

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Dunstable, LU6 1LF on Tuesday, 5 January 2010

PRESENT

Cllr J Street (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: P A Blaine
D Bowater
N B Costin
I Dalgarno
Dr R Egan
P Hollick
K Janes
A Shadbolt

Parental Co-optees: H Chapman
D Landman
B Sear

Apologies for Absence: F Image
J Reynolds

Members in Attendance: Cllrs J G Jamieson
Mrs A M Lewis
S F Male
Mrs C Turner

Officers in Attendance:	Mr M Bowmer	Assistant Director Financial Services
	Mrs S Gibson	Interim Assistant Director, Policy, Planning and Commissioning
	Mrs E Grant	Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children, Families and Learning
	Mrs S Hobbs	Democratic Services Officer
	Ms S Ioannou	Head of Quality Assurance CRS
	Mr J Partridge	Overview & Scrutiny Officer
	Ms K Peddie	Head of Policy & Strategy – Children, Families and Learning

CFL/09/59 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 December 2009 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Members were updated on the following:-

- minute no. CFL/09/54 'Eligibility for Financial Support Policies' - a letter had been sent to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families by the Chairman of the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CFL OSC). The Chairman read the letter out to the Members. He highlighted that after further analysis of figures relating to the number of children seeking asylum and the impression that Toddington Service Station was a 'hot spot' it was confirmed that the final figures were not available for this financial year. As a result of this it was not included in the letter sent by the Chairman and the final year figures would be provided to the Committee to show any variation in the numbers of children seeking asylum. The situation would continue to be monitored and Members would be made aware of any concerns regarding Toddington Service Station
- minute no. CFL/09/55 'The Future of Special Schooling in the East of Central Bedfordshire' – an item on the financial implications of the initiative and an outline implementation plan had been included on the Committee's work programme
- minute no. CFL/09/57 'Quarter 2 Budget Management Report' – the stock condition survey of schools and the capital programme fell within the remit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If there was an issue that arose from this such as competition for the capital programme then CFL OSC would then be consulted.

Members discussed transforming teaching and learning including the performance of Mouchel. The Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be recommended to receive a report from the Director of Corporate Resources regarding the performance of Mouchel and any matters of concern relating to the Children, Families and Learning directorate could be referred to this Committee.

Members also discussed the work programme for CFL OSC as some Members were concerned that critical items were not being submitted for the Committee to scrutinise. The Chairman advised Members that he would seek their views before the next meeting and discuss with Officers regarding the remit of other bodies such as the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that appropriate issues would be considered.

CFL/09/60 **MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

(c) **Any Political Whip in relation to items on the agenda:-**

None.

CFL/09/61 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chairman wished Members a Happy New Year.

The Chairman advised Members that agenda item no. 12 'Draft Budget 2010/11 to 2014/15' would be considered before agenda item no. 9 'Corporate Parenting'.

CFL/09/62 **PETITIONS**

The Chairman announced that no petitions had been referred to this meeting.

CFL/09/63 **QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS OR DEPUTATIONS**

There were no applications from members of the public to speak under the Public Participation Procedure allowed for under Part A4 of the Constitution.

CFL/09/64 **CALL-IN**

No matters were referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to call-in of a decision.

CFL/09/65 **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.

CFL/09/66 **DRAFT BUDGET 2010/11 TO 2014/15**

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources on the draft budget Medium Term Financial Plan for 2010/11 to 2014/15.

Members noted that the report had originally been submitted to the Executive on 8 December 2009 when it had been agreed that the proposals within it should form the basis for consultation with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Members further noted that the Committee's comments, if any, were sought with particular reference to those parts of the report relating to the Children, Families and Learning Directorate. These would be submitted to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then the Executive for consideration at its meeting on 9 February 2010 when the Executive would recommend a budget to full Council.

