

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



please ask for Leslie Manning

direct line 0300 300 5132

date 11 April 2013

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 22 April 2013 at 11.00 a.m.

Venue at

Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

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

Elected Members (Voting)

To be announced at the Council's Annual Meeting on Thursday, 18 April 2013.

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 4 February 2013 (copy attached).

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

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

4. **Members' Interests**

To receive from Members any declarations of interest.

Reports

Item	Subject	Page Nos.
5	Foster Carers' Charter & Care Leavers' Charter To consider a report setting out the Foster Carers' Charter and Care Leavers' Charter for adoption by Central Bedfordshire Council.	* 11 - 26
6	Looked After Children Placement Strategy To consider a report setting out the refreshed Placement Strategy for Looked After Children.	* 27 - 46
7	Adoption Scorecard April-December 2012 To consider a report setting out the Department for Education's Adoption Scorecard for Central Bedfordshire for the period April-December 2012.	* 47 - 54
8	Allowances for Foster Carers To seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the proposed increase in the allowances for foster carers.	* 55 - 56

9 **Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children** * 57 - 64

To consider a report on the role of the Virtual School for Looked After Children, the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2011/12 and the action taken since September 2012 to develop the role of the School and improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

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CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 4 February 2013

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman), A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman), N B Costin, N J Sheppard, A M Turner and B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogley - Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs J Crawford and Mrs H Philips

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs A Barker
Mrs S A Goodchild
Mrs D B Gurney

Officers in Attendance: Ms F Mackirdy – Head of Adoption and Fostering
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Ms M Short – Participation Officer
Mrs S Tyler – Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations

Others in Attendance: Representatives – Children in Care Council

CPP/11/26 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 5 November 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/11/27 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman advised that item 8 (Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2012/13) would be brought forward and considered before item 5. Members were aware that item 8 included a presentation by representatives of the Children in Care Council and considering their item prior to the other reports would provide them with the opportunity to leave in time to attend another appointment.

The Chairman advised that, arising from the Panel's decision at its last meeting (minute CPP/12/20 refers), a working group of the Panel had visited Hertfordshire County Council to observe a corporate parenting meeting at that Authority. He expressed his thanks to the County Council for its hospitality. The Chairman then advised that similar trips were planned to two other local authorities for the same purpose. After the trips had taken place consideration would be given as to whether any of the practices observed could be adopted by this Council's Panel to improve its ways of working.

The Chairman then expressed his appreciation to the Head of Adoption and Fostering for the positive outcome arising from the Ofsted inspection of the fostering service in December 2012 (minute CPP/11/30 below refers).

CPP/11/28 **Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

CPP/11/29 **Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2012/13**

The Panel considered the Children in Care Council Annual Report 2012/13 and the Work Programme Priorities for 2013/14. In addition Members received a presentation from representatives of the Children in Care Council (CiCC).

At the Chairman's request the Participation Officer undertook to circulate copies of the first CiCC newsletter to all Councillors. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing stated that a link would also be included within the Staff Central magazine.

With regard to the creation of a dedicated website for Children in Care the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations reported that discussions were ongoing with Corporate Communications and ICT regarding the form a website could take. A Member with experience in this field indicated that she would be willing to assist in the design and development of the site.

A Member referred to the three pony days organised by the British Horse Society where young people had had the opportunity to learn how to care for the ponies and learn the basis of riding them. The Member stated that young people would be welcome to visit the horses that she owned. The Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to establish the insurance requirements for such a visit.

Discussion took place on holding the proposed annual CiCC conference for members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The conference would provide an opportunity for Members to meet the different CiCC groups and see their work and achievements. Although the conference could also be open to senior Central Bedfordshire Council managers the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing reminded the meeting that all Council employees held a corporate responsibility for Looked After Children. The possible date of the conference was also considered with the Easter holiday and summer holidays having been

suggested by the CiCC. A Member commented on the proximity of the Easter holiday and the relative lack of time to prepare.

The meeting considered possible changes to the way the Annual Awards evening was organised; the number of attendees having led to a lengthy evening and boredom amongst some of those present. Although the CiCC had considered splitting the age range for the evening and having two different events the representatives were also aware that the Awards Evening was the only time at which all Looked After Children were gathered together. An earlier start to the evening was suggested but the representatives advised that starting at 6.00 p.m. allowed young people to prepare for the evening after a day at school or college. Further discussion took place on possible changes to the arrangements especially with regard to the number of young children who received nominations for an award. The possible dates for the Awards Evening in 2013 were noted.

With regard to the attendance by CiCC members at a national CiCC event in London to share examples of good practice the meeting noted that the CiCC members had come away with ideas on how to improve Central Bedfordshire's CiCC. The Participation Officer undertook to circulate feedback on the trip to the Panel.

The meeting considered a proposal by the CiCC that Looked After Children nominate social workers for an award for their efforts in helping young people. Whilst welcoming this suggestion it was suggested that the range of officers eligible for nomination be extended. The Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to progress this item and report to the next Panel meeting.

On behalf of the Panel the Chairman thanked the CiCC representatives for attending the meeting.

NOTED

- 1 the Children in Care Annual Report 2012/13;**
- 2 the Children in Care Council Work Programme Priorities 2013/14;**
- 3 the presentation by the Children in Care Council representatives.**

(Note: The CiCC members left the meeting room at the conclusion of this item).

CPP/11/30

Outcomes of Ofsted Inspection of the Fostering Service - 11-14 December 2012

The Panel received a presentation on the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service which had taken place between 11-14 December 2012. As was required under the current Ofsted inspection framework ten working days notice of the inspection had been given. Members noted that the inspection was the first to take place since the Council had come in to being.

The meeting was advised that the two Ofsted inspectors on site had:

- Examined records
- Met with children, foster carers, staff, other agencies
- Considered the feedback from the surveys sent out in April 2012
- Analysed performance data and the self-assessment submitted in May 2012

A judgement about Overall Effectiveness had been formed based on four sub-judgements; these being:

- Outcomes for children
- Quality of service
- Safeguarding
- Leadership and management

The Overall Effectiveness of the service had been judged to be 'Good'. In the sub-judgements of 'outcomes for children' and 'safeguarding' the Council was judged to be 'Good'. With regard to 'quality of service' and 'leadership and management' the Council was judged to be 'Adequate'.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering informed Members of those areas that the Ofsted inspectors had considered required attention. The meeting noted that the Ofsted report contained eight recommendations and these, together with the related responses contained in the Foster Service operational action plan, were set out in the presentation for consideration.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that a new inspection framework was due to be introduced from 1 April 2013 which would remove the separate inspections of adoption services, fostering services and services for Looked After Children. Instead there would be one, unannounced, ten day inspection of services for Looked After Children which would consider the placements and support given to them and the planning for their permanency including adoption if appropriate.

In response to a query the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained the positive contribution made by Ofsted.

RESOLVED

that the Foster Service operational action plan, drawn up in response to address the eight recommendations contained within the Ofsted report and set out in the presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel, be confirmed and adopted.

CPP/11/31

Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service - October to December 2012

The Panel received a report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during

Quarter Three (October to December 2012) with comparison to previous quarters.

The Panel received updates on the following areas:

- Recruitment of foster carers
- Placements for children
- Training for foster carers
- Key events
- Ofsted inspection

The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that the number of foster carers recruited was similar to the figure for the same period in 2011 as was the number of placements made. In response to a query the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the Independent Fostering Agency provision was used to place some children in order to allow siblings to remain together.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering advised that, further to comments made by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services at the last meeting (minute CPP/12/23 refers), she would ensure that, in future, data was included as part of the relevant text of the report as well as in graphical form within the report's appendix.

In response to a query the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that, theoretically, all foster carers could care for any child. Foster carers within the shared Adoption and Fostering service were not, therefore, categorised as being either Central Bedfordshire Council or Bedford Borough Council carers. However, there was a geographical element, amongst others, in deciding where children should be placed.

Following further discussion the Head of Adoption and Fostering confirmed that the number of Looked After Children was increasing and would continue to do so. She stated this was the result of economic and social factors coupled with increased professional awareness. She further stated that officers were aware of likely increases in Looked After Children that could arise as a result of the projected general population growth within Central Bedfordshire.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Three report on the Fostering Service for the period October to December 2012.

CPP/11/32 **Adoption Improvement Grant**

The Panel considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined the changes to adoption law and practice which had been introduced during the summer of 2012 together with further amendments which had been proposed in a consultation which had finished in December 2012. Prior to this, in October 2012, each council had been advised of the allocation of an Adoption Improvement Grant to assist it with the

implementation of the reforms. The meeting noted that the grants had to be allocated within the 2012-13 financial year with clear reporting deadlines to the Department for Education on 18 January and 15 April 2013. The meeting also noted that the allocation to Central Bedfordshire was £37,010.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering worked through the proposed options for spending the grant as set out in the report. The proposals were:

- The pilot of a specialist Family Finding Project which concentrated on good quality publicity and follow up for children who were difficult to place
- A short time-limited project to consider the feasibility of implementing a fostering for adoption model
- A short term increase in capacity for the Adoption Panel Medical Advisor
- A short term increase in capacity through the recruitment of a locum adoption advisor
- A contribution toward the appointment of an administrator to organise events for the local adoption consortium

The total of the five proposals came to £36,720.

With regard to the proposed implementation of a fostering for adoption model a query was raised regarding the action required to encourage and attract placements. In response the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that since the report had been written the Council had received additional grant from the government in support of its 'Further Action on Adoption' programme to increase the number of adopters. The meeting noted the government was also encouraging local authorities to join with each other in local consortia to improve efficiency.

In response to a query regarding the measurement of outcomes the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the Adoption Scorecard would reveal whether there had been any improvement in the Council's performance in terms of reduced adoption timescales.

Discussion took place on various issues relating to Looked After Children's wellbeing. In connection with this the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that report on apprenticeship schemes within the Council would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED

that the proposed options for the spend of the Adoption Improvement Grant, as outlined in the preamble above, be approved.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.03 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 22 April 2013
Subject: Foster Carers' Charter & Care Leavers' Charter
Report of: Sue Tyler, Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines Charters to be adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council in respect to the support and commitment to foster carers providing placements to children in the care of Central Bedfordshire Council, and information about the development of the Care Leavers' Charter.

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.

Providing foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. There are no new financial considerations arising from either of these Charters.

Legal:

2. There is no legal duty to have a Foster Carers' Charter or a Care Leavers' Charter however it is considered good practice, and Ofsted consider whether a council has adopted these when inspecting services for looked after children.

Risk Management:

3. Not applicable.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Services provided to Looked after Children, including fostering affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on both Charters in order that they can be adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Background

8. The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011 and the Care Leavers' Charter in October 2012. The Charters were jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, charities and children and young people. They are part of the Government's wider programme of reform to improve the care system.
9. Locally, during 2011 and 2012 there was work progressed with the Foster Carers' Forum and with the local Foster Care Association to add local commitments to the Charter.
10. Following their request the DCS has written to the Department of Education to ask if the young people of Central Bedfordshire can make the Care Leavers' Charter bespoke to Central Bedfordshire. A response is still awaited.
11. As the fostering service is a shared service with Bedford Borough Council, a similar version of the Charter has been developed for Bedford Borough Council. This has been presented to that Council's Corporate Parenting Panel.

Summary

12. The two Charters are attached for the Panel's discussion.

Conclusion and Next Steps

13. The Department for Education will be informed that the Charters have been adopted. Copies of the charters will be published on the Council website and distributed to foster carers and care leavers. Monitoring of delivery against the Charters will be done through the Foster Carers' Forum which is a quarterly meeting of foster carer representatives and senior officers in Children's operational services and the Children in Care Council.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Central Bedfordshire Foster Carers' Charter

Appendix B – Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers.

Background Papers:

None

Location of papers:

N/A

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Appendix A

Central Bedfordshire Council

Our aims in ensuring that the aspirations of the foster carer charter are delivered.

Introduction

In April 2011 the Government launched its Charter for Foster Carers in England. Tim Loughton, MP, Under Secretary of State for Children and Families wants all fostering services to sign up to this charter and indicated that he will be monitoring this very closely.

This document represents the aspirations of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedfordshire Foster Care Association and was drawn up following discussions between all the two parties and Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services who share the fostering service. It is based on a national template produced by the Fostering Network. This template has been adapted to reflect the local needs of a shared fostering service managed by Central Bedfordshire, so that children and young people in the care of the Council receive the best possible standards of care, from foster carers who are viewed as an essential part of the team supporting the child.

More information: The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, Regulations and Statutory Guidance sit alongside the Charter. They provide the detail on many of the topics set out in the Charter and cover the fostering services regulatory duties. The Charter should be read alongside the Foster Care Agreement, a legal requirement as specified by the regulations which covers responsibilities, requirements and expectations between the fostering service and the foster carer.

This document has been written to take into account all of these regulations and guidance.

Context

The fostering service's role

The fostering service aims to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and deliver ongoing support to them.

The children's social care service's role

The Social Care service recognises the positive and central role that carers play in the lives of the child placed with them. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for that child we are committed to working in an informed partnership with carers for as long as the child is placed with them to ensure that the child can live as normal a family life as possible.

The foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the foster care service. We are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment, providing them with stability, care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their potential.

This document applies equally to all foster carers whether they are related or un-related to the child that they foster.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other.

Fostering & Children's Social Care Services commitment

You can expect from us:

- 1 Working in partnership
- 2 Information
- 3 Clarity about decisions
- 4 Support
- 5 Learning and development
- 6 Fair treatment
- 7 Communication and consultation

Foster Carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

- 1 Working in partnership
- 2 Respect for the child
- 3 Information
- 4 Learning and development
- 5 Communication and consultation

What foster carers can expect from the fostering & children's social care service:

1 Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make the biggest difference to the every day lives of children in care

We will:

- value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- understand that, unlike other professional partners, you have invited vulnerable children and young people into your homes, which impacts on every aspect of your life
- include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- ensure that our fostering & children's social care service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance, as well as those agreed in the placement plan
- ensure that our fostering and children's social care service at all times seeks to meet Central Bedfordshire Council's Pledge to looked after children
- treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- respect confidentiality

2 Information

We know that accurate and timely information is vital in order for foster carers to provide the high quality care that meet the child's need.

We will:

- give you all the information including that provided by other corporate parents in education and health that you need in order to care safely for the child
- provide this information in writing prior to placement, except when there are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information as soon as possible
- ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you in advance of placements (except in emergencies where this will be done as soon as possible)
- provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide you with full details of all relevant departmental structure, staffing, policies and procedures
- ensure that all information is regularly updated so that you are best placed to care for the child placed with you

3 Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster

We will:

- Ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make every day decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family
- Give timely and detailed information about decision making which allows you to act as an advocate in all aspects of the child's development
- we will ensure that policy and practice does not place artificial barriers in the way of promoting a normal family, school and social life for the children placed with you
- Provide clarity about any decision you cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what

4 Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task that should affect all aspects of family and social life. Appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the whole fostering family and to the child in your care

We will:

- Respond positively to requests for additional support and consider your needs in a timely and empathetic fashion
- provide you with regular supervision and frequent phone contact which meets your needs, those of the children you foster and national minimum standards
- commit to formally review your practice on at least an annual basis which will give you the opportunity to comment on your fostering experience
- provide you with systems that allow you to share electronic information and documents securely ensuring that the data and confidentiality are protected.
- give you honest and open feedback which allows you to reflect on your practice and influence others opinions of you if appropriate
- provide you with access to 24 hour support from people with fostering expertise
- provide specialist support to inform the care that you provide in areas such as education, health, youth offending and / or behaviour
- pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- pay fees that reflect the task where appropriate
- ensure that there is a local foster carers group, recognised by the fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families

5. Learning and development

We believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We will:

- provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task
- provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support
- produce a mutually agreed development plan reflecting your knowledge, the needs of the child you care for and your fostering aspirations
- offer the opportunity for local foster carers to contribute to training of fellow carers

6 Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances

We will:

- Consult with you and your local foster care group before changing terms, conditions and policies affecting fostering
- Provide an independent advice and mediation service which you can access without recourse to the fostering service
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you
- ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent advice and support should you be subject to an allegation
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales
- ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation
- allow you timely access to records held relating to you and your family

7 Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship recognising that carers are expected to act as a 'pushy', corporate parent.

We will:

- facilitate regular communication between you, your local foster carer group, councillors, senior managers in the fostering & children's social care services and the Director of Children's Services
- ensure that we consult with you on matters that affect you in good time and take into account your advice and concerns
- give you timely feedback from consultations

What fostering and Children's Social Care services can expect from foster carers:

1 Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct

We will:

- to support, raise aspiration and transport the child as a demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with an experience of a secure and high quality family life meeting their needs and cultural identity
- attend meetings about the children and young people we care for
- Work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments and act as a 'pushy parent' to advocate for the child to contribute to them achieving the best possible achievements and outcomes
- make reasonable arrangements to support, raise aspiration, transport and care for the child as a good parent would
- show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life in an open and transparent way according the child's needs
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- work with the fostering and children's social care service in seeking to meet Central Bedfordshire Council's Pledge to looked after children
- respect confidentiality and ensure that all confidential material in our care is kept securely.

2 Respect the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and actively encouraged to achieve their aspirations and potential

We will:

- respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the national minimum standards
- Listen to the child placed with us and take their opinions into account
- Provide positive support and encouragement in all aspects of the child's life including health, leisure and education
- ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding

3 Information

We believe that timely and accurate information is essential in allowing professionals to make the right decisions for children. The role of carers is central to providing the up to date information

We will:

- inform our supervising social worker about the changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us
- take part in regular supervision and an annual review of our fostering practice.
- regularly communicate with the child's social worker to keep them fully informed of any developments in their life
- attend meetings and provide reports as requested in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child

4 Learning, development and support

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need, and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We will:

- reflect on our fostering practice in order to improve the service that we offer to the child
- be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- Make an active contribution to our training development plan
- attend relevant training
- take up opportunities offered to us
- let you know if we are unable to attend
- attend and contribute to support groups
- contribute to the training of other carers where appropriate

5 Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service
- meet with councillors, service managers, the local foster care group and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship
- ensure that we communicate with all partners, especially the child's social worker in a professional and secure fashion

Central Bedfordshire Council
Bedfordshire Foster Care Association

January 2012

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Department
for Education



Charter for Care Leavers

A Charter is a set of principles and promises. This Charter sets out promises care leavers want the Central and Local Government to make. Promises and Principles help in decision making and do not replace laws; they give guidance to show how laws are designed to be interpreted.

The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in Legislation, Regulation and Guidance. Care leavers urge Local Authorities to use these principles when they make decisions about young people's lives. The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what Government and Local Authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

- We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make it clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.

To support you

- We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

To be a lifelong champion

- We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges & universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 22 April 2013
Subject: Looked After Children Placement Strategy
Report of: Sue Tyler, Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines Central Bedfordshire Council's refreshed Placement Strategy in relation to current provision and future need for placements for looked after children.

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.

Providing placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. The Council currently allocates a total annual budget of approximately £5.9 million to provide a range of placements for looked after children. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Placement Strategy.

Legal:

2. Regulations issued under The Children Act 1989 requires a council to take strategic action in respect of those children it looks after. This includes a requirement to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, that secures accommodation for looked after children within the authority's area and which meets the needs of those children. Statutory Guidance issued in 2010 gave further direction to Councils on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children and outlined how councils should carry out their duty under The Children Act which came into force in April 2011.
3. The Placement Strategy is Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services response to the duty.

Risk Management:

4. Regulatory Risk: Failure to report to Elected Members would risk adverse inspection judgements from Ofsted in respect of effective Corporate Parenting.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities. Looked after children are particularly vulnerable in comparison with non-looked after peers.

Community Safety:

7. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

8. Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on the content of the refreshed Placement Strategy.

Background

9. A Placement Strategy was written in 2011 and presented to this Panel on 5 March 2012.
10. Following the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children in February 2012 it was part of the action plan to refresh the Placement Strategy to ensure there were robust plans to address the Ofsted requirement in respect of accommodation for 16-18 year olds.
11. On 5 March 2012 the Corporate Parenting Panel asked for some alignment of dates and data in the Placement Strategy, which has been addressed in this refreshed version.

Summary

12. The updated Strategy is attached for the Panel's discussion.

Conclusion and Next Steps

13. An Action Plan is included in the report, and progress towards achieving the actions will be kept under review by Children's Services and presented to this Panel.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Looked After Children Placement Strategy

Background Papers:

None

Location of papers:

N/A

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Appendix A

Looked after children Placement Strategy

2013

Refreshed January 2013, subject to Consultation until 15/4/2013

1. Introduction

Section 22G of The Children Act 1989 requires a council to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, that secures accommodation for looked after children within the authority's area and which meets the needs of those children. Councils should consider the number of accommodation providers in their area that is sufficient in the council's opinion, and take account of the range of accommodation in their area capable of meeting different needs.

In 2010, Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children was published by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families. (Now Department for Education) This outlined how councils should carry out their duty under The Children Act which came into force in April 2011.

This strategy sets out the position in relation to placements for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire, including actions needed to ensure sufficient placements to meet future need.

2. Looked After Population Data and Trends

Overall numbers

On 1 April 2009, when Central Bedfordshire Council became a unitary authority the Looked After Children (LAC) population stood at 132. This represented a rate of 24 per 10 000 population. Our statistical neighbour rate, per 10 000 population, was 38.

The numbers of looked after children have risen significantly over the past 3 years and the population at 31 March 2012 stood at 208. This represented a rate per 10 000 population of 37 and a percentage increase of 58%. Over the same period the statistical neighbour rate, per 10 000 population, has risen to 46. Our position in relation to our statistical neighbours however remains in the fourth quartile. Most of the Councils in our statistical comparison group take more children into care than Central Bedfordshire does.

The increase can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, there has been a national increase in referrals to children's social care services, open cases and statutory intervention in relation to children as a result of the national awareness and response to the Baby Peter case. Secondly, Central Bedfordshire Council has applied more rigour than the legacy authority in applying thresholds and intervening to ensure children are protected from harm.

Age and gender

The age profile of the looked after population as at 31 March 2012 was as follows:

Age	CBC LAC population (%)			England LAC population (%)
	Male	Female	Total	Total
0-4	15	14	29	24
5- 9	7	8	15	18
10-14	22	13	35	18
15-17	14	7	21	37
Total	58	42	100	100

In comparison with the England looked after population (2011) children aged 5 – 14 are under-represented and young people aged 10- 14 are over-represented.

Length of time in care

Data indicates no significant trends in relation to the length of time children remain looked after. In April 2010, 59% of children had been looked after for one year or over. This increased to 63% in March 2011 and fell to 57% by 31 March 2012.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity data shows that children from all non-white black and minority ethnic groups are over-represented in the looked after population when compared to both census data and information from Central Bedfordshire Council local school population. 15% of looked after children are non-white compared to 9% in the council school population. When unaccompanied asylum seeking children are taken out of the looked after population numbers, the percentage of non-white children falls to 11.5% which is still slightly higher than the local school population of 9%.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

At 31 March 2012, 8 of the 192 looked after children were unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. This number has fallen from a peak of 34 in May 2010 and there has been only one new young person claiming asylum and becoming looked after since February 2011. However, it is difficult to predict trends in young people arriving in the council area and claiming asylum.

Placement Stability

In relation to the two measures of placement stability, performance in Central Bedfordshire has been consistently good although in the year to March 2012 there had been some reported decline in performance. We measure both the number of moves children have in any one year, and whether those children who have been looked after for 2.5 years have experienced a recent move. We measure this because we know that a stable placement is

a positive influence on children's emotional wellbeing, achievement and long term prospects. .

At the end of March 2012 12% of looked after children had had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months, slightly above the England average of 11%. This decline in reported performance was largely as the result of improvements in quality of data, ensuring that all placement moves were properly recorded. Those children and young people experiencing multiple moves tended to be those over 11 years. We monitor more closely those children who have had one or two moves, and, where the reasons may be due to placement breakdown, put additional support into the placement to minimise the risk of a further move. For some children, moves may be at the direction of the Court as part of care proceedings.

In respect of long term placement stability, at 31 March 2012, 23 of 41 children who had been looked after for 2.5 years or more had been in the same placement for 2 years or more. For a further 8 children their latest move had been to a permanent placement or onto independence.

Distance from Home

At March 2012, 12% of children were placed more than 20 miles away from their home address, a fall from the previous year's figure of 14.8%. The number of children placed outside the area is in line with the national average. Some of this improvement can be attributed to an increase in numbers of in-house fostering placements and the new framework agreement in place with the Independent Fostering Agencies, which places emphasis on local placements.

3. Current Placement Provision

Fostering Provision

Central Bedfordshire Council operates the 'in-house' fostering service providing placements for its own looked after population and to Bedford Borough Council under a service level agreement. At 31 March 2012 the service had 127 approved fostering households, including those caring for friends and family members under a fostering arrangement. 85 Central Bedfordshire looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers. This was an increase in absolute numbers from the 55 children that were placed in-house on 31 March 2010 and 59 that were in placement in March 2011. The proportion of looked after children placed with in-house foster carers also increase over this period from 33% in March 2011 to 41 % by March 2012.

In addition to mainstream foster placements, the Council as part of its in-house service runs a Youth Care scheme providing specialist placements for young people aged 10-18 who have additional or complex needs. In addition to the fostering allowance for the child, these carers receive a weekly fee and are self-employed, and the Councils' fostering and adoption service provides additional supervision and support to them. 14 Youth Care placements are available when the full complement of carers is approved. During 2011, a recruitment campaign successfully recruited 4 new carers to ensure that the scheme was able to continue at full capacity.

The number of children in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements remained reasonably constant during 2009 -12. In April 2009, 63 children were placed in IFA

placements; in March 2012 the number was 65. Given the rise in overall numbers of looked after children this meant that the proportion of children in externally commissioned foster placements fell during this period. However since April 2012 to the end of November 2012 42 new IFA placements have been made, as the in-house fostering service has not been able to keep full pace with the increase in numbers of looked after children during that period. Of the 42 new IFA placements made, 26 of these were in order to keep sibling groups together, 7 were for children over 10 and 4 were for children with particular needs.

The proportion of looked after children who were in foster placements (in-house or IFA) at 31 March 2012 was 73%. This is a similar proportion to 31 March 2011 although there was a temporary fall in this proportion in late 2011. This compares with England data of 75% of looked after children placed in a fostering placement.

Places in IFAs are sought through a Framework Contract which has been in place since 1 November 2011. More detail about this is given in the 'Planning for Change section below.

Residential Provision

The legacy authority, Bedfordshire County Council entered into an agreement in 2007 for St Christopher's Fellowship to manage its three mainstream children's homes. This arrangement was continued by both new unitary authorities under a Service Level Agreement which runs until 2014.

The arrangement provides for 14 places across 3 homes – one in the Bedford Borough Area and two in the Central Bedfordshire area. One home also has one emergency 72-hour bed. All except one single occupancy provision is shared with Bedford Borough Council. The available number of beds reduced during 2011 with the closure of a four-bed home in the Central Bedfordshire area following an adverse Ofsted inspection. All other provision is rated by Ofsted as outstanding or good with outstanding features. Proposals to extend the provision offered in one of the homes by an additional two beds will be realised during the Autumn of 2012. Overall occupancy in the homes remains high (ranging from 90% to 100% from April 2011 to 31st March 2012). Central Bedfordshire occupancy of places increased during that period from 54% to 65%. The young people placed at the homes by Central Bedfordshire Council were of both genders.

