

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 15 December 2011

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs D B Gurney (Chairman)
Cllr N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	P N Aldis D Bowater Mrs S Clark A L Dodwell	Councillors:	P Hollick K Janes I A MacKilligan R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	S Beattie H Copley D Landman		
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds		
Apologies for Absence:		Mrs F Image	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs Mrs A Barker A D Brown Mrs S A Goodchild D Jones A Shadbolt M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Chairman of Development Management Committee Executive Member for Children's Services	
Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter Mrs E Grant Mrs D Hill	Corporate Policy & Scrutiny Manager Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Senior Finance Manager - Children's Services	

CS/11/71 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 November 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/11/72 Members' Interests**(a) Personal Interests:-**

Cllr N Costin
Cllr A Dodwell (Item 13)

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

CS/11/73 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman had no announcements however a Member of the Committee took the opportunity to raise the issue of receipt of verbal updates to each committee meeting from the Executive Member, a practice which had occurred in the previous municipal year. The Chairman agreed to consider the matter further.

CS/11/74 Petitions

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

CS/11/75 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/11/76 Call-In

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

CS/11/77 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/11/78 Draft Budget 2012/13, Medium Term Financial Plan 2012 to 2016 and Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Council's Draft Budget 2012/13 report, which also contained details of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012 to 2016 and Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16. In doing so, he drew the Committee's attention to the Council's formula grant, budget assumptions, reserves, pressures and efficiencies, and specifically, to

those budgets (both revenue and capital) pertaining to the Children's Services directorate. The Executive Member also wished to praise his officers for delivering a balanced budget in challenging economic circumstances.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:

- The impact the increasing prevalence of academy schools was having on the Council's funding streams (i.e. Revenue Support Grant and Direct Schools Grant). Also, the ability to continue to provide traded services to schools. The Executive Member confirmed that the Council's provision of traded services to schools was currently the subject of fundamental review and acknowledged that in many instances, such services could be provided more competitively in the private sector. He assured the Committee however that the provision of statutory (free) services would continue;
- The accountability of approved academy school partners. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services confirmed that schools that wished to become academy were free to resolve to appoint any partner, which had been approved by the Secretary of State for Education.
- The impact efficiency savings identified within Special Educational Needs would have on those children requiring such assistance. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that outcomes for children would not be affected and confirmed that addressing children and young people's mental health was a priority for the Council and its partners;
- The prioritisation and adequacy of capital budgets to address health and safety issues at individual schools. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services confirmed that health and safety assessments had been undertaken of all schools and bids for capital funds submitted to the Department for Education, which would allocate funding accordingly. Final notification of such funding was still awaited but once received, schools would be informed and work would commence in order of assessed priority. Schools had been informed of the timetable for notice. The Director also assured the Committee that a contingency fund existed for emergencies;
- The difficulty, particularly for newer Members, in understanding the complexities of local government finance and budget setting in particular. The Executive Member acknowledged the issue and agreed that a timely briefing/training session for Members (and co-optees) in future years would be sensible. Officers would ensure such a session was added to the Member training and development programme.
- The permission given to some schools to formally consult on changing their age range. The Executive Member confirmed that following such consultation and under delegated Executive authority, he would be making a decision regarding these requests in April 2012 in public session. He

also confirmed that relevant ward Members from the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area had been invited to a meeting beforehand (17 or 19 January 2012, to be confirmed), when the issue would be discussed in greater detail. The Executive Member also assured the Committee that any decision made in April would have regard to the impact on neighbouring schools.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Draft Budget 2012/13, Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-16 and the Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16 be endorsed as set out.

CS/11/79 **Fees and Charges 2012/13**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Council's Fees & Charges 2012/13 report and whilst doing so, drew the Committee's attention specifically to those fees and charges pertaining to the Children's Services directorate, detailed on Page 19.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a specific query regarding usage of the music service following the introduction of revised fees and charges in the current year. The Executive Member confirmed that although the current year would be challenging in terms of full cost recovery, the service continued to experience increasing usage and a business plan existed to ensure financial viability in 2012/13.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the proposed fees and charges relating to the Children's Services directorate for the financial year 2012/13 be endorsed for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 14 February 2012.

