

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, 1 April 2014

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs A Barker (Chairman)
Cllr N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	R D Berry D Bowater Mrs G Clarke	Councillors:	Mrs R J Drinkwater D Jones R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	Mr J M A Chapman Mr S Court Mr T Hodey		
Church of England Co-optee: Roman Catholic Co-optee:	Mr J Reynolds		
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	Mrs D B Gurney P Hollick Mrs F Image	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	B Saunders (In place of Mrs D B Gurney)	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis A L Dodwell P A Duckett Mrs S A Goodchild M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Chairman of Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs E Grant Ms R Hobbs Mr G Jones Mr P Meigh Mr J Partridge Mrs S Tyler	Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Head of HR Services Assistant Director Children's Services Operations Chief Procurement Officer Scrutiny Policy Adviser Acting Assistant Director, Operational Services, Children's Services	

CS/13/110 **Minutes**

The Committee received the Minutes of the previous meeting and noted that Cllr Aldis had been omitted in error from the list of attendees.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2014 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of Cllr Aldis to the list of attendees.

CS/13/111 **Members' Interests**

Cllr Goodchild registered an interest in Item 13 as a Member of the Houghton Regis Children's Centre Advisory Board.

CS/13/112 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed the new co-opted parent governor representative, Mr Timothy Hodey to the meeting. The Chairman also welcomed two members of the public who were in attendance and informed the Committee that the order of the agenda would be varied to consider Item 13 as the first item of business.

CS/13/113 **Petitions**

None

CS/13/114 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager advised the Committee that a question had been received from a Member querying the implications on staffing of implementing new style CRB checks and whether this had resulted in delays to employing staff.

In response the Director of Children's Services/Deputy Chief Executive stated that analysis had been undertaken, which demonstrated that the length of time taken for staff to complete CRB checks had improved from 35 to 22 days. Some delays in children's social care had resulted from checks for two particularly difficult clearances but whilst the length of time taken to clear checks still needed to improve further if possible, there had been no delay resulting from the change to new style CRB checks.

CS/13/115 **Call-In**

None

CS/13/116 **Requested Items**

None

CS/13/117 **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Children's Services provided the Committee with an update concerning the following:-

- Central Government had reviewed the amount of funding made available to local authorities in the F40 Group as a result of which an additional £3.8M would be made available to Central Bedfordshire Council.
- The ongoing consultation regarding proposals for schools in Dunstable, which would be considered by the OSC at their meeting on 07 May 2014.
- The minimal impact of the NUT strikes in Central Bedfordshire, which had resulted in 5% of schools in Central Bedfordshire closing.
- A foster care recruitment programme that was due to launch in April 2014.

In light of the update Members asked several questions to which the following responses were provided in the meeting:-

- Individual teachers were encouraged to inform Headteachers before taking strike action, the Council treated strike days in the same fashion as snow days.
- The Department for Education (DfE) were currently considering proposals for the academisation of Sandy Upper School, the future of the school was not yet clear but the Executive Member would keep the Committee informed.

CS/13/118

The development of early intervention, early help delivered through children's centres

The Executive Member introduced a report that proposed possible options for a consultation on the future delivery of early help through children's centres. The Committee were advised of the need to realign support to those areas of highest need and comments on specific issues including the following were encouraged:-

1. Whether Members would prefer a targeted approach at the expense of a universal service.
2. Members views on a suitable age range
3. Where services should be delivered
4. The services that should be delivered from Children's Centres

In light of the report and the issues highlighted by the Executive Member the Committee discussed several issues in detail. In particular Members raised a concern that whilst not all of the 'spokes' in the universal service model had been effective there could be instances where vulnerable people would no longer receive support if the universal element was removed. In response the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services commented that in the targeted approach the needs of vulnerable families could still be addressed following early help assessments. The Executive Member agreed to highlight in the consultation document the alternatives that would be available for those that had been in receipt of universal support if a targeted approach was taken by the Council.

A Member also raised a concern regards the order in which the children's centres were listed in the relevant data table in the appendix to the Executive report. There was also a concern that the impact of growth in some areas would affect the "reach" of some centres and this had not been taken into

account in the proposals. In response the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services commented that the data used in the table had recently been provided by ONS and the order of the centres could be amended based on a range of factors. The Council was aware of particular growth issues, which may impact on the reach of some children's centres.

In addition the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The benefits of children's centres to encourage social integration.
- Whether effective arrangements were in place with GPs to encourage the use of support. The Acting Assistant Director Children's Services responded that a high number of referrals for support were received from health visitors although further work in this area was necessary.
- The ways in which the Council could encourage residents who needed support but did not use Children's Centres to make best use of it.
- The importance of the role of health visitors and the support they could provide.
- Whether proof could be provided that children did not require support beyond two years of age. In response the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services commented that whichever model was approved there would be flexibility to provide targeted support to children of any in light of a need. Children above the age of two would not be precluded from support and the consultation would highlight the alternative support that was available.
- Whether other local authorities were considering similar changes in the way that services were delivered. In response the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services confirmed that other authorities were focusing on the most appropriate means of delivering early intervention for families most in need of support.
- Whether the impetus for change related solely to the current financial climate. In response the Executive Member advised the Committee that the changes were not about funding, there was a commitment to deliver early intervention and doing this in the most appropriate way.

In summarising the Chairman proposed that the range of views provided by the Committee be made available to the Executive. The Committee supported the principal of targeted early intervention and agreed that the consultation should include a range of models in addition to making clear the alternative provision that would be available for children not included in the identified age range. The Committee also agreed that none of the 'hubs' should disappear as a result of the changes.

In addition the Committee requested that a summary of the consultation responses to date be presented to the Committee at their meeting in July 2014.

RECOMMENDED to Executive

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the approach to deliver targeted early intervention but feels it is important that children not included in the identified age range should still be able to access support where necessary.**

2. That the consultation include a range of proposed models that also identify the alternative support that would be available if a 'spoke' ceased to operate as a result of the proposal.
3. That none of the current 'hubs' in Central Bedfordshire should disappear as a result of the proposed changes.

(Meeting adjourned at 1121 and reconvened at 1130)

CS/13/119 Q3 budget monitoring

The Senior Financial Advisor (Schools Finance) presented an overview of the capital and revenue budget monitoring information for the Children's Services Directorate for Quarter 3. In response to questions from Members the following was confirmed:-

- The Director would clarify whether 46 new fostering agency placements since the beginning of the financial year had been internal placements.
- The number of in-house and independent placements were included in the total number of LAC.
- Gross spend to dates was ahead of profiled budget due to the delivery of new school places.
- A number of grant funded schemes would be brought forward.
- The Director was not currently aware of any concerning issues in relation to the necessary funding being available to deliver new schools places.
- The underspend on the Children's Services capital budget could not be used to offset the overspend in the revenue budget.

NOTED the presentation

CS/13/120 Q3 performance monitoring

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the quarterly performance monitoring information for the Children's Services Directorate and highlighted performance in relation to achievement of 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C and the published Ofsted school and college classifications.

NOTED the report

CS/13/121 Exclusion of public and press

The Committee considered whether to pass a resolution under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1971 to exclude the public and press from the meeting for Item 11 on the grounds that consideration of the item was likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information relating to any consultation or negotiation, or contemplated consultation or negotiation, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Council or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under the Council.

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of item 11 under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds outlined above.

CS/13/122 **Supply of agency workers and interim managers**

In accordance with the need to consider this item in private the Committee received a presentation. The Committee discussed in detail several options and issues in relation to this item in particular the risks inherent to the Children's Services Directorate arising from some of the proposals.

In reaching their conclusions the Committee were mindful that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also considering the report at their meeting on 08 April 2014 and agreed to send their recommendations to that Committee prior to Executive.

RECOMMENDED that the Children's Services OSC notes the risks inherent in the proposed options for the Children's Services Directorate and asks that the Corporate Resources OSC evaluate the feasibility and risk of undertaking option 5.

CS/13/123 **Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager introduced the Committee's provisional work programme and highlighted that the next meeting on 07 May would be held at the Grove Theatre in Dunstable at 7pm.

RECOMMENDED that the current work programme be approved.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.23 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated