

Central Bedfordshire Council



Appendix A

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report (2009/10)



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If you have any comments on this report, or would like to see any of the papers that are referred to, please contact Bernard Carter, Overview and Scrutiny Manager on **0300 300 4175** or bernard.carter@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Foreword by Councillor Mike Gibson, Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel

It gives me great pleasure in presenting this Annual Report to full Council regarding Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) activities in 2009/10 and to reflect upon how Central Bedfordshire, as a new local authority, has embraced this democratic process over the last year.

The success of the O&S process does not manifest itself only in the number of reviews it undertakes but in the meaningful contribution the recommendations of these reviews make to local governance and the people of Central Bedfordshire. Unless all Members can see value in the contribution O&S makes in support of the Council, its partners and the community at large, issues will arise over 'ownership' of what we, as Councillors, seek to achieve on behalf of our electorate, who after all have entrusted us with the authority to act on their behalf to improve the quality of their lives. It has long been my belief that all Members have a duty and responsibility to show leadership in this respect and become fully and constructively involved in the O&S process.

Our ability to carry out this task depends however on some important fundamental principles, not least of which is independence. O&S Members are independent of the Council's decision makers, the Executive. Through our impartial, objective testing of policies and service delivery, and in monitoring improvement, we provide the people of Central Bedfordshire with the assurance of energetic probing and questioning on their behalf. We must maintain not only this independence but a vibrant work programme tackling key issues which matter to our constituents.

In this report you will find a summary of some of the key pieces of work which my O&S colleagues and I have carried out this year, or intend to begin shortly. As always, this work has been supported by our small but dedicated O&S officer team who undertake independent research on behalf of O&S Committees and Task Forces to ensure the production of objective, evidence-based conclusions and recommendations. It is essential that we continue to work towards continuous improvement in our scrutiny systems, with the overriding aim of providing strong, responsible, challenging and influential input into policy making at Central Bedfordshire in a way that is instantly acknowledged, respected and recognised by both officers and Executive Members alike.

Looking forward, and as an example of how O&S continues to improve its own systems and structures, in the new municipal year the function will be supported by just 4 Committees. This revised structure (a reduction of one Committee) follows a recent review, which looked at ways in which O&S could streamline its processes. In the new year, O&S Chairs & Vice Chairs will also review how best to structure its Coordination Panel to provide better management of individual Committees, deal effectively with cross-cutting issues and work collaboratively with the Executive.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to all those officers and Members who have contributed throughout the year, and also to those individuals and organisations outside of the Council for their valuable input into O&S at Central Bedfordshire Council during 2009/10. I hope you find the report interesting. In summary, it is a straightforward way in which we can be accountable to the Council for the work we do.

1. What is Overview & Scrutiny?

Overview & Scrutiny – A Quick Explanation

Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) is part of the political process introduced in 2000 by the government to modernise the way local authorities conduct their business. It plays a vital role in the decision-making and policy development processes at the Council and is an innovative development in the democratic process because it gives an independent view.

Effectively, the Scrutiny process is like the Council having its own 'watchdog'. It is a process that provides a chance to get a second opinion on key decisions made by the Council's Executive. It can also be used to inform and review any of the Council's plans, policies or strategies or question existing practices of the Council or any other public services causing concern.

Overview & Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) make recommendations and scrutinise the policies, decisions and performance of the Executive. The Executive in turn consults with and responds to Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommendations.

Overview & Scrutiny – A More Detailed Look

OSCs have two main roles: to help develop new policies and to hold the Executive and its partners to account. They therefore monitor decisions taken by Executive Members and examine the provision of services supplied by Council directorates, contractors and external agencies within the Central Bedfordshire area.

O&S is therefore a common sense approach to informing and reviewing decisions and policies, and considering whether they are right for the area. Not only does it provide a means to review the Council's own achievements against its planned targets but it also enables reviews to be carried out in relation to services provided by other public organisations on issues causing public concern. It does all this with a view to involving local people.

The O&S process also provides the opportunity for Members to examine the various functions of the Council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and make recommendations to this effect. It can also provide the opportunity for Members to champion issues of local concern to residents and to participate in the development of new policy.

O&S Members decide the areas they wish to review. The OSCs meet in an informal atmosphere and they invite those who they believe can help with their investigations to give "evidence". The public attending are welcome to participate in asking questions of those making submissions.

The Committees' work falls into a number of broad areas:

- **In-Depth Reviews:** Each Committee can undertake detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services, plans, policies or issues, which affect the lives of local people. At the end of each review the Committee produces a report making recommendations to the Executive and other partner agencies

as to how things could be improved. During the course of a review Members speak to the Executive, Council Officers and external witnesses to assist them in their information gathering. This type of review is normally conducted by a Task Force on behalf of a particular committee.

- **Light-Touch Reviews:** In addition to conducting in-depth reviews, Committees often want to conduct a quick, one-off review of a topic. Typically a Committee will ask Executive Members, Council Officers or external agencies to come and speak to them about a service or issue before making recommendations to the Executive.
- **Call-in:** Each OSC is charged with ensuring that the decisions taken by the Executive are appropriate and within the Council's policy framework. If the Chairman, two members of the Committee or three Members of Council feel that a decision should be reviewed they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect (an individual member can also call in a decision if it has particular significance for that Member's ward). They can then interview the Executive Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements to the decision.
- **Scrutiny of the Council's Performance:** A core role of each Committee's work involves the detailed examination of key performance indicators and the action plans flowing from Council policies and strategies to ensure the Council is meeting, or exceeding, its targets and objectives. The Committees also monitor the Council's budgets on a regular basis to ensure sound financial management.

The Committees conduct their work at regular Committee meetings or alternatively, they can appoint time-limited Task Forces (small, informal Member groups) to undertake work on their behalf. This usually happens when there is a need to review a topic in greater depth.

Why the Council is a strong supporter of the Overview & Scrutiny Process

Central Bedfordshire Council is not only committed to making best use of its resources to meet local needs and priorities, but it is also committed to making sure the decisions made by the Council are the right decisions for Central Bedfordshire and that the process for doing this is seen as an open one.

The Council is also keen to provide the opportunity for local people to contribute and give views on service provision and policies and to be able to challenge decisions made by the Executive.

How Overview & Scrutiny complements the Work of the Council

Whilst the Council's O&S arrangements have been set up to provide an independent process for informing and reviewing Council decisions and policies, 'scrutiny' is not intended to be a confrontational or divisive process. It is not a process that questions every decision the Council makes for example. If it was, clearly this would be counter-productive to Council business and the subsequent delays would win little thanks from our community.

Instead, all those involved in O&S should be aware that its purpose is to complement and add value to the work of the Council.

How Overview & Scrutiny Adds Value

When working well, O&S can add value to the work of the Council by playing an important role in:

- Supporting policy development;
- Raising the quality of debate;
- Improving decisions;
- Teasing out complex issues;
- Engaging the local community and key stakeholders;
- Strengthening accountability;
- Developing new ideas; and
- Monitoring and improving performance.

How Overview & Scrutiny Influences Council policy

Whilst scrutiny, in local government terms, is about reviewing decisions already made, the Council's O&S function also influences the development of new policies or review of old ones to help bring them up to date.

The Council's O&S function might carry out this policy development role at the invitation of the Executive, on its own volition or in response to public pressure (or perhaps also as a result of a Call-In or Councillor Call for Action).

And Finally...

The importance of O&S within a local authority cannot be understated. Those involved with its work are uniquely placed to be **challenging, influencing, and making a difference** because they: -

- Are **independent** of the decision making process
- Can set their **own agenda** according to the needs of the residents of Central Bedfordshire
- Can be asked to investigate issues by the Council, providing independent and objective reviews, with strong, **evidence-based** conclusions and recommendations.

2. Overview and Scrutiny Structure 2009/10



Overview & Scrutiny Coordination Panel

Chairman:
Cllr M Gibson

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr N Young



Business Transformation OSC

Chairman:
Cllr M Gibson

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr R Johnstone



Children's, Families and Learning OSC

Chairman:
Cllr J Street

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr Mrs D Gurney



Corporate Resources OSC

Chairman:
Cllr J Jamieson

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr J Clarke



Social Care, Health and Housing OSC

Chairman:
Cllr Miss A Sparrow

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr A Turner



Sustainable Communities OSC

Chairman:
Cllr N Young

Vice-Chairman:
Cllr A Bastable

In 2009/2010 the O&S Structure consisted of 5 OSCs aligned to the Directorates of the Council each of which had scheduled 10 meetings, 5 of which were to be considered 'reserve' meetings. There has also been an Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel which has met at least on a quarterly basis and is constituted by the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of each of the OSCs. In addition to this Committee structure each of the OSCs has been able to appoint Task Forces to conduct in-depth investigations into any matters within its terms of reference.

Full Membership details of these Committees for 2009/10 are included at Section 11 of this report. In addition to the elected Members appointed to the OSCs, there have also been three parent governors and 2 diocesan representatives of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches appointed to the Children, Families and Learning OSC.

However, it has been agreed that this Committee structure will change in 2010/11. The Business Transformation and Corporate Resources OSCs will be abolished and a new Customer and Central Services OSC will be established. This Committee will manage the areas of responsibility of the two previous Committees.

The remainder of this Annual Report is organised into sections that set out how the work of the OSCs has addressed each of the Council's priorities for 2009 – 11. The report will look at each of the priorities in turn and provide an overview of some of the outcomes achieved by the OSC whilst undertaking detailed investigation of an issue. The report will then set out some of the other major issues that have been considered in OSC meetings during 2009/10 and will provide an indication of some of the work that is intended to be undertaken by OSCs during 2010/11.

3. Supporting and Caring for an Ageing Population

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire where services for Older People are delivered sensitively and effectively and where people are supported to exercise choice over their care and enjoy independent living. The Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SCH&H OSC) has contributed to the Transforming Peoples Lives debate by assisting officers in scoping the way forward towards meeting the challenges of the changing model of care for adult social services.

Bedfordshire and Luton Partnership NHS Trust (BLPT) Tender Process

The proposals relating to the transfer of Bedfordshire and Luton Partnership Mental Health and Social Care Partnership NHS Trust (the Trust) to another NHS organisation were considered by the SCH&H OSC at its meetings on 16 July and 5 November 2009. Both reports provided the Committee with an update on progress from the BLPT Project Handover Board.

The Committee supported the need to develop a common framework for commissioning mental health services in Central Bedfordshire and confirmed that this would need to be in operation for all three participating local authorities operating in the county. South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT) has been selected as the preferred bidder and will be working with the 3 OSCs in the region to ensure the commissioning and delivery of mental health service services are sustainable, reflecting the shifts in the county's demographic, as well as being easily accessible within the community.

Green Paper - Shaping the Future of Care

The SCH&H OSC received a report outlining the Council's proposed approach to delivering the Shaping the Future of Care vision. This sets out changes to the care and support systems, highlighting the challenges faced by the current system and the reasons why the Council would need to think about reforming the current model of care to reflect the proposed development of a National Care System that is fair and affordable for all residents in the region.

The Green Paper proposed a number of questions for consultation with stakeholders and service users which would inform the Care and Support White Paper published on 30 March 2010. Central Bedfordshire Council and its partners carried out local consultation events to obtain the views of local stakeholders. The OSC supported the recommendations of the Executive, in particular the need to consider the proposals made in the Government's Green Paper and the potential impact on the future provision of Adult Social Care in the region.

A Member led Task Force is working with officers and service users to ensure a comprehensive policy will be in place to support the Council's commitment to provide and deliver adult social care services in the Central Bedfordshire area.

Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy

The SCH&H OSC considered a report regarding the proposed Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy 2010 – 2011, prior to being presented to the Executive in July

2010. Although a statutory requirement, the Council needed to produce and implement a strategy from inception as none existed within the legacy authority. The essence of the Workforce Strategy was to understand what skills would be required to deliver adult social care services now and in the future.

The proposed Workforce Strategy is intended to cover all social care staff and the Council is working closely with colleagues from Bedford College as it will be involved in devising a recognised carer's qualification to coincide with the Strategy. There is a recognition that the Council must be proactive and not reactive; especially when defining the journey of care taken by carers and service users.

The Committee recommended that the Executive should be asked to consider the journey of the carer and service user as the strategy becomes more widespread as a result of changes to service delivery. The Committee also advised the Executive to adopt the strategy with a view to reviewing what professional development skills it wants from its staff and what type of monitoring process should be in place to manage the personalisation agenda.

Other Work:-

As well as the issues mentioned above the SCH&H OSC have received a variety of reports considering, amongst other issues; the challenges of the National Dementia Strategy, the Council's approach to reducing health inequalities through the Healthier Communities Strategy, as well as contributing to the debate regarding the Council's provision of Affordable homes in its Housing Strategy.

Looking Forward:-

Throughout 2010 / 2011 the Committee will remain committed to scrutinising the strategies of the Social Care, Health and Housing Directorate as well as consultations from local and regional health providers. It will work in partnership to ensure services are commissioned to reflect the demographic of the locality and will also continue to influence the policy development of the Fairer Access to Care Charges.

4. Educating, Protecting and Providing Opportunities for Children and Young People

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire where children are better educated and their care and health is improving across the board. This priority involves improving educational attainment in areas of underperformance as well as working with partners to develop the Children's Trust and to develop a Children and Young People's Plan. Several of our reviews this year have focused on scrutinising the Children and Young People's Plan and educational attainment.

Children and Young People's Plan 2009 - 2010

The Children and Young People's Plan sets out the shared vision for children, young people and their families in Central Bedfordshire and those things that are critical for the Council to achieve in order to deliver this vision. Recognising the importance of this Plan, in August 2009 the Children, Families and Learning OSC received a report that set out the priorities that had emerged following consultation with children, young people, families and the Council's partners.

As a result of scrutinising the plan the Committee raised specific recommendations regarding some of the priorities contained in the plan and the detail of some of the targets and how strategic actions would be measured. The Director of Children's Services was asked to address these concerns, which were presented to a meeting of the Executive alongside the plan. Each of the Committee's recommendations were taken into account by the Executive prior to the adoption of the plan. The recommendations to Executive resulted in a new key measure of success being added to provide relevant and meaningful youth provision across Central Bedfordshire on Friday evenings and weekends and references in the plan to developing and promoting play, leisure and culture opportunities for children and young people aged 8 – 13 years being widened to include all age ranges. Further amendments were also made to the plan, which included actions and targets relating to the importance of short break provision for respite and palliative care and the importance of providing opportunities for children and young people to keep fit.

Home to School Transport Policy

Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory responsibility to provide free home to school transport for certain children of statutory school age. As part of the Council's overall aim to make the most effective use of resources and to ensure they are targeted where they are most needed a review of entitlement to home to school transport was undertaken. A specific proposal in this review involved ending the provision of transport to denominational schools with effect from 1 September 2010, unless that person was entitled to free transport on 'low income' criteria.

Recognising the public interest in this item and the difficulty this might cause for some parents the Children, Families and Learning OSC received several reports in February 2010, initially during the public consultation and then following the consultation period to review the comments that had been received. The Committee received the views of parents, teachers, the Roman Catholic and Church of England diocese and young people at the meetings to inform the debate on a wide range of proposals. Having considered the proposals in the paper and recognising the difficulty that ending free home to school transport from September 2010 might present for families whose

children currently attended denominational schools, the Committee recommended to the Executive that a phased approach be taken to end the provision of transport to denominational schools with the exception of those on the Council's low income policy. The Executive considered this recommendation alongside the proposed home to school transport policy, which was adopted with an agreement to end provision of free transport to denominational schools, with effect from 1 September 2010. However, in recognition of the difficulties that the decision may have caused for certain families, which had been highlighted in the OSC meetings and in petitions to the Executive, it was recommended that officers meet with Diocesan authorities to consider the implementation of the policy in an attempt to minimise those difficulties.

The Future of Special Schools in the East of Central Bedfordshire

In June 2009 the Executive agreed to carry out formal consultation on the options for the future of special schools in the east of Central Bedfordshire. Following a formal consultation between September and October 2009 the options were presented to the Children's, Families and Learning OSC in December 2009 seeking Members' views on proposals to merge Hitchmead and Sunnyside special schools.

The Committee heard from a number of people at the meeting both in person and in writing, including the Headteacher of Hitchmead School, who attended to present their views on the proposals. The Committee discussed various concerns, which included the survey carried out on the options, the level of financial analysis, particularly regarding the cost of adaptation works, that had been made available and the Council's position regarding the provision of a new build school to replace Sunnyside and Hitchmead.