Central Bedfordshire Council runs two children's homes for children with disabilities. One of these homes, Maythorn provides long stay provision for children who are looked after alongside some provision for short breaks. Kingfisher provides short-break provision. At 31 March, 2012, 5 children were living at Maythorn on a full time or shared care basis

At 31 March 2012, 27 young people were placed in residential provision, including Maythorn and the St Christopher's homes. This is a 29% increase since 31 March 2011. The overall proportion of looked after young people in residential provision in the same period has risen slightly from 12% to 14%.

The profile of young people living in residential care is 61% male and 74% of young people are aged over 14 years. As is usual in this cohort, the majority of the young people have experienced multiple foster placements or present with behaviour that cannot be managed within a family setting.

Provision in private children's homes is sought on a spot purchase basis. There are no formal arrangements with providers for preferred rates or cost/volume contracts. This position was reviewed during 2012 by the Children's Services Commissioning Team and the outcome was that the current arrangement provides the best flexibility and value for money given the relatively low numbers of children placed outside of the St Christopher's

Fellowship provision. There is no evidence that significant expansion of provision in the residential sector is required.

All young people placed in residential provision other than the St Christopher's Fellowship provision are placed outside the boundary of Central Bedfordshire Council. 6 young people are in placements in neighbouring authorities, and 5 in other authorities further away. The number of young people placed outside of Central Bedfordshire or neighbouring authorities had reduced from 8 in 2011.

4 young people are looked after in 52-week residential school placements. 3 are out of the Central Bedfordshire Council area and all are high cost specialist provision.

Secure Accommodation

In the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012, Central Bedfordshire Council has sought secure residential accommodation for two young people for part of the year. There is no secure provision locally to Central Bedfordshire with the nearest provision in Peterborough or Essex.

Independent and semi-independent accommodation

52 of the looked after population at 31 March 2012 were aged 16 or 17. Young people are supported to remain in foster care or in residential homes where this is consistent with their needs and wishes. A 'staying –put' policy is in place for young people who need to remain in a fostering household beyond 18. However for those young people who wish to move towards independence or for those who become looked after at age 16 or 17 a range of semi-independent and independent living provision is required.

Central Bedfordshire Council operates a Supported Lodgings scheme offering 8 places spread geographically across the council area. The supported lodgings scheme also operates 3 crash pad beds for young people who are homeless and need 'emergency short term accommodation' while assessments are undertaken. This service also offers a mediation service for young people aged 14+ to help prevent relationship issues that may lead to homelessness

The council has also worked with two main providers of semi-independent provision, who offer young people housing tenancies and a package of staff support. There are no formal contracted arrangements with the two providers and placements are commissioned on a spot purchased basis. A review of provision was undertaken in Autumn 2012 and plans are underway to provide a similar service via in-house staff from Children's Services (for the support element) and Housing (for the accommodation element.) This is due to come on line in Spring/Summer 2013.

There is limited provision for homeless young people in the area. Under the Southwark Judgement (recently reviewed by the House of Lords), homeless young people are entitled to an assessment by Children's services to establish if they have additional needs. If the council provides any accommodation for these young people they are deemed to be 'accommodated' (looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act). As looked after young people they could be placed in a range of placements. There is little hostel provision within the Central Bedfordshire boundary. There is one small hostel offering approximately 12 beds located in the south of the council area, but no priority is given to looked after children and applications for places are considered on a needs basis, alongside applications from people from the general population. There is also some provision for homeless people of all ages located in the east of the council area but this is not appropriate for many of the 16 and 17 year old homeless young people who may have additional vulnerabilities

Regular meetings are taking place between Children's Services and Housing to identify the need and make provision for good quality housing for 16- 18 year olds.

Emergency placements

Where a child is accommodated or needs a change of placement out of office hours the Emergency Duty Team have responsibility for making arrangements. They have access to the list of in-house carers who have vacancies and who are able to take emergency placements. They also have a list of independent fostering providers who can be approached if no suitable in-house placement is available. One of the St Christopher's Fellowship homes located in Central Bedfordshire has a 72-hour emergency bed that can be used if available.

Provision for Children with Disabilities

The in-house fostering service has some foster carers with the appropriate skills to care for children with disabilities. Similarly some children are looked after in independent fostering agency placements. The council also has a residential provision for children with disabilities who require shared care or full-time care. 4 long stay places are available for looked after children aged 8 to 18 years, with 3 further beds for short breaks.

Whilst the number of looked after children with disabilities is low at 7% of the total LAC population they are more likely to live in residential care or independent provision. Whilst this may be attributed to the more complex needs that some children present with, in some cases it is due to lack of availability of foster placements.

A review of Children with Disabilities services took place during the Autumn of 2011 which considered placement provision as part of the remit of the review. Long stay provision remains at Maythorn which is part of the new 'Hub and Spoke' model of services to disabled children and their families.

Costs

The approximate unit cost of a mainstream in-house foster placement was calculated in March 2012 as £400 per week.

A youth care in-house placement was estimated at £785 per week.

A joint consortium agreement with 19 contractually committed Independent Fostering Agencies commenced in November 2011. If young people are placed with one of these preferred agencies as a single placement (ie. not placed with siblings or in a solo placement) then the average cost for an IFA placement is £759 per week. In all of these agencies, there is a reduction in the weekly charge for siblings. Again, there is variation on costs for solo placements or young people placed in enhanced placements where their needs are specific.

The average cost of a non-consortium IFA placement is £885 per week – this masks the variation in individual placement costs depending on the age and needs of the young person. Placements can cost as much as £1533 per week.

The average cost of an independent residential placement is £3614 per week – this also masks a wide variation in placement cost.

The current cost of a placement in one of the St Christopher's Fellowship homes, including the specialist solo-placement home is less than independent provision. This assumes full occupancy of 7 beds.

4. Provision for children on the edge of care

Central Bedfordshire Council's aim is to support families to care for their own children wherever possible and where this is consistent with their welfare. This is what the majority of families want and will achieve the best for most children.

Where children are determined to be in need or in need of protection a range of support may be identified as needed during assessment to assist with meeting the child's needs or to prevent them from becoming looked after. In Central Bedfordshire requests for support or resources are presented to the professionals making up the Allocation Panel (CBAP), Children with Disabilities Allocation Panel (CDAP) or Joint Agency Panel (JAP) as appropriate. Support or resources may include:

- Services or payments to family members under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to enable them to care for child who otherwise does not need to be looked after by the council
- Childminding or nursery provision
- Services from the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS)
- Crisis or intensive support to assist parents – also known as High Level Family Support Services
- Short breaks or respite breaks for children and their families
- Signposting to community provided services or targeted early intervention services

The Family Group Meeting service provides assistance in facilitating family meetings where support for the family and arrangements to prevent a child becoming looked after can be agreed from within the family network. Similarly Family Group Meetings can be instrumental in supporting a plan for a looked after child to return to their family – either through identifying family support for the parents or by identifying family members who may be able to care for the child.

5. Adoption and Permanence

The Central Bedfordshire Council adoption service has a recruitment strategy which identifies the number of adopters needed in the next 12 months to enable sufficient placements for children with a plan for adoption. It is anticipated that 30 new adoptive households will be needed in 2012-13 to meet the needs of children in Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council.

The in-house fostering service seeks to recruit foster carers who can offer permanent or long-term placements, and in respect of some children has advertised for carers for specific children. The recruitment target for 2012-13 is 50 new households to enable a net increase of carers and range of placements available.

6. Principles of good placements

Where children become looked after a placement within their family or friends network will be sought as a priority where this is consistent with their welfare. As a looked after arrangement, the carer will be assessed and supported as a foster carer.

Where a placement within the child's family or friends network is not available an in-house fostering placement will be sought. Unless it is not safe to do so it is expected that such a placement will be close enough to the child's community to enable them to remain at their school and involved in their networks. It is usual that a child will be placed with siblings wherever possible unless it has been assessed that this is not appropriate.

Where an in-house placement is not available a foster placement from an independent fostering agency will be sought. A placement closest to the child's community will be sought unless this is not consistent with their safety or welfare.

Where the needs of a young person cannot be met within a family environment a residential placement will be considered, with placement within the St Christopher's homes being considered first. Children aged under 12 will not usually be placed in residential homes unless it is clearly demonstrated that this is consistent with their welfare and the only way of meeting their needs.

Any placements will only be made in provision which has been assessed as good or outstanding by Ofsted or the appropriate regulatory body. If a home loses this rating alternative placements will be considered .

Where a highly specialist therapeutic placement or placement in secure provision is assessed as required, this will only be agreed after agreement from the appropriate Joint Agency Panel or Secure Accommodation Panel (and subsequent Court agreement.)

Where children and young people are not able to return to those with parental responsibility planning will take place in a timely way to enable them to move on to permanent families who can offer them legal and emotional security. For younger children the placement of choice will be adoption. For older children who retain significant ties to their birth family, long-term or permanent fostering may be more appropriate if Special Guardianship is not suitable.

7. Assessing Demand

It is not anticipated that increases in national population or local population based on estimates of new local housing provision will make any significant statistical changes to the looked after population in Central Bedfordshire.

Despite recent significant rises, the LAC population rate per 10 000 in Central Bedfordshire Council is lower than the statistical neighbour and national rates. During 2011-12 there was an increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans from 166 in April 2011 to 225 at 31 March 2012. Whilst these children are not looked after, this data can give some indication of looked after numbers in the future, particularly if child protection plans do not effect significant change in families, and legal action has to be taken to remove children from home. On that basis it is estimated that the numbers of looked after children will continue to rise by 20% over the two years to March 2014.

It should be noted that other factors can have influence on LAC population, such as high media profile cases, judgements in case law and national policy change

Some expansion of the overall placement provision is needed alongside remodelling in types of placements will be required to meet need?

Our current LAC population data and placement provision tells us that:

- Children under 4 and those aged 10-14 years are over represented in the LAC population.
- Non-white children are slightly over represented compared to the local population
- We have improved at placing children closer to home but a slightly higher number of children than the England average are placed more than 20 miles away
- In-house fostering provision has not been able to keep pace with the increase in numbers of looked after children, and there has been an increase in the number and proportion of IFA placements
- We need to actively monitor long and short-term placement stability to ensure that children benefit from having stable placements, or from moving quickly to permanent placements.
- The proportion of children placed in foster care and residential care is similar to England averages, but needs to be monitored to ensure as many children as possible benefit from family placements where this meets their needs

Gaps in current provision are:

- The overall number and choice of in-house fostering placements
- Specialist in-house foster placements for teenagers who have complex needs
- Sufficient in-house foster placements for sibling groups and children with disabilities of all ages
- Provision in the local area for young people with complex needs – those needing therapeutic residential placements or who have experienced multiple placements
- A full range of local provision for 16 and 17 year olds, particularly hostel accommodation and emergency/homeless accommodation.

8. Planning for Change

Key areas for development in 2011- 13 are outlined below with a detailed action plan outlined at Appendix One.

Independent Fostering Agency Framework Agreement

During 2010-11 Central Bedfordshire Council joined in partnership with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council to develop a Framework Agreement for the provision of independent fostering agency placements. It was recognised by the partners that a more systematic and holistic approach was required to provide a consistent quality assurance framework, reduce negotiation times, better understand and review pricing structures of placements.

The partnership has tendered a framework agreement with 19 independent fostering agencies. The contract commenced on 1 November 2011 and improvements in value for money have already been seen. Quality of provision is being assessed during Autumn 2012 and overall evaluation of the findings of quality audits will be considered in Spring 2013.

Residential Provision

The Service Level Agreement **hosted by BBC** with St Christopher's Fellowship will continue until 2014. Plans to expand the provision offered by one home by two beds have been implemented and should be completed by Autumn 2012. The additional beds will be allocated one each to Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council and as well as increasing available beds will serve to reduce the unit costs of this provision.

In house fostering provision

The recruitment strategy for fostering identifies how in-house capacity will be maximised. This includes a revised recruitment target for 2012-13 with particular emphasis on attracting carers who can provide for sibling groups, older children and permanent placements.

Recruitment will continue to ensure the Youth Care scheme can offer the full 14 placements. A costed proposal to expand the scheme was put on hold during 2012 while ongoing discussions about the shared service were held. This will be revisited when a decision about the continuation of the shared fostering and adoption service is made.

Semi independent and independent services

Work has been started with Housing, Commissioning colleagues and local providers in order to widen the housing and support options in the Central Bedfordshire area for 16 and 17 year olds.

Children with disabilities services

No major changes are planned in respect of placements for disabled looked after children. However, continued expansion of in-house fostering provision is ongoing in order to attract new carers who can meet the needs of disabled children.

Children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups

Central Bedfordshire Children's Services staff will continue to explore the reasons why the non-white LAC population is slightly higher than that of the general population to ensure that the specific needs of BME communities are met and that children do not become looked after as the result of unconscious stereotyping, or lack of culturally appropriate support to families or communities. They will seek to ensure that all placement provision can meet the heritage, identity and cultural needs of children and will seek to increase the diversity of foster carers and providers.

Appendix One

Placement Strategy Action Plan						
Identified Need	Action	Target Date	Lead Officer	Desired Outcomes	Progress at 31 March 2012	
1.	Improve cost framework and quality of Independent Fostering Agency Provision	Implement and monitor Framework Agreement for new IFA placements	1/11/11 - implementation 1/11/12 – review begins	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Adoption and Fostering	Reduce costs on IFA budget Implement quality framework for IFA provision Ensure IFA provision can meet needs of CBC children	Framework agreement implemented Cost savings for existing placements realised Ongoing work with IFA providers to expand placement availability
2.	Review current provision of residential care, particularly placements outside of the St Christopher's Fellowship contract	Undertake further analysis of the need for local provision for children with complex needs and a commissioning model that could support identified need Work with St Christopher's to realise the additional two beds	31/12/11 31/3/12	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Safeguarding and Children in Care Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Safeguarding and Children in Care	Identify whether commissioning activity is required to secure local provision at best value Increase local residential provision	Decision taken that current spot purchase practice provides best flexibility and value for money Complete

		<p>Review St Christopher's contract to ensure it remains fit for purpose and to inform planning for when the contract ends</p>	<p>30/9/12</p>	<p>Head of Children's Services Commissioning</p>	<p>Ensure future provision meets the need of CBC children</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Increase number and availability of in-house fostering placements</p>	<p>Recruit 40 new fostering households in 2011-12 and achieve net increase in fostering placements available</p>	<p>31/3/12</p>	<p>Head of Adoption and Fostering</p>	<p>Increase availability and choice of foster placements Ensure foster placements can meet need</p>	<p>41 new household approved 2011-12. Target set for 2012-13 of 50 new households</p>
		<p>Review existing foster carers' approval to ensure maximum flexibility and capacity</p>	<p>31/3/12</p>	<p>Head of Adoption and Fostering</p>	<p>Increase foster care placements and minimise placement moves</p>	<p>Completed with net increase in available placements</p>
		<p>Recruit to Youth Care Scheme to maximise placements</p>	<p>31/12/11</p>	<p>Head of Adoption and Fostering</p>	<p>Increase available placement to reduce number of placements in IFA or residential provision</p>	<p>Recruitment complete, scheme running at full capacity</p>
		<p>Complete costed proposal to expand the Youth Care Scheme</p>	<p>31/12/11</p>	<p>Head of Adoption and Fostering</p>	<p>Invest to save – increase youth care placement to reduce IFA or residential placement demand.</p>	<p>Ongoing – will be addressed as part of the decision about the Shared Service arrangement</p>

4.	Develop wider mix of provision for 16 and 17 years olds	Undertake liaison and work with housing on establishing homeless and hostel provision	31/3/12	Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Increase choice of placement for 16 and 17 years olds	Ongoing – task group established
		Undertake analysis of the benefits of a different commissioning model for semi-independent provision	30/9/12	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Consider Identify whether commissioning activity is required to secure local provision at best value	Ongoing – task group established and plans for in-house provision underway
		Continue the expansion of the supported lodgings scheme	31/3/12	Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Increase choice of placement for 16 and 17 years olds	3 crash-pad beds added
5.	Consider outcomes of Children with Disabilities review	Implement the action plan arising from the review	31/1/12	Head of Children with Disabilities and Child Health	Ensure appropriate mix and choice of placement to meet need and reduce costs where possible. Increase numbers of foster placements available in-house for disabled children	Purpose of Maythorn reconfigured to include long-stay and short break provision Increase in family link placement achieved, further recruitment for full time placements ongoing

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 22 April 2013
Subject: Adoption Scorecard April-Dec 2012
Report of: Sue Tyler, Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report discusses the Adoption Scorecard, published by the Department for Education.

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.

Financial:

1. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Scorecard.

Legal:

2. There are no legal considerations.

Risk Management:

3. Not Applicable.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Services provided to Looked after Children, including adoption affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on the Adoption Scorecard April-Dec 2012.

Background

8. The Government produces Adoption Scorecards annually for each Local Authority (LA).
9. Data is sent by the LA in to the Department for Education on a quarterly basis. This data is used internally to track progress throughout the year, although the comparisons with statistical neighbours refer to the previous full year (in this case 2011-2012)

Summary

10. The internally produced scorecard for the Period April to December 2012 is attached for the panel's discussion.
11. The key indicator for the average time between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family is showing as 465 days. This is an improvement on last years figure of 579 days. In the last full year the number of days amongst statistical neighbours varied from 704 at worst to 405.
12. The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family is presently standing at 88 days. The comparator at year end amongst statistical neighbours varied between 84 at the lowest end and 278 at the top end.
13. Of the four children where adoption orders were granted during the period of the scorecard none of them have waited longer than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, so 100% has been achieved to date. At the end of last year the figure was 59%. Amongst statistical neighbours last year the percentage rate varied between 78% at best down to 41 % - the national average is 56%.

Conclusion and Next Steps

14. The data will continue to be used to track progress. The next annual update will be produced by the DfE in May 2013 referring to the full year 2012-13.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Central Bedfordshire Adoption Scorecard April-Dec 2012.

Background Papers:

None

Location of papers:

N/A

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Central Bedfordshire Adoption Scorecard

Local Authority Scorecard April to December 2012

February 2013

Children, Young People and Families Directorate

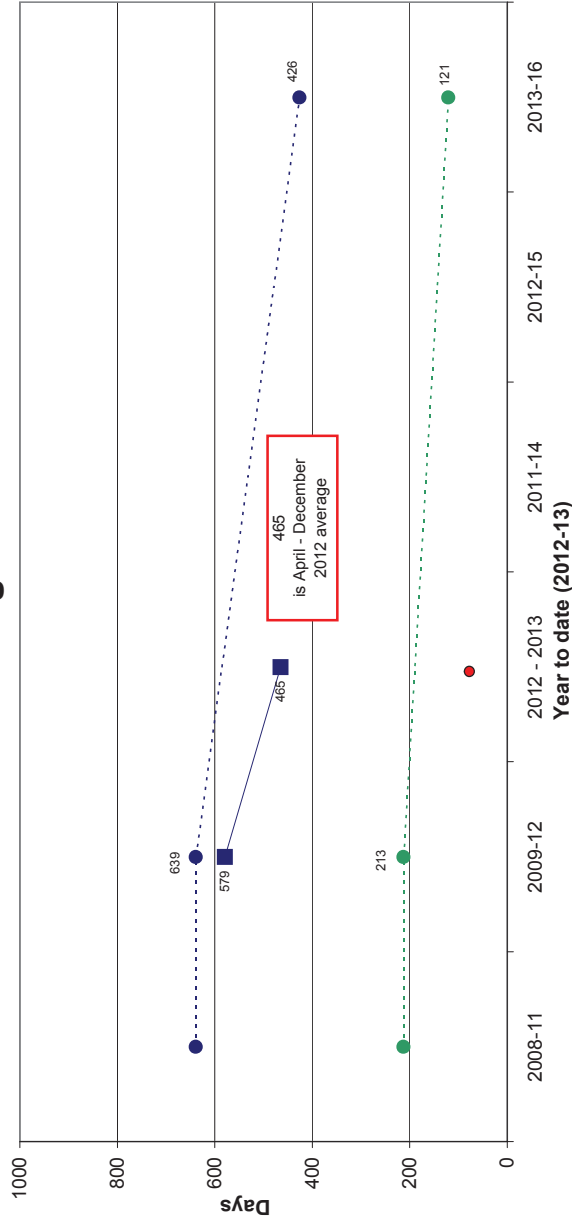
Adoption Scorecard (April - December 2012)

Choose Local Authority Central Bedfordshire

Children

Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	465	n/a	Threshold met
Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	88	n/a	195
Children who wait less than 24 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	4 (100%)	n/a	10,180 (56%)
LA's year to date average 2012-2013			
1 year trend - Improvement from 2011 to 2012			
3 year trend - Improvement from 2008-11 to 2009-12			
England 3 year average (2009-12)			
Distance from 2010-13 performance threshold			

Average Time Indicators



Related Information

Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)	4 (6%)	9,740 (12%)
Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	2 (6%)	1,360 (7%)
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family - Where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)	465	546
Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of BME children leaving care who are adopted)	0 (0%)	1,490 (6%)
Adoptions of children aged five or over (number adopted and % of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)	0 (0%)	2,520 (4%)
Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	46 (04/09-03/12)	53
Number of children awaiting adoption (as at 31 Dec 2012)	25	5,750
Number of approved prospective adopters (as at 31 Dec 12)	26	Data not available until 2013

Prospective Adopters

Adoption Scorecard (CBC = April - December 2012)

Statistical Neighbour Comparisons														
Children		Prospective Adopters (Data not available until 2014)			Related Information									
	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (%)	Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed	Adoptions from care (% leaving care who are adopted)	% of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its foster family, for children who have been adopted by their foster parents (days)	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (% of BME children leaving care who are adopted)	Adoptions of children aged five or over (% of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)	Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	Number of children awaiting adoption (SN as at 31 March 2012)	Number of approved prospective adopters (as at 31 December 2012)
623	Central Bedfordshire	465	88	100	-	-	6	6	465	0	0	46 (04/09-03/12)	25	26
650	Hampshire	566	175	60	-	-	10	7	511	8	3	54	85	-
669	West Berkshire	405	84	57	-	-	10	0	364	x	x	42	15	-
681	Essex	689	263	55	-	-	12	9	618	9	5	52	125	-
919	Hertfordshire	642	187	47	-	-	9	x	591	6	4	56	65	-
695	Cheshire East	704	278	46	-	-	13	7	534	13	4	52	35	-
667	Bracknell Forest	x	x	78	-	-	5	x	x	0	x	41	15	-
803	South Gloucestershire	532	154	41	-	-	6	x	448	x	x	57	15	-
937	Warwickshire	562	117	65	-	-	11	4	512	x	5	57	30	-
655	Leicestershire	549	143	56	-	-	8	0	440	0	2	46	25	-
334	Solihull	491	101	57	-	-	4	x	430	x	x	58	20	-
	Statistical Neighbours	571	167	56	-	-	9	5	494	6	4	52	43	-
970	England	636	195	56	-	-	12	7	546	6	4	53	5,750	-

Notes for all indicators:

1. Percentages have been derived from unrounded numerator and denominator figures.
2. Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers but where the numerator was 10 or less or the denominator was five or less or the denominator was 10 or less, they have been suppressed and replaced by a cross (x).
3. Numbers in the related information section of the scorecard are rounded to the nearest 5 children.
4. The average number of days have been derived from unrounded numerator and denominator figures and are presented rounded to the nearest day.
5. The distance from the 2010-13 performance threshold has been derived from unrounded figures and presented rounded to the nearest day. Therefore the difference between the 3 year average and the 2010-13 threshold may not be the same as the distance from the 2010-13 performance threshold.
6. Symbols used:
 - x Figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality.
 - .. Not applicable, i.e. no children in the cohort.
 - No change in the three year average
7. All figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

Notes for individual indicators:

	Latest data	Data included in average	When will the next data be available?	Where can I find the numerators and denominators for percentages	Notes
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	Indicator A1 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	http://www.education.gov.uk/rsagateway/DB/SFR/S001084/index.shtml	1. This indicator includes all children adopted in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 that were placed for adoption immediately prior to their adoption. 2. Time is calculated between a child starting to be looked after and their placement for adoption, i.e. the date they move with their adoptive family. Only children with valid data are included. 3. Figures are rounded to the nearest day.
Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	Indicator A2 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	Underlying figures are not currently published	1. This indicator includes all children adopted in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 that were placed for adoption and on a placement order or freeing order immediately prior to their adoption. 2. Time is calculated between receiving court authority to adopt (granting of placement order/freeing order) and matching with adopters. A time of zero is assigned to children who were matched before court authority was received. 3. Figures are rounded to the nearest day.
The number and percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family	Indicator A3 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	Underlying figures are not currently published	1. This indicator includes all children adopted in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 that were placed for adoption immediately prior to their adoption and all children with a current adoption plan at 31 March 2012 (excluding those where the decision to adopt has been reversed). When adoption is the preferred option for permanence this is referred to as the adoption plan. 2. Time is calculated between a child starting to be looked after and their placement for adoption, i.e. the date they move in with their adoptive family. Only children with valid data are included. Children are flagged if they waited less than 21 months (measured at 639 days) between starting to be looked after and being placed for adoption or had not yet been looked after for 21 months at 31 March 2012. 3. The numerator is therefore all adopted children who were placed for adoption first within 21 months after becoming looked after and all children looked after at 31 March 2012 with a current adoption decision who were placed less than 21 months after becoming looked after or who had not yet been looked after for 21 months. 4. The denominator is therefore all adopted children who were placed for adoption first and all looked after at 31 March with a current adoption decision.
Adoptions from care (number adopted and percentage leaving care who are adopted)	Indicator A4 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	http://www.education.gov.uk/rsagateway/DB/SFR/S001084/index.shtml The number of children leaving care can be found in table LAD1 and the number of children who were adopted can be found in table LAE1	1. Only the last occasion on which a child ceased to be looked after in each year has been counted. A child who ceased to be in care in more than one year will be counted more than once. 2. This indicator compares the number of children who ceased to be looked after in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 with the number of children who were adopted during that period.
The number and percentage of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	Indicator A5 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	Underlying figures are not currently published	1. The denominator includes all children with an ongoing adoption decision in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012. (The adoption decision date may be prior to 1 April 2009.) The numerator includes all children with an ongoing adoption decision in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 that were placed for adoption immediately prior to their adoption.
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days)	Indicator A10 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	http://www.education.gov.uk/rsagateway/DB/SFR/S001084/index.shtml	1. This indicator includes all children adopted in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 that were placed for adoption immediately prior to their adoption. 2. This indicator includes the same children as indicator A1 and the average time is calculated in the same way for children who are not adopted by their foster carers, i.e. time is calculated between a child starting to be looked after and their placement for adoption (the date they move with their adoptive family). However the average time for children who are adopted by their foster carers is calculated differently to A1. Where children are adopted by their foster carer, the time is measured until the date they moved in with their foster carer. Only children with valid data are included. 3. Figures are rounded to the nearest day.
The percentage of black and minority ethnic children leaving care who are adopted	Indicator A6 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	2011 data: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/0076713/database	1. Only the last occasion on which a child ceased to be looked after in the year has been counted. 2. The numerator includes all children with a known ethnicity of Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed or Other who were adopted in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012. The denominator includes all children within these ethnic groups who ceased to be looked after in the same time period. Numerators and denominators exclude all children where ethnicity was refused or not obtained. 3. Percentages show the proportion of all black and minority ethnic children leaving care who are adopted. Therefore if a local authority has a low proportion of black and minority ethnic children in their care population then the denominator will reflect this low number.
The percentage of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted	Indicator A7 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	2011 data: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/0076713/database	1. Only the last occasion on which a child ceased to be looked after in the year has been counted. 2. Age on leaving care. 3. The numerator includes all children who were adopted in period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012 who were aged 5 or over. The denominator includes all children who were aged 5 or over when they ceased to be looked after in the same time period.
Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	Indicator A8 2012	2010 2011 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	Figures are currently not publicly available	1. Figures are provided from the Cafcass National Case Management System (CMS). 2. The unit of measurement is a care application. An application can involve multiple children. CMS is a live system and any late entries will be accounted for at the time of release of subsequent updates to this data.
Number of children awaiting adoption	Indicator A9 2012	2010 2012	Data for 2013 will be available from Autumn 2013	Underlying figures are not currently published	3. Average care duration is calculated from date of care application to the court to date application completed on CMS in the selected time period. Averages are based on care applications completed in the period. 4. The average length of care proceedings locally includes all care proceedings which the local authority has initiated, including care proceedings which take place in courts outside of the local authority area. 5. All data updated on 25 September 2012. Changes to figures are due to late updates in information within the CMS. 1. This indicator includes all children with an adoption plan in year ending 31 March 2012 that were still looked after at 31 March 2012 and who had not been placed for adoption at 31 March 2012. When adoption is the preferred option for permanence this is referred to as the adoption plan.

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 22 April 2013
Subject: Allowances for Foster Carers
Report of: Sue Tyler, Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the position in relation to Fostering Allowances in 2013-14.

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.

Providing a sufficient number and range of foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. The Council currently allocates a total annual budget of approximately £3.5million to provide in-house and independent sector foster placements for looked after children.

Legal:

2. National Minimum Standards for Fostering (DfE 2011) specify that the council must publish its allowances paid to foster carers. It also states that foster carers must be consulted if any changes to the allowance scheme are made.

Risk Management:

3. No identified risks from these proposals.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities. Looked after children are particularly vulnerable in comparison with non-looked after peers.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on the proposals to increase the allowances for foster carers by 2%.

Background and Proposal

8. In 2011 the Executive agreed a scheme for determining fostering allowances. The scheme agreed was that fostering allowances would be paid which were at a rate equivalent to that recommended by the Fostering Network enhanced by 10%.
9. For 2013-14 the Fostering Network has recommended that allowances rise by 2% to reflect increases in cost of living measures.
10. National Minimum Standards for Fostering state that allowances should be reviewed annually and foster carers should be consulted in advance of any changes to the allowance scheme
11. There is no material change to the allowance scheme, rather a cost of living increase is proposed.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

Location of papers:

N/A

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 22 April 2013

Subject: Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

Report of: Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services

Summary: This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2011/2012. It also identifies the steps taken since September 2012 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Paul Harpin, School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The report supports Priority 2 of the Central Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan: Educating, Protecting and Providing opportunities for Children and Young People. The report also supports Priority 1 of the Children and young People's Plan: Helping children and young people achieve more and transforming our relationship with schools.

The report supports Central Bedfordshire's Medium Term Plan: Delivering your priorities – Our Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-2016 and the specific priority of Improved Educational Attainment.

Financial:

1. The Virtual School is fully funded through the Direct School Grant (DSG).

Legal:

2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. In Central Bedfordshire, this duty is delivered through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children.
3. The governing bodies of all maintained schools are required under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to appoint a Designated Teacher to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children who are on the school roll.

Risk Management:

4. The Virtual School ensures that it knows which children are looked after and that there is a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place for each Looked After Child. The Virtual School monitors the attendance and progress of Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children, in Central Bedfordshire schools.

Staffing (including Trade Unions)

5. Not applicable.

Equalities / Human Rights

6. Not applicable.

Public Health

7. Not applicable.

Community Safety

8. Not applicable.

Sustainability

9. Not applicable.

Procurement

10. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel:

1. **considers and comments on the Virtual School report for the academic year 2011/12;**
2. **agrees to receive an interim report on standards achieved at the Virtual School in October each year and will continue to receive the annual report each March.**

The Virtual School

11. Councils work in a variety of ways to drive forward improvements in the educational achievements of the children they look after. In Central Bedfordshire this is managed through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children.

12. The Virtual School exists first and foremost to ensure each looked after child achieves optimum educational outcomes at each stage of his or her schooling. In order to achieve this the Virtual School:
 - (a) ensures that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of Looked After Children;
 - (b) ensures that each Looked After Child has a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP);
 - (c) works with schools to improve overall attainment of Looked After Children by maximising the achievement and progress of individual children;
 - (d) works with social workers to improve access and attainment of Looked After Children;
 - (e) supports Looked After Children who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire Council boundaries.
13. This Annual Report contains the validated educational outcomes for Looked After Children for the academic year 2011-2012. It is proposed that in future the annual report comes to the Corporate Parenting Panel after February each year to ensure that all data has been collected from schools and validated, and that comparative data is available.

Background

14. The Virtual School for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire was established in September 2009. It has pupils on roll who are in the care of Central Bedfordshire Council and who are being educated in Central Bedfordshire schools or in schools in other authorities. In addition, the Virtual School has pupils on its roll who are living within Central Bedfordshire and who attend Central Bedfordshire schools, but who are in the care of other councils. The total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who were part of the Virtual School at any point over the academic year 2011/2012 was 197. This number includes pupils who may have come in and out of care across the year.
15. There is a statutory requirement to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after and to ensure that each Looked After Child has a PEP. The PEP for a Looked After Child is the main means by which the Virtual School and designated teachers in school monitor the educational attainment and progress of every Looked After Child. The PEP records children's' previous educational experiences and attainment as well as setting targets for future achievement. The nominated social worker is responsible for instigating the writing of the PEP with the designated teacher. Completed PEPs are held in the Virtual School.
16. Staff in the Virtual School liaise with Designated Teachers to support schools in setting appropriate, measurable targets for progress. There is a quality assurance checklist for all new PEPs which ensures that they are of a consistently high standard. PEPs are reviewed at least every six months. Appropriate challenge and support is provided where there are issues and when a child falls behind his or her target trajectory.

17. In April 2011 the Government introduced the Pupil Premium. This is paid to schools for all Looked After Children who have been in care for six months or more. The amount allocated per child for 2011-12 was £488. Through PEP reviews, schools are challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on the achievements of Looked After Children. Amendments to the PEP now include a question on how the school uses the Pupil Premium for eligible children to enable the Virtual School to track its use. The impact of the Pupil Premium on the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children is now also a core focus for inspection within the new Ofsted Framework.
18. During the 2011-12 academic year, progress and attendance information was collected on a termly basis from Designated Teachers on all Looked After Children. This has been improved in 2012-13 as explained in paragraphs 24-25 below.

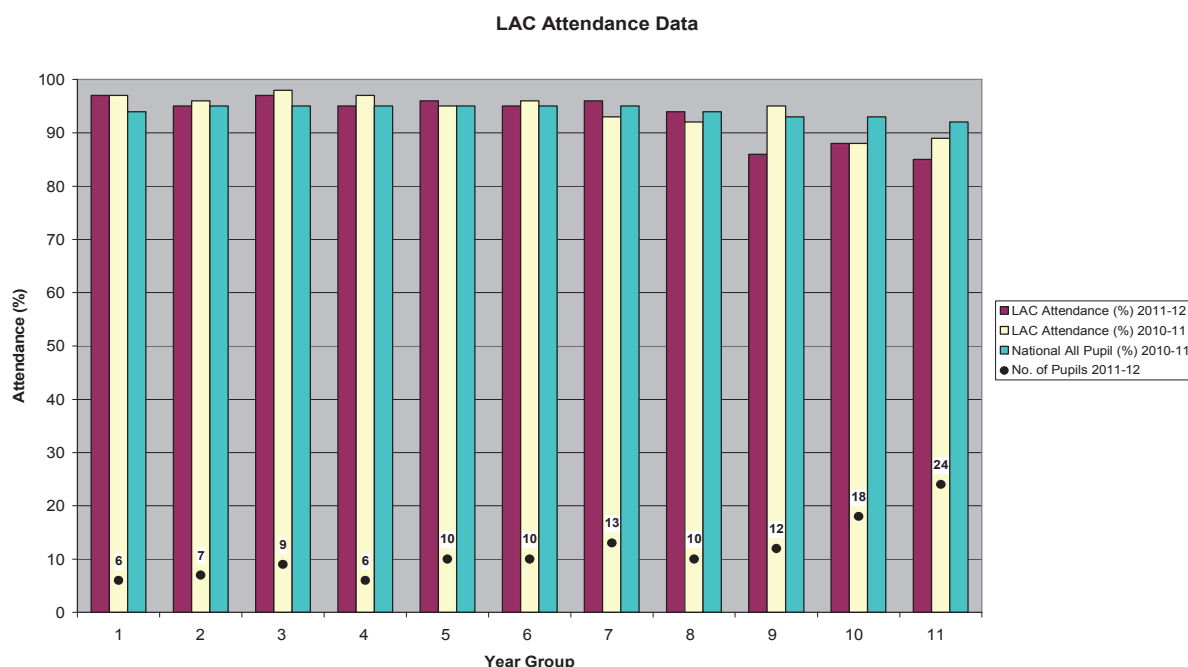
Exclusions

19. In 2011-12 there were a total of 58.5 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusion of Looked After Children from schools and this related to twenty different pupils. There was one permanent exclusion where alternative provision was set up as a suitable alternative.
20. The Virtual School works with the Inclusions Officer who provides advice on exclusions in order to support schools in recognising the impact of exclusion on a Looked After Child, and to help schools to uphold the Council's policy that Looked After Children are not permanently excluded.

Attendance

21. Attendance data for five of the six half terms for the 2011-12 academic year, validated in January 2013, is shown in Table 1 below. It is important to note that these figures reflect small cohorts of pupils and as a result the attendance of each individual child has a significant impact on the overall averages. Table 1 indicates that Central Bedfordshire was in line with or above the national average attendance for all pupils for 2010 in year groups 1-8, and below the national average in year groups 9, 10 and 11. In Year 9 one pupil's attendance was only 44% and another was 69% and these two pupils affected the overall results adversely within the context of a small cohort. In Year 10 the overall results were influenced adversely by two pupils whose attendance was 40% and 57% respectively. In Year 11 five pupils' attendance was below 90% and this again affected the overall average attendance in an adverse way. The steps that the Virtual School is taking to improve attendance are set out in paragraphs 24 and 25 below.

Table 1 Attendance figures for Looked After Children by year group: CBC v National averages.



.Year Group	No of Pupils	CBC LAC Attendance 2011-12	CBC LAC Attendance 2010-11	National All Pupils 2010-11
1	6	97%	97%	94%
2	7	95%	96%	95%
3	9	97%	98%	95%
4	6	95%	97%	95%
5	10	96%	95%	95%
6	10	95%	96%	95%
7	13	96%	93%	95%
8	10	94%	92%	94%
9	12	86%	95%	93%
10	18	88%	88%	93%
11	24	85%	89%	92%
Total	125	93%	93%	94%

22. Attendance tends to be low where pupils have moved placement or have spent some time waiting for a school place in other authorities, or where they have had periods on part-time timetables.
23. In order to counter this, Care Planning Guidance and Regulations (2010) suggest that unless it is an emergency, students in Key Stage 4 should not move care placement unless a school placement is available.

24. As a result the Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

Pupil Achievement

25. Key Stage 1 results

- (a) Key Stage 1 Whole School Cohort Results at Level 2 and above. There were six pupils in this small cohort, and they all attended Central Bedfordshire schools. Two pupils (33%) achieved level 3 in English and mathematics, which is above age related expectations. Two pupils (33%) achieved L2 in English and mathematics in line with national expectations and two pupils (33%) achieved L1. Both were in mainstream schools.
- (b) The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 shows that at the end of Key Stage 1 67% achieved L2 and above in reading, 57% in writing and 71% achieved the expected level in mathematics. Given the very small cohort of KS1pupils in Central Bedfordshire during 2011-12 it would not be appropriate to draw any conclusions in comparing results with national averages, but two of the six pupils achieved in line with national outcomes and two exceeded them.

26. Key Stage 2 Results

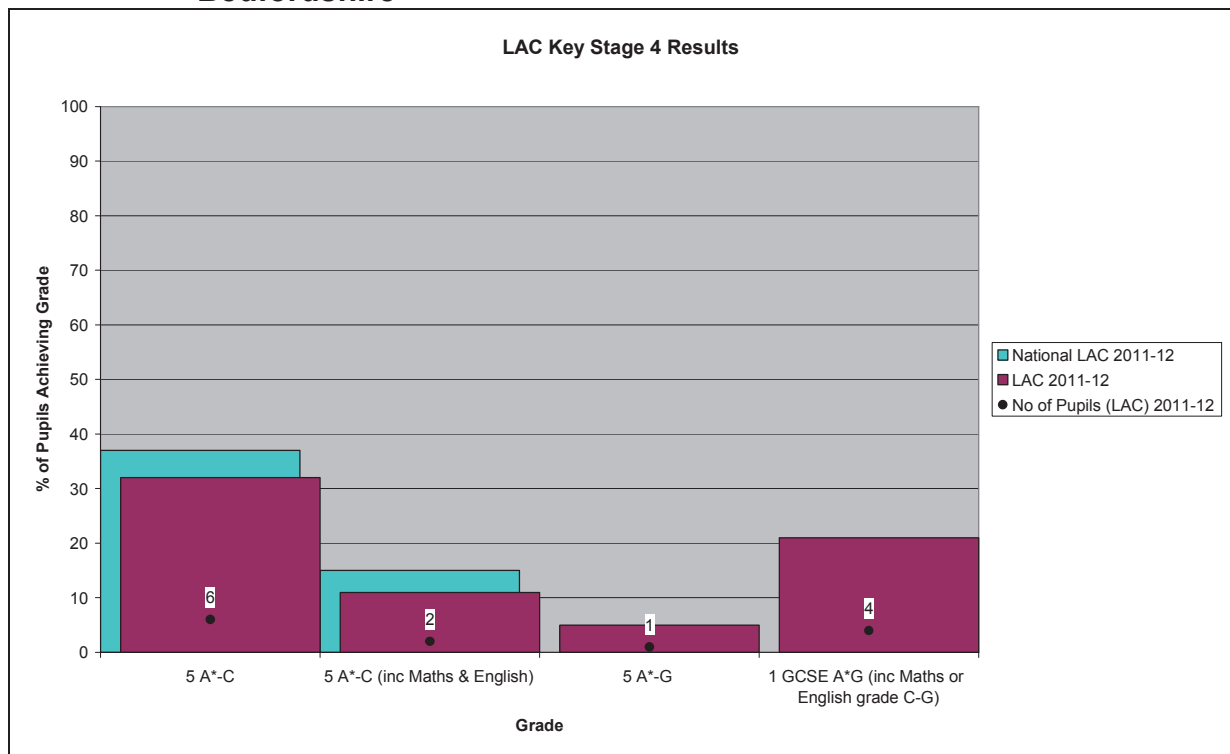
- (a) There were ten pupils in the cohort with six attending Central Bedfordshire schools and four out of authority schools. Overall six pupils (60%) achieved level 4 in English and mathematics, one pupil (10%) achieved level 3 in English and maths whilst three pupils (30%) achieved L2.
- (b) The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 shows that at the end of Key Stage 2, 50% achieved L4+ in English and mathematics. The small Central Bedfordshire cohort exceeded these national age related expectations and standards.

27. Key Stage 4:

- (a) Of the nineteen children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 who took GCSEs, six students (32%) achieved 5 A*-C. This was below the national figure of 37%.

- (b) Two Central Bedfordshire students (8%) achieved at least 5 A*-C grades including English and Mathematics. This was below the national figure of 15% for children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March, 2012. One student (4%) achieved 5 A*-G passes whilst four students (16%) achieved one GCSE graded between A*-G with either English or Maths grade C-G. Those students who did not achieve well at GCSE have now accessed a range of vocational courses or apprenticeship options including child care, plumbing, beauty, health and social care.

Chart 2 2012 GCSE result for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire



Actions taken in 2012/13 and Next Steps

28. Virtual School staff continue to work with designated teachers, social workers and independent reviewing officers to drive up standards for Looked After Children.
29. In September 2012 the School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead took on the responsibility for the Virtual School. The roles and responsibilities of the Virtual School staff were reviewed and amended to reflect a more strategic role which is resulting in schools relying less upon direct external support for Looked After pupils and being enabled to provide that support themselves.
30. From September 2012 the Virtual School bought into 'Welfare Call', an organisation used by many Virtual Schools to gather attendance and progress data for Looked After Children.

31. Attendance data is now collected on a daily basis and immediate actions are taken when required in order to improve attendance for individual pupils. This system enables the Virtual School to generate data which can be regularly interrogated and shared, and appropriate actions identified to support pupils. Comparisons are now possible between Looked After pupils in Central Bedfordshire schools and those in out of authority schools, which was an action identified in the last inspection.
32. Welfare Call has also collected pupil achievement data since December 2012 on to enable Virtual School team to analyse progress on a termly basis. End of Key Stage data will also be collected by Welfare Call during the second half of the Summer Term allowing a much earlier evaluation of pupils' achievements against national outcomes.
33. This new data will inform the Virtual School report for 2012/2013
34. The Council is currently investigating models of governance for Virtual Schools which will support the further development of the Virtual School in 2013 and ensure that it is cognisant of recent Department for Education best practice guidance.
35. The Service Lead has developed stronger links across agencies, and with Virtual School leads across the country in order to identify best practice that can be implemented in Central Bedfordshire.

CONCLUSIONS

36. In order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children the priorities of the Virtual School will be:
 - (a) to ensure that Looked After Children attend school well, in line with their peers.
 - (b) to ensure that Looked After Children are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas
 - (c) to strengthen the school's abilities to meet the needs of Looked After Children
 - (d) to further improve the quality of PEPs
 - (e) to ensure that schools intervene promptly and effectively if a Looked After Child falls behind their target trajectory.
 - (f) To develop a methodology to evaluate the impact of its own activities.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: None

Location of papers: N/A