase the work force to catch up on educational health care plans, the plans would need to be monitored and reviewed. It was recommended that the cost (£500K) should be consolidated into the budget. The Leader advised that the use of the £1m was to be reviewed for its effectiveness.
- That social work teams and family partnership zones needed to work more closely together on prevention.
- That communication had been recognised by Children's Services as an issue and steps were being taken to address this. Board members were to see the information to be sent to parents about the outcomes from the Inquiry Day prior to it being issued.
- That the Council should better communicate roles within the system, including that of parents.
- That all IT systems were not compatible currently and did not allow for the sharing of information. This should be prioritised, and it was suggested that a capital investment might lead to a longer term saving.
- That steps should be taken to address some of the transport issues raised for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). The Leader explained that a report on integrated transport was due and would address some of these issues.
- Issues raised by parents, including that it could take 12 months to obtain a medical diagnosis for an educational health care plan.

The day before the inquiry day, members had visited local schools. The review illustrated the value of members having local knowledge and a good understanding of how the Council worked. This needed to be included in the induction for members of the new Dorset Council.

The Board then considered individual recommendations and the following points were made:

- The possibility of the new Council identifying lead members to oversee performance in key areas to provide assurance.
- The need for parents to be involved and have a better understanding of how the system worked.
- The need to learn from best practice elsewhere in the Country.
- That parents involved in the Inquiry Day should receive an update as to its outcomes and an explanation of where these would be considered.
- That consideration should be given as to how parents without internet access could be informed of the outcomes of the review.
- That the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee might write to the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group with regard to health concerns raised.
- Any action plans arising from the review should include timelines.

The Chairman would send members a copy of the agreed recommendations by email following the meeting. These would be considered by the Cabinet on 6 March and the Shadow Executive on 11 March 2019. They would also be available for the forthcoming Ofsted inspection.

Resolved

1. That the Cabinet and Shadow Executive receive the report at their next meetings.
2. That the Chairman should meet with the new Director for Children's Services and share the details behind this report.

Recommended

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, whilst recognising the pressures on the Dorset Council budget recommends that the base line for the Children's Services budget should be raised to better meet the needs of the SEND students and families.
2. That the new Dorset Council should provide an induction programme for its councillors that should encourage visits to local schools and a greater understanding of the workings and financing of the SEND team and schools. It should also consider a new way of working for councillors that encourages them to be more actively engaged with the users and providers of a service over a reasonable length of time. (A "standing" policy and development group).
3. That the new council, working in partnership with Health, should consider whether capital investment could lead to considerable revenue savings in the medium term by providing more suitable learning and living accommodation locally.
4. That the IT department should have, as a priority, an investigation into how data bases held on SEND students can better communicate with each other – schools, transport, FPZ, SEND team, NHS, Social services.
5. That an in-depth review of SEN transport is undertaken as a priority, taking notice of issues listed in this report and including how identification is made of families for whom personalised budgets are feasible, and whether they save money.
6. That the department is asked to set up timelines for the implementation of the recommendations identified in the Communications section of this report.
7. That the new council should review the progress made to improve communications with families and how the Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) process is working after 6 months.