The Assistant Director for Financial Services introduced the report and provided an update on the current economic position and the specific impacts on local government funding at the current time. The closure of the legacy authority accounts and budget monitoring information from Central Bedfordshire and the priorities of the Council had informed the draft budget proposals.

Members noted that the budget needed to address the following issues:-

- the priorities of the Council and the allocation of resources to deliver those priorities;
- changes to the Medium Term Financial Plan (revised assumptions and facts);
- the Revenue Budget for 2010/11, including reserves;
- the Capital Programme for 2010/11; and
- the consultation process and the incorporation into the budget of issues raised and accepted.

The efficiencies had been categorised green, amber or red based on the ease with which they might be implemented. The green and amber supported by the headroom could meet corporate pressures, but the red efficiencies would be difficult to achieve and decisions would need to be made when considering the growth proposals.

The Director of Children, Families and Learning commented that the budget had been difficult to prepare, especially as there had been an increase in the number of looked after children leading to additional costs. Children Services was a statutory service and had to carry out certain areas such as the Local Safeguarding Board however this did not mean that efficiency savings could not be made within the directorate. An example of this was an area of overspend which had been inherited from Bedfordshire County Council within the school transport budget. The Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CFL OSC) would be requested to scrutinise the

school transport policy at its next meeting in February. This included the contentious issue of transporting catholic children to schools outside of Central Bedfordshire on grounds of their parents' religion and their choice of their child to educated at a denominational school. The Director had arranged meetings with the Roman Catholic and Church of England Diocese representatives to seek their views and to make them aware that this issue would be considered by the CFL OSC.

Members were advised that the Leisure and Culture budget had been the most problematic and further work was still being carried out with the Portfolio Holder.

The Capital Programme was continuing to be worked on and would be informed by the Asset Management Strategy. Discussions with Bedford Borough Council over assets were coming to a conclusion.

The meeting then worked through the report with Members raising a number of issues for lengthy and thorough discussion. Amongst the issues raised the meeting expressed views regarding:-

- the saving of £17,000 proposed by ending grants for school uniforms. The Portfolio Holder explained that this was a small amount of money and was allocated on a first come first serve basis, this did not seem to be a fair process as many parents were unaware of the scheme. If Members requested that this funding be included in the budget then the policy would need to be reconsidered. Members were advised that if parents were struggling to afford school uniforms for their children then Social Services might be able to offer them financial assistance;
- the proposed increase in fees for music lessons;
- the disaggregation and restructuring of resources which related to Greys Education Centre (this was currently shared with Bedford Borough Council). Members were advised that Central Bedfordshire Council was looking at provision within this area to reduce the travelling for children and the cost. Members hoped that cases just over the border from Bedford would have a choice of whether to go to Bedford or the new facility;
- Members were concerned that disadvantaged children would be further disadvantaged after setting the budget, it was the Council's duty to support all children;
- Members noted that there was not enough information provided about the service implications of efficiency proposals especially around the items flagged red and what impact these proposals would have on services; and
- Members referred to the growth proposal for £324,000 as national strategies were ending in March 2011 and it was likely that this funding from the Government would come to an end.

- There was also a growth proposal for £231,000 to replace grants which had been provided by the Training and Development Agency and Children's Workforce Development Council to fund Children's Workforce Development. There would be increased pressure on this service if these grants were withdrawn. Members queried whether these amounts were needed in their totality or if they could be reduced. Officers agreed to consider further to see if there was a middle option that could be found.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

1) to consult and seek assurances from Officers that:-

- a) items flagged as green had no service implications and could be delivered***
 - b) items flagged as amber that could be implemented without undue impact on services and that could be delivered***
 - c) it be clearly identified that items flagged as red would be deliverable and their service implications***
 - d) all the growth and pressure items be clearly identified that:***
 - ***relate to a loss of grant;***
 - ***were previously funded by the transition budget in 2009/2010; and***
 - ***that is discretionary in nature***
 - e) the ongoing impact of pressure/growth/savings on future years be clearly identified.***
- 2) that the Executive be aware of the need not to disadvantage children and young people as a result of changes in setting the budget.***

CFL/09/67 CORPORATE PARENTING

Members agreed to defer this item to the next scheduled meeting on 2 February 2009 due to the length of the meeting.

