

CREATING CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

Transition Task Force – Children, Families & Learning

NOTES OF MEETING HELD FRIDAY 6TH JUNE 2008 AT MID BEDS DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES

Attendance : Cllr. A Rayment – Chair
 Cllr N Costin
 Cllr. J. Murray
 Cllr. R. Younger
 Cllr. Mrs A. Lewis
 Cllr. Mrs J. Fairbairn
 Mr J Dean
 Ms P Coker
 Mr T Dessant
 Mr. S Fell – Harlington Upper School
 Mrs G Ellyard – Southcott Lower School
 Mr C Peters – Weatherfield Special School
 Mr P Wylie – Beds CC
 Ms H Redding – Beds
 Cllr Mrs R Drinkwater
 Mrs A. Eversden

Apologies : Cllr Mrs C Wyles

1.	<u>Notes of last Meeting</u>	ACTION
	The notes from the meeting held on 21 st May 2008 were agreed	
2.	<u>General LGR Update</u>	
	<p>a) JD advised the meeting that there had been a Simulation Exercise undertaken at Mid Beds earlier in the day. This workshop had been run by IDe&A to give Officers and Members an opportunity to consider some of the challenges facing the new authority. From this it became clear that there was a need to plan as if it were Central Bedfordshire and take decisions with that in mind. It also brought home the reality of working within a defined financial envelope.</p> <p>b) Given the scale of Children, Families and Learning, Central Bedfordshire have taken the decision to appoint an interim Director. JD had not been involved in the process but it was understood that the successful</p>	

applicant, would be taking up post on Tuesday 10th June 2008 and he would take forward the work for this service. JD informed the meeting that going forward, he would be stepping back from his lead role with the Children, Families and Learning services but did confirm that he would continue to lead on the forthcoming Head Teacher and Chair of Governors workshops that will be taking place during the first two weeks in July

- c) On 3rd June 2008, a meeting of the Officer Service Group for CF&L was held.. It was a very productive meeting and it was noted that the contribution from Beds County Council colleagues had been very positive and valuable.
- d) AR advised the meeting that he understood that the interim Director, Jan Didrichsen, is highly experienced and had previously held the position of Interim Director for Children's Services with both Lincolnshire County and Hull City Councils. Obviously the TTF will look to the Director to provide his experience in this area but wished it to be recorded that the on-going contribution from JD was still very much wanted by the TTF.

JM asked how it would be possible for the TTF to discuss and make recommendation issues when the financial implications are not known?

JD agreed that the need to have an understanding of the financial implications was one of the major factors that had come out from the simulation exercise earlier in the day and it had therefore been agreed that some indicative budgets for each service would be produced very shortly to allow the TTF's to start to work within a budget. To date, over and above the decision to disaggregate services, the decisions of the TTF so far recommended have had little or no financial implications. It is when we get into the detailed service design that the financial implications will have an impact.

AR stated that to date, the recommendations had been based on principle and what is best for the service. It is correct to say there are potential financial implications for every recommendation given by the TTF and decision taken by the Shadow Executive but, at this point, we are not in the position to make decisions on a financial basis and therefore we may well have to revisit some of the recommendations made so far on the basis of costs. As we work through the policies, the financial implications will become clearer.

There is a Shadow Executive meeting on Tuesday 10th June. From this it is anticipated there will be a decision taken on the senior officer structure and an agreement to go to market for

	<p>some of the senior appointments. Due to contractual issues with Tribal, the agency appointed to handle this recruitment, advertisements for these posts are unlikely to be released until week commencing 16th June.</p>	
<p>2.</p>	<p>SEN Review</p> <p>PW referred the meeting to the full SEN review document and the summary document, a copy of which each member of the TTF had received prior to the meeting. Beds CC had spent a large amount of time in producing the SEN review and giving consideration to the issues surrounding special schools. It was acknowledged that had County Council remained in existence, the review would have gone back to the Shadow Executive at the end of the year with various recommendations. The summary document tries to identify some of the areas that need to be developed going forward. It is acknowledged that close communication with parents regarding on-going decisions is imperative. The summary documents details six specific recommendations which the TTF were asked to consider.</p> <p>1. That the new councils endorse the concept of area special schools:</p> <p>The concept is to provide schools that can meet a range of special needs but currently the existing buildings, classroom size and facilities are not fit for purpose and we need to look at how to provide special schools that are fit for purpose going forward. The teaching staff and skills they provide are recognised as superb. It is important for special schools to feel that they are an important part of the community. At one of the recent head teacher workshops, comment was made in respect of pupils having to be sent all over the county to receive the appropriate support. It is understood that this is due, in part, to the specialist nature of the existing schools. The question was asked as to whether or not we are looking to build a number of new schools across the county that will cope with everyone's needs within their area or are we looking to build a bigger facility that could accommodate a large catchment area? RY referred to the main SEN review document, 4.2 – “children are placed in expensive places outside Bedfordshire”. There is a need to bring the children back into the area at a reduced cost and this concept provides us with a great opportunity. The out of county places could literally be anywhere within the country.</p> <p>Six new schools will provide the facilities that we need for the majority of those children who need support. Not included in this proposal are some young people with extremes of behaviour that need secure facilities. It would not be cost effective to try to be self-sufficient for all needs.</p>	

TD commented that from his experience, he felt this was a very good review.

CP stated that this was the first review that had been completed in six years and it has the agreement of all. It must also be acknowledged that for colocated schools, there are costs involved.

Agreed: there was full support for the concept of area special schools. CC colleagues are requested to take this forward. We would need an analysis for the potential collocation at the three existing sites. Having identified these, it would be helpful to know what impact there would be on the recovery of capital in selling on the old sites.

It was also acknowledged that the impact on reduced costs in transporting children throughout the county would have significant revenue savings.

The question of whether there is any special funding for special schools from government sources was asked. It was mentioned that there is a possibility of funding but over the last number of years, DSC have been decreasing the funding provision.

2. That the new councils support the review of the Funding Formula for the current special schools:

New special schools will need to be funded on a different basis to the current special schools. There is a short term problem with the existing funding formula which needs to be reviewed to free up money for redistribution across the special needs agenda. There is not time to address the formula for mainstream schools but existing schools are under pressure and cannot continue working within the current budget framework.

Beds CC are currently looking at the methods of funding used by other authorities. It was agreed that it would be useful to see a comparison with other authorities.

Some pupils with special needs are educated within main stream schools and the funding for this provision is from their budget. Similarly, funding is provided for children who are schooled outside the Borough.

The recommendation is to support the review of the funding formula for special needs schools.

3. That the new councils consider the future of Oak Bank School as a joint resource:

Oak Bank school had been in special measures for some time but this is no longer the case and it is now developing into a very good school, going from strength to strength. At the time of the SEN review there were insufficient pupil numbers within Bedfordshire to justify two schools of this nature in the county. There is an urgent need to develop provision for the 14 – 19 year olds and look at “hubs” in the north and south of the county to extend BESD support. The hubs would support pupils in gaining vocational qualifications to give them a better chance to move into meaningful employment. There needs to be a decision as to how to move this forward with Bedford Borough.

Oak Bank is a 60 place school and historically the places were split on a 50/50 basis between Central Bedfordshire and Borough. Currently however, there are more Central Bedfordshire pupils but this ratio is ever changing. It was acknowledged that the transportation costs to take pupils to and from the facility are very high. The question was raised of comparison costs between 2 facilities versus 1 facility plus transportation costs. This has been investigated and it was still more cost effective to have a single school with transport costs than to provide two schools. It was also acknowledged that the smaller the provision, the harder it is to recruit and retain staff.

There was a discussion on the question of increasing the school to around 90 plus place. It was generally felt that this could well prove to be too large and needed to be kept under review. The ideal size for this type of facility was around 50.

It was agreed that the proposals for Oak Bank were appropriate and that the current proposals should be progressed. Discussions will take place between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough regarding joint access.

4. That the new councils consider how they wish to support the proposals to develop services for pupils with literacy difficulties, including dyslexia.

Parents of children with literacy difficulties face the difficult that adequate support for them is not available across the whole county. The impact of this on families can be huge. The proposal is to look at the development of a pyramid facility in the Sandy/Biggleswade area which would help to extend the provision to this area of the county.

The TTF requested that the County Council continue with the work they are currently engaged in and refer back to the TTF

with costs for the proposal. County have confirmed they should be able to provide this fairly quickly.

Acknowledging the obvious cost implications, the TTF need to know if this is already included in the County's existing budget. It was confirmed that some of the costs are included in the budget but the capital will have to go into the capital budget this September if the facility is to proceed.

TTF agreed it was necessary to undertake a feasibility study on this provision.

There is a need to develop services for children with dyslexia. We need to make sure we narrow the gap and reduce literacy failure problems. This is a government priority. We need to look at developing, with head teachers, a protocol to identify measures to reduce literacy failure. This really impacts on raising achievements and it is accepted that there is potentially a high number of children involved.

County confirmed that had the unitary decision not happened, they would be working with the schools and special staff services to enable all schools to raise the standard of provision for pupils with literacy problems.

TTF agreed that it was necessary to progress this work and asked for further information to be provided by County.

5. The officers from the councils join the County Council SEN review Officer steering group to sustain the implementation of the review

It was unanimously agreed that this support would be forthcoming.

9. Next meeting

A further series of meetings were agreed as follows:

Monday 4th August – Mid Beds Offices from 5pm – 7 pm
Monday 18th August – South Beds Offices from 5pm – 7pm
Tuesday 9th September – Mid Beds Offices from 5pm – 7 pm
Wednesday 8th October – South Beds Offices from **4 pm – 6 pm**

It was also agreed to switch the locations for the meetings on 30th June and 15th July. Please therefore note:

Monday 30th June – Mid Beds Offices from 5 pm – 7 pm
Tuesday 15th July – South Beds offices from **4 pm – 6 pm**