

## 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, 16 September 2014

### PRESENT

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

Councillors:	D Bowater Mrs G Clarke Mrs R J Drinkwater P Hollick	Councillors:	D Jones D McVicar R B Pepworth
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Parental Co-optees: Mr J Chapman  
Mr S Court  
Mr T Hodey

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

Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	P A Duckett Mrs F Image Mr D Morton
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Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis  Mrs S Clark  A L Dodwell  C C Gomm Mrs S A Goodchild M A G Versallion	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services and Community Services  Executive Member for Children's Services
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Officers in Attendance:	Ms A Craig  Mrs P Everitt Ms D Hill  Mr G Jones  Miss H Redding Mrs J Singh	Fostering Team Manager, Children's Services Scrutiny Policy Adviser Senior Finance Manager - Children's Services Assistant Director Children's Services Operations Assistant Director School Improvement Adoption Team Manager, Children's Services
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Mrs S Tyler

Head of Child Poverty and Early  
Intervention

Mr E Wong

Head of Corporate Parenting

CS/14/29. **Minutes**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 July 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

CS/14/30. **Members' Interests**

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

- Cllr A Barker as a Member of the Corporate Adoption Panel
- Cllr A Dodwell as a Member of the Corporate Fostering Panel
- Cllr D Bowater as a Member of the SEPT Board.

CS/14/31. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and paid special thanks to Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services for her services to Central Bedfordshire Council. Thanks were also extended to officers and staff for organising the Member visit to the Children's Disability Hub in Dunstable.

CS/14/32. **Petitions**

None.

CS/14/33. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CS/14/34. **Call-In**

None.

CS/14/35. **Requested Items**

None.

CS/14/36. **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Children's Services provided the Committee with an update on the following:-

- The slight increased to 57.8% in the number of children that had achieved A\*-C GCSEs in English and Maths. This was in contrast to a downturn nationally and tougher marking.
- Attendance at a meeting to discuss expansion plans for Roecroft School in Stotfold.

- Attendance at the forthcoming Fostering and Adoption Awards ceremony.
- Attendance at the official opening of the Disability Hub for Children in Dunstable

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

- The majority of children in Central Bedfordshire had been awarded places in the school of their choice
- There was a ranged of apprenticeship schemes and college courses delivered at Bedford and Dunstable Colleges for children who did not achieve their expected results. The Executive Member agreed to report back to the Committee on the opportunities that were made for children and young people with special needs.
- Why there was a disparity between Ofsted results and examination results in schools? The Executive Member advised that schools had demonstrated an improvement in teaching practices to Ofsted, of which examination attainment was a part. It was considered that improved school performance would lead to improved examination results for children.

#### CS/14/37. **Children's Trust Annual Report**

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the Children's Trust Annual Report that outlined the progress in the delivering the priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan June 2013 to March 2015. In the first year of the Plan, performance across the set of key indicators was mixed. The main challenges included educational attainment, the Supporting Families Programme and the take up of early education/child care places for disadvantaged 2 year olds.

Members were asked to comment on the plan and were advised that questions and comments would be recorded in the Minutes and provided to the Children's Trust. In light of the report Members discussed the following:-

- The difficulty experienced by one school in allocating their Pupil Premium. In light of the difficulty the Committee supported the development of a guidance note for Governors and teachers of schools and special schools with examples of how this money had been spent in other schools
- Why the number of disadvantaged two year olds placed in early education/child care remained off track. In response the Executive Member advised that capacity issues had been resolved, however, some parents had not wished to take up the place for their child. An update was expected from Central Government in relation to this matter.
- Concern that GCSE exam performance had remained below target. The Executive Member advised that until all examination results had been validated in January 2015 they could not be published.
- Concerns that in light of the enhancement and redesign of the School Nurse Programme there had been an impact on the amount of time taken to refer a specific case that had led to deterioration in that individuals health. The Executive Member advised that work with Public Health colleagues would result in clear pathways for the School Nurse Service and resolve delays in referrals. Cllr Bowater agreed to raise this incident with SEPT colleagues.

- Performance in relation to issuing a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time where domestic abuse was a factor. The Executive Member commented that work was underway to reduce the impact on children, however, if a Social Worker was in any in doubt about childrens' safety they would be put on a protection plan.
- Concern that the number of mothers who smoked at the time of delivery in the south of Central Bedfordshire had not improved, despite attempts to address this.
- Whether the Supporting Families Programme (formally Troubled Families Programme) target had been set too high. The Executive Member advised that Officers would focus on fewer families going forward to improve outcomes for families.

**RECOMMENDED that the comments of the Committee as detailed in the Minutes be referred as appropriate.**

CS/14/38. **Annual Report for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service and Private Fostering**

The Executive Member introduced the Adoption, Fostering and Private Fostering Annual Report and referred to the Joint Adoption Panel Chairman's Report that had been circulated at the meeting. The Executive Member recorded his thanks to the Panel and the service for their hardwork.

In light of the reports and the further clarification provided by the Fostering Practice the Committee commented and discussed the following:-

- The current number of children going through the adoption process and how this compared to other areas. The Adoption Practice Manager explained it was not possible to give an exact number due to the flexible nature of the children's plans.
- The proactive work undertaken by officers on a local and national level help 'harder to place' children that included older children, sibling groups and children with special needs.
- Concerns as to whether a full complement of professional staff was in place following the disaggregation of the service with Bedford Borough Council. The Adoption Practice Manager confirmed all posts were in the new staff structure.

RECOMMENDED that the Fostering, Adoption and Private Adoption Annual Reports be circulated via Central Essentials and the Governor Essentials newsletters for information.

CS/14/39. **Quarter 1 2014/15 Budget Report**

The Executive Member introduced the projected Revenue forecast for 2014/15 for Children's Services and highlighted the continued pressures faced by the Service. The Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations advised that the total debt for Children's Services had improved in comparison to the previous forecast. The number of looked after children had risen leading to additional pressures in Fostering and Special Guardianship Orders. Pressures relating to staff recruitment had also caused delays in the Fostering and

Adoption of children. The Assistant Director reported a successful recruitment campaign for newly qualified social workers which had resulted in the appointment of several social workers and a further similar campaign would be run in November.

The Senior Financial Adviser outlined the Capital forecast and advised that the budget was not overspent and would be adjusted following the receipt of grants.

In light of the report the Committee queried whether there was an increase in the cost of foster care if a carer was contracted to the local authority or an agency. The Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations confirmed that additional fees were incurred by the authority if a foster carer was contracted to any agency and as a result the Council had focused on reducing agency spend in order to achieve better outcomes for fostered children.

In light of the Capital report it was suggested by Members that photographs of capital projects be included in future updates.

**NOTED the report.**

CS/14/40. **Update on Schools' Curriculum**

The Assistant Director, School Improvement introduced a presentation on the changes to the curriculum that also updated the Committee on the changes in assessment arrangements. Primary schools had been given the option to introduce the new curriculum in September, with the freedom to vary the curriculum to meet local needs. The new assessment reforms would include improvement in the consistency of results and teacher assessment.

Steve Gray, Head of School at Redborne Upper School was welcomed to the meeting and explained the secondary curriculum and assessment arrangements.

In light of the presentation the Committee commented and discussed the following:-

- Concern that academies and free schools would be exempt from implementing the new curriculum and that some employers might not understand the changes. In response, Mr Gray advised that academies and free schools were not exempt from the introducing the new curriculum and that employers had been fully consulted on the reforms. Courses such as the farms course at Redborne Upper School which would not count towards the new performance measures, would continue to be run by the school to meet the needs of students and local employers.
- Concern that religious education would be marginalised.
- The extent to which provision had been included in the new primary and secondary school curriculum for physical education (PE). The Assistant Director, School Improvement confirmed that provision was included in both curriculums and a primary schools premium payment was also available.

- The level of support that would be provided prior to assessments of children in Special Schools. The Assistant Director, School Improvement advised that a virtual school for Looked after Children and Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability was available.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1. That the concerns of the Committee relating to the potential marginalisation of religious education be referred to SACRE.**
- 2. That further information be circulated to the Committee in relation to the use of the schools premium for physical education.**

#### CS/14/41. **Impact on Children of Living in Family Circumstances of Domestic Abuse/Domestic Violence**

The Head of Child Poverty and Early Intervention delivered a presentation on the impact on children of living in family circumstances of Domestic Abuse/Domestic Violence and provided an update on the implementation of the Committee's previous recommendations.

The Committee was advised that there had been positive feedback from schools on the successful implementation of the Relay Project. Officers who had been working with the Police had informed schools of incidences of abuse resulting in the provision of additional support and positive outcomes for the victims.

Transformation funding was available to support collaborative working across local authorities, however a tri-borough approach was difficult to achieve with each authority at different stages of development. The Head of Child Poverty and Early Intervention gave a verbal update from a positive report on Transformation from an independent consultant.

In light of the presentation the Committee commented and discussed the following:-

- Whether domestic abuse was reported to schools outside of term time. The Head of Child Poverty and Early Intervention advised that the Relay Team would inform schools once they reopened.
- Concern that current funding for the Domestic Abuse champion would stop. In response the Head of Service advised the role of the Domestic would sit within her team in the Children's Services Directorate.

#### **NOTED the update**

#### CS/14/42. **Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the current draft work programme and agreed the inclusion of a briefing on the repercussions of child sex exploitation in Rotherham.

**RECOMMENDED that the work programme be approved subject to the amendment above.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.15 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....