

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 23 April 2013

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs A Barker (Chairman)

Councillors:	R D Berry D Bowater Mrs G Clarke	Councillors:	Mrs R J Drinkwater P Hollick D Jones
Parental Co-optees:	H Copley Mr S Court D Landman		
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds		
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	N B Costin Mrs D B Gurney Mrs F Image R B Pepworth	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	P N Aldis (In place of R B Pepworth)	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	Mrs S Clark A L Dodwell Mrs S A Goodchild M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Executive Member for Children's Services
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs E Grant Mr R Parsons Mr J Partridge Miss H Redding		Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning Scrutiny Policy Adviser Head of Learning and School Support

CS/13/1 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 February 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CS/13/2 **Members' Interests**

Cllr Bowater declared an interest in item 9 as the Chairman of the Board of Governors at Gilbert Inglefield Academy.

CS/13/3 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman thanked Cllr Mrs Gurney as previous Chairman and the previous Membership of the Committee for their work during 2012-13. The Chairman also welcomed the Parent Governor and Diocesan Representatives to the meeting and explained voting rights for committee members.

CS/13/4 **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/13/5 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No questions, statements or deputations were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CS/13/6 **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/13/7 **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/13/8 **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Children's Services provided the Committee with an update on current activities pertaining to his portfolio, which were not already included on the agenda. This covered the following:-

- Congratulations to staff for an award the Council recently won for its campaign to recruit children's Social Workers.
- The Council's performance relating to enabling pupils to attend their first school choice, which was very positive.

- An increase of £22 million in capital funding that the Council had received from the Department for Education.
- A recent conference he had attended regarding extending free provision for pre-school education to two year olds.
- A public meeting regarding changes in the schools system in Dunstable that was taking place at the fire station in Dunstable on Monday 29 April to which all Members were invited.

Members of the Committee asked several questions to which the Executive Member responded as follows:-

- A 'live' picture of school age ranges was presently available on the Council's website.
- There was no formal requirement regarding the use of the term 'Looked After Children' or 'Children Looked After'.
- Two upper schools in Central Bedfordshire were in the process of converting to academy status, if they convert all of the upper schools in Central Bedfordshire would be academies.
- The increased number of pupils attending schools in Leighton Buzzard resulted from school's changes of age range. Some additional funding would be available to these schools as a result of the increase in pupil numbers.

CS/13/9

Commissioning New School Places for Implementation from September 2015

The Executive Member introduced this report, which outlined seven projects within the New School Places Programme 2013/14 – 2017/18 where local pressures of demographic growth required new school places to be provided from September 2015. The projects represented £21.8m of expenditure and the Executive Member drew attention to the £1m that the Council may be required to provide from its own resources in 2015/16. He also drew attention to an amendment to the report regarding the BEMAT Key Stage 4 results contained in Appendix B to the Executive report of 14 May.

The Executive Member drew particular attention to recommendation six of the Executive report, which referred to proposals for a detailed capital business case and proposals of Bedfordshire East Multi Academy Trust.

Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report in detail and raised the following issues:-

- The purpose of schools preparing a detailed business case for new school places. The Executive Member commented that if a school was keen to expand they should be encouraged to work up a business case themselves with the Council acting as a critical friend.
- The tipping point between expanding a school and providing a new one. The Executive Member confirmed that all schools were governed by nine policy principles set by the Council, Expanding schools had to demonstrate they could still deliver these principles. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented on the importance of the business case in order to determine whether the school could still deliver the Council's principles.

- Whether the lack of S106 funding would have an impact on proposals for new school places. The Executive Member confirmed that the Council would receive a significant contribution through S106 but there were other schemes through which funding could also be obtained.
- The difficulty of communicating to schools and Parish Councils the implications of growth and new housing. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services suggested that a workshop could possibly be arranged for Parish Councils to provide information on school places as part of their already established meetings. The Head of School Organisation, Admissions and Capital Planning also advised the Committee that work was undertaken with housing colleagues and others to provide an accurate picture of growth that informed the annual School Organisation Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee endorses the proposals outlined within the report for consideration by the Executive.

CS/13/10

Elective Home Education

The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with a summary of practice relating to Elective Home Education (EHE) in Central Bedfordshire. In addition to defining EHE the presentation provided further detail on the numbers of pupils in Central Bedfordshire known to be home educated; the role of the local authority; and practice in Central Bedfordshire.

Members of the Committee raised several questions following the presentation relating to the following:-

- Whether we should encourage every child to attend school. The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion informed the Committee that many parents opt for home education as they felt school was not appropriate for their child. In some cases this was the result of a breakdown in communication with a school. The Council attempted to solve issues where possible but parents had a right to choose to educate their child at home.
- Guidelines and support that were available for families. The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion confirmed that support was available for parents through the Council's Access and Improvement Service as well as other national organisations. There were further local activities available for children who were educated at home to develop a gift or talent.
- Advice on what constituted a "suitable education". The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion stated that a suitable education was one that allowed a person to lead the life that they wanted, both at school age and beyond school age.
- Whether the Council provided home tuition. The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion confirmed that the Council did provide home tuition to pupils that were unable to attend school for medical reasons. The Council had also participated in flexi-schooling where a

pupil was on the roll of a school but also received support from elsewhere.

- Concerns regarding the protection of children that were home educated. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services stated that any concerns regarding child protection must be reported directly to the Council's published child protection numbers so that an appropriate assessment could be undertaken.
- Whether an assessment was made of a parent's ability to provide home education. The Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion stated that parents were only required to provide evidence of delivering a suitable education.
- The numbers of pupils of Gypsy or Traveller ethnicity that were home educated. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented on the importance of all groups of pupils who were home educated receiving a good education. It was proposed that this matter be referred to the Children's Trust to consider whether there was appropriate education provision for minority communities in Central Bedfordshire.

RECOMMENDED

That the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services be asked to discuss with the Children's Trust whether there was appropriate education provision for minority communities in Central Bedfordshire.

CS/13/11

Review of the Children and Young People's Plan

The Executive Member introduced a report, which set out the position reached on the development of the revised Central Bedfordshire Children and Young People's Plan (2013/15). The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that the Plan was not mandatory but the Council and Children's Trust had agreed that it was important for other organisations who also relied on it. The development of the Plan was an iterative process and an amended version of the Plan was circulated at the meeting with attention drawn to the following:-

- Changes in terminology such as removing reference to "key actions";
- Balancing the focus on education and child protection;
- Stressing the importance of addressing domestic abuse;
- Ensuring a focus on sufficient foster carers in Central Bedfordshire for looked after children rather than relying on external placements.

In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented that there may be further changes to the draft Plan prior to its presentation to Executive. A further copy would be circulated to Members of the OSC prior to Executive so that they could comment further. Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report in detail and raised the following issues and comments:-

- The vision contained in the draft plan should refer "we want every child to do well in education (...)", it should not refer just to those in school.
- The Council should be congratulated for reducing the number of teenage conceptions.

- The need to understand why there were different outcomes at the Bedford Hospital Trust and Luton & Dunstable Hospital in relation to the percentage of mothers initiating breastfeeding. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services suggested that the Health and Wellbeing Board be asked to consider this issue, which was supported by the Committee.
- The Plan should refer to specific dates for the period that it relates to.

The Committee discussed in detail concerns relating to incidents of domestic violence and the local approach for addressing these issues. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented there were issues in relation to the efficiency and outcomes with which domestic violence was presently dealt with. It was proposed that the Committee add an item to their work programme in 12 months to consider the most effective approach for addressing these issues. In addition the Executive Member informed the Committee that work was presently underway in relation to performance on domestic abuse and domestic violence but it would take time to respond to these issues. The Committee agreed to add this item to their work programme for a future meeting.

RECOMMENDED

That the Committee note the progress made on the review of the Children and Young People's Plan and request that the comments contained in Minutes be considered as part of the review of the Plan.

CS/13/12 **Quarter 3 Performance Report**

The Executive Member presented the Quarter 3 Performance report, which highlighted performance within the Children's Services directorate for the third quarter of 2012/13. The Executive Member drew attention to the mixed performance related to achieving five or more A* - C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths, which had been affected by a failed judicial review of the results.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/13/13 **Revenue Budget Management Report Quarter 3 ended 30 December 2012**

The Executive Member presented this report, which set out the revenue position of the Children's Services Directorate to the end of December 2012 (the third quarter of 2012/13). He further explained that the underspend against the full year projected revenue outturn position for 2012/13 had reduced.

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised that the Sustainable Communities directorate was undertaking work in relation to identifying the ways to deliver the next tranche of savings regarding SEN transport. Progress had been made in relation to

delivering savings but additional pressures had arisen as a result of complex needs, transport for gypsies and travellers, and school places becoming filled.

Members of the Committee were content with the budgetary position outlined and noted the report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/13/14 **Capital Budget Management Report Quarter 3 ended 30 December 2012**

The Executive Member presented this report, which set out the capital position of the Children's Services Directorate to the end of December 2012 (the third quarter of 2012/13).

Members of the Committee were content with the budgetary position outlined and noted the report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CS/13/15 **Ofsted Action Plan and Review of Services for Looked after Children**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an Ofsted Action Plan "close down" and the outcomes of a review of services for Looked After Children (LAC). The presentation covered several areas including:-

- Quality of practice and care planning for LAC;
- Quality Assurance and performance management;
- Educational support to LAC;
- Health arrangements for LAC/Leaving Care;
- Recommendations to Members – Next Steps.

In addition to the presentation the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services offered to provide Members with a quick briefing on the Ofsted inspection process.

Following the presentation Members of the Committee raised several questions, which related to the following:-

- The take up rate in Central Bedfordshire for MMR injections. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to look into this and respond to the parent governor outside of the meeting.
- The speed of the progressing cases through court. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that delays were caused both by the courts and the Council. It was important that the Council acted efficiently before seeking to address concerns regarding the speed of the court process. She was looking at this urgently.

- Further clarification regards performance relating to adoption. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services confirmed that performance related to the number of cases which would have been met within timescale and lead to adoption (6.5%).
- Performance in relation to the number of people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), which the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented was poor in relation to comparators. Action to address this was currently under consideration.

During the presentation the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services referred to three items that the Committee may like to consider at some point in the future. These were:-

1. Poor performance on LAC adoption;
2. The percentage of care leavers at age 19 who were engaged in education, training or employment;
3. Health arrangements for LAC/Leaving Care.

In addition to these three items it was proposed that fixed period exclusions also be considered at some point in the future. During discussion of these items the Executive Member commented on the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the importance of not duplicating effort. Members agreed that these issues were important and requested that the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member consider where it was more appropriate to handle these items and whether to invite Members to attend a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel or for a report to be presented to the OSC so as to minimise duplication. Should it be appropriate for the items to be considered by the OSC they should be added to a relevant future agenda.

RECOMMENDATION

That the presentation be noted and that the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services bring forward presentations on those items outlined above in the most appropriate way to minimise duplication.

CS/13/16

Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and were content with the agenda items proposed for consideration at forthcoming meetings subject to the following amendments:-

- The Meeting date for 02 June be amended to read 04 June 2013 and the Meeting date for 11 December be amended to read 13 December 2013.
- The addition of the Equality and Diversity Strategy on the work programme for 04 June 2013.
- Issues relating to children with special needs also be considered at the meeting on 23 July 2013 under the report titled "Looked After Children – Supporting transition to adulthood".

- The addition of the close down of the actions from the Disability Review to the meeting on 15 October 2013.

The Committee also requested that the Minutes reflect their thanks to Bernard Carter, Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager, for his support of the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Children's Services OSC work programme be noted subject to the amendments outlined above.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.16 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated