

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 5 March 2012

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman), Mrs A Barker (Vice-Chairman), D Bowater, N B Costin, Mrs S A Goodchild, N J Sheppard and B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogle – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Co-opted Foster Carer Representatives (non-voting)

Mrs C Freestone and Mrs H Phillips

Apologies for Absence: Cllr Mrs D B Gurney
Mrs J Crawford
Mrs L Rojek

Members in Attendance: Cllr P N Aldis

Officers in Attendance: Ms F Mackirdy – Head of Adoption and Fostering
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mrs C Parry – Assistant Director (Acting),
Children's Services Operations
Ms S Scholey – Team Leader for Looked after
Children Team
Ms M Short – Participation Officer

Others in Attendance: Ms Y Corden – Interim Assistant Director
Children's Services Operations
(Designate)
Representatives – Children in Care Council

CPP/11/30 Minutes

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

CPP/11/31 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the Work Plan which had been circulated for information. He advised that the Work Plan would be formally considered at the next meeting of the Panel on 14 May 2012.

The Chairman referred to the OFSTED inspections for both safeguarding and Looked After Children which had recently taken place and thanked Members, foster carers and officers for their contribution towards the inspection process.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the training sessions for Members on corporate parenting and informed the Panel that 34 Members had attended to date. He thanked those Members for doing so. The Chairman stated that a further session was scheduled for May and he asked Members to encourage any colleagues who had not already attended a training session to do so.

CPP/11/32 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

Member	Item	Nature of Interest	Present or Absent during discussion
Cllr Mrs A Barker	5	Member of the British Horse Society	Present

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

None.

CPP/11/33 **Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2011/12**

The Panel received the Children in Care Council Annual Report 2011/12 and the Looked After Children and Young People's Participation Work Programme 2011/12. In addition, and following an introduction by the Participation Officer, four members of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) gave a presentation to the Panel. The members of the CiCC took turns to explain various aspects of the CiCC's work to date, its priorities for 2012/13, the Achievement Awards evening and activity based participation over the year.

On behalf of the Panel the Chairman thanked the CiCC members for their presentation. He then commented positively on the last Achievement Awards event and asked the CiCC members if they would wish to see any changes for the event in 2012. In response the CiCC members felt that the existing venue, timing and level of formality were suitable. They indicated that they did not wish to see a theme introduced. Following further discussion the Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations commented that the Awards

event was already regarded as an excellent evening and it was difficult to improve. The Chairman commented that he felt the best ideas on this matter would originate from the CiCC members and the Assistant Director (Acting) suggested that the CiCC consider the question further and bring any suggestions to the next Panel for consideration. The meeting concurred with this suggestion.

The Team Leader for Looked After Children informed the Panel that the next Achievement Awards event was scheduled to take place on 28 September between 6.00-9.00 p.m.

The Panel turned to consider the summer holiday funday, which members of the CiCC had begun to organise. Members noted that the funday was open to all children and young people receiving a service from Central Bedfordshire Council. The Chairman sought suggestions from the Panel on possible dates and venues and Members put forward both the Weatherley Centre in Biggleswade and the Marston Vale Forest Centre for consideration. The Assistant Director (Acting) undertook to examine their suitability as possible venues.

For Members' information the Participation Officer circulated guides which had been prepared in consultation with the CiCC. The guides covered such areas as health, education and accommodation and the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that all Looked After Children would receive copies of these documents.

On behalf of the Panel the Chairman then thanked the CiCC representatives for attending the meeting and for their efforts in producing the Looked After Children and Young People's Participation Work Programme

NOTED

- 1 the Children in Care Annual Report 2011/12;**
- 2 the Looked After Children and Young People's Participation Work Programme 2011/12;**
- 3 the presentation by the CiCC representatives.**

RESOLVED

that the CiCC report to the next meeting of the Panel setting out any proposals the representatives might have for the Annual Awards event and the summer funday.

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

CPP/11/34 Looked After Children Placement Strategy

The Panel considered a report setting out the Looked After Children Placement Strategy for 2011/13. The meeting noted that the Strategy had been prepared

in response to requirements set out within the statutory guidance issued in 2010.

The Strategy covered the following:

- Looked After Population Data and Trends
- Current Placement Provision
- Provision for Children on the Edge of Care
- Adoption and Permanence
- Principles of Good Placements
- Assessing Demand
- Planning for Change

The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that the document had been prepared in the autumn of 2011 and it was expected that it would be updated on an annual basis. She then worked through the Strategy introducing various matters for Members' attention. The Head of Adoption and Fostering referred to the need to remodel types of placements in order to meet need and referred the meeting to the Placement Strategy Action Plan, attached as an appendix to the Strategy document, which set out proposals to achieve this.

A Member commented on the absence of 'as of' dating within the document which made it difficult to know what period the data covered or to carry out any meaningful comparison. Further, the document itself lacked a general publication date. In response the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained how the data in the Strategy had been collected.

The Member also sought information on the provision of hostel accommodation for 16-17 year olds. The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that hostel accommodation was available within Central Bedfordshire at Sandy and in neighbouring Bedford and Luton if required. However, from the autumn of 2012, it was intended to expand the range of suitable accommodation within Central Bedfordshire. The Head of Adoption and Fostering added that those persons placed in hostels were usually those who were homeless after the age of 16. It was unusual to use hostel accommodation for Looked After Children unless absolutely necessary but, if it was, it would be accompanied by a package of supporting measures.

A Member sought clarification on the use of secure accommodation by Central Bedfordshire Council for one young person for part of the year. In response the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that this arose from a court order issued for the young person's own safety. Secure accommodation in Essex had been used as it was one of the nearest of the type. The Assistant Director (Acting) added that the time spent by the young person in secure accommodation had been the absolute minimum required and a package of support measures had been put in place to assist with rehabilitation.

In response to a member's query as to why Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children were over represented within the numbers of Looked After Children in comparison with the general population, the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that this could be due to there sometimes being a larger number of

children in BME families. However, she stressed that the percentage of BME children was at the same level as that experienced under the legacy authority (Bedfordshire County Council). She also emphasised that officers challenged themselves on their response to ensure BME children did not become looked after as a result of unconscious stereotyping or a lack of culturally appropriate support. The Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the largest percentage was formed by Gypsy and Traveller children who, whilst white, had strong cultural differences.

In response to a query from the Chairman on the recording of LAC numbers the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that the collection of this data was a national requirement. She added that it was also embedded in the Directorate's working practices.

Last, the meeting noted that whilst the Adoption and Fostering Service was a shared service with Bedford Borough Council the latter had its own placement strategy.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Looked After Children Placement Strategy be amended to include the publication date and one, consistent 'as of' date throughout which referred to the most up to date data available;**
- 2 that the amended Strategy be referred to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and comment.**

CPP/11/35

Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service - October to December 2011

The Panel considered a report that outlined activity in the Adoption Agency over the Quarter Three period covering October to December 2011 and provided comparative data for Quarters One and Two.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering introduced the report, drawing Members' attention to various points of interest. With regard to the lower number of enquiries on becoming a foster carer from members of the public she explained that this had been due to the low number of face to face recruitment events held during the Quarter and that action would be taken to ensure that the number of such events was increased to optimise enquiries.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering referred to a foster carer recruitment event which had taken place at the Samuel Whitbread Upper School new intake evening. She explained that the event had not generated many enquiries because parents were focused on the needs of their own children. The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated, however, that positive links had been established with Samuel Whitbread and with other upper schools in Central Bedfordshire, all of whom would be willing to host recruitment events at more suitable times in the future.

Members' attention was drawn to the rise in the number of children living with family or friends who were considered, by law, to be looked after. The Head of Adoption and Fostering commented on the demand this development placed on resources due to the requirement to assess the often complex arrangements that were required and contribute to any associated court proceedings.

The Panel discussed the measures taken to recruit foster carers. The possibility of including a recruitment event within the summer funday was suggested. Members were aware of both the advantages and disadvantages that could arise so the Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations undertook to examine the matter further before any action was taken. During further discussion the Head of Adoption and Fostering advised the meeting of the development of a web strategy, including the use of Facebook and online advertising, to encourage foster carer recruitment. She stressed that thought was constantly being given to devising new ways to aid such recruitment.

The meeting noted the legal protection available to Adoption Agency foster carers.

In response to a Member's query on the increase in Looked After Children over the last Quarter the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that there were several reasons why this had occurred including the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seeker children and the increase in children living with family or friends who were technically 'fostered'. She emphasised that the increase in Looked After Children numbers reflected a national trend although the numbers in Central Bedfordshire were significantly below the national average. The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that an evaluation of local data revealed that as many children returned to their homes as came into care.

In response to a query by the Chairman the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that the biggest challenge to be faced over the next 12 months was ensuring that the demand for placements could be met.

Consideration was given to the impact, if any, on the treatment of Looked After Children as a result of schools converting to academies.

NOTED

the Quarter Three report on the Adoption Service for the period October to December 2011.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.30 p.m. and concluded at 3.48 p.m.)