

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, 4 September 2012

PRESENT

Cllr N B Costin (Vice Chairman, in the Chair)

Councillors:	Mrs A Barker Mrs D B Gurney	Councillors: D Jones
Parental Co-optees:	Mr S Court D Landman	
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds	
Roman Catholic Co-optee:	Mrs F Image	
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs R D Berry D Bowater P Hollick K Janes I A MacKilligan R B Pepworth H Copley	
Substitutes:	Cllrs B Saunders (In place of R D Berry)	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs P N Aldis Mrs S Clark Mrs S A Goodchild M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter Mr P Dudley	Corporate Policy & Scrutiny Manager Assistant Director Children's Services (Learning & Strategic Commissioning)

CS/12/25 Minutes**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 July 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/12/26 Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest or political whip in relation to any agenda items.

CS/12/27 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman welcomed Stephen Court, the new Parent Governor representative, to his first meeting.

CS/12/28 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/12/29 Questions, Statements or Deputations

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

CS/12/30 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/12/31 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/12/32 Executive Member Update

The Executive Member for Children's Services provided the Committee with an update on current activities pertaining to his portfolio, which were not already included on today's agenda. These covered the following issues:-

- The disaggregation of the Adoption & Fostering service currently shared between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils, completion of which may now go beyond the original date of 31 March 2013 to ensure an effective disaggregation;

- GCSE and A Level results for Central Bedfordshire. The Executive Member explained that although A Level results had been very encouraging, GCSE results had slipped, albeit with significant variations between schools. These results however still required final validation (by January 2013), and also needed to be considered in the context of the continuing national backlash regarding the sudden drop in GCSE results across the country. The Assistant Director, Children's Services further confirmed that many head teachers within the area had also expressed real concerns about the issue, and officers and Members would seek to make representations to the Secretary of State for Education and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in due course;
- The Department for Education's spending review and in particular the potential claw back of LACSEG grant from local authorities, which in Central Bedfordshire's case could result in a reduction of funding in the order of £2 - £4 million per annum. In response to a question, the Executive Member assured the Committee that he would do all that he could to lobby central government about the issue, particularly as pupil numbers within Central Bedfordshire were predicted to rise; and
- Sandy Upper School, whose head teacher had resigned. The school would now be supported by Harlington Upper School to convert to academy status.

During the verbal update, Members raised two further issues regarding:-

- The Council's healthy eating initiatives with schools. The Executive Member agreed to provide an update regarding this issue at the next meeting; and
- An analysis of how academies had made a difference to the performance of schools in Central Bedfordshire. The Executive Member agreed to bring a report on this issue to a future meeting.

CS/12/33

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 statutory framework regarding the annual reports for the Adoption Service, Fostering Service and Private Fostering Provision, and summarised the key points contained within each. The Executive Member particularly drew the Committee's attention to the government's reform of adoption services designed to increase both the number and speed of adoptions, which the Council's Adoption Service was in a strong position to meet, and the Council's success at recruiting new fostering households.

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

- The need to apply pressure on Bedford Borough Council to fill its vacancy on the Fostering Panel; and

- The need to ensure sufficient training was available for foster carers. In this respect, the Assistant Director, Children's Services assured the Committee that the Council delivered above statutory minimum levels of training to all foster carers and indeed, never placed children with foster carers until such training had been delivered. The Executive Member also agreed to include further information regarding such training in future annual reports.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee notes the annual report for the Adoption Service, Fostering Service and Private Fostering Provision.

CS/12/34

Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2011/2012

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 where they are deemed to be at risk of, or likely risk of, harm. The Executive Member's report was supplemented by an oral presentation from Phil Picton, the Independent Chair of the Board, who provided the Committee with a summary of his role as Chair, and safeguarding performance and issues generally.

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

- With reference to the Independent Chair's summary of safeguarding performance and issues, Members of the Committee expressed some concern regarding his comment about organisations "taking their eye off the ball" during periods of change such as restructuring and relocation of staff. The Independent Chair assured the Committee that his comment referred to issues nationally, particularly with regard to public sector austerity measures, and that in his opinion Central Bedfordshire had achieved continuing operational effectiveness despite a period of considerable change;
- The importance of effective partnership working, particularly during a period of such considerable change. The Independent Chair assured the Committee that his Board worked actively with all key partners, including emerging new players such as GPs and schools, to secure their effective contribution. In a changing partnership landscape, he also stressed the importance of all partners to maintain and indeed enhance networks at all levels to ensure effective partnership working;
- The role of schools in safeguarding. The Assistant Director, Children's Services confirmed that schools had a legal obligation to participate. He further confirmed that relationships with schools in Central Bedfordshire was strong and that schools took safeguarding very seriously; and

- With regard to Professor Munroe's recent recommendations to the Government, the need to ensure the annual report was widely disseminated. The Executive Member confirmed that the report would be submitted to both the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council as well as the shadow Health & Wellbeing Board and new Police and Crime Commissioner, when appointed.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee notes the Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2011/2012.

CS/12/35

Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Quarter 1 Performance report, which highlighted performance within the Children's Services directorate for the first quarter of 2012/13. The Executive Member commented that performance overall was good but particularly drew the Committee's attention to progress being made in improving performance at both Ashton Middle School and Queensbury Upper School.

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

- The unavailability of performance data regarding both the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements and the percentage of child protection cases reviewed. The Assistant Director, Children's Services confirmed that the issue was an IT related one and assured the Committee that there was no risk from an operational perspective. He further confirmed that data should be available for the second quarter; and
- With regard to performance indicator CS7, published Ofsted school and college classifications, a Member requested further detail regarding how this performance compared with schools Key Stage results, and whether there was any variation between academy and non-academy schools. The Executive Member considered this a reasonable request and agreed to investigate the matter further with his officers and provide a progress update at the next meeting, with a possible report to the February meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/12/36

Quarter 1 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the revenue position of the Children's Services Directorate to the end of June 2012 (the first quarter of 2012/13).

He further explained that the full year projected revenue outturn position for 2012/13 was a £0.822M over spend against a £5.08M net budget. He also discussed the continuing trend of pressures within Children's Services operations (safeguarding, looked after children, etc) mitigated by under spends within Learning, Commissioning and Partnerships, a trend which was unsustainable in the long term.

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

- Progress in recruiting qualified social workers. The Executive Member commented that although recruitment of adequately experienced social workers was a perennial issue and a challenge nationally, the Council had recently commenced a new recruitment campaign. The Assistant Director, Children's Services further confirmed that the Council was also actively developing its existing staff as a longer term solution to the issue;
- With regard to the increasing number of child protection cases when set against finite resources, and the need to ensure these resources were appropriately targeted, a Member asked whether every case was indeed a genuine child protection case. The Executive Member assured the Committee that whilst he had a duty to pursue operational efficiencies, his overriding responsibility was the safety of vulnerable children and he would not allow efficiencies to undermine this. The Assistant Director further confirmed that there were robust checks and balance in place which prevented false positives from being pursued inappropriately; and
- With regard to the efficiencies expected to be achieved with the Children with Disabilities Service, a Member requested further information regarding progress at the next meeting. The Executive Member agreed to provide such an update.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/12/37

Quarter 1 Capital Budget Monitoring Report

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the capital position of the Children's Services Directorate as at 30 June 2012 (the first quarter of 2012/13). He further confirmed that he and his officers were currently reviewing the capital programme to ensure it was realistic and deliverable, and the outcome of the review would be reported to a future meeting.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of minor queries, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/12/38 **Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan, and noted the possible inclusion of a report to its February meeting concerning schools KS results and Ofsted reports (as mentioned CS/12/35 above).

RECOMMENDATION:

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

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

Chairman

Dated