Whilst the Committee resolved to support the proposed merger of Sunnyside and Hitchmead special schools it did so subject to a request that if the Executive subsequently approved the merger a further report was to be received containing the detailed financial implications of the initiative and an outline implementation plan. Having published the statutory notice the Children, Families and Learning OSC received a report in March 2010 regarding the financial implications and the implementation plan prior to the Executive agreeing to discontinue Hitchmead Foundation Special School and make an enlargement to Sunnyside Community Special School. Consideration of this item by the Committee enabled a greater level of public participation in relation to this item and detailed scrutiny of the different options for the future of these particular special schools.

Other Work:-

In addition to these specific items the OSCs have reviewed a wide range of reports regarding this priority which include Transforming Teaching and Learning: the Educational Vision for Central Bedfordshire, the Single Children's Workforce Strategy, Strategic Commissioning Framework for Children and Young People, and the Council's response to the recommendations of the Lord Laming report on protection of children.

Looking Forward:-

The Children and Young People's Plan is key to delivering this priority and in recognition of that the Committee receives regular reports throughout the year on each

of the key Every Child Matters outcomes “to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well being.” The Committee will continue receiving these reports in 2010 / 2011 and further items are currently scheduled on the Child Poverty Strategy and integrated and targeted youth support services.

5. Managing Growth Effectively

The Council aims to ensure that growth in Central Bedfordshire is handled sensitively for the benefit of local people and that the quality of the local environment is maintained or improved. This priority includes giving residents a voice in shaping the future of Central Bedfordshire, maximising the proportion of affordable new homes that are available and encouraging and supporting opportunities for creating and facilitating sustainable living and tackling climate change. Many of our reviews this year have focused on growth in Central Bedfordshire.

Development Strategy Task Force (Site Allocations and Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Documents)

Recognising the importance of managing the growth process effectively and engaging Members in this process, the Sustainable Communities OSC agreed to establish a Development Strategy Task Force, responsible for considering all 'non-strategic' matters in relation to the local development framework, housing strategy and local transport policy.

Task Force meetings have provided the opportunity to engage elected Members on behalf of their residents as well as Town and Parish Council representatives to debate growth proposals, primarily relating to the site allocations and gypsy and traveller development plan documents (DPDs).

Prior to consideration by the Task Force the Sustainable Communities OSC had supported, and the Executive had approved, two sets of assessment criteria for determining suitable sites to be contained in these DPDs. The site allocations DPD identified sites to meet the requirement for 17,950 new homes and 17,000 new jobs between 2001 and 2026. The gypsy and traveller site DPD identified sites to accommodate an additional 40 gypsy and traveller pitches, a transit site and a travelling show people site in the former Mid Bedfordshire area.

The Task Force held three meetings to consider in detail the proposed site allocations DPD and invited other local ward Councillors and Town and Parish Council representatives to present their views on the proposed sites. The Task Force also received information from the previous Vision Twentyone consultation. Following full debate the Task Force approved a list of sites it felt was appropriate to be included in the DPD, which was submitted to the Sustainable Communities OSC in October 2009 where the list of proposed sites was approved for submission to the Executive, subject to further information being made available to the Executive on the proposed site in Shillington.

The recommendations of the Committee were subsequently received by the Executive in November 2009 where it was approved subject to the removal of the site in Wrestlingworth. The DPD was received by Council in January 2010 where it was approved by Members for public consultation and submission to the Secretary of State for examination.

The gypsy and traveller DPD was received by the Task Force on two occasions in December 2009 where Members debated potential sites and reviewed scores associated with different sites against the agreed criteria. The Task Force also received views from 24 elected Members and Town and Parish Councillors regarding

the proposed sites prior to approving a short-list of sites for presentation to the Sustainable Communities OSC in January 2010 where over 80 members of the public and Parish Council representatives attended, four of whom spoke to make their views known. The Committee supported an amended short-list of sites for submission to the Executive but following further consideration of one of these sites a further amended shortlist was considered by the Committee in February 2010 prior to its approval for public consultation.

Local Transport Plan 3

The Local Transport Plan 3 is a statutory document that the Council is required to produce, which sets out the strategies and programmes of local transport authorities for transport in their areas up to 2021. The Plan also sets out how transport will contribute to a number of key goals such as tackling climate change, supporting economic growth and improving quality of life. The Council was required to agree how best to produce a new local transport plan, consistent with the local area and taking into account the geographical position of the Council and its neighbouring Councils.

The Sustainable Communities OSC received a presentation and report at its meeting on 7 October that set out two different approaches to developing the plan, asking Members to support a preferred approach for submission to the Executive. The Committee received views in person from an officer of Luton Borough Council regarding the proposals and debated the advantages and disadvantages of both proposed approaches and the impact a decision might have on neighbouring authorities. The Committee recommended that a single local transport plan should be produced and that a formally constituted transport planning body should be maintained with Luton Borough Council. Members were mindful of the importance of partnership working and also recommended that the process should develop stronger partnership links with all neighbouring authorities. These recommendations were endorsed by the Executive.

The Council has now approved the way in which the Local Transport Plan will be developed and the Development Strategy Task Force has continued to debate in detail the structure of the plan, its detailed objectives and priorities and the key strategies that will be included within it, particularly in relation to the freight strategy.

Town Centre Management

As a result of the legacy arrangements of the previous South Bedfordshire District Council, Central Bedfordshire has three Town Centre Management Committees (TCMCs). The Sustainable Communities OSC received a report in September 2009 examining the constitutional arrangements for the three TCMCs and proposals to create consistency across Central Bedfordshire in relation to Town Centre Management. Local ward Councillors from the area and an additional 8 public speakers and representatives of Parish and Town Councils and TCMCs attended the meeting to present their views. Whilst some of the proposals in the report received support, the overwhelming expression was one of opposition. Concerns were expressed that changes could lead to Central Bedfordshire taking an undue level of involvement in Town Council matters whilst failing to have regard to the individuality of local towns.

The Committee did not accept the reports recommendations but instead proposed new recommendations which it felt would create consistency within the Central Bedfordshire Constitution with regard to town centre management as well as further involve communities as partners and thereby prevent an environment of exclusion. It was recommended that the TCMCs in Houghton Regis, Leighton-Linslade and Dunstable remain incorporated within the Constitution and that officers be asked to incorporate a similar formally constituted structure for the other larger towns in Central Bedfordshire, following proper consultation with those towns. It was also recommended that membership of the proposed Town Centre Partnership Panel be enlarged to include the Chairmen of the TCMCs. These recommendations were received by the Executive in November 2009 where they also received a summary of the evidence that was received by the Committee. Whilst the Executive resolved to defer this item, detailed discussion by the OSC allowed a range of views to be presented on the proposals and informed the discussion that took place at the Executive meeting.

Other Work:-

In addition to these specific items the OSCs have reviewed various reports regarding activities that support this priority including; the Bedfordshire Energy and Recycling Project (BEaR), Luton and Dunstable Busway, the Congestion Strategy, the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD, the Waste Core Strategy Preferred Options document and the policy approach to Enforcement of legislation relating to Environmental Protection.

Looking Forward:-

Managing growth effectively will continue to be a key priority for the Council over the next 12 months. OSCs have already scheduled further items regarding the site allocations and gypsy and traveller development plan documents to provide an opportunity to discuss proposals in light of public consultation and prior to an external examination. Further items will also be received on major Council projects relating to this priority including the Waste Management Strategy and the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy.

The Development Strategy Task Force will also continue to operate to consider non-strategic matters relating to the Local Development Framework, housing strategy and local transport policy as necessary.

6. Creating Safer Communities

Creating safer communities involves making sure that Central Bedfordshire is safe and that people feel safe. This priority involves working with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime and also working with communities in priority estates to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. OSCs have considered two key elements of work in relation to making Central Bedfordshire a safer place.

Community Safety Partnership Priorities 2010 - 2012

Under the Crime and Disorder Act the Council is required to do all that it reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder in its area, and along with other partners is required to produce an annual strategic assessment, which identifies crime and disorder priorities for the area. There is also a duty for the Council and other 'responsible authorities' to work together to develop and implement strategies to tackle crime and disorder via a Community Safety Partnership. The scrutiny of local crime and disorder matters was also set out in the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 and the Sustainable Communities OSC is the designated Crime and Disorder Committee with the power to scrutinise decisions or actions taken by 'responsible authorities' in relation to their crime and disorder functions

The Sustainable Communities OSC received a report in January 2010, which outlined to Members the six strategic priorities that had been identified by stakeholder consultation to be included in the Community Safety Plan. These priorities included the reduction of serious acquisitive crime, reducing anti-social behaviour and casualty reduction. The Committee also received the Community Safety Strategic Assessment for the area, which had been used to identify the appropriate priorities for Central Bedfordshire.

In addition to written evidence, Superintendent Neil Wilson of Bedfordshire Police attended to provide additional information, clarification and answer questions from Members regarding the adequacy of the priorities. The Committee fully debated the proposals and whilst they supported the priorities for adoption by the Executive they also raised comments which they requested be taken into consideration by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). These recommendations included matters relating to communication with the public and informing residents of the work of the CSP and the priorities on which it had chosen to focus. It was also commented that the CSP needed to take a lead in making available to residents, the Council and Town and Parish Councils information regarding its performance. The Executive adopted the Community Safety Plan 2010 / 2012 in April 2010.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)

The Social Care, Health and Housing OSC considered the draft copy of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2010 – 2012 at its meeting on 16 July 2009, which incorporated the Council's provision for dispensing Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs). The Committee worked closely with the Head of Private Sector Housing to ensure its comments were appropriate to the development of the policy. The objective of the policy was to deliver the best use of resources based on the funding available, a key priority being to determine the current condition and affordability of the Council's housing stock.

In light of the financial climate the Council is currently facing, the Committee requested officers review the current policy for paying smaller types of assistance to residents in need of financial aid for repairs to a privately owned property. The previous approach allowed those in receipt of aid not to have any repayment conditions. The OSC requested that officers actively review the financial impact to the Council and ensure recovery of financial aid. As a result of OSC involvement in this aspect of the policy in particular, the Executive received and adopted an amended policy incorporating these changes at its meeting held on 9 March 2010.

Other Work:-

In addition to these specific items, the OSCs have reviewed a number of other reports which have had regard to matters of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour including the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Annual Report and the policy approach to enforcement of the Environmental Protection Act (1990), Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005) and other associated legislation.

Looking Forward:-

Looking forward to next year the OSCs will consider various matters relating to the reduction of crime and the fear of crime including a review of the Community Safety Plan.

7. Promoting Healthier Lifestyles

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire where children are healthier and the gap between the healthiest communities and others is narrowing. This priority involves working in partnership with a range of partners, particularly NHS Bedfordshire, to ensure care services reflect the changing demographic profile of the area and that care services work effectively together.

Cultural Strategy Task Force

The Children, Families and Learning OSC identified the development of a Cultural Strategy for Central Bedfordshire as a priority and therefore established a Task Force to undertake such development in August 2009. The purpose of the Task Force was to ensure the development of a cohesive strategy for developing cultural services in Central Bedfordshire and the development of a clear and deliverable action plan for enhancing local cultural services.

