

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2024

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Louie O'Leary (Vice-Chair), Bridget Bolwell, Sally Holland, Chris Kippax, Jane Somper and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllr Claudia Webb

Apologies: Cllrs Laura Beddow and Robin Legg

Also present: Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Byron Quayle and Cllr Clare Sutton

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

George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Tony McDougal (Communications Business Partner - Adults and Housing), Louise Drury (Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers), Kelly Henry (Head of Good Care Provision, Safeguarding and Business Support), Sunita Khattra-Hall (Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Families), Kath Saunders (Head of Locality and Strategy (North)) and Douglas Gilbert (Strategic Education Information Lead)

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

Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing)

STATEMENT ON GAINSBOROUGH CARE HOME INCIDENT

The Chairman read a statement on the incident at the Gainsborough Care Home, Swanage, on 23 October 2024. The full statement is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

12. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Laura Beddow and Robin Legg.

13. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

14. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2024 were confirmed and signed.

15. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

16. Councillor Questions

There were no questions from councillors.

17. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

18. SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Strategy and Progress

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning introduced the SEND Strategy. The Strategy was making a positive difference for children and families. The priority areas, national context, and financial implications were outlined.

Members discussed the report and the following points were raised:

- There were 136 children in mainstream schools who would be suitable for specialist support. Each of them were being considered individually so more funding could be allocated to schools.
- Following a child receiving an EHCP, the right provision for health and education would be found for the child. The timeliness of this would vary depending on the availability of places.
- There were annual reviews for EHCP's to review whether the child's needs have been met.
- There was a recommendation from Ofsted to improve data for measuring targets for EHCP's.
- For children in alternative provision, the School Improvement Team would review their outcomes.
- The new Head of Commissioning would be looking at alternative provision from the commissioning framework. Although for some children alternative provision was the right choice, the aim was to get as many children as possible back into mainstream education.
- The Family Support and Advice Line, which is available through family hubs, could provide assurance and support to parents who need assessments for their child.
- The location of inclusion hubs was based on data to understand where they were needed to be prioritised. More schools were now interested in having

an inclusion hub, so they could be introduced in more areas of the county. There was also the option of special school satellites and working with mainstream schools to ensure they could meet EHCP needs.

- Placements at special schools out of county were made due to being duty bound to find a suitable placement and due to parental choice. Neighbouring authorities could also make placements in the Dorset Council area.

The committee discussed establishing an enquiry day to address the committee's concerns with EHCP's. The concerns raised by committee members included:

- That the council was failing some children by not meeting the deadlines required to provide EHCP assessments.
- There were delays in diagnosis from health partners. Therefore, health partners should be involved in an enquiry day.
- The time taken for a support package to be put into place, and the targets for this.
- Ofsted has recommended that data needed to be used more effectively to improve outcomes through the SEND Inclusion and Partnership Board
- The 20-week period for EHCP's was not being met, with the current success at 60%, and this was not a priority for improvement.

The intended outcome for an enquiry day was that if the council was more successful in delivering EHCP's on time, it would reduce unplanned expenditure.

Proposed by Cllr T Coombs, seconded by Cllr L O'Leary.

Decision

That an enquiry day be established to consider the timescales and timeliness of EHCP's. The group would comprise of Councillors Coombs, Bolwell, and Somper.

19. Educational Outcomes in Dorset

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning introduced the report which provided details on the educational outcomes for the academic year 2023-24. The data showed the disadvantage gap being slightly narrowed and a small improvement in key stage 4 outcomes. Officers were confident in their approach to improvement. There was a need to consider specific priorities for some academy trusts and schools.

Members of the committee discussed the report and asked questions of the officers. The following points were raised:

- There were emerging improvements in the data. Good practice was being shared between education leaders through regular meetings. Leaders within schools and the education sector needed to be able to drive this improvement.

- Schools would have access to their Key Stage 1 data. There was a concern that the council also needed access to Key Stage 1 data for effective early intervention.
- Reading was consistent across schools, whereas maths was not. Maths results were better in larger schools. However, Dorset was in the bottom 20% of local authorities for Key Stage 2 attainment at the expected standard for reading, writing, and maths.
- Where there was a lack of resources for training, teachers could be used to provide mentoring to other teachers and to upskill staff.
- The options for post-16 educational options and skills were promoted, but improvements could be made in this area. There was work with local businesses to explore opportunities for apprenticeships and internships.
- A difficulty with attending post-16 education was caused by transport, particularly in rural areas.

The Chair was discussing with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning about key worker housing from a planning perspective. The Committee would regularly monitor attainment and there was a request for improvement reports to be brought to the committee annually.

20. **Good Care Provision**

The Head of Good Care Provision, Safeguarding and Business Support introduced the report, which updated on the progress of the delivery of good care provision. She outlined the key areas of the report, which included a reduction of children in residential care, foster carer recruitment, and a financial overspend in external placements.

The committee discussed the report and asked questions of the officers. The following comments were made:

- The differences between council and private provided foster care needed to be communicated to potential foster carers.
- The Council raised foster carer fees by 15% in the last year which made the council more attractive to foster carers.
- The Council was part of a South West fostering recruitment group which would respond to initial calls from potential foster carers.
- Parents who have children with a disability could receive direct payments to purchase short breaks.
- There was an action plan for delivering the priority of good care provision, from the Children, Young People, and Families' Plan. A summary on the progress of each action was shared following the meeting.

The committee welcomed the report and the progress made but raised a concern about the reliance on private foster carers. Use of private provision led to higher cost pressures on the budget. There was a need to ensure that the council's support for foster carers and the Mockingbird model was advertised well. There was a suggestion of a mystery shop to provide feedback on the initial discussion.

21. **Committee's Work Programme and Executive Forward Plans**

There were no comments from the committee on the work programme or forward plans.

22. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 11.00 am - 1.21 pm

Chairman

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