

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 29 November 2011

### PRESENT

Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Chairman)  
Cllr N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	P N Aldis D Bowater Mrs S Clark A L Dodwell	Councillors:	P Hollick I A MacKilligan R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	S Beattie D Landman		
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds		
Roman Catholic Co-optee:			
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	K Janes  H Copley Mrs F Image	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	Mrs A Barker  Mrs S A Goodchild D Jones B Saunders M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services  Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter  Mrs E Grant  Mrs S Tyler		Corporate Scrutiny & Research Manager Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Head Child Poverty and Early Intervention & Prevention

CS/11/59      **Minutes**

### RESOLVED

**that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 October 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**CS/11/60 Members' Interests****(a) Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

**CS/11/61 Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements.

**CS/11/62 Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

**CS/11/63 Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Chairman confirmed that no questions, statements or deputations from members of the public had been received in accordance with Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

**CS/11/64 Call-In**

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

**CS/11/65 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/11/66 Adoption and Fostering Processes**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services delivered a presentation to the Committee, which outlined the processes involved in adoption and fostering. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The role of the Adoption, Fostering and Fostering & Permanence Panels;
- The range of information considered when recommending a plan for a child;
- The suitability of prospective adopters or foster carers;
- The consideration involved in placing a child with adopters or foster carers;
- Anonymous case studies;

- The Narey Report on Adoption;
- The Family Justice Review; and
- Key data relating to Central Bedfordshire.

The Committee thanked the Director for an illuminating and interesting presentation and requested that it be circulated to Members electronically after the meeting.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

CS/11/67

#### **Children Centres; Delivery in Central Bedfordshire**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Children Centres report, which outlined proposals for the reconfiguration of Children Centres in Central Bedfordshire from April 2012.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:

- How the hub and spoke model would operate in practice and what effect the preferred option would have on those Centres not designated as a hub.

The Executive Member confirmed that no Centre would close should the preferred option (Option 1) be approved and services would continue in all parts of the Authority but with a focus on areas of greatest need. The Executive Member further stated that whilst Children Centres had provided a good service, they had perhaps not reached those families in greatest need to the extent they should have and Option 1, if approved, would address this issue. The Executive Member went on to confirm that Option 1 would not reduce current funding levels but would target funds more effectively to improve outcomes;

- The need for reassurance that Option 1 would not spread services too thinly on the ground, particularly for rural areas;

The Executive Member confirmed that in many ways the services offered currently would not change although those clusters not designated as a hub may possibly experience a reduction in operating hours or the breadth of service provided. The effective use of outreach services would however continue and new initiatives such as self help, partnered help and the use of voluntary organisations would be explored. These issues would be addressed in a quality led commissioning process, which would ensure providers supported the priorities contained within the Children and Young People's Plan.

- How Children Centres in Central Bedfordshire were performing currently in terms of best practice;

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that although there had been no Ofsted inspection of Children Centres in Central Bedfordshire in the current quarterly reporting to which any external assessment could be made, she confirmed that in her opinion the current service offered a good mix of urban and rural provision, excelled at outreach services but could do better in targeting spend on priority outcomes. In this respect, she would take close interest in the Payment by Results Pilots currently operating in a number of Authorities.

- How hubs would be enhanced under Option 1:

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that whilst the proposed enhancement to hubs would be more specifically prescribed during the commissioning process, early aspirations included: refocusing the peripatetic team on larger Centres; allowing other, relevant, professionals (i.e. health workers) to operate from them; and using them as a possible platform for training.

There were a number of other questions raised during the debate, which the Committee felt required a written response. The Executive Member and officers in attendance agreed to provide such as soon as possible, but in any event no later than the date of the Executive meeting making a decision on this issue (i.e. 10 January 2012). The questions raised and responses given are contained in the attached appendix.

At the end of the debate, the Committee agreed by majority vote (10 for, 1 against, 1 abstention) to endorse the reconfiguration of all existing Centres into 9 clusters, with an enhancement of resources available in the areas of greatest need (i.e. Option 1).

Finally, the Committee requested that the Director of Children's Services pass on their sincere thanks to the staff of The Orchard Children's Centre at Shefford Lower School for their time and hospitality in allowing Members the opportunity to tour the facility prior to today's meeting.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Option 1, the reconfiguration of all existing Centres into 9 clusters, with an enhancement of resources available in the areas of greatest need, be endorsed for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 10 January 2012.**

#### **The Future of Special Schooling in the South of Central Bedfordshire**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services provided the Committee with a verbal update regarding the future of special schooling in the south of Central Bedfordshire and specifically confirmed the following:-

- The recent approval by the Secretary of State to issue an Academy Order for Weatherfield Community Special School;
- The need therefore for the Executive to revoke its previous decision concerning the merger of Hillcrest, Weatherfield and Glenwood schools (this issue being considered by the Executive at its meeting on 6 December 2011);
- The commencement of informal consultation regarding the amalgamation of Hillcrest and Glenwood schools. In this respect the Director confirmed that had this informal consultation not begun when it did, there was a danger that the schools in question would have lost another academic year before being able to amalgamate; and
- Following the consultation process referred to above, the Executive will consider the proposal to amalgamate Hillcrest and Glenwood schools at its 27 March 2012 meeting

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the verbal report be noted.**

CS/11/69

**Customer Feedback - Complaints, Compliments Annual Report**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Customer Feedback report, which fulfilled the Council's statutory duty to produce an annual report for Children's Social Care covering complaints and compliments. The report provided statistics on the number of complaints received; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; issues complained about; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints for 2010/11.

Members of the Committee acknowledged the difficulty that many of our most vulnerable people faced in making a complaint and were therefore pleased to note the Director's work to improve the ease at which complaints could be made and recorded.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

CS/11/70

**Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Children's Services OSC Work Programme be noted.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.10 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....

**APPENDIX**

Minute CS/11/67 - Children Centres; Delivery in Central Bedfordshire

Written response to questions arising at the meeting:-

**Questions**

1. Was the policy encapsulated in Option 1 Council or Government led?
2. Had there been any change since October 2011 to the Children's Minister's verbal commitment to continue the Early Intervention Grant until 2015?
3. Why a status quo option had not been included in the consultation process?
4. Why an Overview & Scrutiny Task Force had not been commissioned to review the issue?
5. In terms of advantages 4 & 6 pertaining to Option 1 (as outlined on Page 23 of the report), can greater detail be provided to explain which services and what finances would be refocused into areas of greatest need (Advantage 4), and what cost savings will accrue and what other early intervention work will it be used for (Advantage 6)?
6. Has any meaningful cost v benefit analysis been undertaken on any of the options proposed?

**Response**

1. The proposal arose out of a government focus on targeting need and also out of the Council's own Child Poverty Strategy;
2. No, and the grant has come in for 2012/2013 in line with the indicative figure expected, which has allowed previous commitments to this grant to be fulfilled;
3. The consultation team advised that status quo as an option was not an option but associated meetings did recognise that members could decide not to implement any change;
4. There is a timing issue, the contracts have to be renegotiated by April 2012;
5. Up to £500k could be refocused and retargeted. This will be in line with the Council's previously agreed commissioning strategy, and outcomes and budget spend will be reported in the usual budget reports and update on the outcomes of the Children and Young People's plan; and
6. A broad cost benefit analysis leading to the notional figure of £500k refocusing of resources was considered, as were other potential budget areas that could be levered in, not only by the Council, but by other partners. In later stages the analysis focused on the preferred option as it became clear that there was to be a strong preference for the preferred option.

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