The Task Force met on several occasions during 2009 to receive briefings on different cultural services including adult community learning, leisure facilities, sports development and countryside access. The Task Force scrutinised the vision and objectives of some of these services and considered a possible framework for the development of a Cultural Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

However, due to a Senior Management Review of Council services during 2009/10 it was agreed by Members that the scheduled meetings of the Task Force should be suspended pending the completion of the review. The Task Force had undertaken some good work and provided recommendations to officers, which will be reconsidered in light of the Senior Management Review and whatever course the Council decides to follow in relation to the development of a Cultural Strategy. As a result of the Senior Management Review the Task Force will now report to the Sustainable Communities OSC.

Scrutiny of “A Healthier Bedfordshire”, NHS Bedfordshire’s Strategic Plan for 2009 to 2013.

Early in 2009, a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee was established by Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council to scrutinise A Healthier Bedfordshire, NHS Bedfordshire’s Strategic Plan for 2009 to 2013.

The 5 year plan contained proposals for addressing three strategic priorities, these being:

- Mental Health;
- Planned Care; and
- Staying Healthy.

The committee met 4 times and scrutinised the various elements of the strategy in depth. The Joint Scrutiny Committee produced a final report with 62 recommendations. NHS Bedfordshire responded positively to the Committee’s recommendations and overall Members welcomed the response. Additionally, NHS Bedfordshire advised that considerable work had taken place on the Strategy since the

Joint Committee had provided its report and added that work with both local authorities would be ongoing. A timetable was developed with the Overview and Scrutiny Managers of the constituent Councils to ensure that each Council received for consideration the refreshed strategy and progress reports thereafter at future meetings. Member's received their first update in February 2010. For the forthcoming Municipal Year and as a result of the joint Committee's work, the following matters will be considered for inclusion on the Work Programmes of the respective Councils' Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees:-

- (i) An annual update regarding the Strategy's implementation by NHS Bedfordshire
- (ii) An approach for securing the issue of a fair NHS funding allocation for NHS Bedfordshire being reconsidered in Whitehall;
- (iii) Monitoring of progress on planned care provision based in the community;
- (iv) An explanation of the Choose and Book system and evaluation of the success of its implementation;
- (v) Consideration of the benefits to patients of being treated at a centre of expertise;
- (vi) Review of the payment arrangements for medical and social care of patients in light of Government changes

Other work:-

In addition to these specific items the OSCs have considered the implications of the Council's approach to promoting healthier lifestyles, as referred to in a number of other reports, which have included the Local Transport Plan, the development of Luton and Dunstable Busway and Shaping the Future of Adult Social Care.

Looking Forward:-

Promoting healthier lifestyles will continue to be a core aspect of the Council's work and various items will be considered by the OSCs in 2010/11 that will impact on its development in Central Bedfordshire.

8. Cross-Cutting Issues

Complementary to the work O&S has undertaken during the year in helping to support delivery of the Council's five key priorities, the function has also played a significant part in reviewing strategically important issues that cut across the whole organisation and beyond. Much of this work has been undertaken by the Business Transformation and Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committees, and detailed below are some examples of each Committee's work.

Single Equality & Diversity Scheme (2010 – 2013)

Reflecting the importance Members place upon promoting equality of opportunity for all residents, in October 2009 the Business Transformation OSC held a single issue meeting to consider an early draft of the Council's Equality & Diversity Scheme. This early sight of the Scheme allowed Members the opportunity to review and influence its policy direction, objectives and action plans prior to wider public consultation. During the meeting, Members received a comprehensive presentation covering the challenges facing Central Bedfordshire in addressing equality and diversity and the Council's statutory equality duties, and questioned officers extensively about the subject matter.

As a result, Members recommended a number of changes to the draft Scheme prior to public consultation and its submission to the Executive. In summary, these changes related to the need for the Scheme to incorporate in sufficient detail:-

- the provision of targeted training and development for both Members and officers to assist in the practical achievement of the Scheme;
- a phased staff training approach, which concentrated limited resources on frontline staff in the first instance;
- the provision of a succinct 1 or 2 page awareness raising document for all employees & Members, which would distil the draft Scheme into key action points;
- the integration of equality and diversity awareness raising into the staff appraisal scheme;
- information regarding how Members could feedback equality & diversity issues encountered whilst undertaking their duties as ward representatives;
- the responsibility of the individual to strive for self-reliance;
- legal compliance;
- the importance of striking the right balance between the costs and benefits arising from particular initiatives (a judgment call would be required to ensure any actions outlined within the draft Scheme were proportionate, i.e. actions did not deliver a disproportionate benefit to the few to the detriment of the many);
- an acknowledgement that, whilst achieving Level 3 of the new Equality Framework may well be an aspiration, the Council should not commit itself to such an aspiration without first knowing the implications (financial or otherwise) thereof.

The final draft of the Scheme, incorporating the above recommendations, was approved by the Executive in May 2010.

Web Development

During the latter part of 2009, the Business Transformation OSC agreed to establish a Task Force to work with officers to improve and develop the Council's web presence. This undertaking reflected concerns from both Members and officers alike regarding the effectiveness and usability of the existing website, which had been constructed in a short period of time from legacy content to meet the Central Bedfordshire vesting day timetable.

From the outset, Task Force Members adopted a collaborative approach, working closely with officers to tease out the key issues, identify best practice and consult widely, before producing an overarching Strategy, supported by a practical implementation plan and robust "invest to save" financial case. The Strategy and implementation plan has been designed to focus on five core strands of activity, as follows:-

- getting the basics right;
- doing it better online;
- personalising;
- getting involved in online conversations; and
- bridging the digital divide.

In addition to delivering greater choice and an improved customer experience, it is expected that the Strategy and implementation plan will generate significant savings of up to £2.5M over 5 years for an initial investment of £550,000. However, Task Force Members were also keen to ensure the Strategy also recognised the fact that nationally, approximately 30% of the population do not have access to the internet. The Strategy's final core strand "bridging the digital divide" therefore addresses this point and makes recommendations on how identified non-internet users in Central Bedfordshire can be reached effectively.

Corporate Commissioning and Procurement Strategy

The Corporate Resources OSC established a Task Force to review the Corporate Commissioning and Procurement Strategy. As recommended in the National Procurement Strategy, the Strategy sets out broadly what is required of the Council in order to achieve best value in all of its commissioning and procurement activity. It also serves as a main platform for the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan. The strategy would be disseminated throughout the organisation with a Commissioning and Procurement Steering Group set up to report progress quarterly to Central Bedfordshire Management Team and annually to the Executive.

The Executive considered the comments and recommendations from the Corporate Resources OSC meeting held on 2 November 2009. The Portfolio Holder accepted the recommendations in their entirety and the Executive agreed that monitoring implementation of the Strategy should be incorporated as part of the overall quarterly performance report to the Committee, the first of which will be received by the newly constituted Customer & Central Services OSC in the new municipal year.

Community Engagement (Councillor Support)

In September 2009, the Business Transformation OSC agreed to establish a Member Task Force to work with officers in formulating a robust and practical action plan to deliver principle two of the Council's draft Community Engagement Strategy. This principle related specifically to the need for the organisation to enable Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities.

The Task Force met on a number of occasions between November 2009 and January 2010, working closely with officers to identify the key issues and develop action plans to effectively support Councillors in their ward based, community champion role. The Task Force exerted significant influence over the final Action Plan produced, which consisted of eight individual themes, as follows:-

- Provide Councillors with relevant ward-based intelligence, information and customer insight
- Provide individual Councillor budgets
- Offer support for scrutiny, Councillor Call for Action and response to petitions
- Establish greater role and involvement in partnerships
- Establish links with Third Sector organisations
- Procure a Case Management system for Councillors
- Provide Member Development of community engagement skills
- Provide dedicated officer support

Each theme was supported by a number of specific, time-bound actions, all designed to provide effective support to Councillors and deliver principle two of the Community Engagement Strategy.

The Community Engagement Strategy and associated Action Plans were approved by the Executive in May 2010.

Other Work:-

In addition to these specific items the OSCs have also reviewed many other cross-cutting issues during the course of the year. These have included; the Customer Services Strategy; the Communications Strategy; support to the Third Sector; the remodelling of customer services; the ICT & Accommodation Strategies and the Treasury Management Strategy; as well as monitoring performance and budgets on a quarterly basis.

Looking Forward:-

As mentioned in the Chairman's Forward, much of the cross-cutting work previously undertaken by the Business Transformation and Corporate Resources OSCs will now be delivered by the new Customer & Central Services OSC. The new Committee will therefore manage a full and demanding work programme during 2010/11, with early work including significant reviews of; shared services; the budget setting process and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

9. Executive Call-in and Petitions

OSCs have a statutory power under the Local Government Act (2000) to review an Executive decision that has been made but not yet implemented (known as Call-In). Any decision of the Executive, an individual Member of the Executive or a committee of the Executive or a key decision made by an officer under delegated authority is subject to call-in. Call-ins can be made by; an individual Member where that decision has particular significance for that's Member's ward; the Chairman of the relevant OSC; any two Members of the relevant OSC; or any three non-Executive Members of the Council. Where a valid call-in is received it is added to the agenda of the next meeting of the relevant OSC.

In addition to Call-ins OSCs can also review and scrutinise the adequacy of a response of the Council, the Executive or a Committee to a petition following a request for a review by the lead petitioner. Where a request for a review is received it is added to the agenda of the next meeting of the relevant OSC.

Executive Call-in: Supported Local Bus Services

The Sustainable Communities OSC considered a report on Supported Local Bus Services relating to the estimated level of overspend for 2009/10 for this service. The Committee's views were sought on various options for the ways in which savings could be achieved and the Committee was provided with the various impacts and risks relating to each option. The Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive that poor performing services be withdrawn based on objective weighted criteria but that, prior to the withdrawing of any supported bus services, a full review be carried out in order to ascertain the impact on users of withdrawing the subsidised services and any alternative, more cost-effective means of delivering the services provided by the Council.

The Executive considered these options and the recommendations of the OSC and resolved to withdraw support from a selected number of poorer performing bus services in order to bring spending in line with the budget. The Chairman of the Sustainable Communities OSC subsequently called-in the item as it had been taken in the absence of a full review of bus services (as recommended by the Sustainable Communities OSC), which considered the impact of the proposed cuts on residents and the use of alternative transport.

On 29 September 2009 the OSC considered the call-in and due to a full review of bus services not having been completed the OSC put forward two alternative recommendations to the Executive; (1) that a decision to cut bus services wait until the outcome of a full review of public transport; or (2) that the Executive consider a reduction in the number of supported bus services that were to be cut. The Executive considered the concerns raised by the Committee but felt it was not possible to defer making a decision until the outcome of the full review of bus services was available, which would take 12 to 18 months to complete.

Whilst the Executive still agreed to withdraw funding to some supported bus services it was felt that the OSC had effectively raised some important matters of concern and in light of the need to make financial savings within the current financial year the OSC had reached a suitable compromise that attempted to minimise the disruption to service users as well as make efficiency savings.

Review of the Adequacy of Response to Petitions:

(1) Weight Limit on Poynters Road, Dunstable: November 2009

The Sustainable Communities OSC was requested to consider the adequacy of the response to a petition requesting the implementation of a weight limit on Poynters Road, Dunstable, which claimed that HGVs were travelling in excess of speed limits and caused disturbance to residents and damage to the road and properties. The petition had been considered by a Traffic Management Meeting in October 2009 where it was agreed that subject to adoption of the Freight Strategy by Central Bedfordshire Council, the proposal for a weight limit on Poynters Road be included in the 5 year Traffic Management Programme.

The Sustainable Communities OSC reviewed the response to the petition at its meeting in November 2009 where it received a copy of the request for the decision to be reviewed, the decision of the Traffic Management Meeting and a copy of the report submitted to the Traffic Management Meeting regarding the petition.

The Committee received the views of the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles and the petitioner and whilst they requested that the Portfolio Holder consider how additional signposting might be erected in the vicinity of Poynters Road to encourage HGV drivers not to use the road and consider what other action could be taken to assist residents, the Committee agreed with the steps taken in response to the petition.

(2) Home to School Transport to Denominational Schools: March 2010

The Children, Families & Learning OSC was requested to consider the adequacy of the response to a petition submitted to the Executive in March 2010 with regard to the Home to School Transport Policy, requesting the Council to maintain free school transport to denominational schools. In response to this petition the Executive approved the Home to School Transport Policy but mindful that the policy could cause difficulties for certain families it was agreed that the Diocesan authorities and parents would be invited to meet with the Authority to consider how best families affected could be supported during the implementation of the policy.

The Children, Families and Learning OSC considered the response to the petition at its meeting on 30 March 2010 where Members reviewed the process through which the petition had been considered and the response provided by the Executive. In light of the process that had been followed and the opportunities that had been provided for the petitioner and various other parents and representatives to speak in meetings it was agreed that the petition had been dealt with appropriately and that every opportunity had been made available to allow people to make their views known at the OSC and Executive meetings. It was resolved by the Committee that the steps taken in response to the petition were adequate and that no further action be taken.

Councillor Call for Action

Within their terms of reference OSCs also receive and consider any Councillor Calls for Action as necessary. There have not been any Councillor Calls for Action in 2009/10.

10. How to Get Involved

The residents of Central Bedfordshire are Overview and Scrutiny's most useful resource for finding out what the key issues are. Residents, community groups, local businesses and others that live or work in the area can make valuable contributions to much of the work Overview and Scrutiny does.

The work programme of Overview and Scrutiny can be flexible so if there is an issue that you would like to see tackled or if you would just like to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny at Central Bedfordshire Council please contact the Overview and Scrutiny team.



Telephone: 0300 300 8000



Post: Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Priory House
Monks Walk
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SG17 5TQ

Details on forthcoming meetings, including copies of the reports and a list of future meeting dates can be obtained from the Overview and Scrutiny website at the following link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/performance/scrutiny/default.aspx>

All OSC meetings are open to the public and a list of future meeting dates is available from the above website.

11. Further Information and 2009/10 Membership:

Agenda papers, reports and the Minutes of the meetings of each Committee can be viewed on the Central Bedfordshire Council Website at the link provided below or on request from the officers whose contact details are provided below:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors	M Gibson (Chairman) R Johnstone (Vice-Chairman) R Barker Mrs A Barker J Clarke D Hopkin	J Jamieson Mrs J Nunn	Councillors:	Substitutes N Aldis R Berry J Kane Mrs J Lawrence N Young
Contact:	Bernard Carter, Overview and Scrutiny Manager Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ Email: bernard.carter@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 0300 300 4175			

Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors	J Street (Chairman) Mrs D Gurney (Vice-Chairman) P Blaine D Bowater N Costin I Dalgarno	Dr R Egan P Hollick K Janes A Shadbolt	Co-opted Voting Representatives Ms Copley (Parent Governor) D Landman (Parent Governor) B Sear (Parent Governor) Ms Image (Roman Catholic Diocese) Mr Reynolds (Church of England Diocese)
Councillors	Substitutes Mrs A Barker Mrs S Goodchild	Mrs M Mustoe	
Contact:	Jonathon Partridge, Overview and Scrutiny Officer Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ Email: jonathon.partridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 0300 300 4634		

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors	J Jamieson (Chairman) J Clarke (Vice-Chairman) I Dalgarno P Duckett D Hopkin R Johnstone	D Jones Mrs J Lawrence J Street	Councillors:	Substitutes A Bastable L Birt D Bowater M Gibson P Snelling
Contact:	Cheryl Powell, Overview and Scrutiny Officer Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ Email: cheryl.powell@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 0300 300 4559			

Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors	Miss A Sparrow (Chairman) A Turner (Vice-Chairman) Mrs J Freeman Mrs R Gammons Mrs S Goodchild	Ms A Graham J Kane P Rawcliffe	Councillors:	Substitutes R Baker Dr R Egan Mrs D Gurney P Hollick B Spurr
Contact:	Cheryl Powell, Overview and Scrutiny Officer Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ Email: cheryl.powell@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 0300 300 4559			

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors	N Young (Chairman) A Bastable (Vice-Chairman) D Gale Mrs R Gammons J Kane Ms C Maudlin	Mrs M Mustoe P Snelling P Williams	Councillors:	Substitutes Mrs F Chapman MBE P Duckett M Gibson A Graham A Shadbolt
Contact:	Jonathon Partridge, Overview and Scrutiny Officer Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ Email: jonathon.partridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 0300 300 4634			