

Dorset County Council September 2018 Report

Dorset Council (Unitary and the Christchurch

The proposals for a Unitary (rural) Council have progressed a step further with the High Court throwing out Christchurch's case to have the process dismissed. An appeal by Christchurch against this decision has also been dismissed. As a result, we feel confident that the process will continue at pace with elections to the new Council to be held provisionally on Thursday 2nd May. I have been asked by many people who pays the costs for these court appearances. The answer is that Christchurch will have to pay for their own costs and we will consider applying to have them to pay ours as well although the advice I am being given is that this is unlikely.

Full steam ahead for changes to SEND service

Dorset County Council's Children's Services has pulled out all the stops following an inspection by the Department for Education (DfE) in January 2017. The inspection identified that the local area needed to improve in four areas to turn around its service for families who have a child or young person with special educational needs or a disability (SEND).

The four main areas for improvement were: Joint working, how we assess a child's needs, communication with families and how we monitor our effectiveness.

Since then the council has radically changed the way it does things to ensure it works more effectively with its partners in health and schools and is trying to communicate better with parents and carers. The county council has also recently had confirmation that its proposal to invest £3million into SEND provision has been successful. Plans are in place to create eight specialist bases in mainstream schools across the county to cater for children with complex communication needs as well as the creation of a new special school at the former Bovington Middle School. This new school will provide places for 160 children with autism, as well as social, emotional and mental health needs.

As part of national SEND reforms that were introduced in 2015, the DfE stipulated all councils must transfer all the Statements of Special Educational Need to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) by the end of March this year. EHCPs set out a child's needs, including any health-related needs, in respect of their education at either a mainstream or special school. Despite finding themselves vastly under resourced for this colossal task, the county council managed to meet this deadline and transfer one hundred per cent of its EHCPs by the deadline – a huge achievement.

In addition to this success, the county council in partnership with schools and the NHS and through consultation with parents and carers, has produced a new SEND strategy, which seeks to improve young people's experience with SEND services from childhood through to adulthood and independence. The strategy has now been agreed as a working document and promotes better partnership working with the NHS and schools.

Surgery

Surgeries are held on the first Saturday of every month. These are held at the communal Lounge in Turberville Court in Bere Regis from 09.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. If you cannot make one of these please email me and I will arrange to come around to see you. If you have any questions or queries related to the business of Dorset County Council please come along. If anyone wants to contact me and cannot get to the surgery my email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com.

Peter Wharf, County Councillor