

Central  
Bedfordshire  
Council  
Priory House  
Monks Walk  
Chicksands,  
Shefford SG17 5TQ



**TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE  
CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

26 June 2017

Dear Councillor

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – MONDAY, 3 JULY 2017**

Further to the agenda and papers for the above meeting, previously circulated, please find attached the following late reports:

**5. Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2016 - March 2017**

To consider a report by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) which provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Central Bedfordshire.

**6. Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017/18**

To consider the fostering recruitment target for 2017/18 including an overview of key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns.

**10. Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2017/18**

To consider the adoption recruitment target for 2017/18 including an overview of key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns.

Should you have any queries regarding the above please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Leslie Manning  
Committee Services Officer

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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

3rd July 2017

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**Report on Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report  
2016-17**

Report of Sue Harrison Director of Childrens Services  
([sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

Advising Officers: Gerard Jones Assistant Director Childrens Services  
Operations ([Gerard.jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Gerard.jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)) and Sharon Keenan,  
Practice Manager, Conference and Review Service

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**Purpose of this report**

To ensure that members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have the opportunity to review and scrutinise the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report, and fulfil their statutory responsibility in accordance with the 'IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children'.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Executive or Committee is asked to:

1. That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the content of the report.

**Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations**

Not required.

**Issues**

Background

1. 'The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children' states that 'the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel'.

2. This report provides an opportunity to report on the activity of Children's Services in relation to Looked After Children, highlight areas of good practice and identify areas which require improvement. In addition the report describes the range of work the service has engaged in during the year and areas for development, which will be prioritised in the coming year.

#### Qualitative Information about the Service

1. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
2. There were 872 reviews held in respect of 414 children during the year from April 2016 to March 2017. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances which might require an additional review to be held.

#### Qualitative Information about the IRO service

The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews.

#### Conduct of the service

The Service has focussed on the quality of care planning and provided challenge and scrutiny to operational practitioners and managers when gaps in relation to timely and appropriate plans for children have been identified.

#### Conclusions and Next Steps

The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children's Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

#### **Options for consideration if appropriate**

None required.

#### **Reason/s for decision**

Not applicable

#### **Reason for urgency**

Not applicable

### **Council Priorities**

Medium Term Plan for Central Bedfordshire – the key priorities which relate to the report are:

*Promoting health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable*  
*Improved educational attainment*

The Children and Young People's Plan 2015/2017

Priority 1: Helping children and young people achieve more

Priority 2 Protecting children and keeping them safe

Provision of an independent reviewing service to scrutinise care planning for Looked After Children is a statutory responsibility of the Council. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are employed to review care planning arrangements for individual children in order to secure the best outcomes for those children

### **Corporate Implications**

#### Legal Implications

Regulation and statutory guidance detail the requirement to report on the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children.

#### Financial and Risk Implications

The Conference and Review Service is part of the wider Professional Standards Service within Children's Services Operations. The service is responsible for the coordination and chairing of reviews for Looked After Children and Child Protection Conferences. The Quality Assurance Service has an annual budget of £1M.

The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to keep under review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook

#### Risk Management

Breach of Regulatory and statutory guidance by non provision of a service by which the care plans of Looked After Children are reviewed and reputational risks by virtue of non production of an Annual Report in line with statutory guidance.

### **Equalities Implications**

Adherence to Human Rights and Equality issues are maintained.

### **Implications for Work Programming**

Not Applicable

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children's Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2016/17

### **Background Papers**

None

Central Bedfordshire Council  
[www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

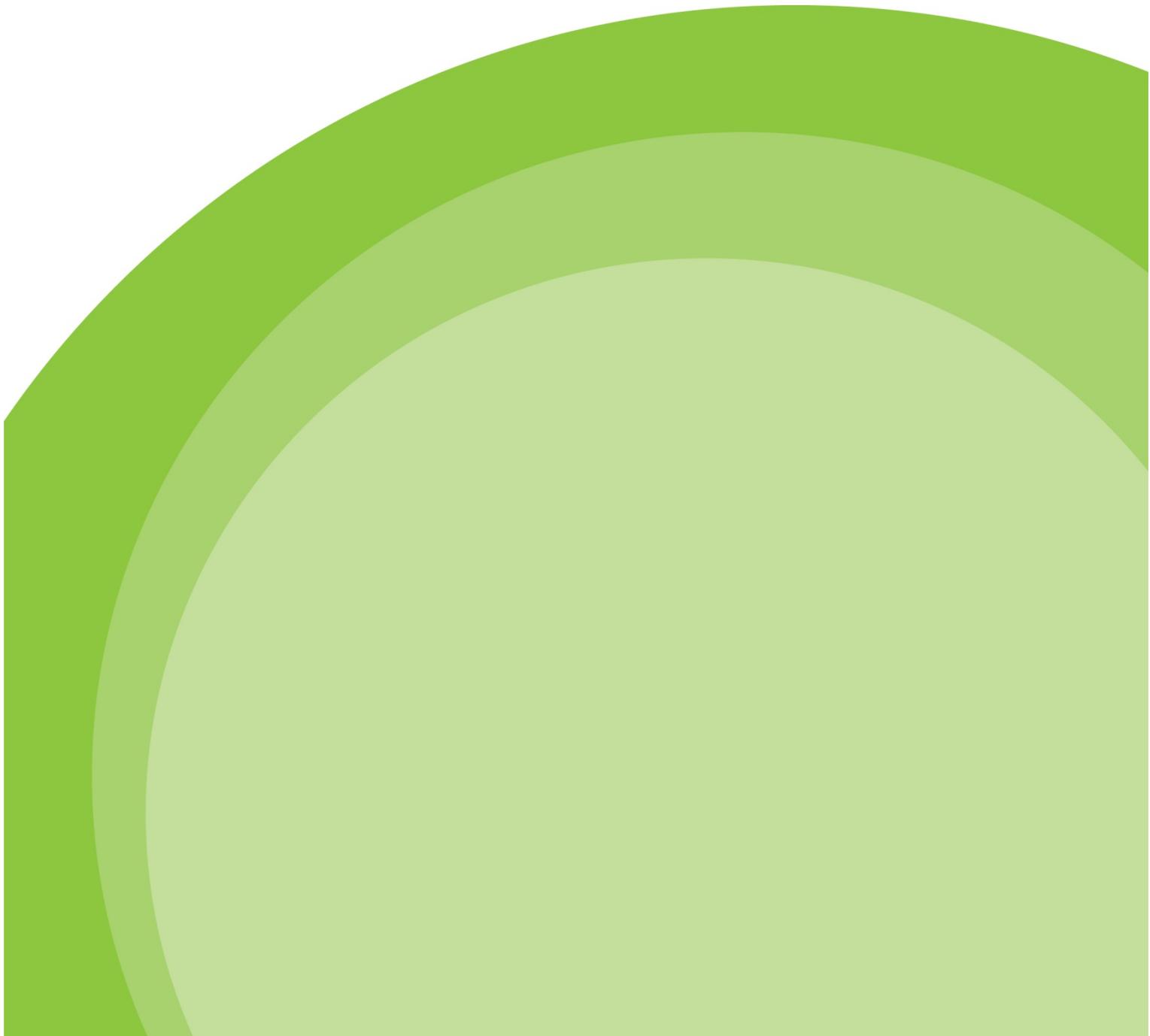
Quality Assurance  
Children Services Operations

Appendix A



# **Independent Reviewing Officers’ Annual Report April 2016 – March 2017**

The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality  
Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care



## 1.0 Purpose of Service

- 1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) role is set out in statutory guidance 2011 The IRO Handbook. The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The responsibility of the IRO has widened from just the review process to an overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews, challenging drift and delay.
- 1.2 In the National Children's Bureau, research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014), the foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson makes the following comment:

*'The independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO Service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment or whether we are failing.'*

This Annual IRO Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Central Bedfordshire.

### 1.3 Summary of Key Points:

- A total of 872 reviews were held this year a slight decrease from 899 last year.
- Timeliness and participation continues to be good.
- An almost 100% permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children (0.5 IRO post was covered by an agency worker for 6 months).
- IRO caseloads are within statutory guidance.
- The quality assurance system, including the dispute resolution process is fully embedded and evidences an improvement in the provision of services to children and young people.
- Impact of the IRO service is illustrated through case examples.
- IROs have responded to the views of young people, captured in the work with the Child in Care Council.

## 2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers' function is undertaken by IROs in the Conference and Review Service (CRS) within the Professional Standards function of Children's Services. IROs undertake two main areas of work: Chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children's Reviews. In addition, a small number of short break reviews when provided under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are chaired by an IRO. One worker undertakes the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role in combination with the review manager role. The Fostering Review Officer is a member of this Service and has responsibility to conduct annual and additional reviews of Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers, as required in accordance with statutory requirements.
- 2.2 In April 2016, the permanent appointment to the post of Head of Professionals Standards started. This strategic leadership and oversight has provided an opportunity for the Service to promote and support continuous scrutiny, implementation and monitoring of quality standards at all levels within the organisation.

In March 2016 the Service had an establishment of 7.2 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) permanent, excluding the LADO function. In August, one member was successfully recruited to join a national inspection team and this subsequent vacancy was filled by an agency worker who had previous experience of working in this team. It is anticipated that at the time of publication this post will be permanently recruited too. This level of stability, knowledge and experience over the past year has provided a good continuity to our children.

- 2.3 In terms of diversity the team has a good gender balance reflecting the looked after children population. Workers come from a range of backgrounds but do not fully reflect the ethnic mix of the population. Ideally the workforce would reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children population it is serving, but within a small group, a wide representation has not been achievable. Within the social work teams there is a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented.
- 2.4 All IROs have, as required in statutory guidance, a considerable number of year's experience. IRO's previous roles include front line social work with Children with Disabilities, Looked after Children and Child Protection, supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience, fostering experience and previous work as Children's Guardians. The majority of the team live locally or in neighbouring authorities, and there is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.
- 2.5 All of the IROs undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO Service or as part of their wider role. These include:
- Bi-monthly Quality Assurance (QA) Liaison meetings with social work teams as part of the QA strategy.
  - Attendance at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings as the Children's Services representative.
  - Supervision of the Parent Partnership Service which sits within CRS as an off-line management role.
  - Participation in rolling monthly audit programme.
  - Attendance at Mosaic practitioner group.
  - Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS.
  - Supervision of the foster care Review Officer.
  - Linking with the Children in Care Council (CICC).

### **3.0 Arrangement for Reviews**

- 3.1 The Social Worker and IRO share responsibility for the review.
- 3.2 The IRO Handbook sets the expectation that children and young people are included in an age appropriate way in deciding on the arrangement for the review which is their review.
- 3.3 The CRS is responsible for the following elements of the LAC Review:
- Deciding who needs to attend the LAC review
  - Where the review should be held
  - Arranging the invitations and consultations
  - Providing reports

- Recording the discussion
- Ensuring timely distribution of the review record
- Involving co-ordination between Social Worker, and administrative staff

Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of Mosaic, the children's case management and recording system.

- 3.4 The IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic support team have successfully implemented new processes to simplify and streamline the procedure, improve the timeliness, and focus on the quality of the recording, ensuring IROs and Social Workers each take responsibility for their part of the process. This has further enhanced the achievements already completed in the timeliness of social work reports for reviews and in review recording and distribution.
- 3.5 The IRO Service has additionally worked with the Participation Officer and the CICC to consult with young people on making the reviews more child friendly. This work is ongoing.

#### **4.0 Qualitative Information about the IRO Service**

##### **4.1 The Timeliness of Reviews**

- 4.2 This figure relates to the rolling year with definition from Department for Education, Children looked after return, '*of those children who had been looked after for at least 20 working days, the percentage whose Reviews had all been on time over the past year*'. This indicator excludes children placed for adoption.

99.5% of LAC reviews were completed on time which is 868 reviews out of a total of 872.

- 4.3 Of these four, three were overdue by one day and it was considered acceptable for continuity of service provision to the child and family as the IRO was off sick. The one other occasion was due to an administrative oversight and booking the review late and remedial action has been taken to ensure that the system flags this at the point of booking reduce the risk of this happening again.
- 4.2 The timing of reviews is specified in regulation. The first review has to be held within 20 working days of the child/young person becoming looked after and the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews are at intervals of no more than 6 months. In addition, reviews will be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or change of care plan.

#### **5.0 Children's Participation**

- 5.1 The IRO Handbook states that it is expected that the child, if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding, will be present for the whole of the Review but this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The IRO may decide, in consultation with the Social Worker that attendance of the child is not in the child's best interests. If the child does not attend, other arrangements should be made for their involvement. It is one of the specific responsibilities of the IRO to promote the voice of the child and to ensure their wishes and feelings are represented. It may be appropriate for a younger child to be observed or for the IRO to interact with that child through play or reading in a placement

setting. If the child's first language is not English, as for example with the unaccompanied asylum seeking children, an interpreter will be provided. A child with disabilities may perhaps be observed in school or placement and their needs and feelings discussed with their carers if a direct conversation is not possible.

- 5.2 The Review Record will include information on how the child participates and how their wishes and feelings were included. Participation is monitored by recording a participation code. Children aged under 4 are exempt from this count but IRO's ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways, such as direct observation and obtaining views from professionals that work with the children. For all other children, it is expected that they should attend or that their views should be represented.
- 5.3 Participation is considered an important performance indicator. This year, 96.6% of young people participated in their most recent review. Children and young people are also actively supported and encouraged to 'chair' their reviews.

*C is 13 and has been looked after for four years along with his brother and sister. He was subject to a Child Protection Plan and then became looked after under section 20 before a full care order was granted and is now placed with his sister with a carer locally. He has faced a number of challenges and is supported by his Foster Carer, Social Worker and specialist support to which he has responded very well.*

*He continues to achieve in his education and is supported to attend after school activities and recently attended the University of Bedfordshire Access Partnership to raise aspirations of Looked After Children.*

*He has worked with his Social Worker to complete his life story and enjoyed this activity and produced a book that he is very proud of. He has also developed a very positive working relationship with his IRO who joined him at the summer activities and consultation events arranged by the CiCC. At his most recent LAC review he was supported by the IRO and co-chaired this meeting and made sure that everyone contributed to his meeting.*

- 5.4 A total of 10 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, 7 of which were missing at the time of the review. One young person was in custody, however gave his views to the IRO prior to the meeting. One was sectioned because of mental health difficulties and one did not attend as she is young for her age so it was decided that it is best she didn't attend as the meeting would be too much for her.
- 5.5 **Work with the Child in Care Council**
- 5.6 IROs value and promote the work of the CiCC and send referrals of young people who would like to be part of the CiCC. Following the success of IROs attending activity days with children and young people, their feedback was that they enjoyed meeting the IRO and spending time with them in an informal and relaxed setting. This has become an annual event. This year was as successful and the IROs attended these days arranged by the CiCC, including 'Gulliver's Land', 'Bounce' and horse riding.

5.7 Consultation booklets are sent out to all young people before their Looked After Children's Review. The booklets were designed by our CiCC and encourage young people to give their views before the meeting about their life and being in care which is then discussed in the meeting. Some young people use the spaces to draw pictures to give their views. This feedback was evaluated and key themes were identified.

- The majority of children and young people (94%) said that they were happy with the current arrangements and where they lived. The changes that they identified included the placement being closer to home, small changes in the house or a change of the routine.
- They said that they liked school especially meeting friends, the teachers and the subjects and if they could change anything a small number said the subjects, the rules and some of the pupils.
- They all felt that they were healthy and the majority said that they has attended their health appointment and would know who to contact if they were unwell.
- 78% of children and young people said that they were happy with how often they saw their Social Worker and some of these said that they saw them too often.
- The children and young people said that in their spare time they liked at to see their friend, do activities of watch TV of play computer games.
- The most significant area of concern identified is that 73% children and young people said that they were not happy with the contact arrangements with their family. When asked they said that were not happy with the venue, would like more contact with those they currently saw, or different people.
- When asked about if they would like an advocate or independent visitor 30% said yes.



5.8 This key themes identified have been reviewed on individually and as an organisation. In April 2017, the Advocacy Service became part of Central Bedfordshire and is offered by professionals who are independent of the organisation to provide a service that 'reaches out' to all children and young people and ensure that they are appointed an advocate is identified as and when they need.

5.9 One of our CiCC Ambassadors was invited to a meeting with the IROs to discuss the use of a new way to organise the Looked After Children's Reviews. She gave her view on what reviews were like for her and how she thinks that they have improved and gave feedback on the information presented. This pioneering work is to be developed as part of our action plan.

5.10 To improve the range of options available to children and young people to support and encourage them to share their views the MOMO app (Mind of My Own) has been purchased. The MOMO app gives children and young people an instant and convenient way to express their views, wishes and feelings, and Social Workers a smart way to record them. This app will be used for all children and young people, including those who are Looked After and will be an alternative consultation form for Looked After Reviews.

### 5.11 Feedback from Young People

5.12 During the recent consultation events and the Peer Review, members of the CiCC spoke about their IROs and the support they have received from them.

5.13 Young people said they have a good relationship with their IRO and that their IRO know them well and made comments like:

*I really liked seeing my IRO at Gulliver's, I was having some difficulties and was able to speak to her about it and she reassured me.*

*My IRO has really helped with sorting things out for me. I have their phone number and can contact them myself.*

*It used be that an IRO would attend a meeting and I would only see them twice a year. Now I feel that it has changed and my meetings are quite different.*

*I feel happier to talk to my IRO and say what I really thing about things, he came on an ice skating trip and we were able to see him outside of a meeting which helped us to get to know him.*

5.14 Our CiCC Ambassadors report that they think the service is very different from when they were looked after and had review meetings. They see that IROs attend activities and make time to meet with their young people and are really interested in what the young people are doing and what they are achieving. Ambassadors stated that although they don't have meetings anymore '*they sound a lot more young person focused and encourage the young people during activities to work with their IRO and make sure that their voice is heard*'.

### 6.0 Parental Participation

6.1 The IRO Handbook advises that the IRO should seek the views of birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility and other significant persons in the child's life, for example extended family members.

- 6.2 Parent's active participation is achieved through attendance, completion of a consultation booklet, representation via an advocate or Social Worker, in writing or consultation by phone or in person with the IRO separately from the review meeting. Consultation booklets are sent out by CRS to all parents whose whereabouts are known unless the IRO advises there are inappropriate circumstances.
- 6.3 Overall 74% (647/872) of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending 30% (264/872) or contributing to the review process. There is a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 70% (617/872) of reviews, fathers for 45% (395/872). For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage 9% (25/265) of cases both parents have died.
- 6.4 There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 11% (102/872) of mothers and 22% (199/872) of fathers. In some cases parents are invited but do not attend 13% (118/872) mothers, 12% fathers (110/872). If they do not choose to attend or to complete the consultation leaflet they can still contribute their views if they wish to do so but a proportion do not choose to take up the opportunity.

## 7.0 Service User Feedback

- 7.1 IROs will respond promptly and informally to questions and queries arising from young people, their parents and carers. This process of engagement resulted in every concern raised being resolved through an informal discussion and exploration of the matter and consequently no complaints were received.

Positive feedback is often verbal and hard to capture, however this is an example:

A young girl of 11, AB, who had suffered a traumatic childhood and consequently has been Looked After for 3 years. She bravely told her Social Worker and IRO that she didn't want contact with her mummy as this made her feel anxious. Her mother is described as very unpredictable and overbearing, so this was a very brave and insightful conversation from an 11 year old. The IRO suggested the her mummy could be video messaged to tell her she was Okay. It was thought that this was far less threatening and manageable. This would enable AB to be in control and redo the video message or change her mind at any point. They had a little practice and then she was able to say a '*hi, I'm fine*'. Afterwards AB stated '*I feel as if a weight has lifted off my shoulders, thank you \*\*\*\**'.

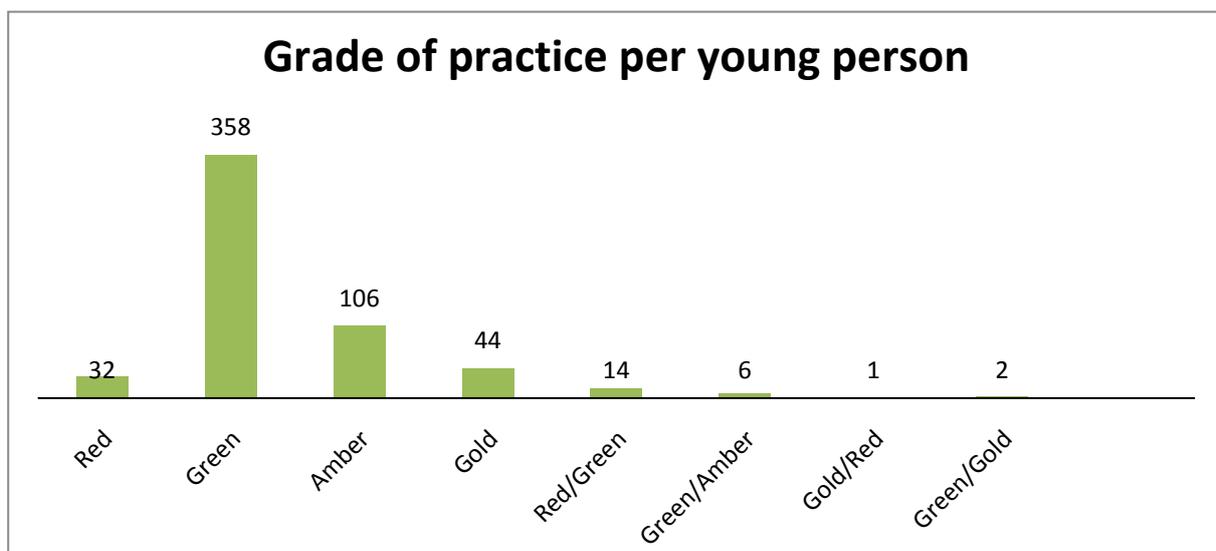
Mother was delighted to see her child and was reassured that this was her daughter's decision and not some ulterior motive from Social Care.

## 8.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review

- 8.1 Conference and Review (CRS) sit within Professional Standards and the quality assurance role is central to the IROs' responsibilities. The IRO is responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority, including effective challenge of poor

practice, and has a crucial role in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for all the children it looks after.

- 8.2 The IRO completes two monitoring forms after each LAC Review. One of these sits within the Mosaic review episode and records information about the arrangements, who has been consulted, participation by parents and children, completion of required documentation, Health Assessment, Personal Education Plan and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. In addition a word form gives qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children’s participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.
- 8.3 The relevant Team Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice includes good practice as well as any areas of concern. The qualitative feedback is rated focusing on the care the child has received and challenging any concerns in respect of the social work practice or wider service provision. The Team Manager will share with the Social Worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed, ensure these are completed.
- 8.4 Conference and Review hold bi-monthly Quality Assurance Meetings with each of the fieldwork teams. A Fostering Manager also attends which helps to pick up any concerns within placement. A summary report is provided by CRS which is also circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual Social Worker and Team Manager and an overview is given to Heads of Service.
- 8.5 Examples of good practice are highlighted in the Quality Assurance Liaison Meetings and recorded in the Minutes.
- 8.6 For the period of 2016, a total of 27 meetings took place in the key areas of Children’s Services whom Looked After Children are allocated to and a total of 584 children were discussed. Of these 571 children, the rating awarded in relation to the quality of social work practice, wider service provision and the outcomes for the young person was:



- 8.7 The grading of practice is consistently high as shown above. Of the 584 children's Looked After Reviews, 44 have been graded as gold, that is outstanding practice, 358 children as green, that is good practice 106 as amber and 32 as red. There are 23 young people whose grading has been separated to reflect the quality of the social work practice and the assessed outcome for the young person.
- 8.8 The identified themes in relation to areas of improvement have been addressed in a variety of ways, including lunch and learn sessions, focusing on 'direct work with children', 'how to write SMART care plans', the quality of assessments regarding 'pre-birth assessments' and 'engaging with fathers'. The implementation and impact on practice relating to these identified themes will be subject to further audit to measure the impact of this learning and the outcomes to children and young people.

## **9.0 Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Case**

### **Procedures for Resolution of Concerns**

- 9.1 The Central Bedfordshire Conference and Review Service focuses on immediate problem solving with Social Workers and Team Managers whenever possible and will always begin to address issues in a constructive co-operative and child-centered manner. Central Bedfordshire already has in place a Quality Assurance Process described above through which most concerns will continue to be raised and resolved.
- 9.2 However the IRO Handbook strengthens the role of the IRO and requires the Authority to have a formal Disputes Resolution Policy.
- 9.3 In the Guidance, the IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority's performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person's case. So the IRO should identify poor practice and must negotiate with the Local Authority's managers up to the highest level. Referral to CAFCASS will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way. The IRO Service has implemented the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice Protocol for Public Law Work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about matters of critical importance to the child's safety, wellbeing and permanency needs. An IRO comment on final care plans is now fully embedded and IROs have contributed to timely care planning and case progression by appropriate challenge to any identified delay.
- 9.4 If an IRO considers that a matter involves a breach of a child's human rights, the matter should immediately be raised as a formal dispute.
- 9.5 Most other concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance Process. The rating system in place ensures that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Cases rated amber or red are tracked through the Liaison Meetings until resolved or escalated into formal dispute, if appropriate, again until resolved.
- 9.6 A failure to respond or a failure to resolve a concern through the Quality Assurance Process will lead to a formal dispute being raised in accordance with the Dispute Resolution Procedure.

9.7 The number of concerns has decreased this last year reflecting the improvements in the quality of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Team. Most concerns identified continue to be raised and resolved through our Quality Assurance process. Areas of concern that have been identified via the Dispute Resolution process have included the following issues:

- the contact arrangements for a young person,
- the plan, quality or timeliness of the young persons care plan,
- delayed implementation of additional services.

Case examples of the impact of the IRO input are given at the end of the report.

- A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service,
- the Assistant Director and, Director have been consulted on one occasion,
- independent Legal Advice or a referral to CAFCASS has not been required.

9.8 Most escalations have been resolved as the Head of Corporate Parenting chaired complex case discussions enabling a thorough exploration of the concerns and options and contributing positively to an agreed resolution.

## **10.0 Any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service for Looked after Children**

10.1 CRS are appropriately resourced to deliver an effective IRO Service. Throughout the year there have been occasional pressure points when the numbers of children and young people who are looked after has risen and subsequently the numbers of reviews required. This is closely monitored and the IRO's caseloads are in line with national guidance.

10.2 The Corporate Parenting Service continues to be fully staffed with permanent employees which assists to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.

10.3 A key focus of issues that affect young people is placement choice and placement stability. During this last year the targets set within the Corporate Parenting Team have been met and exceeded.

## **11.0 Additional updates regarding the progress of Action Plan 2015-2016**

11.1 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of permanence of children and young people in long term foster placements. Various strategies have been implemented to address this.

- The IRO Service is represented at a weekly multi-agency meeting that reviews all children and young people requiring additional services and resources. This meeting provides senior management oversight in relation to practice, decision making and consistency that resources are evenly and fairly provided. The IRO representation provides independent input and robust challenge.
- The IRO Service attends a bi monthly Permanency Tracking meeting as part of the strategy to prevent placement breakdown and ensure permanence is secured for young

people in a timely manner by effective care planning and case progression using appropriate challenge to any identified delay.

- A pathway and relevant policy has been implemented to formally agree children and young people the placements for children and young people in long term foster placements who are over the age of 13 and 'friends and family placements'. This promotes a child friendly approach, as the children are encouraged to attend the meetings were these decisions are endorsed and thus minimise any future delay or anxiety about where they are living.
- 11.4 CRS have extended the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO, for occasions when long term placements breakdown to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more.
- 11.5 The CRS leads a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Meeting with the Corporate Parenting Team. The practice, progress and outcomes of individual and all children and young people is reviewed and identified areas of development, learning and improvement are identified for the organisation and actioned as required. It has recently been agreed that this will form part of a quarterly report to be presented to Senior Managers

**Identifying placement's that are not supporting children and supporting their move**

*NK was placed on an interim Care Order in a placement that did not meet her needs. This was a 12 years old child who had suffered chronic neglect; sadly the placement was not to the standard of cleanliness and repair as the IRO wished or expected, and a view echoed by the Social Worker. The IRO contacted the Team Manager and fostering service to support the move to an appropriate placement where the young person has flourished.*

- 11.2 IRO's continue to undertake additional learning and development. Following the identification of a national gap of post qualifying training two IRO's successfully completed a bespoke Post Qualifying course hosted by the University of Birmingham and were awarded 20 MA (Master of Arts) credits. Two other members of the team are currently completing Post Qualifying courses at the University of Bedfordshire.
- 11.3 The IRO Service have maintained, strengthened and developed partnership working with colleagues in CBC and in partner organisations. Managers in other service areas have been invited to our team meetings to inform and develop practice and improvements. CRS works closely with the Virtual School and IROs ensure oversight of Personal Education Plans and the use of the Pupil Premium, and escalate any concerns. A representative from CRS attends the monthly legal issues meeting.

The Head of Service for Virtual School & Vulnerable Learners, complimented the IRO's and their focus on all aspects of a child's needs. It is recognised that when a Looked After Child moves from their current placement this may affect the young persons education and their ability to remain at the same school or resource. *'The IROs are very supportive and try to either maintain the current provision, or address these challenges and ensure that continuity of their education placement is highlighted and action is taken to resolve any issues that would affect this important part of the child's life'*.

- 11.4 A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has been in post since early 2016 and this has proved to be an asset within the organisation. The Review Officer periodically attends CRS team meetings and this has provided a closer working relationship with all IRO's and the joint views regarding quality of placement. IROs routinely provide the Review Officer a copy of the monitoring form, which includes their views on the quality of care provided by the CBC foster carer for the child and young person reviewed.
- 11.6 The improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the commissioning team have continued. The revised monitoring form includes feedback on Commissioned Services, including placements, The Children's society, CAMHS provision and other specialist services. Both the Commissioning Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager from Commissioning continue to attend CRS Team Meetings to ensure ongoing communication to improve services and outcomes for children. IROs provide commissioning a copy of the monitoring form, including comment on the services provided and the Quality Assurance Officer provides a quality assurance report to the IRO for each placement caring for a young person.
- 11.7 CRS have continued to develop their own learning and knowledge about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and 'Missing' children, ensuring that within the reviewing process, the risks and links in relation to these concerns are appropriately considered, identified and responded to. Both the CSE lead and coordinator of team that complete 'Return Home Interviews' have attended CRS team meetings to ensure that the local knowledge and any learning is disseminated to IRO's and as a result, the risk of CSE is considered at every young persons review. A copy of the Return Home Interview is routinely shared with the allocated IRO.
- 11.8 The IRO Service has developed practice in respect of monitoring and tracking between reviews. This is needs based rather than timetabled so the level of oversight and progress chasing will be dependent on the child's circumstances. All IRO activity in respect of the child is recorded on the child's record and following a successful trial of the use of mobile technology within CRS is available to all IRO's. The use of mobile technology provides a more accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of Skype and facetime and provide a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.

11.9 The Participation Officer has recently moved to Professional Standards and has attended IRO team meetings to ensure that we continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care. An IRO is now a member of the Corporate Parenting Board to offer an independent overview of the needs of young people whom are looked after.

## 12.0 Annual Work Programme for Next Year – detailed action plan in appendix

- Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance.
- Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process.
- Review the Looked After Child Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engage with young people in a meaningful way.
- Continue to develop the work with the CICC.
- Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs.

### **IRO Impact – Case examples**

These case examples illustrate the impact of the IRO Service, representing the voice of the child and challenging the Local Authority when the care it is delivering is not as good as it could be. In some cases the matter was resolved through the formal Dispute Resolution Process, in others the IRO was able to influence a positive outcome working collaboratively with colleagues. The names are not used in these examples.

#### **Case 1. Engaging children with disabilities with their families**

KC has a diagnosis of autism and significant, complex learning needs; she is none verbal but mobile. KC has been Looked After for 8 years; her parents are very committed to her and see her weekly. KC has torn up and eaten the photographs displayed in her bedroom but loves to see photographs of her parents. The IRO suggested the family got a photograph of themselves printed onto a pillow for KC's room. This has been a huge hit, as KC loves it and her parents were delighted that KC was able to 'see them' every day.

#### **Case 2. Trying to engage children with challenges**

The IRO tried to engage a child who was Looked After and had significant mental health issues but refused to speak to the IRO. To try and resolve this and support the young person and gain her views, the IRO made a short video of herself on her iPad, introducing herself and briefly explaining the role of the IRO. The young person told her nurse that she was *'impressed by the IRO trying to communicate with her'* and subsequently spoke to the IRO about herself and her wishes and feelings.

#### **Case 3. Challenging delay in providing for a young persons needs**

JJ aged 14 was placed with out of authority foster carers in June 2016 and at the subsequent LAC review, steps were agreed to access a local school placement. Despite the work of her Social Worker and the Head of the Virtual School it was apparent that the host Local Authority had not identified a school placement. The IRO, young person, her mother and the review members becomingly increasingly concerned about the delay and that a school place was not identified in a timely way.

The IRO escalated this concern and delay of a school place being made available as required. Ultimately, this escalation resulted in a case discussion with the Director,

Assistant Director and Head of the Virtual School. At this meeting the Director agreed that the time delay (of the host authority) was unacceptable and agreed funding to secure an alternative school placement. The IRO conveyed this to the young person and foster carers and the young person started school and has settled in extremely well, is very happy and enjoying attending school.

#### **Case 4. Engaging with family members**

LG aged 15 was placed in a residential placement outside of CBC. Prior to his LAC Review he asked the IRO for his level of contact with his family in CBC to be increased. At the LAC review the IRO recommended a change to the contact plan and subsequently met with Social Worker, Team Manager and the Head of Service soon after and the proposed level of contact was agreed. The IRO ensured that this was promptly conveyed to the young person and agreed change of arrangements commenced within a week. The young person was very happy with this outcome.

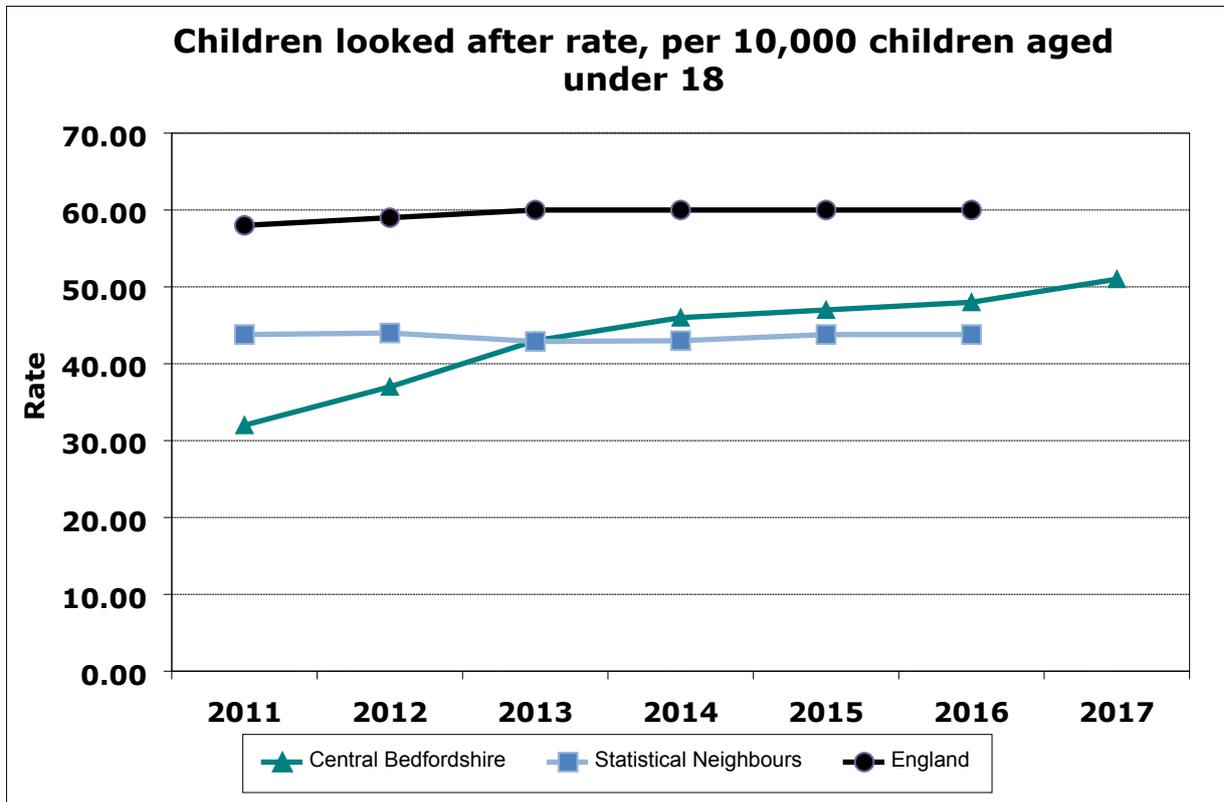
Sharon Keenan  
Practice Manager  
Conference and Review Service

**Appendix A**

**Quantitative Information about the IRO Service**

A total of 414 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2017.

A total of 872 reviews were held in the year.



**Notes**

- (i) The Looked After Children population for the past seven years is shown above. This is shown as a “Rate per 10,000” to enable comparison with other areas. The year end figure for Central Bedfordshire is currently reported as 303, up from 285 in March 2016. National, regional and statistical neighbour rates are also shown above. Of this total 15.2%, that is 46 of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this compares to our statistical neighbours at 6.1% and national figure of 6.0% (2015-2016).
- (ii) The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. In CBC the IROs undertake both the IRO and conference chair roles. Calculated on per child basis, caseloads at 28/03/16 average 65, a decrease of 8 since last year. This figure has varied over the year and there are variations between workers. The size of caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO. The number of other responsibilities, the number of out of county placements, large family groups and complex case needs will also impact on the work load. Staffing and CP/ LAC numbers have remained reasonably stable over the past year, which would suggest that staffing level are appropriate at present, although nearing the recommended capacity.

**Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as of: 31/03/17)**

Total 303

**Ethnicity**

	<b>White</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other</b>
CBC Local School Population	88%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
<b>CBC Children Looked After 31/03/17</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>10%</b>
National Children Looked After 31/03/16	75%	9%	4%	7%	3%

**Age**

<b>Age at 31 March 2016</b>					
	<b>BOYS</b>	<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>Total CBC</b>	<b>% CBC</b>	<b>National 31/03/15</b>
Under 1	7	3	10	3%	5%
1-4	16	20	36	12%	13%
5-9	42	32	74	24%	20%
10-15	50	49	99	33%	39%
16-17	63	21	84	28%	23%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	0	0	0		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	100%
CBC %	59%	41%			
31/03/16 National %	56%	44%			

## Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2016			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Care Orders Interim	29	10%	13%
Care Orders Full	180	59%	52%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	75	25%	27%
Placement Order	14	5%	8%
Sentenced to <i>CYPA 1969</i> Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	0	0%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	5	2%	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	0	0%	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Placement

Placement at 31 March 2016			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	29	10%	74%
Placement with other Foster Carer	182	60%	
Secure Unit	1	8%	11%
Homes and Hostels	22		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	1	0%	1%
Other Residential Settings	0	0%	1%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	6	2%	4%
Placed with Own Parents	13	4%	5%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	40	13%	4%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0%	-
Other Placement	9	3%	-
	0	0%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Action Plan 2016-2017

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities.</li> </ol>	<p>June 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	Implementation of statutory guidance.
Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attend the MOMO training session.</li> <li>2. Ensure that all Looked After Children's views are represented in the LAC review in the most appropriate way for the individual young person, for example on their own, using the consultation document such as MOMO.</li> <li>3. Identified IRO to lead on this and share progress and actions into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<p>July 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	The Voice of the Child is evidenced in all meetings and contributes to the recommendations regarding future care planning. IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.
Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the current LAC review format and explore alternative practice.</li> <li>2. Create and implement an action plan to introduce a new format of the LAC reviews.</li> </ol>	<p>July 2016</p> <p>November 2016</p>	The LAC review is child centered and the voice and participation underpins the review.
Continue the development work with the CICC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Timetable annual consultation events</li> <li>2. Identified IRO to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<p>September 2016</p> <p>Twice Yearly</p>	IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.
Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For identified high risk cases, for example CSE IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the Social Worker and young person.</li> <li>2. IRO's to attend multi agency care planning meetings when children/young</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.

	<p><b>people going through a significant transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>3. Embed the use of the Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes.</b></li><li><b>4. A quarterly report reporting quality of practice and identifying themes from Quality Assurance Meeting to be presented to Senior Management Team.</b></li></ul>	<p><b>September 2017</b></p> <p><b>July 2016</b></p>	
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**Central Bedfordshire Council**

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

Monday, 3 July 2017

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**Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017-18**

Report of: Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

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**Purpose of this report**

1. This Recruitment and Retention Strategy outlines the target for 2017 – 2018, our current need and the successes and learning we have found through our analysis of the last financial year's activities. It gives an overview of our key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns we will be undertaking for the next financial year (April 2017 to March 2018).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider, comment and agree Appendix A - Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2018.

**Issues**

2. Please refer to Appendix A - Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2018.

**Council Priorities**

3. Improving education and skills; protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing.

**Corporate Implications**

4. Legal, financial and equalities implications were requested and are included in the report.

**Legal Implications**

5. None.

**Financial and Risk Implications**

6. The Recruitment and Retention budget sits within the Fostering budget. This information can be found in the fostering quarter reports.

### **Equalities Implications**

7. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council endeavours to meet these requirements by:
- Ensuring that a wide range of approaches to publicity are used in order to recruit a diverse range of foster carers.
  - Identifying the diverse needs of local children and building this into the matching process
  - Providing training and ongoing support.

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

8. The Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy consists of:
- a) Developments within the service
  - b) Needs analysis and evaluation
  - c) Target and current need for 2017 – 2018
  - d) Recommended marketing and recruitment plan for 2017 – 2018
  - e) Retention and support plan.

If approved it will shape the monthly working plan for the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer to recruit and retain foster carers for the Corporate Parenting Service in Central Bedfordshire Council.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017-18

### **Background Papers**

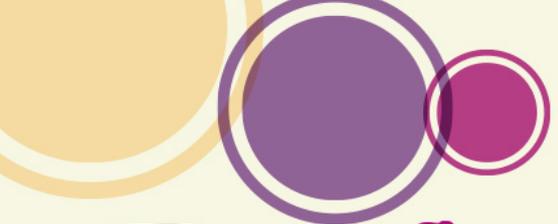
None

Report author(s):

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Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer

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Do something incredible today!

Appendix A



# Recruitment and retention strategy

Fostering Service

1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

**A great place to live and work.**



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## **1. Introduction**

This Recruitment and Retention Strategy outlines the target for 2017 – 2018, our current need and the successes and learning we have found through our analysis of the last financial year's activities. It gives an overview of our key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns we will be undertaking for the next financial year (April 2017 – March 2018).

## **2. Developments within the service**

This year has seen some significant developments within the service including a new in house service within fostering:

### **2.1) Intensive Support**

The youth care scheme was reviewed in 2016 and has become the 'Intensive Support Fostering scheme'.

The age range of children who may be classed as Intensive Support placements is now broader and is based on the child or young person's level of needs rather than their age. It will now include younger children who have challenging behaviour or additional needs. The support package was also reviewed as was the carers tier payment which continues to be linked to the training policy as well as expectations to attend further training and a monthly support group.

Work has been undertaken to promote the scheme but this will need exploring further during 2017 - 2018.

### **2.2) Supported Lodgings**

The Supported Lodgings scheme was introduced at the beginning of 2017.

The scheme was put in place to support young people aged 16 – 17 years of age who are preparing to leave care. The Supported Lodgings scheme will give young people the support and guidance required to support them onto independence. The scheme will also include the opportunity to support some young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum (UASC).

Work has been undertaken to promote the scheme but this will need exploring further this financial year.

### **2.3) IFA transfers**

In 2016 an introductory fee was introduced for IFA carers (with Central Bedfordshire children in place) who chose to transfer to Central Bedfordshire Council. Once they were approved they received an introductory fee in recognition of the additional work required during the transfer process.



### 3. Needs analysis and evaluation

#### 3.1) Needs analysis and current picture

This year has seen a big difference in the ages of children coming into foster care which is shown in the comparison below. During the last financial year 121 placements were made, of those 81 were placed in house:

*Please note – these are number of fostering placements which may be a child moving from one placement to another. The following statistical information also does not include regulation 24 placements for example.*

<b>In house placements 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017</b>								
	<b>0 - 2 years</b>	<b>3 - 5 years</b>	<b>6 - 9 years</b>	<b>UASC 6 – 9 years</b>	<b>10 - 15 years</b>	<b>UASC 10 - 15 years</b>	<b>16 years plus</b>	<b>UASC 16 years plus</b>
April 2016		1	2		4	1		2
May 2016			2		4	2	1	2
June 2016	1	1	1		1			1
July 2016	1				1			
August 2016	2	2	4		2	1		1
September 2016			3		2	1		
October 2016	3				3	2		
November 2016					2			1
December 2016	2	3			1			
January 2017	4	1	2					
February 2017	1				3			
March 2017	6	1						
<b>Total in house placements by age</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>April 2016 – March 2017</b>	<b>0 - 2 years</b>	<b>3 - 5 years</b>	<b>6 - 9 years</b>	<b>UASC 6 – 9 years</b>	<b>10 - 15 years</b>	<b>UASC 10 - 15 years</b>	<b>16 years plus</b>	<b>UASC 16 years plus</b>
<b>Total in house placements April 16 – March 17</b>	<b>81</b>							
<b>In comparison, during April 2015 – March 2016 the figures were:</b>								
<b>Total in house placements by age</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>April 2015 – March 2016</b>	<b>0 - 2 years</b>	<b>3 - 5 years</b>	<b>6 - 9 years</b>	<b>UASC 6 – 9 years</b>	<b>10 - 15 years</b>	<b>UASC 10 - 15 years</b>	<b>16 years plus</b>	<b>UASC 16 years plus</b>
<b>Total in house placements April 2015 – March 2016</b>	<b>111</b>							



Where we were unable to place children or young people with in house foster carers; 40 were placed with our neighbouring Local Authorities or with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The following figures show the number of placements that were made with neighbouring Local Authorities and IFA's (this includes any movement of placements for example to an alternative IFA household).

<b>Placements with neighbouring Local Authorities</b>							
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017</b>							
Month	0 - 2 years	3 - 5 years	6 - 9 years	10 - 15 years	16 years plus	UASC 10 - 15 years	UASC 16 years plus
April 2016						1	1
May 2016						1	1
<b>Total placements made with neighbouring LA's</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>April 2016 – March 2017</b>	0 - 2 years	3 - 5 years	6 - 9 years	10 - 15 years	16 years plus	UASC 10 - 15 years	UASC 16 years plus

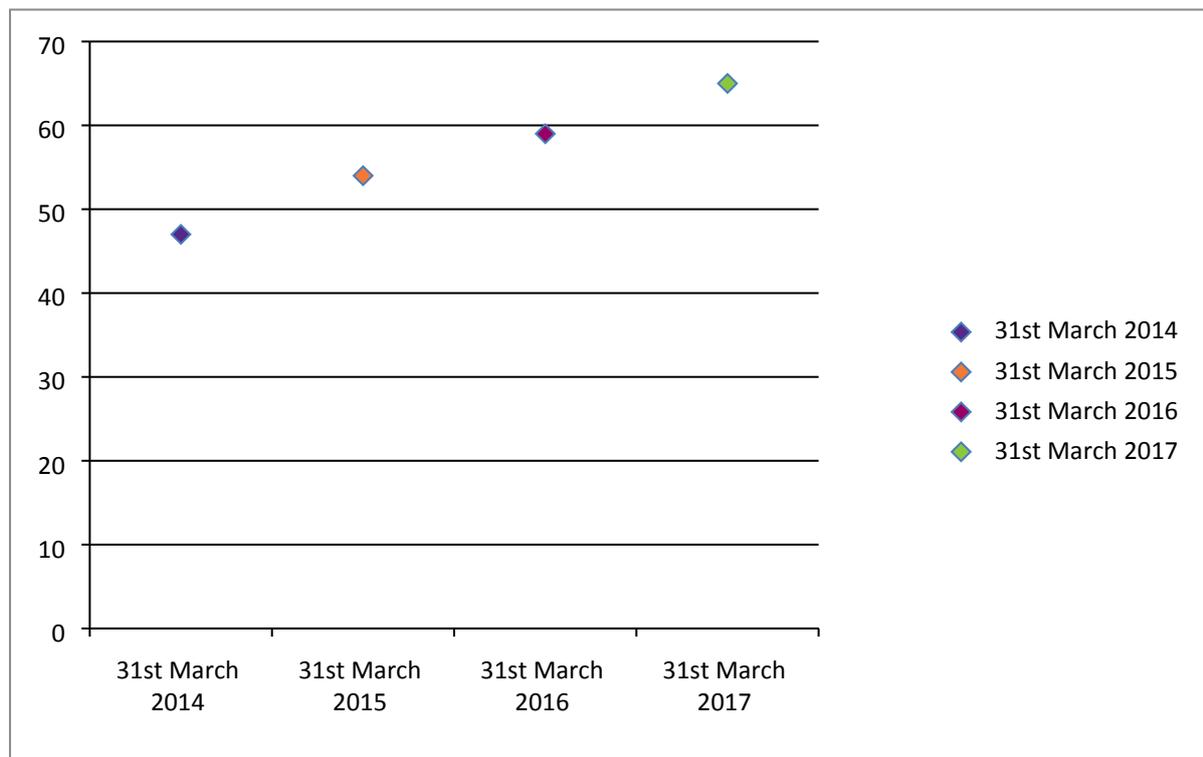
<b>Placements with IFA's</b>							
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017</b>							
Month	0 - 2 years	3 - 5 years	6 - 9 years	10 - 15 years	16 years plus	UASC 10 - 15 years	UASC 16 years plus
April 2016						3	
May 2016							
June 2016				1		2	1
July 2016				1	1		
August 2016		1	3	1			
September 2016		1	2	1			
October 2016	3	2		1			
November 2016							
December 2016							
January 2017			1				
February 2017	1			4			
March 2017			4	2			
<b>Total placements by age made with IFA's</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>April 2016 – March 2017</b>	0 - 2 years	3 - 5 years	6 - 9 years	10 - 15 years	16 years plus	UASC 10 - 15 years	UASC 16 years plus
<b>Total placements made with IFA's</b>	<b>April 2016 – March 2017</b>			<b>36</b>			



The reasons for the above external placements were:

- Unaccompanied young people seeking asylum where no placement was available in house
- Young person requested to return to an IFA foster carer as they had built a good relationship
- Young people who had high risk behaviour and no youth care placements were available in house
- Multiple large sibling groups (3 children plus)
- Large sibling group (4 children) which also ensured the children could attend their current school
- Young person had complex needs and posed a risk to other children
- Parent and child placement
- Parent and child respite
- Young person had complex needs and issues of absconding and no placements were available in house
- To enable a young person to continue at current school which was out of county.

The Corporate Parenting Service has been working towards the aspiration to have 70% of the LAC population with in house foster carers. The following shows the impressive progress between March 2014 to March 2017, which has seen the percentage of looked after children placed with in house foster carers rise considerably from 47% to 65%. The service will continue to aspire to have 70% of the LAC population placed with in house foster carers by the end of March 2018.



From the above statistical information we can see that we need to recruit further foster carers who:

- Are willing to support young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum
- Are willing to foster older children
- Will support young people with more complex needs and behaviours by becoming Intensive Support foster carers
- Have more than one spare bedroom available.

The service will also look into developing a parent and child scheme in 2017 – 2018.

### **3.2) Evaluation of activities in 2016 – 2017**

The number of career fostering households has continued to increase year on year from 68 career fostering households approved in March 2014 to 86 households approved in March 2017.

The Fostering Team has also achieved its recruitment targets for three successive years and has successfully reached the target to recruit 10 career fostering households during 2016 – 2017. In addition to this, one household was approved for the Supported Lodgings scheme which was launched early 2017.

From the cohort of enquiries during 2016 – 2017, the career fostering households that were approved offered a wide range of placements including some households where they were able to have more than one child or young person, including:

- Short term for a child/young person aged 0 – 12 years
- Short term for a child/young person (or two if siblings) aged 0 – 5 years
- Short term or long term for a child/young person aged 4 – 18 years
- Short term for a child/young person aged 4 – 12 years
- Short term for a child/young person aged 5 – 13 years
- Short term for a child/young person aged 5 – 18 years
- Short term for a child/young person aged 12 – 18 years
- An Intensive Support placement for a child/young person aged 12 – 18 years
- An Intensive Support placement for a specific young person.

There was an increase in the number of IFA carers expressing an interest to transfer from their current IFA to Central Bedfordshire's Fostering Service during this financial year. Three of the above approvals were IFA transfers, two of which are caring for Central Bedfordshire children which results in a considerable saving in IFA fees to the service. The carers that were approved and transferred from an IFA included the following placements:

- Short term for a child aged 0 – 2 years
- Short term or long term for one child/young person (or two if siblings) aged 0 – 18 years
- Long term for a specific child
- Long term for 2 specific children.



Between April 2016 and March 2017 there were a total of 299 enquiries, the following shows the progress of April 2016 – March 2017's cohort of enquiries.

Dates:	April 2016 – March 2017
Completed the initial enquiry form	105
Went forward for initial visit	64
Application forms sent to prospective foster carers	53
Application forms returned	26
Number that went forward to assessment	24
Number of assessments that cancelled out	10
Reasons why those assessments were cancelled out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changed mind</li> <li>- Emotional resilience</li> <li>- Expense of learning to drive although they feel they were looking for a reason to withdraw</li> <li>- Decided to stay with IFA</li> <li>- Pregnancy</li> <li>- Not willing to start on tier 1 payments (no previous fostering experience)</li> <li>- Following reflection of the expectations of fostering.</li> </ul>

Based on the above figures our conversion rate from completion of the initial enquiry form to assessment was 22.86% compared to 13.33% the previous financial year. This is a significant improvement. Based on the research and figures above it shows that we continue to provide an excellent service to those who enquire about fostering and respond to enquiries efficiently by cancelling out unsuitable applicants before the completion of the initial enquiry form for reasons such as no spare room, unable to drive, work commitments unsuitable to type of fostering they wish to pursue. Where applicants may not drive or work commitments do not allow them to foster we are now in a position to discuss the Supported Lodgings scheme as a possibility.

The following shows a breakdown of the most popular marketing sources that have encourage the public to make contact about fostering during April 2016 – March 2017:

Marketing source	Total no of enquiries
Website	59
Net Natives – Facebook campaign	56
Net Natives – Facebook campaign re: two specific young people	23
IFA transfer	21
Net Natives – Facebook campaign re: Supported Lodgings	17
Email – marketing not specified	13
Net Natives – google campaign	11
Google search to website	10
Google search	7
Word of mouth – foster carer	5
Word of mouth – staff in CBC	5
CBC ebulletin	5
Information evening	5
Works for CBC	5
Telephone call – marketing not specified	5
LA transfer through own search	3
Drop in – Houghton Lodge, Ampthill	3
Leaflet through door	3



No marketing specified	3
Word of mouth – not specified where from	2
Word of mouth – friend	2
Information evening following newspaper advert	2
Drop in – Chicksands following advert on a CBC ebulletin	2
Roundabout signs – Flitwick	2
Poster – Watling House	2
Job Centre in Leighton Buzzard	2
Website through Facebook	1
Website after seeing a flyer	1
Facebook	1
Tweet from CBC Twitter	1
Word of mouth – IFA transfer through another carer transferring from an IFA who is in assessment with CBC	1
Word of mouth – social worker	1
Word of mouth – Bedford Borough Council	1
Word of mouth – Home 4 Good	1
Word of mouth – friends who foster	1
Word of mouth – family member who fosters	1
Word of mouth – currently a shared lives carer	1
Article – Beds on Sunday following press release	1
Article – The Bulletin (Biggleswade) following press release	1
Leaflet – Priory House	1
Leaflet – Chicksands Army Base	1
Poster – Luton Islamic Centre	1
Poster – Meppershall Notice Board	1
Information stand – Stotfold Fete	1
Information stand – Amptill Gala	1
Information stand – Biggleswade Market	1
Enquired about adoption in CBC	1
Adopted through CBC	1
Previously fostered for this Authority/Bedfordshire County Council	1
Previously fostered with an agency	1
Email – referred by change.org	1
Telephone call – saw Facebook advert	1

When we break down to each stage of an enquiry the following was shown as the most popular:

**Completed initial enquiry form and progressed to an initial visit:**

(A social worker visit to enquirer following initial enquiry)

Conversion for initial enquiry form to initial visit = 60.95%

- Google search to website
- Website
- Website – seen a flyer
- Word of mouth – through staff, foster carers, home 4 good, friends, Shared Lives, an IFA carer in the process of transferring to CBC
- IFA transfer
- LA transfer through own search
- Newspaper advert
- Previously adopted through CBC
- Poster – Watling House
- Leaflet in Chicksands Office
- Works for CBC (CWD)
- Previously fostered for the LA
- Attended an information evening



- Roundabout signs at Flitwick
- Attended drop in at Priory House
- Telephone call – no marketing stated
- Net Natives – various Facebook and Google campaigns
- CBC internal ebuletin
- CBC residents ebuletin
- Tweet from CBC Twitter account
- Article in Beds on Sunday following a Supported Lodgings press release
- No marketing stated.

**Completed an application form:**

(Following a positive initial visit the prospective foster carer is encouraged to complete an application form to start the assessment)

Conversion for initial enquiry form to completion of application form = 24.76%

- Website
- Google search to website
- Word of mouth – through staff, foster carers, friends, an IFA carer in the process of transferring to CBC
- IFA transfer
- Previously adopted through CBC
- Poster – Watling House
- Previously fostered for the LA
- Attended an information evening
- Roundabout signs at Flitwick
- Article in Beds on Sunday following a Supported Lodgings press release.

**Progressed to assessment:**

(Following application, a formal assessment of the applicant will begin)

Conversion for initial enquiry form to progression to assessment = 22.86%

- Website
- Google search to website
- Word of mouth – through staff, foster carers, friends, an IFA carer in the process of transferring to CBC
- Previously adopted through CBC
- Attended an information evening
- Poster – Watling House
- IFA transfer
- Previously fostered for the LA
- Roundabout signs at Flitwick
- Article in Beds on Sunday following a Supported Lodgings press release.

**Went on to approval:**

(Approval at Fostering and Permanence Panel as foster carers)

From this financial year's cohort of enquiries we have approved 5 foster carers and are on track to approve a further 9 (which includes a Supported Lodgings household). This will be a conversion of = 13.33%



This figure could improve further as we progress through the next financial year due to some enquiries being at initial visit stage or where we are waiting for prospective foster carers to return their application forms.

- Website
- Google search to website
- Previously fostered for the LA
- Previously adopted through CBC
- Word of mouth – through staff, friends, an IFA carer in the process of transferring to CBC
- Attended an information evening
- IFA transfer
- Article in Beds on Sunday following a Supported Lodgings press release.

The national average journey time of a prospective foster carer to approval is 180 days, during 2016 – 2017 our average journey time was 173 days.

#### 4. Target and current need for 2017 – 2018

Our targets for 2017 – 2018 are:

- To recruit 10 career fostering households
- To reduce the number of children and young people placed with IFA's and to continue to work towards the aspiration to have 70% of Central Bedfordshire children placed in house
- To set up a Parent and Child scheme.

Our targeted marketing campaign will have various messaging to suit our current need which is households who can support:

- Supported Lodgings placements
- Larger sibling groups – we need further fostering households where they have more than one spare bedroom
- Teenagers aged 10 – 17 years – there is a national shortage of foster carers who can look after older children
- Intensive Support – the scheme has been reviewed this year to include a broader age range and is based more on the child or young person's needs and behaviours
- PACE fostering
- Respite
- Intensive Support respite
- Emergency placements.

#### 5. Recommended marketing and recruitment plan for 2017 – 2018

From reviewing the above research the recommended plan is to focus our attention on our website and digital marketing within a blended marketing strategy which also includes old fashioned style marketing, online advertising and social media presence and advertising.



### 5.1) Website

This year has seen a high level of work reviewing and updating the fostering web pages.



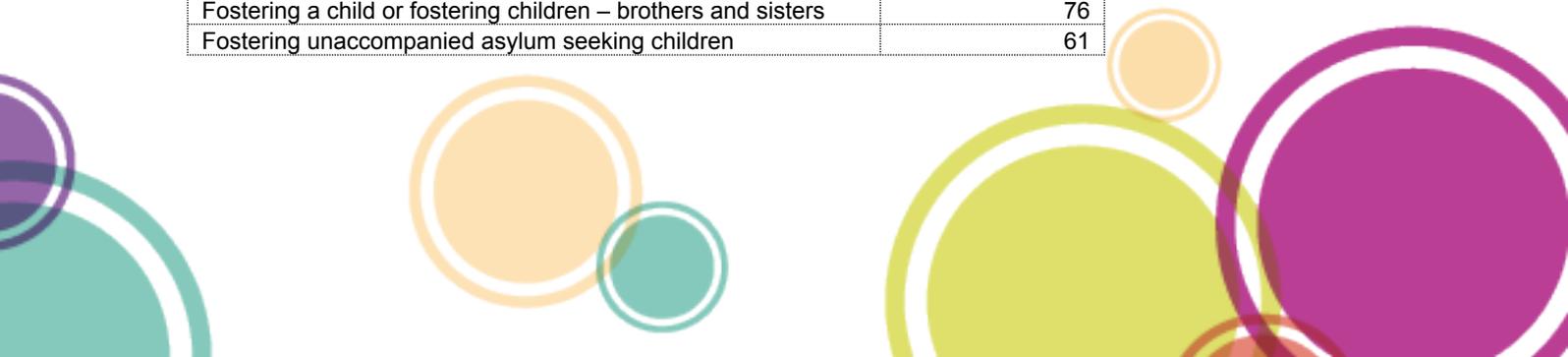
The web content was written using research into a customer’s journey and the UK’s most popular search terms. It ensured that key phrases and words were included within the text to help our pages appear higher within google when a member of the public is searching for fostering in Bedfordshire. This ensures that we are remaining competitive in the fostering market in the Bedfordshire area.

The new layout of the pages helps prospective foster carers get answers to their question or queries quickly by having sections that are important to particular groups of people e.g. those interested in fostering babies, those wishing to know more about fostering teenagers.

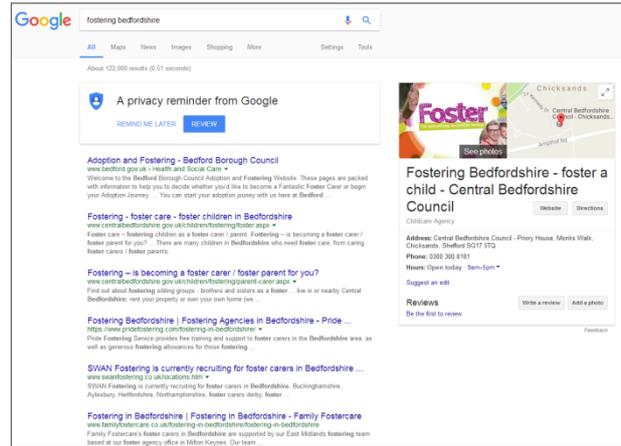
We also included a new section on the website for the Supported Lodgings scheme which went live in December 2016. This has a section of it’s own within the children and families A-Z but there are also links from the main fostering pages to enable users to easily find the information regarding the scheme.

The following shows the total page views of our old and new web pages between March 2016 – March 2017:

Title	Page views
What is fostering	1722
Fostering - foster care - foster children in Bedfordshire	1135
Fees and allowances	732
Types of foster care	617
Support for foster carers	556
Could you foster	511
Fostering children in Bedfordshire	450
Come to a foster information session	450
The assessment process	427
Fostering – is becoming a foster carer / foster parent for you?	267
Foster carers support and allowances	221
Fostering babies, newborns, toddlers and infants	160
Transfer to Central Bedfordshire	145
Fostering assessment process	107
Fostering teenagers	84
Fostering a child or fostering children – brothers and sisters	76
Fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children	61



The web team have also updated our google business listing so we have a visual presence on google search listings. This was a great addition as there is no cost to the Authority and means we have a visual presence on google listings page. For example if a member of the public googles 'fostering Bedfordshire' we are currently appearing second in the search results, however we have a large visual and eye catching business listing on the right hand side that catches the users attention. It gives them our contact details and also a direct link to our web pages.



This financial year we will work to refresh our fostering films which we hope to include on our web pages, social media channels and the Council's You Tube.



At regular intervals and during times of campaigns such as foster carer fortnight, we will also set up to be included on the home page focus circles. This will help us to reach a further audience through the website who may have visited the pages for another purpose.

The website will continue to be monitored and evolve and the fostering service will ensure the pages are current and up to date.

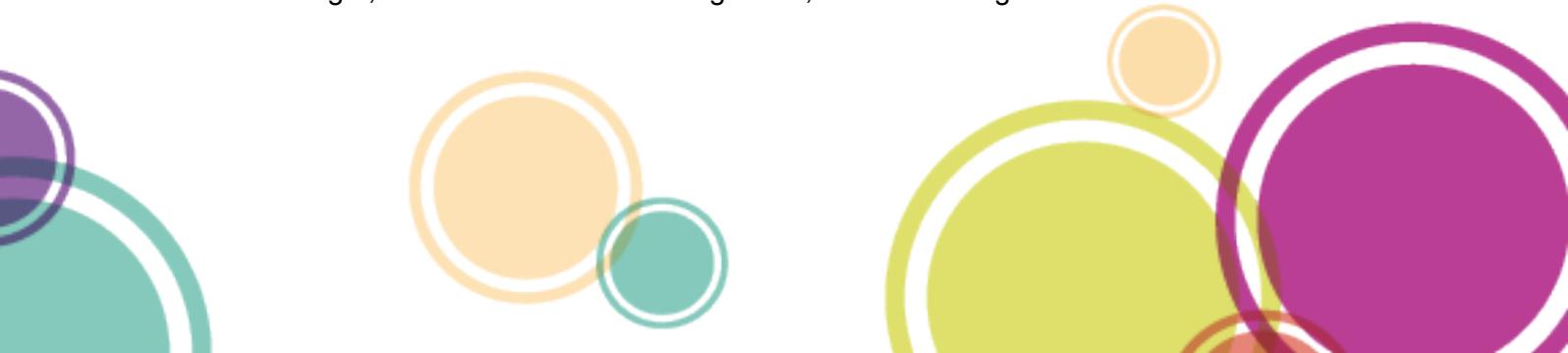
## 5.2) Press

This year has seen some excellent coverage within the local press following a number of press releases, including:

- A foster carer interview as part of a Fostering Network article regarding sibling contact
- A newspaper article re: the great dads award winners in the Times and Citizen
- Multiple newspaper articles re: celebration of fostering winners in the Dunstable Gazette, Luton News, Biggleswade Chronicle, Beds on Sunday, Luton on Sunday as well as articles on some of their online platforms
- A radio interview with a long standing foster carer on BBC Three Counties
- Newspaper articles re: the Supported Lodgings launch in the Biggleswade Chronicle and the Beds on Sunday including their online platforms
- Articles on Luton Today website re: the Intensive Support fostering launch.

This is an extremely important part of the strategy as it shares good news stories, promotes our work and improves our public profile as well as promoting fostering to the general public free of charge.

This year we will continue to work closely with our Communications Officer to produce press releases around national campaigns and times of celebration and success such as foster carer fortnight, the celebration of fostering event, sons and daughters week.



This will include use of the Central Bedfordshire resident ebulletins and messaging to our internal staff.

Part of this work will involve reviewing our bank of foster carer testimonies and films. We will work towards having a bank of testimonies and films from a diverse range of people, families and young people.

We will continue to show our appreciation to our foster carers and their sons and daughters by nominating them for national awards such as The Fostering Network Excellence Awards and The Towergate Care Awards. We also hope to nominate some foster carers for an invitation to the Queens Garden Party and to acknowledge some of our very long standing foster carers by nominating them for an honour.

### 5.3) Social media

Social media is continuing to be a good source for advertising and information sharing that last year produced a high number of enquiries and interest. The work helped increase our number of Facebook 'likes' which has risen significantly from 191 to 382. This gives us a captive audience who can like and share our messaging to the network friends at no cost.

We worked closely with a digital advertising company, Net Natives, who managed different campaigns over the last year to promote caring for older children, the Supported Lodgings scheme and the Intensive Support scheme. It seems that many people enquiring through our Facebook advertising with Net Natives are at the early stages of their fostering enquiry, many of these enquiries did not make it through to assessment stage but it is important that we continue this work to encourage those people to return to us when they are ready to commit to the process. This could change as the year goes on as we still have a number of enquirers who have expressed an interest in an initial visit and a possible prospective Intensive Support carer who is due to send in their application form shortly.

Going forward we will use Net Natives to lead our campaigns as well as using our own Facebook posts and posts on the main Central Bedfordshire Council page who's page 'likes' has risen from 5330 in April 2016 to 8325 in April 2017. Alongside Facebook we will access Central Bedfordshire Twitter followers by working with our Communication Officer. We will be more creative with our posts and hope to include the use of video clips to engage more interest. We will also use the platform to liaise with local pages to help spread our messages of good news stories and successes.

### 5.4) Local news web page takeovers

With more of our enquiries coming through online resources we looked into other possible sources of advertising and will be making use of web page takeovers. During pre-booked weeks across the year our branding and adverts will be across local news websites such Bedford Today, Luton Today, Biggleswade Today, Leighton Buzzard Today and Dunstable Today. We will be running 1 campaign for 1 week on each site.



### 5.5) Radio advertising

Radio advertising was not explored during the last financial year but in past years this has proven to be a real success with four of our current approved foster carers enquiring from this source. We will be running them this year with Global on Heart with each campaign running for two weeks at a time in May, September and December 2017.

### 5.6) Bus advertising

Bus advertising has not been explored for a number of years but has proven success within other Local Authorities as a marketing source. A neighbouring Local Authority have year on year used this route of advertising due to its success. We will have 10 rear bus adverts that travel across Bedfordshire for a twelve week period starting in May and a second campaign running across January to March 2018.

### 5.7) IFA transfers

The IFA introductory fee will continue in 2017 – 2018. This will be given to IFA carers who chose to transfer (with Central Bedfordshire children in place) to Central Bedfordshire Council in recognition of the additional work required during the transfer process.

### 5.8) Leaflets and posters

Leaflets and posters continue to be reviewed regularly and this year we carried out a streamlining process with the support of our communications and branding teams of our leaflets and posters. The messaging had started to spread too wide across the leaflets and posters which meant we had numerous copies of various leaflets. The leaflets and posters were streamlined to one version for fostering and a new version for Supported Lodgings. They were given a new design and a core colour for each scheme.



New versions will be distributed to key partners this year e.g. schools, churches, temples, mosques, youth centres, football clubs, churches and places of worship, doctors, dentists, libraries etc.

### 5.9) Outreach and information evenings

The number of enquiries we receive through outreach and information evenings has year on year dropped with online advertising becoming more popular. It is also a costly route of advertising including advertising of the events, the cost of venues and time and cost of more than one member of staff travelling to and attending the events.



We will be resting outreach events and information evenings this year as we feel those that attend these events are already motivated to foster and would make an enquiry directly. We will then be able to respond quickly to their enquiry and visit them within their home for the initial visit.

We will be looking into other ways of reaching out to communities by seeking opportunities to speak with groups and run presentations about fostering such as to school governors, Churches etc.

#### **5.10) Newsletters and information sharing**

Electronic newsletters continue to bring traffic to our web pages and are a good free opportunity for us to share our messaging to large numbers of people. During the last year we made use of our internal newsletters such as Connect, Governors Essentials, Ezine and Central Essentials. This year we hope to reach more people using electronic newsletters such as schools and academies and staff within services that support people of all ages e.g. police, prison officers, teenage advice and information services, Brook, scout groups etc.

#### **5.11) Interfaith work**

During 2016 - 2017 we were hoping to participate in the Council of Faiths meeting to enable us to start to build relationships with the various faith groups around Bedfordshire. This was not possible and the group has since evolved and is not able to support our request at this time. We also started to build a relationship with The Penny Appeal which is part of the charity Muslim Fostering. Unfortunately the work had a break as the Penny Appeal embarked on a large project with the Department of Education. We are now back in contact with The Penny Appeal and during this financial year we will be in contact with them to gain advice on how we can best build a relationship with the Muslim communities across Bedfordshire. We have also made contact with the local Bishop of Bedford who we hope to start building a relationship with so we can look at ways of working together to spread the message about the need for more foster carers.

#### **5.12) Word of mouth**

Word of mouth continues to be a high scoring marketing response and with more IFA carers transferring to Central Bedfordshire it is important that the £250 refer a friend scheme remains. We will continue to pay foster carers £250 when the person whom they have referred is approved and has taken their first placement. If the person refers an IFA carer who already has a Central Bedfordshire child in placement the foster carer will receive £250 when they are approved. This incentive will also be extended to our Supported Lodgings scheme.

#### **5.13) Large posters**

Within Bedfordshire there are a number of fostering agencies so we must ensure that we stay fresh in the public's mind that as a Council we provide a fostering service. To enable us with this we will be installing some large scale posters outside two large supermarkets that have a high footfall in areas that we would benefit from having foster carers, they are Tesco in Dunstable and Tesco in Leighton Buzzard.



#### **5.14) Roundabout**

The roundabout has brought in a small number of enquiries but one of those enquirers who responded to this went through to assessment. As above the roundabout is a good constant reminder of the services we provide and our roundabout is in a great position with a high flow of traffic and pedestrians. We will continue this for another year and possibly review its position for the next financial year.

#### **5.15) Other areas for consideration**

##### **PACE fostering**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April the service will be launching a PACE fostering scheme. This is a PAN Bedfordshire arrangement whereby Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council are working together on this project. This service will provide overnight stays and support to children and young people who have been arrested and are due to attend court the following day. Initially this will be advertised to staff within Central Bedfordshire Council via the staff newsletter and through a series of drop in events. Following this the scheme may be extended to partners outside of Central Bedfordshire Council such as Police, Health and Youth Offending.

##### **Parent and child**

The need for parent and child placements has continued during 2016 - 2017 so the service will consider setting up a Parent and Child Fostering scheme.

##### **Intensive Support**

Following the review of the Youth Care scheme, which is now the Intensive Support fostering scheme (see section 2 for further information) the service will look to recruit further foster carers to this scheme as part of the yearly recruitment plan.

##### **Supported Lodgings**

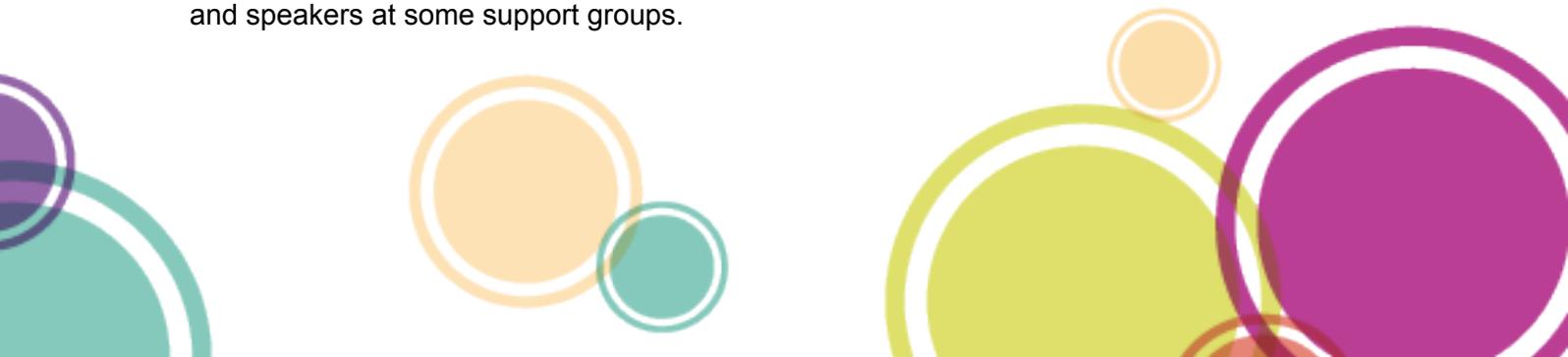
The Supported Lodgings scheme has recently been launched (see section 2 for further information). The service has started to advertise for carers to be part of this scheme and will continue to recruit further Supported Lodgings carers as part of the yearly recruitment plan.

### **6. Retention and support plan for 2016 – 2017**

A really important part of our strategy is the retention and support of foster carers. The fostering task is very rewarding in itself but can also be very demanding on the fostering household so it is important that we show each and every member of the fostering household how much we value their work for each child they care for. During 2017 - 2018 the areas of consideration are:

#### **6.1) Training**

During the last financial year the service implemented a training policy that linked foster carers training attendance to the current fee scheme. This has received mixed feedback from our foster carers but has seen a real positive impact on the level of training attended by foster carers. It also encouraged those who may not have attended training to complete their core training so there is now a benchmark of training that all our foster carers are attending. The programme provided has been reviewed and a comprehensive training package will continue to be available to all foster carers to meet their training needs to ensure best care and practice including face to face training, elearning, a resource library and speakers at some support groups.



### **6.2) Support and social groups**

Support and social groups continue to be a good source of support to a number of foster carers. They are well received in the areas that they have been held so will continue to be held at Dunstable, Millbrook and Cardington. The evening social groups were also very popular this year which ensure that those who were unable to attend the daytime groups had an opportunity to meet with fellow foster carers. Going forward we will run two evening social groups in a central location. One area we will be looking into is the support and training of our family link foster carers with the possibility of a regular training and support group with specific speakers to meet their training needs.

### **6.3) Consultation**

Consultation with foster carers remains an extremely important part of this strategy. The Foster Carers Talk Time (open forum) has been successful this year and will continue to be held four times a year. The terms of reference for the group were revisited this year as part of the meeting and moving forward have a clear description of the forums purpose to enable foster carers to be an integral part of decisions that may affect their work as foster carers. We continue to communicate with foster carers by email which means we can share information quickly and at no cost. Carers are then able to respond and give their views.

### **6.4) Foster Care Association**

The Foster Care Association (FCA) exists to provide support and advice to foster carers and we will continue to work closely with Central Bedfordshire's members of the FCA through regular communication, meetings and financial support will continue to be provided.

### **6.5) Mentoring**

The mentoring scheme has seen a change of coordinators this year who are keen to move forward and expand the scheme. The scheme continues to provide mentors who specialise in their own areas such as care of teenagers, short term care for younger children, long term care and a mentor who has vast experience of different schemes. Mentors are allocated to mentees following approval at fostering panel and existing foster carers are able to access the scheme during challenging times or if they request additional support. Prospective foster carers are made aware of the scheme at the Skills to Foster training.

This year the service will be looking to recruit two, possibly three further mentors, in particular those who can support a wide range of mentees including Intensive Support and Family and Friends carers.

The mentors continue to receive quarterly telephone supervision, quarterly group supervision and additional visits where requested.

The coordinators were keen to research into ways of improving the service so a survey was sent to all mentees that had accessed the service over the last two years. The results are now to be analysed and will be used to shape and improve the service.

Other possible areas for consideration going forward within the mentoring scheme are to hold informal social events for mentees. This was suggested by one of the current mentors of a way of introducing mentees to another strand of support by meeting other foster carers. This will be looked into further this financial year.



### 6.6) Celebration of fostering event

The celebration of fostering event was a huge success with an extremely good attendance of 97 foster carers and 95 children attending alongside Senior Management and staff from the service. The event is a chance to thank all foster carers and their families. It also saw the service congratulate and celebrate long service of 14 fostering households with one couple celebrating 30 years of fostering and 6 fostering households who were awarded as part of the nomination awards.

The press coverage following this event was excellent with the following being published:

- Full front page coverage of Luton on Sunday regarding a couple who have been fostering for 30 years, including an interview and an article within the newspaper
- A radio interview with a couple who have been fostering for 30 years
- An article in The Biggleswade Chronicle
- An article in The Beds on Sunday
- An article in The Dunstable Gazette
- An article in the Bedfordshire Times and Citizen
- An online article on Bedfordshire News Online.



### Lifetime of foster care

Continued from front when I started I thought I'd be doing it for a few months. That was 30 years ago." Since then the couple have fostered more than 250 kids, coupled with raising five children of their own. And the whole family got to celebrate their wonderful work at the ceremony, held at Woburn Safari Park a few weeks ago. Councillor Carole Hegley, Central Bedfordshire Council's executive member for social care, said: "Fostering involves the whole family, so it's great for us to get the foster carers own children involved in the fun, and it's why an

award is presented to a foster carer's birth children who really make a difference in welcoming foster children into their home." And the council, as well as Tim and Sandra, hope more people can step up and become foster carers to address the shortage. Sandra said: "I have always said to people to give it a go, even if you only help a child for a couple of weeks. "Everybody has something to offer - and seeing kids who have difficulties come out of the other end a better person is the most rewarding thing." If you're interested, call Central Beds Council on 0300 300 8181.

The event continues to receive brilliant feedback from attendees so we are pleased to be returning to Woburn Safari Park again this year for the event. The event will again be held on a Sunday to ensure it is family focussed and enables as many foster carers to attend as possible. It is also a good marketing exercise as we receive lots of positive news coverage each year so we will continue to work with our Communications Officer to produce as many publicity opportunities possible.

### 6.7) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support

CAMHS continue to provide support to the Corporate Parenting Service and are now based within the team. This enables them to assess, and where possible, find ways of working with children or young people and those who look after them, in understanding and supporting their needs. They also continue to provide the following services:

- Consultation to social workers
- A kinship carers group
- Training to foster carers
- Consultation to our Intensive Support carers support group
- Consultation and participation in complex case discussions.



### **6.8) Fostering Network membership**

This year we invited an alternative company, Foster Talk, to present the benefits of their membership to the Foster Carers Talk Time. The presentation was well received but carers did not express an interest in transferring so the decision was to continue with the Fostering Network for 2017 - 2018. The service will continue to pay for foster carers to have individual membership and the service will continue to be corporate members of the Fostering Network with spot purchase of Advice and Mediation as required.

### **6.9) Discounts for foster carers**

Max Cards have and will continue to be provided to all foster carers once they are approved. This enables them to gain discounts to family days out and activities nationally and within Central Bedfordshire. The original max cards are due to expire shortly so replacements have been purchased and will be distributed to those carers needing a new card.

Foster carers are also able to access the same discount website as staff at KAARP benefits which will be advertised regularly in the foster carers newsletter.

### **6.10) Working model and joint work with Bedfordshire University**

The service is keen to adopt a working model with all supervising social workers and foster carers. During 2017 – 2018 the service will work with Bedfordshire University to be involved in a pilot promoting a relationship based social work approach.

### **6.11) Family and friends foster carers**

Family and friends foster carers are able to access all support groups and training as career foster carers. We also ensure that they receive all communications as any other foster carer. It was highlighted that the leaflet provided to family and friends foster carers was lacking certain information so time was taken to update the booklet 'Family and Friends; your guide to fostering a connected person'. This ensured that important information was in one easily accessible place such as the assessment process, support available, information on legal options for long term plans for children and contacts for further information and support. The leaflet is also available on our web pages. Family and Friends foster carers who are receiving support from CAMH will also continue to have access to a specific Family and Friends CAMH support group.

### **6.12) Review of strategy**

As the needs of the service change throughout this financial year we will regularly review and adapt our strategy and monthly working plan to meet any challenges or the needs of looked after children.



**Central Bedfordshire Council**

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

Monday, 3 July 2017

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**Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2017 -18**

Report of: Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

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**Purpose of this report**

1. This Recruitment Strategy outlines the target for 2017 – 2018, our current need and an overview of the key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns we will be undertaking for the next financial year (April 2017 – March 2018).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider, comment and agree Appendix A - Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2017 – 18.

**Issues**

2. Please refer to Appendix A - Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2017 – 18.

**Council Priorities**

3. Improve education and skills; protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing.

**Corporate Implications**

4. Legal, financial and equalities implications were requested and are included in the report.

**Legal Implications**

5. No further comments.

**Financial and Risk Implications**

6. The Adoption recruitment budget sits within the Fostering budget. This information can be found in the fostering quarter reports.

### **Equalities Implications**

7. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council endeavours to meet these requirements by:
- Ensuring that a wide range of approaches to publicity are used in order to recruit a diverse range of adopters.
  - Identifying the diverse needs of local children and building this into the matching process
  - Providing training and ongoing support

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

8. The Adoption Recruitment Strategy consists of:
- a) Needs analysis and evaluation
  - b) Target and current need
  - c) Recommended marketing and recruitment plan for 2017 – 2018
  - d) Other areas for consideration.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Adoption Recruitment Strategy April 2017 – March 2018

### **Background Papers**

None

Report author(s):

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Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer

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**Adopt**  
Are you ready  
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Appendix A

Central  
Bedfordshire



**great**  
prospects

# Recruitment strategy

Adoption Service

1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018

**A great place to live and work.**



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## 1. Introduction

This Recruitment Strategy outlines the target for 2017 – 2018 and our current need for prospective adopters. It also gives an overview of our key marketing initiatives and targeted campaigns we will be undertaking for the next financial year (April 2017 – March 2018).

## 2. Needs analysis and evaluation of activities in 2016 – 2017

### 2.1) Needs analysis

The Adoption Service has year on year met its recruitment targets with 20 prospective adopters being approved in 2015 – 2016 and a further 20 in 2016 – 2017.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 15 children were matched for adoption, 9 of those were matched with Central Bedfordshire Council adopters. The remaining 6 were placed with other Local Authority/Voluntary Adoption Agency approved adopters, the reasons for these were:

- 2 children (a sibling group) needed to be placed out of County and the surrounding areas due to risk
- 1 child had significant health needs
- 2 children (a sibling group) were placed with dual ethnicity adopters to reflect their own ethnicity
- 1 child was placed with their sibling who had previously been adopted out of County.

The following is a highlight of performance for the last financial year:

<b>Enquiries:</b>	
Adoption enquiries received	92
Step parent enquiries received	8
<b>Approvals:</b>	
Total number of approvals	17
<b>Picture going forward as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017:</b>	
Total number of households in stage 1	6
Total number of households in stage 2	8

### 2.2a) Evaluation of activities in 2016 – 2017

Last year the Service's promotion of adoption was limited due to the uncertainty of the progress of the East Regional Adoption Agency Partnership work. Adoption also continued to be a highly self-motivated search which returned a good number of natural enquiries so low level marketing was undertaken such as outreach, information evenings, article and information sharing and social media activity.

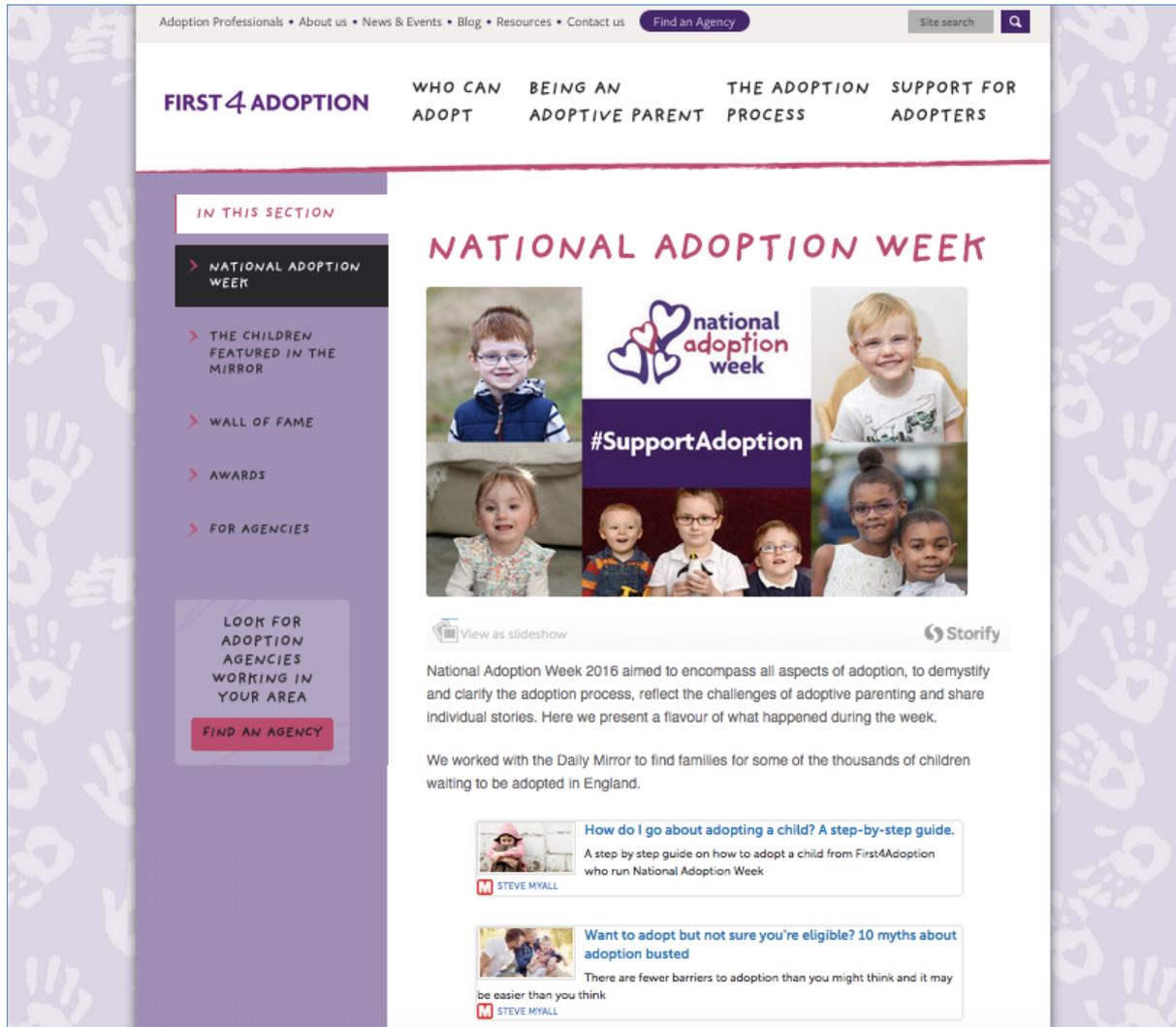
The current process of recording adoption enquiries does not show detailed marketing source information for us to evaluate. This financial year we will make amendments to the way in which we record our enquiries to aid us in evaluating our marketing plan following 2017 – 2018's marketing activity. The changes will be made to the daily recording of enquiries and the use of a tracking spreadsheet to include more specific marketing information and to track the prospective adopters through their journey of application and through to assessment.



**2.2b) Joint work with First 4 Adoption**

We have worked to build an extremely positive relationship with First 4 Adoption which resulted in an exciting piece of joint work during National Adoption Week in October 2016.

Each year First 4 Adoption run a National campaign highlighting the need for adopters for children who are waiting to be adopted. The campaign reaches out to National newspapers and media channels to promote the campaign and help to find suitable placements for children seeking adoptive parents. During National Adoption week they worked closely with The Daily Mirror to share stories of five children/siblings groups, one of which was a Central Bedfordshire Council child.



The campaign was a huge success and has been a significant step in family finding for our child who has complex health needs and communication difficulties.

- The Mirror article reached 926,191 people
- Online media reached 773,190 people
- A specific web profile regarding our child was set up on First 4 Adoption's website and 1150 people visited the page to find out more about him
- 105 people contacted First 4 Adoption regarding our child following the campaign
- 2 credible prospective families, both who were second time adopters, were identified following the campaign
- From the 2 credible prospective families, 1 of those went forward to be assessed as prospective adopters for our child. We are now in the final stages of their assessment and hope to work towards matching in August 2017.

We will continue to build our relationship with First 4 Adoption to enable us to be part of future research, work and campaigns.

#### **4. Target and current need for 2017 – 2018**

The Services target for 2017 – 2018 is to recruit 20 adopters, in particular:

- Adopters who are able and willing to undertake fostering for adoption
- Adopters for children aged 3 years and over
- Adopters who are able and willing to adopt sibling groups of children
- Adopters who are able and willing to meet the needs of children with additional and or developmental needs
- Adopters that reflect the diverse background of the children with a plan for adoption.

This recruitment strategy looks to recruit those people and families from within 20 miles of Central Bedfordshire. It also aims to support the Services priorities by recruiting a diverse pool of adopters, the priorities that directly affect this strategy are:

- Local placements for local children
- Ensuring effective matching of children to the placement that will best meet their needs
- Providing a choice of placements for every child (a more diverse pool of adopters offers greater placement choice, reducing delay for the child)
- Enabling siblings to remain together
- Promoting early permanence to improve performance and placement stability.

#### **5. Recommended marketing and recruitment plan for 2017 - 2018**

##### **5.1) Website**

This year has seen an exciting change to the Council website, with a more up to date platform that ensures users on mobile devices have an easy journey through the website.

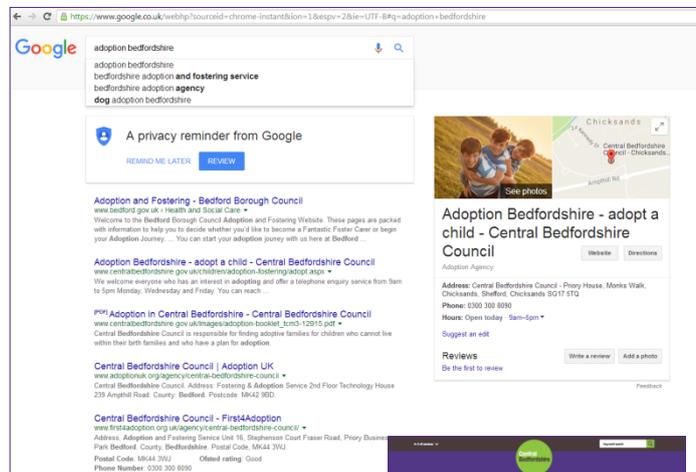


During this financial year the following web pages were most popular:

Page title	Page views
Adopt a child	2294
Come to an adoption information session	732
Support after adoption	404
Adopting your partner's child	290
Inter country adoption	229
I am a birth parent / relative	213

During this financial year we will work closely with the Web Content Manager to review and update the adoption web page content. The work will include research into key phrases and words that are most popular when searching for adoption in Bedfordshire. This will ensure that our pages are highly rated on google search listings and will improve the users journey through our pages to make them engaging and interesting.

Part of this work has already begun and the Web Team have updated our google business listing. This is a great addition at no cost to the Authority to ensure we have a visual presence on google search listings. For example, if a member of the public googles 'adoption Bedfordshire' we are currently appearing second in the search results, however we have a large visual and eye catching business listing on the right hand side that catches the users attention. It gives them our contact details, our duty 'opening hours' as well as a direct link to our web pages.



At regular intervals and during times of campaigns such as National Adoption Week and LGBT week, we will also set up to be included on the home page focus circles. This will help us to reach a further audience through the website who may have visited the pages for another purpose.

### 5.2) Information evenings

Information evenings continue to be well attended and an integral part of the marketing, recruitment and assessment process of prospective adopters. The information evenings will be held each month at our Chicksands office which reduces venue costs and staff travel time without impacting on the quality of the information evenings.

When we reviewed our website figures it was clear that people thinking about adoption are interested in our information evenings with a high number of page views to this particular page.



Currently our website pages do not show the full details of our evenings and previously the venues have not been advertised to encourage prospective adopters to call us first. On reflection we recognise that this may be a possible barrier to further prospective adopters attending.

This year we will start to promote all information, including times and venues across our campaigns and will also ensure that this information is clear on the Central Bedfordshire Council (Adoption) web pages.

The content of the information evening presentation will also be updated this year to ensure it is informative but engaging and to also include some further up to date performance related information such as further information regarding matching.

### **5.3) Press**

The use of press releases is a great way for us to keep in touch with our local media routes e.g. newspapers, newspaper websites, radio and TV stations. It is an opportunity to share good news stories, promote our excellent work and improve our public profile as well as promoting adoption to the general public free of charge.

This year we will work closely with our Communications Officer to produce press releases around national campaigns and times of success such as National Adoption Week and LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week.

Part of this work will involve reviewing our bank of adopter testimonies and films. We will work towards having a bank of testimonies and films from a diverse range of people, families and where appropriate young people.

### **5.4) Local news web page takeovers**

With many of our enquiries coming through email or through our web page online enquiry form we looked into possible sources of advertising and will be making use of web page takeovers of local news websites. During pre-booked weeks across the year our branding and adverts will be across local news website such as Bedford Today, Luton Today, Biggleswade Today and Leighton Buzzard Today. We will be running 1 campaign for 1 week on each in May, July, September and November.

### **5.5) Radio advertising**

Radio advertising was not explored in recent years for adoption but is a great opportunity to reach a large varied audience. We will be running campaigns with Global on Heart Radio with each campaign running for two weeks at a time in June, October, January and March.

### **5.6) Social media and Net Natives – digital advertising**

Social media continues to be a good source of advertising and information sharing so during 2017 - 2018 we will be working closely with Net Natives, a digital marketing company to produce and lead our Facebook adverts that will run between 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> May. The reason for running the campaign at this time of the year is due to the impact of Foster Carer Fortnight which sees a spike in interest around adoption also.



The work with Net Natives will also help to improve the number of likes on our Adoption Facebook page to give us a captive audience for future messaging. Our larger network will be encouraged throughout the year to like and share different messages that we post on our pages to spread our message far and wide at no cost.

Alongside this we will work closely with our communications team to post and tweet messaging on the main Central Bedfordshire Council Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Both have a high number of followers, the Facebook page has now risen to 7829 page likes so we will utilise this large audience to like and share messages about adoption.

### **5.7) Newsletters and information sharing**

Electronic newsletters are a great way of sharing articles, posters, leaflets and messages to a large number of people at no cost, they also bring traffic to our web pages. We will make use of electronic newsletters and information sharing with organisations such as Police, Fire, Health, Schools, Hospitals, Doctors surgeries, Community Groups, Town and Parish Councils to encourage those thinking about adoption to contact us.

### **5.8) Newspaper advertising**

Local newspapers continue to bring in enquiries for our colleagues in fostering so during 2017 - 2018 we will run four half page adverts in publications in the Milton Keynes Citizen, Bedford Times and Citizen, Biggleswade Chronicle and Leighton Buzzard Observer. The publications are good value for money as we will also be provided with a digital element of our adverts across the relevant newspaper's website.

### **5.9) Joint work through the Regional Adoption Agency**

The Service continues to be part of the Central East Regional Adoption Agency Partnership. We will continue to work closely as a partnership to shape the future of Adoption Agency joint working. Part of this work may include ad-hoc, shared recruitment activity and profiling events.

## **6. Other areas of consideration**

### **6.1) The duty recording/spreadsheet**

Currently enquiries are logged with basic information e.g. name, date of enquiry, enquiry type (eform, telephone or email). To enable us to review our marketing strategy and activity we will undertake a review of the information recorded at enquiry stage to gain a more comprehensive view of which marketing activity is aiding us in recruiting adopters. This will then ensure that we have the information we need to review our strategy for 2018 – 2019.

### **6.2) Training**

A comprehensive training programme is currently shared with the Fostering Service which includes face to face courses and elearning with use of our training booking website, CPD Online. Prospective adopters and approved adopters are also able to access a large number of courses through Central Bedfordshire Early Years, Multi Agency and LCSB programmes through this website which provides further training opportunities.



Going forward we will be reviewing the core expectations for training available to prospective adopters. They will continue to be expected to attend the Adoption Preparation Training and First Aid. The review will look into the possibility of a parenting programme and Triple P seminars which will be available to both prospective adopters and those who are approved. In addition to this the Fostering for Adoption training will also be developed.

During 2016 – 2017 the Adoption Preparation training programme was reviewed and redesigned to give it fresh, up to date content that is engaging and informative. We will be using the new presentations which will be reviewed by feedback from participants.

### **6.3) Social events**

The Service's social events continue to be a huge success with over 100 adopted children attending in 2016 - 2017. During 2017 – 2018 the social events will continue to be shared with Bedford Borough Council with events such as:

- Summer BBQ
- Christmas party.

This financial year a quarterly support event will also be looked into as an opportunity for adopters to meet each other and build support networks in their local area.

### **7. Review of strategy**

As the needs of the Service change throughout this financial year we will regularly review and adapt our strategy and monthly working plan to meet any challenges or where the needs of the Service change.



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