

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 July 2013

PRESENT

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

Councillors:	D Bowater Mrs G Clarke Mrs R J Drinkwater	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:			
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	R D Berry H Copley Mrs D B Gurney	
Substitutes:	Cllrs	K Janes (In place of Mrs D B Gurney) B Saunders (In place of R D Berry)	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis 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:	Mr P Dudley Mr J Partridge	Assistant Director Children's Services (Learning & Strategic Commissioning) Scrutiny Policy Adviser	

CS/13/30

Minutes

The Committee noted that Cllr Aldis had been omitted from the attendance list of the previous meeting. A Member also queried whether the remit of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) included encouraging parents not to take sick children to school. The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning

and Partnership commented that schools had their own policies and he had not previously been aware of this problem. The Assistant Director agreed to raise the issue with the Attendance Team and update Members.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 04 June 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of Cllr Aldis in the attendance list.

CS/13/31 Members' Interests

Councillor Costin declared an interest as Chairman of Barnfield College. Councillors Hollick and Bowater also declared interests as school governors and it was noted that other Members of the Committee had similar interests as declared in the register of interests.

CS/13/32 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman advised the Committee that an invitation had been sent to Members and Co-opted Members to attend the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC (SCHHOSC) meeting on 29 July 2013. SCHHOSC was scheduled to receive an update on interim changes to paediatric services at Bedford Hospital. The Executive Member commented that communication with Executive Members had been effective to date and asked that his thanks be recorded to all staff involved in distributing updates. The Health and Wellbeing Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel had also received updates and were reassured that the interim changes were being made for the right reasons.

CS/13/33 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/13/34 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/13/35 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/13/36 Requested Items

The Committee were informed that Cllr Aldis had requested an update in respect of the Troubled Families Initiative, which would be considered at the next meeting on 03 September 2013.

NOTED that an update on the Troubled Families Initiative would be received on 03 September 2013.

CS/13/37

Executive Member Update

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

- A recent visit to Oakbank, Leighton Buzzard, the Executive Member asked that his congratulations for a recent award for quality of teaching, care and support outcomes be recorded.
- A topping out ceremony he had recently attended at Greenleas Lower School, the Executive Member requested that his thanks to all staff involved in the delivery of the new school be recorded.
- A recent conference he had attended at which Sir Michael Wilshaw emphasised the important role for local authorities in school improvement.
- The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership and the Head of Adoption and Fostering were leaving the Council. The Committee requested that their thanks to the Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership be recorded and that an email be sent to the Head of Adoption and Fostering thanking her for her service.

In response the Committee raised several questions, to which the following responses were provided:-

- A slide show of photos could be provided to Members in October 2013 to show the development of the new Greenleas Lower School.
- An information sheet given to head teachers on the role of the local authority had been provided to head teachers because some schools had expressed concern that if, as outstanding schools, they were contacted by Ofsted and asked as part of the new inspection arrangements they were asked about the arrangements for school intervention and support, they would not know what to say. The Council had received thanks from head teachers for providing this information sheet.
- The recent spending round announcement had not been as bad as predicted for Central Bedfordshire, however the final budget was subject to change before December 2013.
- A Department for Education reform consultation on the local school funding formula would take place in September allowing schools and the Committee to be consulted in a timely fashion. A paper requesting delegation to carry out the consultation would be presented to the Executive in August 2013 and a detailed report of the consultation model will be brought to Overview and Scrutiny on 3 September. In the mean time, any questions from Members could be directed to the Children's Services Senior Finance Manager.
- Matters relating to small schools funding would also be included within this consultation.

CS/13/38 Changes to the School Curriculum

The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership provided a presentation (**attached**) that included:-

- Changes to the school curriculum and examples of the aims of several specific subjects;
- Key changes to primary and secondary programmes of study;
- Reforms to assessment and accountability methods for both GCSE and secondary level education;
- Sector-led implementation of the school system.

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

- Whether there was time to influence attainment targets, particularly in relation to swimming. The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership informed the Committee that swimming was statutory.
- Whether the changes in assessment and standards would help or hinder improvements in children's achievement. The Assistant Director responded that the new emphasis was on creating a curriculum which specified the expected outcomes within the programmes of study so clearly that they do not need a separate set of level descriptions. The new curriculum emphasised also the school curriculum and locally agreed approaches that would raise expectations.
- Concerns that whilst it was practical for Bedford Borough, Luton Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils to collaborate on the development and delivery of religious education, having three individual SACREs may cause unnecessary duplication and delay.
- The importance of basic English language and literature. The Assistant Director commented that grammar was emphasised in the current curriculum and it could be strengthened further.
- The importance of pupils developing a solid foundation of knowledge before being taught to pass exams. The Assistant Director confirmed that it was not the stated curricular intention to create a test to which pupils would be taught.
- The benefit of teachers taking into account their local surroundings when developing the curriculum. The Assistant Director commented that the emphasis on the 'School Curriculum' provided the flexibility to enable schools to focus on their local surroundings.
- Whether sciences would continue to be taught as separate subjects or would be consolidated into one subject. The Assistant Director confirmed that the revised curriculum encouraged schools to teach science as single subjects and that there would also be a focus on teaching 'Computing' rather than ICT skills.
- Whether the emphasis on Key Stage 2 (KS2) was diminished as a result of the changes to the curriculum. The Assistant Director commented there was no intention to diminish the importance of the KS2 as a result of changes to the curriculum but that now overtly sets out to ensure children are 'secondary ready'.
- Concerns that there were insufficient funds to implement changes to the curriculum. The Assistant Director commented that the Government

- was developing additional web-based materials for teachers and a program of school to school support driven by Teaching Schools and therefore there would be no direct cost to the Council as a result of changes in the curriculum.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director for his presentation and requested that a further update be provided in January 2015 once the changes to the school curriculum had been implemented.

NOTED the presentation and recommended that a further presentation on the changes to the school curriculum be provided in January 2015.

CS/13/39

Children's Trust Annual Report

The Executive Member for Children's Services presented the Annual Report of the Children's Trust Board, which provided an update on the progress of partners. The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention to performance relating to Key stage 4 (5 A*-C including English and Maths); and the percentage of looked after children (LAC) who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months and who had an annual health assessment during the previous 12 months. There were concerns regarding both of these areas that were being addressed by partners. The Executive Member also referred to challenges relating to the changes in local schools and the ongoing development of partnership arrangements to support improved attainment for children and young people. A consensus was being developed regarding the role of the local authority in school improvement.

In response, Members commented and discussed several issues in detail as follows:-

- The need to consider in more detail the gaps in achievement for vulnerable groups. The Assistant Director commented that there were concerns with regards to gaps in achievement of some groups and he agreed to circulate information about the achievement and progress of specific groups and to report in greater detail on the achievement of vulnerable groups in future reports and specifically how the Council supported improvement in this area.
- Whether the national target to achieve 426 days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family by 2015/16 was achievable. The Executive Member commented this was less of a challenge for Central Bedfordshire Council although there were challenges regards working with the courts and our own social workers.
- Further clarity was required regarding targets in relation to domestic abuse referrals. The Assistant Director also agreed that in future data relating to youth crime would be reported as numbers rather than as percentages.
- A concern was expressed about why the Council area was ranked ninth out of 11 statistical neighbours in relation to the number of children who achieved a good level of development in early years. The Assistant Director commented that in the previous year the results at foundation stage had jumped in the right direction, it was hoped this would occur again thus improving the level of performance.

- Queries as to why there was no rating for performance relating to the percentage of economic activity. The Assistant Director commented that this was a very broad benchmark, he would look into this and provide an update for Members. The Executive Member also commented that whilst it was not rated here the issue was referred to elsewhere within the Plan so the target may exist elsewhere.
- Concerns that percentage figures relating to re-offending rates amongst young people and the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system aged 10-17 did not appear to be correct. The Assistant Director commented that actual figures may provide greater clarity of performance in these areas as small numbers of cases could have a large impact on the percentages.

In addition to the specific comments raised above the Chairman raised several issues regarding the format of the Plan including concerns that the font size was too small and the need for greater clarity in the Plan to highlight the period of time that it covered. It was also requested that a link to the current Children and Young People's Plan be sent to all Members of the Committee.

