

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 27 April 2010.

PRESENT

Cllr J Street (Chairman)

Councillors: P A Blaine
D Bowater
N B Costin
Dr R Egan
P Hollick
K Janes
A Shadbolt

Parental Co-optees: H Copley
D Landman

Church of England
Co-optee: J Reynolds

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs A Barker
Mrs D B Gurney

Roman Catholic
Co-optee Mrs F Image

Parental
Co-optee Mr B Sear

Substitute: Cllr J G Jamieson for Councillor Mrs A Barker

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter
Mrs S Hobbs
Mr M Pratt
Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Director Children Families
and Learning and Assistant Director
Specialist Services

CS/10/1 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 March 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/10/2 Members' Interests**(a) Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

(c) Any Political Whip in relation to items on the agenda:-

None.

CS/10/3 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Children' Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2010/11 Municipal Year. The changes to the membership of the Committee were as follows:-

- Councillor Ian Dalgarno had become a substitute;
- Councillor Mrs Angela Barker was now a member of the Committee and no longer a substitute; and
- Councillors James Jamieson and Andrew Turner had become substitutes.

The Chairman stated that the Members had worked well as a team during 2009/10 and had been very effective.

The Chairman confirmed that at the Council meeting on 22 April 2010 Members noted the names of the co-optees that had been appointed to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee until 31 March 2013. Members requested that notification be sent to Mr Sear who was not in attendance and confirm his position on the Committee.

CS/10/4 Petitions

The Chairman announced that no petitions had been referred to this meeting.

CS/10/5 Questions, Statements or Deputations

There were no applications from members of the public to speak under the Public Participation Procedure allowed for under Part A4 of the Constitution.

CS/10/6 Call-In

No matters were referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to call-in of a decision.

CS/10/7 Requested Items

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a Member under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

CS/10/8 Children and Young People's Plan - Corporate Parenting

Members received a presentation from the Deputy Director of Children's Services on Corporate Parenting and Children in Care. The presentation set out:-

- the definition of the corporate parenting role including the roles and responsibilities of Members;
- Member engagement with Children Looked After (CLA);
- what Members need to know;
- the specific responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny;
- the routes that are taken for a child to become looked after, including the routes to ending the child being looked after;
- comparison figures between 31 March 2009 and 31 March 2010 of the number of looked after children;
- statistical information about which area Central Bedfordshire children are housed, ethnicity, age and disability; and
- why care matters.

Members were advised that the presentation relating to the 14 - 19 education and training agenda had provisionally been scheduled for 23 November 2010. Members requested that if possible that this item be brought forward to an earlier meeting.

Members discussed the processes for assessing the age of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. Specially trained Social Workers had a strict assessment procedure to follow which included a medical assessment. These assessments to determine the age of an unaccompanied asylum seeking child usually took around 7 days to determine.

There were currently 32 unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children within the care of Central Bedfordshire Council. If the child was found to be under the age of 18 then Local Authorities had the responsibility to look after these children until they turned 18 when they could either seek asylum or be deported.

Education performance of looked after children was poor nationally. Central Bedfordshire was trying to improve this situation and in doing so a virtual school with its own head teacher had been set up to work with children in care and develop personal education plans including supporting young people whom were in care when they turn 18 to find employment. 68% of children in care within Central Bedfordshire had found employment. Many of these issues were scheduled in the Corporate Parenting Panel's work programme. Members requested to receive the education performance information once this was available.

As at 31 March 2010 there were 161 children being looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. Members also discussed the fostering and adoption process. Central Bedfordshire Council had foster placements within Central Bedfordshire as well as in Luton and Bedford. Members requested a breakdown of the number of placements outside of the Central Bedfordshire area. The adoption process was highly regulated and set in statute as Local Authorities had a huge responsibility to match the child with the correct parents. The Court process for people adopting a child could take anywhere between 6 weeks to 18 months. It was easier to find parents for young children, but it was a lot harder to find people to adopt teenagers, ethnic minorities and disabled children. The Council had policies for Adoption Financial Support, Residence Order Support and Special Guardianship Financial Support.

NOTED

the presentation.

CS/10/9

Children and Young People's Plan - Staying Safe

Members considered the report of the Deputy Director Children's Services that provided Members with the priorities within the Stay Safe aspect of the Children and Young People's Plan. Members were advised that the Stay Safe Delivery Group's three priorities were:-

- Priority 6 – Protect children and young people from harm by providing a co-ordinated and effective safeguarding process.
- Priority 7 – Reduce the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people.
- Priority 8 – Reduce the incidence and impact of bullying on children and young people.

Members commented that the report had insufficient information on the outcomes and performance to enable in-depth scrutiny. Members requested that in future the progress reports on the Children and Young People's Plan needed to contain detailed information.

Members were advised that data was still being collated on safeguarding children, but an early survey carried out by Ofsted indicated that children worried about bullying had reduced. The number of children reporting bullying was still at 50%, but this had reduced by 6% in Central Bedfordshire.

A comment was made about the efficiencies and effectiveness of the current structure of all the different Boards and Delivery Groups. Members were advised that the Children's Trust and the Local Safeguarding Board were statutory bodies. Although there were separate Safeguarding Boards for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Officer resources were shared and there was a close link with the lead Members. Officers were currently in the process of investigating sharing resources with the Luton Safeguarding Board.

NOTED

the report.

CS/10/10

Work Programme 2010 - 2011 & Executive Forward Plan

Members considered the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Manager which set out the draft Committee work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

A request was made that future meetings be held at the Dunstable Office as the Children's Services team were now based there. The Chairman agreed to review this at the next meeting.

Members were reminded that the meeting scheduled for 25 May 2010 was a reserve date and would be utilised only if there was a need to discuss urgent business. Members requested that the presentation on the 14-19 agenda be brought forward from the November meeting to the meeting on 25 May 2010. Members were advised that confirmation would be sought from the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services to seek her availability to give the presentation.

Members were advised that there was a small budget available to enable Officers to call upon expert witnesses to provide evidence to Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Manager stated that expert witnesses may be used when the Committee scrutinised the draft Child Poverty Strategy in September 2010.

Meetings of the Youth Provision Task Force were being scheduled for May 2010. The Chairman of the Task Force updated Members on progress and visits to youth facilities in Toddington and Barton-le-Clay. Members requested an update report at the next meeting.

Members were advised that the Cultural Strategy Task Force now reported into the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee due to the organisational restructure.

Members requested information on the Learning Transformation Board including its terms of reference, membership, powers and work programme. The Chairman agreed that this information would be circulated to Members.

The Chairman stated that if any Member of the Committee would like an item to be included on the work programme this should be directed through him and not direct to the Officers.

NOTED

the report.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.20 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated