

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Tuesday, 23 November 2010

PRESENT

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

Councillors: Mrs A Barker
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

Roman Catholic Co-optee: Ms F Image

Apologies for Absence: Parental Co-optee Mr B Sear

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
A R Bastable
Mrs A M Lewis
Mrs C Turner
Mrs P E Turner MBE

Officers in Attendance: Ms A Bray Head of School Support
Mr B Carter Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mr K Gandhi Head of Integrated Youth Support
Mrs S Gibson Interim Assistant Director, Policy,
Planning and Commissioning
Mrs S Hobbs Committee Services Officer
Ms K Peddie Head of Policy & Strategy -
Children's Services
Ms H Redding Head of SEN and Inclusion

CS/10/49 **Minutes****RESOLVED**

that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/10/50 **Members' Interests****(a) Personal Interests:-**

Councillor Hollick declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 'Bedfordshire Music Service' as he was asked to be the Vice-President of The Friends of Bedfordshire Youth Music.

Mrs Copley, parent co-optee declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 'Bedfordshire Music Service' as her daughter received violin lessons.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

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

None.

CS/10/51 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman did not have any announcements to make.

CS/10/52 **Petitions**

In accordance with the Scheme of Public Participation set out in Annex 2 of Part 4 of the Constitution, the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the following petitions:-

Save the Music Service

Members noted that an e-petition had been received by the Monitoring Officer to 'Save the Music Service'.

To Stop Cuts to the Sensory Impairment for Deaf and Visually Impaired Children

Mr Hawthorne presented a petition to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee containing approximately 289 signatures requesting that the Council stop cuts to the sensory impairment for deaf and visually impaired children. Mr Hawthorne referred to a child's development between birth and 4 years of age and detecting problems at an early age with the hearing and vision of a child. The support and advice that parents receive from the SEN Team was critical in the development of these children.

A member raised concerns with the e-petitions procedure. Members were advised that the Monitoring Officer was notified of all e-petitions and petitions. The petition organiser would then be notified, once the e-petition had reached 100 signatories, which committee the petition would be submitted to and the arrangements for presenting the petition.

CS/10/53 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No questions, statements or deputations from members of the public were received in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CS/10/54 **Call-In**

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

CS/10/55 **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/10/56 **Portfolio Holder Update**

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services communicated to Members that work was progressing with the Children's Services directorate budget. She had also spent time visiting schools in Dunstable and Houghton Regis as part of the review of school places in these areas. A report on the review would be reported to the Committee on 25 January 2011.

CS/10/57 Learning Transformation

The Interim Assistant Director Policy, Planning and Commissioning updated Members on Learning Transformation. The Executive had approved Central Bedfordshire's Educational Vision on 9 March 2010. Four area reviews would be carried out and the first review was already being undertaken to look at school places in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. A review group comprising of Officers, Headteachers and governing body representatives were gathering evidence and what was driving the current provision including pupil journey and parents preference. A list of options would be drawn up and be considered by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2011. A second report would then be submitted to the Committee on 29 March 2011 for Members to consider options for informal (pre statutory) consultation regarding the review.

A query was raised about the representatives on the review group. Officers did not have this information to hand, but would advise the relevant member of the review group's membership.

Members were advised that a full public consultation would be carried out once all the evidence had been gathered and the options drawn up. Proposals would then be presented to the Executive for their approval.

NOTED

the oral update.

CS/10/58 Future Provision of Bedfordshire Music Service

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services that set out proposed options with regard to future provision and management arrangements for the Music Service when the Service Level Agreement with Bedford Borough Council came to an end in March 2011. Members noted that this report did not include the Sensory Impairment Music Therapy Service as this was dealt with under agenda item 14 'Future Delivery of Special Educational Needs Services in Central Bedfordshire'.

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 two speakers raising the following concerns:-

- that Members should not make any decisions on the future of the Music Services until after the outcome of the Henley review had been published in case the Government announced extra funding to provide people with music;

- that the Music Service provided a social outlet for children and helped children gain in confidence and improve their social skills;
- if fees and charges were raised this would erect a barrier so only those children whose parents could afford to pay for music lessons would be able to attend; and
- that Members consider working in partnership with local neighbouring authorities to provide a Music Service.

Members considered the four service option appraisals and debated at length the key issues affecting the service. Members also acknowledged the e-petition from members of the public entitled "Save the Music Service", which currently had 391 signatures and was due to close on 15 December 2010.

It was suggested by Members that insufficient regard had been given to collaborating with interested parties to identify creative ways to preserve the service and moreover, the service review itself was ill-timed, given that the outcomes flowing from the independent Henley review of music education would be available for consideration before the end of the year.

Members were advised that it was unlikely that there would be additional funding as a result of the Henley review but that if the Government did announce that funding would be provided for music this would probably go directly to schools and not to the local authority. Schools would then be able to improve the quality of service they provide to their students.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. that the Executive be requested to reserve its decision until such time as the outcomes of the Henley Review have been published and ensure that nothing irrevocable is done to the music service in the meantime;**
- 2. that the Executive take steps to bring together at the earliest opportunity a small representative group of interested people to identify creative ways in which to achieve retention of Bedfordshire Music Service; and**
- 3. that the Executive receive and respond to the e-petition entitled "Save the Music Service".**

ADJOURNMENT

The Committee adjourned from 11.52 am to 12.10 pm for a short break. The Chairman advised Members that he would be taking agenda item 14 'Future Delivery of Special Education Needs Services in Central Bedfordshire' as the next item.

CS/10/59 Future Delivery of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services in Central Bedfordshire

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services that set out the direction of travel for the delivery of provision for Special Education Needs (SEN) in Central Bedfordshire. The report focused on the development of provision that would meet children and young people's needs in Special Schools and SEN support services. It took account of the direction of travel set out in the current SEN Green Paper and gave an early indication of two statutory consultations that would be the subject of a more detailed report to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2010.

Members were advised that the overall provision for SEN would be implemented in accordance with a staffing review and in accordance with Children's Services Commissioning Strategy when the budget for the Council was known and approved in February 2011, except for those proposals that required statutory consultation. The proposals which required statutory notice and an Executive decision was around the future direction of the three special schools in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the provision for pupils with dyslexia at Priory Middle School. Members noted that the future configuration of the Area Special Schools and the Dyslexia provision would be part of a report submitted to the Executive on 11 January 2011.

The Chairman invited Mr Hawthorne the lead petitioner for the 'Stop Cuts to the Sensory Impairment for Deaf and Visually Impaired Children' petition to reiterate the points that had been made at the beginning of the meeting. Councillor Bastable was invited to speak as he had received representation from two residents in his ward. He read out the two letters that had been received, both of which were concerned with the proposals for the SEN and highlighted the good work that the service provides.

Members acknowledged the importance of this service as it helped young children with learning, hearing and sight difficulties at an early age to improve their education. It was felt that helping children at a young age would reduce the costs spent on the children further down the line.

The Portfolio Holder thanked Members for their views and reiterated that no decisions had been made but early options were being considered before a final report was discussed by this Committee on 21 December 2010. Members had been provided with the three options for the delivery of Area Special Schooling in Dunstable/Houghton Regis. Hitchmead Foundation Special School and Sunnyside Community Special School had merged to become Ivel Valley Area Special School. Ivel Valley School opened on 1 September 2010 and was working well and would provide the agreed model of special schooling in the East of Central Bedfordshire across two sites.

Members debated all three options and agreed that the third option to merge Glenwood, Hillcrest and Weatherfield schools over two sites would be the preferred way forward. The location of the sites was yet to be decided.

Members discussed the process for a child to be given a statement as there were concerns that this process was very difficult. The Portfolio Holder explained that high statement numbers was not considered good practice.

A Member requested clarification on the following areas:

- what services would not be provided in the future;
- the number of employees that would be cut from 1 April 2011;
- how much would be spent on redundancies;
- what future services would be provided by the schools; and
- what future services would be provided by the community (paid) and volunteers (free).

The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide the relevant Member with a written answer. Members queried the phrase “truly vulnerable” and were advised that a definition for the phrase had been sent to them previously.

Members discussed the future of the dyslexia provision in Central Bedfordshire. Members acknowledged that mainstream schools were now better qualified to deal with students with dyslexia. Teachers were provided with training which was funded by Central Government.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s preferred option for the delivery of Area Special Schooling in Dunstable/Houghton Regis was to merge Glenwood, Hillcrest and Weatherfield schools through the closure of two and the prescribed alteration of one across all three sites initially or the closure of all three schools and the opening of one new school across three or two sites.

ADJOURNMENT

The Committee adjourned for a break between 1.15 pm and 1.52 pm. The Chairman advised Members that he would be taking agenda item 13 ‘Commissioning the Pupil Referral Unit’ as the next item.

CS/10/60 Commissioning the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services which set out options for the delivery of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Central Bedfordshire focused on the development of provision that could meet local needs in mainstream schools. At the current time 116 children from Central Bedfordshire attended the PRU.

Members were provided with three options that would establish the PRU in Central Bedfordshire and secure the financial arrangements and appropriate transfer of relevant staff. Headteachers of local schools were being consulted and positive feedback had been received to schools hosting a PRU.

Members acknowledged that the decision for 2011/12 would only be interim from April 2011 until March 2012. This would allow for the outcome of the review of school places in Dunstable and Houghton Regis to be taken on board. The view that had been received from Headteachers was to develop two units, one for Years 1 to 6 and one for Years 7 to 11. Schools and other educational establishments had been invited to tender for PRU provision during 2011/12 and the closing date for submissions was 17 December 2010. Members requested that the Portfolio Holder provide an update once the tenders had been assessed against the specification as set out at Appendix A to the report. A final decision would be made by the Executive on 8 February 2011.

Members also discussed the rehabilitation of the children into mainstream schools.

Members requested that research be undertaken with the school who have already established an in-house unit. The Portfolio Holder agreed to look into this and provide a written response to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED

to receive feedback on the tender process for the establishment of a PRU in Central Bedfordshire at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2010.

CS/10/61

The Direction of the Youth Service

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services which outlined developing ideas on the proposal to change the delivery model of the Youth Service to targeted areas only and involving the voluntary, community and not for profit sector more through the "Big Society".

The Government had recently agreed to remove the funding for the Area Based Grant. Children's Services was currently going through a restructure and the Council was proposing to cease undertaking the functions of the Connexions Service by the end of the current financial year. Statutory consultation was being carried out with employees which was due to end on 13 December 2010. Members considered the re-designing of the services to young people, including the youth service towards less Council run provision and more volunteering.

Members considered the two phases proposed, the first phase would be during 2011/12 and would create a targeted Youth Service to meet the challenges. The second phase for 2012/13 would be a more significant move to a reduced service to targeted areas only whilst providing universal services in other areas through volunteers in line with the "Big Society". Members agreed that a two phase approach was desirable to enable volunteers to be trained to run youth services. Members supported the need for a Youth Offending Team, and were advised that this Team provided a statutory function shared with Bedford Borough Council.

Members would be able to discuss the savings proposals at their meeting on 30 November 2011.

RESOLVED

that the Executive be informed that this Committee regards the Youth Offending Team (and targeted services generally) as an important and significant preventative service, and its removal would have a detrimental effect on our communities.

CS/10/62

Work Programme 2010 - 2011 & 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.

NOTED

the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 3.35 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated