

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in The Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 24 May 2011

### PRESENT

Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Chairman)

Cllr N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	P N Aldis Mrs S Clark A L Dodwell P Hollick	Councillors:	K Janes I A MacKilligan R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	H Copley D Landman		
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds		
Roman Catholic Co-optee:	Mrs F Image		
Apologies for Absence:	Cllr	Mr B Sear A Shadbolt	
		Mr B Sear	
Substitutes:	Cllr	D Bowater (In place of A Shadbolt)	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	Mrs A Barker Dr R Egan Mrs S A Goodchild J G Jamieson D Jones J Murray M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter Mrs E Grant Mr R Parsons Helen Redding		Corporate Scrutiny & Research Manager Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning Head of SEN and Inclusion

**CS/11/1 Minutes****RESOLVED**

***that the Minutes of the meeting of the Childrens's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 29 March 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to an amendment to the title of Mr J Reynolds as a Church of England Co-optee and not a Roman Catholic Co-optee.***

**CS/11/2 Members' Interests****(a) Personal Interests**

Cllrs N Costin, A Dodwell, Dr R Egan, S Goodchild, D Jones, P Hollick & R Pepworth all declared a personal interest in Items 9 and/or 10, as did the Church of England co-optee, J Reynolds.

**(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were no declarations made.

**(c) Political Whip**

There were no declarations made.

**CS/11/3 Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements or communications.

**CS/11/4 Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

**CS/11/5 Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Chairman confirmed that no questions, statements or deputations from members of the public had been received in accordance with Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

**CS/11/6 Call-In**

No decisions from the Executive were referred to the Committee for review in accordance with Procedure Rule 10.10 of Part D2.

**CS/11/7 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.

**CS/11/8 Outcomes of the Review of Transforming Teaching and Learning in Dunstable and Houghton Regis**

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced his report, which set out the outcome of the review of school organisation in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, as informed by the Council's Education Vision, and described the options by which the aspirations of this vision could be achieved. The Executive Member further explained his rationale for recommending Option 1 as his preferred option, which in his opinion reflected the latest education policy for school improvement, the increasing independence of schools from the local authority and the Council's responsibility to support underperforming schools.

The Committee then received representations from 2 speakers, as follows:-

1. Mr V Dunnell, Parent Governor at St Christopher's Lower School, Dunstable, who expressed concerns regarding the consultation process with parents in recent proposals made by schools where the Council is not necessarily the decision maker; and
2. Cllr S Goodchild, who referenced the Council's vision as a good document and supported consideration of Option 4, if the overriding imperative was to raise educational standards, and challenged the Executive to consider what success would look like.

There followed debate amongst Members of the Committee and the Executive Member for Children's Services regarding the merits and demerits of the 4 options contained within the report. The key issues raised during this debate included:-

- The freedom of schools and academies to choose their own delivery structures and the need for the local authority to trust parents, governors and teachers in making those choices;
- The financial constraints facing the local authority and the need to be realistic within these constraints;
- The perceived lack of serious consideration of Option 4 (and other two tier options) due to financial constraints;
- The difficulties of encouraging schools to co-operate and form hard federations;
- Issues of deprivation, and how best to address them within school structures;

- The changed strategic role of the local authority in light of the increasing number of schools moving to academy status;
- The need for the Council to be creative and a force for good if federations are to be effective; and
- The pastoral care of children moving through the school system;

No consensus was reached during the debate however the following recommendation was moved and seconded:-

1. That Option 4 is considered to have more merit in raising educational standards than Option 1;
2. That Option 1 is not considered to meet the needs of our children; and
3. That Options 3 & 4 should be further considered by the Executive and educational reasons given why either should not be favoured over option 1.

A recorded vote was requested, the result being:-

**For:-** Cllrs K Janes, P Hollick, N Aldis, Mrs S Clark, N Costin and Parent Co-optee H Copley

**Against:-** Cllrs D Bowater, I Mackilligan, R Pepworth & A Dodwell

**Abstained:-** Parent Co-optee D Landman, Church of England Co-optee J Reynolds & Roman Catholic Co-optee Mrs F Image

Accordingly the recommendation was carried.

## **RECOMMENDATION TO EXECUTIVE**

1. **that Option 4 is considered to have more merit in raising educational standards than Option 1;**
2. **that Option 1 is not considered to meet the needs of our children; and**
3. **that Options 3 & 4 should be further considered by the Executive and educational reasons given why either should not be favoured over option 1.**

CS/11/9

## **The Future of Special Schooling in the South of Central Bedfordshire**

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced his report, which summarised the responses received to the consultation on the future of special schooling in the south of Central Bedfordshire that was initiated by the Executive at its meeting on 11 January 2011. The Executive Member further explained his rationale for recommending that the Executive agrees to publish statutory notices for the merger of Hillcrest, Weatherfield and Glenwood special schools at its meeting on 31 May 2011.

The Committee then received representations from 3 speakers, as follows:-

1. Mr J Selmes, Headteacher of Weatherfield School, who opposed the proposed merger;

2. Mr P Skingley, Headteacher of Hillcrest School, who supported the proposed merger; and
3. Cllr J Murray, who believed parents had not been given sufficient opportunity to have their voices heard.

There followed debate amongst Members of the Committee and the Executive Member for Children's Services regarding the merits and demerits of the proposed merger. The key issues raised during this debate included:-

- The informal consultation process adopted prior to the publication of statutory notices (if agreed by the Executive);
- An acknowledgement that one particular school opposed the merger;
- The advantages and disadvantages of area special schools in general;
- Concerns regarding accommodating children with moderate learning difficulties within the proposed merger;
- The need for all three schools to work together regardless of the proposed merger;
- The recent news (received on 23 May 2011) that Weatherfield School had applied for academy status, and the impact this would have on the proposed merger;
- With regard to the application for academy status, the need to liaise with the Department for Education to assess merger options and timing issues; and
- The imperative for the Executive to make a decision regarding the publication of statutory notices at its meeting on 31 May so that a final outcome was known before the start of the new school term in September 2011.

Following the debate and as a result of the news relating to the application for academy status by Weatherfield School, Members of the Committee also discussed the possibility of recommending a merger between Glenwood and Hillcrest schools only.

## **RECOMMENDATION TO EXECUTIVE**

**That, whilst the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee is minded to support the merger of all 3 special schools in south Central Bedfordshire, in the event of Weatherfield School becoming an academy school, the Executive considers publishing statutory notices to merge the 2 remaining schools (i.e. Glenwood and Hillcrest).**

CS/11/10

## **Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan**

Members considered the report of the Chief Executive, which provided details of the Committee's current work programme and Executive Forward Plan. Members also noted that its next meeting would now be held on 28 June 2011 rather than the 20 June 2011 as originally scheduled to accommodate the post 16 Transport consultation timetable.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1. The next meeting be held on Tuesday, 28 June 2011 at 10 am; and**
- 2. The Children's Services OSC Work Programme be noted.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.45 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....