

PEOPLE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 20 JULY 2026

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chair), Sally Holland, Carole Jones, Andy Skeats, Andy Todd and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllr Robin Legg

Apologies: Cllrs Jane Somper, Bridget Bolwell and Chris Kippax

Also present: Cllr Matt Bell, Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Alex Brenton and Cllr Clare Sutton

Also present remotely: Cllr Shane Bartlett, Cllr Steve Robinson and Cllr Gill Taylor

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), Iain Sim (Interim Corporate Director for Housing), Sharon Attwater (Head of Housing), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Liz Crocker (Head of Strategy), Paul Derrien (Housing Enabling and Delivery Manager), Andy Frost (Service Manager for Community Safety), Chris Heighway (Performance and Analytics Team Manager), Jessica Maskrey (Head of Service – Assets & Property), John Newcombe (Service Manager for Licensing & Community Safety), Louise Ryan (Head of Service - Birth to Settled Adulthood), Sarah Smith (Interim Service Manager for Housing Strategy) and Pru Caldwell-McGee (Service Manager - Birth to Settled Adulthood)

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

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jane Somper, Bridget Bolwell and Chris Kippax.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2026 were confirmed and signed.

4. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

5. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

7. **CQC Inspection Update**

The Committee received an update from the Director of Adult Social Services on the outcome of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. The Director outlined the key areas identified for improvement, including waiting times for assessments and reviews. She advised that, while improvements had already been made, further work was required to achieve sustained reductions in waiting times. The inspection had also highlighted gaps in service provision for people with complex needs in some rural areas. She reported that an improvement plan was being developed in response to the CQC recommendations and that a series of staff roadshows were being used to gather feedback from frontline workers on how services could be improved.

The Chairman congratulated officers on the outcome of the inspection. She welcomed the use of roadshows to engage frontline staff and asked whether timescales had been established for the development of the improvement plan. The Director of Adult Social Services explained that some actions had already been implemented, including the introduction of improvement targets and the development of new performance dashboards. She advised that productivity was being examined in detail, down to individual teams and workers, to identify barriers to performance and opportunities for improvement. An action plan would likely be in place by September.

A member asked how many of the areas identified for improvement had come as a surprise to the service and whether they had already been recognised internally. The Director of Adult Social Services explained that the Council had completed a self-assessment as part of the CQC process and that the inspection findings had broadly reflected that assessment. She advised that work to address a number of the identified issues had already begun before the inspection outcome was received.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care commented that the findings provided further evidence to support the case for additional funding in some service areas. He noted that waiting lists remained one of the most significant challenges facing the service.

It was noted that the improvement action plan would be presented to the scrutiny committee in the autumn to enable members to monitor progress against the CQC recommendations.

8. Housing Strategy - Annual Review

The committee received a presentation from Service Manager for Housing Strategy on delivery of the Housing Strategy, including progress against the four phases of work, priorities for 2026-29 and the establishment of a new Housing Delivery Board. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness highlighted the move away from silo working, by creating the Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate, and emphasised that housing should be recognised as a cross-council issue.

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

- Concerns about out-of-date brownfield site data, ongoing challenges in engaging private landlords and the implications of the Primary Residence Policy in areas without neighbourhood plans. The Corporate Director of Housing advised that landlord registration requirements under the Renters' Rights Act should improve engagement with private landlords and confirmed that research on primary residence policies was being fed into the Local Plan evidence base.
- How affordable housing was defined and communicated to residents. Officers advised that resident-led language was being introduced to make information clearer and more accessible for residents.
- The impacts of holiday lets, principal residence policies and planning policy. Members highlighted the importance of considering these issues through the Local Plan process. The Chairman suggested a joint scrutiny meeting with Place and Resources Committee to consider the links between housing and planning policy.
- Concerns about affordable housing delivery and whether future targets should increase in line with overall housing targets. The Housing Enabling and Delivery Manager acknowledged that affordable housing targets had not been met, largely due to nutrient neutrality and flooding constraints, but advised that additional affordable housing was expected through ongoing schemes in Weymouth and Bridport.
- The effect of viability assessments on Section 106 affordable housing delivery. The Chairman noted increasing viability challenges and concerns about achieving future affordable housing targets. Officers advised that most affordable housing commitments were delivered, however, there were wider market pressures and the reluctance of some registered providers to take on additional homes.
- Accessible housing, local occupancy of new homes and the success of the downsizing initiative. Officers advised that accessibility considerations were increasingly being built into housing provision, housing register data was used to inform local housing need, and the main barrier to downsizing was the cost of moving.

- The Chairman queried the use of income generated from the second homes council tax premium. The Corporate Director of Housing advised that 40% of this income was currently allocated towards affordable housing projects, with further options under consideration.

Following a housing performance update from the Strategic Performance, Intelligence and Risk Lead, on which no questions were raised, the Chairman summarised the discussion. She proposed a joint meeting with Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee to consider issues including the Primary Residence Policy, rural exception policies, accessibility and the role of housing in the Local Plan. She also welcomed closer working between housing and adult social care services and expressed concern about the risks of not meeting future housing targets. Members agreed that a further Housing Strategy update should be brought back to the committee in one year's time.

9. **Housing Voids - Process and Procedures**

The Head of Assets and Property introduced the report on housing voids, noting that the detailed information was contained within the report. The Strategic Performance, Intelligence and Risk Lead then provided an update on current performance in relation to void properties and the work being undertaken to reduce turnaround times and maximise the availability of accommodation. The report highlighted the importance of efficient void management in ensuring housing stock is brought back into use quickly and reducing reliance on more expensive forms of temporary accommodation.

The Committee discussed the report, and the following points were raised:

- A member expressed concern that some properties owned by registered providers (RPs) remained empty while there were people in need of housing and asked whether the number of RP voids could be measured. The Corporate Director of Housing explained that the Council had limited influence over how registered providers manage their own void properties. However, the council ensured that nominations from the housing register were provided promptly when properties became available.
- In relation to the regulation of registered providers, the Corporate Director for Housing advised that responsibility for overseeing the performance of registered providers rests with the Regulator of Social Housing.
- A member asked whether there was an optimum amount that should be spent on bringing a void property back into use. The Head of Assets and Property explained that costs varied significantly depending on the condition and type of property involved and whether it was categorised as a minor, major or exceptional void. She advised that the Council is currently using an interim void contractor while procurement was underway for a longer-term repairs and maintenance contract, which was expected to provide better value for money and improve consistency in delivery.
- Any proposals to dispose of Council-owned properties would need to follow the appropriate governance process. Where appropriate, consideration could be given to how any receipts from disposals might be reinvested.

- How Dorset Council's void turnaround times compared with those of other local authorities and what a realistic minimum turnaround time might be. The Head of Property advised that Dorset's performance was broadly in line with comparable authorities and highlighted that a dedicated repairs and maintenance surveyor was working to improve performance and focus attention on reducing void times.

In summing up the discussion, The Chairman commented that the committee had gained a good understanding of the current position regarding housing voids, the challenges involved and the actions being taken to improve performance. She suggested that a further progress update be brought back to the committee in six months' time so that members could review whether the improvements continue to be delivered.

The Committee adjourned for a comfort break at 12.12pm and reconvened at 12.27pm.

10. **2025/26 Quarter 4 Performance Report**

The Committee received the Quarter 4 performance report by the Strategic Performance, Intelligence and Risk Lead, including an update on the performance dashboard and the strategic risk relating to health service reform. The Chairman emphasised the importance of maintaining a watching brief on this risk given its potential impact on services.

The Chairman sought further clarification on a number of performance measures, including outstanding Care Act assessments for adults, tribunal activity and associated costs to the authority, and the reported performance relating to Section 47 safeguarding investigations. She commented that the rating shown for Section 47 investigations did not appear to align with the accompanying narrative.

In response, The Executive Director of Children's Services explained that the description relating to the Section 47 measure was unclear and did not accurately reflect what the indicator referred to. He advised that performance for the quarter was broadly on target. He also explained that tribunal activity had not shown any significant variation, with figures fluctuating from month to month but remaining relatively stable when viewed over a longer period. He noted that only a small number of cases progressed to tribunal.

The Director of Adult Social Services advised that the level of outstanding assessments was linked to the findings of the recent CQC inspection. She acknowledged that performance had deteriorated compared with previous months but stated that increasing demand was not unexpected given Dorset's demographics. She explained that performance targets had been set for individual teams and that work was underway to identify areas where performance was not meeting expectations. She added that the legacy effects of the Covid-19 pandemic had continued to contribute to current pressures and confirmed that these issues would be addressed through the CQC action plan.

A member asked whether the recent period of hot weather had led to an increase in workload. The Director of Adult Social Services confirmed that demand had increased, although no analysis had yet been undertaken to determine whether this was caused by the weather. She also advised that officers were continuing to work closely with Dorset Police to understand and respond to the impact on vulnerable adults.

11. Children Services - Young Carers Services and Support

The Head of Service for Birth to Settled Adulthood introduced the report on Young Carer services and support. Since the introduction of the All-Age Carers Support Service provided by Help & Care / MYTIME Young Carers in November 2025, there has been an increase in the number of young carers being identified. If young carers do not have a significant caring role, they would be given advice and guidance if they were not eligible for the service. Over the coming year, the service wanted to develop further guidance for professionals and establish a network of Young Carer Champions within schools to improve identification and support.

Members discussed the report and during the discussion the following points were raised:

- The types of support available and the circumstances in which young people were identified as carers. The Head of Birth to Settled Adulthood explained that support could involve working with the whole family, particularly where very young carers were involved, and could include assessments and the provision of short breaks. Young people could self-identify as carers or be referred by parents or guardians, and that support ranged from telephone and text-based contact through to practical assistance in accessing activities and services.
- Whether information was available on the school attendance of young carers. The Service Manager for Birth to Settled Adulthood advised that MyTime collected this information and reported that caring responsibilities could have a significant impact on school attendance, with some young carers missing school or being reluctant to attend if they were late due to their caring role. She explained that the development of targeted communications and Young Carer Champions within schools aimed to improve awareness and support.
- Whether Family Hubs could play a role in supporting young carers. The Head of Birth to Settled Adulthood agreed to take this suggestion away for further consideration.
- The Executive Director of Children's Services reported that MyTime had found that educational attainment improved where schools had greater awareness of young carers and the support available to them.
- The process for closing cases due to non-contact. The Head of Birth to Settled Adulthood explained that young carers were contacted at least monthly and, where repeated attempts to make contact were unsuccessful, they would be advised that their case might be closed. However, they would still be able to access support in the future if required.
- Whether the expected increase in the number of young carers reflected growing need or improved identification. The Head of Birth to Settled

Adulthood advised that the increase was primarily due to greater awareness and improved identification of young carers.

During the discussion, the committee agreed to extend the meeting beyond 3 hours.

In summing up, the Chairman welcomed the work being undertaken to support young carers. She requested that further consideration be given to the role Family Hubs could play in supporting young carers and noted the committee's support for the continued development of work within schools, including the Young Carer Champions programme.

Cllr R Legg left the meeting at the end of this item.

12. Cost of Living Impact Report 2025-26

The Cabinet Member for Public Health Prevention and Communities introduced the Cost of Living Impact Report and highlighted the positive outcomes that had been achieved through the Council's cost of living programme. The Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships explained that the programme has now evolved into the Council's longer-term Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), which benefits from a three-year funding settlement and would support a continued shift from short-term crisis response towards prevention and household resilience.

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

- The financial benefits of homelessness prevention work and what savings were being achieved by preventing people from entering temporary accommodation. The Business Partner – Communities & Partnerships explained that the service was increasingly able to track individuals through their support journey, providing a clearer understanding of how interventions make a difference. She noted that bed and breakfast accommodation was one of the most expensive forms of temporary accommodation, meaning that preventing homelessness also delivers significant cost avoidance for the Council.
- The report provided a good example of how Council investment can generate wider benefits than may initially be apparent. The Business Partner – Communities & Partnerships responded that one of the proposals being brought forward to Cabinet was the continued use of funding to support food security initiatives, building on the programme's successful support for sustainable and affordable food projects.
- Concerns about the overspend on community transport and assurance about how this would be funded in future years. The Business Partner – Communities & Partnerships explained that there had not previously been a dedicated funding stream for community transport before the cost-of-living programme. While it had not been possible to incorporate this provision into the Crisis and Resilience Fund from the outset, proposals would be submitted to Cabinet to continue funding at a similar level. She added that

options were being explored to absorb the small overspend through budget adjustments elsewhere if required.

- The changes to the discretionary housing payments (DHP) budget and whether the additional funding reflected an earlier underspend. The Business Partner – Communities & Partnerships explained that demand for DHPs had increased, partly as a result of pressures associated with the Renters' Rights legislation, and that an additional £25,000 had therefore been allocated. She noted that a further increase was also proposed within the forthcoming Cabinet report to ensure support could continue to meet demand.
- The Chairman noted that, in real terms, the overall level of funding available had reduced and asked whether this had affected the programme's impact. The Business Partner – Communities & Partnerships explained that previous cost of living funding had been provided at a higher annual level but over a shorter period, whereas the current settlement provides lower annual funding over multiple years. She noted that the introduction of the CRF followed a reduction in Government funding compared with previous Household Support Fund allocations, but the certainty of a multi-year settlement allows the Council to take a more strategic approach.

13. Annual Community Safety Scrutiny Report

The Cabinet Member for Public Health Prevention and Communities introduced the report and explained the role of the Community Safety Partnership. The Service Manager for Community Safety highlighted the key areas of the report and outlined the crime statistics in the report's appendix.

The committee discussed the report, and the following points were raised:

- Whether the trends shown in the report's graphs correlated with demographic changes or population growth. The Service Manager for Community Safety explained that some variations in the data reflected changes in police reporting requirements rather than underlying trends. He added that domestic abuse data showed a reduction in repeat victims and offered to provide further information on population factors, noting that tourism can create seasonal fluctuations in local data. The Chairman suggested exploring the possibility of incorporating relevant population information into the dashboard.
- Concerns about an increase in anti-social behaviour (ASB) affecting neighbours and families. The Service Manager for Licencing and Community Safety confirmed that ASB cases have increased and explained that many are complex and require a range of interventions, from warnings through to court action.
- Whether the increase in ASB was due to a rise in incidents or a reduction in public tolerance. The Service Manager for Licencing and Community Safety responded that tolerance levels appeared lower during the Covid period and suggested that stronger-smelling cannabis varieties may also contribute to complaints. He noted that persistent and long-term issues can have a significant impact on residents and may lead to increased reporting.

- How local residents' views are obtained when developing the Community Safety Plan. The Service Manager for Community Safety explained that a consultation would be undertaken as part of the development of this year's plan and advised members to refer to the meeting recording for further details. He added that locality groups also play an important role in feeding local views and priorities into the process.

14. Committee's Work Programme and Executive Forward Plans

The committee noted its work programme, the Executive Forward Plans and that the committee would receive updates on the two outstanding scrutiny requests.

15. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 2.02 pm

Chairman

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