

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, 21 January 2014

PRESENT

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

Councillors: R D Berry
Mrs G Clarke
Mrs R J Drinkwater

Councillors: Mrs D B Gurney
P Hollick
D Jones

Parental Co-optees: Mr J M A Chapman
Mr S Court

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

Apologies for
Absence: Cllrs D Bowater
Mrs C Crook

Substitutes: Cllrs K Janes (In place of D Bowater)

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
M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services

Officers in Attendance:	Mrs E Grant	Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
	Ms D Hill	Senior Finance Manager - Children's Services
	Mr J Partridge	Scrutiny Policy Adviser

CS/13/91 Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the previous meeting and commented that the reference to "GP surgeries" (Minute CS/13/83 refers) related to specialised health clinics.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2013 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record in light of the clarification above.

CS/13/92 Members' Interests

None

CS/13/93 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman advised the Committee that:-

- Jonathan Chapman had been appointed as a parent governor representative co-optee, an election to appoint a second representative would be undertaken soon.
- Three recipients had received honours in the New Years Honours list in Central Bedfordshire.
- A presentation had been arranged for Members at Hawthorn Park Community Primary School that would support the Committee meeting in February.
- An overview that had been sent to Members of the Committee concerning developments in child protection legislation.

CS/13/94 Petitions

None

CS/13/95 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None

CS/13/96 Call-In

None

CS/13/97 Requested Items

None

CS/13/98 Executive Member Update

The Executive Member for Children's Services provided the Committee with an update, concerning a report to Executive in March 2014 regards changes to schools in Dunstable, which would be presented to the OSC in due course. Cllr Versallion also referred to recent visits to Cedars Upper School and Redbourne Upper School and Community College, to discuss GCSE results and other matters, which had been very positive.

The Committee raised several questions, to which Executive Member responded as follows:-

- From September 2014 all but one of the upper schools in Central Bedfordshire would have transferred to being academies, the remaining upper school was a foundation school.
- The Council would continue to lobby central government on the manner in which it allocated funding to local authorities and schools through mechanisms such as the F40 Group, which campaigned for fairer funding in allocation.

CS/13/99

Draft Budget 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan 2014-18 and Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2017/18

The Executive Member introduced a report that outlined the Council's draft Budget for 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme, which had been presented to Executive on 14 January 2014. In addition to the proposed budget the report set out the efficiencies and key pressures on the directorate. Cllr Versallion emphasised the increasing demand on children's social care as a result of demographic change and the difficult context within which the Council had drafted a budget for Children's Services. The Executive Member thanked colleagues and the remainder of the Executive for their support in setting the budget.

In light of the report and the further clarification provided by the Executive Member the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- Whether a £300k pressure relating to the disaggregation of the adoption and fostering service (CSP1406) was realistic. In response the Executive Member commented that the quality of service had remained high and he was confident that £300k was a realistic figure. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services also commented that £300k was a realistic figure at the present time, although long-term assurances were difficult due to uncertainty over demographic change. In addition the Committee were informed that careful monitoring was undertaken of children's homes and other placements in order to ensure that, where it was appropriate to do so, children and young people were placed close to home.
- Whether there were proposals to change arrangements for adoptions panels in light of the disaggregation of the service. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that several options were being considered to make the process more efficient without losing the quality of service.
- The impact of changes in the numbers of school improvements advisers employed by the Council and the services that could be delivered. In response the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that where some schools experienced difficulty interpreting the Council's policies on raising standards a strategic community approach to supporting school improvement was necessary. A commissioning approach to the issues was in place. The Executive Member also commented that £1.5m had been allocated for school improvement commissioning and recent Ofsted inspections had been positive in relation to school improvement.
- The manner in which the Council was able to respond to pressures in school transport and progress in relation to walking assessments. The Executive Member advised the Committee that a revised policy was being

developed and walking assessments were about to be underway, although in some cases the outcome of the assessment may result in the Council needing to fund improvements. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services also advised the Committee that the role of the Children's Services directorate was to set the policy, it was important for the directorate not to be involved in the commissioning or delivery of the service as these were technical matters. It was also noted that the Department for Education were thinking of changing the school transport formula in 2015/16.

- The level of progress the Council had achieved in relation to rationalising existing transport for children with disabilities at Ivel Valley. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services agreed to provide an update to the Committee outside of the meeting.
- The level of progress in relation to bringing children back into local placements, which address their Special Educational Needs (CS3). The Executive Member commented that work was underway to bring children back into Central Bedfordshire. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services clarified that the approach was to ensure children preferably did not go out of area in the first place rather than bringing them back into Central Bedfordshire after they started school.
- Whether a reduction of 25 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements by 2015/16 was feasible. In response the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that the target was ambitious but possibly achievable and would need careful monitoring in the future.

In addition the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services confirmed that the report should be revised in relation to the new efficiency (CSE1410) that was identified in the report alongside the reallocation of school improvement activity (CS10).

RECOMMENDED that the Council's draft Budget for 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2017/18 be endorsed in light of the challenges faced by the Directorate.

CS/13/100 **Fees and Charges (2014/15)**

The Executive Member introduced the proposed revised fees and charges for Children's Services, which included a 2% increase in charges for music services. It was proposed to review fees for school transport for 2015/16. In light of a question the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised Members of a £40k fund for vulnerable children to provide opportunities to access music lessons. The Pupil Premium could be used by schools to fund music services and governors were encouraged to discuss with their schools the services that were made available to students in order to add value.

NOTED the report

CS/13/101 **Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee were advised that the meeting on 06 May would consider proposals for changes to schools in Dunstable, it was proposed that this

meeting take place in Dunstable from 7.30pm. Following discussion it was agreed that officers should re-consider the date and time of the meeting and confirm the changes to Members.

RECOMMENDED that the current work programme be approved.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.21 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated