

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 7 November 2011

PRESENT

Cllr M A G Versallion (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs A Barker (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D Bowater
N B Costin
Mrs S A Goodchild

Cllrs Mrs D B Gurney
B Wells

Apologies for Absence: Cllr N J Sheppard
Mrs E Grant – Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Mrs J Ogle – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Members in Attendance: Cllr P N Aldis

Officers in Attendance: Mrs S Gibson – Head of Learning
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mrs C Parry – Assistant Director (Acting), Children's Services Operations
Ms S Scholey – Team Leader for Looked after Children Team

Others in Attendance: Mrs H Hughes – Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Young People, NHS Bedfordshire
Mr L Miller – Head of Joint Child Health Commissioning, NHS Bedfordshire

CPP/11/14 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 5 September 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to adding Councillor N B Costin's name to the list of those members of the Panel present at the meeting.

CPP/11/15 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the Panel that the running order of the agenda had been changed so that the Head of Learning was not required to be present at the meeting unnecessarily. On this basis item 7 (Annual Report of the Virtual

School for Looked After Children) had been brought forward and would be considered before Item 5 (Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service – April-June 2011).

The Chairman then referred to the recent Children in Care Awards ceremony and commented on its success. On behalf of the Panel he expressed his thanks to the Acting Assistant Director Children’s Services Operations and her team for making the arrangements. The Chairman also thanked Members for their attendance and support.

CPP/11/16 **Members' Interests**

a) **Personal Interests:-**

Member	Item	Nature of Interest	Present or Absent during discussion
Cllr D Bowater	6	Central Bedfordshire Council local authority governor on the South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT).	Present
Cllr Mrs D Gurney	6	Central Bedfordshire Council representative on the Bedfordshire Police Authority.	Present
Cllr D Bowater	7	Authority governor on the governing body of Gilbert Inglefield Middle School, Leighton Buzzard.	Present

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

CPP/11/17 **Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered the Annual Report on the Virtual School for Looked After Children for the academic year 2010-11.

The meeting noted that the Annual Report contained the early outcomes for Looked After Children and that, because national and statistical information had not been available at the time the Report had been prepared, the results were provisional. To overcome this problem it was recommended that, in future, the Annual Report be submitted to the Panel in January each year as this would allow sufficient time for the collection of data from schools and the production of comparative information.

Following an introduction by the Head of Learning discussion took place during which Members sought clarification on the role played by the Virtual School in its provision of academic support for Looked After Children and raised numerous queries. Members then referred to the Key Stage 4 results and the significant difference in achievement levels between Looked After Children and others. In response the Head of Learning stated that, whilst there was a clear need to improve outcomes at Key Stage 4, the outcomes for the Whole School Cohort were better than the national figures in 2010. She further explained how achievement levels could vary from year to year as a result of the individual circumstances of the children themselves.

The meeting considered the role of the Virtual School, and of the schools attended by Looked After Children, in encouraging academic achievement.

The Head of Learning explained the sometimes complex needs and requirements of some Looked After Children and commented that Members should not underestimate how much individuals had achieved bearing in mind their particular circumstances.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children be approved and adopted subject to amending the heading on the front of the report so that it states that the report covers the academic year September 2010-July 2011;**
- 2 that future Annual Reports be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel in the January following the relevant academic year in order to allow sufficient time to collect the required data;**
- 3 that the Key Stage 4 results for Looked After Children in the academic year September 2010-July 2011 be used as the benchmark figure for comparative purposes.**

CPP/11/18 **Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service - April-June 2011**

Members considered a report outlining activity within the Adoption and Fostering Service during Quarter One (April to June 2011).

A Member referred to the key events for marketing and recruitment undertaken by the service and queried how successful the events had proved. In response the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that such events were run on a regular basis and were regarded as very useful in attracting potential candidates. However, in connection with this point, the Member referred to that part of the report on the recruitment of foster carers and the apparently low number of new fostering households that were approved during the period. She queried whether this situation could be improved without the lowering of standards. The Acting Assistant Director replied that, in order to maintain the required standards, the Council could only assess those applicants that met the appropriate criteria.

The Acting Assistant Director advised the meeting of the types of venue used for marketing and recruitment events as well as the other methods employed. She added that officers were continually attempting to use the widest range of methods at their disposal for marketing and recruitment purposes.

A Member referred to the recent decision to increase the size of the allowance paid to foster carers and enquired as to whether this had led to an increased level of applications. In response the Acting Assistant Director stated that the increase had not yet been implemented and details of the decision had not been widely publicised so it was unlikely this was an influencing factor in the number of applications received.

The Panel then turned to compare the allowances paid to the Authority's foster carers with those employed by independent foster care agencies. The meeting noted that, although the latter paid more, the Council provided better training and practical support. This was clearly valued by foster carers as they chose to remain with the Council.

Members queried whether it would be possible to further increase the size of the allowances paid by the Council. In response the Acting Assistant Director reminded them that approval had only recently been given to an increase in the allowance so a further increase could not be considered at this time. However, annual reviews, in line with the Foster Care Network, would continue. She added that the allowance rates were comparable to those paid by other local authorities and were aligned to those set out by the Foster Care Network. She also questioned whether foster carers undertook the role simply to receive payment.