CS/11/80 **Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 September 2011**

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the projected financial position of the Children's Services Directorate to the end of March 2012, based on the information available as at the end of September 2011 (being the second quarter of 2011/12).

He further explained that the full year projected outturn position for 2011/12 was a relatively small £0.167M under spend against a £35.2M net budget and congratulated the Directorate on its good financial management, albeit recognising the very challenging financial environment in which the organisation still found itself.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

- The level of agency workers currently required to cover qualified social worker posts and the competitiveness of the Authority to attract permanent staff. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that workforce planning (a statutory requirement) was robust and had recently been rated highly in an independent external assessment. Workforce planning included a number of initiatives such as succession planning, strong training and development, market rate supplements and a rolling programme of recruitment. It was noted that agency staff were primarily used for supervisory posts because approximately 50% of the current workforce were newly qualified social workers in their first 2 years of work placement. This situation would however change over time as a result of the aforementioned robust workforce planning.
- The projected under spend within Early Intervention and Prevention. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services confirmed that this under spend related to a less than anticipated number of parents stepping forward to utilise short breaks services and there was a need to examine this trend in more detail to identify the cause and address any issues arising.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/11/81

Children and Young People's Plan - 6 Month Report

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which set out the progress made in delivering the priorities and targets contained within the Children and Young People's Plan 2011 to 2014 in the first 6 months of 2011/12.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of concerns regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:

- The fall in Key Stage 2 standards and the measures being taken to address this. The Executive Member acknowledged the issue and assured the Committee improvement was a priority for both him and the Director. Actions to improve performance for 2012 included a conference for middle schools to look at good practice in raising achievement, and a programme of targeted support. Next summer the Council would also support a broader conference for lower schools. Members of the Committee noted the improvement plan and requested that a progress report and presentation be submitted in the autumn of next year;
- The pockets of particularly poor school performance in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. The Executive Member confirmed that measures to improve this issue were currently underway and included: strong encouragement by the Council for the failing school to find a credible academy partner; greater Council appetite to intervene and be robust;

national government raising of the floor standard; governor training and school to school support;

RECOMMENDATION:

That the concerns expressed by the Committee and outlined above be submitted to the Children's Trust for consideration.

CS/11/82

Review of Children's Services to Disabled Children, Young People and their Families

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented his report, which provided the Committee with details of the outcome of the review of Children's Services to disabled children, young people and their families living in Central Bedfordshire, and associated recommendations about future delivery of these services. In doing so, the Executive Member also wished to record his thanks to the Members of the Committee's Task Force for their valuable input during the review and to his Deputy, Councillor Angela Barker, who led it.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries during the discussion, which were all addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance. There was general consensus that the conclusions reached within the report were valid and that the recommendations proposed regarding the adoption of a "hub and spoke" model of service delivery, together with the closure of the "Poppies" facility, were sensible. Members were also enthusiastic in their praise of the high standard of service currently provided and wished to thank the staff involved. In this respect, the Deputy Executive Member confirmed that she had written to all 3 centres involved in the review, thanking them for their commitment and input.

Of particular concern to a number of Members however was the need to ensure that there would be no diminution in the overall level of service offered as a result of the proposed implementation of the "hub and spoke" model. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services was happy to provide such an assurance albeit acknowledging the need for flexibility with regard to individual elements of service provision. She reiterated that the overriding drivers for change were the need to ensure the service was better coordinated, more effective and offered better value for money and most importantly, improved provision for children, young people and their families. The Deputy Executive Member also confirmed that she would be happy to bring forward a report to a future meeting in approximately a year's time, assessing the impact of the implementation of the proposed "hub and spoke" model on service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the delivery of services to disabled children via the "hub and spoke" model, to include closure of the "Poppies" facility by March 2013 at the latest, be endorsed for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 10 January 2012.

CS/11/83 **Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

With regard to Minute CS/11/78 above, the Committee agreed that a verbal report from the Executive Member be received at its May meeting, which would provide Members with details of the outcome of his decision regarding schools' requests to change their age range.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Children's Services OSC Work Programme be noted.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated