

## 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, 20 November 2018

### PRESENT

Cllr K Ferguson (Chairman)  
Cllr D Shelvey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:	N B Costin Mrs D B Gurney P Hollick Cllr M Liddiard	Councillors:	A Ryan B Saunders P Smith
Parental Co-optees:	Mrs E Rowlands		
Church of England Co-optee:	Mr D Morton		
Roman Catholic Co-optee:	Absent		
Apologies for Absence:	Cllrs	K Janes Mrs D Main	
Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	S Dixon Mrs A L Dodwell Mrs S A Goodchild Ms C Hegley M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Members for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Families, Education and Children Executive Member for Adults, Social Care and Housing Operations (HRA)
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs S Childerhouse Mr A Coman Ms A Craig Mr P Fraser	Assistant Director Public Protection & Transport Head of Corporate Parenting Practice Manager, Fostering Assistant Director Education	

Mrs S Harrison	Director of Children's Services
Ms J Nason	Head of Commissioning & Performance
Mrs R Preen	Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Mrs S Tyler	Assistant Director Business and Supporting Services

Public: 0

CS/18/48. **Minutes**

**RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 September 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

CS/18/49. **Members' Interests**

Cllrs Costin, Smith, Gurney, Ferguson, Liddiard and Co-optee Emily Rowlands declared an interest in item 11 due to their role as school Governors.

CS/18/50. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

CS/18/51. **Petitions**

None.

CS/18/52. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CS/18/53. **Call-In**

None.

CS/18/54. **Requested Items**

None.

CS/18/55. **Executive Members' Updates**

The Executive Member for Children, Schools and Families advised the Committee that the school's adjudicator was considering a decision to close Shelton Lower School and that an outcome would be announced in the coming

weeks. Members were advised that many local authorities faced the challenge of the rising costs associated with school transport, both mainstream and SEND and the need to re-evaluate the service provision in order to ensure children received an appropriate, cost effective and efficient service. Land supply was influencing the location of new school sites and the emerging Local Plan would help shape the future delivery of educational infrastructure. The Executive Member recognised the need for effective communication between the Children's Service Directorate and Members and expressed a desire to see a regular channel of information shared with all interested parties.

Several Members raised concerns with the Executive Member and director in relation to the funding received by Autism Bedfordshire and whether parents were subsequently receiving the support they needed for their children. Concerns were also raised in relation to the continuing viability and sustainability of some organisations without ongoing grant funding. In response the director reminded Members that block funding was no longer paid directly to organisations, instead parents received payments in order that they could commission their own provision of services, allowing flexibility with services tailored to a child's needs. There was a need to understand whether certain individuals were struggling to access that which was available to them and the director urged all Members to encourage any concerned parents to contact the service directly in order that any such instances could be investigated.

As a result of the concerns Members agreed to consider including a future item to the work programme, to be discussed at item 14.

#### CS/18/56. **Foster Carer Loans Scheme**

The Practice Manager, Fostering delivered a report and provided Members with an overview of the scheme, the aims and goals and the proposed initial central funding for carers and fosterers to adapt their properties in order to support additional children.

In light of the report Members discussed the following in summary: -

- That certain criteria would need to be met by those applying for funding along with an appropriate repayment schedule.
- Whether foster carers could take older teenagers or permanent placements once the original child/ren had moved on, therefore potentially delaying repayments. It was confirmed that this scenario had been taken into account when drawing up the business model.
- Affordability was a key factor in ensuring foster carers could repay loans, an appropriate insurance scheme was also in place to support any potential change in circumstances resulting in an inability to make repayments.
- The scheme could enable siblings to remain together also increasing the possibility of bringing together those siblings who had previously been separated, if appropriate.
- Whether the initial funding of £100k was considered enough to ensure the scheme's viability and longevity.
- The support of foster carers for the scheme.
- A need to consider those foster carers not living in private accommodation and how they could be supported to adapt their homes via the scheme.

- That a charge on the property would be applied in order to secure repayment in the event of a sale shortly after adaptations had been made.
- That repayments would be reinvested in future adaptations in order to support more foster families care for additional children.

**RECOMMENDED that the foster carers loan scheme be supported and that the Executive Member ensure flexibility within the budget in order to secure additional funding as necessary.**

CS/18/57. **Outcome of the Schools Funding Formula Consultation**

The Assistant Director, Education delivered a report which outlined changes to the national funding formula for schools, the associated impact of those changes locally and the outcome of a consultation with schools in light of the revised model. The Government had agreed a further year to allow a smooth transition to the new formula which would be fully implemented in 2021. There had been a low response rate to the consultation from schools, which was disappointing. However, all comments had been taken into account before reaching a final conclusion.

In light of the report Members discussed the following in summary: -

- In light of the low response rate whether all schools had received the relevant documentation. It was confirmed that they had, however the Schools Forum had not received the additional modelling they requested which had been an oversight.
- It was the responsibility of all head teachers to share the relevant documentation with the Chairs of Governors of their schools.
- There was a need to improve educational standards within Central Bedfordshire, reduce exclusions, ensure children were appropriately supported and learn from best practice in order to deliver the best outcomes.
- Concerns that the Schools Forum had not supported proposals to top-slice up to 0.5 percent of the schools block funding and transfer it to the high needs block and the associated financial risks to the Council as a result.
- Concerns that the national funding formula favoured a secondary school model and the possible negative impact on lower and middle schools once the formula was fully implemented, negatively affecting a positive educational start in life.
- Whether the new formula might affect the viability of small rural schools and a need to work far more closely with them in order to prevent closures.

**NOTED the report and the outcome of the consultation and;**

**RECOMMENDED that the Executive Member engage with the Secretary of State for Education in order to secure support for the transfer of 0.5 percent from the schools block funding to the high needs block and that the outcome of this be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.**

(Cllr Ryan left the meeting at 11.12am)

CS/18/58. **Home to Education Travel Assistance Policies**

The Assistant Director for Public Protection and Transport delivered a report which outlined a recent consultation and proposed changes to transport provision. The response indicated that service users were not favourable to change and so a project group had been formed in order to determine an acceptable provision for users of the service, taking into account the financial challenges to the Council. A new policy was being developed around the provision for young people aged 19-25 and was due to go out to consultation, with a request that the Committee provide their views on a new approach.

In light of the report Members discussed the following: -

- The recent increase in costs to concessionary passes, which was very high. In response Members were advised that the service was being charged at cost to the Council rather than the previously subsidised rate.
- The view that those who required help with costs should still receive it where necessary.
- Ultimately it was the responsibility of parents to ensure their children arrived safely at school, notwithstanding the statutory responsibilities of the local authority.
- The need to encourage those aged 19-25 to use Motability vehicles where they had been provided and reduce the demand for additional provision of transport
- That it was standard procedure to calculate walking routes 'as the crow flies'. Statutory government guidelines were used when calculating safe walking routes including those in rural areas.
- A need to consider the diverse area of Central Bedfordshire when planning schools for the future and any associated transport provision.

(Cllr Costin left the meeting at 11.33am)

**RECOMMENDED:-**

- 1. That the Committee acknowledge the outcomes of the home to school transport policies consultation.**
- 2. That the Committee welcome the policy review of the 19-25 year old provision for educational transport and that its implementation be as robust as was considered reasonable, taking into account the individual circumstances of young people using the service.**
- 3. That the Executive consider the use of the Council's fleet and transport provision, including that of the voluntary sector in order to support an effective service.**

CS/18/59. **Children's Centres Report**

The Head of Commissioning for Children's Services delivered a report which set out historic performance, how the service was measured against the Ofsted framework, the early years profile, school readiness and the level of children achieving the required standard of literacy and numeracy. The new model would relocate sites to specified localities with a broader agenda aligned with social care and health and education.

In light of the report Members discussed the following in summary: -

- The need for Children's Centres to align with the Children and Young People's Plan, specifically in relation to the first 1000 days of a child's life.
- That the health visitor agenda and the work of midwives supported the early days of a child's life, many of whom worked directly out of the children's centres. It was noted that the healthy child agenda was currently undergoing transition with the work of health visitors being far more clinic based in the future.
- The methods of supporting young children and identifying any emerging educational needs.
- A need for more clarity on the work supporting 5-year olds in order to support parents and carers make appropriate choices for their children.
- The need to ensure that the procurement process was not compromised in any way.
- A need for a consistent delivery of service and whether buildings needed to be adapted to meet the future needs of the service.
- The importance of a holistic approach, including the need to liaise with health colleagues and partners in order to meet the needs of children accessing the service.

(Cllr Gurney left the meeting at 11.47am)

(Co-optee David Morton left the meeting at 12.05pm which resulted in the Committee being inquorate. Members and the Director agreed to proceed with the remainder of the meeting and that all comments made by the Committee would be taken into account)

**NOTED the report and the positive work of children's centres to date and;**

**RECOMMENDED:-**

- 1. That a future report be delivered to the Committee following the conclusion of the procurement process.**
- 2. That a member briefing be delivered focussing on the work of children's centres in relation to journey of the child from pre-birth to 5 years.**

CS/18/60.

**Work Programme 2018/19 & Executive Forward Plan**

**AGREED the Committee Work Programme subject to the following amendments:-**

- **To consider moving the Domestic Abuse report from March to January 2019.**
- **To consider moving Validated Exam Results from March to January 2019.**
- **The outcome of a request to the Secretary of State for Education to secure support for the transfer of 0.5 percent to the High Needs Block (Date TBC)**
- **Children's Centres - That a future report be delivered to the Committee following the conclusion of the procurement process (Date TBC)**
- **Autism Bedfordshire – the commissioning of services and the impact on voluntary organisations and parents (Date TBC)**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.20 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....

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