The Vice-Chairman sought clarification for the reasons why applicants decided to withdraw from the assessment process and expressed concern at the possibility that the Authority could fail to maintain its foster carer numbers as existing carers retired or resigned. In response, the Acting Assistant Director explained that the assessment process was laid out within the statutory guidelines and carefully followed. A full exchange of information took place at

all stages of the assessment between the applicants and the fostering service. If some applicants decided that they did not wish to progress their application, or if it was decided by the fostering service not to progress the application, the individual reasons for not doing so in each case were discussed by both sides and recorded. The Acting Assistant Director concluded by emphasising that the fostering service was recruiting sufficient new foster carers to replace those who left.

NOTED

the report.

CPP/11/19 Looked After Children Health Reports

The Panel considered the Annual Report on the health of Looked After Children for the period April 2010 to March 2011, which set out the delivery of service and the progress achieved for the health and wellbeing of children in care, together with a six monthly update for the period April 2011 to September 2011. The meeting noted that production of the Annual Report was required by the Department of Health Statutory Guidance 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' (2009).

The Head of Joint Child Health Commissioning, NHS Bedfordshire briefly introduced the Annual Report and update before seeking Members' questions.

In response to a Member's query regarding the current absence of a designated doctor to support the Primary Care Trust (PCT) in its statutory functions relating to Looked After Children the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Young People, NHS Bedfordshire explained that action was being taken to secure an appropriate clinician locally to fill the vacancy and it was hoped an appointment would take place within the next few months. The Head of Joint Child Health Commissioning added that the post had to be filled by a Paediatrician. He then advised the meeting that, if necessary, alternative means of filling the post would be considered, including the possibility of a short term appointment. He assured the meeting that sufficient funding was available.

In response to a query on whether other PCT's had undergone similar recruitment difficulties the Designated Nurse advised that some Trusts had adopted a different organisational model and so, with regard to this particular issue, had not experienced a problem.

The Vice-Chairman commented on the relatively small number of suitable candidates available to fill the position of designated doctor and she suggested that regional centres such as Great Ormond Street and Addenbrooks Hospitals should be considered as a possible source. She also commented on the need to ensure that the appointee understood that this particular role would include responsibility for young adults up to the age of 25 and not up to the usual age of 18. In response the NHS representatives thanked the Member for her suggestion and stated that, if necessary, they would seek candidates beyond the current local geographical boundaries.

A Member queried whether input was sought from the Police. In response the Head of Joint Child Health Commissioning explained that this did not take place directly but that individual services such as community health and mental health had such links.

In view of the forthcoming abolition of the PCT in 2013 the Chairman queried how the Annual Report would be produced in future. In response the Head of Joint Child Health Commissioning explained that this was still undecided but it was likely that responsibility would pass to the Clinical Commissioning Group. With regard to next year's Annual Report he stated that this would be produced far sooner after the end of the financial year.

NOTED

the Annual Report and the six monthly update.

CPP/11/20 **Looked After Children Awards 2011**

The Panel received a verbal report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations on the outcome of the Looked After Children Awards ceremony held at Priory House on 27 October 2011. The Acting Assistant Director stated that the credit for the successful outcome of the ceremony should be given to the Participation Officer and the Children in Care Council for their planning and preparatory work. The Acting Assistant Director added that she had also received positive feedback from carers and others on the ceremony.

Discussion then took place on possible improvements to the ceremony. Consideration was given to inviting a wider range of guests including, for example, teachers although it was acknowledged that the use of the Council Chamber as the Awards venue restricted the number of attendees. The Acting Assistant Director suggested that the Children in Care Council could consider this issue and make a presentation to the Panel setting out its views.

The meeting turned to consider the date for the Looked After Children's Awards in 2012. The Acting Assistant Director stated that the last two ceremonies had been held during autumn half terms but this had not proved wholly successful as some potential attendees were on holiday at this time. The Panel asked that alternative dates be considered and a Friday evening during term time was suggested as a possibility.

NOTED

the verbal report.

CPP/11/21 **Work Plan 2011-2012**

The Panel considered its Work Plan for the remainder of the 2011/12 municipal year. In response to a query the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations informed the meeting that three sessions were being arranged to brief all Members of the Council on their role as corporate parents. Although dates and venues had yet to be finalised it was intended that the sessions would be held between now and the end of March 2012. A Member asked that consideration be given to holding one of sessions at Watling House in Dunstable for the benefit of those Members from the south of Central Bedfordshire.

A Member referred to recent criticism by the government regarding the time taken by some local authorities to deal with adoption applications. He asked that the six monthly adoption report, scheduled to be submitted to the Panel in January, include a response to the government's comments, including a comparison of Central Bedfordshire's performance with that of other Bedfordshire local authorities and the national figures.

Further discussion followed regarding the absence of foster carer representation and the arrangements for the remaining Panel meetings in the current municipal year.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the six monthly adoption report to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 10 January 2012 include comment from the Central Bedfordshire perspective on the government's recent criticism of the delays experienced at some local authorities when those authorities were dealing with adoption applications;**
- 2 that the Committee Services Officer circulate details of the arrangements for the remaining meetings of the Panel in 2011/12;**
- 3 that the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations establish why there had been no foster carer representation at the meeting.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.20 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....