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**Meeting:** Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 5 January 2010  
**Subject:** Care Matters  
**Report of:** Martin Pratt Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services and Deputy Director Children, Families and Learning  
**Summary:** The report sets out Central Bedfordshire Council's response to 'Care Matters; Transforming the Lives of Looked After Children.'

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**Contact Officer:** Martin Pratt, Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services and Deputy Director Children, Families and Learning  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

The recommendations directly support Priority 2 of Central Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan 2009-2011, Educating, Protecting and Providing Opportunities for Children and Young People (looked after) ; Priority 5, Promoting Healthier Lifestyles. The recommendations also support the delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan priorities as they relate to children who are looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council.

### **Financial:**

In order to deliver the Care Matters additional funding has been made available to local authorities via the Care Matters Grant. Whilst some of the plan will be delivered within existing resources, other aspects will be funded from the grant.

### **Legal:**

As legislative change and changes to guidance, regulations and national standards are introduced, the Care Matters Plan will be amended to reflect these. This will ensure that practice and procedures within Central Bedfordshire are compliant with legislation, guidance and procedures and thus mitigate risks to service users and the Council.

**Risk Management:**

Risks to children, young people and their families will arise from a failure to implement the Care Matters and incur risk to the Council's reputation. All such risks will be mitigated by delivery against the Care Matters Implementation Plan.

The Care Matters Implementation Plan and progress against it will be monitored and reviewed by the Stay Safe Delivery Group of the Children's Trust. If areas of poor practice and non-compliance with the Care Matters and/or legislation, guidance, regulation, procedures and systems were to be identified these would be responded to via the Stay Safe Delivery Group.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

It is the responsibility of core members of the Care Matters Steering Group to deliver Care Matters. The Care Matters Project Manager has a substantive post within Children's Specialist Services and is using additional capacity to manage the project. A Children's Participation Officer has been appointed out of the Quality Assurance budget to support delivery of some of the Care Matters objectives.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

Delivery of the Care Matters will have a significant and positive impact on the looked after population within Central Bedfordshire. Under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Care Matters will support children and young people's right to life (article 2), their right to freedom of expression (article 10) and the right to an education (article 2, first protocol).

**Community Safety:**

Providing a high quality education and good access to leisure facilities will positively support looked after children and young people to engage in those services and consequently feel safe and secure within their communities.

**Sustainability:**

Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **that the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-**
  - (a) **receive and note Central Bedfordshire Council's response to Care Matters, in accordance with the national agenda to promote better outcomes for looked after children and those on the edge of care.**
  - (b) **are aware of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents and agree how they will monitor and support implementation of the Care Matters.**

## Background

1. 'Care Matters Time for Change 2007' sets out Government policy and agenda in respect of securing improved and sustainable outcomes for children in care and their families. This is seen as critical for the individual children concerned but also because making these changes will contribute to social and economic regeneration and the cohesion of communities.
2. The Care Matters agenda acknowledges the importance of effective family support services provided by local partners to assist those on the edge of care to remain at home where appropriate, as well as providing a framework for delivering high quality services to children who need to come into care.
3. Where children do need to come into the care of the state, delivering good outcomes requires excellent corporate parenting based on high aspirations, stable relationships and taking seriously the voice of children and young people.
4. In Central Bedfordshire this will be accomplished by the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Panel which supports the delivery of the Children's Pledge and the work of the Children in Care Council.
5. The outcomes Central Bedfordshire should be seeking to achieve should be aligned with those set out in the DSCF. i.e.

*'Our aspirations for children in care are no less than those each parent has for their own children. Children in care are often in much greater need than other children but much less likely to get the help they require. We aim to create a care system that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to fulfill their potential.'*

## National Agenda

6. The Care Matters National Agenda is based on 6 outcome areas and these form the main structure for Central Bedfordshire's CMIP:
  - (a) Corporate Parenting

Improving the role of the corporate parent as part of Children's Trusts, is key in improving outcomes for children in care. Establishing a Corporate Parenting Panel and Children in Care Council will support this.
  - (b) Children on the Edge of Care

Providing timely and high quality support to children within their own families to prevent them from coming into care where this is in their interests.

(c) Care Placements

Providing successful, stable placements is central to supporting the needs of children in care.

(d) Delivering a First Class Education

Delivering high quality education provides the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care, supporting and encouraging them to reach and exceed their aspirations.

(e) Promoting Health and Wellbeing

Enabling children in care to lead healthy and enjoyable lives by joining services involved in all aspects of their wellbeing to create a holistic approach.

(f) Transition into Adulthood

Extending the level of support and the duration of placements to young people post 16 and preparing to leave care, enabling them to move into adulthood successfully and with the right support. Central Bedfordshire's Care Matters Implementation Plan seeks to engage senior managers and practitioners within Central Bedfordshire, lead members, key partners from the statutory and voluntary sector and children in care in a work programme which will deliver improvements and changes in practice such that better outcomes will be achieved for children and young people and families within the community and for those children in care.

7. In order to measure, monitor and evaluate the changes and improvements made Care Matters Implementation is supported by a performance framework and key indicators and will be subject to internal monitoring and review via the Stay Safe delivery group of the Children's Trust, the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

8. Central Bedfordshire has responded to the Care Matters Agenda and has in place a comprehensive plan to achieve national and local objectives. The Care Matters Steering Group is responsible for the delivery and review of the plan. There will be management oversight of the plan and regular reporting into the Stay Safe Delivery Group of the Children's Trust.

**Appendices:** None

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands