

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, 25 February 2014

PRESENT

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

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| Councillors: | R D Berry D Bowater Mrs G Clarke Mrs R J Drinkwater | Councillors: | Mrs D B Gurney D Jones R B Pepworth |
| Parental Co-optees: | Mr J M A Chapman Mr S Court | | |
| Church of England Co-optee: Roman Catholic Co-optee: | Mr J Reynolds | | |
| Apologies for Absence: | Cllrs P Hollick Mrs F Image | | |
| Substitutes: | Cllrs B Saunders (In place of P Hollick) | | |
| Members in Attendance: | Cllrs A L Dodwell C C Gomm Mrs S A Goodchild B J Spurr M A G Versallion | Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services Executive Member for Children's Services | |
| Officers in Attendance: | Ms L Baker Ms C Churchley Marianna Cunto Mrs J Keyte Ms G Redbond | Freedom Programme Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator Relay Officer Head of Community Safety Freedom Programme | |
| Others in Attendance: | Ms A Birch Ms C Banks Ms L Johnson Ms L Johnson | Healthy Relationships Programme Home Group Freedom Programme Headteacher at Hawthorn Park Community Lower School | |

Ms L Gillespie

Sorted

CS/13/102 **Minutes**

The Committee received the Minutes of the previous meeting and in addition to noting that Mr J Reynolds had been in attendance it was agreed that Minute CS/13/98 should be amended to read “the Council would continue to lobby central government on the formula upon which it allocated funding...”

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2014 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the amendments above.

CS/13/103 **Members' Interests**

None

CS/13/104 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed guests to the meeting and thanked officers and the Headteacher of Hawthorn Park Community Lower School for arranging a visit for Members to discuss issues relating to the impact on children of living in circumstances of domestic abuse/domestic violence. A summary of the visit and some key issues that Members might consider raising during the meeting had been circulated. The Chairman also outlined that the purpose of the meeting was to develop an understanding of the impact of domestic abuse/domestic violence on children and to arrive at recommendations to present to the Executive to enhance the Council’s offer in this area.

The Chairman also commented on her the recent appointment as a Member of the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC and the contribution of former Councillor Anita Lewis, who had recently passed away.

CS/13/105 **Petitions**

None.

CS/13/106 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CS/13/107 **Call-In**

None.

CS/13/108 **Requested Items**

None.

CS/13/109 **The impact on children of living in family circumstances of domestic violence and abuse**

In setting the context for this item the Committee watched a DVD demonstrating the experiences of victims of domestic abuse and domestic violence. A presentation was also provided by the Client Service Manager for Central Bedfordshire's Refuges with regards to the "Children's Worker Pilot". This presentation demonstrated the benefits of the Pilot that commenced in April 2013 and the impact of these posts on meeting the needs of women and children. The presentation highlighted the numbers of children that had been supported and detailed some of the other supported outcomes that had been achieved as a result of the pilot.

The Committee also received a presentation of the Deputy Executive Member that provided an overview of the prevalence of domestic abuse, the impact of abuse on children and the current support that was available in Central Bedfordshire. The presentation also set out some of the challenges and pressures in relation providing support for children and responding to incidents of domestic abuse.

The Committee discussed the issues in detail with a range of professionals and a service user in attendance at the meeting. A full report of the meeting is **appended** in which the following issues were discussed:-

- The benefits of early intervention and the extent to which additional funding could be made available to provide additional resources that would enhance the services that were available. There was a need to recognise that funding in early intervention could reduce spend in the long-term although it was accepted that spending more on intervention and prevention could result in reduced funding being available to fund more reactive programmes of support.
- The need for effective co-ordination of training and support for children across Central Bedfordshire in order to maximise outcomes.
- The need to address the continuum of abuse that can occur where children learn behaviours they have learnt in relation to domestic abuse, which they then consider to be acceptable.
- The importance of schemes such as the Healthy Relationships Programmes and encouraging schools to take part in these.
- The difficulty of distinguishing between learning difficulties and the impact of domestic abuse.
- Whether money could be saved by training a number of dedicated professionals to go to schools to deliver support, rather than schools arranging their own support.
- The importance of understanding the prevalence of women as perpetrators of domestic abuse and the levels of support provided to male victims.
- The need to ensure that rural areas of Central Bedfordshire had the same level of access to programmes as those in urban areas.
- The value of Central Bedfordshire refuges and the service that they provided for women.
- The negative impact of the national media and television programming in the manner in which it displays domestic abuse.
- The importance of a multi-agency approach in order to effectively address the prevalence of domestic abuse.
- The critical importance of HomeStart as a way of engaging with families.

- The need to enhance signposting in schools to those services that are available in Central Bedfordshire.
- The need to ensure Members contacted the Intake and Assessment Team (during the day) or the Emergency Duty Team(out of hours) if they were made aware of an incident of domestic abuse of a child and the Police who should also be contacted.
- The difficulty of addressing incidents where children are domestically abusing their parents.
- The need to address the 75% of incidents that were perpetrated by repeat offenders.

(The Committee adjourned at 1135 and reconvened at 1155)

Following a short break the Committee reconvened and heard of the experience of a service user who had personal experience of domestic abuse and use of Women's Aid.

The service users experience and the discussion of the Committee informed several recommendations that were proposed and discussed with the following issues being raised:-

- The benefit of training being delivered by those who have experienced domestic abuse and providing more targeted and continued training for professionals.
- The critical importance of raising awareness in relation to domestic abuse, which the Committee felt needed to be prioritised above the other recommendations agreed. Of particular importance was need to ensure that Councillors were aware of the services that were available in light of their roles as corporate parents.
- The need for the Council's directorates to work collaboratively in relation to domestic abuse and to focus effort on both children and adults in order to achieve successful outcomes. This included the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees also working collaboratively to ensure that appropriate Members and officers were engaged in conversations.
- The importance of a 6-month review of progress in relation to any recommendations of the Committee to ascertain what happens as a result.
- The need to understand what constitutes a 'healthy relationship' to inform the training that is provided.
- As a result of a recent HMIC Inspection the Police were already undertaking work in this area to develop their approach and develop more effective means of supporting victims. It was requested that a copy of the HMIC report be provided to Members once it had been published.

RECOMMENDED as a priority that organisations develop more effective means of signposting to the support that is available for the victims of domestic abuse. The issue of domestic abuse should also be highlighted:-

- (i) through 'Central Essentials' (the school newsletter), the Governors and Headteachers Forums in order to encourage attendance at Local Safeguarding Children Board training; and**

(ii) at the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, especially in relation to mental health and substance misuse services.

RECOMMENDED that following detailed work on the above priorities the following also be considered:-

1. That the co-ordination of preventative and early intervention work to support children at risk be further enhanced.
2. That the Executive continue working with the Community Safety Partnership to identify sources of funding to preserve and enhance the current services that are available to support the victims of domestic abuse.
3. That the benefit of support and training for professionals to help identify victims, preferably delivered by those who understand the issues, be recognised and that targeted training be provided for frontline professionals, particularly those in universal services e.g. health visitors, Children's Centres and GPs, with the aim of earlier identification of incidents of domestic abuse.
4. That the accessibility of services for victims in same sex relationships and disadvantaged groups, such as unemployed persons, Gypsies and Travellers and other BME groups be further enhanced.
5. That schools be encouraged to recognise the value of the "healthy relationships" programme and as well as developing similar programmes for younger age groups schools ensure that vulnerable teenagers are engaged in such programmes.
6. That all schools be encouraged to develop a system of staff mentors, particularly in areas of high incidence of domestic abuse, to provide support and a focal point for training.
7. That all schools be encouraged to designate a member of staff responsible for raising awareness and attending training in relation to domestic abuse and domestic violence.
8. That the level of future need for support services be identified and commissioned appropriately.
9. That an understanding be developed of the extent to which victims enter into a cycle of abusive relationships so organisations can determine the extent of support that is required.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated