

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 3 June 2013

### PRESENT

#### Elected Members (voting)

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

#### Carers (non-voting)

Mrs H Philips

Apologies for Absence: Mrs Mrs E Grant  
Mrs Mrs J Ogley  
Cllr B Wells

Members in Attendance: Cllr P N Aldis

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Dunn – Acting Participation Officer  
Mrs C Jones – Head of HR Policy and Development  
Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer  
Ms C Seamarks – Acting Participation Officer  
Ms I Wilks – Team Manager Conference and Review

Others in Attendance: Representatives – Children in Care Council

#### CPP/13/9 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 22 April 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### CPP/13/10 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reported that the Foster Carer Awards Evening had been enjoyable and well attended. He also reported that, with regard to the future

development of the Panel, the visits by Members and officers to view the working of other Councils' Panels were still ongoing. The next visit would be to Milton Keynes Council on 17 June.

The Chairman announced that, so as not to detain the Head of HR Policy and Development unnecessarily, he would be bringing forward item 7 (Apprenticeships Update) for consideration.

CPP/13/11 **Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

CPP/13/12 **Apprenticeships Update**

The Head of HR Policy and Development provided the Panel with a verbal update on the progress made towards establishing a corporate apprenticeship scheme for young persons. She explained that the Council's Directors had expressed considerable interest in the proposal and a report was due to be submitted to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on 12 June. The Head of HR Policy and Development was optimistic that the proposal would move forward and apprenticeship opportunities would be available at the Council from September.

The Chairman referred to the substantial Member interest generated in this matter and the subsequent discussions which had taken place with especial regard to Looked After Children. He stated that there was clear support for a corporate apprenticeship scheme and, arising from this, the possibility of a career within the Council. However, a Member cautioned the meeting on treating Looked After Children more favourably than others and stressed the need for equality of opportunity. She then stated that she would wish to see apprenticeships offered to individuals on a long term basis and not merely for a few years. The Member referred to an existing scheme offered by Shuttleworth College and queried whether the Council could work with it.

In response the Head of HR Policy and Development welcomed the comments made. She then explained that CMT would be considering the need for additional resources to research alternative schemes. The Head of HR Policy and Development stressed that the Council was fully aware of its responsibilities to all young people and would not be treating Looked After Children any differently.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations referred to the annual provision of twelve paid placements by the London Borough of Lambeth and how they had provided for the development of young people's skills and confidence. He explained that this type of alternative scheme would be examined.

Members then raised a number of queries. In response the Head of HR Policy and Development stated that it was planned to offer approximately nine apprenticeships spread across the Council. She also stated that the possibility

of offering internships would need to be researched separately. The Head of HR Policy and Development explained that following consideration by CMT the proposals would be submitted to Members for consideration and approval.

With regard to the cost of the scheme the Head of HR Policy and Development stated that the funding requirement had been based on the provision of nine places but this number could be increased should there be sufficient interest and if additional funding was forthcoming.

Turning next to the question of travel costs the Head of HR Policy and Development reported that this issue had been fully considered and the pay rate for the apprentices would be sensitive to the costs involved.

Following a reference to the extensive work undertaken by Hampshire County Council on apprenticeship and placement provision the Head of HR Policy and Development undertook to investigate the action taken by that authority.

In response to a query by the Chairman on the level of participation in the proposed apprenticeship scheme by the Council's contractors the Head of HR Policy and Development explained that the focus had been on providing apprenticeships within the Council's own directly provided services. It was felt that the Council, by leading by example, could encourage other sectors to participate.

A foster carer referred to the impact of unemployment on young people and the problems which this generated. She gave her full support for the proposals. The meeting noted that the Children in Care Council had also indicated its support.

In conclusion the Chairman thanked the Head of HR Policy and Development for her update. He expressed the hope that the funding for the nine apprenticeships would have been approved by the time she next reported to the Panel.

#### **NOTED**

**the verbal report of the Head of HR Policy and Development.**

#### CPP/13/13 **Charter for Care Leavers**

Members were reminded that at the Panel's last meeting they had approved the adoption of the Department for Education's Charter for Care Leavers (minute CPP/13/4 refers). Members were aware that during their discussion on the Charter it had been apparent that various amendments were favoured in order that the document reflected local requirements. To this end it was now proposed to adopt a Central Bedfordshire version of the Charter in addition to that from the DfE. It was noted that the Children in Care Council was in the process of drafting a Central Bedfordshire Charter and that, once the draft was completed, it would be sent to the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations for consideration. Before the draft was finalised, however, the Panel's views on its content were sought.

The Panel divided into two groups. Each group was tasked with considering approximately half of the promises made to Care Leavers that were set out within the DfE Charter and suggest any changes or amendments that they would wish to see introduced. Discussion took place within each group and the comments and suggestions recorded for consideration by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives present. It was noted that the views gathered would be shared with other CiCC members engaged in preparing the draft Central Bedfordshire Charter.

#### CPP/13/14 **Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2012-13**

The Chairman welcomed Gerard Jones to his first meeting of the Panel as the Council's Assistant Director Children's Services Operations.

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Director of Children's Services Operations which outlined the activity of the Conference and Review Service, which formed part of the Quality Assurance Service, in the reviews of Looked After Children which had been carried out during 2012/13.

The meeting noted that Independent Review Officers (IROs) chaired the reviews of all Looked After Children and all child protection conferences. Further, the IRO Manager was required to produce an Annual Report for consideration by Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. To this end a copy of the IRO Manager's report was attached at Appendix A to that of the Assistant Director.

Following an introduction by the Assistant Director the Team Manager Conference and Review worked through the report drawing Member's attention to major points of interest. Arising from this the Chairman queried the accuracy of the figure for the number of Looked After Children given in the report as this was higher than he understood. In response the Assistant Director explained that the original, lower figure had been subject to amendment and the revised, higher figure was the most accurate.

The Chairman then referred to the example given within the report of a young person who had chosen not attended their review. In response the Team Manager explained that the report represented a 'snap shot' of what had happened at a particular point and that a social worker would have undertaken a follow up meeting with the young person. In response to a further query by the Chairman the Assistant Director explained that achieving full attendance by all young people at their reviews was not possible as some, at some point, would refuse to cooperate.

With regard to the provision of health assessments for Looked After Children the Assistant Director expressed concern at the failure to meet the target figures and fully acknowledged the need for improvement. To this end he stated that he would direct social workers to pursue the take up of health assessments. He undertook to report back to the Forum on the progress made on this matter. In relation to this topic the meeting noted the impact of major changes in the Health Authority's structure and the current position.

A Member sought information on the re-audit of the children and young people to assess compliance with expectations regarding the IROs meeting them separately. In response the Team Manager explained that the re-audit had yet to start. Following discussion the Assistant Director undertook to brief the Chairman on the outcome.

A Member commented on the use of acronyms within the report. She stressed the need for clarity and suggested a number of amendments to the text and the inclusion of a glossary of terms at the end of the report. The Member then referred to the important role played by school governors in influencing the efficient and effective use of the Pupil Premium. She stressed the need to ensure that governors were taking a full and active role.

Further comment and discussion followed. In particular a foster carer referred to the lack of feedback to carers on their role and contribution. The Panel noted that this information was contained within the Annual Report and Members expressed the view that the Report should be made widely available for public examination.

#### **NOTED**

**the activity of the Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2012-13 as set out within the Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the typographical errors identified by Members be corrected and the proposed amendments be incorporated within the Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report;**
- 2 that a link to the Report be published on the Council's website.**

#### **CPP/13/15 Development of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)**

The Panel considered a slide pack setting out a summary of the findings on regional and other Corporate Parenting Panels, a summary of the current position regarding Central Bedfordshire Council's Corporate Parenting Panel and, lastly, options for development and increased engagement in Central Bedfordshire.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations reminded the meeting that the review process had not yet finished and the Chairman and officers were due to visit Milton Keynes to examine its Corporate Parenting Panel arrangements (minute CPP/13/10 above also refers).

The Chairman explained that although the Panel would further consider this matter at its July meeting he wanted to gain Members' initial views in order to provide the Assistant Director with guidance. The Assistant Director stated that Members should be aware of the positive aspect of the Panel's current format.

He felt that the Panel was positively supported and functioned well although the frequency and timing of meetings could be examined. He stressed that any review of the Panel was starting from a position of strength and he awaited guidance from Members.

The Chairman suggested the possibility of quarterly meetings held at 4.00 p.m. He also suggested a separate half hour session be held immediately prior to the Panel's meetings to allow for direct discussion with young people. However, Members commented the suggested timing would conflict with the end of the school day and would make attendance by some Members difficult. The Vice-Chairman suggested a later start at 5.00 p.m. with refreshments and the Assistant Director undertook to investigate this further.

With regard to the location of future meetings discussion took place on the suitability of types of venue. It was acknowledged that the use of non-Council venues would require payment. It was then suggested that the use of the Council Chamber was overwhelming too formal for young people. However, Members commented that some young people liked the formality of the Chamber and its use suggested to them that their presence was being taken seriously. Members were aware that the Children in Care Council representatives had not experience difficulty earlier in the meeting when presenting their views. It was also stated that continuing to hold the meetings at the Council Offices would make the provision of refreshments more convenient. The Chairman suggested that the Children in Care Council's views be sought on venues for future Panel meetings.

A Member expressed a need for the Panel to receive development and training especially in order to deal with questions arising from Ofsted inspections. The Chairman reminded the meeting that an attempt had been made to provide training in its broadest sense to all Central Bedfordshire Council Members but only approximately half had attended one of the training sessions. Reference was then made to the action taken by other authorities which emphasised that all elected Members were aware of their responsibilities as corporate parents. Mention was made that some authorities provided a charter setting out Members' aims, objectives and responsibilities. The Assistant Director undertook to examine the suggestions made.

Reference was made to the provision of training to staff who were also 'corporate parents' by virtue of their employment.

A foster carer suggested that the number of carers on the Panel be increased. The Assistant Director suggested that this matter should be raised at the Council's Foster Care Forum.

## **NOTED**

**the slide pack on the development of the Corporate Parenting Panel.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.10 a.m. and concluded at 1.25 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....