RECOMMENDED

That the comments of the Committee as recorded in the Minutes above be provided to the Children's Trust for consideration.

CS/13/40

2012/13 Provisional Outturn Revenue Budget Monitoring

The Executive Member presented the provisional outturn revenue budget management report for 2012/13 and asked that his thanks be recorded for the hard work of the Children's Services Directorate during 2012/13. The Executive Member also commented that in light of the pressures on the Directorate the provisional revenue outturn position (before proposed new reserves) was positive. He also highlighted that without the use of reserves the Children's Services Operations budget would have been £3.3M overspent. It was commented that this situation would continue unless it was addressed during the budget setting process.

In response to the report the Committee raised several questions to which the following responses were provided:-

- The Directorate were addressing the pressures that had arisen from the re-commissioning of special education needs (SEN) transport contracts not delivering the expected savings. There were anticipated savings in relation to SEN transport and the Council continued to consider the use of taxis in appropriate circumstances.
- The Council continued to chase unpaid debts.
- There was a legal requirement to provide funding to Teachers' Unions and Professional Associations, although this level of funding is, in agreement with the professional associations, being reduced annually.
- The underspend in Learning, Commissioning and Partnership was being used to meet demand in Children's Social Care. The Assistant Director agreed to look into the issue of children's centres liability and discuss this further with a Member.

- The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership was not aware of any issues relating to the governance of the Music Service but he invited Members to email any issues that they were aware of to him.

In addition to these questions, the Chairman raised several issues regarding the format of the report, which the Directorate were asked to consider addressing in the next budget report. It was also suggested that where possible the Council's staff recruitment adverts in local newspapers should be consolidated to save costs. Further clarity was also requested in future budget reports regarding the what constituted "other" expenditure types (Table B) and what constituted "miscellaneous" grants (Table C).

NOTED the report

CS/13/41 **2012/13 Provisional Outturn Capital Budget Management Report**

The Executive Member presented the provisional outturn capital budget management report for 2012/13 and drew the attention of the Committee to slippage in the programme, which he commented was to be expected.

NOTED the report

CS/13/42 **Q4 Performance Report**

The Executive Member presented the Q4 performance for the Children's Services Directorate and drew attention to positive performance relating to published Ofsted school and college classifications. The Executive Member also drew attention to the 'red' rated performance for the achievement of 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths and performance relating to the number of education and training opportunities for young people made available in the Autumn, which were not meeting the national average.

In response to the report the Committee discussed in detail the importance of raising aspirations for those children and young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Chairman requested that an update be added to the work programme on the outcomes for NEET children and young people who took part in education and training opportunities. It was suggested this could include the National Citizenship Programme. In response the Executive Member commented that the Council undertook a considerable amount of work to raise aspirations of NEET children and young people but there were lots of variables that needed to be addressed. The Assistant Director agreed to provide an update to a future meeting of the Committee, which if appropriate could also consider the use of the National Citizenship Programme as an education and training opportunity. The Chairman also requested that consideration be given to any opportunities that might exist for young people returning to Central Bedfordshire from university during the summer vacation which the Assistant Director agreed to follow up.

NOTED the report

CS/13/43 **Quarter 1 Risk Report**

The Executive Member presented a report that drew the Committee's attention to the strategic risk within the Children's Services Directorate and commented on how operational risk was managed. In response to a question the Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnership commented that the annual report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board would be presented to the Committee in October 2013.

The Committee discussed the format of the report and the roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee. The Committee agreed it was pertinent for the Audit Committee to make them aware of issues as necessary but the Committee should not seek to duplicate the role of the Audit Committee. It was agreed therefore that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would regularly review risks as recommended by the Audit Committee or the Children's Services directorate but requested that these be reported in a tabular rather than narrative prose format.

NOTED the report

CS/13/44 **Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan. The Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager advised the Committee that following their previous meeting items had been added in relation to school funding and the Council's draft budget. A Member requested that the committee consider a wider debate on school improvement and the benefit of play in schools. The Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnerships commented that there were proposals to increase direct instruction on play in schools and these could be considered separately at the consultation stage outside of the meeting.

NOTED the Children's Services OSC work programme.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.38 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated