

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Watling House, High Street North, Dunstable on Tuesday, 11 November 2014

### PRESENT

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

Councillors:	P A Duckett P Hollick	Councillors:	D McVicar R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	Mr J Chapman Mr S Court Mr T Hodey		
Church of England Co-optee:	Mr D Morton		
Roman Catholic Co-optee:			
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	D Bowater Mrs G Clarke Mrs B Coleman Mrs R J Drinkwater Mrs F Image	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	R D Berry K Janes M A Smith	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis  Mrs S Clark  A L Dodwell  M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services and Community Services Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs P Everitt  Mr P Hardy Mrs S Harrison Mr R Parsons	Scrutiny Policy Adviser  Compliance and Risk Adviser Director of Children's Services Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning	

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 September 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**Members also resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Co-convened Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 September 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**CS/14/44. Members' Interests**

The following interests were declared in the business to be transacted:-

- Cllr A Barker as a Member of the Corporate Adoption Panel
- Steve Court as a Member of the Schools Resilience Panel.

**CS/14/45. Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services to her first meeting of the Committee. It was also announced that Members would be asked to mark the two minutes silence for Armistice Day.

**CS/14/46. Petitions**

None.

**CS/14/47. Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

**CS/14/48. Call-In**

None.

**CS/14/49. Requested Items**

None.

**CS/14/50. Executive Member Update**

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

- Attendance at meetings to discuss the pressures and efficiencies to be made to the Directorate's budget.
- Attendance at the Children in Care Awards evening.
- The visit made by Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler to the Council.
- Attendance at the National Children's Conference with the Director of Children's Services and colleagues from Social Care Health and Housing.
- A welcome to Sue Harrison Director of Children's Services to the Authority.

The Committee raised several questions to which the Executive Member responded as follows:

- The Council continued to see a rise in the number of adoptions and Special Guardian Orders against the national trend that had seen a fall in adoptions.
- A Member raised concerns that a school in his ward had not received the level of support it expected from the Council. The Executive Members agreed to look into this specific case. The Director of Children's Services commented on the good partnership working in schools and would bring a report with some new ideas to a future meeting.

#### CS/14/51. **Annual Local Safeguarding Children's Board Report**

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the Annual Local Safeguarding Children's Board report and gave apologies for the new Chairman, Alan Caton, who was not able to be present. The Committee requested that Mr Caton attend the next meeting of the Committee on 20 January 2015, when the Committee considered the Jay Report on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.

In light of the report and further clarification provided by the Executive Member and the Director of Children's Services, the Committee commented on and discussed the following:-

- Why it was necessary to set a target for the number of Children on protection plans. The Director of Children's Services advised the target was a national target put in place to ensure a child's plan was revisited regularly as it was not good for a child to stay on a plan for too long. Either the plan would be effective within timescales and the child would no longer require a plan, or if the plan was ineffective further pathways needed to be explored.
- The reasons behind the decision to withdraw from the LCSB partnership with Bedford Borough Council. Officers present would investigate and advise Members of the reason.
- That need to raise awareness and the profile of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), also known in Central Bedfordshire as the Allegations Manager be raised for Members. The Director of Children's Services advised information and contact details could be found on the website page 'protecting children'.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of children with special needs should be included in the report in addition to further information on the valuable work undertaken by the Voluntary Sector .
- That the Council seek to eradicate Child Sexual Exploitation, not manage it.
- That improved ways of working with some partners be highlighted as a priority for the Council.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1. That the comments of the Committee be reported back to the Safeguarding Children's Board**
- 2. That a further report on the work the Council had undertaken in light of the Jay Report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham be submitted to the next meeting.**

**NOTED the multi-agency team working arrangements put in place to improve outcomes for children.**

CS/14/52. **Annual Schools Resilience Report**

The Director of Children's Services introduced the annual report of the Resilience Group for Schools and other settings. The report set out the positive work that had been undertaken to support schools and the robust arrangements which are in place.

In light of the report and clarification provided by the Compliance and Risk Adviser, the Committee commented and discussed the following:

- Concern that few schools had responded to the recent consultation and that officers write to School Governors as well as Headteachers and Business Managers to prompt an early review of their resilience plans.
- Concern that with the current pressures on schools, resilience planning was not a high priority, nor was it a focus for Ofsted or a legal obligation.
- That the Committee supported a 'badge scheme' to help raise the resilience planning profile in schools.
- That best practice resilience planning be shared to encourage more schools to revisit their plans.
- That schools be encouraged to open their premises with a skeleton staff on snowy days.
- That pre-schools continue to be encouraged to have resilience plans in place, including private, voluntary and independent groups.

