

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Meeting Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Friday, 13 December 2013

PRESENT

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

Councillors:	R D Berry D Bowater Mrs R J Drinkwater	Councillors:	P Hollick D Jones R B Pepworth
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Parental Co-optees: H Copley
Mr S Court
D Landman

Church of England
Co-optee:
Roman Catholic
Co-optee:

Apologies for
Absence: Cllrs Mrs G Clarke
Mrs D B Gurney
J Reynolds

Substitutes: Cllrs K Janes (In place of Mrs G Clarke)

Members in
Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
Mrs S Clark Deputy Executive Member for
Children's Services
A L Dodwell Deputy Executive Member for
Children's Services
A Shadbolt

Officers in
Attendance: Ms G Chandler Senior Finance Advisor - School
Finance
Mrs E Grant Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Children's Services
Mr S Jones Senior Finance Manager - Public
Health
Mr J Partridge Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Mr B Pearson Head of Children's Services
Commissioning
Miss H Redding Assistant Director School
Improvement

CS/13/73 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of Cllr Hollick to the list of attendees.

CS/13/74 **Members' Interests**

- Cllr Costin declared an interest as Chairman of Barnfield College.
- Cllr D Jones declared an interest in Item 12 as the Chair of Governors for Hawthorn Park Primary School.
- Cllr Bowater declared an interest in Item 19 as a Governor of SEPT.
- Mr S Court also declared an interest in Item 13 as his child benefited from home to school transport.

CS/13/75 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the Committee that the order of the agenda would be reorganised to facilitate the attendance of officers and a Deputy Executive Member. The Chairman also informed the Committee that by virtue of the Local Government Act (1972) she had agreed to add an urgent item to the agenda regarding a quarterly budget update for public health. This item was felt to be of urgency due to the importance of advising Members in a timely way of the current projected outturn of the public health service.

CS/13/76 **Petitions**

None.

CS/13/77 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Committee received a question from a member of the public regarding services for children on the autistic spectrum in Central Bedfordshire. The speaker highlighted five concerns as follows:-

- Responsibility for and application of services;
- Early recognition and specialist teaching;
- Need for awareness and training;
- Family learning and support; and
- The inadequacy of containment.

In response to the speaker and questions from Members the Assistant Director for School Improvement informed the Committee that the Council delivered some additional autism services in Biggleswade. The Children's and Families Bill had placed additional responsibilities on the Council in relation to services required to be delivered. The Assistant Director stressed the importance of early diagnosis and training being provided in appropriate locations and stated that the Council coordinated with parents and families to ensure that services were delivered in a way that supported families. The Assistant Director also advised the Committee that additional support was provided via special schools and pre-schools to enhance availability of services.

Following the discussion the Chairman requested that a copy of the points raised by the speaker be circulated to Members of the Committee.

CS/13/78 Call-In

None.

CS/13/79 Requested Items

None.

CS/13/80 Executive Member Update

The Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services advised the Committee of two reports that were recently considered by the Executive in relation to the New Schools Places Programme and fostering fees and allowances.

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented she felt the Government were right to review the age to which children in care would be able to stay with foster families as a means of providing a more stable environment. There were several issues for the Council to consider before forming a view on the proposals, including:-

1. The implications of the proposals for colleagues in adult social care;
2. The financial implications of the proposals as costs for placements would increase as children aged;
3. The need to maintain an accurate risk log to identify financial pressures in relation to spend in children and adult services.

NOTED the update

CS/13/81 Q2 Revenue Budget Monitoring

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a presentation and drew the attention of Members to the current forecast revenue outturn for Children's Services, which was £2.6m overspent. In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services reminded Members that they were made aware of the overspend in the quarter one report and at each quarterly review after that, much of which was due to the loss of Government grants.

In response to questions from Members the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised the Committee as follows:-

- The directorate had considered several scenarios for the upward trajectory and pressure on the budget but it was difficult to profile fully as the Council were providing services in a different way without a great deal of background information, the increase in the numbers of children in care was a particular issue. The directorate currently invested 17% of its budget on prevention and early intervention but it would need to consider in the future if this amount was appropriate. The number of cases were now stabilising and signs were good.
- There were challenges in relation to the Troubled Families programme and determining whether this programme or the Pupil Referral Unit was

responsible for improvements in attendance. There were also challenges relating to the sharing of information across organisations.

NOTED the update

CS/13/82 **Q2 Capital Budget Monitoring**

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a presentation and drew the attention of Members to the current forecast capital outturn for Children's Services, which was £0.4m underspent.

NOTED the update.

CS/13/83 **Disability Review Programme: Support and Aspiration**

Cllr Dodwell delivered a presentation that updated Members on the progress of the Disability Review and Support and Aspiration including progress on recommendations, key changes to the Children and Families Bill and the project workstreams that were presently underway. Cllr Dodwell also produced photographs of some of the resources currently available in Central Bedfordshire. In addition to the presentation the Chairman and the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services recorded their thanks to officers and Members for their support throughout the programme, which had resulted in greater stability for social workers. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services planned to seek opportunities to show-case the work that had been undertaken.

In light of the presentation and the further detail provided the Committee commented and discussed several issues in detail as follows:-

- The benefit of the hub in Biggleswade as a means of drawing disability teams together and the further benefit that would be provided by co-locating GP surgeries in these hubs. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented that co-location with GP surgeries was currently being considered.
- Attendance levels at meetings of the Special Needs Action Panel (SNAP), whereby the Assistant Director for School Improvement commented that the Council encouraged feedback on these meetings and that it tried to ensure meetings were held at accessible times.
- The access to services for residents who were not able to travel to Houghton Regis. The Assistant Director advised the Committee that the Council tried to ensure services were accessible and that in the future it would be considered how services could be provided in areas where there was a current gap in provision.
- The importance of organisations sharing necessary information. The Committee were informed that key workers would be identified to lead on information sharing, the Council was considering ways of supporting this in an appropriate manner.
- The legal basis on which planning and commissioning of services for disabled children and young people would be required under the Children and Families Bill. The Assistant Director commented that these requirements were not too dissimilar to current arrangements. The Deputy

Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services also commented that the current pathfinders had found the cost of implementing this requirement very high and as a result those pathfinders had recently been extended. The sufficiency of staff levels in the NHS had been a major issue with which the pathfinders had struggled. The issue of staff recruitment in the NHS had been raised with the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

- Whether the Council would be able to finance the services that it aspired to provide. The Committee were advised that Government were aware of the need to enhance funding for services, some of the funding came through the Dedicated Schools Grant but there were other sources of funding that were also available.
- Guidance documents for the NHS, which would be provided when the Children and Families Bill became an Act.

NOTED the presentation

CS/13/84 Responses to School Funding Consultation: Arrangements for 2014/15

The Assistant Director for School Improvement presented a report that set out the responses to a consultation on School Funding for 2014/15. In particular it was highlighted that the seminars for schools had not been well attended but the Council did all it could to encourage responses. Whilst many schools had not responded to the consultation they had advised the Council they both understood and were comfortable with the proposals. A considerable amount of consultation had been undertaken via the Schools Forum.

In response to a question the Assistant Director for School Improvement advised the Committee that the Government provided figures for the numbers of children receiving free school meals (FSM). In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that the Department for Education (DfE) triangulated data to provide a very accurate picture of deprivation so whilst it was important that children received FSM the links to funding were not so important.

NOTED the responses to the school funding consultation for 2014/15.

CS/13/85 Accountability Framework for School Outcomes

The Assistant Director School Improvement delivered a presentation that informed the Committee of the Council's role in monitoring and evaluating performance data, the Council's powers of intervention in addition to the framework for inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement.

In light of the presentation the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The powers of the local authority in relation to free schools. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that a team had been appointed to support school improvement with academies and free schools.
- The capacity of academies to effect educational transformation. The Assistant Director commented that strong leadership was key in academies

achieving transformation and whilst there were issues regarding capacity each academy sponsor was scrutinised to determine their ability to lead transformation. In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented on the importance of working with those schools for whom the Council was responsible rather than focusing on those powers that were no longer relevant to the Council in relation to some schools.

- School inspections in Dunstable, which the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented had not been triggered by the local authority, but may have resulted from changes in the flow of pupils due to age range changes.
- Payment for school support, which was dependent on individual circumstances and was considered on a case by case basis.
- Information relating to SAT results, which would be published on the Council's website and a link provided to the Committee in due course.

In addition to the discussion on the presentation Members requested that all future Committee meetings take place in the Council Chamber and that officers ensure the readability of papers in the future.

NOTED the presentation.

CS/13/86

Home to School Transport Policy

The Head of Children's Services Commissioning introduced a report that outlined proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy further to a previous report that had been considered by the Committee. The purpose of the changes were to enhance clarity and reflect entitlement criteria. Whilst there was no provision in the Policy for children over the age of 16 the Council did have a post-16 Transport Policy, which was not subject to any amendment as a consequence of changes to this Policy.

In light of the report and the further clarification provided at the meeting the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- Some of the language in the draft Policy was not appropriate for a public document. The Committee accepted that some of the language was necessary for a policy document and noted that a plain-English guide would also be produced in consultation with parents/carers and partners.
- Whether it would be feasible to include a 'lay' member on the transport appeals panel. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services commented that it would be a challenge to include a lay person in light of the Council's responsibility for the Policy. However, the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to consider how this principle might be addressed.
- The Policy used terms that described specific disabilities and referred to levels of disability (for example 'severe'), which may lead to confusion.
- The Policy referred to children walking between home and school and walking with 'reasonable safety', this needed to be cross-referenced with the section on safeguarding.

RECOMMENDED that the comments of the Committee as detailed in the Minutes be considered and provided to the Executive for their consideration of this item.

CS/13/87 **Consultation on Admissions Arrangements 2015/16**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services introduced a report that sought comments on proposed admission arrangements for 2015/16. In light of the report a Member queried the reasoning for converting the lower catchment areas in Houghton Regis for Hawthorn Park, Houghton Regis, Tithe Farm and Thornhill to Primary school catchment areas. The Member did however support the proposed criterion to give priority to children in the nursery placed above the final criterion of straight line distance. It was queried whether the catchment areas in Houghton Regis could be reviewed again in the future. In response the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to review the future catchment areas for Houghton Regis for future admissions years after 2015/16.

NOTED the report and request that the comments of the Committee in relation to Houghton Regis be taken into consideration for future admissions arrangements.

CS/13/88 **Q2 Public Health Revenue Budget Monitoring**

The Interim Senior Finance Manager (Public Health) outlined the projected full year outturn position for the Public Health revenue budget, which was presently on budget. The attention of the Committee was drawn to current potential risks and the difficulty of avoiding the spend of a strategic reserve.

In response to a question from a Member the Interim Senior Finance Manager commented that funds would not be diverted to Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) until it had been confirmed that additional funding to meet demand was necessary.

NOTED the presentation.

CS/13/89 **Q2 Performance Monitoring Report**

The Committee received the recent Executive report that detailed quarter two performance for the Children's Services directorate. The Committee commented on the importance of ensuring that co-opted Members also received hard copies of the agenda papers.

In response to a question from a Member the Deputy Chief Executive/Director or Children's Services agreed to review the number of children's safeguarding indicators that were included in the performance report and inform Members whether this number had diminished.

NOTED the report.

CS/13/90

Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan

RECOMMENDED that the current work programme be approved.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 9.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.35 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated