

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



please ask for Leslie Manning
direct line 0300 300 5132
date 21 November 2013

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 2 December 2013 at 11.00 a.m.

Venue at

Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

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

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 and
B Wells

[Named Substitutes:

Cllrs P N Aldis, Mrs G Clarke, Mrs D B Gurney, K Janes, B J Spurr and
A M Turner]

Officers (voting)

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Director of Social Care, Health and Housing (or the Head of Housing Services
or their representative if the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing is
unable to attend)

Head of Leisure Services (or their representative if the Head of Leisure
Services is unable to attend)

Carers (non-voting)

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

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**

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 7 October 2013 (copy attached).

3. **Members' Interests**

To receive from Members any declarations of interest.

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

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

Reports

Item	Subject	Page Nos.
5	The Experience for Looked After Children with Housing To receive a presentation on this matter.	
6	Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service - July to September 2013 To consider a report outlining activity in the fostering service during Quarter Two, with a comparison to previous quarters.	* 11 - 18
7	Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2013 To consider a report outlining activity in the adoption service during April to September 2013.	* 19 - 24

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CPP/13/23 **Members' Interests**

Councillor Costin declared a general interest as the Chairman of Barnfield College.

CPP/13/24 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the meeting that she had greatly enjoyed the recent Children in Care Council annual awards evening and thanked the young people and Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker for their efforts. The Chairman then referred to comments she had received regarding the apparent reduction in the number of care leavers present at the awards. In response the Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker informed the meeting that all young people had been invited to attend the awards evening. The meeting noted the explanatory comments of the Children in Care Council representative on this matter.

Members expressed their thanks to the Assistant Director Children's Services for presenting the awards. In response the Assistant Director expressed his enjoyment of the awards evening and commented on the young people's appreciation of the strong Member and senior officer attendance at the event.

A Member referred to the positive comments expressed by three foster carers at the awards evening on the quality of the support they received from the Council.

A foster carer raised the point that Shared Lives carers did not have an awards evening and suggested that one be introduced. In response the Assistant Director undertook to examine this issue.

(Councillor Versallion in the Chair)

The Chairman apologised to the Panel for his late arrival which had been caused by his attendance at an earlier meeting. He too commented positively on the presence of senior Members and officers at the awards evening. The Chairman also informed the Panel that he had received a gift from one of the children in care and would be writing to thank him. He then advised the Panel of staffing changes at Assistant Director level in the Children's Services Directorate following the recent departure of the Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnerships.

CPP/13/25 **Entitlements for Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Workshop**

Following the earlier reference to the Children in Care Council awards evening (minute CPP/13/24 above refers) the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative advised Members that, at that event, children and young people had been asked to write down on cards what they had felt to be their proudest moment in the last year. The representative had brought some of the cards with her and circulated them amongst the Panel for Members to read.

The CiCC representative next requested that Panel Members consider attending a meeting with CiCC representatives to be held outside school/college hours. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained that a meeting arranged for that time would allow a greater opportunity for the young people to attend. He added that the meeting would be informal in nature whilst stressing the importance of Member involvement. The Chairman gave his support for such a meeting and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to report to the Panel with possible meeting dates and venues.

The meeting then turned to the forthcoming attendance of CiCC representatives at a meeting of the All Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the House of Commons to discuss entitlements for Looked After Children and care leavers. The Panel noted that the All Parliamentary Group was now scheduled to meet in November rather than October as had originally been scheduled.

The Panel had before it a list showing five entitlements for Looked After Children and five entitlements for care leavers which had been identified as the most important by attendees at a previous meeting of the All Parliamentary Group held in February 2013. The CiCC representative asked Members to consider the entitlements in the context of the following question:

'As Corporate Parents, how will you ensure young people are receiving the entitlements they are due to receive as a looked after child or care leaver?'

Both Members and officers separated into groups of two to three persons to discuss the question and write their answers on cards. At the end of the exercise each group outlined their responses and these were discussed by the Panel as a whole. During the discussion the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations referred to the need to ensure the review of the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for Looked After Children at least every six months. At the conclusion all cards were passed to the Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker for collation.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the points made through the workshop be captured and brought back to a future meeting;**
- 2 that the collated points be passed to the Children in Care Council representatives due to attend the All Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in November 2013;**
- 3 that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations submit an item on measures to ensure the review of Looked After Children's Personal Education Plans to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.**

CPP/13/26 **Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service - April to June 2013**

The Chairman welcomed Neil Wood, the Council's new Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering.

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter One (April to June 2013) 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
- Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

Following an introduction by the Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering, and additional comment by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations, Members sought clarification on a number of issues within the report. In particular discussion took place of the forthcoming ending of the shared service arrangement with Bedford Borough Council for adoption and fostering. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services advised that a range of possible options for the administration of the Central Bedfordshire Council service fostering and adoption panels would be considered shortly and that there would be full regard to budget pressures. The meeting noted that, as a result of disaggregation, each council would need to employ its own specialist officers and the overall cost of service provision would therefore rise for both authorities.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter One report on the Fostering Service for the period April to June 2013.

CPP/13/27 **Interim Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered a report by the Executive Member for Children's Services which provided information on the role of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and the outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2012/13. In addition the report identified the steps taken since September 2012 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and identified the next stages of its development.

The Assistant Director School Improvement advised the meeting that the report before them was interim in nature and had been provided in order that Members received information, albeit provisional, on the educational outcomes for Looked After Children rather than wait until next March for the annual report, which contained full, validated data.

The Assistant Director School Improvement then worked through the report introducing and developing the information contained under the following headings:

- The Virtual School
- Background
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Pupil's Achievement
(including Key Stage 1 results, Key Stage 2 provisional outcomes, Key Stage 4 provisional outcomes)
- Governance
- Priority actions for 2013/14

Whilst various issues were raised for clarification and discussion, Members expressed satisfaction with the steps identified to improve academic outcomes for Looked After Children in the future.

In conclusion the Chairman referred to the revised format adopted to convey information on Key Stage 4 provisional outcomes and requested that the original format be reintroduced in future reports as it clearly illustrated cohort achievement.

RESOLVED

that the measures taken to improve the academic outcomes for Looked After Children, together with those identified as Priority Actions for 2013/14, be approved.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.37 p.m.)

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 02 December 2013
Subject: Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service
July to September 2013
Report of: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter Two, with comparison to activity in previous quarters.

Contact Officer: Neil Wood, Interim Head of Adoption and Fostering
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Medium Term Plan Priority C Promote Health and Well-being.

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

Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £6.6 million, including costs of Independent Fostering Agency placements and provision on behalf of Bedford Borough Council under the Shared Service arrangement. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Annual Reports.

Legal:

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

Risk Management:

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

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Fostering and services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

8. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

- that the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on the content of the report

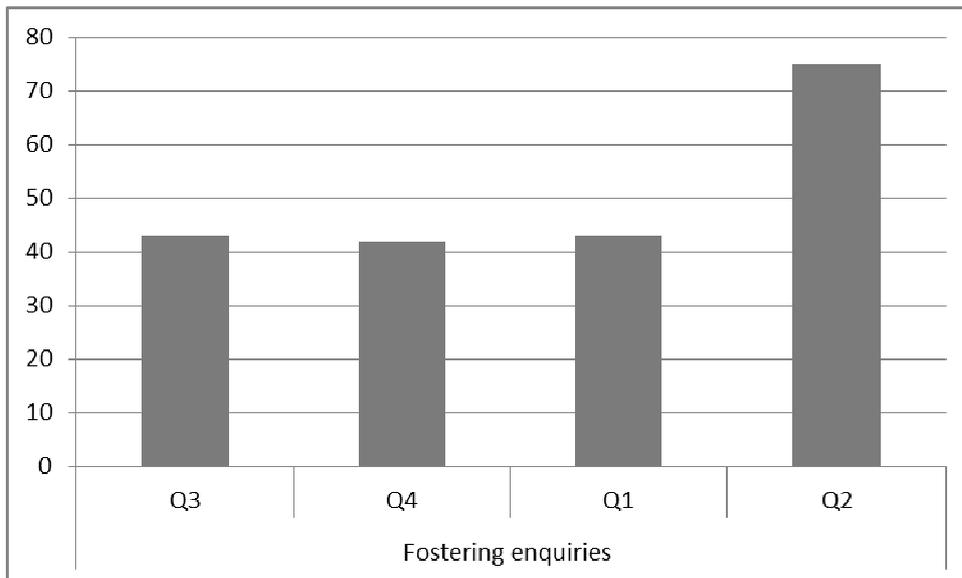
Background

9. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Fostering Services to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.
10. The Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough.
11. This report covers activity in the period July to September 2013. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

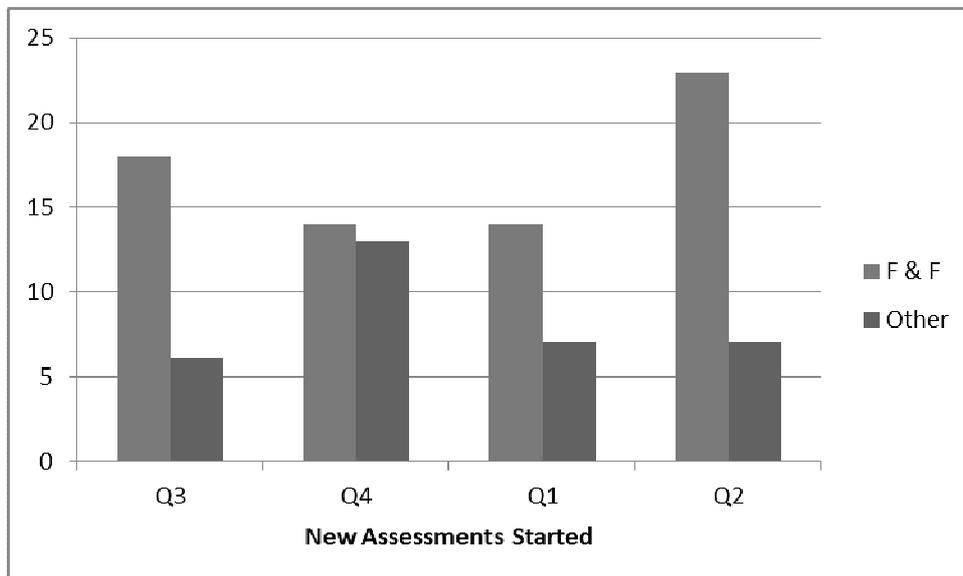
12. During the period 75 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is an encouraging uplift from previous three quarters.

Chart one shows the total number of enquiries made about fostering in the last four quarters.



13. 30 assessments of new foster carers commenced, of which 23 were assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is an increase on previous three quarters.

Chart two shows the number of foster carer assessments started in the last four quarters.



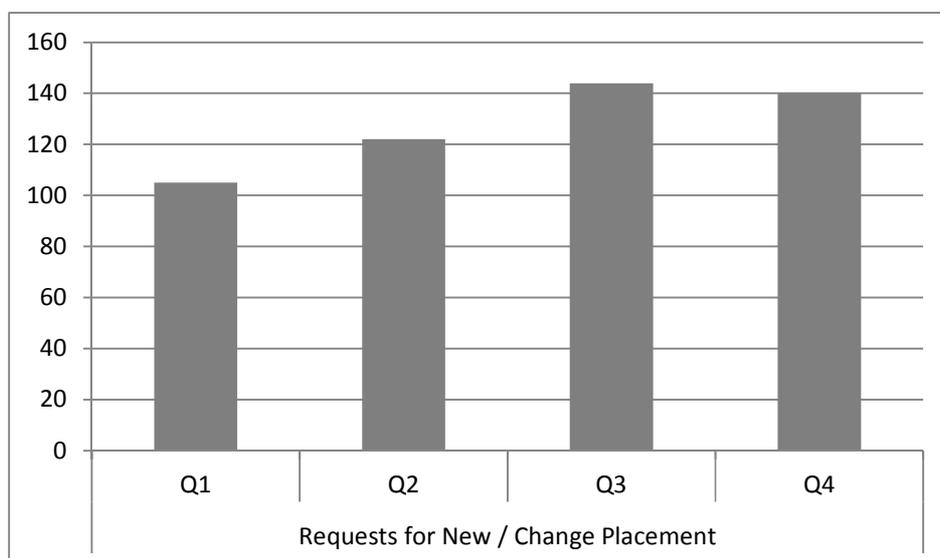
14. 13 new fostering households were approved by the Fostering and Permanence panels in Quarter Two.

15. There were 166 approved fostering households at end of Quarter two (not including 'temporary' approvals under Regulation 24 (a further 8 households). Depending on outcome of full assessment and panel recommendation, some of those may become confirmed fostering households for '*Connected Person*' (new term for *Family and Friends* carers).

Placements for Children

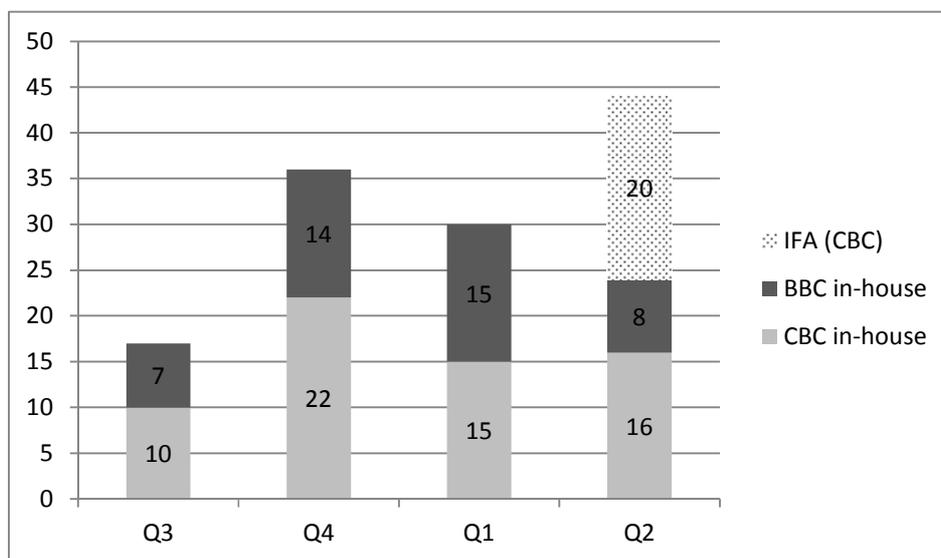
16. In these 3 months there were 140 requests for new or change of fostering placements. This is a minor decrease on previous quarter but still shows an upward trend over the last 12 months, in keeping with the rise in number of LAC.

Chart three shows the total number of requests of both councils for new placements and a change of placement in the last four quarters.



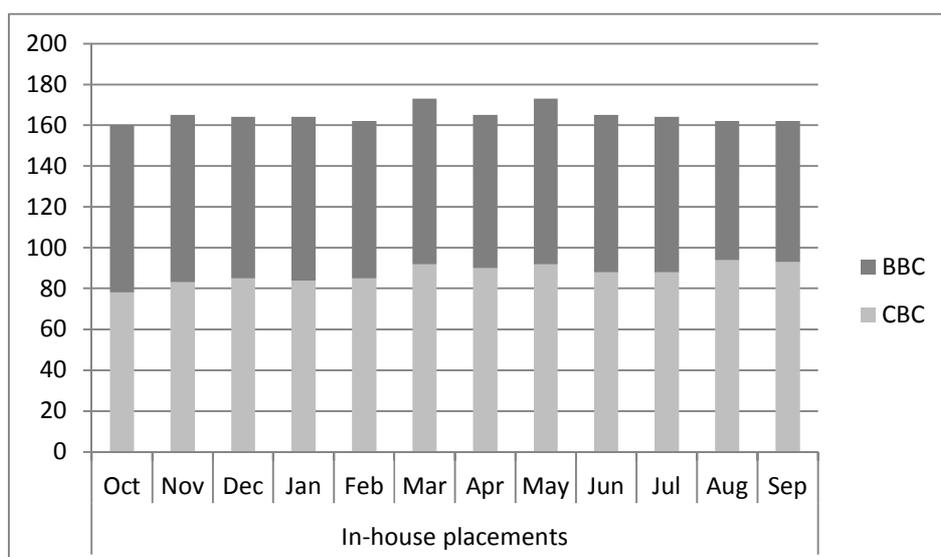
17. 24 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 16 were Central Bedfordshire children. 20 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision when becoming looked after.

Chart four shows the proportion of new in-house placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters. New information introduced from Q2, showing number of IFA placements made by CBC.



18. At 30 September 2013, there were a total of 162 children living with in-house foster carers of which 93 were Central Bedfordshire children and 69 Bedford Borough children. This number has remained relatively consistent for the last three quarters. Taken with the number of fostering households at 166, this represents a placement ratio of 1:1.

Chart five shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last twelve months, ending in Quarter 2.



19. The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 109 at 30 September 2013, a decrease of 1 since the last quarter.

Training for Foster Carers

20. 9 training courses took place involving 69 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers. 85 households have achieved CWDC standard.

Key Events and Advertising

- 21.
- Biggleswade Farmer's Market – tweeted photo of Jamie Oliver
 - Bedford Gourmet Market
 - Beds on Sunday (all editions) – Advert for young families
 - 'Super hero' advert in local press
 - Beds on Sunday
 - Mid-Beds Bulletin
 - Biggleswade Bulletin
 - Salvation Army Dunstable – Leaflets, Newsletter & Bookmarks
 - Posters at Bedford General Hospital
 - Website advert – Bedford Volunteer Centre
 - Dunstable Market
 - Facebook advertising campaign
 - Kings House Church – information evening

Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

22. The programme for disaggregation of the Adoption and Fostering service has progressed to plan. The prospective fostering team for each Council has worked to prepare the new arrangement. They also continue to meet jointly, to ensure business continuity up until the final disaggregation at the end of December 2013.
23. All foster carers are now aligned to one of the Councils and know who they will deal with after formal ending of the joint service arrangement. This has been established through consultation with the carers and has resulted in a balanced distribution of carers. (This was approximately a 50/50 split). Similarly, staff consultation has been successfully completed and all workers know which agency they will be working for, commencing January 2014.

24. The service is developing the detailed arrangements of preparing for separation, for example ensuring data lists are comprehensive and ready for secure electronic transfer to Bedford Borough. Foster carer payments are organised to be paid without disruption to carers. There have been trial runs of payment information transfer and this has shown systems to be robust, with excellent liaison between the relevant personnel.

25. The disaggregation of the service continues to be overseen by the project board lead officers from both councils. Tasks and key milestones in the project have all been met within target and no significant risks in respect of meeting future milestones have been identified.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 02 December 2013
Subject: Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service
April to September 2013
Report of: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the adoption service during April to September 2013

Contact Officer: Neil Wood, Interim Head of Adoption and Fostering
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Medium Term Plan Priority C Promote Health and Well-being.

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

Adoption is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £6.6 million, including costs of Other Adoption Agency placements and provision on behalf of Bedford Borough Council under the Shared Service arrangement. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Annual Reports.

Legal:

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

Risk Management:

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

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Adoption services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

8. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

- that the Corporate Parenting Panel comment on the content of the report

Background

9. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Agencies to report to Members at six monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of a six monthly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.
10. The Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council (until end of December 2013). Annual and six monthly reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough.
11. This report covers activity in the period April to September 2013.

Recruitment of Adopters

12. The national Adoption Reform agenda has led to significant changes in process this year, with emphasis on improving timescales for both children and adopters. Therefore, the recruitment process has been reconfigured. Previously, the process offered information evenings as a first step for adopters to explore the idea of adoption. New adoption regulations were enforced in this period (Q1 & Q2 of 2013) which required a two stage process for adopter recruitment:
 - Stage 1: adopter led – agency enabled: Self preparation through preliminary training, and research; 2 months
 - Stage 2: agency led – applicant enabled: Agency assessment phase, culminating in panel presentation

13. Sum effect is that some applicants were in previous process and in latter part of this period applicants were engaged in the new two stage process. 16 households attended adoption information evenings. 4 of those households attended a subsequent in-depth interview to explore adoption further with an adoption Social Worker. As of 30th September, 24 households were in stage one of the process and 4 in stage two. This is the first cohort of applicants in new process. These figures reflect a start-up of a new process that will build up over time. Future reports will be more indicative of flow rate through this new system.
14. 17 assessments of new adopters commenced in the period. 12 new adoptive households completed their assessment and were approved to adopt. We will see an increase in rate of assessments, as the new process settles-in. For the joint service with Bedford Borough led by Central Bedfordshire, the target for the whole year 2013-14 was set at 55 new adoptive households. Central Bedfordshire as a single service from January 2014, will have a smaller number of children to place for adoption (though trend overall is upward). At this stage, it is reasonable to assume approximately 50/50 split of activity between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough.

Adoption Planning and Placements for Children

15. The total number of family finding cases (as of 30 September 2013) was 70; 25 for CBC and 45 for BBC. Although this will seem disproportionate, in fact there is a high degree of change in this aspect of work. The higher number of BBC cases in this period is affected by a number of large sibling groups. Generally the distribution between CBC and BBC is more even.
16. Since an earlier change to Adoption Regulations in 2011, most cases where adoption is the plan for a child are no longer presented to the Adoption Panel. (There are a few exceptions such as relinquished children). The new mechanism is that 'adoption as the plan' is presented directly to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision. There were no cases of 'adoption as the plan' presented to the Adoption Panel in this period. 42 cases of 'adoption as the plan' were presented to the Agency Decision Maker. 18 were BBC children and 24 were CBC children.
17. 13 children were placed with adopters during the period. 8 were from CBC and 5 were from BBC. This took the total number of children placed with adopters and awaiting adoption order to 22 children. (This comprises 17 adoption households, given that some are siblings in same placement). 12 were from CBC and 10 from BBC. As of 30 September 2013 there had been 4 adoption orders granted; 4 were CBC and 1 was BBC.

Special Guardianship and Adoption Support

18. At the end of September, the team were providing adoption support for 41 families; 18 CBC and 23 BBC. The team also provided special guardianship support for 33 families; 15 CBC and 18 BBC.
19. Support was also offered through 202 'Letterbox' arrangements; 89 CBC and 113 BBC. Letterbox contact (sometimes referred to as indirect contact) is identified as part of the permanence planning for each individual child. It seeks to ensure a

secure and consistent record of contact between birth family and adoptive family. This often includes letters, occasional photographs and other ephemera that is often of high significance to the adoptee later in life.

Adult Adoption Work

20. Over the period there were 62 referrals from adopted adults or their birth relatives seeking support to trace records or for intermediary services to facilitate contact. Of these, 40 were CBC and 22 were BBC.

Key Events

21. This period has seen a raft of changes in Adoption Legislation, Regulations and Guidance. The Adoption Agency has disseminated knowledge and training about these changes as well as having continued to embed these in practice. For example, the adoption team has adapted the approval process in line with new two-stage process required by Adoption Regulations 2013, which came into force 01 July 2013.
22. Disaggregation of the Adoption and Fostering Service is nearing conclusion, with separate services for Adoption (for purposes of this report) being provided by Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. From 01 January 2014, these will be two Adoption Agencies where formerly Central Bedfordshire provided majority of services for this function on behalf of Bedford Borough Council.
23. It had been proposed that the Adoption panel would continue as a joint panel. However, significant increase of adoption activity for both Councils has led to conclusion that it will be necessary to form a separate Adoption panel in Borough Council. As an interim measure, the programme board has agreed that the adoption panel functions should remain joint until end of this financial year.
24. In conjunction with the increased volume of adoption work, there has been a need to increase medical advice time. This has been achieved as part of the Adoption Reform Grant for 2013-14.

Adoption Reform Grant

25. Central Bedfordshire Adoption Agency and Bedford Borough Council each obtained an Adoption Reform Grant for 2013-14. This comprised two parts; Part A is non-ring-fenced and has been utilised for a range of initiatives to influence the permanence planning of the whole system. Part B is ring-fenced to '*spend on adoption services*'. The Government's priorities are:
 - Structural reform of adopter recruitment to increase the supply of adopters, including equalisation of the inter-agency fee
 - Reducing the backlog of children waiting for adoption, particularly by developing innovative ways of finding adoptive families for children who traditionally wait longer than average to be adopted.
26. In order to balance fact that first 9 months of this year are as a joint service, there are mechanisms in place to recharge Bedford Borough Council for a suitable proportion of those activities that are joint enterprise, using part B of the grant.

Some of the planned grant spend is Central Bedfordshire specific. The monies have been allocated to a range of activities associated with achieving improvements in adoption outcomes. This is a whole system approach and is not exclusively targeted at the Adoption Service. In this respect, the whole Looked-After system is part of the Adoption Agency.

27. Central Bedfordshire has organised the Adoption Reform Grant in the following areas:
- Additional medical advisor time for adoption cases
 - Family Finding project – SLA with St Francis Children’s Society
 - Implementing new adopter recruitment process – training and material update
 - E-learning for Stage 1 applicants to adopt
 - Scoping for *Foster to Adopt* project
 - Training on new assessment format and timescales
 - Increase legal services time for adoption cases
 - Increase social worker assessment capacity
 - Life story workers in LAC team
 - Tracking adoption recruitment
 - Tracking cases in proceedings where adoption the plan
 - Contribution to increased inter-agency fee rate
28. A 6 monthly report on Adoption Reform Grant (part B) spend to date has been returned to government as required. This details the range of activity, it is intended impact on achieving improvements in recruitment of adopters, tighter timescales and better matching etc. This is fully informed by the Adoption Reform agenda.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None

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