

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2025

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Jane Somper (Vice-Chair), Bridget Bolwell, Sally Holland, Carole Jones, Chris Kippax and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Robin Legg and Claudia Webb

Apologies: Cllrs Laura Beddow

Also present: Cllr Jon Andrews, Cllr Steve Robinson, Cllr Clare Sutton and Cllr Kate Wheller

Also present remotely: Cllr Gill Taylor

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

George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Sunita Khattra-Hall (Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Families), Mark Tyson (Corporate Director for Adult Commissioning & Improvement), Beth Whittaker (Interim Corporate Director for Education and Learning) and Louise Ryan (Head of Service - Birth to Settled Adulthood)

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

Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing) and Chris Heighway (Performance and Analytics Team Manager)

46. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Laura Beddow.

47. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

48. Minutes

Cllr Legg raised a concern with the accuracy in Minute 43 – Scrutiny Request. The wording of this minute would be amended and agreed with Cllr Legg following the meeting.

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting, subject to the amendment agreed with Cllr Legg.

49. Public Participation

There was 1 question submitted by a member of the public, which was read out by the Chairman. A response was provided by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

The question and the response are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

50. Councillor Questions

There were no questions submitted by councillors.

51. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

52. Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding introduced the report and highlighted the key areas. The report identified some areas for improvement, and she updated on progress in these areas. The Safeguarding Children Partnership had split from BCP Council and now included education as a statutory partner. The Partnership had implemented new Working Together statutory guidance before the deadline.

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

- There were concerns about pupils' mobile phone use in schools and how this affects their mental health. Improvements to socialisation and mental health had been seen in schools operating a no-phones policy.
- Individual schools can introduce a no-phones policy; however, it would need a change from government for it to be mandated in schools.
- The council should be encouraging schools to introduce no-phones policies. Training could be given to school governors to raise awareness of introducing a no-phones policy
- A fortnightly Headteacher meeting would be used to discuss the benefits of no-phones policies in schools. There would be opportunities for schools with the policy to mentor those schools without the policy and helping them to introduce it.
- A member questioned what the council was doing to raise parents' awareness of online safety and safeguarding. In response officers advised that online safety learning and development was available to professionals and the voluntary sector. Report Remove, an initiative by Childline, was raised at the Children's Services conference.

- The Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding committed to discussing online safeguarding and raising awareness with parents at a Safeguarding Children Partnership meeting and creating an action plan.
- As a result of the Families First for Children Pathfinder, there was improved integration from the Education sector in multi-agency work. Members requested that an update on this is included in the next annual report.
- In response to whether there were areas of safeguarding unique to Dorset, it was confirmed that there were no unique areas, however there could be differences in safeguarding caused by demographics.
- A member questioned how responsibility and finances worked in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The Executive Director for Children's Services advised that the Safeguarding Partnership Board oversees the delivery of safeguarding, and the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People was responsible for the Children, Young People and Families Plan. The Executive Director was responsible for facilitating across the system.
- In relation to the finances, there could be tensions with funding. The council was receiving a grant for 2025/26 for implementing the Pathfinder, which included introducing the Education sector as a statutory partner in safeguarding.
- The Chairman sought assurance that the council learns from previous safeguarding issues to ensure they do not happen again as in her experience over time, learning was forgotten leaving services vulnerable to repeating safeguarding failures. Officers advised that there were multiple options, which included changing policies, delivering training to staff, and monitoring progress and performance, ensuring that it is reviewed regularly. Issues which cause gaps in awareness could include changing staff or new leadership. The Chairman would take this up further with the Strategic Director outside of the meeting.

The Corporate Director for Adult Social Care summarised the role of the Safeguarding Adults Board and their role in safeguarding arrangements. There was also a role for the Community Safety Partnership in safeguarding.

The Chairman summarised the key points arising from the discussion. The committee should receive progress updates on no-phones policies, online safety, and embedding the education sector into safeguarding arrangements.

53. **Birth to Settled Adulthood Progress Report**

The Committee was disappointed with NHS and council officers not being in attendance, who were asked to attend for this item. The committee agreed to defer the item to an additional meeting in March 2025.

The Committee adjourned for a comfort break and returned at 11.28am.

54. **Performance Scrutiny**

The Performance and Analytics Team Leader introduced the item. In a pre-meeting to review the performance dashboard, the committee identified 3 performance indicators of concern which officers needed to address.

The first indicator was the number of outstanding Care Act assessments. There was a 30% reduction in the waiting list for Care Act assessments and the average wait time for assessments had been reduced to 71 days. Approximately 200 requests for statutory assessments and 200 requests for therapy assessments were received each month. There was new staff guidance and a risk management tool for triaging assessments.

In response to questions asked by committee members the Corporate Director for Adult Social Care advised that there was no national benchmark or indicator to responding to assessments, so it could not be compared to other councils. Metrics on the number of new and closed assessments per month would be prepared for the committee. The main barrier to reducing the number of assessments was the lack of a community based reablement offer. This reablement offer was currently being piloted on a small scale, but there was national evidence that the model is successful.

The next performance indicator was the number of recorded crimes which had worsened. The Corporate Director for Housing and Community Safety said that the data for this indicator was complex and reported by the police through the Community Safety Partnership. The Community Safety Annual Report being considered by the committee in June would have further details about crime statistics. An online tool for crime statistics would be circulated following the meeting.

The final indicator was the percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Dorset NEET rate was higher than the council's statistical neighbours, however it had a lower 'not known' rate. A careers hub was available to pupils, and it would be hosted by the council from March. Families with children in home education would be contacted about careers. A lack of transport contributed to young people not being able to access opportunities. Data on the number of NEET young people in each locality would be produced and made available to the Local Alliance Groups.

55. Committee's Work Programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan

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

The Chairman would explore issues with NHS funding issues for hospices and issues with end-of-life care.

Members suggested items for the committee's work programme, which included:

- A review of public health disaggregation
- Void housing and temporary accommodation
- Continued monitoring of outstanding Care Act assessments

56. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.21 pm

Chairman

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