

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



**please ask for** Leslie Manning  
**direct line** 0300 300 5132  
**date** 21 June 2012

## NOTICE OF MEETING

### CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

**Monday, 2 July 2012 at 1.00 p.m.**

Venue at

**Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford**

Richard Carr  
**Chief Executive**

### PLEASE NOTE THE START TIME

To: The Chairman and Members of the CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL:

#### **Elected Members (Voting)**

Clrs M A G Versallion (Chairman), A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman),  
Mrs A Barker, N B Costin, A L Dodwell, Mrs S A Goodchild, Mrs D B Gurney,  
N J Sheppard and B Wells

[Named Substitutes:

Clrs: P N Aldis, D Bowater, I A MacKilligan, B J Spurr and A M Turner]

#### **Officers (Voting)**

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services  
Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

**Carers (non-voting)**

Only two of the four foster carers' co-opted representatives will be expected to attend at any one meeting.

# AGENDA

1. **Apologies**

To receive any apologies for absence and notification of substitute Members.

2. **Minutes**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 14 May 2012 (copy attached).

3. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

To receive any announcements from the Chairman and any matters of communication.

4. **Declarations of Interests**

To receive any declarations of interests from Members.

## Reports

<b>Item</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Page Nos.</b>
5	<b>Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report 2011-2012</b>  To consider a report outlining the activity of the Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2011-2012.	+ To Follow
6	<b>Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service</b>  To receive a report outlining the statutory framework for the submission of annual reports on the adoption and fostering services and summarising the key points contained in the attached Annual Reports for 2011/12.	* 11 - 56

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CPP/12/3 **Members' Interests**

a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

CPP/12/4 **Children in Care Council - Presentation**

The Panel received a presentation by two representatives of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) which set out the proposed arrangements for the Looked After Children Awards on 28 September 2012 and the Fun Day 2012.

Turning first to the Looked After Children Awards, a Member suggested that electronic nominations be allowed in addition to the use of paper cards for this purpose. The Member also requested that consideration be given to introducing an award for those children who welcomed foster children into their homes.

In response to a Member's query the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care explained that the awards ceremony itself would start at 6.00 p.m. and finish by 7.00 p.m. Then, between 7.00 p.m. and the end of the awards evening at 9.00 p.m., there would be an opportunity for activities and discussion. She explained that the awards themselves were not age related but based on a range of different categories.

In connection with the use of the Council Chamber in Priory House as the venue for the awards evening, a Member referred to the forthcoming technical upgrades to the presentation and camera equipment in that room.

In response to a query from the Chairman on the possibility of greater publicity for the awards, the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care stated that information on the evening was currently included in the Council's internal electronic staff newsletter 'Be Inspired' but the Panel could consider whether, subject to the views of the individual award winners, it would wish to see their details circulated more widely. Members indicated their awareness of the need to respect the privacy of the young people concerned. The Participation Officer suggested that a display featuring the views of the young people, but which did not divulge any confidential information, could be shown at Chicksands whilst the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care added that artwork and work for the awards ceremony could also be included. The co-opted foster carer representatives referred to the Christmas tags which contained messages from Looked After Children and it was suggested that these could be typed up in either leaflet or book form for display. The Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care undertook to give further attention to these suggestions.

Consideration was given to the possible publication of the award categories. The meeting noted that the list was quite long as the award was personal to each young person. The Participation Officer explained that nominations were encouraged for the widest range of achievements, not just those that were academically related. The Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care explained that the publication of the award categories could be done electronically.

The meeting noted that most of the 130 nominations for the 2011 awards had been received from social workers. The Participation Officer stated that an effort would be made this year to encourage greater input from foster carers.

The meeting noted the supervisory arrangements for the awards evening.

Turning next to the arrangements for the Fun Day the CiCC representatives advised the meeting that, although the Weatherly Centre had originally been booked as the venue, it had subsequently been established that the Centre lacked sufficient outdoor space for the planned events. Alternative venues were therefore being sought. The meeting noted the date of the Fun Day would depend on the venue that was chosen. A Member suggested that the CiCC consider the sports pavilion and associated outdoor facilities at Sandy.

Members noted that a raffle would be used at the Fun Day to raise money for a local charity. The CiCC representatives advised that the Keech Hospice was the chosen charity.

The possibility of sponsorship for both events was considered. The meeting acknowledged that some organisations would be willing to undertake sponsorship though some concerns were expressed at this proposal.

## **NOTED**

### **the arrangements for the Looked After Children Awards 2012 and the Fun Day 2012.**

CPP/12/5

### **Six Month Health Report: Health of Looked After Children**

The Panel received a report which focused on the findings arising from the Ofsted/Care Quality Commission inspection of services for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire with specific reference to the contribution of the Health Services to the children's health and wellbeing. The report also set out the actions proposed to address the issues which had arisen from the inspection.

The meeting noted that the inspection had been carried out between 20 February and 2 March 2012.

The report was introduced by the Consultant in Public Health, NHS Bedfordshire who first drew Members' attention to Ofsted's judgement that health outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire were poor and that outcomes to enable Looked After Children to be healthy were

inadequate. The health outcomes had declined over the 12 months proceeding December 2011 compared to East of England and England averages. In addition the inspection had highlighted a number of specific weaknesses including:

- Health agency awareness of their responsibilities towards Looked After Children
- Access to health information by Looked After Children
- No specific health service for care leavers or health after care service
- The content and quality of health files
- No permanent designated doctor or nurse for Looked After Children in place.

The Consultant in Public Health next drew Members' attention to Ofsted's conclusion that, in order to meet the health needs of Looked After Children, some issues should be addressed in the three to six month period following the inspection whilst others required longer term planning and service redesign. Further to this conclusion the report set out the areas of improvement identified by Ofsted and the action taken in response under a two stage programme; stage 1 covering the three to six month period following the inspection and stage 2 covering the longer term service redesign. The Consultant in Public Health worked through the actions already taken and updated the meeting on any further developments which had taken place since the report had been written, with especial reference the appointment of a Designated Doctor and Designated Nurses and the related challenges.

In response to a Member's request regarding the presentation of stage 1 of the programme as an action plan the Consultant in Public Health explained that an action plan was being developed which would address all the issues raised by the inspection. It had not been possible to provide a copy to the meeting because the action plan was not yet ready but it would be submitted to a future Panel meeting. The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations stated that the action plan would include all relevant dates so that Members could effectively monitor progress. The Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care explained that the action plan would integrate the contributions by both health and social care. She added that there were 8-9 work streams and working groups were in the process of identifying the remedial actions required but the first draft should be available by the end of the week. The Head of Service assured the Panel that the draft action plan would be submitted to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committees and Executive for consideration and approval. She undertook to clarify the timetable to be followed and update Members.

The Member also referred to the reference in the report to the development and distribution of an age appropriate health promotion information pack for Looked After Children and requested that the Panel have the opportunity to examine and comment on it. In response the Consultant in Public Health assured Members that the pack's content had received thorough consideration during its preparation. She undertook to circulate copies of the pack to Members.



The meeting gave full consideration to the means by which the health care needs of Looked After Children were being met, the role of the children themselves and the areas identified as requiring improvement. During discussion the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Children in Care stressed that the health needs of Looked After Children were currently being met on an individual basis but that the Ofsted inspection had revealed the need for improvement at the strategic level. She stated that actions to ensure such improvements were implemented were fully embedded in the forthcoming action plan.

A Member commented on the Panel's desire to see Looked After Children offered the same opportunities that any good parent would wish to offer their child. She then referred to a comment by the Consultant in Public Health regarding improvements leading to an adequate standard of service by three months and queried whether the quality of service could not be improved upon still further. In response the Consultant in Public Health concurred in full, explaining that the proposed action incorporated within the stage 2 service redesign reflected aspirations well beyond 'adequate'.

In response to a query regarding future Ofsted inspections the Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations stated that a new inspection regime had been introduced that month and all future inspections would take place unannounced and last for at least one week. The next inspection would take place at some point next year.

In conclusion the Consultant in Public Health stressed that issues raised by the Ofsted inspection were strategic in nature and were not a reflection on the quality of health care service provided to Looked After Children on day to day basis.

#### **NOTED**

**the findings of the Ofsted/Care Quality Commission inspection of services for Looked After Children and the action taken and proposed to address the health related issues that had arisen.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that, when ready, the action plan drawn up to address the issues raised by the Ofsted/Quality Care Commission inspection be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel for consideration;**
- 2 that the next six monthly health report on Looked After Children made to the Corporate Parenting Panel include a full update on the progress made in addressing issues raised by the inspection.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.30 p.m.)

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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 2 July 2012  
**Subject:** Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service  
**Report of:** Yolanda Corden, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Summary:** The report outlines the Statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

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Contact Officer: Fiona Mackirdy, Head of Adoption and Fostering

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

#### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Council Priorities:**

Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Adoption and Fostering are key statutory services to Looked After Children.

##### **Financial:**

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £5.015 million, including income from Bedford Borough Council under the Shared Service arrangement. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Annual Reports.

##### **Legal:**

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

##### **Risk Management:**

3. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

4. There are no staffing issues.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

5. Adoption and Fostering affects all sectors of communities.

**Community Safety:**

6. There are no community safety issues.

**Sustainability:**

7. There are no sustainability issues.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**that the Corporate Parenting Panel note and comment on the content of the reports.**

**Background**

8. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Services and Fostering Services to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
9. The Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough Council.

**Adoption Services**

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Scrutiny Committee. An Annual Report will be produced by the end of May each year covering the preceding April to March period. In addition a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. In 2011/12 there was an increase for the second year running in the number of children whose cases were presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 31 children, an increase from 27 in the previous 12 months. 14 households were approved as adopters, an increase from 11 in 2010/11 and matches of 15 children to adopters were made.
12. 4 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further 11 being granted Special Guardianship. Whilst the number of adoptions was down from 5 the previous year, the overall number of children where a permanent legal option was secured via adoption or Special Guardianship increased from 7 in 2010/11 to 15 in 2011/12.

13. As of the 31 March 2012, 25 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 190 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
14. There were 88 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives, a slight increase on the previous 12 month period. Post Adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support was provided.
15. As part of the Government reform of adoption services, a range of measures is planned for implementation 2012 to 2015 to increase the number and speed of adoptions. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' for each council, and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. We are currently analysing Central Bedfordshire Council's scorecard profile and consider that the Council is in a strong position to respond to the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.

### **Fostering Services**

16. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by production of an Annual Report to this Committee by the end of June each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
17. 41 new fostering households were approved during 2011-12, an increase on the previous year.
18. 162 children were placed in full-time foster placements at the end of March 2012, of whom 85 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. This is a significant increase from the 118 who were in placement in April 2011. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, there have been 375 referrals for new or a change of placement. 146 children were placed with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 116 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies, 9 placed in residential units and the remainder did not become looked after by either Council.
19. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers fell slightly from 260 in 2010/11 to 218 in 2011/12. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. 84 households made formal application to become a foster carers either from a follow up enquiry as a member of the public or because they wished to care for a looked after child known to them as a family member or friend. This was an increase from the 45 applications received in 2010/11.

20. Over the course of the year 77 training activities were provided for foster carers on 36 topics. 567 delegates attended. A range of support is provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

### **Shared Service Arrangement**

21. In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement as of 31st January 2013. Key staff in both councils will therefore be meeting regularly during 2012 to plan the arrangements for February 2013 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that effective adoption and fostering services that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Adoption Annual Report.

Appendix B – Fostering Annual Report.

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands



Central Bedfordshire Council  
and Bedford Borough Council  
working together

# Adoption Agency

Annual Report

For the period  
2011/2012

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils' Adoption Agencies during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2012, 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. A copy of this report is provided to Bedford Borough Council for presentation to Elected Members.

### 1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Adoption and Permanence Support Team is made up of the following staff as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012:
- 1 x full time Team Manager
  - 1 x full time Deputy Team Manager
  - 4 x Senior Practitioners (three full time equivalent)
  - 8 x Social Workers (6.5 full time equivalent)
  - 4 x Social Work Assistants (2 full time equivalent)
  - 0.5 x Administrator for Letter-box contact
  - 1 x Lifestory Senior Practitioner
  - 2 x Administrators
- 1.1.2 The service has remained fully staffed this year, with staff seconded from within the service to cover a secondment and maternity leave cover.
- 1.1.3 Most staff have a number of years post-qualifying experience, and a programme of additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.4 The adoption agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering service area. These staff include a Business Support Officer with responsibility for adoption and special guardianship allowance payments, a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and Training coordinator, and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the adoption panel.

## 1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required. There were three extra panels during 2011/2012 and the panel therefore met on 15 occasions.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes recommendations as to their approval. The panel also considers whether adoption should be pursued as the plan for a child, and considers the proposed match between children with adopters, making recommendations on both these matters.

## 1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 1.3.1 From 1 April 2011 amended Regulations introduced greater flexibility in relation to the membership of adoption panels, allowing for the use of a 'central list' of panel members from which attendees for any particular panel could be chosen in accordance with quoracy requirements. The Regulations also allowed for the appointment of more than one vice chair to afford greater flexibility to agencies when convening panels.
- 1.3.2 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 the Adoption Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Independent	Adoptive Mother
Independent	Adoptive Father
Independent	Birth Parent of an Adopted Child
Social Work Member	Fostering Team Manager
Social Work Member	Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (BBC)
Educational Psychologist (Vice Chair)	Educational Psychologist (BBC)
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:

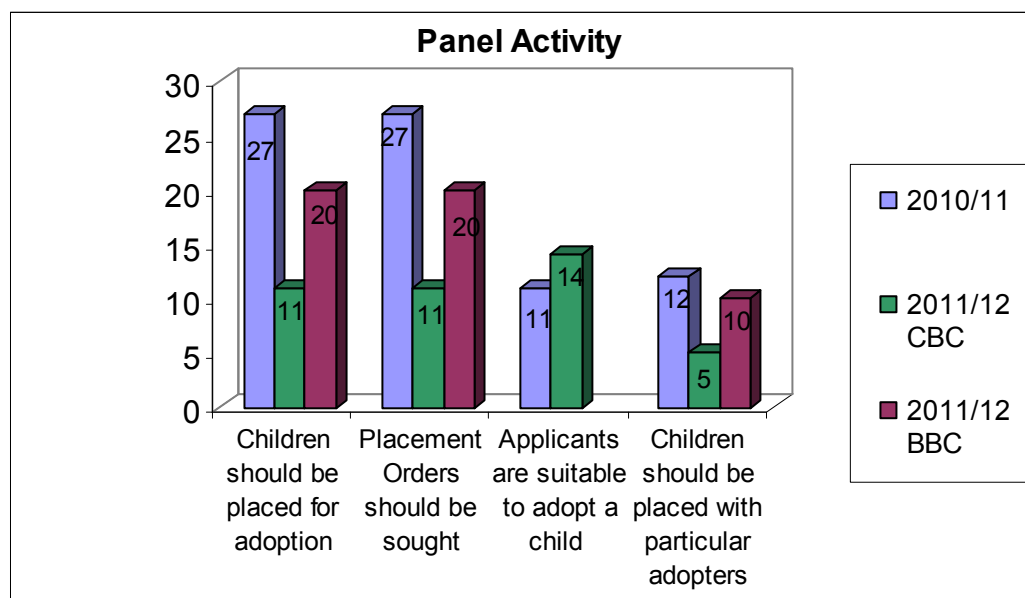
Professional Adviser	
Panel Secretary	

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

## 1.4 PANEL ACTIVITY

- 1.4.1 In 2011/2012 the Adoption Panel met 15 times and recommended that 31 children should be placed for adoption. Of these 11 were from Central Bedfordshire and 20 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 27 children in 2010/11 and represents an increase for the second year in succession. The Panel also recommended that Placement Orders should be sought in relation to all 31 children.

- 1.4.2 In relation to approvals, the Panel recommended that 14 households were suitable to adopt a child. This compares to 11 households in 2010/11. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.3 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 15 children should be placed with particular adopters. Of these 5 were from Central Bedfordshire and 10 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 12 children in 2010/11.



## 1.5 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1.5.1 Over the past 12 months, the following training has been provided to the Panel Members:

April 2011	A Guide to Care Proceedings (Bitesize) The Role of the Guardian ( Bitesize) Education – From Risk to Resilience (Bitesize)
May 2011	Adoption Support Service (Bitesize)
June 2011	Loving Waters and String Exercise (Bitesize) Safeguarding and Allegations (Full day)
August 2011	Teenage Adoption Panel (Bitesize)

- 1.5.2 A full day's training is planned in July 2012 which will include consideration of the implications of the Government Action Plan for Adoption.

## 1.6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTION

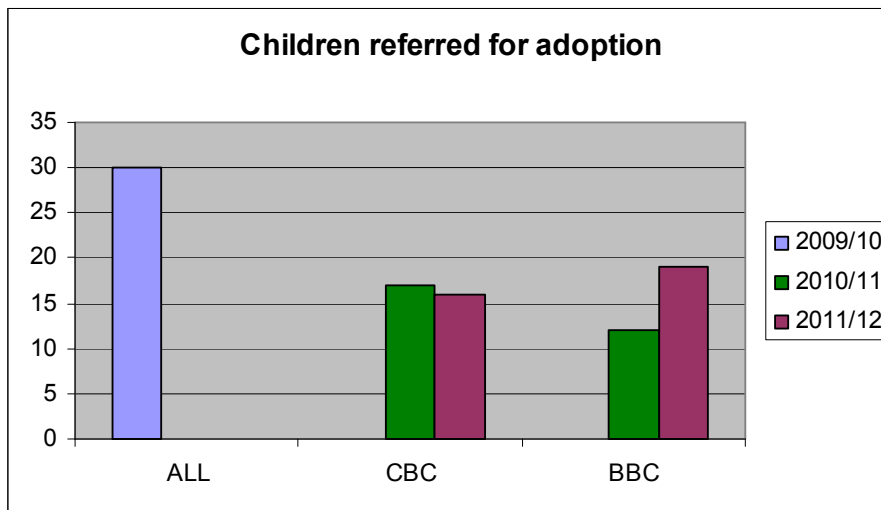
- 1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils have a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. A regularly updated information pack outlining the services available and procedures for prospective adopters is sent within 24 hours to those expressing an interest in adoption.

- 1.6.2 Bi-monthly Information Evenings are held by the Adoption and Permanence Support Team 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. It is a legal requirement for the agency to ensure that prospective adopters are offered the opportunity to attend an Information Evening within 8 weeks of their enquiry to the team.
- 1.6.3 Preliminary counselling discussions in the form of an initial interview with prospective adopters are offered by Adoption Social Workers to enable enquirers to decide whether to pursue their enquiry. This counselling session also enables the Adoption Agency to decide whether to accept an application and whether this is an assessment which should be prioritised as a likely resource for children awaiting adoption.
- 1.6.4 Statistics in relation to enquiries received are included later in this report.

## SECTION 2 – CHILDREN AND ADOPTION

### 2.0 – CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

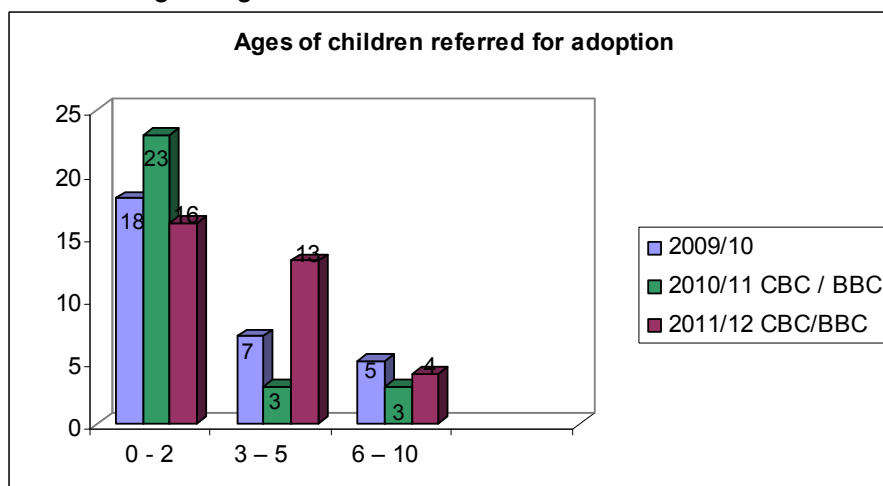
2.0.1 In 2011/12, there were 35 children referred to the service for adoption. Of these, 16 were from Central Bedfordshire and 19 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 29 children in 2010/2011 (17 of whom were from Central Bedfordshire and 12 from Bedford Borough).

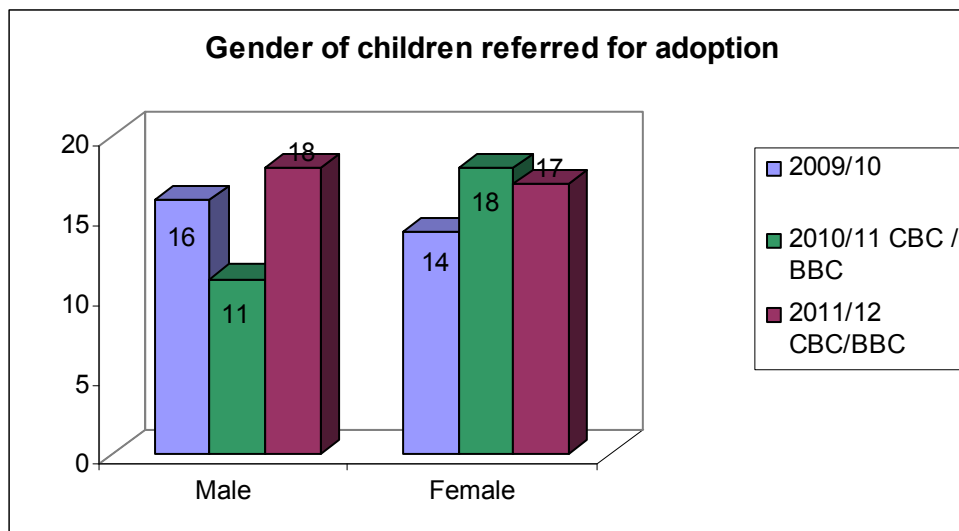


2.0.2 During 2011/12 a further 75 looked after children were referred for permanence planning, where the primary plan was long-term fostering or permanency by way of a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order. 29 children were from Central Bedfordshire and 36 children were from Bedford Borough.

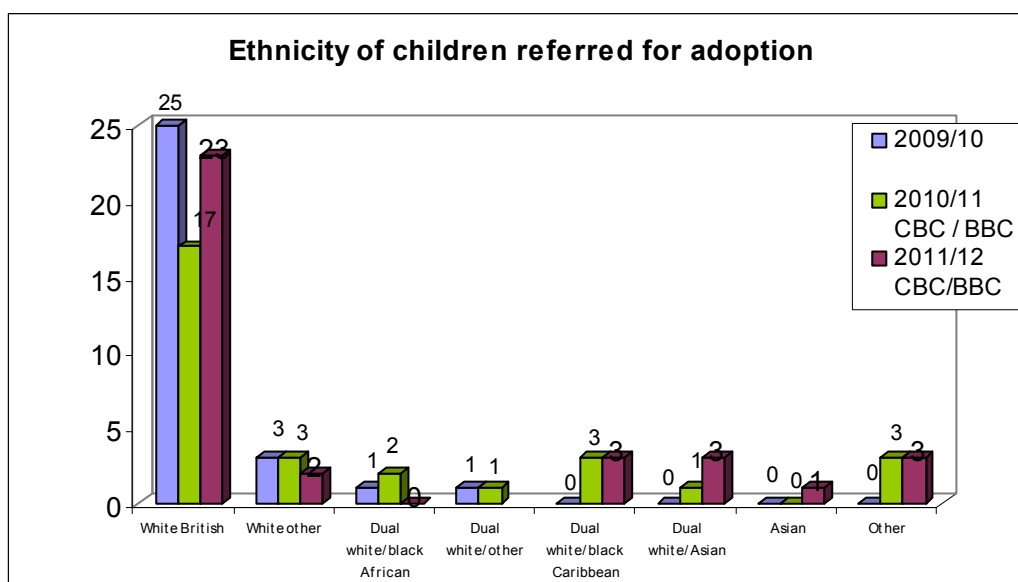
### 2.1 – AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

2.1.1 As can be seen from the figures below, the majority of children referred for adoption were under the age of 5 years. This has also been the case in previous years. Even numbers of boys and girls were referred. There was a significant increase in the number of referrals for children in the 3-5 age range.





Of the 35 children referred for adoption 23 were from White British ethnicity, 2 were White other backgrounds, 3 were dual heritage White / Caribbean, 3 were dual heritage White / Asian, 1 was Asian and 3 were from other ethnicities.



**2.2 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

2.2.1 The service received referrals for 8 sibling groups during the year 2011/2012. This compares to 8 sibling groups in 2010/2011. Placing large sibling groups together for adoption can be challenging, especially when the group contains older children.

**2.3 – CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

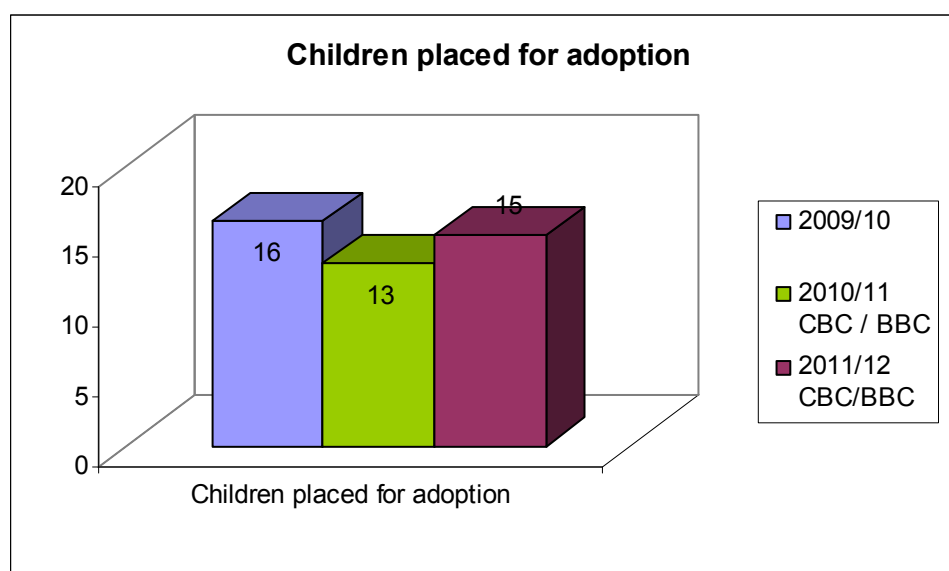
2.3.1 The service received 2 referrals for siblings with a disability during 2011/2012. This was a slight increase on the previous year when there was one referral for a child with a disability.

## 2.4 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.4.1 Of the 35 children referred for possible adoption in 2011/2012, 2 had been matched with adopters by March 2012. In the case of 10 children the Adoption Panel had considered their case and a decision made that adoption should be the plan. For 2 children possible adopters had been considered and were being assessed in respect of those children. The remaining children were still subject to care proceedings as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Permanence planning was in place with potential adopters beginning to be identified in order to expedite placements once Placement Orders were granted.
- 2.4.2 In order to avoid case drift 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.
- 2.4.3 In the year 2011/2012 we have continued to see a large number of children where Care Proceedings have taken much longer than expected, often due to viability assessments of family members taking place consecutively.

## 2.5 – PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN

- 2.5.1 Members of the Adoption Team were active in facilitating the placements of the 15 children placed for adoption in 2011/2012. This compares to the placement of 13 children in the previous year.
- 2.5.2 There were 2 sibling groups placed for adoption during 2011/2012. Additionally 1 child was able to join a sibling who had already been adopted.



## 2.6 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT

2.6.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption in 2011/2012, 11 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Bedfordshire. 1 sibling group and 2 single children were placed with adopters recruited by other adoption agencies – a Voluntary Adoption Agency for the sibling group, and other local authorities for the single children.

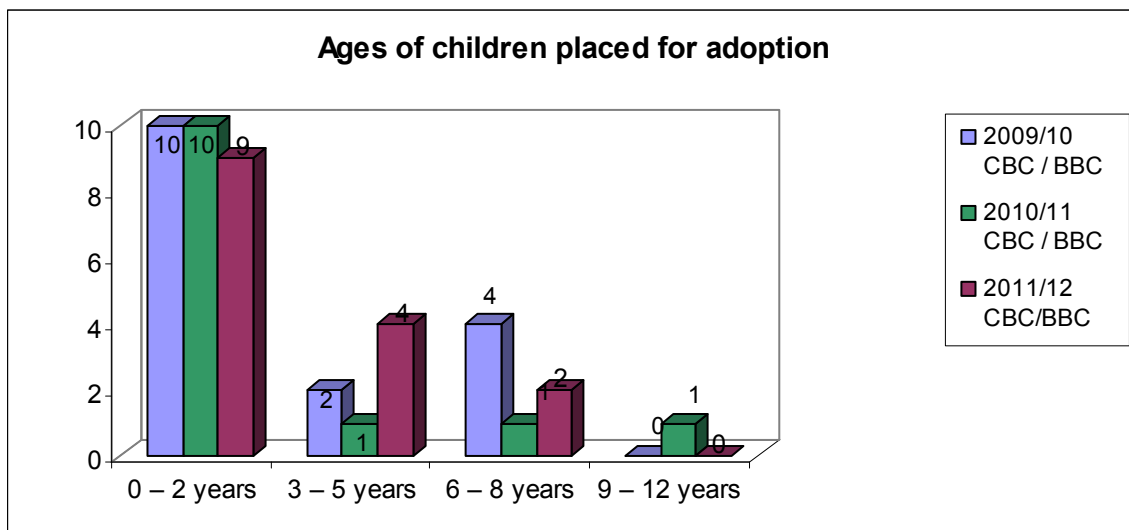
## 2.7 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.7.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption in the year 2011/2012, 7 were White British, 2 were of White British/Irish Traveller heritage, 1 child was of White European heritage and 5 children were of dual heritage, including White/Black Caribbean, White/Turkish and White/Iraqi heritages.

## 2.8 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.8.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption in 2011/2012, 6 were aged three and above. 9 out of the 15 were aged 2 years or under. The age of a child at placement is the single most important variable in predicting a successful outcome, the younger the child at placement, the higher the likelihood of success.

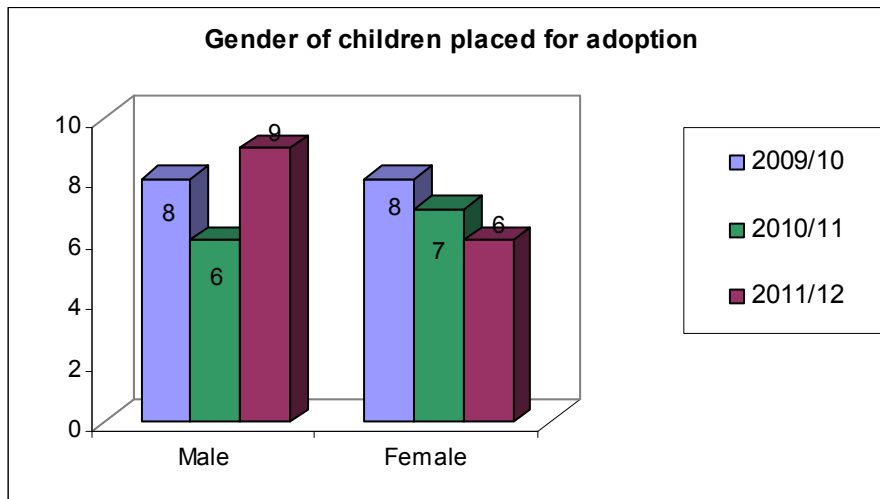
0 – 2 years	9
3 – 5 years	4
6 – 8 years	2
9 – 12 years	0



## 2.9 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.9.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption, 9 were female and 6 were male. Of these in Central Bedfordshire there were 2 females and 3 males placed for adoption and in Bedford Borough, there were 7 females and 3 males.





## 2.10 – ADOPTION ORDERS / SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

2.10.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 12 children during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Of these 4 were for children from Central Bedfordshire and 8 from Bedford Borough. This is a decrease on the 16 orders made in 2010/11.

2.10.2 Special Guardianship Orders were made in respect of 12 children. Of these 11 were from Central Bedfordshire and 1 was from Bedford Borough.

## **SECTION 3 - ADOPTERS**

### **3.0 – THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SUPPORT TEAM**

- 3.0.1 Every child looked after who may need a new permanent family has a social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. Family Finding Social Workers attend regular permanence planning meetings with other professionals involved with the child. For those children for whom a return to the care of his / her parents or a member of the extended family is not possible, adoption or long term fostering will be the plan. Family Finding Social Workers are active in identifying not just adoptive families, but also foster families, as appropriate to the needs of the child. This helps ensure that permanence is achieved for all children in a timely manner.

### **3.1 – RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS**

- 3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for both Bedfordshire children and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families a range of recruitment activity has taken place this year. Drop-in sessions were held in June 2011 and February 2012, as well as four specific drop-in events during National Adoption Week in October 2011. A radio advertising campaign was also broadcast in October 2011 to tie-in with National Adoption Week. In addition the Adoption and Fostering service had stalls at Bedford Market, Leighton Buzzard Market, Linslade Canal Festival and Bedfordshire Young Farmers Event during 2011.

### **3.2 – THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS**

- 3.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective adopters are required to undertake a training programme as part of the preparation and assessment process and have a review of their assessment conducted by a Manager or Senior Practitioner of the Adoption and Permanence Support Team.
- 3.2.2 104 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in 2011/12 which was an identical number to the 104 in 2010/2011. All enquirers were invited to attend information evenings and sent information packs. 73 households attended with 37 households being interviewed. Applications were accepted from 25 households. 14 adoptive households were approved in 2011/12

### **3.3 – ETHNICITY OF ADOPTERS**

- 3.3.1 Of the 104 enquiries, 85 were white British. 12 households were of a dual heritage background, with 8 being white and white European heritage. 5 households were from an Asian background, 1 of a black African and 1 from a black Caribbean heritage.
- 3.3.2 Of the adopters approved 11 households were White / British. In other cases the household comprised one partner of white of non-British heritage and another household were Asian.

### 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 made, adopters can continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs through the Adoption and Permanence Support Team.

### 3.5 – TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS

- 3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption and Fostering Service provide the preparation training for adopters. Adopters also have access to the full training programme offered to the Agency's foster carers and adopters. This ongoing training is available to both approved adopters as well as to adoptive parents at any point after an Adoption Order has been granted.
- 3.5.2 During the year April 2011 to March 2012 a four day preparation training programme was held on four occasions and was attended by 19 households, compared to 14 households during 2010/2011. In addition, specific preparation training was held for second-time adopters in November 2011 attended by 3 households.
- 3.5.3 The training covered a variety of topics and experiential exercises including:
- The Adoption Process
  - Agency Policy / Legislation
  - Valuing Diversity
  - Disability Awareness
  - Child Development
  - Attachment and Resilience
  - Health and Education
  - Abuse
  - Memories, Loss and Separation
  - Lifestory work
  - Adoption Support including contact
  - Matching
- 3.5.4 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme, and again when prospective adopters attend Adoption Panel. The feedback to Panel during the past 12 months has been universally positive.

## **SECTION 4 – ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

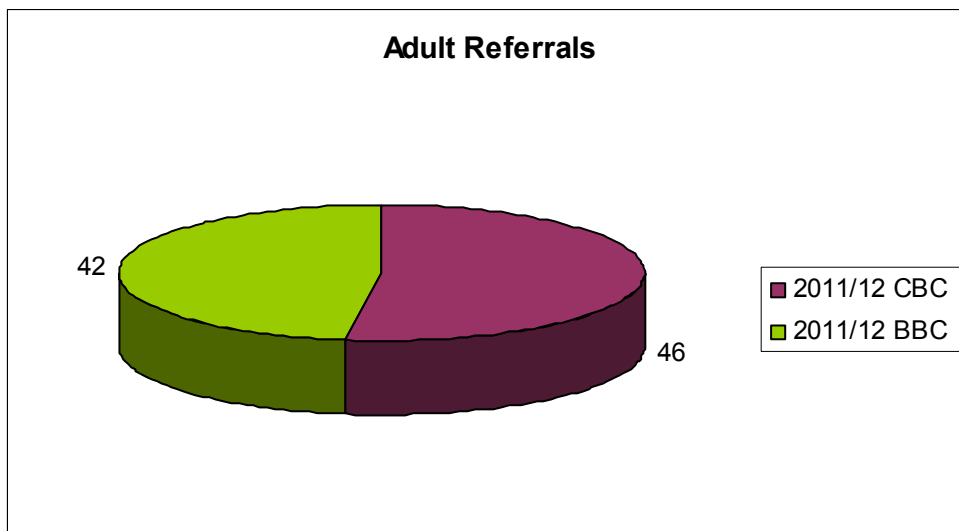
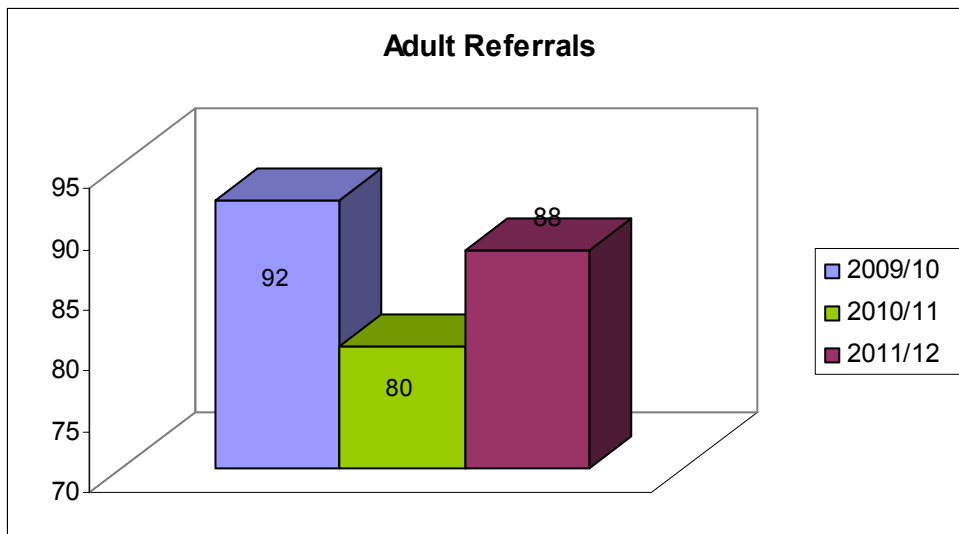
### **4.0 – POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES**

- 4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. These families either self-refer or come to the attention of the department via another agency. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.
- 4.0.2 As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, the team were working directly with 25 adopted children and their families who were in need of support. Of these 12 were from Central Bedfordshire and 13 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 41 children and their families in March 2011. The reduction in open cases is largely as a result of a lower number of referrals than in the preceding 12 months, coupled with the service supporting children and families to make use of some of the lower level group support offered. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 the team received a total of 17 new referrals for adoption support, 8 from Central Bedfordshire and 9 from Bedford Borough.
- 4.0.3 The team have a mailing list of 130 adoptive families from Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days, some of which are provided by the service and some by Adoption UK. They are also sent information about training events provided by the Adoption and Fostering Service.
- 4.0.4 All new adoption support referrals are offered an Adoption UK Buddy and access to the above services. The Adoption & Permanence team also provide groups for adopted children and their families, including Talking About Adoption workshops. All adoption support referrals have an assessment of need and adoption support plan upon request.
- 4.0.5 Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of 190 children (compared to 204 children in 2010/2011), many of which have required direct intervention to support all the parties involved in the contact arrangements, i.e. adopted children and young people, their adoptive parents and their birth families. In addition the service currently manages contact plans in Special Guardianship cases on behalf of 18 children.

### **4.1 – SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES**

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Support Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted people seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Bedfordshire, a counselling service is offered and information is provided to other councils who are supporting people in their areas who were adopted through Bedfordshire. Specific leaflets outlining this service are available to enquirers through the Adoption Duty Desk.
- 4.1.2 Not only is an initial counselling interview offered to those seeking birth records, but 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 seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service. In the case of birth relatives, they are not given any identifying information about the adopted person.
- 4.1.4 In the period 2011/2012 there were 88 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives who were seeking Post Adoption counselling support. This was an increase on the 80 referrals received in 2010/11
- 4.1.5 Of the 88 adult referrals received during 2011/2012, 46 came from Central Bedfordshire and 42 were from Bedford Borough. .



## 4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

- 4.2.1 Nationally the disruption rate pre Adoption Order is considered to be in the region of 20%. There were no disruptions in 2011/12 of children placed by the two councils, meaning that there had only been one disruption in the last 4 years. This low figure reflects the care given to the matching process between children and adoptive families, the resilience and commitment of adoptive parents and the support given to them and the children in the critical early months of placements.
- 4.2.2 During 2011/12 the service provided advice in the cases of three children placed by other councils, but living in this area, whose adoptions had disrupted post Adoption order.

## SECTION 5 – OTHER ACTIVITIES

### 5.0 – INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

- 5.0.1 Inter-Country adoption has become increasingly more complex in terms of the legal requirements of those countries that permit children to be placed for adoption outside of their country of origin. In recognition of this and given the specialist knowledge and expertise which this work demands, the Adoption Agency has a Service Level Agreement with a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, Parents and Children Together (PACT), which is recognised as being a leading agency in this area of work, to provide this service on its behalf.
- 5.0.2 Families who are normally resident in Bedfordshire wishing to adopt children from overseas are referred to PACT who will provide information and preparation training and will assess and approve families wishing to adopt children from overseas.
- 5.0.3 Families are required to pay for their assessment in accordance with Regulations but Bedfordshire funds all of the initial counselling interviews.
- 5.0.4 During 2011/2012 PACT received 6 enquiries concerning inter-country adoption from residents of Central Bedfordshire or Bedford Borough. 2 of these enquiries were followed by an initial interview. During the period PACT approved one adoptive household and made one inter-country placement. This is a reduction in enquiries and interviews from the previous 12 months.

### 5.1 – THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

- 5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency is a member of the local adoption consortium whose aim is to work in partnership to share information about children and approved adopters to make local matches and to share good practice. The other full members are:
- Buckinghamshire County Council
  - Hertfordshire County Council
  - Luton Borough Council
  - Milton Keynes Council
- Associate member: St Francis Children's Society

- 5.1.2 We are pleased to be able to assist other consortium members and in the year 2011/2012 2 children from Bedford Borough were placed with adopters from the consortium. Three children from within the consortium were placed with adopters trained, assessed and approved by Bedfordshire.

## **5.2 – BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTERING (BAAF)**

- 5.2.1 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agencies are full members of BAAF which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and voluntary adoption agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 5.2.2 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency is also a member of the BAAF Eastern Region, a group which meets quarterly to discuss and exchange best practice in the East Anglia region. Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough are represented by the Agency Adviser, Adoption and Fostering.
- 5.2.3 During the last 12 months the agency has taken up 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.

## **5.3 – 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 and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency. 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 adopted an opportunity to talk about their feelings. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members and the counselling will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
- 5.3.3 The contract with Adoption Plus was renewed in 2011/2012 and at that time the arrangements for how the service is provided were changed to provide more flexibility for those accessing the service and to encourage a greater take up by birth parents.

## SECTION 6 CONCLUSION

- 6.0.1 2011/12 has been the third year of the shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. This has been a successful year for the service and one in which we have continued to develop our practice and meet challenges of offering creative and quality services that are cost effective.
- 6.0.2 Compared to last year there has been an increase in activity across all aspects of the service. The increase in looked after children in both councils during 2011/12 resulted in increased numbers of referrals for permanence planning, both for adoption and for long-term fostering or for other legal alternative permanent options, such as Special Guardianship or Residence Orders.
- 6.0.3 In response, the service has increased the number of assessments of prospective adopters, resulting in increased numbers of approvals. The full success of this will be seen in 2012/13 as children are placed with those adopters and adoption orders granted. In order to meet continued demand a recruitment target for adopters has been set again for 2012/13, based on known and likely numbers and needs of children requiring adoption. The target has been set at 24 new approvals in 2012/13.
- 6.0.4 In August 2011 the Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted and judged to be Good with outstanding features. The Teenage Adoption Panel was singled out for particular praise as an example of innovative practice.
- 6.0.5 Overall in 2011/2012 there has been another significant increase in the number of children who have been referred for permanence planning, including those where adoption is being considered. Additional adoption panels have been required to meet the need.
- 6.0.6 During 2011 there has been considerable Government attention paid to the performance of councils in respect to the numbers and timeliness of adoptions of children. In March 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' which outlines measures planned to monitor and improve performance. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' for each council, and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. The Adoption Service is in a strong position to meet the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.
- 6.0.7 In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement as of 31st January 2013. Key staff in both councils will therefore be meeting regularly during 2012 to plan the arrangements for February 2013 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective adoption service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed

Report written by:

*Fiona Mackirdy*  
*Head of, Adoption and Fostering*  
*Joint Service for Central and Bedford Borough Councils*

*Telephone: 0300 300 8090*



This information can be made available in  
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**Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council**

Children's Specialist Services

Technology House

239 Ampthill Road

Bedford

MK42 9BD

[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk)

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

Tel: 0300 300 8090

Fax: 0300 300 8255

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Central Bedfordshire Council  
and Bedford Borough Council  
working together

# Fostering Agency

Annual Report

For the period  
2011/2012

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 Since Local Government reorganisation in April 2009 Central Bedfordshire has hosted the Fostering Service as a shared service on behalf of both new unitary councils. This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council's Fostering Agency during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2012, noting its achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the Fostering Agency required under the Fostering Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and three monthly update reports will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. A copy of this report is provided to Bedford Borough Council for presentation to Elected Members.

## 1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service is made up of the following staff as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012:
- 1 x full time Team Manager
  - 1 x full time Deputy Team Manager
  - 8 x Senior Practitioners
  - 10 x Social Workers
  - 2 x Social Work Assistants
  - 1 x Duty Worker
- 1.1.2 The service is supported by 2 full time and 1 part time administrators.
- 1.1.3 The workforce is diverse and includes staff of both genders, and from other European and black and minority ethnic groups. This level of diversity is valued when considering case allocation.
- 1.1.4 All staff have access to the Council's extensive learning and development programme, and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The service also provides diversity training for staff in order to improve its understanding of the needs of children from black and minority ethnic communities and enable them to meet their needs more appropriately.
- 1.1.5 Most staff have a number of years post-qualifying experience, and a programme of additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.6 The fostering agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Fostering and Adoption service area. These staff include a Business Support Officer with responsibility for foster care payments, a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and Training coordinator, and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the fostering and permanence panels.

## SECTION 2 – THE PANELS

### 2.1 THE FOSTERING PANEL

- 2.1.1 The Fostering Panel meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required.
- 2.1.2 The Fostering Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. The panel also considers the first annual review of foster carers, as well as any change or termination of approval. The Panel is advised of any exemptions or variations to a carer's existing terms of approval. Reviews following complaints or allegations are also presented to the Panel.

### 2.2 FOSTERING PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 2.2.1 From 1 April 2011 the new Fostering Regulations 2011 introduced greater flexibility in relation to the membership of fostering panels, allowing for the use of a 'central list' of panel members from which attendees for any particular panel could be chosen in accordance with quoracy requirements. The Regulations also allowed for the appointment of more than one vice chair to afford greater flexibility to fostering agencies when convening panels.
- 2.2.2 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2012 the Fostering Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist, Central Bedfordshire Council
Social Worker (Vice Chair)	Senior Practitioner, Adoption Team, Central Bedfordshire Council
Social Worker	Deputy Team Manager, Looked After Children, Central Bedfordshire Council
Elected Member (vacancy)	Bedford Borough Council
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA
Independent	Health Visitor
Independent	Independent Social Worker
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA
Independent	Gypsy and Traveller Education Consultant
Independent	Independent Family Group Meeting Coordinator

- 2.2.3 In attendance but non voting members were:

Professional Adviser	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

- 2.2.4 A Medical Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings, but may attend in person if requested.
- 2.2.5 A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings and attends in person as requested.

## 2.3 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL

- 2.3.1 The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel's primary activity is to deal with permanent fostering work and family and friends placements.
- 2.3.2 The panel considers the plan for any child under the age of 13 for whom permanent or long-term fostering is proposed and any matches with specific carers for these children. In all but a few exceptional cases, matching decisions on children over 13 years are made by the Head of Service for Quality Assurance for Central Bedfordshire or the Head of Service for LAC & LAAC for Bedford Borough.
- 2.3.3 This panel also considers applications by foster carers to be long-term carers for a particular child and applications by those who are family and friends foster carers. The panel also considers the first annual review of permanent foster carers and family and friends foster carers, as well as any changes to their approval. The Panel is advised of any exemptions or variations to a carer's existing range of approval.
- 2.3.4 Due to the volume of cases concerning short term fostering, the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel also considers the approval and reviews of short term foster carers from time to time.

## 2.4 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 2.4.1 From 1 April 2011 the new Fostering Regulations 2011 introduced greater flexibility in relation to the membership of fostering panels, allowing for the use of a 'central list' of panel members from which attendees for any particular panel could be chosen in accordance with quoracy requirements. The Regulations also allowed for the appointment of more than one vice chair to afford greater flexibility to fostering agencies when convening panels.
- 2.4.2 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2012 the Permanence Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Social Worker	Deputy Team Manager, Looked After Children, Central Bedfordshire Council (Vice Chair)
Social Worker	Independent Social Worker (Vice Chair)
Social Worker	Team Manager, Looked After Children, Central Bedfordshire Council
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist
Independent	Adoptive Parent
Independent	Independent Social Worker
Independent	Independent Social Worker
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA
Elected Member (Vacancy)	Bedford Borough Council
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent	Gypsy and Traveller Education Consultant
Independent	Family Group Meeting Team Manager

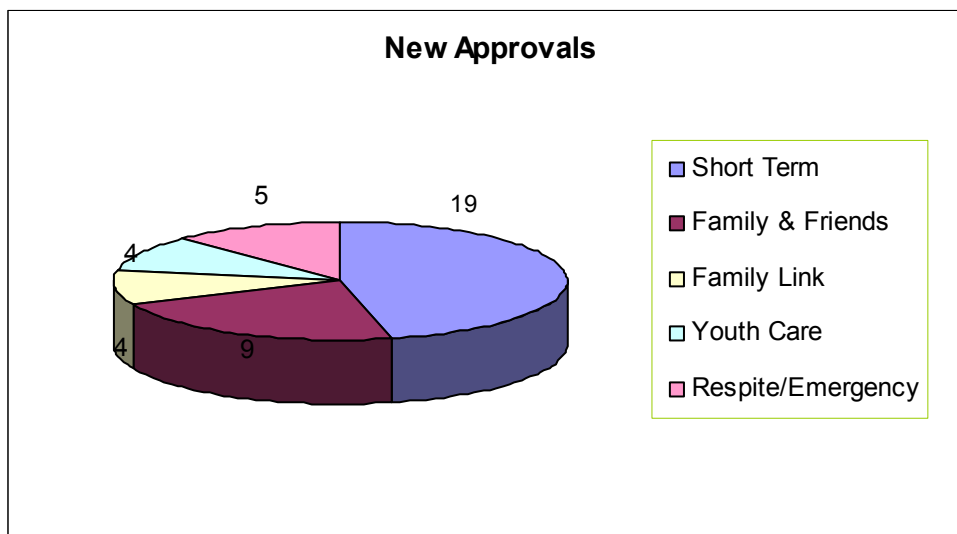
- 2.4.3 In attendance but non voting members were:

Professional Adviser	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

- 2.4.4 A Medical Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings and may attend in person if requested.
- 2.4.5 A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings and attends in person as requested.

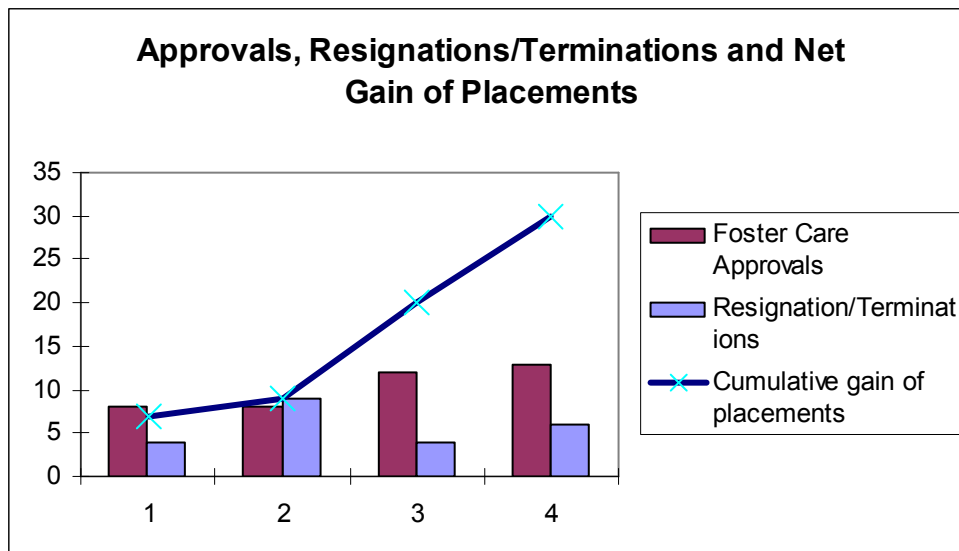
**2.5 PANEL ACTIVITY**

- 2.5.1 In 2011/2012 the Fostering Panel met 13 times and recommended that 20 households should be approved as foster carers. This is the same number of approvals as 2010/11.
- 2.5.2 Of the 20 carers newly approved by the Fostering Panel, 4 were approved for the Family Link Scheme, 12 as short-term carers and 4 for the Youth Care Scheme.
- 2.5.3 The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel met 17 times during the year 2011/2012. During this time, 21 households were approved as foster carers (which compares with 16 the previous year). Plans for 12 children for permanent or long-term fostering were recommended and 2 children were recommended for a match. 7 households were approved as short term foster carers, 9 as family & friends carers and 5 as emergency or respite foster carers.



- 2.5.4 The Panels considered first annual reviews for 19 households, 7 reviews following concerns or allegations, 11 requests for change of approval, 2 terminations of approval following allegations.
- 2.5.5 In total 96 fostering households attended one or other of the panels.
- 2.5.6 21 fostering households resigned at their request in 2011/12 and 2 households had their approval withdrawn by the Fostering Agency. This total was down from 31 in 2010/11. The reasons for deregistration varied, but included personal circumstances, ill health, retirement, relocation, moving to another local authority and children in placement becoming permanent family members. Balancing new approvals against resignations there was a net gain of fostering placements of 30 during the year.





## 2.6 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.6.1 The Fostering Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members. This year, due to the number of cases and business on the agendas it has been a challenge to find time for the 'bite-size' training on panel days. All Panel Members had an annual appraisal where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.
- 2.6.2 A full day's training on Safeguarding and Allegations in Fostering and Pre-Adoptive Placements was held in June 2011 for Panel Members and staff of the Fostering Agency. In addition a bitesize training session on Care Proceedings was held in April 2011.

## 2.7 PANEL DIVERSITY

- 2.7.1 The agency has ensured that both panels are diverse and include members of black and minority ethnic groups. Panel members also bring particular expertise or experience, including a member experienced in working with gypsy and traveller communities, a member with personal experience of being looked after and of disruption. Both Panels have male and female panel members. During this year more male panel members have been recruited giving a more even gender balance on panels. There is also a diversity of age on both panels.

## 2.8 AGENCY DECISIONS AND INDEPENDENT REVIEW MECHANISM

- 2.8.1 If a foster carer is not satisfied with the Fostering Agency's decision about their approval or the terms of their approval, they have a right to make a request within 28 days for a review by the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent Review Mechanism is a review process conducted by a review panel independent of the fostering service provider who hears the evidence presented to the Agency's own panel and then makes a recommendation to the Agency in respect of their decision. Whilst the Agency Decision Maker must take into account the recommendations of the IRM, the final decision remains with the Agency.

- 2.8.2 In two cases this year foster carers applied for a review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent panel view about their approval.

## **SECTION 3 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING**

### **3.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME**

- 3.1.1 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.
- 3.1.2 Family Link Workers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Periods of short breaks will be carefully planned and could be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.1.3 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
- 3.1.4 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, there were 12 Family Link carers approved with a further 3 Family Link carers being assessed.
- 3.1.5 During 2011/12 the scheme expanded with 4 more new carers being approved and 24 children being supported. This is an increase of 3 carers and 11 children from 2010/11. The 3 fee-based Family Link carers continue to be an integral part of the scheme, having increased availability and the capacity to be linked to up to 7 young people receiving short breaks.

### **3.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME**

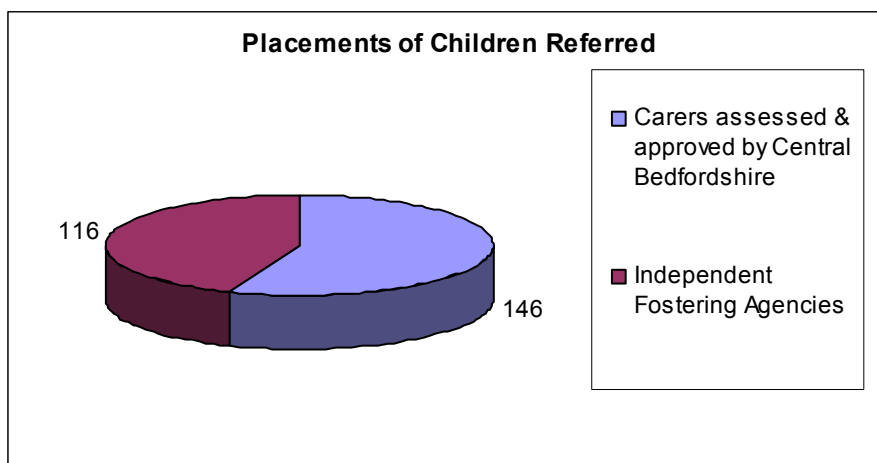
- 3.2.1 The Youth Care Scheme is a comprehensive, fee paid fostering scheme which provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.2.2 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, there were 13 approved Youth Care households. This was an increase from the 10 approved households at the beginning of the reporting year, and reflected a successful recruitment campaign during 2011 for Youth Care and Youth Care Respite carers.

**SECTION 4 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING**

**4.1 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING**

4.1.1 During 2011/2012, the Fostering Service received a total of 375 referrals for foster placements of which 197 were for children becoming newly looked after. The remainder of referrals were for a change of placement. This is a significant increase on the total number of 159 referrals received in 2010/11 and reflects the increase in both councils of social care activity and numbers of looked after children.

4.1.2 Of the referrals received 198 were Central Bedfordshire children and 177 were Bedford Borough children. 146 of the referrals resulted in placements with in-house carers. 9 young people were placed in residential units. 116 children (45 Central Bedfordshire and 71 Bedford Borough children) were placed in an Independent Fostering Agency placement as a result of becoming looked after or due to a change of placement. Some children did not ultimately enter foster care, but remained at home.

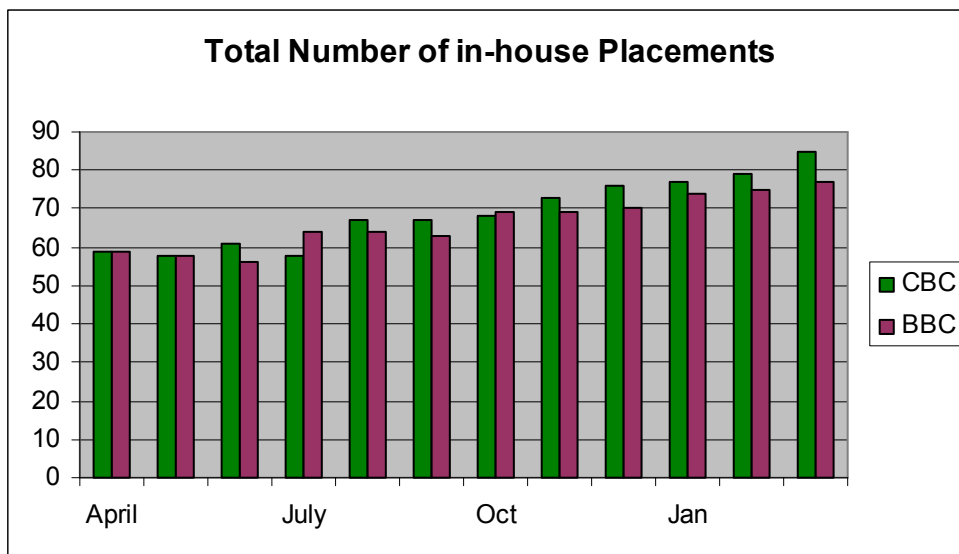


4.1.3 The referral for the child includes the matching criteria that are essential and preferable when looking for a placement for a child, and a risk assessment is also considered. This is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.

4.1.4 Respite placements were provided on 142 occasions, with 11 children having regular respite as part of their care plan.

4.1.5 Of the new referrals for foster placements, 19 came through the Emergency Duty Service, an increase from 13 in 2010-11.

4.1.6 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 a total of 162 children were placed with in house foster carers, with 85 children coming from Central Bedfordshire and 77 children from Bedford Borough.



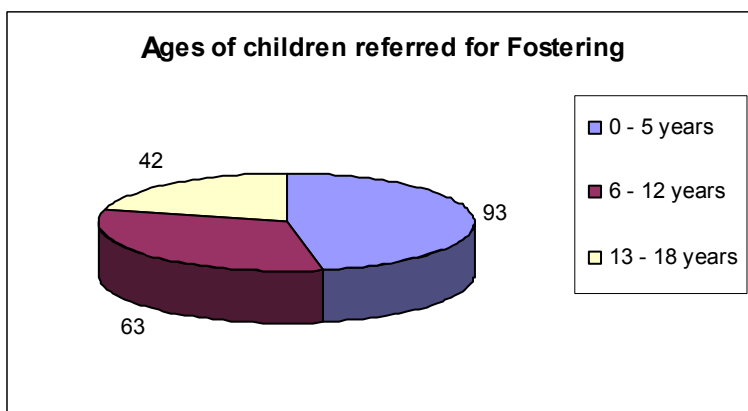
**4.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING**

4.2.1 Nearly half the children referred because they were newly looked after were aged 0-5 years. From Central Bedfordshire the age distribution was as follows:

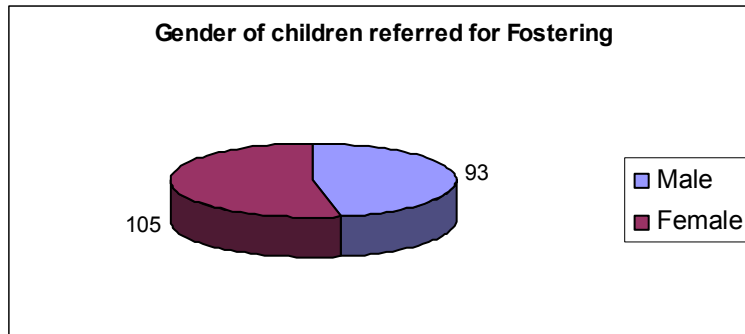
- 0-5 years      48 children
- 6-12 years    32 children
- 13-18 years   16 young people

From Bedford Borough the age distribution was:

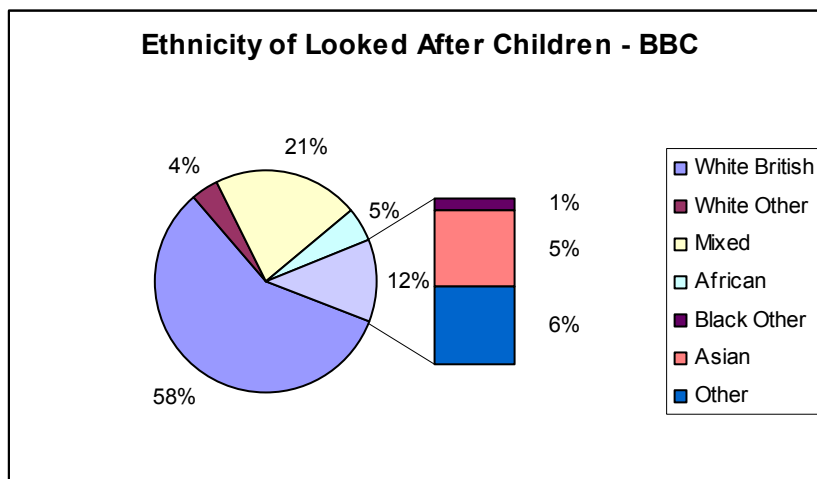
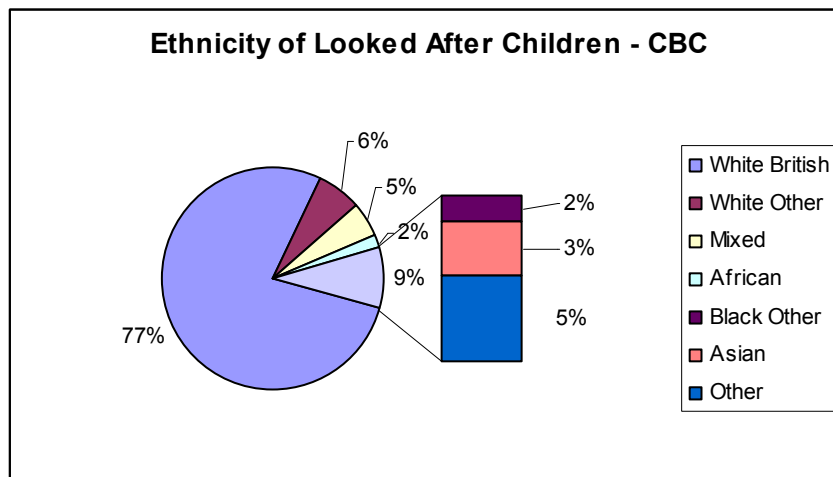
- 0-5 years      45 children
- 6-12 years    31 children
- 13-18 years   26 young people



4.2.2 Of the 96 children referred from Central Bedfordshire, 51 were female and 45 male. Of the 102 children referred from Bedford Borough 54 were female and 48 were male.



4.2.4 The agency has clear management information and monitors closely the ethnicity of Bedfordshire's looked after children.



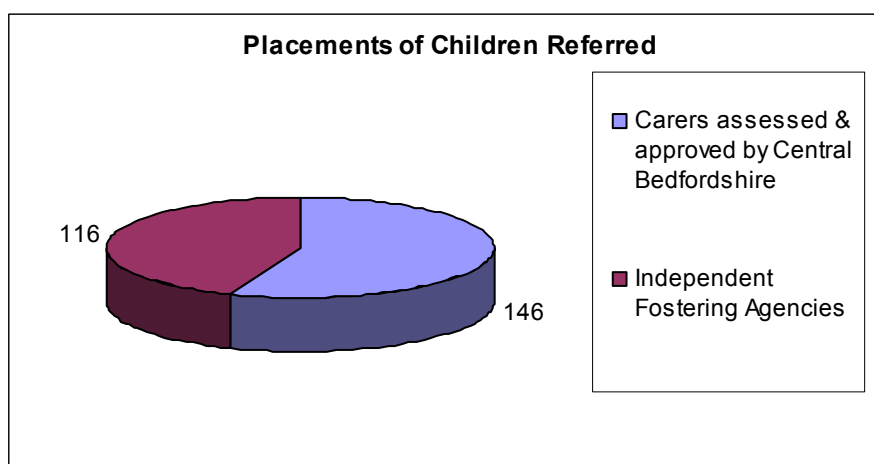
### 4.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

4.3.1 There were 36 sibling groups within the children referred for fostering during the year. This comprised 19 sibling groups from Central Bedfordshire and 17 from Bedford Borough.

### 4.4 TYPE OF FOSTER PLACEMENT PROVIDED

4.4.1 Of the 236 children placed in foster placements this year, 146 were placed with carers assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire Council on behalf of both Councils. The advantages of this are that the staff of the service have prior knowledge of the children and positive working relationships with the carers, thus enhancing fostering support for these placements.

4.4.2 116 of the children referred were placed externally with Independent Fostering Agencies (45 from Central Bedfordshire and 71 from Bedford Borough).



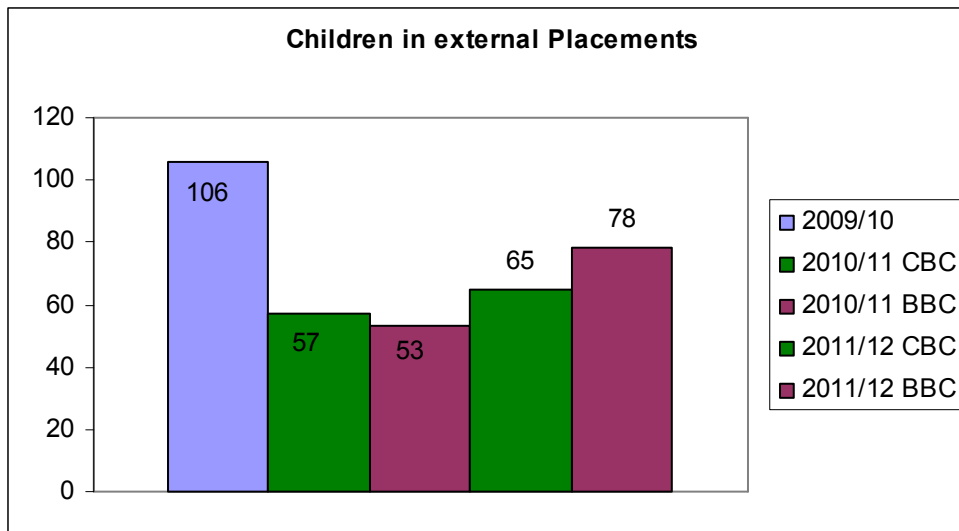
### 4.5 CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT AT 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2012

4.5.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, there were 120 fostering households with full fostering approval, and a further 23 with temporary approval pending full assessment.

4.5.2 A total of 162 children were in these placements. Of these 85 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council and 77 by Bedford Borough Council

4.5.3 A total of 143 children were living in external foster placements provided by independent fostering agencies, as compared to 110 the previous year. Of these 65 children were from Central Bedfordshire Council and 78 from Bedford Borough Council.

4.5.4 In November 2011 both Councils entered into a regional Framework Agreement for the commissioning of placements in Independent Fostering Agencies. This agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 19 preferred providers with the aim of reducing costs and improving quality of placements to meet need.

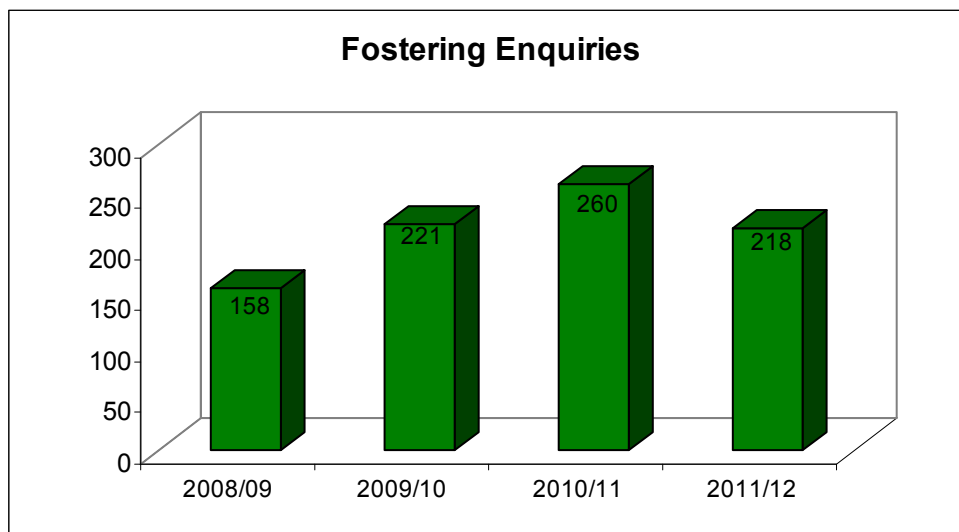


4.6.1 There has been a significant increase in the number of children in external placements as at 31 March 2012, which reflects the overall increase in numbers of looked after children.

## SECTION 5 – FOSTER CARERS

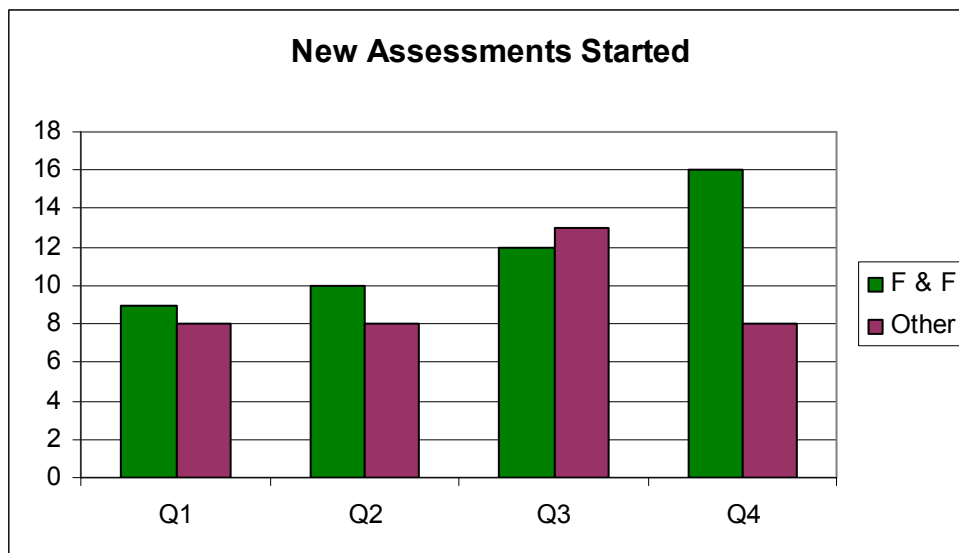
### 5.1 FOSTERING ENQUIRIES

- 5.1.1 All enquirers are sent an Information Pack within 24 hours of their enquiry. A social worker from the Fostering Service will then make a follow-up telephone call to the enquirer within 2 working days and carry out an initial visit within 7 working days if requested.
- 5.1.2 After the initial visit, and a formal application from the enquirer the decision will be made whether or not to complete the assessment or to defer the assessment process until the enquirer is in a better position to proceed.
- 5.1.3 There were 218 initial fostering enquiries from members of the public during 2011/12 compared with 263 the previous year.



- 5.1.4 Application forms were received from 37 households and in addition application was made by 47 households wishing to care for a child known to them as a family member or friend. This is an increase in the number of applications and in assessments of family and friends. There were 41 new fostering households approved, up from 26 in 2010-11.





## 5.2 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR FOSTER CARERS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

- 5.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to undertake a training programme as part of the preparation and assessment process.
- 5.2.2 Implementation of new Regulations on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 changed the way in which family members or friends of looked after are assessed if the child needed to be placed with them prior to a full fostering assessment being completed. In this situation temporary approval may be granted under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations pending a full fostering assessment being carried out and presented to the Fostering Panel. This temporary approval lasts for 16 weeks in the first instance and can be extended for one period of 8 weeks. 23 such temporary approvals were granted in 2011-12.

## 5.3 ETHNICITY OF CARERS

- 5.3.1 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, 12 out of 121 fostering households included carers from black or ethnic minority groups. At 10% this ratio broadly reflects the population in Bedfordshire, although carers from Asian backgrounds are under-represented.
- 5.3.2 Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, the agency has approved 5 fostering households from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and a further household from a white eastern European background.

## SECTION 6 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS

- 6.0 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 through to more complex post-approval training.

### 6.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER

- 6.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, the 'Skills to Foster' course 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.
- 6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective carers to reflect on their values and attitudes to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.
- 6.1.3 During 2011/2012, the Fostering Service ran 6 of these courses (compared with 5 the previous year) and they were attended by 58 delegates in total, (compared with 47 the previous year). For the first time this year bespoke preparation training was offered to friends and family foster carers. 3 such courses were run attended by 24 delegates in total.

### 6.2 CHILD CARE EMERGENCY FIRST AID

- 6.2.1 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete an Emergency First Aid course. 10 courses were held during 2011/2012 and these were attended by a total of 123 delegates.

### 6.3 SONS AND DAUGHTERS

- 6.3.1 'Sons and Daughters' is a one day programme that started in 2010 and mirrors the 'Skills to Foster' course. It is aimed at helping the children of prospective foster carers to consider their role in the process. It also helps increase their awareness of the needs of a child who has come into care.
- 6.3.2 During 2011/12, the Fostering Service ran 2 courses for children and young people aged between 8 – 16 years. In response to feedback from young people from fostering families, the service also provided a specialist training session for them on 'Moving On and Letting Go'.

## 6.4 INDUCTION

- 6.4.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. The implementation of the new standards has been supported by ongoing workshops for carers alongside group supervision for supporting social workers. Aside from having the opportunity to meet members of the service who work with looked after children, there are also opportunities to ask questions and receive essential information about the agency's policies and procedures. In addition, carers are made familiar with the comprehensive training opportunities available throughout their fostering career.

## 6.5 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 6.5.1 Each year, the service devises a comprehensive programme covering a wide variety of the skills and knowledge needed in order for carers to develop their careers in fostering. There were a total of 77 different courses on 36 subjects held over the year. This includes:
- Understanding the Mental Health issues for Looked After Children
  - Safeguarding Children
  - Introduction to Lifestory work
  - Talking to Teenagers about sex and relationships
  - Working with Self Harm
  - Safer Caring
  - Safeguarding Children Online
  - Contact
  - Managing Behaviour
  - Helping in learning
  - Attachment
  - Allegations Awareness
  - Understanding Diversity
  - Food, Feelings and Strategies
  - A Guide to Care Proceedings
  - The Gypsy Roma and Travelling Communities
  - Protective Behaviours
  - Working with birth families
  - Foetal Alcohol syndrome
- 6.5.2 Each carer is required to have a record of their training and development needs, although other alternatives to formal training courses are encouraged in order to meet the minimum standards. This can include home study, training, reading and also on-line training. This can be especially helpful for carers who find it hard to attend training dates. There is also the opportunity for carers to complete an NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or BTEC in Advanced Foster Care Skills.
- 6.5.3 In total, 567 delegates attended training courses held over the year, a similar number to the previous year. This demonstrates the commitment that the agency has towards training foster carers and illustrates the willingness of carers to develop their own knowledge and skill base.
- 6.5.4 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, 59 foster carers have completed their CWDC workbooks. Workshops, surgeries and one to one appointments are facilitated for those who have still to complete their workbooks.

## SECTION 7 – SUPPORT FOR CARERS

- 7.0.1 Every foster carer from the agency receives regular supervision and support from a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, the agency provides foster carers with an Independent Advisor from the Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers. There are also local support groups of foster carers that meet regularly to discuss fostering issues and to enjoy occasional social events such as the annual awards presentation or a cheese and wine evening. Foster carers also have access to telephone support out of hours, and can access the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers.
- 7.0.2 All new carers are also matched to a foster carer mentor who provides formal and practical guidance and support through the carer's first placement and beyond.

### 7.1 FOSTER CARERS' SUPPORT GROUPS

- 7.1.1 Foster Carers' Support Groups meet regularly in the north and south of the county. During the year, the Support Group North met 11 times and was attended by 130 delegates. During the same period, the Support Group South met 10 times and was attended by 72 delegates.
- 7.1.2 Some of the topics discussed included:- Leaving and After Care, The role of the Designated allegations Officer, and the role of the Fostering Review Officer. There were also fun activities such as craft and opportunities to socialise informally.
- 7.1.3 A men's support group meets approximately every 3 months and was attended by 20 delegates throughout the year. Guest speakers covered topics on Allegations, Autism awareness and the Foster Care Association.
- 7.1.4 The Family Link Support Group met twice during 2011/12 in the evenings. An average of 9 carers attended per meeting. One of the meetings had the Lead Nurse for Specialist Children's Services as the Guest speaker.
- 7.1.5 This year a support group specifically for family and friends foster carers was started. The group aims to meet every two months. Two groups were held, attended by 8 carers.
- 7.1.6 Towards the end of 2011 a support group for single carers was established and met monthly. The groups were attended by 12 different foster carers.
- 7.1.7 The annual Foster Carers Awards Ceremony and Social Event was held in May 2011 which was attended by 92 carers and 85 children. Staff and elected members also attended, including the Directors of Children's Services in both authorities. 11 long service awards were given out, and there was 1 award for carers who had completed their BTEC Level 3 and 4 in Advanced Skills in Foster Care.

### 7.2 THE MENTORING SCHEME

- 7.2.1 The Fostering Service offers peer mentoring to all new and existing carers. This service for carers, staffed by carers, offers encouragement, support, and opportunities for collaborative working. It also allows experienced foster carers the chance to develop professionally.

- 7.2.2 Carers who join the scheme are linked with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer themselves. Mentors are trained to support foster carers in their role. As well as offering support to new carers, sometimes mentoring can be offered to experienced carers when they are undergoing a particularly challenging time. The service currently employs 6 mentors – who have varying experiences of fostering, including age ranges and types of approval. This year 3 new mentors have been recruited to the scheme, including a mentor for friends and family foster carers.

### 7.3 THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

- 7.3.1 Fostering Social Workers offer an 'out of hours' service for carers. A mobile telephone number has been 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. Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued.

### 7.4 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION

- 7.4.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. Both Councils actively encourage and support the Association and provide financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quality newsletter.

### 7.5 BAAF AND THE FOSTERING NETWORK

- 7.5.1 Both local authorities are full members of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and independent fostering agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 7.5.2 The Fostering Service is a member of the BAAF Eastern Region, a group which meets quarterly to discuss and exchange best practice in the East Anglia region.
- 7.5.3 The Fostering Service is a member of The Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also able to have individual membership funded by the service, as well as access to The Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Service.

## SECTION 8 - CONCLUSION

- 8.0.1 We have had another successful year, continuing to deliver a high quality service within a shared arrangement. The third year of this shared service has been positive and we continue to work in close partnership with both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire to respond to the individual needs of each local council.
- 8.0.2 This year the service has faced some challenges from the significant increase in the referrals of children requiring a foster placement, due to the increase of looked after children in both councils. Whilst the overall number of children accommodated in in-house fostering placements has increased, the service has not been able to accommodate all children and the number of new placements made in Independent Fostering Agencies has significantly increased. In particular, both authorities have accommodated a number of sibling groups of three, four and five children, where we have struggled to find placements.
- 8.0.3 Our recruitment strategy continues to have a positive effect on our enquiry rate. Whilst overall the number of enquiries is slightly reduced from last year, the number of applications from prospective carers has increased once again. The increase in the number of foster care approvals and a reduction in resignations of carers demonstrates the success of our recruitment and retention programme. Throughout the whole of 2011 – 2012 we have had nearly 40 assessments ongoing at any one time (another increase from the previous year, which averaged 31 at any one time). We exceeded our recruitment target of 40 new fostering households during 2011-12.
- 8.0.4 The increase in numbers of looked after children, and the change in regulations concerning family and friends foster carers has changed significantly the numbers and types of assessment of these fostering arrangements. The number of friends and family assessments has doubled during the year, and coupled with a new statutory 16 week assessment timescale, the service has had to increase the staffing resources to meet these requirements.
- 8.0.5 This year we spent time and effort gathering information using various tools and research of our existing customers to enable us to formulate successful targeted recruitment campaigns to reach potential customers. By profiling our current foster carers and those that had previously responded to advertising were able to ascertain receptivity to certain marketing methods and advertising channels. This has led to the development of an internet and social networking based campaign for 2012-13 as well as the traditional advertising and marketing activity.
- 8.0.7 We have continued to develop our support for foster carers and two social work assistants continue to provide bespoke support to children and carers, with one worker experienced in supporting over 10 year olds and one worker specialising in under 10 year olds. This year we have expanded the specific tailored support offered to those fostering children from within their family or social network through specialist preparation training sessions and the establishment of a support group.
- 8.0.8 The Family Link and the Youth Care Schemes have both expanded this year and we aim to ensure that they run to capacity, thereby minimising the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 8.0.9 The service has to be able to respond to the identified need for more children from Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough to be appropriately placed with in house carers. Furthermore we need to ensure we replenish the number of approved carers who will resign or retire from fostering. . We therefore aim to recruit 50 new fostering households in 2011-12.

8.0.10 In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement as of 31 January 2013. Key staff in both councils will therefore be meeting regularly during 2012 to plan the arrangements for February 2013 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with foster carers and staff to ensure that an effective fostering service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed.

Report composed by:

*Fiona Mackirdy  
Head of Adoption and Fostering  
Joint Service for Central and Bedford Borough Councils  
Technology House,  
239 Ampthill Road  
Bedford, MK42 9BD  
Telephone: 0300 300 8090*

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Children's Specialist Services  
Technology House  
239 Ampthill Road  
Bedford  
MK42 9BD

[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk)  
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Tel: 0300 300 8090  
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