

## 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, 4 June 2013

### PRESENT

Cllr Mrs A Barker (Chairman)  
Cllr N B Costin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	R D Berry D Bowater Mrs G Clarke Mrs D B Gurney	Councillors:	P Hollick D Jones R B Pepworth
Parental Co-optees:	Mr S Court D Landman		
Church of England Co-optee:	J Reynolds		
Roman Catholic Co-optee:	F Image		
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	H Copley Mrs R J Drinkwater	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	B Saunders (In place of Mrs R J Drinkwater)	
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:	Ms D Clarke Mrs E Grant Ms C Harding Mr J Partridge Mrs S Tyler	Director of Improvement and Corporate Services Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services Corporate Policy Advisor (Equality & Diversity) Scrutiny Policy Adviser Acting Assistant Director, Operational Services, Children's Services	

CS/13/17

### Members' Interests

The following Councillors declared interests in the business to be transacted:-

- Cllr Costin as Chairman of Barnfield College;
- Cllr Barker as her daughter was a teacher; and
- Cllr Bowater as a governor of SEPT.

CS/13/18 **Minutes**

**RESOLVED**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 April 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

CS/13/19 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman congratulated the Council's Children's Centres on the recent award of UNICEF Baby Friendly status. The Chairman also announced that the item on the Equality and Diversity Strategy would be considered as the first item of business.

The Chairman also drew the Committee's attention to a referral from the Audit Committee regarding a strategic risk they had been asked to consider. The risk related to "a failure to work to access sufficient resources to respond quickly enough to rapid changes or a failure to implement new child protection procedures, and update guidance and share good practice".

In response the Executive Member commented he was reassured that the Council was delivering its statutory obligations. He was presently lobbying Central Government to the effect that budgets for children's social care needed to more accurately reflect the demands on services. He stated the Committee could be assured there were directorate plans in place to mitigate risks that were monitored regularly. In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented on the high reputational risk of child protection issues. The residual risk rating had increased as a result of several senior vacancies within Children's Services and the significant number of temporary social workers employed by the Council as a result of increasing caseloads. Whilst there was an overspend in children's social care the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented this needed to be accepted and eventually budgets needed to rise permanently to cope with increasing demands.

In response to the assurance provided by the Executive Member and the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services the Committee discussed the following:-

- The Committee had previously been advised by the Director over the last few years that the caseloads in children's social care would increase and Members should be aware of and accept this.
- The importance of ensuring that appropriate funding was allocated to children's social care services in comparison to other services.
- The ways in which the Council lobbied Government for additional resources. The Executive Member commented that whilst the Council itself

lobbied Government there were others, such as the Local Government Association, who also lobbied the Government on our behalf.

The Committee discussed whether a more detailed report or regular updates were required to be received at future meetings. In light of the discussion the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented that the public's tolerance of child protection was very low and media coverage did not always reflect the reality of the local situation. In addition to the Council being accountable for some aspects of child protection the Government had also strengthened the positions of the Local Safeguarding Board, the Chief Executive, the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services. Figures could be provided periodically on the numbers of children receiving support if the Committee wished to receive further detail.

The Committee noted that this risk was being scrutinised in several different ways including via the Local Safeguarding Board. In light of the assurance they had received at the meeting a further detailed report was not deemed necessary. However, the Committee did feel it was appropriate for a statement on the numbers of children being supported and comments on risk to be presented on a quarterly basis alongside the quarterly performance report.

## **RECOMMENDED**

**That the Audit Committee be made aware of the discussion of the Committee and that a statement regards the number of children being supported and comments on risk be presented to the Children's Services OSC on a quarterly basis.**

CS/13/20

## **Equality and Diversity Strategy**

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services delivered a corporate priorities diversity quiz and drew the attention of the Committee to the following four corporate, overarching objectives and activities essential to ensuring that consideration of equality and diversity was embedded across all council activities:-

1. Strong leadership (championing diversity in our area, identifying objectives and monitoring outcomes).
2. Improved outcomes for vulnerable groups.
3. Good recruitment and management of a high performing workforce.
4. Improved engagement, civic participation and cohesion.

In response to the quiz and the further clarification provided by the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services Members of the Committee discussed the following:-

- The need for the objectives to reflect the importance of fair opportunities and treatment for all.
- That whilst the Council should aim to have a modern and diverse workforce we should ensure that the best possible candidates were employed.
- That the foreword should reflect the need to promote equality of opportunity for some residents in a vulnerable group rather than referring to all of those in a vulnerable group.

In addition a Member sought clarification on the consultation toolkit and current structures for consulting with user groups. The Corporate Policy Adviser (equality and diversity) clarified that the consultation toolkit was written by the Consultation Manager and that it provided guidance on methods and techniques for undertaking consultation to ensure that a mix of people were able to provide their views. The Council arranged meetings with hard to reach groups to understand their concerns during periods of consultation. The findings of these discussions were reported to the Executive in an Equality Impact Assessment that also highlighted risks of discrimination and necessary mitigating actions.

## **RECOMMENDED**

**That the comments of the Committee be considered by the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services and Members send any further comments on the content of the draft Strategy to officers.**

### **CS/13/21 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/13/22 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/13/23 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/13/24 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/13/25 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:-

- A letter from Michael Gove MP that proposed extending the school day.
- A forthcoming visit to Milton Keynes Council's Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) to consider the manner in which it operated. He also thanked the Members of Central Bedfordshire Council's CPP for their work.
- The recent foster carer awards for which there were several awards handed out.

- Recent meetings he had attended relating to changes in the schools system in Dunstable, which provided the Council with a clear direction of the views of some chairs of governors and head teachers.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the Executive Member responded that recent meetings relating to changes in the schools system in Dunstable were a response to concerns of ineffective communication between some schools. The meetings provided a sample of the views of those schools who attended the meeting. There was no change of direction with regards to school changes in Dunstable, the Council would continue to adhere to a policy of allowing schools to make a case for change.

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented that an information sheet had been given to head teachers regarding the role of the local authority as some head teachers had expressed concern that the new Ofsted Inspections meant that a group of schools would be inspected all at the same time in a Council. Also that if they were rung and asked as an outstanding school about improvement support they would not know what to say. The Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented that if Members wished to receive further detail regarding why we had circulated this sheet this could be provided by the Assistant Director for Children's Services who was doing a presentation on curriculum at the next meeting.

**NOTED the update and that any further detail regarding the information sheet given to head teachers on the role of the local authority could be raised with the Assistant Director at the next meeting.**

CS/13/26

### **Early Help Offer**

The Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention presented a report that outlined the revised and updated Early Help Offer to families in Central Bedfordshire in light of the publication of the Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance (2013). The views of Members were sought prior to the publication being updated on the Council's website.

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

- The publication required a glossary in light of the number of acronyms.
- The numbers of families supported in the Troubled Families Programme. The Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention commented that troubled families were a specifically identified cohort but there were others not included in this cohort who were supported through specific interventions.
- The importance of supporting families prior to the birth of a child. A Member also suggested that a charter was necessary to set out parental responsibilities. The Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention commented that whilst the Council did not produce a charter there were several schemes, such as the Mellow Bumps programme, that provided support to mothers during pregnancy and after the birth of their baby.
- How children's centres were integrated as part of the Offer and the way in which performance was monitored. The Head of Early Intervention/

Prevention commented that children's centres formed part of the Offer for children aged 0-5 years and other services were also delivered at or through children's centres. Children's centres had performance targets that measured work with the most disadvantaged people in the area. Whilst outcomes were monitored regularly there were longer-term outcomes, such as qualifications and employment, that would take time to become visible.

- Concerns that parents would view the Offer as intrusive and not provide their support. The Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention commented that parental consent was fundamental to the Offer and officers discussed this with parents at the outset, there were very few refusals to offers of support. Further information would be provided to parents on the website to explain the purpose of the Offer.
- People's needs changed over time and information held by the Council would need to be updated periodically to reflect personal circumstances. The Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention commented that information would be updated in consultation with parents as necessary rather than relying on previous information.
- The publication was too 'professionally' focussed. The Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented on the difficulty of striking an appropriate balance in the language used in the publication. The Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services agreed to review the document to ensure that the language was as helpful as it could be.

## **RECOMMENDED**

**That the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services consider the comments of the Committee as detailed in the Minutes prior to Executive considering the publication.**

CS/13/27

### **Update on Children's Health Provision**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention that provided an update on children's health provision. The presentation set out current and future issues in relation to a range of Council services and how the Council aimed to address several of those issues. In addition to the presentation the Executive Member commented that delays in the reorganisation of the NHS meant that performance was not where it needed to be in some areas.

In response to questions from Members the Head of Early Intervention/ Prevention provided several responses as follows:-

- Data relating to performance on immunisations and vaccinations was already presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis.
- Several of the gaps identified in services had previously been the remit of school nurses. There were also several schemes that had been implemented that were not necessarily targeted at the appropriate people. The Council was seeking to address both of these issues.

### **Noted the presentation**

CS/13/28

### **Policy Change for Children's Social Care**

The Committee received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services that outlined the national picture in relation to children's social care and addressed issues that may impact on Central Bedfordshire. In addition to the presentation the Executive Member commented on the challenge of engaging with the police regards establishing a Multi Agency Strategic Hub (MASH) style approach.

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services commented that poor performance in relation to the speed to get cases through the courts was caused by both the courts and the Council. Also it would be helpful to revisit the discussion regards the MASH in a meeting with the Police and how this might work in Central Bedfordshire.

### **Noted the presentation**

CS/13/29

### **Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan. The Committee were informed that the Chairman had agreed to remove the item on statutory proposals to extend the age range at five schools as it was not required to be considered by the Committee. The Chairman also proposed that the items presently listed for 13 December 2013 be sent to Members by email and any questions submitted directly to officers. The meeting date was to be held in the diary in case it was required.

A Co-opted Member suggested that items be added to the work programme relating parenting and to swimming in schools; the role of education welfare officers and school policy on anti-racism. In response the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services agreed to circulate a briefing note regards the legal position on swimming in schools so that Members could consider if an item was required in the light of the Council's responsibilities. A briefing note would be circulated on schools responsibilities for equalities and one on the current role of education welfare officers.

During discussion it was noted that the Council's budget was not presently listed on the work programme and the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel had agreed that it should be considered by the Corporate Resources OSC only. The Committee agreed that the Co-ordination Panel should be invited to reconsider this proposal and asked that they have the opportunity to review the Children's Services budget proposals.

### **RECOMMENDED**

**That the Children's Services OSC work programme be noted subject to the removal of the item on the statutory proposals to extend the age range at five schools and that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel be asked to reconsider whether the relevant budget proposals should be presented to each Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.40 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....