

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



please ask for Leslie Manning
direct line 0300 300 5132
date 23 January 2014

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 3 February 2014 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 2 December 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	All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Roles and Responsibilities	
	To receive a presentation by members of the Children in Care Council.	
6	The Experience for Looked After Children with Housing	
	To receive a presentation by the Assistant Director Housing Services.	
7	The Health of Looked After Children - Six Monthly Update	
	To receive a presentation by the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group).	

8

**Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service -
October to December 2013**

* 11 - 16

To consider a report outlining activity in the fostering service during Quarter Three, with a comparison to previous quarters.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 2 December 2013

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs:

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

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

Officers in Attendance: Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's
Services Operations
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mr N Wood – Interim Head of Service for
Adoption and Fostering

CPP/13/28 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 7 October 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/13/29 Members' Interests

Councillor Mrs A Barker declared an interest as a member of the Council's Adoption Panel.

Councillor N B Costin declared an interest as the Chairman of Barnfield College.

Councillor A L Dodwell declared an interest as a member of the Council's Fostering Panel.

CPP/13/30 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

Further to minute CPP/13/25 Members were advised that Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives had attended a meeting of the All

Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers to discuss entitlements for Looked After Children and care leavers. A number of recommendations had arisen from that meeting and, in order to ensure that they meshed with the forthcoming presentation by the Assistant Director Housing Services on housing and Looked After Children, it was intended that the CiCC representatives report to the next meeting of the Panel in February followed by a response by the Assistant Director Housing Services (Minute CPP/13/31 also refers).

In connection with the Virtual School the meeting was advised that a number of changes had taken place regarding this body. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to provide an explanatory report to the next meeting of the Panel on this development.

The Chairman stated that, locally, National Adoption Week had proceeded well though he was unsure as to whether it had generated interest from prospective adopters. He added that he had been interviewed by Three Counties Radio and he believed this had generated good publicity.

Arising from the above the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised the meeting that the number of local adoptions had more than doubled from 7 last year to an expected 16 in the current year and that, overall, good progress had been made in this area. He then reminded the Panel of the recent changes within the field of adoption and the challenges which had arisen. He drew Members' attention in particular to the expectation by the courts that all relevant information on a proposed adoption would be available for presentation at the first hearing. Whilst this situation enabled judges to make their decisions in a far speedier manner than previously it generated an extremely high level of work for local authorities and had already led to criticism by the courts of those councils which had failed to meet this requirement.

In response to a query the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained that the changes had not merely seen the 'frontloading' of the workload but an increase in the amount of work and a reduction in the time available in which to do it. Furthermore, whilst the costs for expert reports had been shared amongst various bodies in the past, these now fell in full to the Council to pay.

Discussion took place on the need to ensure the wellbeing of the child remained the priority and concern was expressed on impact of a poor, hasty decision by the courts on children who were already vulnerable. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that, whilst adoption might not be suitable in all cases, the courts did usually find the correct way forward.

Further discussion followed on the breakdown rate for adoptions, coupled with reference to the situation in other European countries. Whilst the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations was unable to confirm if the rate had increased nationally he acknowledged that an increasing number of children, often in sibling groups, had much wider needs than had been found in the past and this factor was likely to lead to an increased number of breakdowns. He explained that even if a child was removed from abuse or neglect at a very

early age the long term impact of psychological damage remained and this could generate stresses leading to a breakdown in the adoption. Nonetheless, he emphasised that, for the majority of children, adoption was the single most effective action that could be taken for their benefit. Further, the Council retained responsibility to assist adoptive families should they require support.

Following further discussion the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to report to the next meeting of the Panel on both national and local breakdown rates for adoption.

CPP/13/31 The Experience for Looked After Children with Housing

Members were aware that this item had been withdrawn and that it would now be considered at the Panel's next meeting on 3 February 2014.

CPP/13/32 Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service - July to September 2013

The Panel received a report by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Two (July to September 2013) with comparison to previous quarters.

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Placements for Children
- Training for Foster Carers
- Key Events and Advertising
- Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

The Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering advised that, in view of the impending disaggregation of the Adoption and Fostering Service, he would amend the presentation of the report at the Panel's next meeting to focus on Central Bedfordshire data.

Comment and discussion then took place on the report. Clarification was sought on a number of issues.

In response to a Member's queries the Interim Head of Service acknowledged the seasonal pressure on the fostering service but emphasised that carers were available over Christmas and New Year to cover both anticipated and unplanned demand.

The Interim Head of Service advised the meeting of intended amendments to the charts within the Assistant Director's report in order to ensure clarity and greater accuracy.

A Member referred to 'Fostering for Adoption' placements and sought clarification on the scheme's operation within Central Bedfordshire and the role

of Members. In response the Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering briefly outlined the legislative basis and how, locally, the scheme applied to only a very small number of Looked After Children. Following further discussion it was felt that a short briefing on the legislation and its application in Central Bedfordshire should be given to a future meeting of the Panel.

Turning to service disaggregation the Interim Head of Service reported that this was in its final stages and all foster carers were aware of which council they had been aligned to. No complaints had been received regarding the alignment. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that there had been an approximately 50/50 split in both foster carers and staff between the two authorities. A number of key vacancies had arisen as a result and action was to be taken to remedy this situation.

In conclusion a Member suggested that the Council consider the wider, strategic, use of communications to assist in the use of foster carer recruitment. She also queried whether Central Bedfordshire's profile had been raised as a result of National Adoption Week and whether officers monitored how inquiries were generated. The Member then thanked the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel and the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services for their efforts relating to disaggregation.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Two report on the Fostering Service for the period July to September 2013.

RESOLVED

that a short briefing session on 'Fostering to Adoption' and its application within Central Bedfordshire be provided to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

CPP/13/33 Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2013

The Panel received a report by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which outlined the activity in the adoption service over the six month period from April to September 2013.

The report provided updates on the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Adopters
- Adoption Planning and Placements for Children
- Special Guardianship and Adoption Support
- Adult Adoption Work
- Key Events
- Adoption Reform Grant

Members were aware that adoption service issues had already discussed at some length earlier in the meeting (minute CPP/13/30 above refers).

For Members' benefit the Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering introduced the report. In particular he drew Members' attention to the large number of significant changes in adoption legislation, regulations and guidance during the six month period. The meeting noted that the Adoption Agency had disseminated knowledge and training about the changes and had continued to embed them in practice.

Following a query by the Chairman regarding the current upper age limit for adopters the Interim Head of Service explained that the advice from the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) was to look for health and vigour in prospective adopters rather than be guided by strict age limits. He added that over the previous ten years the upper age profile of adopters had moved from 40 to 50 and emphasis was now placed on individual suitability and the ability to connect with a particular child or children.

NOTED

the content of the six monthly report on the Adoption Service for the period April to September 2013.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.28 p.m.)

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 03 February 2014
Subject: Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service
October to December 2013
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter three, with comparison to activity in previous quarters.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations
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 outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management:

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

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Fostering and Adoption services provided to Looked after Children affect 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

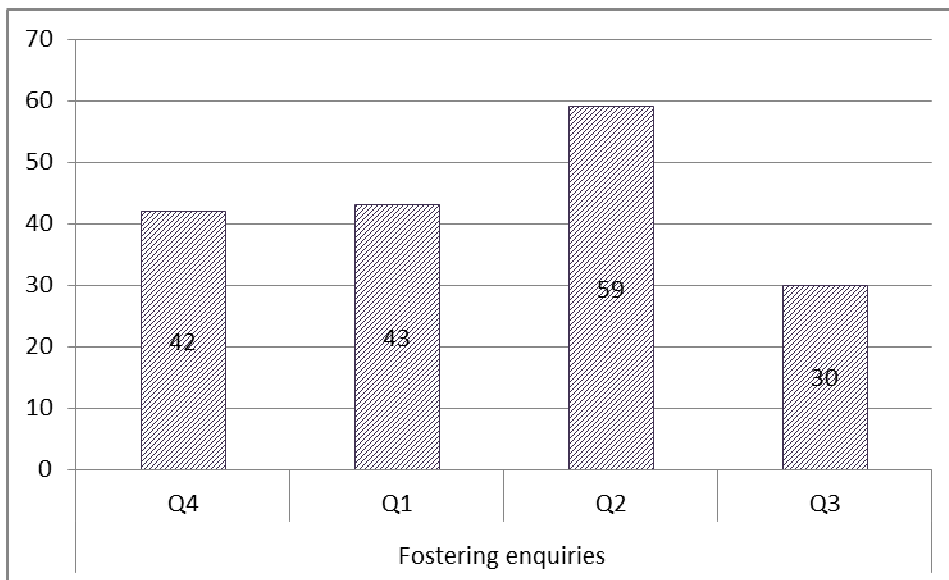
9. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Fostering Services to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.
10. This is the final period for which the Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough Council. From January 2014, Central Bedfordshire Fostering Service will be a single agency, as will Bedford Borough Council (BBC).
11. This report covers activity in the period October to December 2013. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

12. During the period 30 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is a fluctuating trend, with some apparent seasonal influence. This is a low number of enquiries and previous Q3 for December 2012 showed 43 enquiries, by direct comparison. The service will need to further develop marketing and recruitment activity so that this can be built upon to increase the number and range of foster carers.

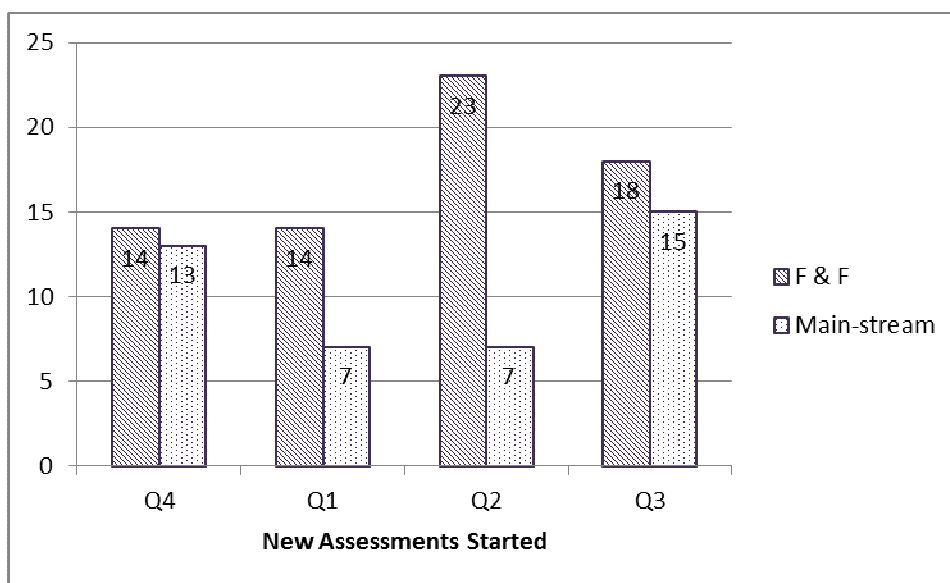
In the year to date (Q1-3) there were 132 enquiries and 13 newly approved foster carers (excluding Family & Friends carers). This represents a conversion rate of 10%. The national average is 11%.

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



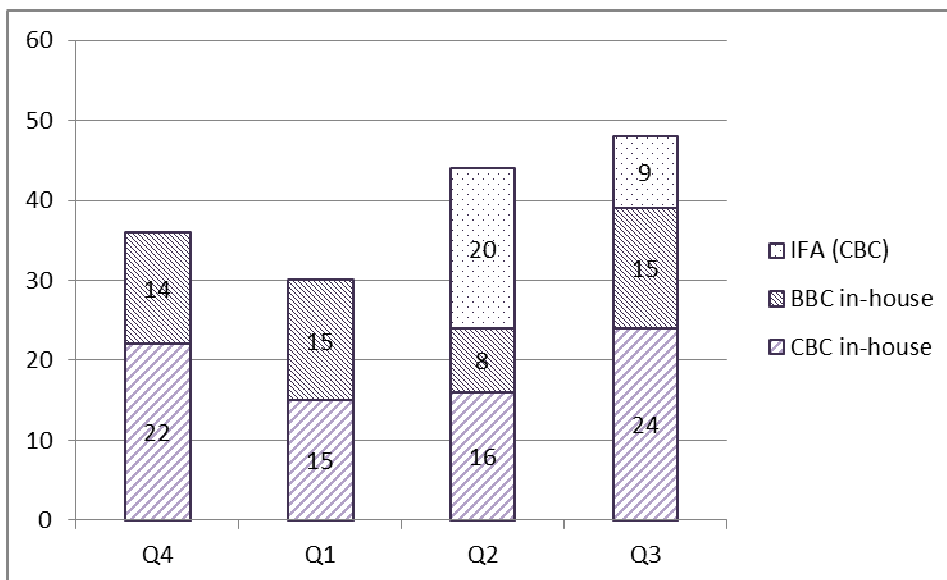
13. In Quarter three, 33 assessments of new foster carers commenced of which 18 were assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is an increase on previous three quarters.

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



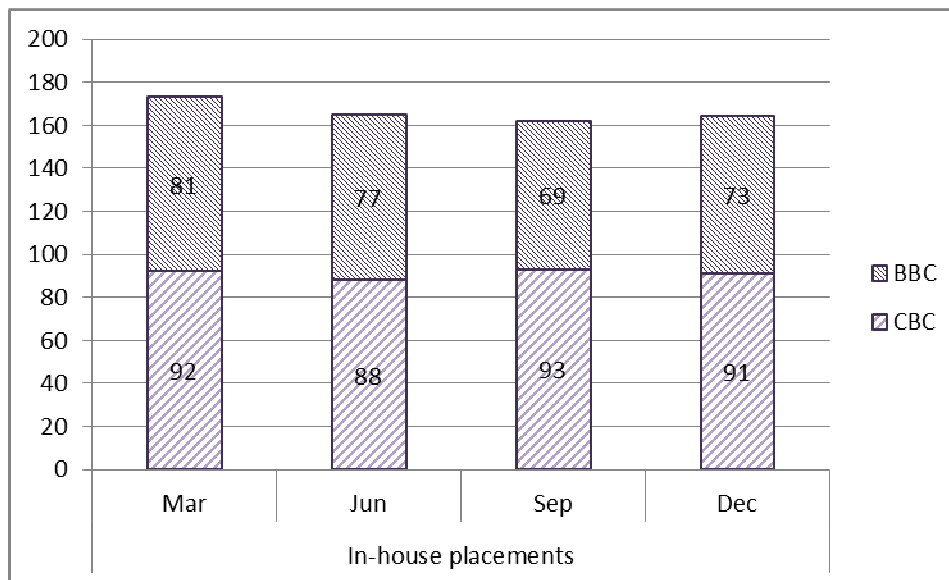
14. 6 new fostering households were approved by the Fostering and Permanence panel in Quarter three. 2 households were Family & Friends carers, each for a specific child. The other 4 newly approved households were mainstream carers, offering a potential 7 additional placements.
15. There were 169 approved in-house fostering households at end of Quarter three. This is an increase of 3 households since last quarter.
16. 39 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 24 were Central Bedfordshire children and 15 were Bedford Borough children. 9 Central Bedfordshire Council children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) provision when becoming looked after. Bedford Borough Council placements with IFA's were not processed through Central Bedfordshire.
17. IFA placements (figures shown below for Central Bedfordshire only) have reduced significantly in comparison to the previous quarter. This is a quick changing feature and cannot be assumed to reflect an overall trend at this point in time. It is clearly desirable to continue to reduce the proportion of foster placements made through IFA's, given their higher cost; at the same time to increase the proportion of in-house foster placements. At end of December 2013, Central Bedfordshire foster placements were 54% with IFA's and 46% with in-house carers.

Chart three shows the proportion of new in-house placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters



18. At 31 December 2013, there were a total of 164 children living with in-house foster carers of which 91 were Central Bedfordshire children and 73 Bedford Borough children. This number has remained relatively consistent for the last three quarters. Taken with the number of fostering households at 169, this represents a placement ratio of 1:1.

Chart four shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last twelve months, ending in Q3.



19. The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 108 at 31 December 2013, a decrease of 1 since the last quarter. This represents 54% CBC children placed with IFA carers and 46% placed with in-house carers (including Family & Friends carers).

Training for Foster Carers

20. 22 training courses took place involving 218 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.
21. 90 households have achieved *Training, Support and Development* (formerly known as *Children's Workforce Development Council*) standard. This is an increase of 5 households since last quarter.

Key Events and Advertising

- 22.
- Siblings advert – Local press
 - Polish community article in Beds on Sunday
 - Leaflet drop
 - Drop-in afternoon - Queens Park neighbourhood centre
 - Babies and toddlers advert - Local press
 - Nation adoption week advert - Local press
 - Website advert - Bedford volunteer centre
 - A5 posters x 14 - Bedford general hospital

Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

23. The Fostering service joint arrangement with Central Bedfordshire providing service for Bedford Borough Council, ended on 31 December 2013. Those staff aligned to Bedford Borough moved to their new office ahead of time, to avoid the complications of an office move in the middle of seasonal public holidays. This move went smoothly and all staff met for a lunch to mark the beginning of the new arrangements.
24. Foster carers have been re-allocated their supervisory social worker, where necessary. During the final weeks of a joint service, there were handover meetings. There have been no gaps in service provision.
25. The disaggregation project board met in early January to consider and resolve any remainder details. The lead officers from both councils reported that the process was successful and on target. 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