

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, 15 January 2013

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Chairman)

Councillors:	Mrs A Barker R D Berry P Hollick	Councillors: K Janes D Jones R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	Mr S Court D Landman	
Church of England Co-optee: Roman Catholic Co-optee:	J Reynolds	
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs D Bowater N B Costin H Copley Mrs F Image	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs P N Aldis A L Dodwell Mrs S A Goodchild J G Jamieson M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter Mr P Dudley Ms D Hill Mr R Parsons Miss H Redding	Corporate Policy & Scrutiny Manager Assistant Director Children's Services (Learning & Strategic Commissioning) Senior Finance Manager - Children's Services Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning Head of Learning and School Support

CS/12/64 Minutes**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 December 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/12/65 Members' Interests

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

CS/12/66 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

There were no Chairman's announcements.

CS/12/67 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/12/68 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/12/69 Call-In

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

CS/12/70 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/12/71 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. This covered the following issue:-

- The Fostering and Adoption shared service, which the Council managed on behalf of both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. The Executive Member confirmed that since the withdrawal of funding by Bedford Borough, both organisations had been negotiating an agreed way forward, which would either mean disaggregation of the existing shared

service or the creation of a new contract. Whilst negotiations continued, the service would continue in its current form under the existing Service Level Agreement until September 2013. In response to a question regarding the performance of the current service, the Executive Member confirmed that performance compared favourably with national statistics and other similar local authorities.

CS/12/72 **Draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013 - 2017 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17**

The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment upon the draft budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013 to 2017 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17, which had been presented and approved for consultation at a meeting of the Executive on 8 January 2013.

The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention in particular to the efficiencies and pressures impacting upon the Children's Services directorate amounting to £1.7M and £2.422M respectively in 2013/14, and wished to record his thanks to the officers of the directorate for all their hard work during the budget setting process this year.

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

- The Council's ability to manage budgetary pressures within Children's Services to the extent suggested i.e. from a pressure of £2.422M in 2013/14 to only £45k in 2016/17. The Executive Member explained that the directorate was undertaking extensive work now around demand management, early intervention and prevention, which would support robust management of pressures in the future. The Assistant Director also referred to the review of safeguarding thresholds over recent years and the substantial increase in casework as a result, which would peak and stabilise in 2013/14;
- The additional budgetary pressures which would occur as a result of increased housing development and population growth. The Assistant Director confirmed that such growth had been taken into account when preparing the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan;
- The Council's ability to "squeeze the pips" out of contracts. The Assistant Director confirmed that this was an organisation-wide ambition, which would be achieved by smarter, outcome based commissioning, new ways of working and greater contractual efficiencies; and
- The efficiencies proposed regarding school transport provision and walking to school assessments. Members were concerned to ensure that such assessments were undertaken with care and consideration and in partnership with schools on a school by school basis. The Executive Member was content to provide such an assurance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013-17 and the Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17 be endorsed as set out.

CS/12/73 **Fees and Charges 2013/14**

The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with details of the revised fees and charges rates to be effective from 1 April 2013 relating to the Children's Services directorate and which also identified those charges where increases were different from the 2% advisory increase as per the 2013/14 Budget Strategy.

The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention in particular to the charges for the music service, which were being held at 2012/13 rates.

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

- Charges for school transport, which were currently set per year, term or half term. Members queried whether greater flexibility could be introduced to allow parents to purchase shorter periods, which would encourage cycling to school in good weather. The Assistant Director commented that the introduction of greater flexibility would be a challenge and could potentially impact upon the Council's current contractual arrangements with bus companies however greater flexibility was certainly an ambition which schools themselves, with the support of the Council, could investigate further; and
- The performance of the music service following its redesign in 2011. The Executive Member confirmed that the music service was performing well, was cost neutral and continued to improve take up rates.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the schedule of Fees and Charges for 2013/14 for the Children's Services directorate be endorsed as set out.

CS/12/74 **Children & Families Draft Bill**

The Head of Learning and School Support delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with details of draft legislation on reform of provision for children and young people with Special Education Needs. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The expected outcomes of the proposed changes;
- The case for change;
- Key changes included within the Children & Families Bill;
- The details and objectives of the national SEN Pathfinders testing how to reform the current system;
- Core elements being tested;
- Key emerging themes from the testing; and

- Programme delivery/next steps in Central Bedfordshire.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during the presentation regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

- The particular challenges Central Bedfordshire faced to ensure hospitals operating outside its area delivered the same care pathways for children and young people with SEN;
- The importance of effective information sharing and lines of communication in any multi-agency approach to assessment and planning;
- The importance of good advocacy and support to parents and carers of children and young people with SEN;
- The need to ensure robust transition arrangements were in place to support children and young people with SEN moving into adulthood;
- The need to raise awareness of these proposals with parents, carers and other stakeholders. In this respect, the Assistant Director agreed to disseminate the presentation to a much wider audience.

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the Head of Learning and School Support for a most informative and comprehensive presentation and requested a further update regarding emerging themes and programme delivery in due course.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentation be noted.

CS/12/75

Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in Schools and Annual Refresh of the New School Places Programme 2013/14 - 2017/18

The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with details of the outcome of the consultation on the proposed Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in Schools. The report also outlined the annual refresh of the Council's rolling five year investment programme in new school places to fulfil the Council's statutory duty regarding sufficiency of school places and to implement the identified need in the previously published school organisation plan.

The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention in particular to the consultation responses contained within Appendix B (circulated at the meeting), which generally indicated strong support for most of the principles although there had been a mixed response regarding principles 3, 5, 8 and 9. With regard to principle 8, the Executive Member reiterated his strong support of the Council's ambition to encourage a diversity of education provision including faith based provision, which was currently lower than national rates of representation.

The Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning went on to explain in further detail the process and programme for new school places and referred

Members in particular to Appendix C of the report, which set out a summary of the indicative programme of major schemes for new school places that were to be commissioned and constructed in the period 2012/13 to 2018/19.

The Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning also explained that a further report would be presented to the Committee at its February meeting, which would provide more detailed proposals for new places in September 2014, evaluated against the new Policy Principles if adopted by the Executive.

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

- The challenges of encouraging the establishment of school federations particularly when Ofsted continued to insist on separate inspections for individual schools within such federations;
- The importance of ensuring this Committee reviewed the impact and achievement of the Policy Principles after an appropriate implementation period, which the Executive Member was happy to endorse;
- The viability, in particular, of lower schools in a changing educational landscape. The Executive Member reiterated his view that no lower school would close although some may need for example to reconfigure and collaborate as part of federations;
- The impact of cross border pupil flow and school catchment areas;
- The difficulty of adhering to Policy Principles in practice, with some Members expressing concern about the need for local flexibility and opportunities for parental choice. The Executive Member acknowledged the issue and confirmed that the principles should not be seen as edicts but rather operational guidelines;
- The sufficiency of places for children with Special Educational Needs in either special or mainstream schools. The Executive Member confirmed that the provision of such places would continue to be a priority within the School Organisation Plan; and
- The ability of the Council to use S106 monies flexibly to met demand across Central Bedfordshire.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in Schools, as set out in Appendix B, be endorsed for approval by the Executive as the basis for the future development of commissioning options for New School Places in Central Bedfordshire.

CS/12/76

Customer Feedback - Complaints, Compliments Annual Report

The Executive Member 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 2011/12.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/12/77

Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and were content with the agenda items proposed for consideration at forthcoming meetings.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.45 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated