

People and Health Overview Committee

24th March 2022

Children's Commissioning Strategy

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to comment on the 5-year Commissioning Strategy and support the intended approach.

Reason for Recommendation: Effective strategic commissioning is the main way to understand, plan and deliver better outcomes for residents. This strategy sets the direction for commissioning activity that will support our strategic aims to improve the well-being of children in Dorset over the next five years.

1. Executive Summary

The core purpose of this strategy is to ensure we provide the best start to life for all children and the right support at the right time for vulnerable children and young people. It seeks to create a shared vision across a wide range of partners, including GPs, the police, schools and the voluntary and community sector, in order to create a whole system approach to strengthen the service offer to meet all levels of need. We want children, young people and their families to experience a positive journey through a system of services that builds their resilience and enables them to meet their full potential.

There are 3 priorities for delivery:

- I. Ensure there are sufficient, quality services for children, young people and families through:
 - a. Ensuring sufficient local provision to meet needs
 - b. Supporting a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector
 - c. Market development to ensure the provider market offers value for money, person centred provision and choice
 - d. Implementing effective quality assurance processes

- II. Improve outcomes for children and young people across their life-course through:
 - a. The development of whole life commissioning approaches
 - b. Joint commissioning arrangements with partners including health and adult services
 - c. Implementation of whole family approaches
 - d. Development of networks of support from Family Hubs

- III. Continued investment in early intervention through:
 - a. Delivery of a Digital Family Offer high-quality information provision and services that supports self-service
 - b. Implementation of Asset Based Community development approaches

2. Financial Implications

All activity carried out under this strategy will be undertaken within existing, or identified, revenue and grant funding. It will be carried out within the terms of Dorset Council's scheme of delegation and financial regulations and will align with the commercial strategy.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

The strategy aims to improve the health and well being of children in Dorset.

4. Climate implications

A core aim of the service is to ensure that more services for children and families are delivered locally – reducing our travel needs and contributing to a sustainable local economy.

5. Other Implications

The strategy seeks to support the development of a strong and vibrant community and voluntary sector and will deliver a changed service landscape

over time, changing the premises for where we deliver our work. Detailed engagement will be undertaken under specific commissioning work plans.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

The risks associated with specific commissioning proposals will be assessed as part of the relevant governance process.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

EQIAs will be carried out for specific commissioning proposals.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Children's Commissioning Strategy

9. Background Papers

[Dorset Council's Plan 2020-24](#)

[Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020-23](#)

[Dorset SEND Strategy 2021-2024](#)

[Dorset SEND Capital Strategy 2020-25](#)

[Dorset Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2023](#)

[Dorset Children and Young People's Mental Health Strategy 2020-24](#)

[Dorset Childcare Sufficiency Strategy 2020-21](#)

[Dorset Commercial Strategy – Commissioning and Procurement 2021](#)

[A Whole new World: Funding and Commissioning In Complexity](#)

[Green Paper: Transforming Public Procurement](#)

[Transforming Public Procurement: Government response to consultation](#)

[Asset-Based Community Development for Local Authorities](#)

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Appendix 1: Children's Commissioning Strategy

Introduction

The core purpose of this strategy is to ensure we provide the best start in life for all children and the right support at the right time.

It seeks to create a shared vision across a wide range of partners, in order to create a whole system approach to strengthen the service offer to meet all levels of need.

We want children, young people and their families to experience a positive journey through a system of support and services that builds their resilience and enables them to meet their full potential.

Our vision for children and strategic plans

Dorset Council's Plan sets out the council's approach to ensuring Dorset is a great place to live, work and visit and our partnership vision is for:

'Dorset to be the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.'



This vision is being delivered through our Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2020-23, led by the Board of the Dorset Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People, which brings together colleagues from Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset, Dorset 0-19 Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, Dorset Youth Offending Services, Dorset CCG, Dorset Healthcare, Dorset Parent Carer Council, Schools' representatives and Early Years representatives and other agencies to deliver on our ambitions for our children. The Board is chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services and co-chaired by a partner representative.

The delivery of this plan is supported by additional strategies and plans which include:

- Dorset SEND Strategy 2021-2024
- Dorset SEND Capital Strategy 2020-25
- Dorset Children in Care Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-23
- Dorset Children and Young People's Mental Health Strategy 2020-24
- Childcare Sufficiency Strategy 2020-21
- Dorset Commercial Strategy – Commissioning and Procurement 2021

Needs Analysis

Dorset is a beautiful coastal county situated in the South West region of England. Over half of Dorset is covered by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation. Our children and young people recognise this as a real asset, but have told us that access to this can be more difficult for those with additional needs. Spending time in greenspace has many benefits for our health and wellbeing, and close proximity of greenspace means we can build contact into our everyday lives. Dorset and the surrounding area has many high quality outdoor spaces. However, accessibility can be an issue, with 43% of residents living more than 300m safe walk from a publicly accessible greenspace. Socio-economic status, age and health can also influence ability to access nature.

The Dorset rural idyll can conceal hidden deprivation, with significant pockets found mostly in urban coastal areas as well as rural deprivation due to isolation and difficulty accessing housing, transport, and essential services. The Department for Work and Pensions estimates that 25% of Dorset's children are living in poverty.

Earnings are below average and house prices are high with affordability issues for many young people and keyworkers. In Dorset the median house price to earnings ratio is 9.7 (7.8 England) and this one of the highest rates in the South West. Living in cold, damp, overcrowded or insecure accommodation affects our health and wellbeing. Securing large enough high quality and affordable housing, with access to physical space can be a challenge for families across the county.

Dorset has relatively low birth rates and younger people often move away from the area. Participation of 16- and 17-year olds in employment, education and training is relatively high, however about 5% of our young people do not and this can have long lasting economic impact into later life.

We have 159 schools in Dorset and although educational outcomes are broadly in line with national rates at most phases, the gap between the most disadvantaged students (including those eligible for free school meals) and their peers is too high and levels of employment for young people with Special Educational Needs is too low. Social mobility in Weymouth and Portland is at one of the lowest levels in the country. Dorset has been designated one of the 55 Education Investment Areas by the Department of Education. There are 80 different languages spoken in Dorset schools. 8% (Jan 2021 school census) of school age children are from black and minority ethnic communities compared to 35.1% nationally.

About 18% of Dorset's children and young people have special educational needs and disabilities. We have approximately 3,200 children with Special Educational Needs supported through an Educational, Health and Care Plan out of a wider total of 6,500 children and young people identified with SEN Support needs in our schools.

Children, young people and their families can experience difficulties and needs support from early help or social care at different stages of their lives. At the end of December 2021 there were:

1100 children and young people being supported through early help

1,143 Children in Need supported by social workers

283 Children with a Child Protection Plan (at risk of or experiencing significant harm)

437 Children in Care

272 Care Leavers

Although crime overall is low in Dorset, domestic abuse, criminal exploitation, and rural crime have been identified as priorities for our partner agencies and we are increasingly worried about violence against girls and women. Some groups in our communities are more at risk of disadvantage or exploitation. Particular issues include county lines, child sexual exploitation and practices such as Cuckooing. Local intelligence from young people have identified, through survey and feedback during participation events, that they do not always feel safe in places they frequent or in their communities.

Having the best start in life is key to avoiding poor health outcomes and health inequalities in later life and most thrive and experience good health. However, this is not the case for all children and there are some areas of concern.

Childhood obesity is considered one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. Obesity in childhood is associated with a higher chance of premature death and disease such as diabetes or cardiovascular diseases in adulthood. Although our rates are good compared to England, the prevalence rate of obesity has been increasing. If Dorset had a population of 100 children, 9 would be classified as obese at 4-5 years and 17 at 10-11 years.

It is estimated that mental health problems affect about 1 in 10 children and young people. Experiencing mental health issues in childhood can result in lower educational attainment and risky health behaviours such as smoking and

substance misuse. In Dorset, hospital admissions as a result of self-harm have been increasing over the last few years and are higher than the national rate. During Covid there has been an increase in requests for support for anxiety and depression and eating disorders.

Rates of childhood admissions to hospital in Dorset are significantly worse than national rates for some specific issues including unintentional and deliberate injuries, A&E attendances and emergency admissions and alcohol admissions.

We provide a wide range of services to children, young people and families and Children's Services in Dorset have been evaluated by Ofsted as 'good with outstanding leadership'. The overall budget for delivery of children's services in 2022/23 is £74.481million, an increase of 3.82% from the previous year. A key aspect of financial strategy has been to establish budgets that reflect current and planned demand and practice. Achieving this baseline means transformation and tactical service change programmes can be implemented from a stable starting position. £8.96m of additional funding is required to do this. Children's Services have developed an ambitious evidence-based transformation programme to deliver £14.9m cashable savings over five years, £2.2m in 2022/23. The largest challenges facing the budget in the last year has been the cost of care placements for children and young people and loss of trading income from schools.

Our commissioning approaches

Commissioning is a key enabler to support and deliver sustainable change and deliver better public services. Strategic commissioning is a mechanism to get the best possible outcomes within resources available (ensuring best value) by deciding how to use our resources for children, young people and parents in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way.

Our commissioning approach is underpinned by a set of shared values and principles set out in our children, young people and families plan, and described below:

- Always putting children and families at the heart of everything we do
- No child or family left behind – we will strive for equity of outcomes for our children, young people, and their families
- Focussing on early intervention and prevention aiming to help early in the life of a problem and providing a graduated response to need – the right help, in the right place, at the right time
- Working restoratively, doing things with families instead of to them, for them or doing nothing
- Thinking Family and working together so that children and families receive a joined-up response and good transitions

- Focussing on strengths within families and communities, understanding the lived experience of children
- Staying with families until outcomes are delivered, embedded and change is sustained
- Being inclusive – we want our children and young people to be able to get the help they need in the county that is their home
- Empowering young people and families to use the information we give them to make decisions for themselves
- Delivering best value for money - spending the Dorset £ in Dorset on the things that get the best outcomes for children and families.

Because we understand that systems that exist to deliver public services are complex, our approach to commissioning is informed by the research around commissioning for complexity led by Newcastle University Business School. A challenging environment but one that invites innovation and importantly requires commissioners in local authorities to work with their counterparts in other organisations (such as the NHS or the police), as well as with providers and residents, to design and deliver sustainable new services that manage need and demand across the whole system. This requires coproducing solutions with residents, providers and partners, and sharing responsibility outside of the local authority, for example by budget pooling with partners, or by devolving budgets to local communities.

Our approach to commissioning is shaped by the following methodological approaches:

- Needs assessments for specific areas of work or population groups
- Design methodology and co-production to problem solve
- Project management approaches to governance and delivery
- Emerging and promising evidence used to inform
- Outcomes based approach to measuring impact
- Adoption of the Institute of Public Care’s commissioning cycle (see diagram)



Transforming public procurement

The government wishes to move beyond the Transition Framework and cease the alignment with EU procurement regulations. The intended outcome is that public procurement processes will be simplified and aligned to key elements of

national economic policy. The proposals were outlined in a Green Paper called Transforming Public Procurement and further refined in the government response to consultation on the proposals. These changes offer a number of opportunities:

- Simplification of process and reduced overheads
- Improved digital platforms to modernise and reduce document handling
- A broader view of value for money to include strategic considerations such as reshaping a market; social and environmental concerns and value over the life of a contract.

The simpler routes to market proposed by the government will enable the council to focus on shaping the market, achieving best value, and developing partnership approaches to complex issues with a range of providers. Commissioners in Children's Services will work with corporate procurement colleagues to take advantage of this to develop new approaches that will be compliant with the future regulatory environment.

Our Commissioning priorities for 2022-2027

We have 3 key commissioning priorities for the next 5 years to support the delivery of our vision for ensuring that children in Dorset can thrive:

1. Ensure there are sufficient, quality services for children, young people and families through:
 - 1.1. Ensuring sufficient local provision to meet needs
 - 1.2. Supporting a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector
 - 1.3. Market development to ensure the provider market offers value for money, person centred provision and choice
 - 1.4. Implementing effective quality assurance processes
2. Improve outcomes for children and young people across their life-course through:
 - 2.1. The development of whole life commissioning approaches
 - 2.2. Joint commissioning arrangements with partners including health and adult services
 - 2.3. Implementation of whole family approaches
 - 2.4. Development of networks of support from Family Hubs
3. Continued investment in early intervention through:
 - 3.1. Delivery of a Digital Family Offer high-quality information provision and services that supports self-service
 - 3.2. Implementation of Asset Based Community development approaches

Priority 1: Ensure there are sufficient, quality services for children, young people and families

1.1. Ensuring sufficient local provision to meet needs

We will commission provision that meets local needs and delivers on our statutory sufficiency responsibilities. In Years 1 and 2 this will include:

- Residential children's homes
- Independent Foster Care
- Supported accommodation
- Accommodation for vulnerable 18 to 25-year olds
- Alternative Education provision
- Specialist assessments
- Short breaks
- Family Support
- Implementation of the SEND Capital Strategy
- Implementation of the Children in Care Placement Sufficiency Strategy

We will continue to develop business cases to secure investment in the development of provision based on needs assessments and gap analysis and participate in bidding for national transformation funding to secure additional investment into Dorset.

1.2. Supporting a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector

We are committed to supporting a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector through the facilitation of a forum that brings together partners delivering services to children and young people age 0 to 25 and their families.

We will share our data and information on needs and support the sector with fundraising and the submission of funding bids, including where appropriate match funding.

We will simplify procurement processes and use targeted grant making opportunities, when appropriate, to support the sector to develop provision. We will work with the voluntary and community sector to support them to develop the capacity to fully participate in joint commissioning arrangements and local service provision.

1.3. Market development to ensure the provider market offers value for money, person centred provision and choice

It is recognised that over time, both local and national priorities and the capacity of the market to respond to these priorities will change. As part of ongoing performance monitoring, there will also be a need to identify the potential for managing the market. This applies to working with private and public sector providers to help them to understand the needs and priorities of the local context.

We share national concerns that in some sectors of care for children, there is disproportionate profit making and quality of provision is not reflective of the price paid. We will participate in regional and national frameworks to help to improve our influence over the market as well as supporting the development of small local provision. We will expect greater transparency over costs and will be demanding in our expectations of providers to deliver good outcomes.

We will participate in regional and national sufficiency projects to develop more provision and influence the development of new contracts that better meet our needs.

We will stimulate the market in areas where there is a paucity of provision, for example, home care and short breaks provision for children who are disabled. We will support providers to consider how they can develop approaches to receiving direct payments so that families have greater choice and control of the support they receive.

1.4. Implementing effective contract management and quality assurance processes

We will adopt proportionate outcomes-based commissioning approaches across all commissioned services and ensure that there is sufficient resource to effectively quality assure provision.

All provision will have a lead contract manager focused on performance and contract compliance and there will be clear processes for operational employees and partners to share intelligence about provision and we will work with providers to address any concerns in a timely manner.

We will ensure that we visit all commissioned provision at least once per year in addition to contract management meetings.

We will invest in joint commissioning capacity and workforce development for commissioners to ensure that that they are skilled and confident.

We will invest in a 'Young Commissioners' programme to increase their involvement across the commissioning cycle.

Priority 2: Improve outcomes for children and young people across their life-course

2.1. The development of whole life commissioning approaches

One of our major themes for transformation is the 0 to settled adulthood programme. The programme is steered by a joint board, which is independently chaired. The programme will work out from the better management of transitions for young people who will require adult social care, continuing health care, or ongoing support under the Mental Health Act. Future work will include the development of 0-25 services for young people who are disabled or who have mental health needs and move towards a culture where children benefit from whole life planning and whole life commissioning rather than staged and siloed offers – services which are defined by age or need.

2.2. Joint commissioning arrangements with partners including health and adult services

A key driver to improving outcomes for some young people is ensuring services are jointly commissioned to ensure that they wrap around and support them rather than building in transitions, breaks or mismatches in offers from individual services and agencies.

Work is progressing on joint commissioning for:

- Dorset Care and Support framework – in partnership with adult's services with a particular emphasis on enabling micro-enterprises and co-operatives as part of local economic development
- Speech Language and Communication Needs – this involves aligned commissioning with all partners supporting the delivery of a single services specification in Year 1 moving to a pooled budget in Year 2.
- Emotional Health and Well Being Services
- S.117 – after care for people who have been in hospital receiving treatment for mental health. This will include the development of a pooled budget.
- Complex needs provision (avoiding inappropriate in-patient episodes)
- Targeted grant making for the voluntary and community sector to support emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Implementing the Dorset Children and Young People's mental Health Strategy

We will continue to seek opportunities to develop pooled budgets and integrated commissioning arrangements over the life of this strategy including supporting the implementation of the findings from the CCG led All-Age Autism review.

2.3. Implementation of whole family approaches

The impact of parental issues and needs makes up a significant proportion of the work that is undertaken by practitioners in Children's Services and there is clear evidence that implementation of working in a 'whole family way', supports better outcomes for families, improves recruitment and retention of social workers; and delivers cost reductions. The approach provides a coherent continuum of family support from preventative to statutory intervention, enabling swift step-up and down and continuity of multi-agency engagement, according to need. Whole-family approaches can be key in maximising the impact of resources and identifying opportunities to support carers, and to ease the very real risks to health and wellbeing that caring can bring.

We will implement a new approach 'Safeguarding Families Together' where The key elements of this include the embedding of specialist workers with domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health expertise working as a multi-disciplinary team with children's social workers and the delivery of training for these teams to operate a single practice model. This programme will deliver planned savings of £4,500,000 over 5 years.

Additionally, we will continue to implement the national 'Supporting Families' (formerly known as Troubled Families) programme. This programme brings additional investment to the council through a payment by results approach, where we receive funding for demonstrating that we have improve outcomes for all members of a family. This funding enables us to deliver whole family approaches, improve partnership working and data sharing, and develop systems of family support services. Although the 3-year national programme is still under development, funding has been agreed for 2022/23 and we anticipate that we will be expected to work with approximately 1,200 families over the life of the programme.

2.4. Development of networks of support from Family Hubs

Family Hubs will be at the heart of how we deliver our work in localities. They will provide whole-family, universal and specialist services (including safeguarding) for pre-birth to aged-19 (or 25 with SEND), with space for practitioners to touch down and work with families both directly and through group work.

Family Hubs are not just about physical places and spaces. We will support families to access preferential digital services, so that Dorset families know where to get the right help at the right time. This will avoid costly interventions. At the heart of our Family Hubs will be well-designed services, that offer pathways to families that are integrated with our partners - improving the experience and potential outcomes.

A network of Family Hubs, embedded in communities in Dorset will:

- Provide visible and branded spaces for families to access help and support. Spaces that are appealing and welcoming.
- Integrate council and partner service pathways, providing a joined-up and comprehensive experience for families. Helping us to deliver the right help at the right time.
- Support families to access hybrid and digital services.
- Help locality teams (and partners) to be present in and to deliver a whole-family approach within communities.
- Deliver planned savings of £2,500,000 over 5 years (£250,000 in 2022/23) plus £1,000,000 in cost avoidance. These will be achieved through a reduction in buildings (and the management costs of them) used by Dorset Council, and efficiencies delivered by the integration of service pathways.

Priority 3: Continued investment in early intervention

3.1. Delivery of a Digital Family Offer high-quality information provision and services that supports self-service

We will create an online customer platform that:

- Provides a tailored experience for families based on their needs and circumstances.
- Provide universal and specialist services directly to families from their mobile device, giving them access to support outside of our working hours and at their convenience. This supports us to provide the right help at the right time.
- Integrates services and information provided by partners and other trusted sources – enabling families to feel confident they are accessing the right support.
- Increases opportunities for children and families to engage and co-produce the work we do with them, such as plans – putting them at the heart of everything we do.

- Improve and streamline behind the scenes business processes and tools used by the workforce – helping staff to spend time on what is most important.
- Deliver a saving of £2,927,500 over 5-years plus £2,250,000 in non-cashable, cost avoidance. Services delivered digitally are on the whole cheaper to deliver in the long-term and can avoid costly interventions.

3.2. *Implementation of Asset Based Community Development approaches*

The communities we live in and the relationships we have are the primary source of our physical and mental health – which in turn affects the kind of life we are able to live and what part we can play in society. By investing in communities, local authorities can focus on cultivating the conditions for people to flourish – and, over time, reduce the demand for services at the point of crisis.

The effectiveness of this approach was demonstrated through Covid, when residents and organisations were able to effectively come together to help and support each other. This type of approach shows that connecting people and creating more resident-to-resident relationships builds interdependence and reliance on each other. Connecting people to their shared interests, and enabling them to exchange skills and resources, helps communities identify and take action on the issues that are most important to them and builds on strengths that are already there.

We will invest in these approaches through community conversations facilitated by our Local Alliance partnership groups for children; identification of community builders and connectors; Asset Mapping and development of micro-grants to communities and individuals to create projects that benefit the whole neighbourhood.