CFL/09/68 CARE MATTERS

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services and Deputy Director Children, Families and Learning that set out the Council's response to 'Care Matters; Transforming the Lives of Looked After Children'.

Members were advised that the first Corporate Parenting Panel had met on 4 January 2010. This Panel would be supporting the delivery of the Children's Pledge and the work of the Children in Care Council. The Panel would be meeting monthly for the first few months, and then it would eventually meet quarterly. Members discussed the monitoring process for the following and agreed:-

- to receive quarterly update reports from the Corporate Parenting Panel;
- to receive an annual report from the Local Safeguarding Board; and
- to receive an annual report from the Children's Trust and to continue to receive presentations on the five Every Child Matters Delivery Groups – Be Healthy; Make a Positive Contribution; Enjoy and Achieve, Economic Wellbeing; Stay Safe at meetings throughout the Council year.

NOTED

- 1) ***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***
- 2) ***their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.***

RESOLVED

- 1) ***that the Committee would monitor the following areas as Corporate Parents and to support the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Panel:-***
 - ***to receive quarterly update reports from the Corporate Parenting Panel;***
 - ***to receive an annual report from the Local Safeguarding Board; and***
 - ***to receive an annual report from the Children's Trust.***

CFL/09/69

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN: ENJOY AND ACHIEVE

Members considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning outlining the current position in relation to standards in Central Bedfordshire's schools and provided an overview of the progress made with the priorities within the Enjoy and Achieve Plan.

Members referred to the report within the Executive agenda for the 12 January 2010 'Raising Achievement in Central Bedfordshire's Schools'. There was a section in this report that referred to the Principles to support schools in raising achievement. Members agreed to recommend to the Executive as follows:

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that they be made aware that whilst the Committee noted the principles detailed in the report it still wished to comment on these further and would do so at their next meeting in February where they considered the vision for transforming learning.

Members then discussed the report in detail and commented as follows:-

- a request was made for the Education Vision to be considered at the Committee's next meeting in February prior to it being considered by the Executive in March. This report would enable further discussion regarding the principle of developing trusts and partnerships at the same time as the Committee discussing the 'educational vision' for children and young people in Central Bedfordshire
- that there needed to be more extensive debate regarding the manner in which improvement in school results might be achieved. It was commented that the report did not propose many actions for improving school performance
- the importance of communication between the Council and schools as a means of enhancing trust and the level of cooperation between partners

Members noted that the meeting was no longer quorate. The terms of reference stated that there must be 2 co-opted members present whenever considering education matters and due to the length of the meeting the co-optees in attendance had left the meeting.

- the importance of an effective challenge of poor leadership and governance in order to develop improvements in the school system
- the importance of being able to challenge schools effectively on performance and using data to develop principles that will lead to transformation
- Members were disappointed with the current standards in schools and were keen to see improvements in performance.

NOTED the report.

CFL/09/70 **WORK PROGRAMME 2009-2010**

Members noted that from 11 January 2010 the Leisure and Cultural Services division would be transferred to the Sustainable Communities Directorate. This would mean that the Cultural Services Task Force would report to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Further clarification was being sought on whether the co-optees of Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee could remain on the Task Force. The Task Force would be seeking representatives from Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to sit on the Task Force. The Director of Children, Families and Learning would still be called by the Task Force to give evidence.

Due to the number of items scheduled for the meeting on 2 February 2010 Officers suggested that the Guidance on the role of the Lead Member and the Director of Children Services be rescheduled for the 2 March 2010.

RESOLVED

to reschedule the Guidance on the role of the Lead Member and the Director of Children Services from the meeting on 2 February 2010 to 2 March 2010.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 3.12 p.m.)

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