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## **Appendix**

# **Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report (2012/13)**



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## Foreword

### **Foreword by Councillor David McVicar, Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel**

I am very pleased to introduce this Annual Report to full Council that reflects the issues discussed and the accomplishments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) during 2012/13. In June 2012 the Council approved its Medium Term Plan and the priorities on which it will focus for 2012 to 2016. This report reflects on the value the overview and scrutiny process has added during the year and specifically the input it has provided to the Council's priorities.

Throughout 2012/13 the OSCs have engaged in several major pieces of work and in particular some items with a significant amount of public interest. The significant amount of engagement and input from residents in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan is an example of the way that OSCs can encourage engagement and provide a forum for Members to discuss issues in public. This engagement in OSCs provides us with an opportunity to ensure that our recommendations are informed by the views of our residents and the evidence we receive. The OSCs will continue to encourage public engagement in their meetings during 2013/14 to provide an opportunity for the public to be involved.

The OSCs have also concluded their work as one of fifteen 'scrutiny development areas', leading nationally on the most effective means of undertaking scrutiny in relation to health and social care matters. The Council's input to a national best practice document and the outcomes of this review will support all of the OSCs during this year in building relationships, undertaking proactive scrutiny and being more outcome focused. This was a unique opportunity to work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Department of Health and we must ensure that the outcomes of this programme are imbedded in our own OSC structure.

During 2013 the final report of the enquiry into Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust (the Francis Report) has been published. The enquiry made several recommendations relating to local authority health scrutiny and emphasised the role that health scrutiny can play in holding NHS Trusts to account and undertaking robust challenge of health service providers. During 2013/14 it will be important for our OSCs to be mindful of these recommendations and develop our approaches so that we can provide a robust challenge.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who attended or contributed to overview and scrutiny over the year. Input from Members, the public, officers and representatives of organisations have all been invaluable in assisting our approach to challenging proposals and reaching our conclusions.

*Cllr David McVicar*

Councillor David McVicar  
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel

## 1. What is Overview & Scrutiny?

### A Quick Explanation

The Scrutiny process is like the Council having its own 'watchdog'. It 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.

### A More Detailed Look

OSCs have 2 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 priorities 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 about why 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 and 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.

- Scrutiny of the Council's Performance and budget: 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.
- 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, 2 members of the Committee or 3 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.

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.

## **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 are aware that its purpose is to complement and add value to the work of the Council.

## **How Overview & Scrutiny Adds Value**

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

When working well, O&S can add value to the work of the Council by importantly:-

- 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.

## 2. What Overview and Scrutiny Committees does Central Bedfordshire have?



Throughout 2012/13 the O&S Structure consisted of 4 OSCs. Each of the Committees had scheduled between 8 and 10 meetings. There is also an Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel consisting of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the OSCs, which meets on an adhoc basis.

In addition to the main Committees the following task forces were established during 2012/13 and are presently still underway. Further details on their outcomes will be published once they have been completed:-

| Task Force Reviews                          | Parent Committee                |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Changes in Housing                          | Social Care, Health and Housing |
| Review of Hospital Discharge                | Social Care, Health and Housing |
| Joint Health OSC: Healthier Together Review | Social Care, Health and Housing |

Full Membership details of the OSCs for 2012/13 are included at **section 12** of this report. In addition to the elected Members appointed to the OSCs, there have also been 3 parent governors and 2 diocesan representatives of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches appointed to the Children's Services OSC. A representative of Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch also attends meetings of the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC as an observer.

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 Medium Term Plan priorities. The report will look at each of the priorities in turn and provide an overview of some of the outcomes achieved by the OSCs.

### **3. Enhancing your local community – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow**

The Council wishes to see an increase in the satisfaction of residents who find Central Bedfordshire a nice place to live year on year and we will continue our programme of enhancements to the area. This priority involves developing our Economic Development Plan to ensure current employment rates remains 5% higher than the national average. Through our planning policies the Council will ensure the availability of high quality, appropriate housing for our residents. The Council will continue working with Bedfordshire Police to deliver our Community Safety Partnership priorities.

#### **Draft Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire**

At its meetings in May and June 2012 the Sustainable Communities OSC considered the draft Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire. The Committee also considered a requested item from a Member in connection with this item. This Strategy sets out the level of need for development such as housing, employment land and retail and provides a strategy for accommodating this new development, including the allocations of large scale new sites. In addition to questions from seven public speakers the Committee challenged the draft Strategy and raised specific concerns that included:-

- The numbers of homes and jobs that were proposed in the draft Development Strategy and concerns that the provision of 1,700 additional homes through windfall applications and identification in neighbourhood plans was unachievable. It was proposed that the Council develop a contingency plan in case there was a shortfall in the number of homes that came forward for development.
- The importance of making the evidence base for the Strategy available prior to a full public consultation and making it clear the extent to which the evidence had informed the final draft proposals.
- The strategic nature of several transport routes included in the draft Strategy and the importance of promoting the delivery of infrastructure before new housing and ensuring that developments did not have a negative impact on current residential areas.
- The need to ensure that the Development Strategy, and subsequently the Council's Design Guide, identify appropriate housing densities throughout Central Bedfordshire whilst also being mindful of the level of land-take.

Detailed comments from Members and the public were provided to the Executive Member to be taken into consideration prior to a 6-week public consultation. A written response was also provided to members of the public on some specific concerns that could not be answered at the meeting.

The consultation on the draft Development Strategy commenced in June 2012 and the responses will be submitted to the Secretary of State in June 2013 with the intention of adoption by the Council in February 2014.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan**

At its meetings in January and February 2013 the Sustainable Communities OSC considered the draft Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire that set out proposals for pitches to be allocated up to 2031.

In January 2013 the Sustainable Communities OSC discussed a report regarding the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). In addition to the views of Members the meeting provided the opportunity for over 100 residents to attend and 12 residents to present their views regarding a 'long-list' of potential sites. A detailed Q&A was undertaken and detailed views provided to the Executive Member. As a result of the Committee's discussion a partial refresh of the GTAA was commissioned to consider some of the concerns that had been raised regarding the evidence base for the number of pitches that were considered to be required. The Committee also endorsed an additional, non-statutory, consultation to enable residents to send their views to be considered by the next meeting of the committee.

In February 2013 the Sustainable Communities OSC considered a further report and presentations that detailed the outcomes of the refresh of the GTAA as well as the outcomes of the site score assessment of the long-list of potential sites. The meeting received a summary of over 3,000 representations from residents as well as verbal statements from 33 of the 200 plus residents that attended. This significant level of engagement in the OSC meetings helped Members consider the suitability of the sites that were proposed for development and resulted in the OSC choosing not to recommend several sites to the Executive for further consideration. The draft Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan, including those sites proposed by the OSC, was approved by Council for public consultation and will subsequently be considered by an independent inspector.

## **Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Management Plan**

At its meeting on 26 July 2012 the Sustainable Communities OSC received a report that updated Members on the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Management Plan. The report also proposed how the Council could continue to demonstrate its commitment to tackling climate change and become more energy efficient.

In response to the issues raised by Members the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development commented that the Council would insist on white energy efficient lighting in new homes. It was also commented that the Council would not delay the completion of new homes if Anglian Water stated that they could provide water to those homes, the Council would encourage Anglian Water to provide surface water storage solutions in the region to alleviate concerns of water stress.

As a result of their consideration the Committee raised several recommendations that:-

- Informed the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Management Plan during 2012/13.
- Required officers to develop further evidence prior to considering whether the Council should sign up to the LGA's Climate Local Initiative.
- Asked the Executive Member to consider whether an appropriate level of capital funding had been made available to support the delivery of the three key aims of the Climate Change Strategy, in particular the reduction of the Council's own carbon footprint by 35% before 2015 and 60% before 2020, which the Committee considered to be unrealistic.



- Requested further reports detailing the programmes that the Sustainable Communities directorate aims to progress in order to deliver a 35% reduction by 2015 and 60% reduction by 2020 in the Council's carbon footprint.
- Sought detailed discussions to be undertaken between the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development and the Executive Member for Children's Services as to whether an appropriate budget had been allocated for adaptations in schools in order to reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

The Committee received a further report at their meeting in December 2012 at which they raised further questions regarding the Council's schemes and provided feedback on potential initiatives.

### Other items...

The Sustainable Communities OSC received several other items that related to this priority, which included:-

- Community Safety Plan and Priorities (2013/14)
- Development Brief for Land at Biggleswade Rd, Potton,
- The Statement of Community Involvement
- Masterplan for Land at Steppingley Rd and Froghall Rd, Flitwick

## 4. Improved educational attainment

The Council wishes to see all Central Bedfordshire schools drive improvement. To achieve this goal, the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014, was adopted with all schools, governors and young people embracing the challenging targets that the Council and its partners aim to achieve.

### Consultation on proposed changes to council admissions arrangements

At its meeting on 11 December 2012, the Children's Services OSC received a report that outlined details of the commencement of consultation on proposed Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in schools which, if adopted, would form the basis for the development of commissioning options for New School Places in Central Bedfordshire. Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised several issues including the following:

- Concern over the description of principle 9 regarding Special Educational Needs provision, which seemed to suggest provision in mainstream schools only.
- Whilst Members were generally supportive of the principles outlined within the report, there was some concern over the difficulty in executing them in practice in a consistent and compatible manner.

The Committee was content to endorse for consultation the nine policy principles outlined within the report subject to the amendment of principle 9 to ensure place planning at Special Schools was also captured. In the meeting the Assistant Director confirmed that to imply that special schools were excluded was not the intention and would therefore revise the description to ensure place planning at Special Schools was also captured explicitly.

The Council's Executive approved changes to the admissions criteria in response to the feedback from the consultation on the proposals. This work ironed out inconsistencies in the then current arrangements and recognised the complexity of the local admissions system in which every academy was its own admissions authority.

The new arrangements preserve admissions pathways between schools in pyramids or clusters but from now on remove 'medical needs' as an admissions criterion (because schools cope well and no longer use this in practice). They also iron out differences between admissions arrangements for schools with early years provisions on site so the criteria now apply consistently across schools.

### Youth Service Provision

At its meeting on 16 October 2012, the Children's Services OSC received a report which provided the Committee with an update of commissioned Youth Support Services and outlined proposals for meeting the new national requirements captured within 'Positive for Youth'. The report was supplemented by a presentation from the Head of Children's Services Commissioning and representatives of the Youth Parliament, which provided the Committee with an insight into the work of Youth Support Services and the Youth Parliament in the context of emerging national policy. At the end of the presentation members of the Youth Parliament were allowed the opportunity to ask questions of the Committee and

Executive Member present, which centred on raising awareness of the Youth Parliament and encouraging volunteering.

Members of the Committee raised particular concerns on a lack of sufficient detail regarding the activities, locations, participation rates, targeted services and outcomes relating to commissioned youth services to enable the Committee to adequately scrutinise proposed changes. The Committee was concerned to ensure the service was reaching the most vulnerable and sought clarity regarding how the service had already changed and how it would change further under new proposals;

In light of these concerns the Committee requested that a more detailed briefing be provided to Members as soon as possible, which took place on 7 November 2012. At the briefing the Executive Member was also requested to arrange a presentation on the work of the Youth Commissioning Service at a full Council meeting, to give all Members the opportunity to learn about the outcome based approach.

### Other items...

The Children's Services OSC received several other items that related to this priority, including:-

- Commissioning new school places
- Regular performance updates on the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Consultation on policy principles for pupil place planning in schools

## **5. Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable**

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire where services improve the health and wellbeing of our local communities, where accommodation and care strategies for older people provide a wider range of support services and where we continue a commitment to protect the young and old in our safeguarding activities. The Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee has supported the improvement of health and wellbeing by focusing on the needs of the population to ensure that appropriate services are delivered. The Children's Services OSC has provided a clear focus on children's safeguarding activities, reviewing adoptions services and Ofsted action plans to ensure that the services the Council delivers are effective.

### **Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Central Bedfordshire**

At its meeting on 22 October, 2012 the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC considered the outcomes of public consultation and the nine priorities contained in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWBS) that emphasised the importance of improved outcomes for those who are vulnerable, early intervention and prevention and improving mental health.

In response to the issues highlighted in the report the Committee discussed several issues in detail that were submitted as a response to the consultation. This response highlighted several concerns that included:-

- The need for an effective mechanism for reporting on progress and delivery in light of many of the indicators being delivered in partnership and the difficulty this created for determining outcomes.
- The need to emphasise the role of parents in taking responsibility for and supporting the three cross-cutting priorities.
- The need to share data between GPs and schools in relation to the height and weight of pupils so as to support the reduction of childhood obesity.
- The need to stress the importance of identifying future need so that appropriate services could be provided in the future.
- The need to take into account the importance of managing the transition between childhood and adulthood. The strategy also needed to provide a definition of the ages related to both adulthood and childhood.

As a result of this report the OSC agreed that an item be received at a future meeting of the Committee providing feedback on village care schemes and the comments of the Committee were submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board as part of the formal consultation. The Committee also used this item to frame further discussions regarding the suitability of proposals and the extent to which they would support improved health and wellbeing.

### **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**

At its meeting on 18 June 2012 the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC received a report that presented the executive summary of the re-freshed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Central Bedfordshire. The OSC considered the executive summary of the JSNA, and particularly how it might influence the future work programme of the OSC. The

Committee also received a presentation from the Assistant Director for Public Health that drew attention to the transition of responsibilities for public health to the Council; a focus on early intervention and prevention.

Following detailed discussion by those in attendance the OSC received further reports on the implications of social isolation and loneliness on a persons mental health and the prevalence of problem drug users. The OSC also requested that officers not lose sight of the critical importance of a cross-cutting approach and improving education attainment as a means of improving health outcomes.

In addition to the specific items that the Committee added to their work programme the discussion of the JSNA enabled the Committee to ensure that all of the items considered at future meetings addressed the needs of local residents.

## **Ofsted Inspection Outcomes**

On several occasions during 2012-13 the Children's Services OSC has received the outcomes of Ofsted Inspections and post-inspection action plans. These related specifically to the following:-

- Safeguarding and Looked After Children Post-Inspection Plan
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 and Ofsted Inspection Outcomes
- Outcomes of Ofsted Fostering Service Inspection
- Progress report on the Implementation of the Post-Inspection Ofsted Action Plan.

The presentation of these reports enabled the Committee to develop an understanding of the Ofsted Framework for inspections and to consider and challenge performance and overall effectiveness. The Committee has discussed in detail the content of these reports and questioned specific feedback that has been provided and the manner in which the Council intends to address concerns.

The Committee has commented upon and endorsed several action plans that the Council has put in place to coordinate activity to ensure improvements. Progress reports have also been received on the implementation of inspection plans to monitor progress of previously completed inspections. Presentation at OSC has enabled Members to challenge performance and provide assurance that action plans are being implemented effectively.

## **Safeguarding Board Annual Reports**

To monitor progress in relation to the safeguarding of both children and adults the Children's Services and Social Care Health and Housing OSCs have received the annual reports of the Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and the Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Adult Safeguarding Board.

These annual reports set out the activity of the respective Boards, the interventions carried out to secure safety and where necessary manage circumstances in a safe and effective manner. The production of these reports is a statutory requirement and they provided the OSCs with an opportunity to recognise achievements and challenge progress against business plans over the previous 12 months. Members were also able to contribute to the learning points and business plans that had been set out for the next 12 months

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The Children's Services OSC received a presentation from the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board to which the Committee challenged:-

- Whether organisations were "taking their eye off the ball", which it was clarified was a national issue, locally Central Bedfordshire had achieved continuing operational effectiveness.
- The importance of effective partnerships during a period of considerable change, which the Board was currently actively engaged in.
- The plans that were in place to ensure the wide dissemination of the report in light of the recommendations of the national Professor Munroe review.

The Social Care, Health and Housing OSC received a presentation from the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Manager. The Committee raised queries relating to the types of abuse that were visible in Central Bedfordshire and queried problems relating to provider forums, which it was informed did not relate to Central Bedfordshire.

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### Other items...

As well as the items detailed above the OSCs have considered other reports relating to this priority, including:

- Annual reports for Adoption Service, Fostering Service and private fostering provision and regular updates on the Fostering and Adoption Service.
- Tenancy Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Renewals Policy
- Local welfare provision
- Fee levels and Standard and Quality of Dementia Care

## **6. Better infrastructure – improved roads, broadband reach and transport**

The Council aims to ensure completion of a series of infrastructure projects and set out aspirations for further significant transport improvements.

### **Consultation on the development of the approach to parking**

At its meeting on 12 June 2012 the Sustainable Communities OSC received a report that set out the research and consultation that had been undertaken on the Council's approach to parking and the changes that were planned to the document as a result. In response to the report the Committee raised several concerns that included:-

The use of verge/footway parking and not permitting parking on grass verges

- Concerns relating to the displacement of HGVs into villages if parking hours were restricted in lay-bys overnight. There were also concerns relating to the level of enforcement that the Council would be able to undertake overnight.
- Concerns that the Highways Agency was responsible for several roads throughout the Central Bedfordshire area and parking standards relating to HGVs needed to be managed in a consistent manner.
- The need to ensure that blue badge holders did not incorrectly receive a penalty charge notice (PCN).
- Whether it should be permissible to allow an illegally parked vehicle to accrue 5 or more unpaid PCNs before it was clamped and removed. The Council was legally required to permit an illegally parked vehicle to accrue 3 unpaid PCNs before it could be clamped and removed.

The Committee also discussed the minimum suggested parking standards for residential schemes. As a result of discussion Members requested that the Council's Design Guide reinforce the need for garages to be a minimum 3.3 metre width and that restrictions be put in place to prevent residents from converting the use of a garage to another function. The Committee agreed 7 recommendations to the Executive. The Executive resolved that the Parking Strategy be endorsed including the recommendations from the OSC, with the exception of the recommendation that parking on grass verges not be permitted.

## **7. Great Universal Services – bins, leisure and libraries**

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire that fully delivers our BEaR project, including the renovation and rebuilding of all Household Waste Recycling Centres by 2016 and maintaining a high rate of recycling. The Council will ensure the number of adults in Central Bedfordshire taking part in sport and physical activity remains above the national average and will maintain satisfaction of adults with the library service and increase the usage of libraries by 20%

### **Customer First**

At its meeting on 23 October 2012 the Corporate Resources OSC received a presentation from the Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) providing an update on progress regarding the Customer First programme.

The Committee endorsed proposals regarding the closure of Ampthill and Shefford customer service centres and recommended that the implementation of the recommendation regarding the Leighton Buzzard customer service centre be postponed. The Committee also proposed that a further consultation with Members and other relevant stakeholders be undertaken.

The Committee received a further report at its meeting on 18 December, which detailed the outcome of further consultation regarding the reduction in opening days of Leighton Buzzard Customer Services Centre. Members commented on the constructive nature of the further consultation, which had provided Ward Members with the necessary information upon which to endorse the proposal to close the Centre for two days a week.

### **Leisure Facilities Strategy**

At its meeting on 13 December 2013, the Sustainable Communities OSC received a report from the Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities Services that set out the methodology and key findings of an audit and assessment of leisure facilities in Central Bedfordshire and the emerging preferred options. The Strategy was to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and provide a strategic direction for leisure facilities in Central Bedfordshire. The Committee also heard from three members of the public who had registered to speak and raised issues in relation to the Houghton Regis Leisure Centre.

Members reflected that progress in relation to the strategy had been slow to date and urged the Executive to submit further financial information so that they could comment in more detail. In light of comments at the meeting the Committee also urged the Executive to reopen Houghton Regis Swimming Pool with immediate effect with due consideration to financial implications. The Committee received a subsequent report at their meeting on 17 January 2013 at which they endorsed the Leisure Facilities Capital Programme, which included work to develop a business case to re-open the swimming pool. Executive adopted the Leisure Facilities Strategy in light of the Committee's comments with further work being commissioned in relation to Houghton Regis Swimming Pool.

### **Other items...**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees have considered several other items relating to this priority and include the Capital Programme and Asset Disposal List.



## 8. Value for Money

The Council wishes to see a Central Bedfordshire where council payments remain the same for all Central Beds residents. Residents will see an improvement in the value for money delivered and we will continue to work on making efficiency savings, limiting impact on existing services by exploring different ways of providing services.

### Council Tax Support

At its meeting on 11 September 2012, The Corporate Resources OSC received details of the draft policy on localised Council Tax support. Members of the Committee raised a number of concerns including:

- The financial impact the draft scheme would have on Town and Parish Councils..
- The financial impact the introduction of the draft scheme would have on Central Bedfordshire Council and the difficult decisions the Council would have to make regarding management of the funding shortfall of circa £2.5M per annum.
- The flexibility available to the Council to amend Council Tax discounts and exemptions according to local circumstances.
- The protection of groups such as pensioners and other vulnerable people (lone parents with children under 5, carers, those with disabilities and those in receipt of war widows or war disablement pensions), who would be exempt from any contribution.
- The ability of other working age benefit claimants to make a 25% contribution to Council Tax from an already very low income base.

Whilst the Committee supported the four principles upon which the draft policy was based and acknowledged the difficult financial and moral position the Council found itself in, it nonetheless expressed considerable concern about the detrimental impact it would have on working age benefit claimants not designated as vulnerable (and therefore protected from the need to make a contribution) such as those persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment & Support Allowance (Work Component). It was Members opinion that these people, who were perhaps least able to make a contribution, would suffer considerable hardship as a result of the introduction of the draft scheme.

The Committee recommended that a clear statement of concern be forwarded to the Executive regarding the detrimental impact the draft Council Tax Support Scheme would have on those persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment & Support Allowance (Work Component). The Committee also asked that the Executive considered exempting temporarily, until such time as the recession ends, those persons referred to from having to make any contribution at all, with the subsequent funding shortfall being met from the identification of efficiencies as part of the budget setting process, increases in fees and charges generally or as a last resort, by increasing Council Tax.

Mindful of the need to support vulnerable groups, the Executive recommended approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme but agreed that a report on the impact of the scheme should be presented to the OSC during the Summer to consider its implications.

## 9. CfPS Programme - Health and Social Care Scrutiny

Health scrutiny is an integral part of holding health services to account and an effective health scrutiny approach is important to ensure that health and wellbeing are kept under review. In July 2012 the Council was appointed as one of 14 Scrutiny Development Areas (SDAs) involved in a national programme supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Department of Health. The aim of the programme was to support the production of a publication to support effective scrutiny of health and social care issues.

In discussion with Members and other health partners the Council agreed three principle aims for the Council's involvement in the SDA programme, these were:-

1. to strengthen the role of the Social Care Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee (SCHHOSC) as a "critical friend";
2. to develop a more strategic, outcome focused and evidence based approach to health scrutiny; and
3. to develop arrangements that reflects complex local circumstances and will support joint working with other neighbouring authority health scrutiny committees.

In undertaking the programme the Council arranged two events attended by a wide range of officers and partners from health and social care services including Bedford and Luton and Dunstable Hospitals, the Older People's Reference Group, SEPT (service provider) and Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG).

The first event improved understanding of the health reforms and enhanced relationships with health providers. Members discussed how the reforms affected Central Bedfordshire and particularly how the role of O&S might need to change to reflect the health landscape. Invitees contributed to three group discussions; how can scrutiny improve outcomes? what are the key issues O&S should focus on?; and how can O&S ensure positive and proactive relationships? The second enabled attendees to discuss the best approaches for health scrutiny locally and how to demonstrate improved outcomes and develop responsive services.

The principal outcome of the programme was the input that the Council was able to provide to the Centre for Public Scrutiny to feed into its publication "Spanning the System – broader horizons for council scrutiny"<sup>1</sup>. This provides best practice for Councils relating to relationship-building, proactive scrutiny, being more outcome focused and scrutiny in multi-tier areas. In particular the programme has enabled the Council to develop a toolkit for scrutinising the work of Clinical Commissioning Groups. The principles that have been developed as a result of the programme will be developed throughout 2013/14 to encourage excellent health and social care scrutiny and to achieve the following:-

- more effective communication and relationships;
- make better use of patient experience and engagement; and
- undertake more effective collaborative and joint working.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/downloads/L13\\_19\\_CfPSspanning\\_the\\_system\\_web.pdf](http://cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/downloads/L13_19_CfPSspanning_the_system_web.pdf)

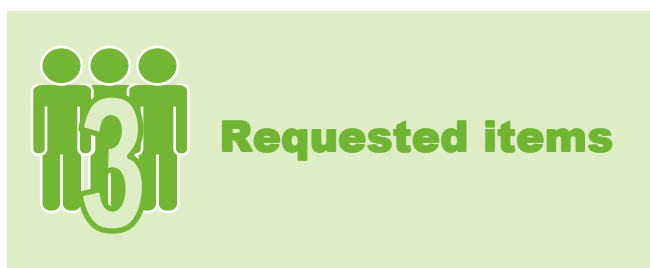
## 10. Call-ins, Petitions and further involvement

Overview and Scrutiny Committees have a statutory power to review Executive decisions that have been made but not yet implemented. 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. The Constitution also provides opportunities for elected Members or members of the public to get involved in meetings by requesting an item or submitting questions, statements or deputations.



### Questions, Statements or Deputations

There were a total of 66 questions raised at meetings of the OSCs this year (60 more than 2011/12). Nearly all of these were raised at the Sustainable Communities OSC, 45 relating to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan and 7 relating to the draft Development Strategy. Other questions were raised in relation to Biggleswade Hospital and other individual development briefs. There were also three statements submitted to the Sustainable Communities OSC relating to the Cranfield Development Brief. This is a significant increase from 2011/12 and represents a significant amount of engagement in the Council's overview and scrutiny process. There were almost 400 residents in attendance at meetings of the OSC this year.



### Requested Items

There were a total of three items requested by Members during 2012/13 (2 more than last year) as follows:-

- Closure of Biggleswade Hospital: At the meeting on 18 June 2012 the Social Care Health and Housing OSC received a request from Cllr Maudlin in relation to concerns that had been raised by residents relating to the numbers of admissions at Biggleswade Hospital. Discussion provided an opportunity to clarify that no decision had been taken in relation to the future of Biggleswade Hospital whilst making others aware of concerns regarding that lack of communication. The item was subsequently added to the work programme of

the Committee so that it could be considered in more detail. This item will be considered in 2013/14.

- Carbon Management Plan and the Climate Change Strategy: At its meetings on 26 July and 13 December 2012 the Sustainable Communities OSC received a request from Cllr Aldis to review the Council's performance in relation to the Carbon Management Plan and how it planned to demonstrate commitment to tackling climate change. The outcomes of this item are set out in detail in chapter 3.
- Draft Development Strategy and infrastructure requirements in the proposed urban extension north of Luton: At the meeting on 18 October 2012 the Sustainable Communities OSC received a request from Cllr Nicols for which a response had been prepared by the Executive Member. The issue was considered in greater detail during the meeting and a response to these issues detailed by the Executive Members and the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy. Further details on this item are set out in chapter 3.

### Call ins and Petitions

Once call-in was received in 2012/13 by the Sustainable Communities OSC relating to a decision of a Traffic Management Meeting on Poynters Road. The decision was called-in by Cllr Young in order to clarify the Executive Member's decision. Following discussion by the Committee the decision was referred back to the Executive Member to be reconsidered with alternative recommendations seeking more timely implementation of a 7.5 tonne weight limit following remedial works.

One petition was received in 2012/13 by the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC relating to the threat of closure of Biggleswade Hospital. This petition had been previously considered by a meeting of Full Council but referred to the OSC to provide an opportunity for residents to raise their views. As a result of this item the Clinical Commissioning Group and SEPT had an opportunity to explain the current situation in public and residents had an opportunity to raise their concerns directly with the service provider, specifically in relation to poor communication. Further items will be considered in 2013/14 relating to Biggleswade Hospital when the outcomes of a Joint Community Bed Review are known.

## 11. 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.

Details regarding 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/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx>

All OSC meetings are open to the public and a list of future meeting dates is available from the above website. Residents are also welcome to come and speak and provide their views at meetings. If you would like to attend a meeting and speak please contact us in advance.

### Contact Us:



Telephone: 0300 300 8301



Post: Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager  
Priory House  
Monks Walk  
Chicksands  
Shefford  
Bedfordshire  
SG17 5TQ

## 12. Further Information and 2012/13 Membership:

**Agenda papers, reports and the Minutes** of the meetings of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) 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/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

### Corporate Resources OSC

|             |                                       |               |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Councillors | <b>P Duckett (Chairman)</b>           |               |
|             | <b>Miss A Sparrow (Vice-Chairman)</b> |               |
|             | L Birt                                | R W Johnstone |
|             | Mrs R Drinkwater                      | J Murray      |
|             | Dr R Egan                             | Mrs M Mustoe  |
|             | C C Gomm                              |               |
| Substitutes | Mrs C F Chapman MBE                   | B Saunders    |
|             | D Jones                               | M Smith       |

### Children's Services OSC

|                                 |   |              |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Councillors                     | <b>Mrs D B Gurney (Chairman)</b>        |              |
|                                 | <b>N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)</b>       |              |
|                                 | Mrs A Barker                            | K Janes      |
|                                 | R Berry                                 | D Jones      |
|                                 | D Bowater                               | R B Pepworth |
|                                 | P Hollick                               |              |
| Co-opted Voting Representatives | Ms Copley (Parent Governor)             |              |
|                                 | Mr Court (Parent Governor)              |              |
|                                 | Ms Image (Roman Catholic Diocese)       |              |
|                                 | Mr Landman (Parent Governor)            |              |
|                                 | Mr Reynolds (Church of England Diocese) |              |
| Substitutes                     | Mrs R Drinkwater                        | A Shadbolt   |
|                                 | Mrs S A Goodchild                       | N J Sheppard |
|                                 | B Saunders                              |              |

## Social Care, Health and Housing OSC

|             |                                    |                |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Councillors | <b>Mrs R Drinkwater (Chairman)</b> |                |
|             | <b>N Sheppard (Vice-Chairman)</b>  |                |
|             | D Bowater                          | Mrs D B Gurney |
|             | P Duckett                          | P Hollick      |
|             | Mrs R B Gammons                    | M A Smith      |
|             | Mrs S A Goodchild                  |                |
| Substitutes | P N Aldis                          | C C Gomm       |
|             | R Berry                            | A M W Graham   |
|             | Mrs G Clarke                       | R W Johnstone  |

## Sustainable Communities OSC

|             |                                     |              |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Councillors | <b>D McVicar (Chairman)</b>         |              |
|             | <b>A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)</b> |              |
|             | Mrs C F Chapman MBE                 | Ms C Maudlin |
|             | Mrs R B Gammons                     | B Saunders   |
|             | Ms A M W Graham                     | P Williams   |
|             | K Matthews                          |              |
| Substitutes | D Bowater                           | T Nicols     |
|             | Dr R Egan                           | A Shadbolt   |
|             | R W Johnstone                       | I Shingler   |

## Contact us...

Për Informacion

Per Informazione

Za Informacije

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برای اطلاع

المعلومات

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Za Informacija

by telephone: 0300 300 8301

on the web: [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17  
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