

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



please ask for Leslie Manning

direct line 0300 300 5132

date 21 May 2014

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 2 June 2014 at 10.30 a.m.

Venue at

Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

PLEASE NOTE THE START TIME

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 D B Gurney, K Janes, B Saunders 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 24 March 2014 (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.	Involving Young People in the Corporate Parenting Panel	
	To discuss ways of engaging with the young people who attend the Corporate Parenting Panel.	
6.	Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service	* 29 - 34
	To consider a report outlining activity in the fostering service during Quarter Four.	
7.	Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service	* 35 - 74
	To receive a report outlining the statutory framework for the submission of annual reports on the adoption and fostering services and summarising the key points contained in the attached Annual Reports for 2013/14.	

8. **Placement Stability & Suitability**

To receive a presentation which provides performance data on the stability of Looked After Children placements together with plans to improve placement stability and suitability.

9. **Housing Issues**

To receive a verbal report.

10. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

To consider whether to pass a resolution under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that the consideration of the item is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Item Likely to be Considered Following the Exclusion of the Press and Public

<i>Item</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Exempt Para.</i>	<i>Page Nos.</i>
11.	Celebrating the Journey of the Child A video will be shown following which a young person will talk about his experiences growing up as a Looked After Child.	* 1	

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 24 March 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman)
A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs A Barker
D Bowater
Mrs S A Goodchild
B Wells

Officers (voting)

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

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs C Andrews
Mrs N Banks
Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: Mrs J Dickinson
Mrs E Grant
Miss D Jeeves

Officers in Attendance: Mrs M Brown – Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager
Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's Services
Operations
Ms J Edwards – Interim Virtual School Head Teacher
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mrs C Seamarks – Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker
Mrs J Stanton – Interim Participation Support Worker
Mr N Wood – Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering

Others in Attendance: Representatives – Children in Care Council

CPP/13/41 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 3 February 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/13/42 Members' Interests

None.

CPP/13/43 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

At the request of the Chairman, and with the approval of the Panel, the running order of the agenda was revised so that item 8 (Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers) was considered before item 7 (Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2014-15).

CPP/13/44 Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2013

The Panel considered a report from the Executive Member for Children's Services which set out the Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2013. The Annual Report included the Participation Forward Plan for 2014.

The report was accompanied by a presentation from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives attending the meeting. A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

Following a query by the Chairman discussion took place regarding Member attendance at CiCC meetings and events. The Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker undertook to notify the Panel, through the Committee Administrator to the Panel, of the dates where Member attendance was appropriate.

Full and open discussion then took place during which CiCC representatives outlined their own experiences as Looked After Children to illustrate policy areas which they felt required review, including that of education, accommodation and placements. In response the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing and Assistant Director Children's Services Operations assured the meeting that officers were aware of the issues raised and advised of the action being undertaken with regard to accommodation. Arising from this discussion it was agreed that there would be an update report to the next Panel meeting.

Debate also took place on the support that was offered to Looked After Children in the move to independence, the impact on educational attainment and need to assess individual needs and requirements.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the local consultations which took place with Looked After Children and young people and queried what was done with the responses received. She explained that knowing what problems existed would enable Members to raise and discuss the issues with officers. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that the information was not systematically being fed back to Members in terms of improvements made and he undertook, in conjunction with the Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker, to establish the most suitable means of reporting this information to the Panel.

In response to a Member's query regarding the representation of those under eight years old and of those over sixteen on the CiCC the Personal

Advisor/Participation Support Worker advised that CiCC membership was open to the age of 24 whilst the views of those under eight were established through discussions with the fostering team in an informal, relaxed environment. However, the Member expressed concern at the loss of knowledge and experience from the CiCC as those young people in their late teens moved on. It was agreed that this would be reviewed.

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

NOTED

- 1 the Children in Care Annual Report 2013;**
- 2 the Children in Care Council Participation Forward Plan 2014;**
- 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/13/45 Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report from the Executive Director for Children's Services which explained the role of the Central Bedfordshire Virtual School, provided the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2012/13 and identified the impact of the steps taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

Information relating to the Virtual School Development Plan 2013-15 and Looked After Children Validated Outcomes in 2013 were attached to the report at Appendices A and B respectively.

The Interim Virtual School Head Teacher introduced the report and drew Members' attention to points of specific interest. Reference was made to those students (Y12/13) who chose not to engage in the in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process but favoured other opportunities. A Member advised the meeting that he had been made aware of the apprenticeships that were available at Amey plc, one of the Council's consultants, and the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher undertook to notify the Youth Support Service of these.

The Chairman then reminded the meeting that the Council itself also provided apprenticeships. He sought clarification on the outcome of recent Member discussions on whether or not an applicant, who was one of the Council's Looked After Children, should be guaranteed an apprenticeship on the Council's scheme. In the absence of a conclusive answer both the Chairman and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to seek further information on this matter. However, the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stated that applicants would be required to have a certain level of academic achievement and some Looked After Children were still failing to reach that required.

In connection with underachievement a Member suggested that it would be beneficial for some Looked After Children if there was a greater focus on the teaching of English and Maths. She also emphasised the need to ensure that those Looked After Children who were experiencing long term sickness received tuition. In response the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stressed that English and Maths were already ranked as the most important. She also stated she could supply further tuition if this was required.

The Panel then turned to consider Pupil Premium funding and its impact on the achievements of Looked After Children. Concern was expressed that some schools were not using the Pupil Premium for eligible children but were diverting funds into a general 'pot'. However, in contrast, a Member commented that he was readily provided with data on this topic and it was noted that, through PEP reviews, schools were being challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on Looked After Children's achievements. In addition the impact of the Pupil Premium on the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children was now a core focus for Ofsted inspection.

Following further discussion the Chairman queried what, if any, further action could be taken by the Council to improve educational outcomes for Looked After Children. In response the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stated that, despite funding being available, the provision of one to one tuition was challenging because there were so few good quality tutors available to provide this service.

Following further discussion and comment the Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, thanked the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher and her team for the improvements which had been made and expressed confidence in the action being taken.

NOTED

the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2012/13 and the impact of the measures taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

CPP/13/46

Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers

The Panel considered a report by the Council's Executive Member for Children's Services which outlined a review of the foster care allowance scheme. The meeting noted that the review increased remuneration to the Council's own foster carers in an attempt to both retain existing foster carers and increase their number, thereby reducing the current high use of the more expensive foster placements purchased from Independent Foster Agencies (IFA's).

Members were advised that the Executive had agreed a plan in September 2013 to increase recruitment and retention through the introduction of a fee based scheme to improve rewards to in-house carers. Further, the end of the

joint service with Bedford Borough Council in January 2014 had seen additional work undertaken to ensure the scheme was as competitive as was possible given the resources available. The scheme, details of which were set out in full in the report, was due to be implemented with effect from 1 April 2014.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised that discussions on the revised scheme had been held with carers. The Panel then considered how the fee based scheme would provide an incentive to foster carers to undertake training beyond the basic level and the benefits that would arise.

NOTED

the progress made in the development and implementation of the revised foster care allowance scheme.

(Note: Minute CPP/13/47 below also refers).

CPP/13/47 Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2014-15

The Panel received a presentation from the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager which set out the 2014-15 recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers. The presentation included the current recruitment situation, the overall marketing objectives, the overall retention objectives, the number of foster carers needed and the various, wide ranging means to be employed to achieve the recruitment and retention objectives. The meeting was aware that the strategy was linked to the review of the foster care allowance scheme (minute CPP/13/46 above refers).

A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix B to these minutes.

Members noted the competition with both neighbouring local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) to recruit foster carers. Arising from this discussion took place on how to make the most effective use of recruitment activity with regard to both content and location. The Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager welcomed Members' suggestions on this issue.

In response to a Member's query the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager confirmed that an element of the recruitment strategy would focus on the professional development and support offered by the Council to its in-house foster carers.

During further discussion a foster carer representative explained why she had become a Council foster carer rather than join an IFA, whilst another explained how she had been successfully recruited by the Council and how the recruitment process could be improved. A third commented on the level of support offered by the Council and the need to prevent over commitment by some foster carers.

In response to concerns over the impact of the recruitment campaigns being undertaken by neighbouring local authorities on the outcome of the Council's strategy, the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager referred Members to

the success of a previous foster carer recruitment strategy she had conducted for a London borough. The Assistant Director also stressed the ambition which lay behind the implementation of the recruitment and retention strategy before advising the meeting that the strategy would be launched in the foyer of Priory House on 15 April.

NOTED

the 2014-15 recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.20 p.m.)



Appendix A

Children in Care Council and Participation 2013

Annual Review
Corporate Parenting Panel
24th March 2014

How we have made a difference in 2013

We are representatives from the Children in Care Council and we meet on a regular basis to talk about issues the affect us and the care we receive.

The CiCC have worked very hard to make improvements for ourselves and other looked after children and care leavers.

We are here today to show you some examples of how we made a difference in 2013.



How we have made a difference in 2013

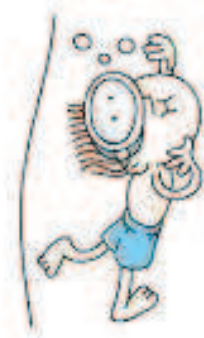
Increased CiCC representation.

We write our own newsletter called “Say it Loud” which we send out 4 times a year to all looked after children aged 8+ .

The CiCC peer mentor our ‘Young voices’ groups during the school holidays and during fun activities we talk to 8 – 16 year olds

We continue to have good links with our corporate parents and meet with members on a frequent basis to talk about our work plans and future planning.

