

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 16 APRIL 2026

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

Present remotely: Cllr Robin Legg

Apologies: Cllr Bridget Bolwell

Also present: Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Steve Robinson and Cllr Clare Sutton

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

George Dare (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director - Children's Services), Jen Furnell (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Julia Ingram (Director - Adult Social Care), Dean Spencer (Place Director - Dorset), Sue Evans (Head of Specialist Services) and Chris Highway (Strategic Performance and Risk Lead)

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

Iain Sim (Interim Corporate Director for Housing)

58. **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Bridget Bolwell.

59. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

60. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2026 were confirmed and signed.

61. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

62. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

63. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

64. **2025/26 Quarter 3 Performance Report**

The Strategic Performance and Risk Lead introduced the report and the Executive Director of Children's Services outlined the performance for the key lines of enquiry in the report. The Sufficiency Strategy aimed to increase the number of children in care living with their families. Some of the children in care placed outside of the Dorset Council area were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or were placed with family members. It was normally within the child's best interest to be placed outside of the county, but for those that it is not in their best interest, the council aims to place them in Dorset.

The Committee discussed the key lines of enquiry and the children's performance indicators. The following points were raised during the discussion:

- There were 2 children in unregistered provision, but the council was planning to move them into regulated provision. There was robust risk management in place for this.
- There was a strategy for increasing the number of placements in the Dorset Council area.
- A number of children from outside Dorset would be placed in Dorset by other local authorities, which was to do with the market and where a child can be placed.
- The enhanced regional fostering imitative means there was a regional hub for marketing and enquiries, before being put in contact with a local authority. The work of regional hubs would be extended to manage the assessment of foster carers.

The Committee discussed the performance indicators for the Adults & Housing directorate. The following points were raised:

- There had been an increase in Section 21 notices ahead of the Renters Rights Act being introduced. A variety of homelessness prevention options were available, and officers would look at the best option available for each individual case.
- There was a consistent number of homeless older people and additional support was given to over 65s. Sheltered accommodation and over 55s accommodation was available to older people.
- The Corporate Director for Housing updated that accommodation had now been found for the pregnant woman and 2 of 3 families in B&B accommodation, which was reported in the data.
- There were currently 40 void houses, and the housing and assets teams were working to include this. A report on Housing Voids would be brought to the next committee.

The Committee noted the Quarter 3 Performance data.

65. **EHCP Working Group - Final Report and Recommendations**

The Chairman introduced and presented the report of the committee's EHCP Working Group. The working group was established in October 2024, following the committee raising concerns about the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). She outlined the processes that the working group took to investigate the issues. This included establishing an inquiry day, followed by further meetings with parents of children with an EHCP, and with NHS representatives. The Chairman thanked everyone who took part in giving evidence to the working group and thanked the panel members for their involvement. The Chairman outlined the recommendations in the report.

The Executive Director for Children's Services responded to the report and made the following points:

- He believed that there should be more nuance in the report, particularly around what parents say, because not all parents give the same feedback.
- He did not believe that council's rate of tribunals were high.
- Many of the issues captured in the report reflected national issues, which was caused by a system which was not financially sustainable, leading to children's experiences not improving.
- The council's performance in the percentage of EHCP's issued within 20 weeks had improved from 22% in September 2025 to 54% in March 2026. There was an aspiration for issuing all EHCP's within 20 weeks, but this was not likely to be achieved.
- It was a professional decision by the Executive Director for the working group to not speak directly with children. However he offered working group an opportunity to work with the Youth Voice team, which was not accepted by the working group.

The Chairman responded to the Executive Director for Children's Services. She agreed that there should have been more context in the report with regards to national issues, however the report reflected the evidence the working group received. The working group wanted the best outcomes for Dorset children and felt that most issues that were raised were caused by communication.

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

- A member noted that children who had an EHCP were not afraid to express their opinions.
- Good improvements had been made over the past several months, but was progress slowing down? The Executive Director for Children's Services responded that progress was due to remodelling the locality model to increase capacity, although the full change had not been made yet. Using AI in EHCP's was also being introduced which created improvements in other local authorities, therefore further improvements to timeliness were anticipated.

- In response to a question about the form of communication the council receives from families, the Executive Director explained this often included written, legal, or challenging communication to him. All families had a named caseworker and communication with the caseworker would take a variety of forms. A phone line with booked appointments had been trialled in a locality and had very limited take up.
- Dorset Council could make its own improvements to communication, however was the council limited due to communication improvements also being needed in the NHS? The Place Director for Dorset, representing the Integrated Care Board, accepted their part in needing to make improvements to communication. He also explained that changes were being made around waiting lists and the processes for assessing it.
- During the 20 weeks to issue an EHCP, it could be very challenging to complete all the administration, organisation, and getting the responses required from organisations to contribute to the EHCP. It could also be challenging to respond to some frequent communication from some families.
- At 20 weeks, it was the end of the beginning for children with an EHCP. It was good that schools were being recognised as the front line, which was critical for meaningful improvement.

The Executive Director for Children's Services commented on the Schools White Paper. He explained that the white paper had caused some anxiety for parents, however it had been quite well received by most parties involved. The council had received notification that it would receive some Government funding for creating an 'expert at hand service' in mainstream provision. The Council would develop a SEND Reform Plan which would set out how the council would use the funding.

Proposed by Cllr J Somper, seconded by Cllr C Jones.

Upon being put to the vote, the committee unanimously agreed the report and recommendations and that they be submitted to Cabinet for response.

Decision:

That the report and recommendations be agreed and submitted to Cabinet for a response.

ADJOURNMENT

The Committee adjourned for a 10 minute comfort break.

66. Children out of School or in Home Education

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning introduced the report. The rate of children missing school or home education was lower than average, particularly across the South-West. The council was aware of all the young people in the report and there was some oversight of them.

The committee asked questions and discussed the report. During the discussion the following points were raised:

- How confident were officers that all the children out of school has been identified? The Corporate Director for Education and Learning responded that the council knows about all the children within the report. The council is notified by a school or another local authority if they are removed from a school's register.
- There were concerns with increased pressure on teams caused by the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.
- Mental health was the most requested reason for home schooling. Mental health support teams were in more than 50% of schools.
- There were concerns about children being permanently excluded from primary schools. 34 children had been permanently excluded across all schools in this academic year. Although there had been an overall decrease each year, there had been an increase in primary school exclusions. The VSEND implementation would ensure that schools had information about children before they start the school, so schools were prepared. There was not as much alternative provision available for primary aged children.
- Officers advised that the council's Best Start Local Plan, for school readiness, had been submitted to the Department for Education. A proposal in this was that each family hub would have a SEND practitioner.
- It was likely that some children leave home education without qualifications, however if young people decide to take up post-16 education, then this presents them an opportunity to gain qualifications.
- There were 118 children and young people on reduced timetables, which was intended to be short term. Officers work with schools to ensure that reduced timetables are kept to a minimum and that they can be used positively to introduce young people into education or if they at risk of exclusion.

Following the discussion the committee noted:

1. The current position regarding children missing education, children missing out on education, and children who are electively home educated, and Children's Services approach to supporting these children, and,
2. The strong possibility that the imminent Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill will result in additional responsibilities being placed on local authorities with regards to the above cohorts of children and that this is highly likely to require additional resources.

Councillors S Holland, C Kippax and C Woode left the meeting at 1pm.

67. Continuing Health Care and Joint Funding (Adults) Performance in Dorset

The Director of Adult Social Care introduced the report. The report was developed following a request from the committee's Chairman and Vice-Chairman and after a number of questions from members of the public. It was recommended to commission a joint deep dive with the NHS. The Head of Specialist Services gave a presentation to the committee to understand the Continuing Health Care (CHC) and Joint Funding performance in the Dorset Council area. The presentation is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The Place Director – Dorset, representing the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), responded to the presentation. He explained that the ICB was put under special measures following an investigation conducted by NHS England into how the ICB was running CHC. This may have been a cause for improvement, as Quarter 4 data showed levels had improved.

The Chairman suggested that it would be useful for the committee to talk to someone with lived experience of CHC as a part of the deep dive process. A final report on the deep dive should be brought to the committee on October 2026.

The Committee agreed to commission the deep dive into Continuing Health Care.

Decision:

That a deep dive be carried out into the CHC and Joint Funding arrangements in the Dorset area.

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

The Committee agreed to extend the meeting beyond 3 hours to complete the remaining items of business.

The Chairman reported that two items had been raised: NHS Community Transport and Registered Providers' disposal of housing stock.

The Place Director for Dorset explained that it was the Integrated Care Board's responsibility for transport and that the council did not provide funding for this. A discussion would take place to see whether scrutiny would be able to have impact on this topic.

A discussion would take place with the Corporate Director for Housing regarding the request to scrutinise registered providers' disposal policies.

The committee noted its work programme.

69. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.40 pm

Chairman

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