
Meeting: Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date: 23 November 2010
Subject: Commissioning the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
Report of: Cllr Mrs Anita Lewis, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Summary: The report sets out options for the delivery of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Central Bedfordshire focused on the development of provision that can meet local needs in mainstream schools.

Contact Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The proposal relates to the Council's Key Priority:

- Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

The proposal also relates to the provision of effective and efficient local services and is linked to programmes for early intervention and prevention and for transforming learning and the Council's relationship with schools.

Financial:

The most significant financial impact will be in reducing transport and staffing costs for Central Bedfordshire.

The current spend on the PRU is:

- Total Cost of provision £2.3million (2009-10 figures);
- the average cost of provision per pupil is £13.4k per annum;
- the average cost of travel per pupil is £11k per annum.

The projected costs for Central Bedfordshire Council for 2010-11 are: £1.6M. However negotiations are still taking place with the Borough to confirm final figures.

The charging for this service is on the basis of actual costs which vary from year to year, but which are normally apportioned 53% to Central Bedfordshire Council and 47% to Bedford Borough Council.

The intent is that every pound saved will be invested back into Early Intervention and Prevention for our truly vulnerable children.

As the PRU is funded out of the Direct School Grant (DSG), it will be necessary to put any financial proposals to the Schools Forum for the allocation of money currently allocated to the PRU.

Bedford Borough Council has signalled increased unit costs for 2010-2011 which would increase costs to an unsustainable level.

Legal:

Local authorities have a statutory duty to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school, (including pupil referral units), or otherwise than at school for children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, will not receive a suitable education without those arrangements.

Any change to the statutory operation of the school requires formal consultation on published proposals.

Risk Management:

Vulnerable pupils are subject to personal and collective risk assessments by nature of being assessed for a provision that is different from that of their peers.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

There will be staffing implications resulting from any changes to the way provision is made available. Any necessary consultation will take place at the appropriate time.

Disaggregation of staff will be the subject of full consultation, including with Trade Unions, and this will be undertaken in accordance with Central Bedfordshire Council procedures and best practice.

Central Bedfordshire will consider the TUPE rights of permanent staff in PRU establishments.

Equalities/Human Rights:

An equality impact assessment is being carried out which will be submitted when the issue is considered by the Executive on the 8 February 2011.

Community Safety:

None specifically.

Sustainability:

The development of local provision to meet local needs matched to analysis and understanding of the needs of our truly vulnerable pupils is the best way to ensure sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the proposals in this report for the future delivery of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision in Central Bedfordshire.

Background

- 1 Further to the report on 14 September 2010 to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this report provides an update on proposals for the provision for children excluded from school.

Members considered the following at their meeting of 14 September 2010.

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services which summarised the present situation regarding the provision for children excluded from school. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council to provide via Greys Education Centre Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for the provision of education for pupils of statutory school age unable to access education due to permanent exclusion, pregnancy or the difficulties of being a young mother, long term illnesses or other temporary difficulties which arrive in people's lives and make access to school very difficult was due to come to an end from March 2011.

The Council had agreed not to renew the SLA and had given notice to Bedford Borough Council. Officers were looking at alternative arrangements, as it was not appropriate for these children to be travelling to Bedford every day and the service was not providing value for money. On average it cost around £11,000 to transport a child to the PRU and then £12,000 to educate the young person. Members noted that alternative arrangements were being drawn up and would be discussed at the Schools Forum and by Headteachers. By bringing the service in-house it would allow also Members to hold the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services to account.

Members acknowledged the success of the PRU and the good Ofsted report, but concerns had been raised by this Council, in particular regarding the number of pupils being educated in libraries and this practice was still continuing.

A query was raised regarding the number of excluded children from the Academy. Members were advised that whilst initially the number of exclusions had been high, Officers were expecting the number to be reduced. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to write to the member concerned regarding her question on funding.

Members noted that a further report would be submitted to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2010.

Members are asked to consider this report and identify their preferred option. The feedback from schools from the Workshop of 12 November 2010 will be given verbally at the meeting.

- 2 The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), via Greys Education Centre, provides education for pupils of statutory school age unable to access education due to permanent exclusion, pregnancy, the difficulties of being a young mother, long term illnesses or other temporary difficulties which arrive in young people's lives and make access to school very difficult.
- 3 Current provision is through a shared agreement with Bedford Borough Council in which Bedford Borough Council is the provider. This arrangement ends in March 2011 and Central Bedfordshire Council will need to make its own arrangements to provide from 1 April 2011. When disaggregation was discussed between Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council, the Lead Members were looking to adopt a commissioning model. However, Bedford Borough Council have reviewed this and decided to continue to provide its own provision in house.
- 4 Currently pupils in Years 1 to 8 and Year 11 are supported in the Kempston Unit. Pupils in Years 9 and 10 are supported at Kingsland, Houghton Regis. Manor House in Kempston offers support to pregnant school aged girls and mothers.
- 5 Statistically, the highest need in Central Bedfordshire is in Dunstable and Houghton Regis for Years 7 to 11 and Sandy/Biggleswade for Years 1 to 6.

Permanent Exclusions

- 6 In 2008/2009 the number of permanent exclusions in Central Bedfordshire was in line with both statistical neighbours and the national average. There has been an improvement in performance compared to statistical neighbours from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010, with a reduction in the number of pupils excluded in all phases, and no children from special schools excluded.

Fixed Term Exclusions

- 7 In 2008/2009, the number of fixed term exclusions was above Central Bedfordshire's statistical neighbours and in line with the national average. There has been a reduction overall in the number of pupils excluded in 2009/2010.
- 8 Some of this improvement has been achieved through Local Authority challenge and support and through the funded Behaviour and Attendance partnerships across schools taking responsibility for making provision locally to meet the needs of their pupils.

Rationale For Change

- 9 Ofsted judged that provision in the PRU is good, but for some children the provision currently offered by the PRU is off site in Central Bedfordshire libraries. The number of young people who do not access the PRU site directly is not sustainable in the longer term as an appropriate response to the duties on the Council to set up suitable provision. This view is endorsed by Central Bedfordshire headteachers and officers who feel that, in the case of Central Bedfordshire pupils, the amount of off site provision is not appropriate.

- 10 The unit costs of the present provision are high. This is because of the number of pupils educated in libraries and the associated travel costs. Current arrangements are not an efficient use of resources nor do they allow for a direct line of accountability for some of our most vulnerable children.
- 11 The Children's Trust Commissioning Group considered the current arrangements at its meeting on 19 July 2010 and recommended that:
- The PRU should be de-commissioned in its current form and provision re-commissioned from April 2012.
 - Interim arrangements should be made with schools for PRU provision from April 2011 until March 2012.

Principles

- 12 Any revision of the provision for excluded pupils needs to take into account the Authority's statutory responsibilities for providing for children who are excluded from school.
- 13 The local authority retains statutory responsibility for ensuring that this provision is fit for purpose and offers good outcomes for children and young people. Quality assurance and progress monitoring will remain a local authority function.
- 14 Schools will take responsibility for the management of vulnerable students.
- 15 Emphasis will be placed on the "Think Family" approach, including support to parents and carers.
- 16 Children should wherever possible remain in their local community. This will support reintegration into mainstream education more effectively.

Objectives

17. The objectives for future PRU provision are to:
- reduce the numbers of permanently excluded pupils;
 - reduce the length of time that pupils are excluded;
 - support individual students to engage effectively with learning;
 - increase reintegration rates;
 - engage and support families;
 - work with schools to manage, and be responsible for, all vulnerable children and young people in their area.

Proposals

- 18 The proposal is to develop two units, one for Years 1 to 6 and one for Years 7 to 11. These would be based on a hub and spoke model, with one core base and outreach and peripatetic services as appropriate.

- 19 Schools and other educational establishments have been invited to tender for PRU provision during 2011-2012. The specification was sent to schools, academies and colleges on 21 October 2010 (see Appendix A attached). The possible options are given below and in Appendix B (attached).
- 20 Final arrangements for the provision will be determined following the bidding process by schools, academies and colleges.
- 21 **Option 1:** Local Partnership model based on the Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships and Trust and Academy status
1. Sandy/Biggleswade
 2. Leighton Buzzard/Linslade
 3. Chiltern – Dunstable and Houghton Regis
plus
 4. Harlington – Trust status
 5. BEST Trust – Trust status
 6. All Saints – Academy status
- 22 Behaviour Partnerships, Trusts and Academies are able to access resources to create their own local PRU. This offers a service for 4 to 16 year olds in a local area, potentially involving all schools.
- 23 **Option 2:** Invitation to tender from local schools and colleges with a Good or above Ofsted rating, particularly in behaviour and attendance, and work with vulnerable students
- 24 Those establishments wishing to tender must be able to provide evidence of good practice in working with vulnerable pupils. This approach allows practice to be developed across Central Bedfordshire. Schools and colleges would identify where the provision is offered.
- 25 **Option 3:** Invitation to tender from local schools and colleges with a Good or above Ofsted rating, particularly in behaviour and attendance, and work with vulnerable students
- 26 Those establishments wishing to tender must be able to provide evidence of good practice in working with vulnerable pupils. Central Bedfordshire Local Authority would provide help with the provision of accommodation using Hub and Spoke facilities linked to localities.

Governance

- 27 The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 requires PRUs to have a management committee. Subject to the views of the constitution advisory group and the Council it is proposed that this is made up of representatives of Headteachers and Governors from schools across Central Bedfordshire with the Director of Children's services and the Portfolio Holder ex officio. This body may then co-opt representation from other agencies as necessary e.g. Health.

Conclusion/Next Steps

- 28 Options 1, 2 or 3 would establish the PRU in Central Bedfordshire and secure the financial arrangements and appropriate transfer of relevant staff. However, option 2 b) would give the widest possible client base for bidding. Building on the lessons learned in 2010/11, further work will be required in consultation with Central Bedfordshire schools, the Schools Forum, and other partners to develop an evidenced based model for full commissioning in the open market for the academic year 2011/2012. The funding formula for vulnerable pupils via the pupil premium should be clearer by then.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Specification

Appendix B: SWOT Analysis PRU Options