We have had the chance to talk about improvements for young people last year and we were able to get free swimming passes to all CBC leisure centres for looked after children and foster families and a free football coaching programme for care leavers.



How we have made a difference in 2013

Central Bedfordshire signed up to the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers.

We also attended the house of commons and spoke to Edward Timpson about entitlements.

The CiCC created and delivered training to the newly qualified social workers and workers who have started the social work tier programme.

The CiCC created and delivered training to the newly qualified social workers and workers who have started the social work tier programme.

We also delivered training to a total number of 33 foster carers from January to December 2013.



How we have made a difference in 2013

The awards night was organised and arranged by members of the CiCC, we took care of things such as decorations, entertainment, refreshments and designing the invitations and certificate.

As a members of the CiCC peer support is vital for the younger members of looked after young people and with out the activity based participation we arranged things such as sowing seeds for the 8-12 year olds it's a workshop designed to promote going to university.

We also arranged residential trips for the older members of looked after and care leavers this is to enable them to improve their independent living skills ready for them to live independently.



How we have made a difference in 2013

We arranged a winter wonderland themed Christmas party which was attended by 28 young people.

We have attended 2 charity events have raised a substantial amount of money for 2 charities Keech Cottage and Comic Relief.

We had a bake sale and raised £80 pound for Comic Relief and members of the children in care council made Christmas cards which were sold to staff and we raised £375 for Keech Cottage.



How we have made a difference in 2013

Conclusion

We will continue to improve work we do as members of the children in care council and continue to promote our work through the 'say it loud' newsletter national and regional events.

We have built up a strong relationship with our corporate parents and would like to invite them to other CiCC events and fun days which will give them the opportunity to meet other looked after young people.

We will be continuing to discuss new ways to promote the work of the children in care council and will encourage more young people to join the CiCC.

We can see what a difference we have made to the life's of looked after young people and the encouragement they have been given from all members of the CiCC and will continue to support them in order to improve the service for looked after young people in 2014.

How we have made a difference in 2013



We have 5 main key points that we will be working on this year and they are the following:

1. The cicc to continue achieving our priorities.
2. To increase the involvement of children with disabilities.
3. To encourage the looked after children and care leavers to participate more in activities and opportunities given.
4. We need to encourage the out of county young people to get involved and we should support them in doing so.
5. We need to carry on developing relationships with all members of the corporate parenting panel.

We hope you enjoyed the presentation we have put together if you have any question don't hesitate to ask.

Thanks from members of CiCC.



Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2014-15

Fostering Service

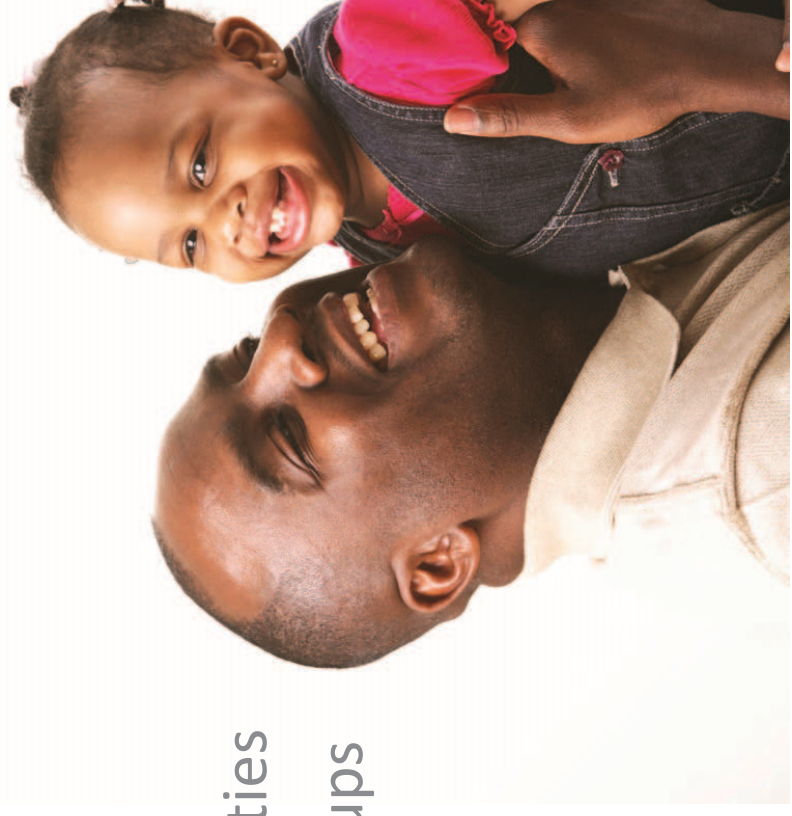


Current picture

We need carers for children and young people.

In particular, those who:

- Have challenging behaviour
- Are sibling groups, 2 or more
- Are over 12 years of age
- Have physical or learning disabilities
- Are from dual heritage/BME groups



Current picture

Current recruitment situation

- Enquiries and approvals are down year on year
- 11 new mainstream foster carers were approved in 2013-14
- We risk losing existing carers to other LAs
- We risk losing existing carers to IFAs



Aims and objectives

Overall marketing objectives

- Rebrand the service and go live Tuesday 1 April
- Promote Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) as the preferred agency to foster or adopt for
- Saturate the area so that CBC fostering service is a known brand
- Introduce low cost, high impact marketing channels
- Involve staff, carers, looked after children and the children in care council



Aims and objectives

Overall retention objectives

- Launch the new fees scheme on Tuesday 1 April
- Push the existing incentive scheme
- Improve existing communications methods with foster carers
- Involve carers in consultations about service changes and recruitment
- Make them feel like a valued part of the service



Aims and objectives

Number of foster carers needed

- Need to recruit at least 10 new carers in 2014-15
- Need to recruit at least 15 additional new carers in 2015-16



How?

Improved publicity materials

- Rebranded items distributed across Central Bedfordshire
- Monitoring process of where and when
- Updated regularly and campaign specific

Outreach Plan

- Wide and varied programme of locations
- Tag onto events currently taking place
- Deliver presentations to groups and companies



Advertising

- Ensure chosen advertising is cost effective
- Explore new online opportunities
- Embed a robust monitoring process

Social Media

- Facebook and Twitter pages
- Use to promote outreach activities
- Use to engage with potential carers and existing carers



Website

- Update existing content and maintain
- Include 'Vine' style videos and sound bites
- Introduce form to register interest

Other/additional

- Press bank for activities and events
- Closer working with community groups
- Targeted campaigns aimed at specific audiences



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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 02 June 2014
Subject: Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter four. Usually this is with comparison to activity in previous quarters, however, the shared service arrangement ended at the end of December 2013 and therefore it is difficult to compare activity like for like.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services 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. For the first three quarters of the year the Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services had an annual budget of £6.6 million, including costs of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and provision on behalf of Bedford Borough Council under Shared Service arrangement. For this final quarter Central Bedfordshire Council have provided Fostering Services as a single agency and budgets have been adjusted to reflect this.

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:

4. As part of the disaggregation, staff moved into their respective authority's service. The Fostering Service is now incorporated in the Corporate Parenting Service.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Fostering and 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 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 first period for Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption and Fostering Service to report on following the disaggregation.
11. This report covers activity in the period January to March 2014. It is difficult to provide comparative data with previous quarters due to the service now being a single agency as previous reports reported data as a shared service.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

12. During the last quarter, a total of 29 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming a Foster Carer. Of these enquiries, 9 were in January (16 in January 2013), 7 in February (11 in February 2013) and 13 in March (15 in March 2013). Numbers are down from last year but reflect the fact that since January 2014 Central Bedfordshire Fostering Service has been operating as a single agency. From the rebranding exercise and recruitment activity already commenced the figures are gradually increasing. In March 2014 there were only 2 fewer enquiries than in March 2013 when the service was joint with Bedford Borough Council. This should therefore be recognised as an

achievement and these figures should increase further as the revised recruitment strategy is implemented during the year.

January

Marketing activities included an article on the two Foster Carers who received their MBE nomination. This appeared in the local press. A newspaper advert ran in all editions of *Beds on Sunday*. In addition, the existing core publicity items were given a temporary re-brand and reprinted to remove reference to Bedford Borough. The same adjustment was made to the fostering and adoption pages of the Central Bedfordshire Council website and all external websites holding dual branded information were also contacted to remove Bedford Borough references.

The Central Bedfordshire Council website was the most cited source of advertising during this month and the newspaper advert generated one enquiry.

February

Contact was made with all Central Bedfordshire Council public buildings to replace the existing poster with temporarily rebranded items. The Service promoted a Private Fostering Awareness week and an advert ran in *News Central* in the last week of February to tie in with this. The website was amended to include a case study of a real life private foster carer. A press release was sent out by Central Communications but only one magazine published it.

The Central Bedfordshire Council was the most cited source of advertising during this month. Two enquiries came from word-of-mouth referrals and one from a flier, though the location is unknown.

March

Throughout March, the new marketing and recruitment manager put together the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy and Outreach Plan for 2014-15 and started the full re-brand on all publicity items, display items and advertising. Two new email addresses were set up to separate Fostering enquiries from Adoption enquiries and an online form was introduced to the Central Bedfordshire Council website, to allow the public to submit an enquiry online. At the start of March, the rebranded bookmarks were distributed across Central Bedfordshire and a Facebook campaign was implemented to run in the last two weeks of March.

In March, all enquiries apart from one were due to Facebook advertising and the Central Bedfordshire Council website.

13. In Quarter four, 19 assessments of new Foster Carers commenced of which 12 were assessments of family/friends carers where the child was previously known to them as an extended family member/ connected person.
14. Two new fostering households were approved by the Fostering Panel in Quarter four.

15. 19 children became Looked After during Quarter four. 14 of these were placed with Family/Friends in Regulation 24 placements. The remaining 5 children were placed with in-house carers.
16. At 31March 2014 there were a total of 85 children living with in-house foster carer (43 with general foster carers and 42 placed with family and friends carers). 109 children were living in Independent Fostering Provision. This represents 56% children placed with IFA carers and 44% placed with in-house carers (including Family and Friends Carers). As of the 31March 2014 there were 29 family and friends carers looking after 42 children.
17. During this quarter a lot of work went into setting up a fees scheme for foster carers which went live on the 01April 2014. The fees scheme will help the service become more competitive with its neighbouring Local Authorities and I.F.A.'s and help us to recruit carers who might otherwise not be able to afford to foster. The new scheme offers a financial reward element rather than just pay a boarding out allowance which covered the cost of caring for the child/children

Training for Foster Carers

18. 12 Training Courses took place during Quarter four, involving 79 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as a separate preparation course for prospective family and friends carers. The other training provided were short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

All foster carers in their first year of approval have to complete an induction programme which includes completion of their T.S.D. (training, support and development) standards. 56 households have now achieved the standards. This is an increase of 5 households since last Quarter. 15 households are in the process of completing their TSD standards within the agreed timescale. A further 14 are still outstanding and additional support is being put in place to help these carers achieve the standards as a matter of urgency.

Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

19. The Fostering Service joint arrangement with Central Bedfordshire providing a service for Bedford Borough Council, ended on 31December 2013. The disaggregation process was successful with no significant risks/issues occurring during the process. As a single agency, Central Bedfordshire Council Fostering Service moved to new premises in Stephenson Court on 16 March 2014 and new working styles were introduced as part of the My Space project. Many of the staff group are now either mainly home based or working in and out of Stephenson's court or other offices around the county rather than being based entirely in one office. The move went smoothly and staff have adjusted well to these changes and to being part of the new Corporate Parenting Service.

Following the disaggregation, some Foster Carers have been re-allocated new supervising Social Worker due to some staff moving over to Bedford Borough.

All Foster Carers have now had an opportunity to start working with their new supervising Social Workers. There are currently no gaps in service provision.

Plans for the next financial year

20. Whilst this report reflects the work of the fostering service for the quarter 4 period, it is also important to plan ahead and outline our priorities.
21. The Fostering Service has been through many changes during quarter 4 and it will be important in the next quarter to help staff settle into their new environment, new working style and within the newly created Corporate Parenting Service. Staff are already benefitting from developing closer working relationships with their colleagues, supporting each other, foster carers and children so that they receive an improved service.
22. During the next quarter work will be done to ensure our readiness for any inspection should Ofsted decide to inspect the service in the near future.
23. The other main priority for the service will be to recruit more foster carers. We need to increase the pool of foster carers and decrease reliance on the use of I.F.A. placements. With a new interim marketing and recruitment manager in post and the new fees scheme in place it is likely that the service be able to recruit a net gain of 20 more fostering households during the next financial year. This will give more placement choice and, where appropriate, consideration will be given to take opportunities to bring children back from I.F.A. placements to more local in house placements where children's needs can be better met.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers (Open to public inspection):

None

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 02 June 2014
Subject: Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service
Report of: Edwina Grant, Director Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the Statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations
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.

Adoption and Fostering are key statutory services to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £8,044,710 million. 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 would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. There are no staffing issues.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Adoption and Fostering affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

7. There are no sustainability issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the statutory reports.

Background

8. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Services and Fostering Services to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
9. The Adoption and Fostering service continued to be a shared service with Bedford Borough Council until the end of December 2013. This was hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Therefore, the Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils up to the end of December 2013. Thereafter, the reports focus on activity as a single CBC service.

Adoption Services

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Scrutiny Committee. An Annual Report will be produced by the end of May each year covering the preceding April to March period. In addition a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. In 2013/14 there was an increase in the number of children whose cases were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 48 children, an increase from 41 children from the two authorities in the previous 12 months. 29 households were approved as adopters, an increase from 22 in 2012/13 and matches of 20 children to adopters were made.

12. 10 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further 20 being granted Special Guardianship. The number of adoptions was an increase from 6 the previous year, and the overall number of children where a permanent legal option was secured via adoption or Special Guardianship increased from 18 in 2012/13 to 30 in 2013/14
13. As of the 31 March 2014, 12 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 92 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
14. There were 17 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives, a slight drop from the previous 12 month period. Post Adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support was provided.
15. As part of the continued Government reform of adoption services, a range of measures is planned for implementation 2012 to 2015 to increase the number and speed of adoptions. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' for each council, changes to adopter recruitment processes and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. The Adoption Services is in a strong position to meet the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.

Fostering Services

16. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This is achieved by production of an Annual Report to this Committee in September each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
17. 30 new fostering households were approved during 2013-14, a decrease of 19 in the previous year.
18. 224 children were placed in full-time foster placements at the end of March 2014, of whom 85 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council up to December 2013, there have been 381 referrals for new or a change of placement. 85 children were placed with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 109 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies, 8 placed with other Local Authorities and 22 placed in residential units.
19. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers dropped in 2013-14 by -29% from 2012-13. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. 164 households made formal application to become a foster carers either from a follow up enquiry as a member of the public or because they wished to care for a looked after child known to them as a family member or friend. This was an increase from the 213 applications received in 2012/13.

20. Over the course of the year 77 training activities were provided for foster carers on 41 topics. 587 delegates attended. A range of support is provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

Shared Service Arrangement

21. In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both Councils has been established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective fostering service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Adoption Agency Annual Report
Appendix B – Fostering Agency Annual Report

Background Papers (open to public inspection):

None



APPENDIX A

Adoption Agency

Annual Report

**For the period
2013 - 2014**

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption Agency during the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service. It also reflects that during the period of the report, from 1st April to 31st December 2013, the Council's adoption service operated as a shared service with Bedford Borough Council.
- 1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the adoption agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a six-monthly update report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The joint Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Adoption and Permanence Support Team was made up of the following staff until 31st December 2013:

- 1 x full time Team Manager
- 1 x full time Deputy Team Manager
- 4 x Senior Practitioners (3 full time equivalent)
- 8 x Social Workers (6.78 full time equivalent)
- 4 x Social Work Assistants (2 full time equivalent)
- 0.5 x Administrator for Letter-box contact
- 1 x Lifestory Senior Practitioner
- 2 x Administrators

As of 31st March 2014 the Adoption Team of Central Bedfordshire Council [as a single adoption agency] is made up of the following staffing compliment:

- 1x full time Team Manager
- 3x Senior Practitioners (2 full time equivalent)
- 4x Social Workers (3.5 full time equivalent)
- 2x Social Work Assistants (1 full time equivalent)
- 1x Adopter Stage One Project Worker
- 0.5x Administrator for Letter-box contact
- 1x Administrator

- 1.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed this year.
- 1.1.3 Most staff have a number of years post-qualifying experience, and a programme of additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career. The team carries out the full functions of an adoption agency, with social workers carrying a range of adoption work, including adopters' assessments, family finding and work with adopted adults and their birth relatives.

- 1.1.3.1 The adoption agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering service area. While a shared service, these staff included a Business Support Officer with responsibility for adoption and special guardianship allowance payments, a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and Training Coordinator, and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the adoption panel. Since the disaggregation, the Adoption and Fostering Service has retained a Resources Team and a newly formed Marketing Team.

1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The adoption panel has for the time being remained a shared panel between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council with separate decision-makers from each authority.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required. There were 5 extra panels during 2013/2014 and the panel therefore met on 17 occasions.
- 1.2.3 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes recommendations as to their approval. Panel also considers the proposed match between all children with adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them. On 1st September 2012 amended Regulations determined that where a child's case was before the Court in respect of Court Proceedings, the adoption panel would no longer consider whether adoption should be the plan for the child, and this decision would instead be made by the Agency Decision Maker without a recommendation from the Adoption Panel.

1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 1.3.1 As at 31st March 2013 the Adoption Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Independent	Adoptive Mother
Independent	Adoptive Father
Independent	Birth Parent of an Adopted Child
Independent	Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant
Social Work Member	Fostering Team Manager, Bedford Borough
Social Work Member	Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (BBC)
Social Work Member	Social Worker, Adoption Team CBC
Medical Adviser	Consultant Community Paediatrician
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent (Vice Chair)	Adopted Person
Elected Member	Bedford Borough Council

- 1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are:

Professional Adviser	
Panel Secretary	

- 1.3.3 The Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings.

1.4 PANEL AND AGENCY DECISION MAKER ACTIVITY

- 1.4.1 In 2013/2014 the Adoption Panel met 17 times and considered one plan for a relinquished baby.
- 1.4.2 Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014 the Agency Decision Makers decided that adoption should be the plan for 91 children. Of these 48 were from Central Bedfordshire and 43 were from Bedford Borough. This compares to 41 in 2012/2013 and is an increase for the fourth year in succession.
- 1.4.3 In relation to approvals, the Panel recommended that 29 households were suitable to adopt a child. This compares to 22 households in 2012/2013. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.4 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 48 children should be placed with particular adopters. Of these 20 were from Central Bedfordshire and 28 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 21 children in 2012/2013 from Central Bedfordshire Council.

1.5 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1.5.1 The Adoption Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members. This year, due to the number of cases and business on the agenda, it has been a challenge to find time for the 'bite-size' training on panel days. However, a 'bite size session' was held in May 2013 on 'Loving Waters', a technique demonstrated at Preparation Group to adopters as a means of understanding attachment difficulties.
- 1.5.2 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.
- 1.5.3 A full day's training was held in November 2013, which looked at the national reforms to adopter recruitment and planning for children.

1.6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTION

- 1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire Council has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Following the Statutory Guidance on Adoption published in July 2013, social workers from the team meet to share information with enquirers within 5 working days.
- 1.6.2 Information Evenings are held by the Adoption and Permanence Support Team where current information on the needs of children requiring adoption and the process of assessment is given to those people who are interested in becoming prospective adopters. Since July 2013 these have been held monthly. Statistics in relation to enquiries received are included later in this report.

SECTION 2 – CHILDREN AND ADOPTION

2.0 – CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.0.1 In 2013/2014, there were 48 children from Central Bedfordshire referred to the service for adoption. In the same period there were 43 children from Bedford Borough referred to the service .
- 2.0.2 During 2013/2014 a further 58 looked after children were referred for permanence planning, where the primary plan was long-term fostering or permanency by way of a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order. This is an increase from the 30 referrals in 2012/2013.

2.1 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION

- 2.1.0 Of the 91 children with plans for adoption in 2013/2014, 48 were from Central Bedfordshire. Of the 48 children, 13 children had been placed with prospective adopters by 31st March 2014, with a further 5 having been matched but not yet placed. The team were still family finding for 14 children, three of whom were likely to remain with their current foster carers. 6 children, representing two groups of three siblings, returned home to the care of their parents, and 8 children were placed with wider family members under an SGO. 2 children's plans were rescinded in favour of long term fostering.
- 2.1.1 In order to avoid case drift for children, social workers are asked to refer children for family finding when adoption is a possible outcome for that child. This does not mean that all children referred will subsequently be adopted, but ensures that robust planning is considered as part of a child's care plan. In many cases, children safely return to their families or are placed with extended family members under other Orders, such as Special Guardianship.
- 2.1.2 In 2013/2014, reforms to the Family Justice system began to take effect with the average timescale for care proceedings to conclude showing a marked reduction enabling us to place children in a timely way.

2.2 – PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN

- 2.2.1 Members of the Adoption Team were active in facilitating the placements of the 48 children from the two authorities placed for adoption in 2013/2014. This compares to the placement of 21 children in the previous year.
- 2.2.2 There were 9 sibling groups placed for adoption during 2013/2014, of which 3 are from Central Bedfordshire.

2.3 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT

- 2.3.1 Of the 20 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2013/2014, 11 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire. 4 were placed with adopters recruited by Bedford Borough and 3 more were placed with adopters approved by another authority. Two children were placed inter-country with relatives in Ireland
- 2.3.2 No children were placed under the new 'Fostering to Adopt' regulations. The adoption team has guidelines in place to consider this as an option for children, however it is recognised that this will only be an option for a small number of children in any one year.

2.4 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.4.1 Of the 20 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in the year 2013/2014, 18 were White British, and two were of White/Asian ethnicity.

2.5 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.5.1 Of the 20 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2013/2014, 12 were aged 2 years or under, 4 were between 3-5 years and 4 were 5 and above.

2.6 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.6.1 Of the 20 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 12 were female and 8 were male.

2.7 – ADOPTION ORDERS / SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

- 2.2.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 17 children during the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014. Of these 10 were for children from Central Bedfordshire and 7 from Bedford Borough. This is an increase in the numbers of adoption orders granted in 2012/2013, which was 12 (6 from Central Bedfordshire).
- 2.2.2 Special Guardianship Orders were made in respect of 20 children. This is an increase for the third year running, last year's total was 12 children.

SECTION 3 – ADOPTERS

3.0 – THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SUPPORT TEAM

- 3.0.1 Every child looked after who may need a new permanent family has a social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. Family Finding Social Workers attend regular permanence planning meetings with other professionals involved with the child. For those children for whom a return to the care of his / her parents or a member of the extended family is not possible, adoption or long term fostering will be the plan. Family Finding Social Workers are active in identifying not just

adoptive families, but also foster families, as appropriate to the needs of the child. This helps ensure that permanence is achieved for all children in a timely manner.

3.1 – RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS

- 3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for both children from Central Bedfordshire, and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families, a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. Drop-in sessions were held in July 2013 as well as specific drop-in events during National Adoption Week in November 2013. A social media campaign using twitter and email alerts has been used. Advertising in local newspapers and magazines was used to publicise events.

3.2 – THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

- 3.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013. We have since July successfully implemented the two stage process for adopters which was introduced as part of the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda
- 3.2.2 98 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in 2013/2014. This represents the joint agency from 1st April to 31st December and Central Bedfordshire as a single agency from 1st January. At 31st March Central Bedfordshire had 12 sets of adopters in Stage one of the process and 8 in Stage 2. In total 27 households were approved during the period.

3.3 – ETHNICITY OF ADOPTERS

- 3.3.1 Of the adopters approved 25 households were White British, 2 were Asian, one was White Scottish, 1 was White British/Italian and one was White British/Asian.

3.4 – POST APPROVAL SUPPORT

- 3.4.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team from approval, through the process of placement of children, to the making of an Adoption Order.
- 3.4.2 Once an Adoption Order has been made, adopters can continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs through the Adoption and Permanence Support Team.

3.5 – TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS

- 3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption team provide the preparation training for adopters. Adopters also have access to the full training programme offered to the Agency's foster

carers and adopters. This ongoing training is available to both approved adopters as well as to adoptive parents at any point after an Adoption Order has been granted.

3.5.2 During the period April 2013 to July 2013 a four day preparation training programme was held. Since the changes to the adoption process in July 2013 a new modular training programme has been introduced. This runs monthly with adopters attending at least three foundation modules during the period of their assessment prior to presentation at adoption panel

3.5.3 The training modules are

The Child
Adoption For Life
The Adoption Process.

3.5.4 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme, and again when prospective adopters attend Adoption Panel. The feedback to Panel during the past 12 months has been universally positive.

SECTION 4 – ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

4.0 – POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. New legislation about to be published at this time requires all adoptive families to be provided with information about adoption services available locally and how to access them. This practice is already well-established in Central Bedfordshire.

4.0.2 These families either self-refer or come to the attention of the department via another agency. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.

4.0.3 As of 31st March 2014, the team was working directly with 12 adopted children and their families who were in need of support. This includes 2 families where a social worker from the team trained in Theraplay delivered this intervention to assist the development of attachment in the new families.

4.0.4 A number of adopted children and their families were assessed as being in need of therapeutic support. It is expected that this is provided by community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). In a small number of cases this year CAMHS did not have the resources to meet the identified needs of children or deemed that children did not meet their referral criteria.

4.0.5 The team have a mailing list of adoptive families who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days, some of which are provided by the service and some by Adoption UK. Since the disaggregation with Bedford Borough we have continued to provide some of these events as a shared services to families living in Bedfordshire.

- 4.0.6 The Adoption & Permanence team also provide groups for adopted children and their families, including Talking About Adoption workshops. All adoption support referrals have an assessment of need and adoption support plan upon request.
- 4.0.7 Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of 92 children many of which have required direct intervention to support all the parties involved in the contact arrangements, i.e. adopted children and young people, their adoptive parents and their birth families. .

4.1 – SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted people seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Central Bedfordshire, a counselling service is offered and information is provided to other councils who are supporting people in their areas who were adopted through Bedfordshire. Specific leaflets outlining this service are available to enquirers through the Adoption Duty Desk.
- 4.1.2 Not only is an initial counselling interview offered to those seeking birth records, but work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- 4.1.3 Birth relatives seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service. In the case of birth relatives, they are not given any identifying information about the adopted person.
- 4.1.4 At 31st March 2014 the Adoption Team were providing support to 17 adult adoptees and birth relatives who were seeking access to records and support in tracing.

4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

- 4.2.1 There no disruptions in 2013/14 of children placed by Central Bedfordshire, meaning that there had only been two disruptions in the last 4 years. This low figure reflects the care given to the matching process between children and adoptive families, the resilience and commitment of adoptive parents and the support given to them and the children in the critical early months of placements.

SECTION 5 – OTHER ACTIVITIES

5.0 – INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

- 5.0.1 Inter-Country adoption has become increasingly more complex in terms of the legal requirements of those countries that permit children to be placed for adoption outside of their country of origin. In recognition of this and given the specialist knowledge and expertise which this work demands, the Adoption Agency has a Service Level Agreement with a

voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, Parents and Children Together (PACT), which is recognised as being a leading agency in this area of work, to provide this service on its behalf.

- 5.0.2 Families who are normally resident in Bedfordshire wishing to adopt children from overseas are referred to PACT who will provide information and preparation training and will assess and approve families wishing to adopt children from overseas.
- 5.0.3 Families are required to pay for their assessment in accordance with Regulations but Bedfordshire funds all of the initial counselling interviews.
- 5.0.4 During 2013/2014 PACT received 4 enquiries concerning inter-country adoption from residents of Central Bedfordshire. No enquirers followed up their enquiry with a request for an initial interview. For the third year running this is a decrease in activity in respect of inter-country adoption.

5.1 – THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

- 5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Agency,(until December 2013 alongside Bedford Borough) is a member of the local adoption consortium whose aim is to work in partnership to share information about children and approved adopters to make local matches and to share good practice. The other full members are:
 - Buckinghamshire County Council
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Luton Borough Council
 - Milton Keynes CouncilAssociate member: St Francis Children's Society

5.2 – BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTERING (BAAF)

- 5.2.1 Central Bedfordshire Council is a full member of BAAF which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and voluntary adoption agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.

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- 5.2.2 During the last 12 months the agency has continued its membership of New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies.

5.3 – INDEPENDENT BIRTH FAMILY COUNSELLING

- 5.3.1 The agency provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling and support service. This service is provided by Adoption Plus Limited on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency. Adoption Plus is an independent adoption support agency.
- 5.3.2 The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be adopted an opportunity to talk about their feelings. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members and the counselling will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
- 5.3.3 The contract with Adoption Plus was renewed in 2013/2014 with ongoing contract reviews to ensure there is maximum support for those accessing the service and to ensure optimum take up by birth parents.

5.4 – THE ADOPTION SCORECARD

- 5.4.1 In 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan For Adoption: Tackling Delay' in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions.
- 5.4.2 The scorecard details the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving in with their adoptive family and the length of time between the council having court authority to place a child and them moving in with their adoptive family.
- 5.4.3 The scorecards published in November 2012 and January 2014 showed that performance in relation to timeliness of placements was in the upper quartile of all councils and better than the targets set by government.

SECTION 6 CONCLUSION

- 6.0.1 2013/14 was the fourth year of the shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. The decision was taken to disaggregate the service and this was achieved in January 2014.
- 6.0.2 There has been a continued increase in activity across all aspects of the service. The increase in looked after children in both councils over the last three years has resulted in a hugely increased number of referrals for permanence planning, both for adoption and for long-term fostering or for other legal alternative permanent options, such as Special Guardianship or Residence Orders.
- 6.0.3 In response, the service has increased the number of assessments of prospective adopters, resulting in increased numbers of approvals and adoption orders granted. In order to meet continued demand a recruitment target for adopters has been set again for 2014/2015, based on known and likely numbers and needs of children requiring adoption. The target has been set at 24 new approvals in 2014/2015.

6.0.4

The Government's national reform of adoption has continued during 2013/2014. The statutory Guidance for Adoption, published in July 2013, restructured the approval process for adopters, made significant amounts of funding available to Local Authorities and introduced the concept of 'adoption passports' to equalise adoption support services. Central Bedfordshire has used the money provided by the Adoption Reform Grant to embed the new adopter approval process, improve our family finding for children and increase legal and medical advice to Children's Services.

6.0.5

As reported above, in March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both councils was established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process has involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff and has resulted in a smooth transition to ensure that our services to children and families remains of a high standard

6.0.6

The Adoption and Fostering Service relocated in March 2014 to Stephenson Court in Bedford. The service now is part of the Corporate Parenting Service under a single Head of Service. It is anticipated that this will further enhance the quality of service delivered by maximising opportunities for joint working with our colleagues in Looked After Children and Leaving and After-care.

Report written by:

Jane Singh
Adoption Team Manager

Telephone: 0300 300 8090

This information can be made available in
Large print and in other languages if required

Për Informacion

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Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council

Adoption, Permanence and Support Team
Unit 16, Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Park
Bedford
MK44 3WJ

www.bedford.gov.uk
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 300 8090
Fax: 0300 300 8255



APPENDIX B

Fostering Agency

Annual Report

**For the period
2013/2014**



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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 Following a local government re-organisation in April 2009 Central Bedfordshire Council hosted the Fostering Service as a shared one on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. This report describes the activities of both Councils' Fostering Agencies, up to the end of December 2013. Thereafter it reports on the sole activities of Central Bedfordshire's Fostering Agency.
- 1.0.2 The report will note the Fostering Agencies' achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identify recommendations for the development of the service. Attached to the report is the Fostering Panel Chair's report.

1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service was made up of the following full-time equivalent staff as of 31st March 2014:
- 1 x full time Team Manager
 - 1 x full time Deputy Team Manager
 - 2 x Senior Practitioners
 - 13 x Social Workers
 - 1 x Social Work Assistant
 - 1 x Senior Social Work Assistant
 - 1 x Duty Worker
 - 1 x Training Co-ordinator
 - 1 x Recruitment and Marketing Manager
- 1.1.2 The service is supported by 2 full time administrators.
- 1.1.3 The workforce is diverse and includes staff of both genders, and from different European and black and minority ethnic groups.
- 1.1.4 All staff have access to the Council's extensive learning and development programme, and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The service also provides diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- 1.1.5 Most staff have extensive post-qualifying experience, and a programme of induction and additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.6 The fostering agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Fostering and Adoption service area. These staff include a Business Support Officer with responsibility for foster care payments, a Recruitment and Marketing Manager, Training coordinator, and the Panel Advisors and Secretaries who support the fostering and permanence panels.

SECTION 2 – THE PANELS

2.1 REPORT FROM FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR

- 2.1.1 The attached Fostering Panel Chair's Report (Appendix 1), includes valuable information and feedback on the function of panel business. Statistical information regarding panel business is attached (Appendix 2).

SECTION 3 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING

3.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME

- 3.1.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Family Link carers are foster carers who are recruited, approved and trained in the same way as other foster carers. They receive regular support and guidance from a supervising social worker.
- 3.1.2 Family Link Foster carers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Periods of short breaks will be carefully planned and could be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.1.3 Once agreement has been given for the care package from the Resource Panel, a careful process of matching takes place, taking into account the individual needs of the child and their family and the carer's abilities
- 3.1.4 On the 31st March 2014, there were 7 Family Link carers approved. These carers were supporting 19 children by providing regular short breaks. There was also 1 salaried family link fee-based carer who was linked to 6 children who had complex medical needs.

3.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME

- 3.2.1 The Youth Care Scheme is a comprehensive, fee paid fostering scheme which provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.2.2 As of 31st March 2014, there were 6 approved Youth Care households, caring for 4 children.

SECTION 4 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING

4.1 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.1.1 Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014, the Fostering Service received a total of 449 referrals for foster placements of which 323 were for children becoming newly looked after. The remainder of referrals were for a change of placement.

- 4.1.2 Of the 449 referrals received, 219 were Central Bedfordshire children and 230 were Bedford Borough children. 115 of the referrals were for newly looked after children and were placed in house, 4 young people were placed in residential units and 59 children (33 Central Bedfordshire and 26 Bedford Borough children) were placed in an Independent Fostering Agency placement as a result of becoming looked after. 145 of the referrals did not result in a placement. This would have been for various reasons, for example, Section 20 was not agreed on or the Interim Care Order was not granted.
- 4.1.3 The referral for the child includes the matching criteria that are essential and preferable when looking for a placement for a child, and a risk assessment is also considered. This is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.
- 4.1.4 Respite placements were provided on 124 occasions, with 15 children having regular respite as part of their care plan.
- 4.1.5 Of the new referrals for foster placements, 16 came through the Emergency Duty Service, an increase of 5 from 2012/13.
- 4.1.6 As at 31st March 2014 there were a total of 85 children living with in-house foster carers and 109 living in Independent Fostering Agency provision. This represents 56% children placed with IFA carers and 44% with in house carers.

4.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.2.1 Over half the children referred because they were newly looked after were aged 0-5 years. From Central Bedfordshire the age distribution was as follows:
- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 0-5 years | 43 children |
| 6-12 years | 19 children |
| 13-18 years | 19 young people |

From Bedford Borough the age distribution was:

0-5 years	19 children
6-12 years	6 children
13-18 years	9 young people

The age profile of referrals has changed with more children now being referred in the 0-5 age group than in previous years.

- 4.2.2 Of the 81 children referred from Central Bedfordshire, 49 were female and 32 male. Of the 34 children referred from Bedford Borough 20 were female and 14 were male.
- 4.2.3 In terms of ethnicity of the 81 children referred from Central Bedfordshire, 55 were white/British, 7 were white/English, 5 were white/other, 1 was white/Irish, 8 were mixed white/black Caribbean, 1 was Asian, 1 was Chinese, 1 was black British and 2 were recorded as white/traveller. Of the 34 children referred from Bedford Borough, 20 were white/British, 5 were white/English, 1 was mixed white/black Caribbean, 4 were mixed white/Asian, 1 was mixed other, 2 were black African and 1 was black/British.

4.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.3.1 There were 30 sibling groups within the children referred for fostering during the year. This comprised 22 sibling groups from Central Bedfordshire and 8 from Bedford Borough. One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with siblings wherever possible. 4 of the sibling groups comprised 3 or more children. Large sibling groups are more difficult to match with suitable foster placements, particularly when seeking to place them together, which is the aim wherever possible.

4.4 TYPE OF FOSTER PLACEMENT PROVIDED

- 4.4.1 Of the 174 children placed in foster placements this year, 115 were placed with carers assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire Council on behalf of both Councils. The advantage of this is that staff in the service had prior knowledge of the children and positive working relationships with the carers, thus enhancing fostering support for these placements.

4.5 CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT AT 31ST MARCH 2014

- 4.5.1 As at 31st March 2014, there were 85 fostering households with full fostering approval, and a further 12 with temporary Regulation 24 approval pending a full Family and Friends assessment.
- 4.5.2 A total of 85 children were in these placements, while 109 were in IFA placements.
- 4.5.3 In November 2011 both Councils entered into a regional Framework Agreement for the commissioning of placements in Independent Fostering Agencies. This agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 18 preferred providers. After the first year of this arrangement there was evidence that the average costs of placements had reduced and there were clearer expectations in respect of quality and outcome for children.
- 4.5.5 The number of children in external placements has significantly increased over the past few years. A new fees scheme has been introduced (effective from 1st April 2014) in Central Bedfordshire. It is envisioned that this and the revised recruitment activities will help change this trend.

SECTION 5 – FOSTER CARERS

5.1 FOSTERING ENQUIRIES

- 5.1.1 In 2013 -14, there were 164 enquiries by people who were interested in becoming Foster Carers compared with 213 in 2012 -13. This is a year on year (YOY) decrease of -29%.
- 5.1.2 The best 3 months for enquiries were August 2013 with 30, July with 18, then October with 15. The worst month was during the build up to the disaggregation in December, when only 1 enquiry came through.

- 5.1.3 Numbers remained low during January and February 2014 during the transition period and then picked up again in March 2014, with 13. This is only 2 enquiries less YOY than when it was a joint service and should be recognised as an achievement.
- 5.1.4 From April to December 2013, 53 enquiries were from Central Bedfordshire residents, 53 enquiries were from Bedford Borough residents and 11 were from outside of both areas. In January, February and March, 16 enquiries were from Central Bedfordshire residents, 9 enquiries were thought to be from Bedford Borough residents, but they were recorded as unknown, and 4 were from outside of both areas.

5.2 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR FOSTER CARERS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

- 5.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to undertake a training programme as part of the preparation and assessment process.
- 5.2.2 In July 2013 amendments to the Children Act 1989 brought changes to the assessment process for general foster carers. There is now a 2 stage assessment process and an expectation that the full assessment is presented to fostering panel and a recommendation made about approval within an 8-month timescale. The Fostering Service generally completes all such assessments within a 6 month timescale.

Implementation of new Regulations on 1st April 2011 changed the way in which family members or friends of looked after are assessed if the child needed to be placed with them prior to a full fostering assessment being completed. In this situation temporary approval may be granted under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations pending a full fostering assessment being carried out and presented to the Fostering Panel. This temporary approval lasts for 16 weeks in the first instance and can be extended for one period of 8 weeks.

In terms of assessments started between April 1st 2013 and March 31st 2014 there were 103. These assessments would have been a mixture of Regulation 24 assessments, full Family and Friends assessments, assessments on prospective foster carers wanting to provide general fostering or Special Guardianship assessments. During the year there were 58 requests to agree temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer to allow an immediate placement (Regulation 24 of Care Planning, Placements and Care Review (England) Regulation 2010). 21 of these carers were given temporary approval and went on to be fully assessed as Family and Friend carers. 37 of these Regulation 24 placements were not agreed.

5.3 ETHNICITY OF CARERS

- 5.3.1 At 31st March 2014, 13 out of 85 fostering households included carers from black or ethnic minority groups. At 13.7% this ratio broadly reflects the population in Bedfordshire.
- 5.3.2 Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014, the agency approved 27 fostering households. 23 of these were White British, 3 were Asian and 1 was from a Turkish background.

SECTION 6 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS

- 6.0 All foster carers are expected to attend relevant training recommended by their supervising social worker. The service has a full and comprehensive training programme for carers, from preparation training, through induction and core training through to more complex post-approval training.

6.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER

- 6.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, the 'Skills to Foster' course examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the local authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.
- 6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective carers to reflect on their values and attitudes to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.
- 6.1.3 During 2013/2014, the Fostering Service ran 5 of these courses and they were attended by 29 delegates (16 households) in total. In addition, bespoke preparation training was offered to friends and family foster carers. 5 such courses were organised and were attended by 26 delegates (16 households).
- 6.1.4 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete an Emergency First Aid course. 7 courses were held during 2013/2014 and these were attended by a total of 123 delegates.

6.2 SONS AND DAUGHTERS

- 6.2.1 During 2013/14, the Fostering Service ran holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which were activity based and aimed to support them with the impact of fostering in their family. This included attendance at an outdoor activity centre (20 attendees) and horse riding (12 children). 35 children also attended a Christmas party in December 2013.
- 6.2.2 A joint workshop for sons and daughters of foster carers and looked after children was also held which included drama and cooking workshops, as well as first aid. 15 children attended this workshop and the feedback was very positive.

6.3 INDUCTION

- 6.3.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards. The implementation of the standards has been supported by ongoing workshops for carers alongside group supervision for supporting social workers. Aside from having the opportunity to meet members of the service who work with looked after children, there are also opportunities to ask questions and receive essential information about the agency's policies and procedures. In addition, carers are made familiar with the comprehensive training opportunities available throughout their fostering career.

6.4 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 6.4.1 Each year, the service devises a comprehensive programme covering a wide variety of the skills and knowledge needed in order for carers to develop their careers in fostering. There were a total of 77 different courses on 38 subjects held over the year.
- 6.4.2 Each carer is required to have a record of their training and development needs, although other alternatives to formal training courses are encouraged in order to meet the minimum standards. This can include home study, training, reading and also on-line training. This can be especially helpful for carers who find it hard to attend training dates. There is also the opportunity for carers to complete an NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or BTEC in Advanced Foster Care Skills.
- 6.4.3 In total, 587 delegates attended training courses held over the year, which is an increase on the previous year. This demonstrates the commitment that the agency has towards training foster carers and illustrates the willingness of carers to develop their own knowledge and skill base.
- 6.4.4 A total of 58 households have now completed their TSD standards. 15 are still in the process of completing in the required timescale.

SECTION 7 – SUPPORT FOR CARERS

- 7.0.1 Every foster carer from the agency receives regular supervision and support from a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, the agency provides foster carers with an Independent Advisor from the Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers. There are also local support groups of foster carers that meet regularly to discuss fostering issues and to enjoy occasional social events such as the annual awards presentation or a cheese and wine evening. Foster carers also have access to telephone support out of hours, and can access the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers.
- 7.0.2 All new carers are also matched to a foster carer mentor who provides formal and practical guidance and support through the carer's first placement and beyond.

7.1 FOSTER CARERS' SUPPORT GROUPS

- 7.1.1 Foster Carers' Support Groups meet regularly in the north and south of the county. During the year, additional support groups were provided for men, single carers and Family Link carers. A total of 24 support groups ran with 170 delegates. Additional and regular support groups were also provided for Youth Carers. Many of these support groups had speakers on relevant subjects. Although educational, foster carers were also able to enjoy socialising with other foster carers in an informal setting.
- 7.1.2 A support group specifically for Family and Friends carers continued in 2013/2014. The group meets quarterly and is open to foster carers, and those looking after related children subject to Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.
- 7.1.3 Foster Carers Talk Time is organised every 3 months (previously known as the foster carers forum). These meetings give foster carers the opportunity to meet with managers and senior

managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Following the Talk Time meeting a newsletter is sent out to all foster carers updating them of areas discussed at Talk Time as well as providing information on a whole host of other topics relevant to fostering.

- 7.1.4 The annual Foster Carers Awards Ceremony and Social Event was held in May 2013 which was well attended by foster carers, their children and children in care. Staff and elected members also attended, including the Directors of Children's Services from Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. 11 long service awards were given out on the evening for those achieving 5, 10,15 and 20 years of service.
- 7.1.5 One set of foster carers also received MBEs in the Queen's New Years Honours.

7.2 THE MENTORING SCHEME

- 7.2.1 The Fostering Service offers peer mentoring to all new and existing carers. This service for carers, staffed by carers, offers encouragement, support, and opportunities for collaborative working. It also allows experienced foster carers the chance to develop professionally.
- 7.2.2 Carers who join the scheme are linked with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer themselves. Mentors are trained to support foster carers in their role. As well as offering support to new carers, sometimes mentoring can be offered to experienced carers when they are undergoing a particularly challenging time. The service currently has 3 mentors who have varying experiences of fostering, including age ranges and types of approval. 6 more mentors will be recruited in the forthcoming year.

7.3 THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

- 7.3.1 Fostering managers and Social Workers offer an 'out of hours' service for carers. A mobile telephone number has been dedicated to this service and all carers have access to the number. The service is available from 5.20pm – 11pm weekdays and from 9am-11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service ensures that foster carers can readily access telephone support from an experienced fostering worker. Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued. Outside these hours foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty Team.

7.4 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION

- 7.4.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. Both Councils actively encourage and support the Association and provide financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quality newsletter. With the disaggregation of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough's Fostering Service, Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association still continues and has widened its remit. As well as supporting carers from the 2 Local Authorities they now work closely with carers from I.F.A.'s in the local area too.

7.5 BAAF AND THE FOSTERING NETWORK

- 7.5.1 Both local authorities are full members of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and independent fostering agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 7.5.2 The Fostering Service is a member of the BAAF Eastern Region, a group which meets quarterly to discuss and exchange best practice in the East Anglia region.
- 7.5.3 The Fostering Service is a member of The Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also able to have individual membership funded by the service, as well as access to The Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Service.

7.6 OFSTED

- 7.6.1 Ofsted last inspected the Fostering Service in December 2012 when the service was judged to be good overall.
- 7.6.2 At that time Ofsted made 8 recommendations, an action plan to address the recommendations was drawn up and action completed in respect of all recommendations by 31st March 2013.

SECTION 8 – CONCLUSION

- 8.0.1 We have had another successful year, continuing to deliver a high quality service both as a shared arrangement and as a single agency since January 2014. Although the two authorities have now disaggregated we will continue to work in partnership with Bedford Borough, for example, joint training initiatives. Due to the disaggregation some Central Bedfordshire Council children continue to be in placement with Bedford Borough's foster carers and vice versa. Both authorities continue to work together regarding these placements to ensure children's needs are met and their care is not affected by the ending of the shared service.
- 8.0.2 This year the service has continued to face the challenge from the significant increase in the referrals of children requiring a foster placement, due to the increase of looked after children in both councils. Whilst the overall number of children accommodated in in-house fostering placements has increased, the service has not been able to accommodate all children and the number of new placements made in Independent Fostering Agencies has significantly increased. In particular, both authorities have accommodated a number of large sibling groups where we have struggled to find placements. With the introduction of a fee scheme as of 1st April 2014 it is hoped the pool of in-house carers will increase and we will become less reliant on the use of IFA placements.
- 8.0.3 The increase in numbers of looked after children, and the change in regulations in 2011 concerning Family and Friends foster carers has continued to mean significantly more placements with relatives are subject to fostering regulations. The number of family and friends assessments continues to increase and coupled with changes to the Family Justice system, particularly in relation to timescales have created challenges in completing complex assessments in very tight timescales. Many of these Family and Friends assessments

progress into SGO placements which have provided positive outcomes for those children. There has been a sharp increase in the number of SGOs granted this year compared to previous years. During 2013-14 there were 20 SGOs granted compared to 12 in 2012-13 and 12 in 2011-12.

- 8.0.5 We again reviewed our advertising and marketing campaign to ensure maximum value for money and effectiveness. Since becoming a single agency Fostering Service, we have revised the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy, aiming to increase its presence in the community and promote CBC as the Fostering Service of choice.
- 8.0.6 The service has to be able to respond to the identified needs of children from Central Bedfordshire so that they are appropriately placed with foster carers. Furthermore we need to ensure we replenish the number of approved carers who will resign or retire from fostering. We therefore aim to recruit 20 new fostering households (net gain) in 2014-15 including assessment of Family and Friends carers for children who otherwise would be placed outside their family network.
- 8.0.8 In January 2014 the Shared Service Arrangement between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council came to an end. This process was completed successfully with minimal disruption to staff, foster carers and the children placed. The Fostering Service successfully moved offices on 17th March 2014. They are now co-located with the Looked After Children colleagues and come under the umbrella of the newly created Corporate Parenting Service. This has already had a positive impact on the service provided to children in care and foster carers. The LAC and fostering service are now working much more closely together in order to ensure the needs of children in care are met in the most effective way.

Report composed by:

(Family Link care)
Annie Craig
Manager Fostering
Corporate Parenting Service
Central Bedfordshire Council
Unit 16, Stephenson Court
Fraser Road, Priory Business Park
Bedford, MK44 3WJ
Telephone: 0300 300 8090

This information can be made available in
Large print and in other languages if required

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Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council

*Unit 16, Stephenson Court
Fraser Road, Priory Business Park
Bedford, MK44 3WJ
Telephone: 0300 300 8090*

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 300 8090
Fax: 0300 300 8255

APPENDICES 1 – REPORT FROM FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR

9.1 INTRODUCTION

- 9.1.1 From April 2009 to December 2013 Central Bedfordshire hosted the Fostering Services as a shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. From January 2014 the two services separated and each Authority became responsible for its own fostering provision. The Panels also reflected this pattern. This Report is considering the period from April 2013 to March 2014. So, during that time two different systems operated. From April 2013 to December 2013 there were two Panels dealing with fostering work – the Fostering Panel and the Fostering and Permanence Panel. Each of these Panels met at least once a month (often more frequently) and each was Chaired by one of two Independent Chairs who liaised closely to ensure that there was consistency and co-ordination. From January 2014 each Authority set up its own Fostering and Permanence Panel. It is still very early days for the new Panels but the current picture seems to indicate that each Panel is likely to need to meet about 18 times a year. This Report will refer only to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for Central Bedfordshire for the time period January to March 2014.

9.2 PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 9.2.1 I (Kathy Bird) have chaired the Fostering Panel for Central Beds and Bedford Borough since October 2005. My background is as a qualified child care social worker and Manager since 1976 and I have worked mainly in the areas of Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Children with Disabilities and Residential Care. My colleague, Marion Hundleby, Chaired the Fostering and Permanence Panel, also since 2005. Marion is also a very experienced child care social worker and Manager who has specialised in Fostering, Permanence and Adoption work. Both Marion and I have worked as Independent Consultants for over 10 years and have worked with a wide range of local authorities and voluntary organisations. We are both independent of the two Authorities – a requirement of the Fostering Regulations 2011.
- 9.2.2 From April 2013 to December 2013 there was a Central list of Panel members that each Panel could call upon to be quorate. Panel membership was drawn from the following members:

Social Worker	Senior Practitioner (Adoption) CBC – Vice Chair
Social Worker	Deputy Manager (Adoption) CBC – Vice Chair
Social Worker	Independent – Vice Chair,
Educational Psychologist	CBC
Social Worker	Deputy Manager (LAC) – CBC
Social Worker	Family Group Meetings – Team Manager
Elected Member	BBC
Elected Member	CBC
Foster Care	IFA
Foster Carer	IFA
Health Visitor	BBC
Adoptive Parent	Independent
Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant	Independent
Family Group Meeting Co-Ordinator	Independent
Social Worker	Independent

- 9.2.3 All Panel members have shown a very high commitment to attending panels and it is obvious from their contributions that they put a great deal of time, thought and dedication into their roles on Panel. There has never been a problem in getting Panels together that are quorate (minimum of 5 members with Independent Chair and at least one social worker), even when calling additional and extended Panels.
- 9.2.4 Panel members receive their papers 7 working days in advance of Panel. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to five hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared.
- 9.2.5 **Transition to Single Panel**
In October 2013 the formal process began to split into two Panels – one for BBC, one for CBC.
- 9.2.6 I agreed with my colleague Chair and Managers that I would take on the CBC Fostering and Permanence Panel. We then circulated a document to all Panel members to help them decide which Panel they wanted to sit on in the future and where they were needed. Some Panel members such as Elected members and direct employees had no choice as to which Panel they sat on in the future. For the more Independent Panel members the process, in the end, ran very smoothly and most Panel members were able to sit on the Panel of their choice. A number of Panel members have opted to sit on both CBC and BBC Fostering and Permanence Panels.
- 9.2.7 In CBC we now have 11 Panel members on the Central list to call on for each Panel as well as two very experienced and competent Vice Chairs (one CBC Senior Practitioner, one Independent Social Worker).
- 9.2.8 **Areas for improvement**
Getting the balance of Panel members right on any Panel is a constant process of review as Panel Membership changes. It would be useful to recruit some new Panel members who are not involved with other Panels as this will help with availability on extra dates. It would also be useful if any new members had not done direct work in CBC before as this would help with the cases where Panel members are not allowed to sit due to conflicts of interest.
- 9.2.9 **Diversity**
Across the two Panels, and now in CBC, there has been a wide range of background, ethnicity and culture. Panel members are white British, black British, South African, Nigerian, Italian and American. Age ranges go from 33 years to 66 years of age. There are people who are currently fostering and people who have adopted. Some Panel members have very young families of their own, one Panel member was looked after outside their family as a young child, and many Panel members have experience of adoption and fostering in their immediate family. One Panel member is a wheelchair user and many Panel members have experience of disability in their immediate family.
- 9.2.10 **Areas for improvement**
It has always been a difficult issue to recruit enough males to get a balance at Panel and also to get people who are at the younger end of the age spectrum. On occasions Panels have had to go ahead with no males present and on two occasions this has been questioned by the Carers attending Panel. Getting a better balance of age and gender on Panel should be a high priority for the Panel Adviser to assist the Chair with in the year 2014 / 15.

9.3 PANEL SUPPORT

9.3.1 Panel Support

Panel work is supported throughout the whole process by the Panel Adviser. From March 2013 to December 2013 Panel had a very experienced and positive Panel Adviser who worked tirelessly to help us get Panel work as on track as possible. Fortunately for the Team (but unfortunately for the Panel!) that Manager then took over as CBC Team Manager for Fostering where her skills will be well used.

9.3.2 Within CBC presently, the role of Adviser to the Fostering Panel is still not filled permanently and we have so far had two Agency workers in this role. Both Agency workers have worked very hard to do their best to make things work but being new to the role, not knowing the Area or the staff and trying to do this at a time of such change has meant that consistency and follow through of some aspects of Panel work has not been as thorough as we have been used to.

9.3.3 Throughout the whole year Panel has been supported by two excellent Panel Administrators. These two workers have been working for CBC and BBC for many years and have now transferred across to CBC. I cannot speak highly enough of their effort, efficiency, organisational skills and good humour throughout difficult times. CBC is indeed fortunate to have two such dedicated workers and as Panel Chair I value their contribution very highly.

9.3.4 A Medical Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel Meetings and on occasions over this year the Medical Adviser has been asked to provide further detail on specific cases or conditions to better inform Panel's decision making.

9.3.5 A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing to Panel Meetings, this advice is usually available on the day of Panel.

9.3.6 Areas for improvement

It is imperative that the role of Panel Adviser is permanently recruited to as soon as possible. It is this role which provides the glue which ensures that the work of the Panel is carried through into Management, the teams and into everyday work.

9.4 PANEL ROLES / TASKS

9.4.1 The Panel task includes addressing work presented as follows:

- Applications from prospective foster carers for a range of tasks
- Applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for children already or about to be placed with them
- Taking a view in Connected Persons cases where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is proposed in order for assessments to be completed
- First Annual Reviews of foster carers and other Reviews which discuss continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care
- Matching of children to long term foster carers
- De-Registration of carers
- Quality Assurance of work presented

- 9.4.2 Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective carers or re-approve approved carers to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

9.5 APPRAISALS

- 9.5.1 The appraisal of all members takes place annually. All involved value this opportunity to consider Panel functioning, outside the day to day work of panel. The Appraisals, conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser, reflect on the Panel member's contribution for the year, any comments they have on improving processes and any training they wish to undertake over the next year.

9.6 PANEL TRAINING

- 9.6.1 There have been two full days training offered to all Panel members in the last year.
- 9.6.2 In July 2013 a Training Day was held for Fostering and Permanence Panel Members together with members of the Fostering Team. This day focussed on the child's journey through placement and covered specific sessions on Family Group Conferences, Family and Friends Assessments and Support, Duty and Matching, Resilience and Transitions, Delegated Authority and Internet Safety. It was a very positive and varied day and the day is one of the few opportunities that Panel members and Team members get to meet and talk together in a less formal setting.
- 9.6.3 In November 2013, Fostering and Permanence Panel members were given the opportunity (which a number of members took up) to attend the Adoption Panel Training Day which was looking at the Adoption Reforms 2013. As these reforms include new provisions for fostering to adopt there was a lively and positive exchange of views and everyone learned a great deal and had the chance to work alongside Adoption Panel members and Adoption Team members.
- 9.6.4 As well as these two days both Panels use any time that is left on agenda time whenever suitable to have short sessions of "Bite Size" training. Over the last year this has covered the areas of – The Role of the Health Visitor and The Role of the Educational Psychologist, with particular reference to Looked After Children.

9.7 TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS

9.7.1 Carers attending Panel

It is now the usually accepted process for Carers to attend for most of the time their case is heard at Panel. The main exception to this is the time that Panel reaches its recommendation but also a time for any third party information which needs to be discussed. Although Carers are often daunted at the prospect of coming to Panel, many of them find the time much less daunting than they feared and feel included in the process as part of the wider Fostering Team right from the start. Carers always have a social worker with them, and some (often single carers) have chosen to bring a friend with them for support. One or two have even gone as far as to say they enjoyed it! (See section on Feedback below).

9.7.2 Observers

Student social workers, members of staff on induction, members of Senior Management and prospective panel members, have all joined panel to observe over the last year and there are few Panels without one observer. Panel welcomes observing at meetings. It is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process, particularly for those who will, in the future, present cases to Panel for the first time.

9.7.3 Panel Feedback

Applicants and social workers attending panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form - this information is fed back to the next Panel and helps to shape panel direction moving forward. Honest feedback is encouraged and has had a significant effect on how Panels are run.

9.7.4 The most common feedback has been how daunting Carers find it to walk into a room with so many people present. So, over the last year we have tried to cut down Panel membership from the ten previously stipulated to an average of 6 or 7 Panel Members. This gives us a small safety margin to meet the statutory Quoracy of 5 Panel members in case at the last minute anyone is unexpectedly unable to attend or has to declare an interest in a particular case.

9.7.5 Two specific issues have occurred in feedback that Panel have had to think about and make changes:

- One case of foster carers who adopted and then wanted to foster again. The Carers were unhappy that Panel did not agree that they could continue fostering without a break. In this case the Panel Chair and the Team Manager for Fostering met with the Carers, answered their specific concerns and Panel have now asked CBC to draw up guidelines on the issue of foster carers who adopt and then wish to continue fostering.
- Another area of feedback was from a child care worker who was not given a copy of the fostering report before Panel and felt that her views were therefore not represented on paper or fully heard in Panel. This matter is subject to on-going work between child care and fostering and the Panel is looking at wider learning outcomes from this case.

9.7.6 However, comments from most people attending Panel have been largely positive:

- *"Very friendly, welcoming and appreciative",*
- *"The Panel were open and honest to us. They allowed us time to talk and they listened to what we were saying. It was a very good experience."*
- *"Constructive and friendly, a positive experience".*
- *"We left feeling positive and pleased that the Panel were appreciative of our work with fostered children".*
- *"We both felt very pleased that the Panel approved us as Long Term Carers. When we met A from school the first thing he asked was "Am I staying with you until I am 18?". We said yes and he was very happy. One very happy little boy and two very happy Carers!"*

9.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE ROLE

9.8.1 Panel covers its Quality Assurance roles at a number of levels:

9.8.2 Individual Issues

If there are matters which relate to a specific case these are picked up at the time and fed back to the child care and fostering teams by the Panel Adviser.

9.8.3 Practice Issues

At every Panel the Panel considers whether matters have cropped up which may be affecting more than one Carer / worker which need to be followed through. These issues are taken back by the Panel Adviser to the relevant Team Manager and then the Panel Adviser will feed back to Panel any outcomes. Over the last year examples of matters which have arisen in this category include:

- First Reviews coming to Panel with considerable delay,
- Assessments not providing enough analysis,
- Carers having such a high turnover of child care workers that they have felt unsupported,
- Foster Carers helping looked after children to complete their feedback forms about the placement rather than this being independently supported,
- Foster Carers being asked to do complex tasks without adequate support e.g. returning a baby back to birth parents, visiting a baby in hospital where a potentially violent parent was also present.

9.8.4 Assessments and Reports

Panel will often comment directly to workers and Carers if they have been presented with well written reports. Panel also comment in the feedback section of Panel when Reports received have been particularly good or have been lacking in some way. These matters are taken back to the Team Managers by the Panel Adviser so that staff receive both compliments and requests for improvement via their Team Manager.

9.8.5 Overall, in the year from April 2013 to March 2014 the standard of Report writing has been very good. The weakest area in Reports has on some occasions been “telling the story” of what has happened to Carers or children without providing analysis of this.

9.8.6 Panel Chairs Meetings

Throughout the year the Panel Chairs have met on approximately a 3 monthly basis with the Panel Advisers, the Head of Service and the Agency Decision Makers. This has been of particular importance during the disaggregation of the Fostering service to BBC and CBC. *It remains to be seen what frequency and nature of Panel Chairs meetings will need to be held in 2014 / 15.*

9.8.7 Eastern Region Panel Chairs Meetings

As Panel Chair I have attended all of the quarterly Meetings of the Eastern Regional Fostering Panel Chairs, along with one of the Vice Chairs. These meetings take place in Cambridge and Ipswich and are a time for Panel Chairs to meet together to consider the wider national picture for fostering and to improve practice. All meetings are attended by and supported by BAAF and Fostering Network. These meetings have been extremely useful and a number of matters from these meetings have been fed back into CBC.

9.9 OBJECTIVES FOR 2014/2015

- Firmly establish the new CBC Fostering and Permanence Panel into a strong working team.
- Continue to lobby for the Panel Adviser's role to be recruited to on a permanent basis in order to provide continuity and consistency throughout the whole Panel process.
- Review and extend the diversity of panel membership.
- Work on the liaison between the Panel and the Fostering and Child Care teams to assist with joint working.

- Monitor the Fostering Team's new goals to get all first Reviews to Panel in a timely manner and to monitor Fostering Assessments to ensure the right level of analysis is provided.
- Establish a new pattern within CBC of Panel Chairs meetings with Head of Service and Agency Decision Makers.

Kathy J Bird
Panel Chair – CBC Fostering and Permanence
April 2014

APPENDICES 2 – PANEL ACTIVITY

- 10.1.1 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 the Fostering Panel met 9 times and recommended that 13 households should be approved as foster carers.
- 10.1.2 Of the 13 carers newly approved by the Fostering Panel, 3 were approved for the Family Link Scheme, 3 Family & Friends and 12 mainstream carers (one of which was also approved as a Youth Carer).
- 10.1.3 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel met 10 times and recommended that 15 households should be approved as foster carers.
- 10.1.4 Of the 15 carers newly approved by the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel, 12 were approved for Family & Friends and 3 mainstream carers.
- 10.1.5 From 1st January 2014 – 31st March 2014 the Fostering and Permanence Panel met 5 times and recommended that 2 households should be approved as foster carers. Both of which are Family & Friends.
- 10.1.6 During the year 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014 30 households were approved as foster carers (which compares with 29 the previous year).
- 10.1.7 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel recommended a Plan for 1 child for permanent / long-term fostering.
- 10.1.8 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 13 children were recommended for a match with foster carers at the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel.
- 10.1.9 Between 1st January 2014 – 31st March 2014 6 children were recommended for a match with foster carers at the Fostering and Permanence Panel.
- 10.1.10 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 the Fostering Panel considered first annual reviews for 12 households, 7 of which required changes of approval and 5 of which required no change of approval. In addition there were 7 requests for change of approval and 1 review following allegations/complaint.
- 10.1.11 Between 1st April 2013 – 31st December 2013 the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel considered first annual reviews for 6 households, 3 of which required changes of approval and 3 required no change of approval. In addition there were 5 requests for change of approval.
- 10.1.12 Between 1st January 2014 – 31st March 2014 the Fostering and Permanence Panel considered first annual reviews for 7 households, 6 of which required changes of approval and 1 required no change of approval. In addition there were 2 requests for change of approval, 1 following an allegation/complaint and 1 review not recommended by Panel.
- 10.1.13 In total 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014 88 fostering households attended one or other of the panels, this compares with 97 in 2012/2013.

- 10.1.14 22 fostering households resigned at their request in 2012/13 and 1 household had their approval withdrawn by the Fostering Agency. This total was similar to the 21 in 2011/12. The reasons for deregistration varied, but included personal circumstances, ill health, retirement, relocation, moving to another local authority and children in placement becoming permanent family members. Balancing new approvals against resignations there was a net gain of fostering placements of 52 during the year, a significant increase on the 30 net gain of placements in 2011/12.