

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Tuesday, 14 September 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
A Shadbolt

Parental Co-optees: H Copley
D Landman
Mr B Sear

Church of England Co-optee: J Reynolds

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs A Barker
P Hollick

Roman Catholic Diocese Co-optee Mrs F Image

Substitutes: Cllrs J G Jamieson

Members in Attendance: Cllrs B J Spurr

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mrs E Grant Deputy Chief Executive and Director
of Children's Services
Mrs S Hobbs Democratic Services Officer
Ms K Peddie Head of Policy & Strategy –
Children's Services

CS/10/24 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 June 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Members were updated on minute CS/10/19 'Children and Young People's Plan: Making a Positive Contribution' and noted that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had discussed the removal of Government funding to provide free swimming for the under 16 and over 60 year olds. Officers confirmed that this funding had ceased as from the 1 August 2010 and the Council had not been able to continue this funding due to the current economic climate.

CS/10/25 **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/10/26 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised Members that due to the current economic climate and the new coalition Government's changing legislative framework he had agreed to have a standing item on the agenda at each meeting for a Portfolio Holders' update to enable the Committee to be kept informed.

CS/10/27 **Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CS/10/28 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No applications from members of the public were received in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure allowed for under Part A4 of the Constitution.

CS/10/29 **Call-In**

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

CS/10/30 Requested Items

A request was made that a report be submitted to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the future of the music service. Members were advised that this item was scheduled to come to their meeting on 23 November 2010.

CS/10/31 Portfolio Holders' Update

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services updated Members on the following areas:

- the Assistant Director of Children's Services had taken up the post of Director of Children's Services at Luton Borough Council and Members wished him well in his new job. The post of Assistant Director would be advertised and appointed to before the end of December. In the meantime Mark Wheeler, who had acted as an interim during the Shadow Council period, would be Interim Assistant Director;
- the GCSE results in Central Bedfordshire had improved by 9% which was a 5% increase above the national target. The Portfolio Holder congratulated the schools and thanked teachers and parents for supporting the children through their school years to enable them to achieve great results;
- Hitchmead and Sunnyside Schools in Biggleswade had merged and was named Ivel Valley School. Access works to the former Hitchmead School had been completed and the new Ivel Valley School was going from strength to strength. A press release was due to be published during week commencing 20 September 2010;
- a new replacement school for Roecroft Lower School, Stotfold was due to be started with the first sod being dug during week commencing 20 September 2010. The funding for the school was coming from the Section 106 Agreement and the new school was due to be opened in the autumn of 2011;
- the new coalition Government had stated that local authorities no longer needed to have Children's Trusts. Central Bedfordshire Council had agreed, as there were benefits from working in a Trust and a lot of hard work had been put in by all the partners, to invite partners to continue with the Trust and the Children and Young People's Plan. The Portfolio Holder advised that she had received positive feedback from partners. A query was raised about attendance allowance not being paid for attendees of the Children's Trust. The Portfolio Holder advised Members that there was no provision in the Council's budget to fund attendance allowances for the many panels within the authority;

- the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services had been invited to give a presentation at a group session at the Guardian Innovation Conference in November on the Youth at Risk pilot scheme that the Council had been running in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised Members that she would feedback to the Committee the information from the Conference.

Members were informed that the Principal at Central Bedfordshire College would be retiring after Christmas.

CS/10/32

Task Force Review of the Provision of Facilities for Children & Young People in Central Bedfordshire

The Chairman of the Youth Provision Task Force presented a report which provided details of the aims, process and key findings of the review of the provision of facilities for children and young people in Central Bedfordshire. The Task Force received evidence relating to performance, local consultation and schemes that were currently being undertaken by the Council and had carried out three site visits to youth centres in Barton, Toddington and Leighton Buzzard.

The review had been carried out in the context of the current financial situation and the limited resources on offer to deliver youth support services. The Task Force report focused specifically on issues relating to children and young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The report was structured around the three key areas that had been investigated:

- targeted youth support services;
- property and assets; and
- working in partnership.

Due to the financial constraints the Council should focus the services and raise the aspirations of those most vulnerable children and young people in Central Bedfordshire. The Council needed to ensure that there were processes in place to analyse the numbers of NEET young people at ward level and that resources would be targeted in those areas of greatest need. The Task Force felt that the Council needed to develop its role as a commissioner of services, increasing the range of universal services that were provided by other organisations. Those youth services that the Council provided needed to be delivered in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. The Task Force had set out their recommendations to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Appendix A to the report.

Members noted that the Government was removing the Tell Us survey. The Council through their Consultation Strategy would ensure that young people would still be consulted and involved. The Portfolio Holder was having discussions with members from the Youth Parliament about the best ways to consult with young people.

Members were advised that an analysis of the Not in Education and Training (NEET) young people as a performance indicator was not currently reported to the Executive in the current performance suite, but Officers would take this forward in their management reviews. Members discussed Central Bedfordshire Council's figures in relation to the numbers of NEETs in Central Bedfordshire. The Council had adjusted their target for 2010/11 to 5.0%, although the current national average was 6.5% and the regional average was 6.1%. Officers would consider if there was a need to adjust this target mid way through 2010/11.

Members thanked the Task Force for their hard work. Members noted that the draft policy on the provisions for youth would be available for the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on at their meeting on 23 November 2010.

RESOLVED

to endorse the findings and recommendations contained within the Task Force report.

NOTED

that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services would bring forward a policy for provision for youth in February/March 2011 that would address the findings and recommendations from the Task Force review, whilst taking account of the changing national landscape. The draft policy would be available for Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on at their meeting on 23 November 2010.

CS/10/33

Future of the Youth Service

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services which summarised the present situation regarding the provision of youth service. Members also received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services on the future of the youth service. The presentation provided Members with:

- the history and development of the youth service;
- the policy position of the last Government and the new emergent Government's thinking;
- the challenges facing the council including the reduction in budgets, the role of Councils in the Big Society;
- the current performance in Central Bedfordshire;
- quality assurance;
- good practice examples; and
- the next steps.

A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix A.

Members discussed the loss of the Area Based Grant (ABG) which contributed to the funding for Connexions. Due to the loss of the ABG a restructure, including the closure of Connexions, was taking place in the Youth Service and all employees within this service were part of a 90 day consultation period as from 13 September 2010. Members were advised that the Central Bedfordshire Together Board (Local Strategic Partnership Board) were the fund holders for any performance reward grants, including the ABG. Connexion's would continue until March 2011. The funding of any the redundancies would come from a corporate fund but employees would, where posts were available, be offered redeployment or restructured to other services. Members noted that the statutory function to provide a form of advice and guidance would continue.

The Government had launched the 'Big Society' programme in May 2010, which would create opportunities empowering local people and encourage them to take an active role in their communities. Officers were waiting for further details from the Government on the availability of future grants. The Government was due to announcement their findings from the Comprehensive Spending Review on 20 October 2010. Members agreed that Officers write to all local MPs, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury requesting their support to maintain funding for the benefit of young people. A copy of this letter would be circulated to all members of the Committee. The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services agreed to reinforce this message at a meeting she was due to attend with MPs.

Members discussed the commissioning of services through the voluntary and community sector including the public sector. Officers would need to support ward members to enable them to take a bigger role in their community.

Members noted that the availability of places for apprenticeships. The number of people interested in taking up a place was higher than places available as companies were not taking on any apprentices. It was noted that apprentices were not always reliable and that there was an issue for 16-19 year olds being able to travel to their workplace. Members were advised that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee were due to discuss the Council's transport policy and Members requested that they be notified when this was due to happen.

RESOLVED

that delegated authority be given to the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to sign off the letter that Officers would write to the local MPs, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury requesting their support to maintain funding for the benefit of young people.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned from 12:05 – 12:15 p.m.

CS/10/34 Children and Young People's Plan: Overview and Scrutiny Comments

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services which provided a summary of the comments received from the Committee in relation to the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The report provided Members with an opportunity to inform the refresh of the Children and Young People's Plan 2011/12. Members noted that the refresh of the Plan would be submitted to Council on 14 April 2011.

NOTED

the report.

CS/10/35 Children Excluded from School

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services which summarised the present situation regarding the provision for children excluded from school. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council to provide via Greys Education Centre Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for the provision of education for pupils of statutory school age unable to access education due to permanent exclusion, pregnancy or the difficulties of being a young mother, long term illnesses or other temporary difficulties which arrive in people's lives and make access to school very difficult was due to come to an end from March 2011.

The Council had agreed not to renew the SLA and had given notice to Bedford Borough Council. Officers were looking at alternative arrangements, as it was not appropriate for these children to be travelling to Bedford every day and the service was not providing value for money. On average it cost around £11,000 to transport a child to the PRU and then £12,000 to educate the young person. Members noted that alternative arrangements were being drawn up and would be discussed at the Schools Forum and by Headteachers. By bringing the service in-house it would allow also Members to hold the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services to account.

Members acknowledged the success of the PRU and the good Ofsted report, but concerns had been raised by this Council, in particular regarding the number of pupils being educated in libraries and this practice was still continuing.

A query was raised regarding the number of excluded children from the Academy. Members were advised that whilst initially the number of exclusions had been high, Officers were expecting the number to be reduced. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to write to the member concerned regarding her question on funding.

Members noted that a further report would be submitted to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2010.

NOTED

the report.

CS/10/36

Work Programme 2010-11 and Executive Forward Plan

Members considered the report of the Chief Executive which provided details of the current committee work programme and the latest Executive forward plan.

Members noted that the following items had been rescheduled:

- budget 2011/12 to be slipped from 23 November to 21 December 2010;
- child poverty to be brought forward from 21 December to 23 November 2010; and
- to include items on the work programme for children excluded from school, the music service, revised 16 - 19 transport policy and youth provisions for the meeting on 23 November 2010.

Due to the number of items on the agenda for the meetings on 23 November and 21 December 2010, Members requested that provision be made for these to be all day meetings.

Members noted that the quarter 1 performance monitoring would be circulated to Members by email and the reserve meeting on 19 October 2010 would not be called unless an urgent item needed to be considered by the Committee.

NOTED

the above amendments to the work programme.

[Please note that since the meeting it has been agreed that the reserve meeting for Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 October 2010 will not be cancelled. The following items will be considered at this meeting:

- Portfolio Holder's Verbal Update
- Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring
- Options Regarding a Revised 16 - 19 Transport Policy
- Child Poverty Presentation in advance of the policy discussion on a later agenda]

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.52 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated