

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, High Street North, Dunstable, LU6 1LF on Wednesday, 24 February 2010

PRESENT

Cllr J Street (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Vice-Chairman)

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

Parental Co-optees: H Copley
D Landman

Church of England
Co-optee: J Reynolds

Roman Catholic
Co-optee: Ms F Image

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs I Dalgarno

Parent Co-optee B Sear

Substitutes: Cllrs Mrs A Barker

Members in Attendance: Cllrs J Jamieson
Mrs A Lewis
Mrs C Turner

Officers in Attendance: Mrs E Grant Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of
Children, Families and Learning
Mrs S Hobbs Democratic Services Officer
Mrs K Partington Strategic Finance Manager
Mr J Partridge Overview & Scrutiny Officer
Mrs S Reed Head of Commissioning

CFL/09/1 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 February 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Members were advised that in consultation with the Chairman it had been agreed to combine the special meeting scheduled for 24 February 2010 with the ordinary meeting scheduled for 2 March 2010. This enabled the meeting on 2 March 2010 to be cancelled. Members were also advised that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services had not been involved in the preparation of the agenda.

CFL/09/2 **MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

CFL/09/3 **PETITIONS**

A petition was received from a member of the public regarding the Home to School Transport Policy. Members were advised that the Constitution set out in paragraph 1 of Annex 2 of Part A4 'Petitions Procedure' stated that seven clear days notification of a petition be provided to the Monitoring Officer. Members were advised that notification had not been provided, so they were unable to accept the petition at Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officers advised that the petition could be submitted to the Executive on 9 March 2010 as there was appropriate time.

CFL/09/4 **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.

CFL/09/5 CALL-IN

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

CFL/09/6 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.

CFL/09/7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman advised Members that they would be considering the Home to School Transport Policy and they were to make recommendations to the Executive in light of the consultation results. He highlighted that the Committee was not a decision making body and could only make recommendations. Any recommendations on the Home to School Transport Policy would be considered by the Executive on 9 March 2010. The agenda and reports for the Executive would be available on the Council's website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

CFL/09/8 FOLLOW UP REPORT ON HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning that provided Members with further information on the Home to School Transport Policy, as requested by Members at their meeting on 2 February 2010. A copy of the Home to School Transport Consultation headline results were tabled at the meeting. The consultation had taken place over a 7-week period with a total of 313 responses to the consultation being received.

Members were advised that in the report submitted to them on the 2 February 2010 eight proposals had been set out on the following areas:-

- 1 – Road Safety Transport;
- 2 – Denominational Transport;
- 3 – Permanently Excluded Pupils;
- 4 – Medical Needs;
- 5 – Pupils in Years 10 and 11;
- 6 – Looked After Children and Refugees and Asylum Seekers;
- 7 – Special Educational Needs Transport; and
- 8 – Concessionary Places on School Contract Vehicles.

Members noted that the suggestions made at their meeting on 2 February 2010 for clarification and amendment to the draft policy in relation to numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 above had been changed in the draft policy. These changes had been incorporated in the body of the report being submitted to the Executive. Members were then required to make a recommendation to the Executive on denominational transport.

In accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in paragraph 2 of Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution, the Chairman then invited those members of the public who had registered to speak on this item to address the Committee. Each speaker was permitted a maximum of three minutes. Statements were received from seven speakers raising the following concerns on the abolishment of free transport to denominational schools (copies of the statements from the speakers were tabled at the meeting):-

- the cost and pressure this would place upon the parents whose children are already attending a faith school, especially those parents who were just above the low income threshold and had more than one child;
- poor public transport links;
- the effect this would have on the children who were in the process of doing their GCSEs or who had chosen their subjects for their GCSEs;
- bus passes previously issued to children attending faith schools had an expiry date of when the child would finish school;
- the length of the consultation period being very short;
- the availability of places for children in the catchment area schools; and
- those parents of children at a denominational school contribute 10% towards the building cost.

Members discussed the above issues and in particular queried the expiry date on the current bus passes that had been issued. Members were advised that these passes had been issued under the existing Policy, if the Policy was to be amended it was possible that new bus passes would be issued.

A motion was proposed and seconded that free transport to denominational schools be withdrawn as at September 2010, apart from those parents who are on a low income.

Members debated the best way forward that would reduce the cost of home to school transport for the Council especially in this current economic climate. There was some concern that those children already in attendance at a denominational school should not have their education disrupted. It was highlighted that those parents on a low income would still receive free school transport to denominational schools.

A suggestion was made at the previous meeting to phase out free school transport to denominational schools. Members discussed the financial summary of phasing out of denominational transport as set out in the report and were advised that the cumulative cost should read £590,843 and not £625,670 as the cost for school years 12 and 13 of £34,827 should not have been included.

The above motion was amended and seconded that the Council end the provision of transport to denominational schools in a phased matter with the exception of those on the Council's low income policy.

Members requested a recorded vote. Those in favour of the amended motion were Councillors Mrs Barker, Bowater, Costin, Mrs Gurney, Hollick, Janes, Shadbolt and Street and Mr Reynolds and Ms Image. Those against were Mr Landman and Ms Copley. Those abstained were Councillors Blaine and Egan.

This motion was carried.

Members then discussed the issue of Looked After Children, Refugees and Asylum Seekers as the Council proposed that Looked After Children, Refugees and Asylum Seekers were supported with transport, if required, to attend schools that best met their needs. This might mean that transport would be provided to schools where the 2 or 3 mile distance criteria or road safety criteria were not met. Members noted that a claim was made to the Home Office once a year for reimbursement for any cost incurred for looking after children seeking asylum who had been abandoned within Central Bedfordshire. Members agreed that this proposal be supported.

The final issue to be discussed was the Special Educational Needs Transport and it was agreed to support the way forward for this with the amendment agreed at the previous meeting on 2 February 2010 to remove the words 'with parental support' from the policy.

Members thanked the members of the public who had attended the meeting.

RESOLVED

that the Council end the provision of transport to denominational schools in a phased matter with the exception of those on the Council's low income policy.

CFL/09/9

QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING INFORMATION - QUARTER 3

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning which set out the quarter three performance information for the Children, Families and Learning Directorate. Members noted that the column titled Group 07/08 referred to the Council's statistical neighbours.

A comment was made about adult and children participating in sport and active recreation and the free swimming that Central Bedfordshire offers to under 16 year olds. It was noted that this also applied to adults on a low income and it was felt that this should be advertised.

NOTED the report.

CFL/09/10

QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING INFORMATION - QUARTER 3

Members received and considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Learning which set out the budget management position as at December 2009. It was noted that this would be the last budget management report for Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee that would cover Countryside and Archives as these areas had been transferred to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The following individual queries were raised:-

- Tithe Farm Lower School and the delay in the work that was due to be carried out at the School. Members were advised that the Corporate Resources Directorate was reviewing the capital position. Officers agreed to take this issue away and respond to Councillor Dr. Egan direct. The Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that all externally funded projects would go ahead unless it there was negative revenue
- the review of transport routes, with a view to rationalisation where possible, was being carried out on Special Educational Needs transport. Members were advised that each child would receive an individual assessment through the statement review.

Members commented on the shared services with Bedford Borough Council and obtaining reliable estimates for costs for the shared services to reflect clear actual to date figures and improved forecasts for these services. Members were advised that the Service Level Agreements were still being embedded in. The Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee had put together a Task Force to look at Shared Services.

As from April 2010 the Council had a duty to educate 16-19 year olds and the Learning and Skills Council post would become the responsibility of Central Bedfordshire Council. Officer agreed that once further information was known Members would receive a presentation.

NOTED the report.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.55 p.m.)