**RECOMMENDED the comments of the Committee as detailed in the Minutes be referred to the Resilience Group for Schools and other Settings.**

CS/14/53. **Customer Feedback Annual Report**

The Director of Children's Services introduced the annual report of compliments, comments and complaints for children's social care for 2013/14. The Director of Children's Services commented that the Directorate always tried to learn from experience and was concerned when complaints were due to a breakdown in communications. A new Communications Strategy was being developed and would be presented to the Committee next year. Overall feedback had increased and had included a good number of compliments.

In light of the report and further clarification the Committee raised were pleased to note the high number of compliments that recognised the good work undertaken by officers in the Directorate. The Executive Member endorsed the work of officers to improve the service.

**NOTED the report**

CS/14/54. **Council's Schools Admission Arrangements for 2016/17**

The Head of School Organisation, Admissions & Capital Planning introduced a report that sought the Committee's comments on the revised Central Bedfordshire co-ordinated admissions scheme and the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools for 2016/17. A consultation had commenced on the proposed admission arrangements for academic year 2016/17 that included:

- clearer arrangements for pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs;
- the removal of nursery, pre-school and other childcare criteria from school admission policies in response to recent decisions made by the national schools adjudicator;
- A revised catchment area for Russell Lower School in Ampthill.

In light of the report, Members queried the extent of the Council's influence over Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. The Head of Service explained the Council could advise and influence decisions on admission arrangements. The Council was also legally obligated to collate all school admissions data and print the information in an admissions booklet. Free schools and the independent special schools admission process varied and the new SEND reforms gave parents a greater choice. Difficulties arose when academies decided to change their admissions numbers especially when this happens with very short notice. This challenge had been raised with the Department for Education.

Members noted the challenges faced by the Admissions Team who had successfully placed 98% of pupils in their preferred school during September 2014. This performance had launched them into the top 10% of authorities in the country for Admissions.

**NOTED the report.**

CS/14/55.

**New school places in Stotfold and Leighton Linlade and 2014/15 refresh of the Council's School Organisation Plan and New School Places Programme**

The Head of School Organisation, Admissions & Capital Planning introduced a presentation on a report being prepared for the Council's Executive on the 9 December. The report provided the 2014/15 refresh of the Council School Organisation Plan and New School Places Programme and would also include recommendations to provide additional schools places in Stotfold and to commence consultation on school expansions in Leighton Linlade.

The final Executive report and additional information on data collected would be circulated to Members for comment.

In light of the presentation and further clarification, Members raised the following questions:

- Whether it was practical to expand schools on their existing sites or if it was more realistic to find a new location. In response the Head of Service

explained how model accommodation schedules, suitability surveys were undertaken to inform the briefing of capital feasibility studies.

- Whether academies were obligated to expand to accommodate an increase in pupil numbers. The Head of Service confirmed there was no obligation on Academies, however, the Council retained a good working relationship with Academies and there had been no issues to report where they had been invited to expand to provide new school places on commission from the Council.
- Whether the service encountered difficulties in resolving cross-boarder placements and parental preferences with other authorities. Members were advised that places were commissioned in other authorities where school pyramids extended beyond administrative boundaries. This arrangement was common across the Council area and elsewhere nationally.
- What procedures were in place for developers to discuss their plans for growth in an area with the Council. The Head of Service advised that his service was engaging directly with the Council's Planning Service in these consultations although occasionally developers would instead choose to engage directly with schools to discuss their plans and to inform their alternative proposals to mitigate the impact of development on school places. Schools were provided with regular updates on demographic change, including that driven by housing development by the Council's School Organisation Team. All schools were encouraged to seek advice from the Team if they were approached directly by a developer.

**RECOMMENDED that the final Executive report and additional information on data collected, be circulated to Members for comment.**

Subsequent to the meeting the Head of School Organisation, Admissions & Capital Planning advised that as at January 2014 the total number of 2+ year olds was 3429, 3+ year olds was 3353, 4+ year olds was 3346. (January 2014 Area Health Authority data)

CS/14/56. **Q1 Performance Report**

The Executive Member introduced the Quarter 1 performance report for Children's Services and highlighted the published Ofsted inspections that showed schools and colleges were performing well with 86% of schools and colleges that had achieved either good or outstanding. Of particular note was the achievement of Sandy Upper School that had made good progress after being placed in special measures in 2013. The Deputy Executive Member reported the UTC, now sponsored by Bedford College, had made considerable progress to recover from its poor start.

The Adoption service continued to perform well and child protection reviews had been completed within timescales and continued to achieve the 100% target.

**NOTED the report**

CS/14/57. **Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the current draft work programme and agreed to consider the following items at its next meeting and that an invitation be extended to the Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to attend :-

- Budget 2015/16
- Repercussions of the child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.
- Domestic Violence action plan

**RECOMMENDED that the work programme be approved subject to the amendment above.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.55 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....