

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



TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

27 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:

8. **Agency Report Quarter 4 - Fostering 1 January - 31 March 2017**

To consider the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Performance Report for 2016/17.

9. **Corporate Parenting Service - Fostering Team Annual Report 2016/17**

To consider the 2016/17 Annual Report for the Fostering Agency.

11. **Adoption Agency Annual Report 2016/17**

To consider the 2016/17 Annual Report for the Adoption Agency.

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

Yours sincerely

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Committee Services Officer

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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 4 July 2017

Agency Report Quarter 4 – Fostering 1 January – 31 March 2017 CPP

Report of (Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing (carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

Advising Officers: Sue Harris, Director of Children’s Services, and Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering (annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2000 requires the Fostering Agency to monitor and control the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarterly reports are presented to elected members in order to outline the activities in the Fostering Service so that members can monitor and feedback on the quality and performance of the Service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. This report has not been to or is planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendations/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 report.

Executive Summary

The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require the Local Authority

Fostering Service to report to Members regularly on the activities of the Service. This report, therefore, focuses on the work

- articles were placed on the Beds on Sunday website, Luton Today and various newsletters such as Central Essentials (sent to all head teachers in all schools/academies in the CBC area), Governors Essential (sent to all Governors of schools/academies in the CBC area), Connect (sent to all staff within Social Care, Health, Housing and relevant portfolio holders). A local news webpage takeover (fostering advert) was also placed in Biggleswadedetoday.co.uk.
- In terms of social media various posts were made on Central Bedfordshire Council's Twitter account and Facebook page. A Net Native campaign started with Facebook adverts regarding the Intensive Support fostering scheme and a Google search campaign which focused on general fostering.
- During this quarter 2 number of carers chose to transfer from their agency to CBC as a result of the 'Golden Handshake' initiative that was introduced in September 2016.
- As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 34 enquiries, 16 in January, 10 in February and 8 in March (this is 13 more than in the last quarter). There were 24 Initial Visits during this period: 6 in January, 8 in February and 10 in March (this is 6 more than in the previous quarter). There were 7 application forms received during this period: 4 in January, 2 in February and 1 in March (this is 5 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was via the net native campaign (7 enquiries) and the CBC website (5 enquiries).

Assessments

- During this period 17 new assessments were started: 5 career carer, 2 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 8 Family and Friends/Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and 2 Supported Lodgings assessments. As of the 31st March 2017 there were a total of 16 assessments in progress: 6 career carers, 2 Regulation 24's, 6 Family and Friends/SGO's and 2 Supported Lodgings assessments.
- 6 Fostering households were approved, all as career carers, during this quarter (2 of which were IFA transfers). This brings the number of approval for the year to 11 which exceeds the recruitment target set for 2016/17 which was to recruit 10 career carers.

During this quarter there were 2 de-registrations of foster carers, 1 carer resigned following concerns being raised with her regarding the care provided to the child in placement, The second resignation was from a carer where a planned review of her approval was going to

recommend she was no longer suitable to be approved as an Intensive Support foster carer.

- As of the 31st March 2017 the Fostering Agency had a total of 107 fostering households (compared to 103 in the previous quarter), 85 of these were career carers.
- In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers and children placed, there is a fair match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care.

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	90%	76%
Dual Heritage	1%	6%
Black or Black British	6%	5%
Asian	3%	3%
White Gypsy/Traveller	/	1%
Other	/	9%
Not known	/	1%
	100%	100%

- As of the 31st March 2017 there were a total of 134 children placed with in house foster carers compared to 74 with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The number of children placed with in house carers is increasing year on year. At the end of March 2014 the percentage of children placed in house was 46%, by the end of March 2015 this had increased to 54%, by the end of March 2016 it was 59%, and at the end of March 2017 this had further increased to 65%. This increase has been achieved by the Service reviewing all existing foster carers to ensure we maximise their fostering offer, by having a robust recruitment strategy in place including supporting IFA carers to transfer to CBC when they have chosen to do so, by work being progressed regarding our step down initiative to move children from residential care into a fostering placements where they have the opportunity to experience family life. It has also been achieved by ensuring foster carers are well supported to care for the children placed with them. Our aspiration is to increase the percentage of in house placements further to 70%. We can never achieve 100% in house as there will always be children that need to be placed out of the area or in IFA/residential placements. Increasing our pool of in house carers will not only improve services to children in care and help improve placement stability but children will have local placements to better meet their

needs and the Council will decrease its reliance on more expensive IFA placements

- As of the 31st March 2017 there were 135 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 140 at the end of the last quarter). Each year the number of SGO's granted has increased year on year, this is the first time that the SGO numbers have actually decreased. Although Special Guardian Order (SGO) carers are generally expected to access universal services, they are entitled to seek support from the Local Authority as and when required. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service sporadically for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits, or provide telephone support in order to meet the needs of individual carers. The main area Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers seek support with is in relation to contact, children's behaviour or support in financing respite or holiday activities.

Private Fostering

- This report does not cover Private Fostering as the Fostering Service is not responsible for managing or reporting on this area of work.

Referrals/Placements

- During January, February and March 2017 there were 33 new fostering placements made: 12 in January, 5 in February and 16 in March. This is an increase of 16 new placements compared to the last quarter.

Training

- During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 14 specialist in house training courses which included: Children who go missing; the risk of sexual exploitation, Looking after yourself and others by promoting resilience with attachment in mind, Help for carers with troubled teenagers, Moving on to adoption, Childcare emergency aid, Foster to Adopt, Safer Caring; a new approach, Supporting the Health needs of LAC, Life Story workshop, Contact and working with birth parents, Supporting educational achievement, Preparing LAC for Independence and Allegations Awareness for foster carers. In total 213 candidates booked on training and 192 attended.
- Foster carers also accessed training from the Early Years programme, these included; Early Help and support for mental health in children and young people, Paediatric first aid, Protective behaviours, Tip of the

Iceberg, Crisis Intervention, Learning through play and Prevent training.

- There were 22 foster carers also accessed e-learning training on the following subjects: Safer caring, E-safety, Equality and Diversity, Sexualised behaviour, Child Development, Foetal exposure to alcohol, Attachment and brain development, An introduction to Safeguarding Children and Awareness of child abuse and neglect.
- As of the 31st March 2017 there were 80 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 8 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 11 households were overdue in completing their TSD Standards and were outside the required timescale. Supervising social workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve the standards.

Ofsted Notifications

- Whenever a significant event happens i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs the agency have to report these to Ofsted. During this period no notifications were necessary.

Allegations

- During this period there were no allegations made regarding foster carers.

Complaints

- During this period there was 1 complaint made by a foster carer in relation to the Local Authority's decision to move children prematurely to their adoptive placement. There were 11 points to the carers complaint of which 4 were partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The 4 partially upheld points related to the clarification of raising concerns and communication regarding the carers being placed on hold. This has been rectified through the introduction of a concerns/complaints against foster carers procedure. The upheld point relates to a process issue in relation to the foster carers payment which has been rectified.

Compliments

- During this period no compliments were received.

Annual Budget

- Year 2016/2017 the Fostering Service within Children's Services had an annual budget of £1,179,630.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

- Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirements to report to Members on the management and outcomes of Services provided, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services provided are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management

- Regulatory Risks: Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standards.

Staffing

- The Fostering Agency comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Head of Service has overall management responsibility for Fostering. Under the Head of Service is the Practice Manager who is also the Registered Manager for Fostering. This person monitors and manages the activities of the Fostering Agency. She supervises 2 team managers who have day to day responsibility for management of 2 fostering teams. During this period there were no new starters or leavers. As at the 31st March 2017 there were vacancies for a business support officer and a Supervising Social Worker.

Council Priorities

- Children and Families First.
- Working as One Team close to our community.
- Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers – much more than care.
- Being a well managed service and providing great public care.

Corporate Implications

- Not applicable.

Legal Implications

- This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the activities of the Fostering Agency in the previous quarter as required by legislation, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

- The report is an update on the service and does not have financial implications.

Equalities Implications

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 report highlights ongoing efforts to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds and to provide training and development in relation to equality issues.

Implications of Work Programming

- The 4 quarter Fostering reports feed into an annual report which is then presented to Overview and Scrutiny along with the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Conclusion and next Steps

- During this quarter the service has worked hard to ensure that assessments in progress were completed and approved at fostering panel in order for the Service to meet its recruitment target. The target set for 2016/17 was to recruit 10 new fostering households and the Service actually approved 11.
- As of 31st March 2017 65% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 35% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The % of children placed in house has now stabilised at 65%, however the Service is striving to increase the number of children placed with in house carers further. Our aspiration is to be able to place 70% of our children in house. If the Service continues with its robust recruitment strategy and continues to provide good support to carers it is expected that the 70% target can be met within this financial year.
- Long term placement stability of children is good as evidenced in our performance indicator exNI63 which look at the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption. Our target in this area was 70% (high is good) and at the end of March 2017 we had exceeded this target at 78.4%
- Short term stability of children is also good as evidenced in our performance indicator exNI62 which looks at the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements during the previous 12 months. Our target in this area was 11% (low is good) and as at the end of March 2017 we exceeded this target at 9.2%.

- Good progress has been achieved in both performance indicators due to a number of initiatives and work being undertaken which has focused on placement stability issues. This has included in various way.
 - Having a robust recruitment strategy in place.
 - Creating profiles of carers strengths and vulnerability which are utilised during the matching process.
 - Ensuring foster carers are accessing appropriate training to meet their learning and development needs.
 - Having CAMHS clinicians based in the Corporate Parenting Service who can work with children and carers when required.
 - Ensuring meetings take place when placements are fragile or disrupt so that additional support can be provided where required and any learning can be shared to help plan for future placements.
 - Constantly reviewing the quality of referrals and challenging when they do not meet the required standard.
 - Ensuring foster carers have resource packs and appropriate training when they care for UASC.
 - Updating the foster carers supervision checklist to ensure consistency of supervision with all foster carers.
- Other indicators of placement stability include the fact there have been no notifications made to Ofsted regarding any events/significant incidents, there have been no allegations made against foster carers and only 1 complaint made during this period. Foster carers core training needs have been reviewed, gaps identified and action taken to ensure all foster carers complete core training. Foster carers are accessing more training and developing their skills and knowledge which means they are in a better position to support the children in their care. When placements become fragile or disrupt the service is quick to respond in order to resolve issues and support carers appropriately.
- In conclusion this has been a very positive quarter for the Service, exceeding its targets in relation to recruitment and short and long term placement stability. The performance and available data for the service give a good indication that foster carers providing a high standard of care to the children placed with them, that children are well matched and supported in local resources and that outcomes for them have improved considerable during this quarter, particularly in relation to placement stability.

Appendices

- None.

Background Papers

- None.

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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 3 July 2017

**Corporate Parenting Panel - Fostering Team Annual Report
2016-17**

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

Advising Officers: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

This report relates to a Non-Key Decision – Annie Craig, Practice Manager,
Fostering – annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Purpose of this report

1. This report introduces the Fostering Agency Annual Report for Members to consider and note.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive or Committee are asked to:

1. That Corporate Parenting Panel considers and notes the Fostering Agency Annual Report and Appendices.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for fostering will need to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny to note the contents and provide feedback.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to

them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.

3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council has a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

Council Priorities

- Improved educational attainment and progress
- Protecting vulnerable children and young people
- Early help and improving life chances
- Being healthy and positive

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

4. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placement is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked after Children.
5. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
6. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
7. Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend

Legal Implications

8. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the performance of the Fostering Agency in the previous year as required by legislation. As the report is provided in accordance with timescales and does not highlight any issues, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

9. This report provides updating information and does not include any financial decision / implications.

Equalities Implications

10. 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 following equality issues have been reported:

- All staff have access to the Council's extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. This includes diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have included outreach work; advertising; press coverage; online posts/websites/Facebook and twitter pages.
- Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge
- The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability.
- The Youth Care Scheme provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- This year has seen a significant increase from the previous year in terms of the number of males being accommodated compared to females. It would be advisable to give further consideration to the causes of this trend.
- 35% children fostered are from BME communities. This indicates a possible over representation of BME children in the LAC population which should be given further consideration.

- 91% of foster carers are White. This indicates that further initiatives may be required to encourage and support more foster carers to come forward from different BME communities

Conclusion and next Steps

12. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note progress on the Development and agree the implementation of the revisions proposed to the fostering fees scheme.

Appendices

Appendix A – Fostering Agency Annual Report 2016/17

Appendix B – Chair of the Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report
2016-17

Background Papers

None



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Appendix A



Annual report

Fostering Team, Central Bedfordshire Council

For the period: 2016 - 2017

A great place to live and work.



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Introduction

The annual Fostering Service Report provides information about the management and outcomes of the Fostering Service and meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Services: National Minimum Standard 25.7.

The report will inform Elected Members, Senior Managers and decision makers about key outcomes in service provision, identify any issues of concern and outline plans for improvement to the quality of service provision. The report may also be of interest to service users, staff and colleagues from other agencies. The report provides information about the activities and outcomes achieved between 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 and identifies developments for the Service for the year ahead.

Section 1

1.1. Service Overview

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Agency is co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children's Services. This supports the close working relationship between the operational childcare teams and the Fostering Service.
- 1.1.2 The Fostering Agency has remained conveniently located to support the provision for providing a range of fostering services as specified within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning fostering legislation prescribes the services and processes to be followed by a Fostering Agency and the qualifications required by Managers and Social Workers.
- 1.1.3 The Fostering Agency has experienced a number of staff changes during this year mainly due to staff moving on to further their career, retirement or staff moving out of or living out of area.
- 1.1.4 As at the 31st March 2017 the Fostering Service was made up of the following full time equivalent staff:-
 - 1 x Practice Manager
 - 2 x Team Managers
 - 2 x Senior Social Workers
 - 10 x Social Workers
 - 1 x Family Support worker.
 - 1 x Panel Secretary
 - 2 x Business Support Officers



- 1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent (apart from a small number of Independent Form F assessors) and have a number of years post-qualifying experience.
- 1.1.6 All fostering social workers are qualified and registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). They have access to the Council's extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The Council's Learning and Development Programme also provides diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- 1.1.7 The teams carry out the full functions of the fostering agency with social workers completing a range of fostering work, including foster carer assessments (Family and Friends and career carers), supervision/support, reviews etc. In addition the fostering service is involved in the assessment of Supported Lodgings carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers.
- 1.1.8 The fostering service is also supported by specialist staff across the Fostering and Adoption Service. These include a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer, a Professional Panel Adviser and Panel Secretaries who support and manage the Fostering and Permanence Panel. The Fostering Service has access to CAMHS clinicians who provide support to Social Workers, Children in Care and Foster Carers. The Fostering Service also works particularly closely with the Placement and Resource Team whose staff are responsible for making placements and foster carer payments.

1.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel

- 1.2.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel usually meet twice a month depending on demand. These panels have primarily been full day panels considering a maximum of 6 cases per panel.
- 1.2.2 During the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017 the panel met on 17 occasions.
- 1.2.3 The Fostering and Permanence Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. First Annual Reviews and those where there has been a change in carers' approval or where there have been a complaint or allegation are presented to



Panel for consideration. Panel also make recommendations in relation to children being matched to their permanent foster carers.

- 1.2.4 The attached Fostering Panel Chairs Report (Appendix B) includes valuable information and feedback on the function of panel business.

1.3 Provision of information on fostering

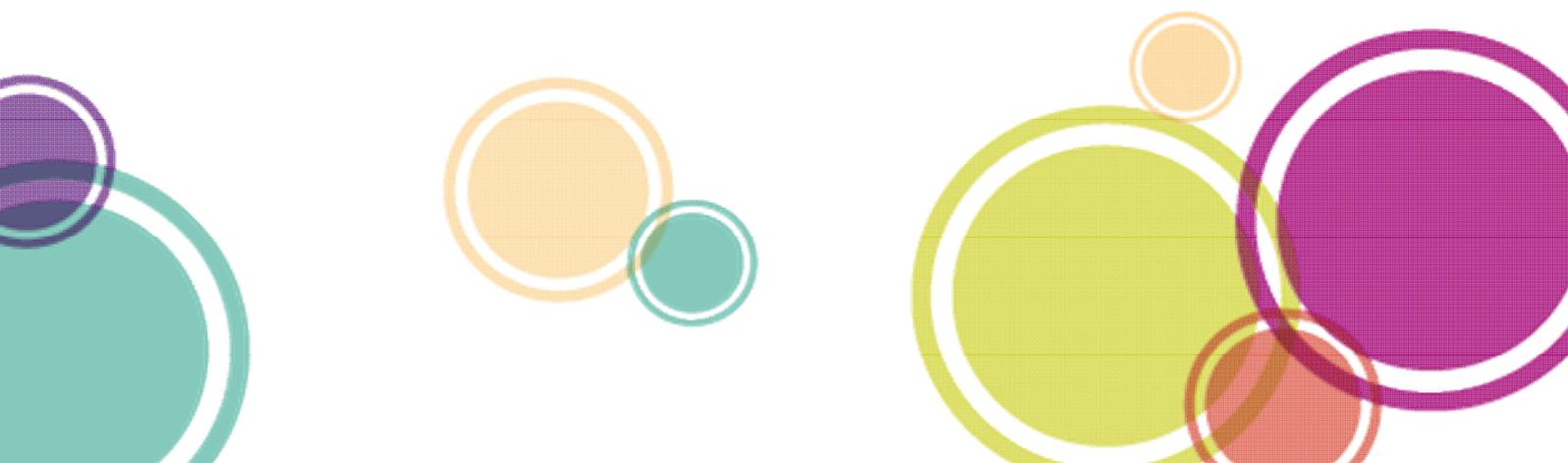
- 1.3.1 Central Bedfordshire Council has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Enquiries can be made via the council website where information on fostering is readily available and directly to a fostering email address. Enquirers are provided with information about fostering and the assessment process and are invited to attend information events during the year. In addition they are offered Initial Visits where enquirers are provided with more information about fostering and an initial assessment of their home is undertaken to ensure it meets health and safety requirements to foster.

2 Section 2

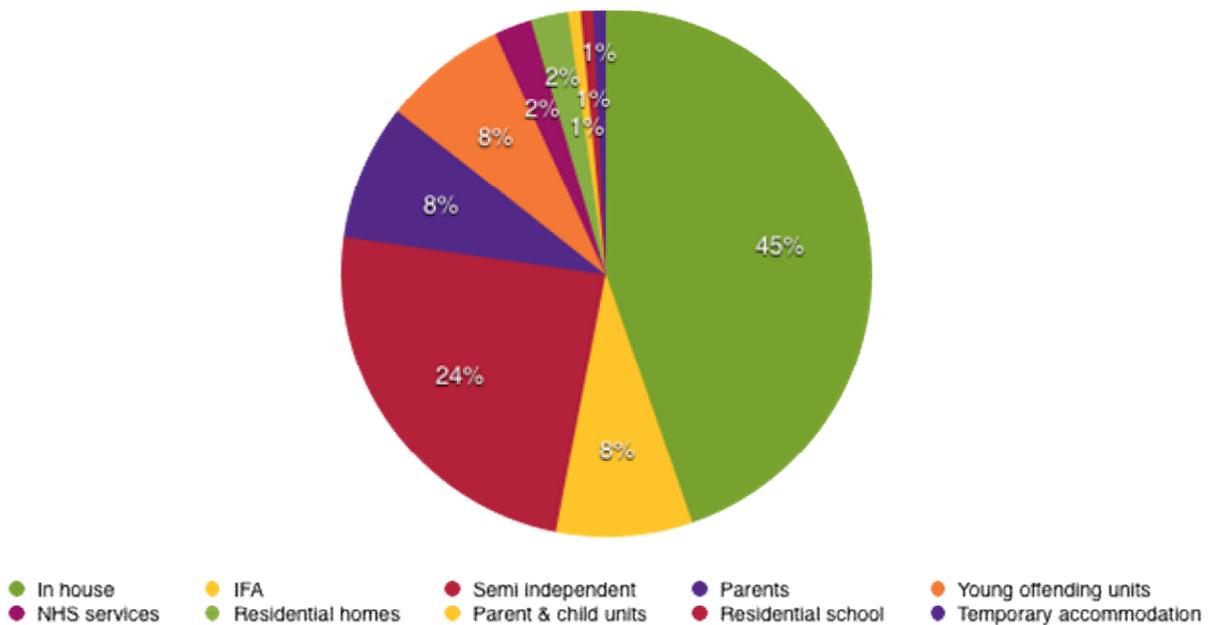
Children and Fostering

2.1 Children accommodated

- 2.1.1 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 132 children were accommodated (compared to 108 in the previous year) 59 (45%) of these children were placed with in house foster carers (compared to 53 in the previous year). 11 (8%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (compared to 19 in the previous year). 32 (24%) were placed in semi-independent accommodation (compared to 24 in the previous year), 11 (8%) were placed with parents, 10 (8%) were placed in Young Offending Units, 3 (2%) were placed within NHS services, 3 (2%) were placed in residential homes (compared to 7 in the previous year), 1 (1%) was placed in a Parent and Child Unit, 1 (1%) was placed at a residential school and 1 (1%) was placed in temporary accommodation.



Children accommodated between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017



2.1.2 44 of the young people placed either with in house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) or in semi-independent living were unaccompanied asylum seekers (compared to 29 in the previous year). The main countries of origin for these young people were Iran (14), Vietnam (8), Iraq (6), Syria (4) and Eritrea (3).

2.1.3 The referral for the child/young person which includes essential and preferable matching criteria, which are crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.

2.1.4 Respite placements were provided as and when needed on 52 occasions. In addition 5 children had regular monthly respite as part of their care plan. Youth carers were provided with 16 periods of respite as part of the Youth Care agreement.

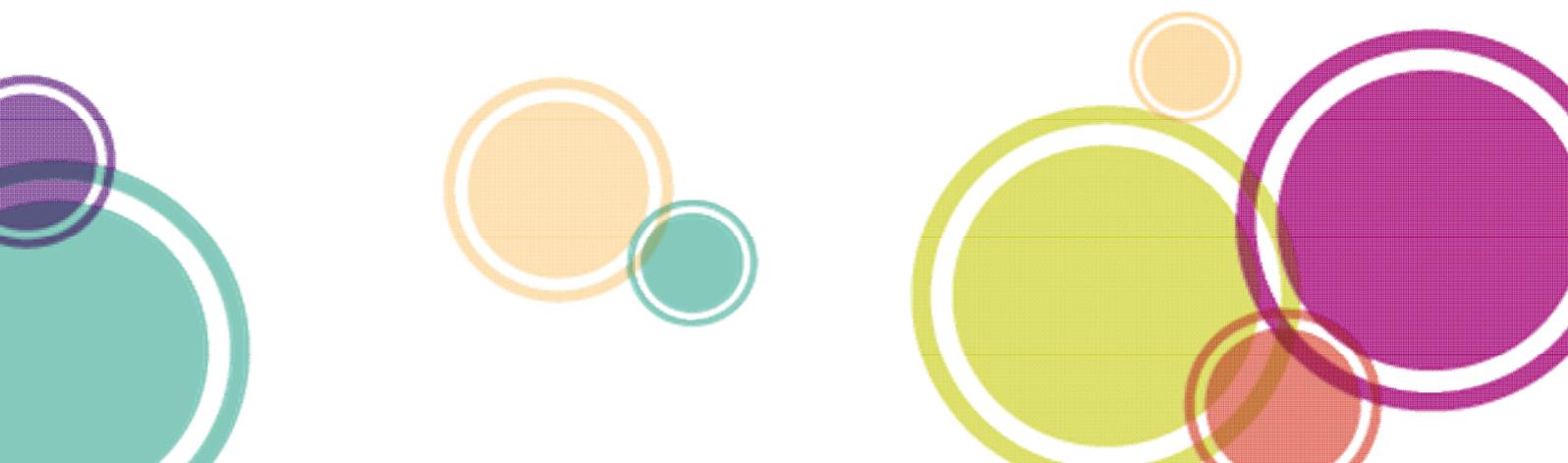
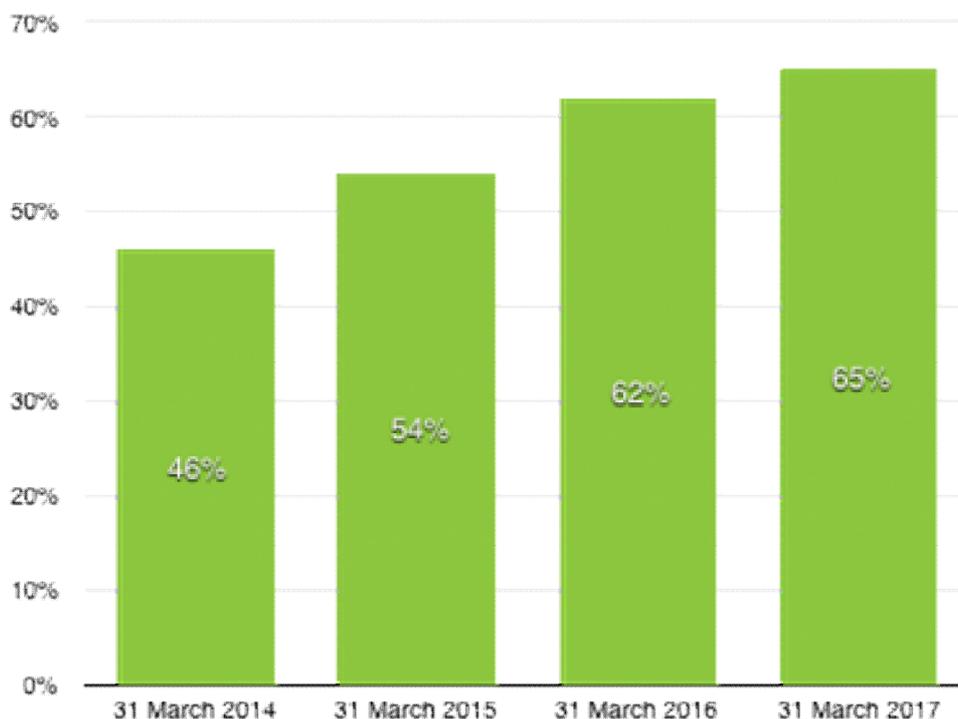
2.1.5 Of the referrals for foster placement 15 came through the Emergency Duty Desk Service (compared to 12 in the previous year).

2.1.6 As at 31st March 2017 there were a total of 131 children living with in-house



foster carers (compared to 117 as at 31st March 2016) and 74 living in Independent Fostering Agencies (compared to 82 as at 31st March 2016). This represents 65% of children placed with in-house carers (compared to 62% as at 31st March 2016, 54% as at 31 March 2015 and 46% as at 31 March 2014). This increase of in-house placements has been achieved not only by the increase in number of career carers being approved, but also in supporting existing foster carers to consider changes in their approval so as to enable them to care for a wider variety of children and increase the number of children they can care for. This has enabled CBC to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in homes which is more cost effective than placing children in IFA's (Independent Fostering Agencies). When children do need to be placed in IFA's (Independent Fostering Agencies) there is a regional Framework Agreement in place to commission these placements. The agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 18 preferred providers. This agreement has enabled the council to reduce the average cost of placements and there are clearer expectations in respect of quality and outcomes for children.

Percentage of children living with in-house foster carers



- 2.1.7 Research indicates that placement stability for children and young people in care is an important factor for them having more positive outcomes during their lives. Changes of placement and primary carers causes instability in terms of attachment and sometimes disruption in education/friendships etc.
- 2.1.8 Changes of placement primary carers. The increase in number of available in house placements has also supported placement stability as there is now more choice of foster carers available so better matching can be achieved.
- 2.1.9 The Service has 2 targets set in relation to placement stability, one for short term and one for long term stability. Short term placement stability is measured by the performance indicator exN162 which looks at the percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placement moves over the previous 12 months. The target set was 11% (low is good) and at the end of March 2017 this target was exceeded at 9.2%. Long term placement stability is measured by the performance indicator exN163 which looks at the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years or are placed for adoption. The target in this area was 70% (high is good) and at the end of March 2017 this target had been exceeded at 78.4%. Good progress has been achieved in both performance indicators due to a number of initiatives and various work being undertaken which has focused on placement stability issues, this has included;
- Having a robust recruitment strategy in place which has delivered on what it set out to achieve
 - Reviewing foster carers approval range to ensure the fostering service is utilising what foster carers can offer in terms of placements
 - Creating profiles of foster carers strengths and vulnerabilities which are utilised during the matching process
 - Ensuring foster carers are accessing appropriate training to meet their learning and development needs
 - Having CAMHS clinicians based in the Corporate Parenting Service who can work with children and carers, when required
 - Ensuring meetings take place when placements are fragile or disrupt so that additional support can be provided when required and any learning can be shared to help plan future placements
 - Constantly reviewing the quality of referrals and challenging when they do not meet the required standard
 - Ensuring foster carers have resource packs and appropriate training when they care for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)



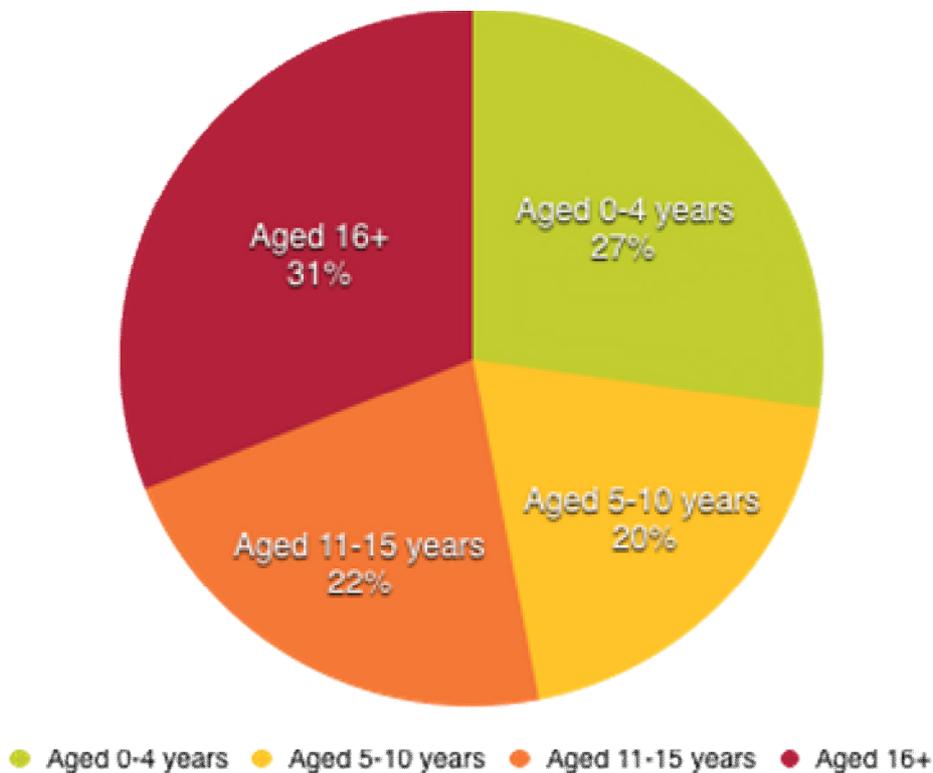
- Updating the foster carers supervision checklist to ensure consistency of supervision with all foster carers
- Having a stable and permanent workforce in place to provide consistency to children and foster carers.

2.2 Age gender and ethnicity of children referred for fostering

2.2.1 The majority of children accommodated between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 were aged 16 plus and were mostly unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, the full age distribution was as follows:

- 0-4 years - 36 children (27% compared to 37% in the previous year)
- 5-10 years - 26 children (20% compared to 9% in the previous year)
- 11-15 years - 29 children (22% compared to 27% in the previous year)
- 16+ years - 41 children (31% compared to 27% in the previous year)

Age of children accommodated



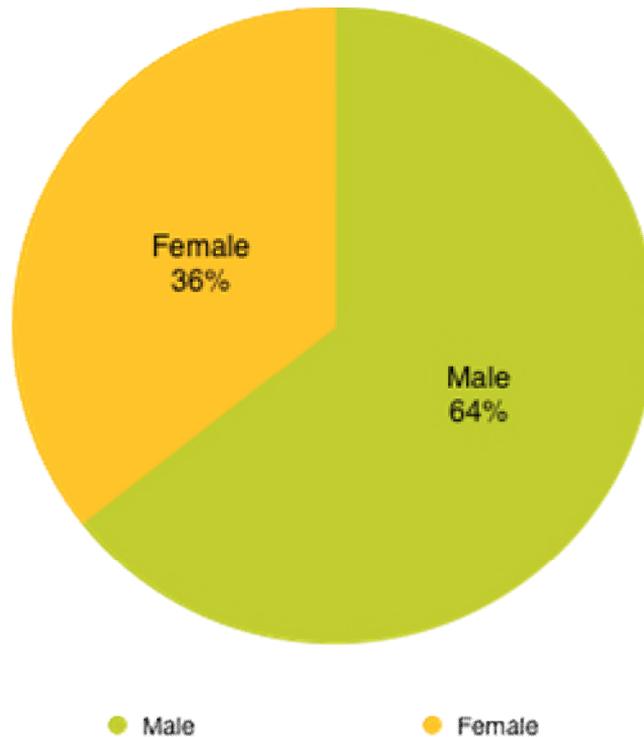
2.2.2 Last year the highest percentage of children accommodated were in the 0-4 age category, this year the highest percentage were in the 16 + category.



70% of all children placed in care were aged 11 and over.

2.2.3 Of the 132 children accommodated between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 85 (64%) were male and 47 (36 %) were female. This evidences a slight increase of males accommodated during this period compared to last year when there were 73 (68%) of males accommodated compared to 35 (32%) females.

Gender on children accommodated

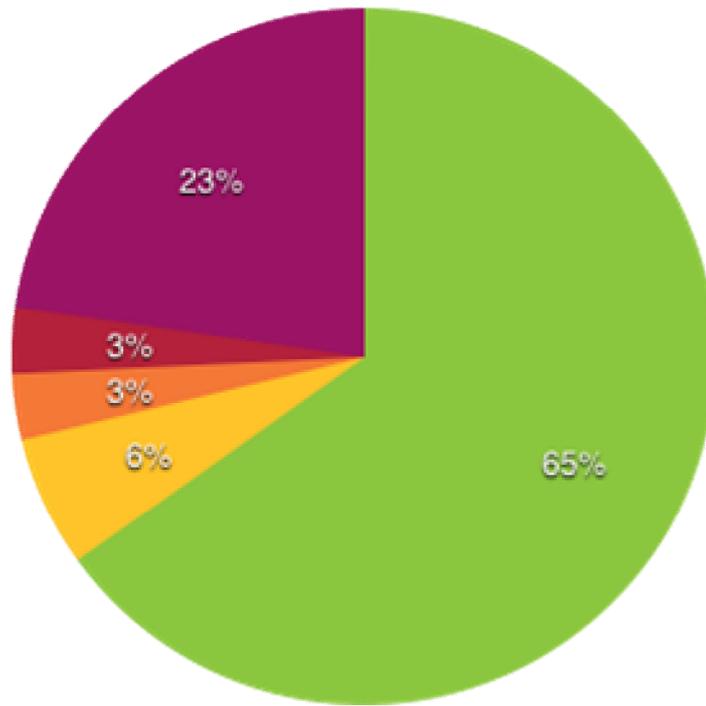


2.2.4 In terms of recording of ethnicity of the 132 children accommodated between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017; 86 (65%) were White/British; 8 (6%) were Asian or Asian/British, 4 (3%) were Black or Black British, 4 (3%) were Dual Heritage and 30 (23%) were classed as Other Ethnic Groups (many of these would have been the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People). This means that 35% of placements were for children from ethnic minority groups and therefore, strategically services provided may need to be reviewed in order to ensure the specific needs of this group of children are appropriately met.



Ethnicity of children accommodated

● White/ British ● Asian or Asian/British ● Black or Black/British
● Dual Heritage ● Other ethnic groups



2.3 Sibling groups of children referred for fostering

2.3.1 There were 11 sibling groups within the children accommodated during the year (compared to 7 in the previous year), 6 groups of 2, 4 groups of 3 and 1 group of 4. 9 of these sibling groups per placed in house with only 2 needing to be placed in I.F.A placements. One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with siblings, wherever possible. Out of these sibling groups all sibling groups were assessed as needing to be placed together apart from 1 young sibling group where the baby had a different father and it was decided to place separately. All sibling groups assessed as needing to be placed together were placed together. This is a significant achievement as sibling groups are more difficult to match with suitable carers as many fostering households do not have spare bedroom capacity to accommodate sibling groups.



**3 Section 3
Foster carers**

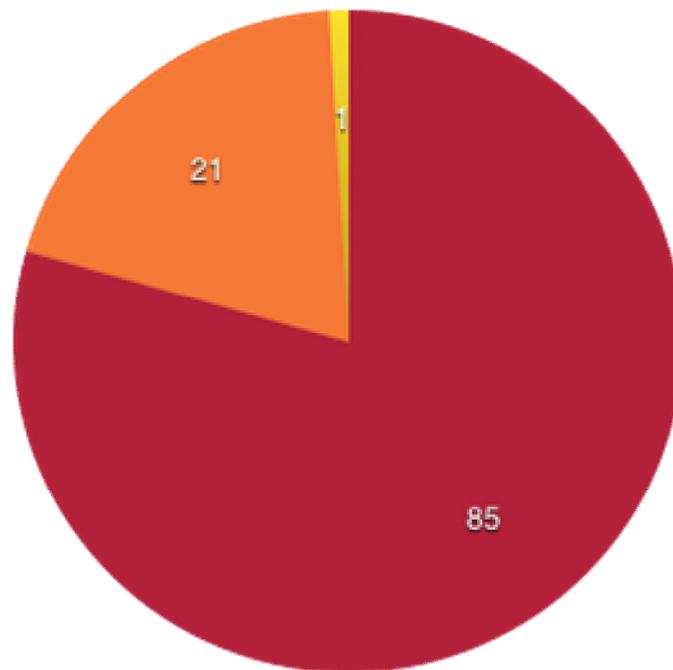
3.1 Recruitment of foster carers – enquiries through to approval

- 3.1.1 The Fostering Service's recruitment target for 2016/2017 was to recruit 10 new career carers and this was achieved. In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have included outreach work; advertising; press coverage; online posts/websites/Facebook and twitter pages.
- 3.1.2 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 there were 92 enquiries (compared to 90 in the previous year) by people who were interested in becoming career foster carers.
- 3.1.3 The best months for enquiries were January (16); May (10) and February (10). The worst 3 months were August (2); September (3) and December (5).
- 3.1.4 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth 'Skills to Foster' training as part of the preparation and assessment process.
- 3.1.5 In terms of assessments completed between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 there were 67 (compared to 61 in the previous year) These assessments would have been a mixture of Regulation 24, temporary approval (11); Family and Friends/SGO,(38); Career Carers (24) and Supported Lodgings assessments (2).
- 3.1.6 As at 31 March 2017 the Fostering Service had a total of 107 fostering households (compared to 104 in the previous year). 85 of these were career carers (compared to 82 in the previous year) which included 7 intensive support carers and 1 specialist family link carer, 1 foster for adoption carer and 21 family and friends carers, 6 of which were Regulation 24 (temporary approved) carers.



Foster carer approval categories

● Careers carers ● Family & friends carers ● Foster to adopt carer



3.2 De-registrations/terminations of approvals

3.2.1 Foster carers cease to foster either because their approval has been terminated by the Service or because they wish to resign. Termination of approvals occur usually because there has been an allegation/concern against a foster carer that has been upheld or because foster carers no longer meet the standards required. Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 there were no terminations of approvals. During this period, however, there were 14 de-registrations, 5 of which were family and friends carers, the remaining 9 were career carers.

3.2.2 Reasons for de-registrations/resignations as follows;

Family and Friends:

- 1 x Child reached 18 years of age
- 1 x SGO (Special Guardianship Order) granted
- 1 x sibling group returned to birth parents
- 1 x Adoption Order granted
- 1 x Full care Order granted to the LA and carer unable to care for the child.



Career Carers:

- 1 x Carer's birth children did not wish to continue fostering
- 1 x Carer decided it was the right time to end their fostering career
- 1 x Carer moved from tier 3 to tier 2, couldn't then afford to foster
- 1 x Carer moving a significant distance from the Bedfordshire area
- 2 x Carers had personal issues and a change in circumstances
- 3 x Carers were dissatisfied with the Service

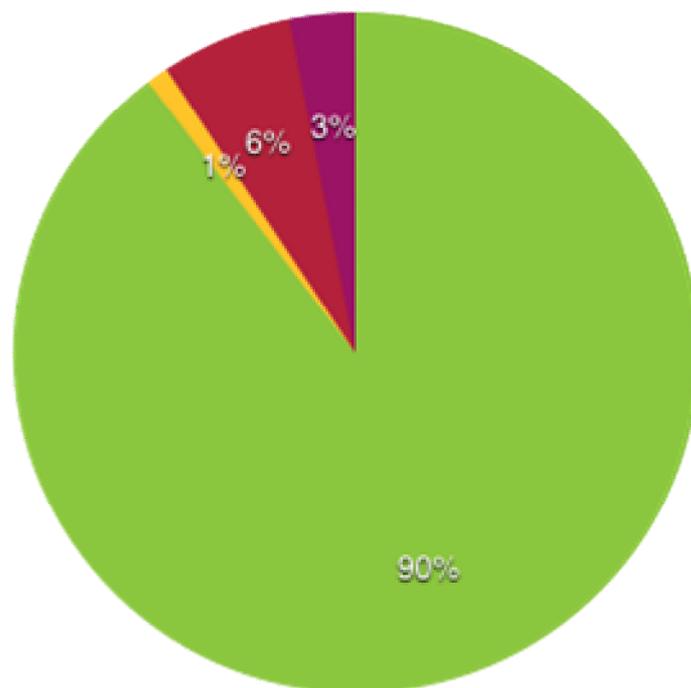
3.3 Ethnicity of foster carers

3.3.1 As at 31 March 2017 the breakdown of ethnicity of foster carers was as follows:

- White - 174 (90%)
- Dual Heritage - 2 (1%)
- Black or Black British - 12 (6%)
- Asian - 6 (3%)

Ethnicity of foster carers

● White ● Dual heritage ● Black or Black British ● Asian



3.4 The Intensive Support Fostering Scheme (previously known as Youth Care)

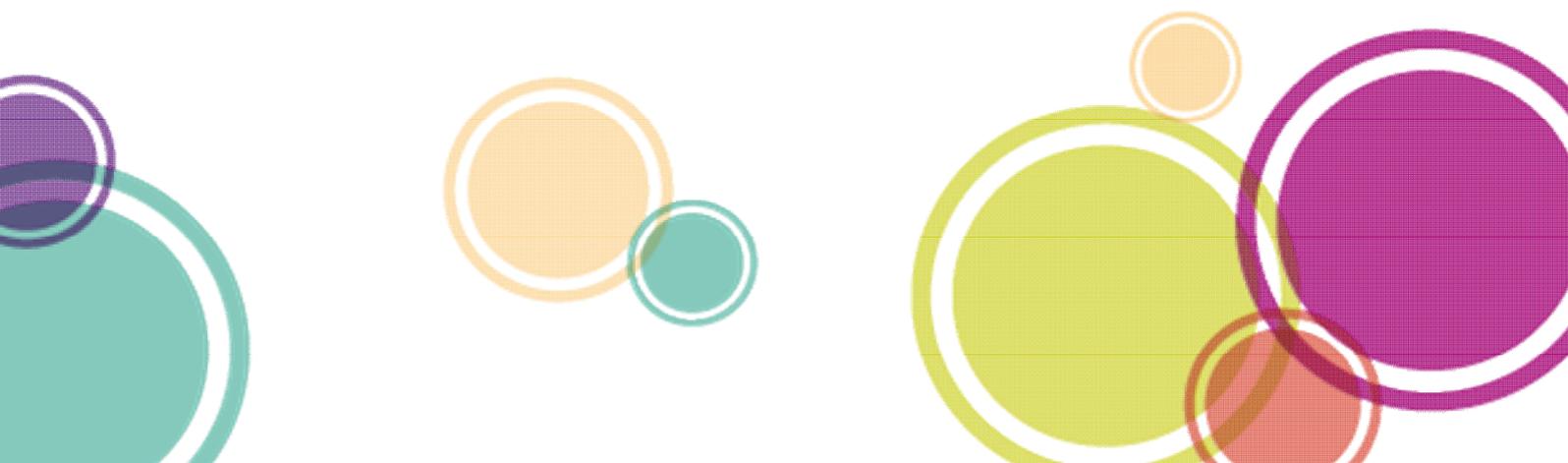
- 3.4.1 The Youth Care Scheme was reviewed in 2016 and renamed as the Intensive Support Fostering Scheme. This is a comprehensive and enhanced fee paid scheme which provides specialist care to children and young people mainly over the age of 10 years (although younger children can be placed) who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.4.2 As of 31 March 2017 there were 7 approved Youth Care Households, caring for 4 children.

3.5 The Family Link Scheme

- 3.5.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Family Link carers are foster carers who are recruited, approved and trained in the same way as other foster carers. They receive regular support and guidance from a supervising social worker.
- 3.5.2 Family Link foster carers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Period of short breaks will be carefully planned and can be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.5.3 Once agreement has been given for the care package from the Resource Panel, a careful process of matching takes place taking into account the individual needs of the child and their family and the carer's abilities.
- 3.5.4 On the 31 March 2017 there were 5 Family Link carers approved (2 of whom were on hold). These carers were supporting 2 children by providing regular short breaks. There was also a salaried family link fee-based carer who was linked to 2 children.

3.6 The Supported Lodgings Scheme

- 3.6.1 The Supported Lodgings Scheme was introduced at the beginning of 2017 and was put in place to support young people aged 16-17 years of age who are preparing to leave care. The aim of the scheme is to give young people the support and guidance required to support them into independence. It also provides the opportunity to support some young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum. There was 1 in house 1 Supported Lodgings carer approved as at 31 March 2017.



**4 Section 4
 Special Guardianship Orders**

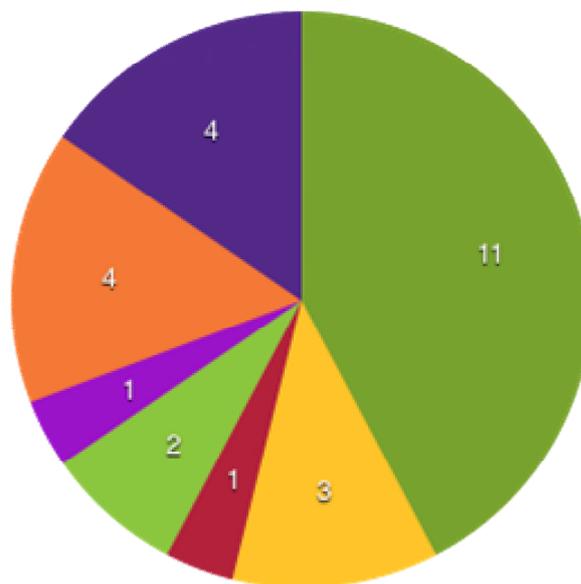
4.1.1 The Fostering Service is involved in the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order carers (SGO's). The number of Special Guardianship Order carers in Central Bedfordshire has been increasing year on year. As at 31 March 2017 there were 135 SGO's in place compared to 130 as at 31 March 2016.

4.1.2 Once assessed and the SGO is granted the majority of SGO Carers do not receive ongoing support (apart from a financial allowance) as they access universal services. There are, however, a small number of families who contact the service for specific support when issues arise. Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 the Fostering Service worked with 27 families (compared to 36 for the previous year). The areas of support requested from families were as follows:

- Contact - 11
- Financial support - 3
- Financial advise - 1
- Respite - 2
- Allegation/concerns - 1
- Play therapy - 4
- Support to SGO carer during court case - 4

Type of SGO support provided

● Contact ● Financial support ● Financial advise ● Respite
 ● Allegation/ Concern ● Play therapy ● Support to SGO carer during court case



5 Section 5

Training and development for foster carers

5.0.1 All foster carers are expected to attend relevant training recommended by their supervising social worker. The service has a full and comprehensive training programme for carers, from preparation training, through induction and core training to more complex/specialist post-approval training.

5.1 Skills to foster

5.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment preparation to become a foster carer the 'Skills to Foster' training examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the Local authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.

5.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective foster carers to reflect on their values and attitude to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer. During 2015/2016, the Fostering Service ran 4 'Skills to Foster' courses with 38 delegates attending.

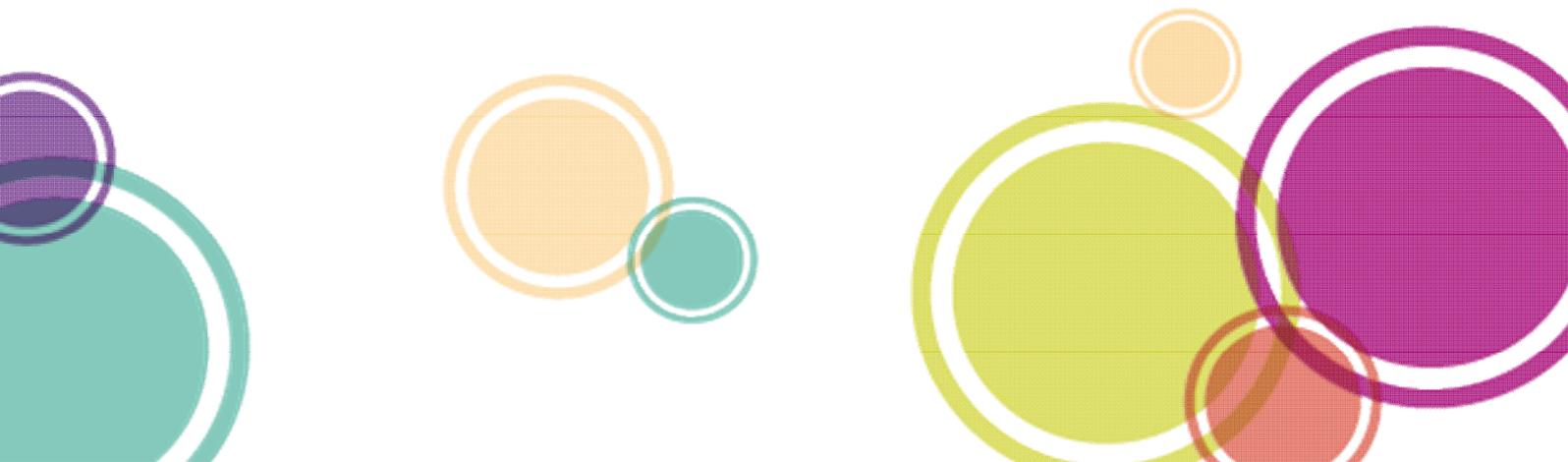
5.1.3 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete Emergency First Aid training. 6 courses were held during 2016/2017 and these were attended by 88 delegates.

5.2 Induction

5.2.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards.

5.3 The Fostering training and development programme

5.3.1 This year saw the introduction of a Training Policy which linked the foster carers tier fee to attendance at training and the core training modules. This appears to have had a positive impact of raising the standards of foster carers practice alongside their continued professional development. Evidence of this is shown in the noticeable increase in foster carers attendance at training. Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. During this financial year a total of 40 specialist in-



house training courses were provided (compared to 39 in the previous year) on 26 subjects (compared to 14 in the previous year) with 614 foster carers attending courses. The training available was diverse to meet the differing needs of carers and included the following courses:

Self harm, first aid, de-escalation/restraint, MISP, troubled teenagers, eating disorders, contact, radicalisation, tax talk, allegations, introduction to therapy, caring for UASC, attachment disorders, depression, supporting the health needs of LAC, understanding ADHD/ASC, internet safety, safer caring, permanent fostering, sexual exploitation, resilience and attachment, moving on to adoption, foster to adopt, life story, supporting the education of LAC and preparing LAC for independence.

- 5.3.2 The Fostering Service also accesses training for foster carers from the LSCB, Social Care, Virtual Schools, Domestic Violence and Early Years teams. Foster carers are able to book these courses on line and access various e-learning as well as more traditional classroom based training. 33 different training courses were accessed by foster carers from the shared training programme. Training accessed included: working with troubled teenagers, working together, Makaton, understanding the impact of sexual trauma, attachment and brain development, sexual exploitation, introduction to safeguarding, child accident prevention, paediatric first aid, protective behaviours, introduction to mentoring, parental substance misuse, child abuse and neglect, early child development, equality and diversity, sexualised behaviour, risk assessments in safeguarding, e-safety, CSE, behaviour and the physical environment, adolescence, safer caring, foetal alcohol, contact, early help and support for mental health of children and young people, crisis intervention and learning through play.
- 5.3.3 Having access to many specialist training courses in different formats enables foster carers to tailor their training to suit their specific requirements/style of learning based on the needs of the children they have in placement as well as ensuring they attend the core training required by the National Minimum Standards for the Fostering Service.

**6 Section 6
 Support for foster carers**

6.0 The Fostering Social Worker

- 6.0.1 The fostering social worker is responsible for the foster carers ongoing assessment and support and must provide regular supervision that addresses their learning and development needs. It is the key role of the fostering social worker to support foster carers in meeting the National Minimum Standards



required in the care they provide to children and young people.

- 6.0.2 A key strength of the fostering service is the ability of the staff group to remain child focused while providing a high level of support to foster carers.

6.1 Advise and Mediation Service

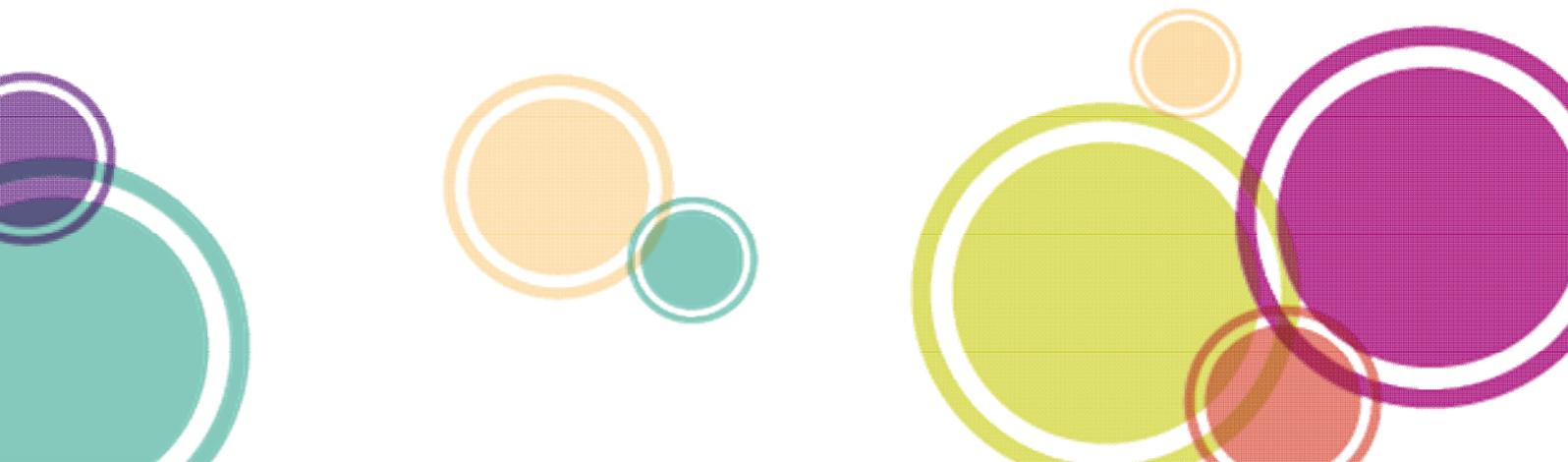
- 6.1.1 Independent advice and mediation is provided to foster carers via Fostering Network (a national organisation supporting foster carers). This service is primarily used for foster carers during an allegation as it helps to have independent support and advice during these times. The Fostering Service spot purchases this service as and when it is required. During this financial year there was only 1 request for this service which the Fostering Service supported.

6.2 Foster carer support groups

- 6.2.1 Local monthly support groups are held for foster carers across the country. These are held in Dunstable, Millbrook and Cardington and have been well attended throughout the year.
- 6.2.2 Monthly support groups are also held for Intensive Support carers. As part of the support offered to Intensive Support carers a clinician from CAMHS attends these to provide group supervision and offer advice and support to help aid placement stability.
- 6.2.3 Two evening social events for foster carers took place over this financial year and included a Pizza night (22 adults and 23 children attended), and a Chinese night (18 adults and 20 children attended).

6.3 Celebration of Fostering event

- 6.3.1 A Celebration of Fostering event is held every year to recognise the commitment, loyalty, hard work and achievements of our foster carers and their families. This year the event was held at Woburn Safari Park and was extremely well received with 97 adults and 95 children attending. Staff from the Corporate Parenting Service attended as well as the Chief Executive, Deputy Director for Children's Services and Councillor for portfolio for Looked After Children. 14 foster carers received awards this year; 3 for 5 years service, 1 for 10 years, 3 for 15 years, 1 for 25 and 1 for 30 years. Special awards were also presented for carers in the following categories:



- Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities
- Brilliant family and friends foster carer
- Fabulous foster carer
- Outstanding contribution to fostering
- Special sons and daughters

6.4 Foster carers Talk Time

6.4.1 This event is held quarterly and gives foster carers the opportunity to meet with Fostering Managers and other senior managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Four Talk Times were held in this financial year with a total of 51 carers attending. Following the Talk Time meeting a newsletter is sent out to all foster carers updating them of areas discussed at Talk Time as well as providing information on a whole host of other topics relevant to fostering.

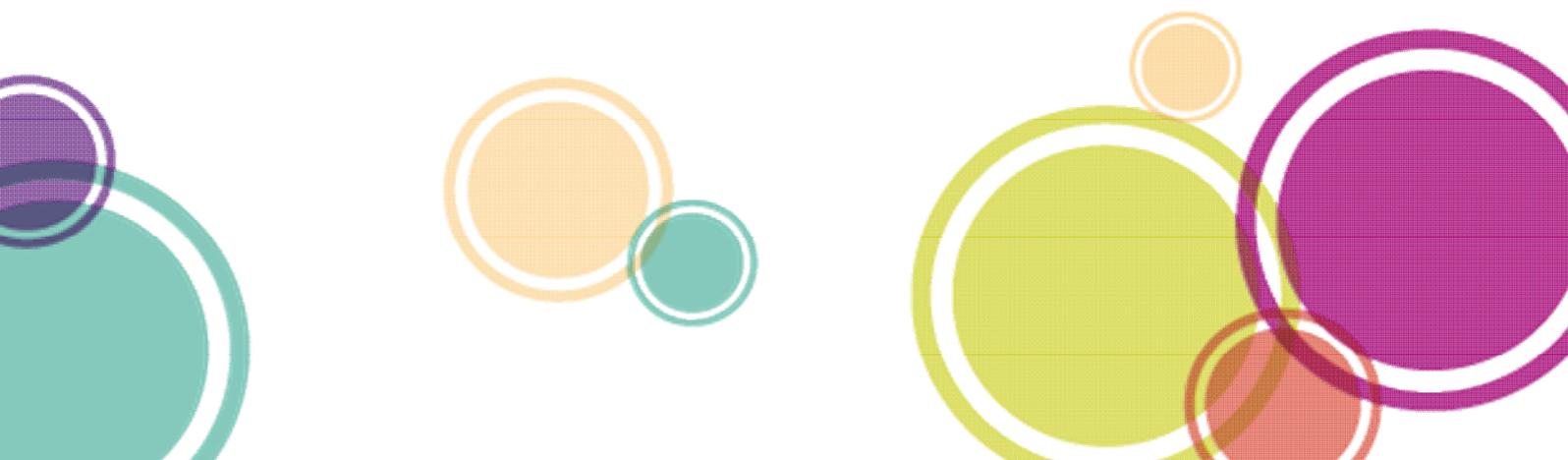
6.5 The Mentoring Scheme

6.5.1 The Mentoring Scheme currently has five foster carer mentors who specialise in their own areas such as care of teenagers, short term care for younger children, long term care and one mentor with vast experience of the different schemes. All newly approved foster carers are allocated a mentor at the time of approval and existing foster carers are able to access the scheme during challenging times or if they require additional support. During this financial year 10 mentees were supported by this scheme.

6.6 Out of hours service

6.6.1 Fostering managers and social workers from the Fostering Service provide an 'out of hours' telephone support service for foster carers. A mobile phone is dedicated to this service and all carers have access to the number. The service is available from 5.20pm – 11pm weekdays and from 9am – 11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service ensures that foster carers can readily access telephone support from an experienced fostering worker.

6.6.2 Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued. Outside of these hours foster carers will contact the Emergency Duty Team.



6.7 The Foster Carers Association

6.7.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. The council actively encourages and supports the Association and provides financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quarterly newsletter. During this financial year events that the Foster Carers Association provided included an Arts and Crafts Day, Picnic in the Park, a Halloween Party, a Christmas Party and a trip to Wickstead Park.

6.8 Fostering Network and BAAF membership

6.8.1 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also provided with individual membership, funded by the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service also spot purchases Fostering Networks advice and mediation service for foster carers, as and when required.

6.9 Sons and daughters

6.9.1 The Fostering Service run holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which are activity based and aimed to support them with the impact of fostering on their family. This year 4 events took place, these included NerfZone, Milton Keynes (10 attendees), a Pony Day (9 attendees), Bounce, Milton Keynes (13 attendees) and the Pantomime (14 attendees).

7 Section 7 Notifications

7.1.1 The Fostering Service has to notify Ofsted (Schedule 7) of any significant events, accidents or incidents that occur for children whilst placed in foster care.

7.1.2 Between 1 April 2016 and 31st March 2017 there was 1 notification sent to Ofsted (compared to none in the previous year). The notification was in relation to a young person who became aggressive towards one of his foster carers. The police were called and due to concerns about the young persons mental health he was taken to hospital. He was assessed and later returned to the foster carers. He was already known to CAMHS as they were already working with him and they were contacted in order to provide additional support.



**8 Section 8
 Allegations**

- 8.1.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about foster carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Fostering Network’s Advice and Mediation Service.
- 8.1.2 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 there were no allegations of misconduct made against foster carers (compared to 4 in the previous year). The Service dealt with concerns with foster carers during the year none of which reached the threshold for investigation but were dealt with in a variety of ways i.e. through discussion/supervision with the carers, through training or by reviewing the carers approval.

**9 Section 9
 Complaints**

- 9.1.1 The Fostering Service uses the Children’s Services Complaints Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other partners with a relevant interest in the way CBC fostering services are provided.
- 9.1.2 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 there were 8 complaints made (compared to none in the previous year). 2 of these complaints were not accepted into the complaints process as there was an alternative process available to consider the issues raised; 1 complaint was withdrawn by the complainant; 1 complaint was considered under the non-statutory children’s complaints process and 1 complaint is pending conclusion under the non-statutory children’s complaints process as the complaint issues have not been clarified so the complaint is on hold. The other 3 complaints were considered under the statutory children’s complaints process and are outlined below;
- Complaint in relation to the social worker not turning up for visits; unprofessional comments and a lack of support during a placement breakdown – this was not upheld
 - Complaint about the decision to move a foster child earlier than expected without allowing the family to say goodbye and concerns over the well being of the carers own child not being listened to – this was partially upheld
 - Complaint about the quality and content of a social workers report for the foster carers review – this was not upheld



9.1.3 There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) during this period. The IRM is a mechanism for appeal open to the foster carer/s when disagreeing with the fostering service provider which considers a prospective or existing foster carer not to be suitable to foster a child, or feels an alteration is needed to an existing foster carers terms of approvals

10 Section 10 Compliments

10.1.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these alongside complaints and comments can be shared to promote learning and make improvements.

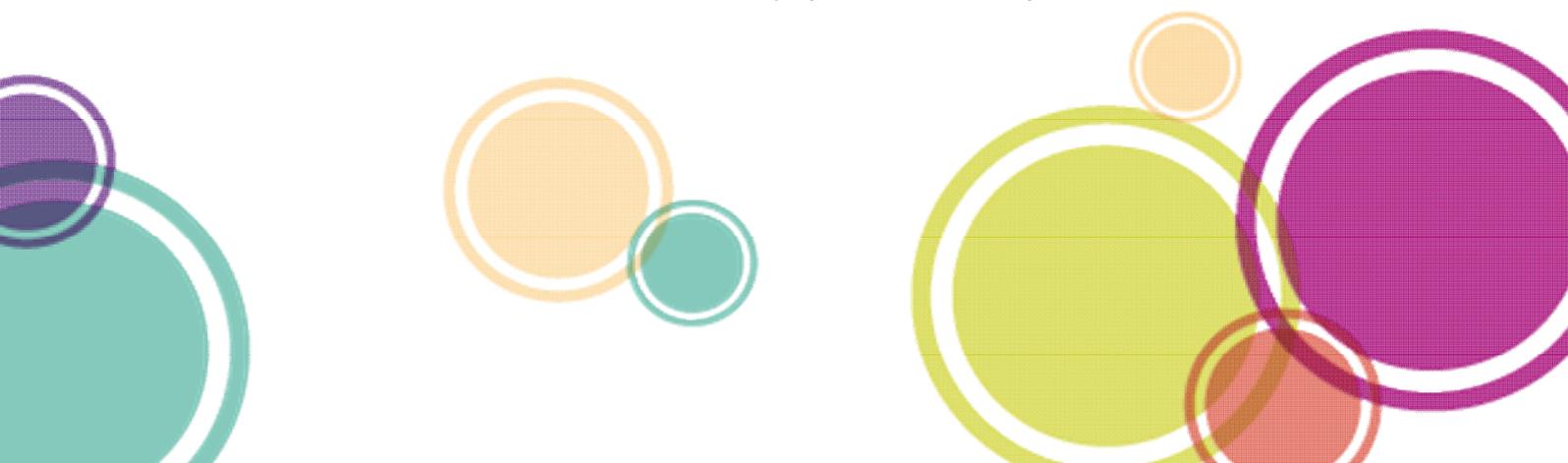
10.1.2 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 the Fostering Service received 16 compliments (compared to 37 in the previous year). Many of these compliments were made in relation to the excellent work foster carers are doing. For example an IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) praised a foster carer for her child focused care of a new child in placement which helped him settle, a childcare social worker complimented a foster carer for her excellent 'life story' work and another social worker praised a foster carer for going 'above and beyond' in her role as a foster carer.

10.1.3 Fostering staff have also received several compliments from foster carers, child care social Workers, IRO's and the Fostering Panel, regarding the support/training foster carers had received and in relation to the quality of the work produced. For example, 4 foster carers complimented their supervising social workers on the support received, 1 for their support and trust, another for their patience and support, another thanked their S/S/W for all their help and support and the 4th for being a 'shining star' where they felt their S/S/W had been reliable, consistent and responsive to their communication and had generally been a great support. An IRO and a Child Care Manager also complimented the Fostering Team and Child Care Team for their 'excellent joint working'. The Service often received positive feedback regarding training, however, it is worth noting, for example, the feedback received for 1 course which focused on looking after UASC. Foster carers really appreciated the stories the young people brought with them and the invaluable knowledge of the staff who facilitated the training.



11 Section 11 Conclusion

- 11.1.1 This has been another successful year for the Fostering Service. For three years in a row the Fostering Service has met its recruitment target for foster carers. Not only has the service increased its number of foster carers but it has also decreased its usage of more expensive IFA's (Independent Fostering Agencies) placements.
- 11.1.2 At the end of March 2014 only 46% of our looked after children were placed with in house foster carers. This number has increased year on year and as at 31 March 2017 stood at 65%. Our aspiration is to increase this further during this financial year where we hope to achieve 70%. This target will never reach 100% as there will always be a need to place some children out of area e.g. in specialist placements.
- 11.1.3 The increase of in house resources has enabled CBC to make significant savings on placement costs as IFA placements are significantly more expensive than in house foster placements. Placement choice has been improved which has enabled better matching of children. More children are now in local placements that better meet their needs and where support is more readily available. It has also enabled the service to exceed its targets in relation to placement stability.
- 11.1.4 This year has seen some significant developments within the Service including the introduction of a new in house scheme within fostering. The Youth Care Scheme was reviewed in 2016 and became the 'Intensive Support Fostering' Scheme. The age range of children who may be classed as Intensive Support placements is now broader and based on the child and young person's need rather than their age. It now includes 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.
- 11.1.5 The Supported Lodgings Scheme was introduced at the beginning of 2017 and was put in place to support young people aged 16-17 years of age who are preparing to leave care. The aim of the scheme is to give young people the support and guidance required to support them onto independence. The scheme also includes the opportunity to support some young people who are unaccompanied and are seeking asylum.
- 11.1.6 In 2016 the Service also started to pay an introductory fee to IFA



(Independent Fostering Agency) carers (with CBC children in placement) who choose to transfer to CBC. Once approved they receive an introductory fee in recognition of the additional work required of them during the transfer process.

11.1.7 Apart from these changes there have been very few changes in the way the Fostering Service provides services this year. The primary purpose of the Fostering Service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster placements for children who are unable to live with their birth families. The service continues to provide placements that meet this requirement. The quality of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service and the support and training offered to foster carers has been excellent. This is evidenced in the low level of complaints, lack of allegations and the regular flow of compliments and positive feedback received by the service this year.

11.1.8 In terms of the forthcoming year the service will continue to concentrate on increasing the number of in house foster carers so that more and more children can be placed with carers who can appropriately meet their needs locally. The recruitment target for 2017/18 is to recruit a further 10 foster carers, however this will be targeted recruitment as the service has sufficient foster carers to care for young children but needs to increase the number of foster carers who can care for older children, sibling groups, children with complex needs and asylum seeking young people.

11.1.6 During 2017/2018 the Fostering Service also plans to develop a Parent and Child Fostering Scheme, recruit some specific Intensive Support respite carers and introduce a PACE fostering scheme which will provide overnight stays and support to children and young people who have been arrested and are due to attend court the following day.

11.1.6 In terms of developing the Service plans are in place to work with Bedfordshire University in 2017/18 to pilot a relationship based model for effective work in foster care.



This Report has been composed and presented for members to consider and note by:

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This information can be made available in Large print and in other languages if required

Për Informacion

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Appendix B

ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE FOSTERING AND PERMANENCE

PANEL

1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017

Introduction

This report covers the year from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. This has been another busy year, with seventeen Panels having been held which has meant a combination of one or two Panels each month. Panel has seen some staff changes but on the whole, this has been a more stable year than last year.

Panel Membership

Panel has continued to be chaired by Suzannah Robinson, a qualified Social Worker, with experience in Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Looked after Children and Residential Care. She is currently employed part time by another Local Authority as an Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair, and also sits as a Panel Member for the shared Adoption Panel hosted by CBC and an IFA Fostering Panel. She is independent of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Fostering Regulations require that Panel runs with a minimum of five members including the Chair or vice-chair and a social worker with a minimum of three years' experience in order to be quorate. During the year, CBC Panel process was changed and it now runs with a preference of six members where possible, rather than seven, to ensure quoracy in the event of any conflicts of interest or unexpected absences. CBC has two vice-chairs, both of them are independent. Panel now makes every effort to ensure that one of the vice-chairs is present at each panel, to ensure that panel is able to go ahead if the Chair is unexpectedly unavailable or discovers a conflict of interest.

During the year, we have had two resignations. One of our Vice-Chairs felt she could no longer commit to the time needed for panel. She had been undertaking the role in the main in her own time without payment, and with other commitments including two other jobs and young children, felt she could no longer manage Panel as well. The other was one of our experienced Independent Social Workers, who had been a Panel member for some time and had made the decision to fully retire. She had previously been a Guardian so had brought to Panel a significant level of experience.

It is important that the composition of the Panel reflects as far as possible the diversity of the wider local community. At this stage, Panel Members range in age from 36 to 68, include both genders and come from a variety of heritage and ethnic backgrounds. Panel continues to have a central list of Members from which attendees are drawn. This list currently comprises of the following:

Vice Chair-Independent	Social Worker – Reviewing Officer, Fostering Team Manager (another LA), Chair of two IFA Panels.
Vice Chair-Independent (new)	Social Worker – until recently Team Manager of Fostering Team in another LA.
Independent (new)	Social Worker recently retired from front line Social Work
Independent	Social worker and Trainer. Previously Reviewing Officer, Panel Member for other LAs and Connected Person carer for Granddaughter
Independent	Educational Psychologist Former Foster Carer for IFA
Independent	Advisor and Teacher of children from Gypsy and Traveller families
Independent	Adoptive parent and a magistrate
Independent	Foster Carer for IFA
Independent	Foster Carer for another Local Authority, Panel Member for an IFA
Independent (new)	Health Visitor / Named nurse for Looked After Children
CBC Member	Elected Council Member, experience of children with disabilities
CBC Member	Social Worker – Children with Disabilities team

Panel Members have shown a varied commitment to attending Panels, depending on their availability and other commitments. There is a core list of Panel Members who are able to commit to attending most Panels, whilst other Members have more limited availability. As Panel dates are set for the year ahead, all Panel Members are able to indicate their availability in advance and commit to as many Panels as they feel they can manage. It is rare for a Panel Member to withdraw at short notice and has only happened in exceptional circumstances. However, there have been occasions when a panel member has been unable to attend on the day because of illness or transport issues, and also occasion when a panel member has had to withdraw from a case when a conflict of interest has arisen. Because of the policy of six members attending, this has always meant that panel has been able to go ahead without any disruption to Applicants, Carers and Social Workers.

Because of the volume of work, Panel Members have to allow several hours of reading for each Panel, and all come well prepared. It is clear that all reports are always read, as Panel Members come with a good level of understanding of the issues, and always with areas they require further clarification on.

Panel Advisor

Panel now has a permanent Panel Advisor, which has ensured greater stability and consistency throughout the panel process.

The role of Panel Advisor, although not statutory, is crucial to the functioning of the Panel. The Panel Advisor spends a considerable amount of time ensuring that all paperwork is ready for Panel, available in time and complies with regulations and good practice guidelines. On a significant number of cases, the Panel Advisor will return paperwork to the Social Worker for clarification and will not book it in to panel until she is satisfied that all the required information is available. This ensures that Panel is able to make a fully informed recommendation, without needing to seek further information from the Social Worker or Applicant/Carer. Applicants/Carers need to be confident that Panel will not become a re-assessment process, so it is essential that the Panel Advisor role is fully supported within the Service to enable the quality of paperwork provided to panel to be as high as possible. This enabled Panel Members to focus on questions which provide evidence of the Applicants'/Carers' level of understanding and insight, rather than factual details. The Panel Advisor is the link between the Panel Chair, Panel Members and the Fostering Team and is available at Panel to give advice as needed. The Panel Advisor also takes back issues raised by Panel to the Practice Manager, and co-ordinates the responses to those issues.

Panel Administration

During this period, Panel has been supported by two Panel secretaries. The quality of this support remains consistently high. These secretaries are shared with Adoption Panel so have to support between two and four Panels a month. The volume of work is significant but timescales and deadlines are always achieved. As part of the panel preparation, the Panel secretary, in discussion with the Panel Advisor, draws up an agenda and sends out invitations to all those attending. Reports are available to Panel Members without fail eight working days before every Panel, minutes are swiftly produced and are of a very high standard, appraisals are booked in and organised efficiently, and any additional requests for help or information are responded to very quickly.

One significant change this year is that Panel no longer uses paper. All Panel members have been provided with an iPad, a CBC email address and a Box account. All reports are placed into Box accounts at least eight days before Panel, and an email sent advising members that they are available for reading. At this stage, each Panel member is finding ways that suit them to record notes and questions, some are using paper for now, some are recording on the iPad using mainly Notes, others are annotating on the documents using other apps. As Panel Members become more familiar with the iPad and different methods of making notes, this experience will be drawn together and a consistent way of working will be agreed.

The Panel Secretaries have been crucial in managing the process of becoming paper-free. They have tested different applications and methods of providing reports to Panel members, have responded to requests for help whenever they can (despite original reassurance that IT support would be available to Panel Members), and they have patiently supported those Panel Members for whom learning new technology has been more challenging.

Panel tasks

The Fostering and Permanence Panel's primary legal function is to make recommendations about the approval of Foster Carers including first reviews, subsequent reviews (which take place every three years), changes of approvals and reviews following allegations or complaints, as well as matches of children on a permanent basis to Foster Carers. The Local Authority must ensure that all prospective Foster Carers are considered by Panel before approval and placing children. The only exceptions to this process for approving people as Foster Carers are in relation to connected persons, when a Local Authority can place a child with a relative, friend or other person connected to a child for up to sixteen weeks without referring it to a Fostering Panel, and a Local Authority can grant temporary approval as a Foster Carer to a prospective adopter for a named child. (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.)

At the 17 Panels held during this period, the following was achieved:

74 cases were presented in total, a breakdown of this figure is as follows:-

16 were presented for approval to include;

- 11 new households were recommended and agreed by the ADM as approved Foster carers
- 5 approvals were Family and Friends carers

(1 Foster Carer request for approval was presented twice as originally deferred)

41 were annual reviews to include:

- 10 were first annual reviews approved with a change
- 23 were subsequent annual reviews approved with no change (including 1 not recommended but agreed by ADM)
- 7 were subsequent annual reviews approved with a change
- 1 was an annual review following a complaint, allegation or concern

(4 Foster Carer annual reviews were either withdrawn or deferred)

7 were extensions of temporary approval.

5 were matching children to their permanent foster carers, 1 of which included a sibling group.

In addition, 41 variations of approval were acknowledged, alongside 4 exemptions.

An essential function of Panel is to assess the quality of the information being presented, and feed this back to the agency, so for a number of these cases, Panel gave advice regarding outstanding work, matching considerations or gaps in the information available.

Although in the majority of cases, Panel supports the recommendation of the Social Worker, there have been occasions when Panel has not reached a unanimous conclusion, has advised a change in the terms of approval, or has deferred a case in order to clarify some of the information provided by the prospective carer. Any views expressed by Panel Members are recorded, and if a majority recommendation is reached rather than a unanimous one, clear reasons for dissent are given, to enable the ADM to be clear about the views of all Panel Members.

The quality assurance function of the Panel can be clearly evidenced in particular by the cases either withdrawn following discussion with the Social Worker/Team Manager, or those deferred. On one occasion this year, an approval was deferred, and clear, detailed information by the Panel Chair, on behalf of Panel, was provided to the Team Manager to enable a more thorough, challenging assessment to be undertaken in order to evidence that the Applicant had sufficient capacity and insight to provide good quality foster care to vulnerable children.

The ADM has agreed with all the recommendations from Panel apart from one occasion when the terms of approval were amended.

Panel Members feel confident in robustly challenging information they are given, both in their questions to Applicants and Carers and their Social Workers, and in their recommendations. Panel Members are encouraged to contribute to the summary of strengths, and are now consistently providing reasons for their recommendation.

Panel process

This year Panel has introduced a Panel member Profile folder. Prior to Panel starting, the Panel Advisor prepares the folder by removing the profile of anyone not sitting on Panel that day, and this is now given to applicants while they wait. These profiles include a photograph and brief summary of experience of each Panel Member, so the Applicant/Carer is better prepared for coming in to Panel.

Another change made this year has been the positioning in the room. Panel now consistently uses the same room and venue, and has decided that a different seating pattern would be more suitable. Feedback so far from Social Workers and Foster Carers has been that they prefer the new positions as they can more easily see all panel members.

Each case should begin with a discussion amongst Panel Members about areas they need further clarification on. However, despite the invitation letter stating that discussion about their application or review will start at the allotted time, many Carers still come to panel expecting to come into the room at this time. For this reason, and to reduce anxiety, the Chair now very briefly meets with the applicants before discussion starts if possible, to explain the process and give them an approximate timescale for them joining panel. The Chair then compiles and allocates a list of questions from the panel discussion then goes out and meets the Carers and their Social Worker, if she has not already done so, or if she has, goes out to fetch in either just the Social Worker, or the Social Worker and Applicants/Carers. Occasionally, the Social Worker(s) come in to Panel first to address any confidential or practice issues. Otherwise, it is general practice for Applicants/Foster Carers and their Social Worker to come in to Panel together and respond to questions between them. The Carers then leave Panel and the Social Worker remains whilst discussion takes place and a recommendation agreed. The Chair then go out with the Social Worker to advise the Carers of the outcome whilst the Panel Advisor gathers together the feedback from Panel Members.

It has been routine for the Panel Secretary to send out a feedback form to both Social Workers and Applicant/Carers with their invitation. However, the response rate was very low, so from this year, the Chair now takes out forms when she goes to advise the Applicants/Carers of Panel's recommendation, and asks all involved to complete the form before they leave. As most people now do complete them, the response rate has much increased. It also means that feedback relevant to that panel is received that day, rather than feedback being read out to Panel Members who may not have been in attendance at that panel.

Quality assurance

The Panel has independent oversight of all aspects of the Fostering service and has a responsibility to provide the Local Authority with feedback on the quality of the work undertaken. The processes by which this is done are currently under review. At present, feedback is compiled after every case by the Panel Advisor and emailed to the Social Worker after they attend Panel, with a copy to his/her manager for them to address any issues in supervision. This feedback covers the quality of the reports, the verbal presentation of the Social Worker and the preparation of their Applicants or Foster Carers. As yet, this information has not been pulled together in a way that enables Panel to identify

any common areas of concern or particular practitioners about whom there are a number of issues raised, so this is an area for development as we move forward. In addition, as more general practice issues are identified, these are recorded during Panel and the Panel Advisor is then raising them with the Practice Manager. These are tracked in order to ensure the issues do not drift without action being taken, and to provide Panel with some indication of the outcomes. This tracking also gives Panel the ability to consider issues being repeatedly raised, or patterns of practice which may need to be addressed through training or more general awareness-raising. Moving forward, the tracking sheet will be amended to enable it to be a more accessible tool. Feedback to Social Workers and their Managers covers a variety of issues including timescales, quality of assessments, health, training, policy and procedural issues.

Feedback responses received have continued to be positive. Comments from foster carers reflect a consistent view of Panel as being welcoming and friendly whilst remaining professional. None made specific suggestions for change. One Social Worker felt that compared to other Panels she attended, the questions asked were too detailed and Panel was reassessing her couple. Whilst Panel took this on board and does regularly consider the appropriateness of questions, it was also fed back to the Social Worker that this Panel is a robust one and will ask such questions if there appear to be gaps in the assessment report.

Other Panel Business

It is important that Panel is kept abreast of changes within the Fostering team, and with fostering on a local and national level. The Panel Advisor provides regular feedback to Panel regarding staff, policy and process changes within the agency. The agency Practice manager has attended Panel twice this year to provide detailed information about areas of change within the department. In particular, Panel has learnt about the changes to the tiered foster care levels and how they are linked to training requirements, and to the Amended Youth Care scheme, now called the Intensive Support Fostering Scheme, the introduction of Supported Lodgings and general updates about staff changes and developments in the Service.

Post-panel

The Panel Secretary who attends Panel provides a draft set of minutes two days (sometimes as quickly as one day) after Panel. These are checked and agreed by the Panel Advisor and Chair, and are then distributed to all Panel Members via their Box account. It is the expectation that all Panel Members who attended that Panel will respond within the deadline given, usually either one or two days. If a Panel Member is consistently not responding, this is addressed within their appraisal. Especially during the holiday period,

Panel Members are expected to consider whether they will be available to check the minutes, when they agree to the dates they can attend Panel.

These minutes are then sent to the ADM, along with all other reports.

At the end of the Panel day, it is the responsibility of all Panel members to delete any notes they may have made in other applications on their iPads. Within 48 hours of Panel, all documents relating to that Panel are deleted from Box accounts by the Panel Secretaries.

Appraisals

All Panel Members, including the Chair, have an annual appraisal. For Panel Members these are undertaken by the Chair and Panel Advisor. Appraisals are organised where possible after Panels to limit the additional costs.

Appraisals are the Panel Member's opportunity to give and receive feedback about their role and about the functioning of the Panel generally. Any suggestions and ideas are welcomed as Panel is an ever-evolving process as legislation, guidance and good practice change. It is the appropriate time for any training needs to be identified, either because of a gap in the Panel member's skills or knowledge, or to develop a particular interest which can then be shared with the rest of Panel.

Panel training

There has been one full day's training this year, attended by Panel Members and the Fostering team. This focussed on:

- A New Approach to Safer Caring
- Motivation of Carers
- The Impact of Mental Health on Parenting
- Travellers of the UK – their Ethnicity and Origins

Feedback from the training was that it was well received and thought to be helpful.

During every Panel member's appraisal, they are asked if there is anything they feel they can deliver in a bite-size training session, and several have agreed to this. So far, on the occasions when Panel has a shorter day, one Member has delivered a session on the experience of the Foster Carers during adoption introductions, which raised understanding of the important role the foster carers play as well as the emotional impact and need for increased support during this time. The Chair has also delivered a summary of the Parent and Child Fostering training, which increased awareness of the many challenges of such

fostering, and the need for the agency to provide much greater clarity of expectation upon the Foster Carers. The Panel Advisor now has a list of other bite-sized training that Panel Members are willing to deliver in the future.

In addition, Panel Members do have access to the online training programmes available to staff and carers and I am aware of at least one Panel Member who has undertaken several online courses and found them to be helpful.

The Chair and one of the Vice-Chairs attend the Fostering Network Panel Chair's forum when possible. These are very helpful in terms of keeping up to date with national issues, practices and legislation, as well as seeking advice and guidance from other Chairs based on their experiences. The Panel Advisor is in the process of setting up a Regional Panel Advisors group, which will similarly be an opportunity to share practice, seek advice and learn from each other about any issues that do, and will, impact on fostering.

On a regular basis, the Panel Chair sends out articles of interest to all Panel Members. This year, these have included "Reunifying abused or neglected children: Decision making and outcomes", "Factors affecting foster care placement stability for young people", "The experiences of young adults leaving foster care", "Ethnicity and Foster Care" and "Contact with Birth Families".

The Panel Adviser will also contribute to keeping Panel up to date with any changes in legislation and policy that may impact on the functions of Panel and will periodically distribute documents that may be of interest and contribute to learning for Panel.

Communication with agency

This year there has been two meetings between the Panel Chair, Panel Advisor, Practice Manager and ADM. These have been useful opportunities to discuss process and practice issues, changes within the service, feedback and learning, both for panel and the agency.

Areas for development

Continued efforts to ensure that Panel Members reflect the diversity of the community

Three new Panel Members have been recruited this year, one male and two females, all three are White British. Panel will continue to focus recruitment to ensure that there is a variety of skills and backgrounds, and to ensure that Panel includes people from a variety of ethnic heritages, from both genders and with experience of disabilities. We still hope to recruit further Members who have been looked after as a child by foster carers, and those who care for a member of their own family as a Connected Person. In addition, we are

seeking an additional Panel member with a health background, as our new member has limited availability.

Continued focus on developing a more robust quality assurance and feedback process, with the capacity to track practice issues and identify patterns of concerns and strengths, to enable the agency to continue to develop a service of high standard.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all Panel Members, the Panel Advisor and the Panel Administrators for their commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in our care are provided with the highest quality foster care.

Suzannah Robinson
April 2017

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 3 July 2017

Adoption Agency Annual Report 2016/17

Report of: Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services; Nickie Phillips, Practice Manager – Corporate Parenting Service – Adoption.
(Nickie.phillips@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

1. The report and appendix outlines the statutory framework regarding the Adoption annual report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive or Committee are asked to:

1. Note the statutory report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The report is planned to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Issues

2. Appendix A is the Adoption Annual Report for 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Options for consideration

3. None

Council Priorities

4. Adoption is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
 - Great resident services
 - Improving education and skills
 - Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing
 - Creating stronger communities
 - A more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

5. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable adoption placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked after Children.
6. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient and suitable adopters would be a child protection risk.
7. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of adopters is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
8. Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Interagency adoption placements are high cost and can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

Legal Implications

9. Adoption regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the service, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Financial and Risk Implications

10. This report provides updating information and does not include any financial decisions / implications

Equalities Implications

11. 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.
12. The annual report highlights how these considerations are taken into account. Examples include:
 - Diversity related training provided for the panel and adopters
 - A range of recruitment activity
 - No adoption disruptions in this period, reflecting the care given to the matching process
 - Continued membership of New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community.

Conclusion and next Steps

13. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the Adoption Agency statutory report for 2016-17.

Appendices

The following Appendices are attached/provided through an electronic link:

- Appendix A:** Adoption Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council 1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017
- Appendix B:** Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Joint Adoption Panel Overview Report – Panel Chair 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Background Papers

None

Report author:

Nickie Phillips, Practice Manager – Corporate Parenting Service – Adoption

Nickie.phillips@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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Appendix A



Annual report

Adoption Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council

For the period:

1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017

A great place to live and work.



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Section 1: Introduction

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption Agency during the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the adoption agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a six-monthly update report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.1 The Adoption Team

- 1.1.1 The Adoption Agency is co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children's Services. This supports the close working relationship with the court teams to achieve early permanence for children.
- 1.1.2 The Adoption Agency has remained conveniently located to support the provision for providing the range of adoption services as specified within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning adoption legislation prescribes all the services and process to be followed by an Adoption Agency and the qualifications required by Social Workers
- 1.1.3 The agency has experienced some staffing absences this year but largely retained a consistent staff group. Throughout the reduction in staff
- 1.1.4 During this period the Adoption Team Staffing has been:
- 1 x full time Practice Manager
 - 1 x Senior Practitioner (part time)
 - 5.5 x Social Workers
 - 1 x Social Work Assistant
 - 1 x Business Support Administrators
- 1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent and have a number of years post-qualifying experience.
- 1.1.6 All adoption social workers are qualified and registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and have three years post qualifying experience required by the 'Restriction of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005'.
- 1.1.7 The team carries out the full functions of an adoption agency, with social workers carrying a range of adoption work, including prospective adopter assessments, adoption support, family finding and work with adopted adults and birth relatives.
- 1.1.8 The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Coordinator, a Professional Panel Adviser and Panel Secretary who support and manage the Adoption Panel.

1.2 The Adoption Panel

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel continues to be a shared panel with Bedford Borough Council hosted by Central Bedfordshire. Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required.
- 1.2.2 Within this period the Adoption Panel met on 17 occasions and have primarily been full day panels considering a maximum of six cases per panel.
- 1.2.3 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes recommendations as to their approval. Panel also considers the proposed match between children with prospective adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them.
- 1.2.4 The Agency Decision Maker makes the decision in regard to whether a child should be placed for adoption without a recommendation from the Adoption Panel. The only exception is for a plan for adoption for a relinquished child.

1.3 Adoption Panel membership

- 1.3.1 As at 31st March 2017 the Adoption Panel Central List was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Independent	Adoptive Mother
Independent	Adoptive Father
Independent	Birth Parent of an Adopted Child
Independent	Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant
Independent	Adopted Person,
Social Work Member	Social Worker
Social Work Member	Social Worker
Social Work Member	Independent Social Worker
Social Work Member	Social Worker, Adoption Team CBC
Medical Adviser	Consultant Community Paediatrician
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent (Vice Chair)	Adopted Person
Elected Member	Bedford Borough Council

- 1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are:

Professional Adviser	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

- 1.3.3 The Legal Adviser and Medical Advisor to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings.



1.4.1 Panel and Agency Decision Maker activity

- 1.4.2 In this period the Adoption Panel met on 17 occasions.
- 1.4.3 The Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 18 children. This compares to 30 in 2015/2016 which shows a significant decrease reflective of the National Adoption activity.
- 1.4.4 In addition the Agency Decision Maker decided that 5 plans for adoption should be rescinded. 2 were plans for children made in a previous year and 3 were due to a change in the children's Care Plan.
- 1.4.5 In relation to approvals of Prospective Adopters, 17 households were recommended for approval by Adoption Panel and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker as suitable to adopt. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.6 This was 3 households less than the set target however is a reflection of the reduction in adoption plans for children within this period.
- 1.4.7 The panel considered matches for 15 children with identified prospective adopters. This compares to 22 in 2016/2017 and 29 children in 2014/2015 again reflecting the National decline in children with a plan for adoption.

1.5 Panel training and development

- 1.5.1 The Adoption Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members.
- 1.5.2 An annual training day was held on 24th October 2016 covering the following subject matters:
- Review of the Legal Framework.
 - The Impact of Mental Health on Parenting
 - Travellers of the United Kingdom – their ethnicity and origins
 - Central Bedfordshire Performance Update
- 1.5.3 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal completed by the Agency Panel Advisor and Panel Chairperson where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.
- 1.5.4 In addition the Panel Chair attends the CoramBaaf panel chairs meeting to support learning, good practice development and updates to legislation. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair also attended practice meetings with the Central East Regional Adoption Agency partnership to share good practice.
- 1.5.5 Panel members can also access the annual training programme to attend any training needs identified from their annual appraisal.

- 1.5.6 The Panel Chair is also invited to attend adoption disruption meetings to learn from practice.

1.6 Provision of information on adoption

- 1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire Council has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Enquiries can also be made via the council website where information on adoption is readily available and directly to an adoption email address. Enquirers are provided with further information about the needs of children placed for adoption and the assessment process and are invited to attend an information evening. In addition they are offered a meeting with an adoption Social worker to provide further information and discuss their personal circumstances to enable them to consider whether they want to progress an application as prospective adopters.
- 1.6.2 Information Evenings are held monthly where current information on the needs of children requiring adoption and the process of assessment is given to those people who are interested in becoming prospective adopters. Statistics in relation to enquiries received are included later in this report.

Section 2:

Children and adoption

2.0 Children referred for adoption

- 2.0.1 In this period 33 children were referred to the service for parallel planning where adoption would be the alternative plan if no other options were available. This was a slight decrease from the previous year of 38.
- 2.0.2 In order to avoid case drift or delay for children, social workers are asked to refer children for family finding when adoption is a possible outcome for that child. This does not mean that all children referred will subsequently be adopted, but ensures that robust planning is considered as part of a child's care plan. In many cases, children safely return to their families or are placed with extended family members under other Orders, such as Special Guardianship.
- 2.0.3 Early Permanence has remained a focus including the provision of Foster for Adoption placements for children. Such placements will only be progressed when there is clear evidence that adoption is a likely Care Plan for that child. This usually means that there is evidence from recent Care proceedings of a parents previous children who have been placed for adoption and there has been no positive changes to the current circumstances.

2.1 Outcomes for children with plans for adoption

- 2.1.0 Of the 18 children with plans for adoption in this period (1.4.2) 4 children had been placed with prospective adopters by 31st March 2017, with a further 2 having been matched but not yet placed. 2 have been linked with prospective adopters pending the match being presented to adoption panel, 3 have had the adoption decision rescinded due to a change to the Care Plan and a further 6 are due to have the decision rescinded following conclusion of the court proceedings as Placement orders were not granted.

2.1.1 In this period a total of 15 children have been matched with prospective adopters.

2.1.1 As of 31st March 2017 there are 2 children subject to Placement Orders with a Care Plan for adoption. 1 child is linked with prospective adopters pending assessment and 1 child where family finding is active as a link has yet to be identified.

2.2 Placements of children

2.2.2 There were 2 sibling groups placed for adoption during this period.

2.2.3 1 child placed had significant health needs.

2.2.4 No placements experienced a disruption pre adoption order

2.2.5 3 children have been placed in Foster for Adoption placements enabling early permanence.

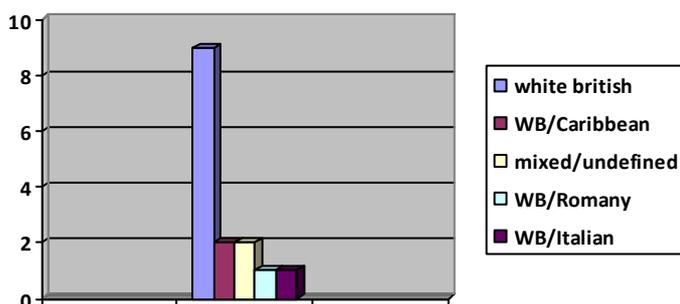
2.3 Type of adoption placement

2.3.1 Of the 15 children matched in this period, 9 were matched with prospective adopters approved by Central Bedfordshire. 6 were matched with prospective adopters approved by other agencies.

2.3.2 2 children were placed in Fostering for Adoption placements approved by Central Bedfordshire. 1 child was placed in a placement provided by another Local Authority to enable a placement with a sibling.

2.4 Ethnicity of children placed for adoption

2.4.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption, 9 were White British, 3 were of dual ethnicity, 2 were of mixed ethnicity and 1 was White British/Romany.



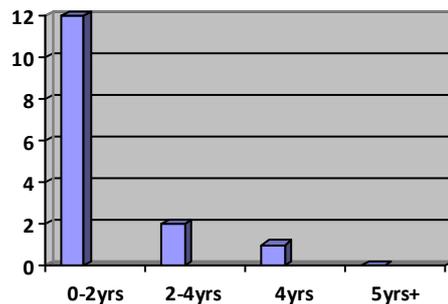
2.4.2 Central Bedfordshire practice is to recruit adopters who can support and promote a child's ethnic and cultural heritage

2.4.3 Central Bedfordshire works within the statutory guidance regarding the placement of minority ethnic children to avoid any delay in matching due to a child's ethnicity. Children are matched within families who are able to meet the majority of a child's identified needs.

2.5 Ages of children placed for adoption

- 2.5.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 12 were aged 2 years or under, 2 were between 2-4 years and 1 child was 4yrs +.

All children placed in Foster for adoption placements were under 1 year old.



2.6 Gender of children placed for adoption

- 2.6.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 7 were male and 8 were female.

2.7 Adoption Orders

- 2.2.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 27 children during the period. Reflecting a significant increase from 17 in the previous year.
- 2.2.2 As of 31st March 2017 6 looked after children are placed for adoption pending the adoption order. These are likely to be granted within the year period 2017/18.

Section 3:

Adopters

3.0 The work of the Adoption Team

- 3.0.1 A core objective is to recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer foster for adoption placements, placements for siblings and children with significant needs.
- 3.0.2 Placing children with adoptive families who can meet most of the child's identified needs including, ethnicity, culture and religion where possible.

However each may be reconsidered if there is a delay in identifying a suitable match in which case a match with adopters who are able to meet most of the identified needs will be considered.

- 3.0.3 Central Bedfordshire provide a responsive adoption support service that is available to adopted children, adoptive families, birth families and prescribed persons and adopted adults. Children and families are provided with a leaflet explaining adoption support which is available on the council website.
- 3.0.4 Central Bedfordshire offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption or affected by adoption

3.1 Recruitment of adopters

- 3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for children from Central Bedfordshire, and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families, a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year.
- 3.1.2 This has included information stands throughout the year with the community 'Just Ask' bus manned by staff throughout the county at various events such as Gala Days and local Markets. Communications via e bulletin during National Adoption Week and use of social media campaigns. In addition national advertising in the media has taken place in partnership with First4Adoption to identify a match for a specific child.
- 3.1.3 The recruitment strategy has become more targeted to provide placements that can consider:
 - Foster for Adoption – to provide early permanence for children where this type of placement is appropriate
 - Sibling groups – if appropriate we strive to place siblings together in the same family.
 - Children with additional needs – children with a disability, children exposed to drugs and alcohol during pregnancy or children with social, educational and/or emotional needs.
- 3.1.4 The target for approval of adopters during 2016/17 was 20. This reflected what had been anticipated in demand from children subject to placement orders and the number of adopters already approved and waiting.

3.2 The assessment process; enquiries, assessments and approvals

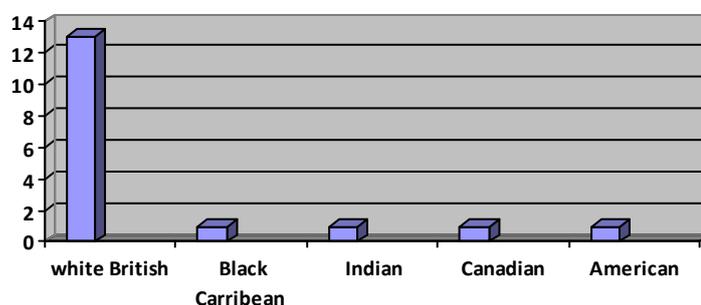
- 3.2.1 Prospective Adopter assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013. The two stage process for adopters, which was introduced as part of the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda, remains to be implemented.
- 3.2.2 100 enquiries were received in this period.
- 3.2.3 17 were presented to panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

At 31st March 2017 Central Bedfordshire had 6 prospective adopter households in Stage one of the process and 8 in Stage two.

- 3.2.4 As of 31st March 2017 Central Bedfordshire have 9 approved prospective adoptive families waiting to be linked with a child. Many of these are available for children who are waiting nationally.
- 3.2.5 8 Central Bedfordshire approved adoptive families have provided placements for 12 children from other Local Authorities within this period.

3.3 Ethnicity of adopters

- 3.3.1 13 approved households were White British. 1 was Black Caribbean and 3 were couples of mixed ethnicity including White British and Indian, White British and Canadian and White British and American.



3.4 Post approval support

- 3.4.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team from approval, through the process of placement of children, to the making of an Adoption Order.
- 3.4.2 Once an Adoption Order has been granted, adopters can continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs via the Adoption Team.
- 3.4.3 As of 31st March 2017 there were 9 approved prospective adopters who had yet to have a link with a child identified.
- 3.4.4 Approved prospective adopters must be reviewed annually if not matched or linked with a child. There is no requirement for the review to be presented to the Adoption Panel unless the agency consider that approval is no longer appropriate. 3 Annual Reviews were completed within this period with approval continuing to be appropriate.

3.5 Training for adopters

- 3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption team provide the preparation training for prospective adopters. Up until January 2017 this training was held jointly with Bedford Borough.



3.5.2 Training is accessed by prospective adopters in Stage one and is provided in three modules:

- **The Process** – information about the assessment process and matching.
- **The Child** – Explores the experiences and trauma of children placed for adoption
- **Adoption for Life** – Explores a child's life story and Adoption Support

3.5.3 Foster for Adoption training is also available for applicants wanting to consider providing this type of placement. A Foster for Adoption placement will only be progressed when there is clear evidence that adoption is a likely Care Plan for that child.

3.5.4 Adopters also have access to the full annual training programme offered by Central Bedfordshire. This annual programme is available to both prospective adopters and adoptive parents after an Adoption Order has been granted.

3.5.5 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme. The feedback during the past 12 months has been positive.

Section 4:

Adoption support services

4.0 Post adoption support to families

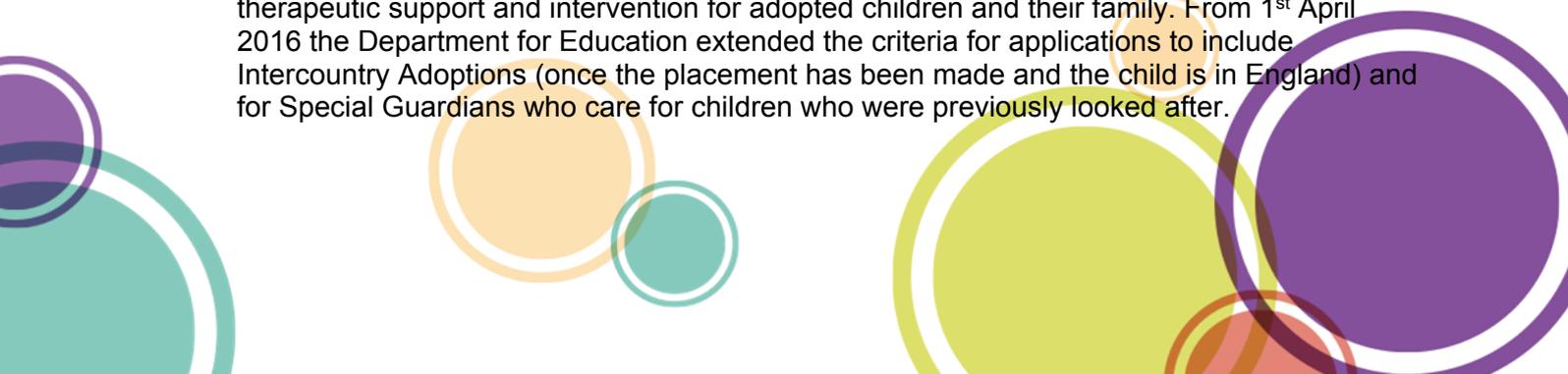
4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. To inform people about support available we have a booklet called 'Adoption Support Services in Central Bedfordshire'. Also available is a 'Children's Guide to Adoption Support'. Both can be downloaded from the Council website.

4.0.2 In this period the service has completed 13 adoption support assessments, each either requiring advice and support only, signposting to universal services or a prescribed service such as therapy or counselling.

4.0.3 The family's either self-refer or are referred via other agencies such as school or health services. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.

4.0.4 As of 31st March 2015, the team was working directly with 36 adopted children providing adoption support. This is a increase of 4 from the same time in the previous period.

4.0.5 The Adoption Support Fund has remained available throughout this year to provide therapeutic support and intervention for adopted children and their family. From 1st April 2016 the Department for Education extended the criteria for applications to include Intercountry Adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in England) and for Special Guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.



- 4.0.6 In October 2016, following a budget review of the fund the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families advised of changes to the funds available for families. The letter advised that in 2015/16 the £19 million pound fund was accessed by 3500 families. In 2016/17 the available funding was increased to £21 million and a further £2 million increase was introduced in October 2016. However demand for support was twice the level forecast and in October 2016 the fund had already been accessed by more families than the total in the previous year.
- 4.0.7 Following discussions with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Adoption Leadership Board, an interim measure was introduced with immediate effect. This measure was the introduction of a £5000.00 'Fair Access Limit' which meant a maximum amount of funding was available per child for the remainder of the year.
- 4.0.8 The review recognised that a small number of children may require an exemption to the Fair Access Limit and advised that funding will be available for such children in exceptional circumstances. In such cases funding would be available but only where the Local Authority agree to 'match' funding.
- 4.0.9 The scope for access to the fund has remained unchanged.
- 4.10 The Agency maintains a mailing list of adoptive families to send newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days and the annual training programme.
- 4.11 Each child placed for adoption has a contact plan in relation to post adoption contact with their birth family. Birth family includes birth parents, siblings, grandparents and any other significant family member. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of 120 children.

4.1 Services to adopted adults and birth relatives

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted adults seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Central Bedfordshire an access to records counselling service is offered. Information is also provided to other councils who are supporting adopted adults living in their area who were adopted through Bedfordshire.
- 4.1.2 Initial counselling interview is offered to those seeking birth records and work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- 4.1.3 Birth relatives or those with a prescribed relationship, seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service where appropriate. In the case of birth relatives, they are not provided with any identifying information about the adopted person but the Agency acts as the intermediary.

4.1.4 At 31st March 2017 the Adoption Team were providing support to 4 adult adoptees accessing their adoption records.

4.2 Disrupted adoptions

4.2.1 There was one adoption placement for two siblings that experienced a disruption pre the granting of an adoption order. Both children were placed in 2014.

Section 5:

Other activities

5.0 Inter-Country and non agency adoption

5.0.1 Intercountry Adoption

During this period we did not receive any enquiries regarding intercountry adoption.

5.0.2 A Service Level Agreement is being explored with the Intercountry Adoption Centre to manage this aspect of the agency responsibility.

5.0.3 Non Agency Adoption

In this period 8 enquiries regarding Step Parent Adoption were received and 1 progressed to a notification of intention to adopt.

5.1 Regional Adoption Agency

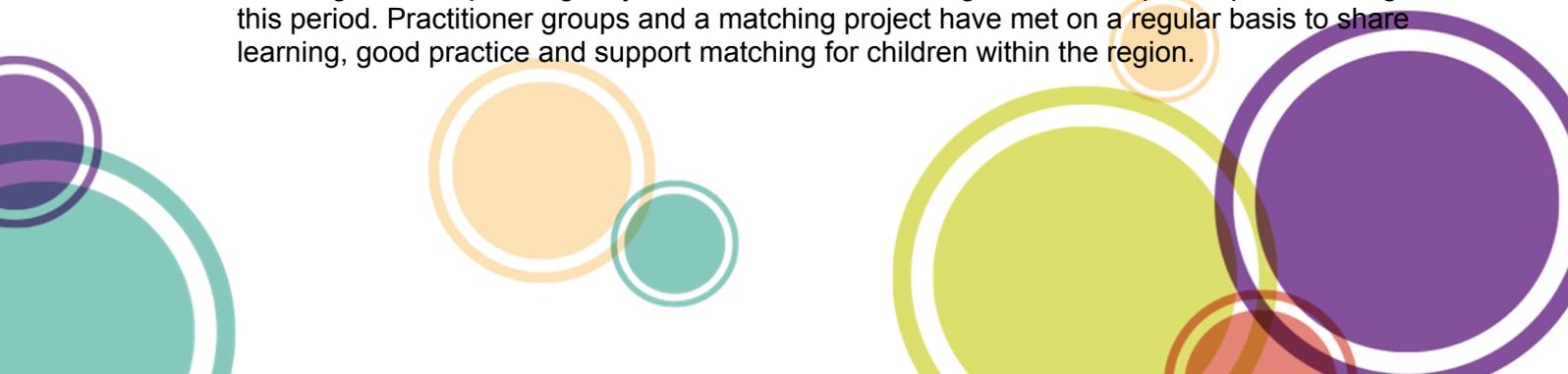
5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire are members of the Central East Partnership with other Local Authorities:

- Northamptonshire Council
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Cambridge Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Norfolk Council
- Milton Keynes Council

In addition the partnership includes two Voluntary Adoption Agencies:

- AdoptionPlus
- St. Francis Children's Society

5.1.2 The Regional Adoption Agency has remained in the design and development phase during this period. Practitioner groups and a matching project have met on a regular basis to share learning, good practice and support matching for children within the region.



5.2 Membership

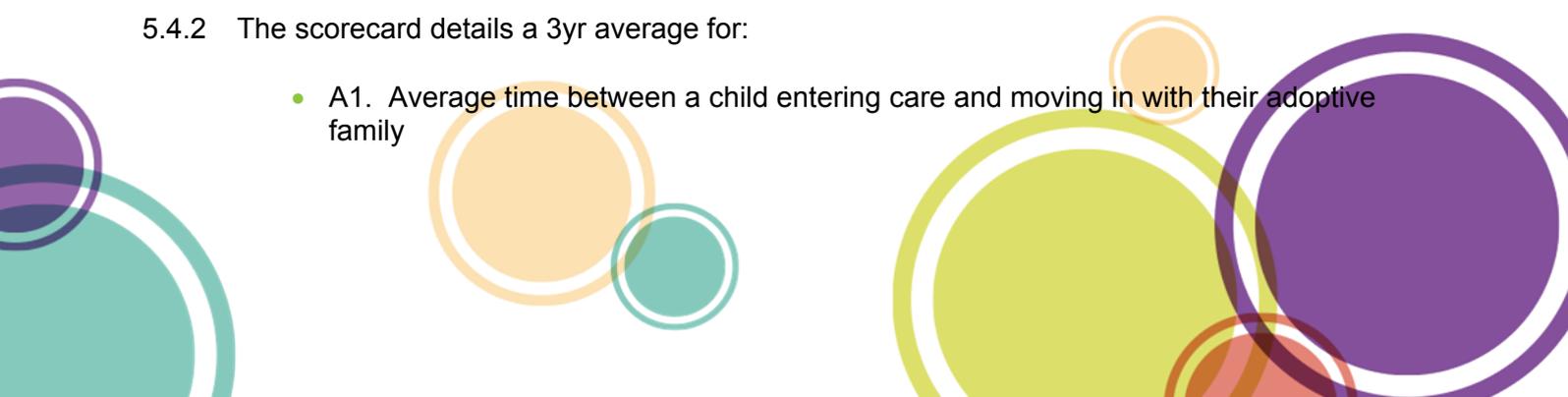
- 5.2.1 The agency has continued its membership of New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies.
- 5.2.2 Membership with Adoption UK has continued which provides:
- The ability to Feature children within a family finding resource – Children Who Wait which has an online and printed facility.
 - Attend training workshops on a wide range of current adoption issues and practices, or purchase courses for families.
 - Get promoted on our online database of agencies.
 - Receive up to four free memberships to give to families for their adoption journey.
 - Connect with experienced staff through the helpline.
 - Access to over 900 books and CDs for professionals and families.
 - Receive up to six free copies of Adoption Today magazine to keep up to date with the latest news and expert advice.
 - Access information for families; from articles about the process, to factsheets and recommended reading lists.
 - Receive discounts on the latest publications, guides, and practical handbooks

5.3 Independent birth family counselling

- 5.3.1 The agency provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling and support service. This service is provided by Adoption Plus Limited on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council. Adoption Plus is an independent adoption support agency.
- 5.3.2 The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be/are adopted an opportunity for independent counselling support. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members which will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
- 5.3.3 Ongoing contract reviews are held each quarter of the year to ensure there is maximum support available for those accessing the service and to ensure optimum take up by birth parents.

5.4 The Adoption Scorecard

- 5.4.1 In 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan For Adoption: Tackling Delay' in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions.
- 5.4.2 The scorecard details a 3yr average for:

- A1. Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family
- 

- A2. Average time between the council receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- A3. Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)

5.4.3 Central Bedfordshire performance is:

A1. 3 year average (2013-2016) for time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days) was 507 days. Showing a reduction of 31 days from the previous performance.

This is lower than the England/National average for the same period which was 558 days. (Nationally, the lowest rate was 325 days and the highest was 872 days)

The scorecard of the period 2012-15 was 538 days showing that performance has improved to reduce the number of days.

A2. 3 year average time between a local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family was 150 days. Showing an increase of 8 days from the previous performance.

This is lower than the reported England/National figure of 226 days for the same period. (Nationally, the lowest rate was 62 days and the highest was 413 days)

A3. 60% of Central Bedfordshire Children with a placement order wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The England/National average of 55% shows that Central Bedfordshire is performing slightly better than the England average.

5.4.4 Average length of care proceedings locally during 2013-16 (weeks) at 28 weeks was lower than the reported England/National average of 30 weeks. Showing a significant improvement from the previous performance of 40 weeks.

Section 6:

Conclusion and performance objectives

- 6.0.1 Recruit a target of 20 adopters within 2017/18 and continue to work in partnership with regional partners to widen the pool and placement choice to meet the needs of all children with a plan for adoption.
- 6.0.2 To continue to focus on Early Permanence for children by maintaining a robust parallel planning process within the authority to improve on reducing the number of days a of a child entering care to be placed in an adoptive family.
- 6.0.3 Target performance has improved from the previous year scorecard and has been a service approach in a combination of improving the length of care proceedings and the focus on Early permanence.
- 6.0.4 Post Adoption support continues to be an increasing feature of the work of the Adoption team. Adoptive parents have access to the annual training programme and can request an assessment of adoption support needs until their child is 18 years old. Central Bedfordshire

will continue to make the best use of the Adoption Support Fund to provide therapeutic adoption support for families.

- 6.0.5 Development of the Teenage Adoption Panel has been slow due to staffing capacity but will be progressed in 2017/18.
- 6.0.6 Preparation training for prospective adopters has been reviewed and re designed for implementation in 2017/18.
- 6.0.7 Continue to work in partnership with regional partners to develop the Regional Adoption Agency.

Report written by:

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Adoption Practice Manager
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This information can be made available in large print and in other languages if required.

Për Informacion

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Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council

Joint Adoption Panel

Overview Report – Panel Chair

April 2016 to March 2017.

1. Introduction

Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough run a joint Adoption Panel which previously has been under annual review but in light of the proposed changes through regionalisation is unlikely now to separate.

The Joint Adoption Panel in 2016 – 2017 schedules one full day panel per month with a second monthly panel scheduled approximately every 3 months. Additional panels are arranged as required.

Panel Membership

I (Fran Thompson) have Chaired the Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Joint Adoption Panel since June 2013. My background is as a lawyer with additional experience of Chairing several Multi-agency Group environments and Dorset County Council Fostering Panel for 7 years previously. I am also the current Chair for three other Local Authority Adoption and Fostering Panels, and for one Independent Fostering Agency. I am independent of both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Authorities – a requirement of the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

The Joint Adoption Panel holds a Central list of Panel members that each Panel could call upon to be quorate. As The Adoption Panel remained a Joint Panel for the period of this report, quoracy continued to consist of :

1. The person appointed to Chair the panel or one of the Vice-Chairs; and
2. A Social Worker with at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience; and
3. Four other members.

Panel membership at the start of this reporting period was drawn from the following 13 members:

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Independent Chair

Independent – Previously Head of SEN Provision and ex Head Teacher– Vice Chair

Panel Medical Adviser - Paediatrician

Independent Social Worker – IRO

Social Worker – BBC

1 Independent Social Worker - CAFCASS

Elected Member – Bedford Borough

Elected Member – CBC

2 Independent Adoptive Parents

Independent Birth Parent of an Adopted Child

Independent Member - Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant,

Independent Member – Adopted Person

In addition to the required six, an extra member is scheduled to attend each meeting to prevent cancellation and delay if a panel member is unable to attend on the day, or is held up en route. A core group attend the majority of panels and this allows for consistency, particularly when adoptive parents have been approved and return to be matched with their child(ren).

All new panel members are required to attend a panel as part of their induction process before becoming part of the Central List and all panel members have a copy of Effective Adoption Panels (updated 2013). An updated 2016 version is available and copies have been ordered for circulation to panel members however as yet they are still awaited.

All Panel members have continued to show a very high commitment to attending panels and it is obvious from their contributions that they put a great deal of time, thought and dedication into their roles on Panel.

The Panel have really benefitted in the last year from the stability of their membership and all panel members continue to work well together, complementing each other's strengths and as a result can more easily identify and respect individual areas of expertise.

As a result of the new fee structure introduced by Central Bedfordshire Council for Panel members, effective as of 1st April 2016, and the 3 subsequent resignations from the panel, two being CAFCASS officers and one independent member with a background in education, the male representation on the central list was reduced to two.

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The area of improvement identified last year to recruit more male panel members has not been met to date however interviews are scheduled for three new members including one male.

A panel member who is the birth mother of an adopted child had relocated to Scotland during 2015 however has remained on the list and has continued sitting when she is in the area. Panel are grateful for this given her specific area of personal experience.

A new panel member has been appointed during this reporting period. She is a former foster carer who went on to adopt a child who has additional needs.

The overall central list now stands at 13 regular members plus the one Independent mentioned above who sits when she can.

Throughout this reporting period, panel members received their papers 7 working days in advance of Panel. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to five or more hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared.

Areas for improvement:

Getting the balance of Panel members right on any Panel is a constant process of review as Panel Membership changes and careful consideration needs to be given when listing Panel Members for attendance to ensure sufficient sittings for each member to maintain competence without numbers of Panel members appearing overwhelming to applicants attending panel. There is still a continued need to recruit more male members to Panel along with more social worker representation and a broader diversity.

Diversity.

As in previous years, across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough there is a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicity and culture. Panel members are White British, Black British, Indian and Bangladeshi. There are three people who have adopted, three who were adopted themselves as children and one who is the birth parent of an adopted child. Some Panel members have very young families of their own and many Panel members have experience of adoption and fostering in their immediate family. Panel would like to expand this diversity further in other areas and, as mentioned above, this will be a target for the forthcoming year.

2. Panel Support.

Panel work is supported throughout the whole process by the Panel Adviser. Within the Joint Adoption Panel presently, the role of Adviser to the Adoption Panel was filled on a permanent basis in December 2015. This reporting period therefore is the

Appendix B

first full year subsequent to this appointment and the effects of this not only in the quality assurance element of the cases coming to panel but also in the consistency and follow through of some aspects of Panel work has been highly beneficial. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Panel Adviser for this and for the commitment shown to the role in often exceeding her working days!

Throughout the whole year Panel has continued to be supported by two excellent Panel Administrators who have been working for the Panel for many years and as yet again, I cannot speak highly enough of their effort, efficiency, organisational skills and good humour throughout. The Adoption Panel is indeed fortunate to have two such dedicated workers and as Panel Chair I continue to value their contribution very highly.

A Medical Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel Meetings and on occasions over this year the Medical Adviser has been asked to provide further detail on specific cases or conditions to better inform Panel's decision making.

A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing to Panel Meetings, this advice is usually available on the day of Panel and towards the latter end of this reporting period there has been a great improvement in not only the quality of this advice but the timeliness too.

The introduction of paperless panels has remained current throughout this year as many years before and it is very positive to be able to say that this has now been successfully implemented!

All panel members were issued with ipads in around August 2016 along with local authority email addresses. Despite some initial teething problems causing a delay in moving over to being totally paperless, a joint process trial was held in February and the first entirely paperless panel held in March 2016. The early indications are that this is working well and any issues are being addressed as they arise.

The Adoption Panel Administrators, as mentioned above, appear to have made the transition to paperless panels seamlessly (although I am sure not without considerable effort behind the scenes) and their adaptability is remarkable!

Areas for improvement:

It has been hugely beneficial for the role of Panel Adviser to have been permanently recruited as it is this role which provides the consistency and means of communication which ensures that the work of the Panel is carried through into Management, the teams and into everyday work. It will be beneficial to panel for the improvement in legal advice to continue along its current lines particularly in respect of the cases from BBC.

4. Panel Roles / Tasks.

There have not been any changes to legislation or regulations during this period which have directly impacted upon the role of panel. The Panel task therefore continues to include addressing work presented as follows:

- Applications from prospective Adopters
- Matching of children to approved Adopters
- Considering Best Interest Recommendations in the cases of relinquished babies or those where no care proceedings are being pursued through court.
- Quality Assurance of work presented

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective adopters, potential matches of children with adopters, and best interest recommendations to the Agency Decision Makers (one each for Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Council), who then either ratify or reject the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

The work required of panel continues to be demanding but remains very interesting. During this period the numbers of cases heard at panel have continued to be high but largely consistent with the previous year despite the increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders being encouraged by the courts.

The comments made in my previous report regarding introduction of the Two Stage Assessment of adopters, combined with a new PAR form, being firmly embedded remain true as does the fact that overall Panel generally continue to feel that the forms are an improvement. There has still been mixed feedback from the Adopters about the very strongly “Adopter Led” first stage of the assessment and a few issues with information gathered during this stage not being fully explored in stage two but some amendments to the process have been made and overall it continues to result in a high standard of paperwork in assessment. Panel certainly feel that the PARs focus on evidence and analysis is clear.

A new Child Permanence Report (CPR) was introduced by BAAF more recently and they have received a similarly positive response overall however there has been a far more varied standard in terms of both content, presentation and updating and it is fair to say at this stage the evidence still suggests that there is still a way to go for this to become the “living document” that was envisaged.

There has been one adoption disruption reported this year along with a further disruption during introductions. Whilst this can be regarded as an improvement, the Panel continue to consider the information available regarding the possible factors which could have led to this, and whether or not this may include the shortened assessment process. Panel are mindful of the learning from these disruptions when considering matches now and are constantly looking at areas to develop to improve

this and are keen to learn from information gathered on a national basis through forums such as the CoramBaaf run Panel Chairs Briefings which I attend.

Areas for improvement:

The Chair of Panel and Panel Adviser are constantly considering improvements to the Adoption Matching report and the CPR and will be looking to develop this still further over the coming months along with the Adoption Team Managers for the two authorities.

5. Appraisals

The appraisal of all members continues to take place annually. All involved value this opportunity to consider Panel functioning, outside the day to day work of panel. The Appraisals, conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser, reflect on the Panel member's contribution for the year, any comments they have on improving processes and any training they wish to undertake over the next year. This is a rolling programme and all appraisals are in date.

The Panel Chair is appraised by the Agency Decision Maker.

6. Panel Training

During the last round of reviews, Panel members with particular expertise were identified and indicated a willingness to share and contribute to the continued professional development of the panel. This was put into practice during the Annual Panel Training Day held on 24th October 2016, the areas covered being:

- A Review of the Legal Framework.
- The impact of mental health on parenting.
- Travellers of the UK – their ethnicity and origins.

The Panel Chair also continues to undertake a regular programme of independent training and attends regular Chair's Meetings with CoramBAAF to keep apprised of developments and updates within the field of adoption and likely future policy changes. In addition the Panel Adviser also attends the Panel Adviser's Regionalisation Forum and Training.

The Chair of Panel and Panel Adviser have started to put together the likely agenda for a training day in October 2017 informed by suggestions from panel members during the course of their reviews.

7. Transparency and openness

Applicants attending Panel

As reported in previous years, it is now the usually accepted process for Applicants to attend for most of the time their case is heard at Panel. The main exception to this is the time that Panel reaches its recommendation but also a short time at the

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beginning of each case for any third party information which needs to be discussed. Although Applicants are often nervous at the prospect of coming to Panel, many of them find the time much less daunting than they feared and feel included as part of the wider Adoption process right from the start. Prospective Adopters always have a social worker with them, and some (often single carers) have chosen to bring a friend with them for support. (See section on Feedback below)

Observers

Many observers arranged to attend and observe panels during the period April 2016 to March 2017 including student social workers, members of staff on induction and members of Senior Management although overall numbers of observers have fallen. Panel welcomes observing at meetings. It is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process, particularly for those who will, in the future, present cases to Panel for the first time.

Panel Feedback

Applicants and social workers attending panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form - this information is fed back to the next Panel and helps to shape panel direction moving forward. Honest feedback is encouraged and has had a significant effect on how Panels are run. Panel have reverted to the practice of all panel members asking their own questions having gone through a trial period where all questions were put to applicants by the panel chair. This appears to be preferable amongst panel members and feedback previously gathered from Adopters had suggested a 50/50 split in views.

During this reporting period, a total of 19 completed feedback forms were received, a decrease on the previous reporting period of 32, however the comments from most people attending Panel have been largely positive, a random selection of which are as follows:

- "it was a bit easier than we thought it would be".
- "the fact that most panel members were adopters or had been adopted was re-assuring."
- "we felt that the panel was affirming and positive. The panel were very respectful, friendly and valuing of us (sic)".
- "we felt the whole panel experience to be positive, we understood the importance of panel but our social worker and panel members made us feel at ease and it took the pressure off the importance. Panel was organized and structured".

Three feedback forms were received from Social Workers attending panel.

Where some less positive comments were made in feedback forms received from social workers and from one set of applicants whose case was deferred, the areas identified have been discussed with panel members and the Panel Adviser. A written response has been given, (one is still being followed up) and the issues contained therein will be subject to a meeting with the Panel Chair, Panel Adviser and Team Managers for resolution at the Advisory Group meeting on 18th May.

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One area which appears to be a continued cause for concern is the perceived punctuality of panel. Despite re-wording the Letter of Invitation to Applicants, and asking for information to be fed down to Social Work Teams, the expectation appears to remain that Applicants come into panel at the time on the agenda, whereas this is in fact the time that Panel begin to consider that particular case. In some instances, there has been updated information or possibly documents tabled on the day of panel so this “pre-discussion” can vary in length. Panel would like to see this being explained as part of the social worker’s preparation of the applicants for panel and re-iterated on the day.

8. Quality Assurance role.

As the last couple of years, Panel continues to cover its Quality Assurance roles at a number of levels:

i) Individual Issues

A Quality Assurance questionnaire had previously been introduced for completion by the panel jointly at the end of each case. Matters which relate to a specific case are picked up at the time and fed back to the Child Care and Adoption Teams by the Panel Adviser. This is now done by way of the Panel Adviser writing individual feedback to Social Workers and their managers.

This also provides the opportunity for recognition of particularly thorough and well prepared pieces of work although Panel also like to acknowledge this to the Social Workers and Applicants verbally at the time of Panel.

ii) Practice Issues

At every meeting, the Panel considers whether matters have emerged which may be affecting more than one Prospective Adopter / worker which need to be followed through. These issues are taken back by the Panel Adviser to the relevant Team Manager and then the Panel Adviser will feed back to Panel any outcomes. Matters which had been raised during the previous and current reporting period in this category include:

- Assessments not providing enough analysis,
- Consistency of Legal Advice across the two local authorities.
- Difficulties in obtaining medical information relating to children when matching cases are presented to panel.

Panel have noted that despite a significant improvement in these areas during this period, there is still some way to go to reach desirable levels.

Matters identified during this year continue to include:

More detailed consideration of sibling contact plans prior to matching panel.

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Information being presented to panel regarding the proposed timescales for introductions.

Consideration of continued contact with Foster Carers after introductions.

These matters are taken forward in the first instance by the Panel Adviser.

iii) Panel Chairs Meetings

Following changes in 2013 to the operating structure of Children's Services in the two authorities, at a meeting held in February 2014 it was decided that moving forward, both the Joint Adoption Panel and CBC Fostering Panel would meet independently with the respective Panel Adviser, ADM, Head of Service and Team Managers twice a year, and that additionally twice a year, joint meetings would be held.

During this reporting period, no joint meetings have been held with the Fostering Panel and two meetings have been held with regard to the Adoption Panel on 12th July 2016 and 14th December 2016.

It remains to be seen whether this frequency and nature of Panel Chairs meetings will need to be amended or not.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2016/2017

- As detailed in the areas of improvement contained throughout the report.
- Establish whether the new pattern within CBC of Panel Chairs meetings with Head of Service and Agency Decision Makers is sufficient and/or productive and priority to be given to dates once booked given the difficulties of getting everyone together at the same time should meetings be cancelled.

Frances M Thompson

Panel Chair – Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Joint Adoption Panel

April 2017

APPENDIX 1 – PANEL ACTIVITY

- Between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017 the Joint Adoption Panel met 17 times. Many of these were extended panels. This was a reduction from 19 in the previous period.
- 29 Prospective households were recommended to the ADM as suitable to adopt, comprising 12 from BBC and 17 from CBC. (*This compares with 31 in the previous 12 months*). This comprised 23 heterosexual couples, 4 same sex couples and 2 single adopters.
- 34 Children (including 5 sibling groups of 2 children) were recommended for match with approved Adopters. This comprised 22 from Bedford Borough and 12 from Central Bedfordshire. (*This compares with 38 in the previous 12 months*)
- No Should be Placed for Adoption recommendations were considered. (*This compares with 1 in the previous 12 months*)
- There was one ADM decision (CBC) that did not agree with the Panel's recommendations. Further additional work was done on this case however and the ADM subsequently agreed the approval without the matter returning to panel. In 1 further case the ADM (CBC) asked to meet with the applicant before making a decision.
- 3 cases were deferred by panel, one was subsequently withdrawn.
- Otherwise all Panel recommendations were subsequently followed by the ADM decision.

The above figures show an approximate maintaining of levels consistent with the previous year in terms of Panel business. This would appear to reinforce the need to ensure that twice monthly panels can be facilitated when needed; particularly in conjunction with the reductions in 2013 to the National Minimum Standard Timescales under the 2 Part Assessment Process to 4 months from the date of commencement of Part 2 to the ADM decision, and 6 months for matching a child after the date of decision of Adoption being the Best Interest. Any delay in waiting to bring cases to Panel will result in these timescales being exceeded. Panel will monitor the level of business over the next 12 months to ascertain panel's frequency.