

## **PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 16 JANUARY 2025**

**Present:** Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Jane Somper (Vice-Chair), Laura Beddow (leaves at 13.55), Bridget Bolwell (leaves at 14.03), Sally Holland, Carole Jones, Chris Kippax (leaves at 14.14), Robin Legg and Carl Woode

**Present remotely:** Cllr Claudia Webb

**Apologies:** None

**Also present:** Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Derek Beer, Cllr Simon Clifford, Cllr Jack Jeanes, Cllr Steve Robinson, Cllr Clare Sutton and Cllr Gill Taylor

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Ryan Hope, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke and Cllr David Tooke

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

George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Mark Tyson (Corporate Director for Adult Commissioning & Improvement), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Heather Lappin (Head of Strategic Finance), Lee House (Service Manager for Finance), Carolann James (Interim Corporate Director - Care and Protection), Gary Messenger (Head of Housing), Sian White (Service Manager, Finance) and Joshua Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer)

**36. Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

**37. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

*Declarations of interest were raised during the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy report and are detailed under Minute 42.*

38. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 October 2024 and 14 November 2024 were confirmed and signed.

39. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

40. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

41. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

42. **Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Strategy Report**

The Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial introduced the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) report. They gave a presentation which summarised the budget and the increase in the base budget for each service, as well as the high-risk service pressures, and the numbers of children in care and how it influences spend. The presentation is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The committee discussed the overall budget position and the budgets for Children's Services, Adults and Housing, and Public Health. Non-committee members were also given the opportunity to ask questions. During the discussion, the following key points were raised:

- There was an average uplift for fees and charges of 2.5%. Clarification was needed how these were put into directorates and that the committee needed more detail on fees and charges in future years. Officers responded that the list of fees and charges would be available in the Full Council report and that fees and charges were either set by government or by the council based on the market.
- The council not being able to meet savings and transformation targets this year and that they must be met next year to ensure the council's budget was not affected and transformational savings were achieved.
- One of the principal pressures was high-cost placements. It was important the council was able to provide bespoke packages for each child and being able to provide all options for children in care so the council does not have to commission high-cost packages. Members asked how the local market was being developed to reduce high-cost pressures.

- The 50% reduction in funding for the Dorset Education Board was a concern given the educational achievement levels in the county. The Corporate Director for Education responded to this concern giving assurance and the reason the saving.
- Consideration should be given to the Birth to Settled Adulthood programme having a combined budget between Children's Services, Adults and Health. This could be explored further through the committee's work programme.
- How the council was promoting that people can purchase their own home care through the council and whether an investment was needed in marketing for this, and could it help with the local market. Officers responded that more work was needed to promote the service, however if the number of clients increased quickly, it could put pressures elsewhere.
- Shared Lives should be added to the committee's work programme to review the development of the service and its transfer to Care Dorset.
- What were the confidence levels in being able to eliminate the use of B&B's for temporary accommodation. The Corporate Director for Housing explained that it was an achievable target and that a plan to eliminate B&B accommodation use was being developed through a delivery paper which would be considered by the People & Health Overview Committee.
- What was the financial impact of separating joint funding for Public Health. The Executive Director for Corporate Development responded that public health disaggregation was not a financial risk for the council and that ringfenced funding was provided by government through the Public Health Grant.

At the relevant points during the discussion Cllr L Beddow declared that she worked for a registered social landlord and Cllr C Jones declared that she was involved with setting up a family hub. Both councillors continued to take part in the meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr J Somper, seconded by Cllr C Jones and agreed by the Committee that the meeting extend beyond 3 hours. Following this, at 12.23pm the committee adjourned for a 20-minute break.

Following the discussion, the chairman summarised the points raised and outlined the areas to be considered by Cabinet.

In relation to Appendix 1d – Adults and Housing – the following matters were raised for consideration by Cabinet:

- When the 2024/25 budget was agreed by full council in February 2024 a decision was taken that 40% of the additional income from the council tax on second homes in Dorset is allocated to the Housing budget annually. The Committee requested evidence to demonstrate how this was being achieved.
- The committee asked Cabinet to review the description for the saving 'review funding source prevention contract'. There was an option to reduce the contracts from their current level or to use the Better Care Fund. The description of this saving should be updated to include the option of using the Better Care Fund.

- The committee raised the importance of demonstrating the impact of early intervention against critical need. This should be continued to be developed through Adult Social Care transformation.
- The committee raised a concern about the risk caused by the employers National Insurance rise.
- The committee raised the importance of support services being able to provide an enabling role to front-facing services to deliver their work and targets.

In relation to Appendix 1g – Children’s Services – the following matters were raised for consideration by Cabinet:

- The committee asked that Cabinet was provided with clarification around the proposed saving of £34k relating to youth services (page 75 of the report).
- The committee recognised that the High needs block overspend was an issue for many councils across the Country but requested further information about the financial risks and implications for Dorset Council of a continued overspend. The committee asked for continued focus and oversight over the High Needs Block and to continue strengthening work with partners to address the issues causing overspend.
- The committee asked that Cabinet recognise the impact of the £7m saving caused by early help and prevention in Children’s Services, and to give consideration to how further savings could be made and see the benefits of early help and prevention continue.
- The committee recognised the challenging nature and volatility of funding provided to the council by the government.

#### 43. **Scrutiny Request**

Cllr Legg introduced the scrutiny request regarding a reduction in NHS funding for Weldmar Hospicecare. He outlined the background to the request and an update he received from Weldmar Hospicecare since submitting the request.

The update included that Weldmar has proposed a redesign of existing services to support patients with a more blended staff approach. A grant had been agreed with NHS Dorset for 2025/26 which would enable provision of existing services and a new specialist at home service. A joint letter from Weldmar and the NHS would be sent to Dorset Council with an update.

Given the update, senior officers of Adult Social Care needed to do further work to understand the changes that were happening.

The Committee agreed that the request should be explored outside of the meeting, following discussions with officers, and that a decision to agree the scrutiny request would be made by the chairman.

#### 44. **Committee's Work Programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan**

The committee noted its work programme and the executive forward plans.

45. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Duration of meeting:** 10.00 am - 2.35 pm

**Chairman**

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