

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 6 September 2011.

PRESENT

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

Councillors: P N Aldis
Mrs S Clark
A L Dodwell

Councillors: I A MacKilligan
R B Pepworth

Parental Co-optees: S Beattie
H Copley
D Landman

Church of England
Co-optee:
Roman Catholic
Co-optee:

Apologies for
Absence: Cllrs P Hollick
Mrs F Image
K Janes
J Reynolds
A Shadbolt

Mrs F Image
J Reynolds

Substitutes: Cllrs D Bowater
N J Sheppard

Members in
Attendance: Cllrs Mrs A Barker Deputy Executive Member for
Children's Services
Mrs S A Goodchild
M A G Versallion Executive Member for Children's
Services

Officers in
Attendance: Mr B Carter Corporate Scrutiny & Research
Manager
Mrs E Grant Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Children's Services
Mrs C Parry Assistant Director, Children's
Services Operations

CS/11/33 Minutes**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 September 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to an amendment noting the attendance of Councillor Susan Goodchild.

CS/11/34 Members' Interests**(a) Personal Interests:-**

Councillors A Dodwell and S Goodchild.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

(c) Any political whip in relation to any agenda item:-

None.

CS/11/35 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

CS/11/36 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/11/37 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/11/38 Call-In

The Committee 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/11/39 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/11/40 Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2010/11

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the annual report of the Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, which set out the activity and interventions carried out by the Council and its partners to secure children's safety and manage their circumstances in a safe and effective manner when they are deemed to be at risk, or likely risk of, harm.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised the following key issues:

- The performance of the Council and its partners in terms of safer recruitment practices;
- The importance of anti bullying strategies and effective implementation thereof, particularly with regard to those forms of bullying considered a priority by children i.e. web based bullying and bullying occurring via transport to and from school;
- The responsibility of schools, parents and the wider community for children's behaviour outside the school boundary;
- The need for a greater level of statistical data regarding, amongst other issues, obesity, teenage pregnancy and drug misuse (although the Committee acknowledged that this information would be available via performance reports in the future);
- School's academic performance, particularly those of upper schools; and
- The general increase in referrals and thus caseloads.

The Executive Member for Children's Services also wished to extend his thanks to the outgoing Chairman of the Safeguarding Children Board.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted and the comments of the Committee referred to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

CS/11/41 Review of Disabled Children's Services

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented a report, which outlined the detail behind the proposed independent review of services for children with disabilities, due to commence in the autumn. During presentation of the report, the Executive Member made specific reference to his pleasure that the Committee was willing to consider establishing a Member Task Force to assist with the review.

The Committee was supportive of establishing such a Task Force and sought volunteers to take part. Councillors David Bowater, Amanda Dodwell, Susan Goodchild, Iain MacKilligan, and Roger Pepworth volunteered, together with parent governor co-optee Heather Copley.

Members were informed that the Task Force would meet on 2 occasions, as follows:-

- Friday 7 October (morning site visits); and
- Wednesday 9 November (potentially a whole day meeting);

Further details regarding these meetings would be provided to Task Force Members in due course and the outcomes of the review would be reported back to this Committee at its 15 December meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That a Member Task Force be established to assist in the Council's review of services for children with disabilities and that the outcomes of this review be reported back to this Committee at its 15 December 2011 meeting, to inform the January Executive report.

CS/11/42

Allowances for Foster Parents

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the details of proposals to increase payments for foster parents in 2011/12 by returning to the use of the Fostering Network's recommended rate plus 10%.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised the following key issues:

- The difference in rates paid between Council appointed foster parents and those commissioned via independent private fostering agencies;
- The foster parent vetting system;
- The level of Council payments compared to our statistical and regional neighbours;
- The percentage of children in care placed via independent private fostering agencies;
- Any shortfall in the number of foster parents required to meet demand; and
- The Council's success at matching children in care with foster parents on the basis of ethnicity, etc.

The Executive Member for Children's Services also informed the Committee of the views of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP), which had met recently to discuss these proposals. It was the CPP's view that the Council should do all that it can to increase allowances for foster parents, thereby reducing its reliance on the use of private fostering agencies.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee endorses the proposal to increase payments to foster parents in 2011/12 and beyond by returning to the principle of the Fostering Network's recommended rate plus 10%.

CS/11/43 Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the proposed policy for financial support for transition to adulthood for care leavers. In addition, officers also circulated a revised Appendix A at the meeting, which took account of a number of revisions since publication of the agenda. These revisions had been made following a recent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP), which had also considered the proposed policy.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised the following key issues:

- The changes made by the CPP i.e. to the Birthday Allowance and Winter Heating Allowance;
- The process of assessing need; and
- The Government's commitment to improving higher educational prospects for disadvantaged young adults and the Council's proposed Higher Education Needs Allowance.

Following consideration of the report, the Committee was content to endorse the proposed policy for adoption by the Executive.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee endorses the proposed policy for financial support for transition to adulthood for care leavers.

CS/11/44 Annual Report for the Adoption Service, Fostering Service and Private Fostering Provision

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which outlined the new statutory framework regarding annual reports for the Adoption Service, Fostering Service and Private Fostering Provision. He further explained that this first report was by necessity very detailed but in future the Committee would receive more concise 6 monthly progress reports. The Committee was also informed that the Adoption Service had recently been the subject of an Ofsted inspection, the result of which would be announced formally in due course.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised the following key issues:

- The difference between Adoption and Special Guardianship;
- The average number of fostering households per annum who withdrew their service;
- The process of adoption generally; and
- The adoption of older and/or disabled children;

Members of the Committee also enquired as to the possibility of observing Fostering and/or Adoption Panels in action. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services confirmed that this was unfortunately not possible however the Committee could receive a presentation at a future meeting outlining the process. Members were content with this suggestion and agreed that a presentation be made to its 29 November Committee meeting.

To conclude, the Executive Member for Children's Services paid tribute to and congratulated officers for their successful management of the service.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted and that a presentation be made to the 29 November Committee meeting outlining the Adoption and Fostering process and in particular the role of the respective adoption and fostering panels.

CS/11/45 **Revenue Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 June 2011**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the projected financial position of the Children's Services Directorate to the end of March 2012, based on the information available as at the end of June 2011 (being the first quarter of 2011/12).

He further explained that the full year projected outturn position for 2011/12 was a relatively small £0.1M overspend against a £35.6M budget and congratulated the Directorate and Council generally on its good financial management, albeit recognising the very challenging financial environment in which the organisation still found itself.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report and raised a number of specific questions, which were answered in full by the officers in attendance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/11/46 **Capital Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 June 2011**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the projected financial position of the Directorate's Capital Programme to the end of March 2012, based on the information available as at the end of June 2011 (being the first quarter of 2011/12).

He further explained that the full year projected outturn position for 2011/12 was currently on budget.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report and raised a number of specific questions, which were answered in full by the officers in attendance.

Councillor S Goodchild also wished to thank the former Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Anita Lewis) for her much appreciated support in bringing to fruition the Tithe Farm Lower School capital scheme, which had transformed tired and unsuitable accommodation into a flagship school fit for the 21st century.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/11/47

Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and made the following changes to the Work Programme:

- 18 October 2011 – the addition of a report on the Base Budget Review and the postponement of the Children's Centres report to the 29 November meeting;
- 29 November 2011 – the addition of the Children's Centres report (as mentioned above) and a presentation on the Adoption/Fostering process; and
- 15 December - the addition of the Draft Budget for 2012/13 and the Outcome of the Review of Services for Children with Disabilities.

A Member of the Committee also requested an update regarding the outcome of the commissioning of Youth Services. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services agreed to prepare and circulate a note to Committee Members regarding this issue.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **That the Children's Services OSC Work Programme be noted.**
2. **That the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services prepare and circulate a note to Committee Members regarding the outcome of the commissioning of Youth Services.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.45 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated